

# THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES 2001-2010: A CASE REVIEW

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*Tourism is a development option that is pursued by the Philippines from the 1970s until present where it is a pillar of the country's economy. Arrivals from foreign origins are increasing at double digit growth rates while domestic tourism continues to outpace international arrivals. Recent legislation on tourism during the past two years has continued to place importance on the industry as an engine of growth. However, such legislation should be viewed against the backdrop of local governance structures that includes processes on comprehensive land and water use planning. The country faces a lack of environmental planners (as urban and regional planners are formally called in the Philippines) where tourism planning is a sub-specialization. This paper describes and reviews the current state-of-art of tourism planning in the Philippines against this backdrop of governance, the planning profession and tourism legislation.*

*Philippine tourism, tourism planning, comprehensive land and water use planning, local government, tourism governance, Philippine tourism policy*

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a mainstay of the Philippines' economic policy and development since the 1970s. Successive governments from the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, People Power-era Corazon Aquino, the liberalizing economics of Fidel Ramos, the short-lived Joseph Estrada government, and second-longest serving government of Gloria Arroyo have made it a cornerstone of development agenda. Such focus on tourism has necessitated the establishment of a high-level tourism department in the governments of all the mentioned administrations. Indeed, for a country that is the world's second largest archipelago with 7,100 islands (after Indonesia), slightly larger than the United Kingdom and has immense potential for tourism, an effective governance system and an institutionalized system of planning for such use is an important ingredient to harness its potentials of tourism. (Choy, 1991)

This paper seeks to describe the current state of Philippine tourism planning given the current state of local governance – its political ecology. This paper takes into account existing laws on local governance, tourism policies, environmental planning and the current state of implementation of comprehensive land use planning that at current state-of-art, includes tourism for islands planning. Existing literature points to a common thread where institutions and predictable systems of policy making, planning and development for tourism are vital to a sustainable tourism industry future, especially for a country that has identified tourism as a major engine for development.

This paper is a case review that uses the political ecology approach in its succeeding analyses. This case review is limited within the current confines of the various comprehensive land use processes within the different levels of governance, from the

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*THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES  
2001-2010: A CASE REVIEW*

national government level down to the local government units. Generally, political ecological analysis involves seeing the interactions among members of a particular ecology in concert with their environments in different spatial scales (from international to regional to local, etc) and the power relations of government and the different classes within society. (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987) This concept has been used in Blaikie and Brookfield's (1987) work in describing the dynamics of land use and degradation.

**Tourism in the Philippines**

The country has experienced relatively high-paced growth in both inbound international tourism and domestic tourism from the middle until the end of the past decade. International arrivals in 2010 numbered a record-breaking 3.52 million visitors from 1.78 million international visitors in 2004. (DOT, 2006b, 2011a) In the first six months of 2011, the country has recorded double-digit growth of 12% in international arrivals from 1.71 million in the January to June 2010 period to 1.92 million this year. (DOT, 2011a) This has been considered a success despite a 21.4% drop in arrivals from Hong Kong as fallout from the botched rescue attempt of Chinese tourists held hostage by a disgruntled police officer in August 2010 that has generated widespread world media attention. Table 1 illustrates the major origin markets of international arrivals to the country which is dominated by East Asian countries.

**Table 1 Top 12 International Origin Markets (2010)**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Origin Country</b>	<b>2010 Arrivals</b>	<b>Market Share</b>	<b>2009 Arrivals</b>	<b>Growth</b>
1	South Korea	740,622	21.04%	497,936	48.74%
2	United States	600,165	17.05	582,537	3.03%
3	Japan	358,744	10.19%	324,980	10.39%
4	China	187,446	5.32%	155,019	20.92%
5	Australia	147,469	4.19%	132,330	4.08%
6	Taiwan	142,445	4.05%	102,274	39.29%
7	Hong Kong	133,746	3.80%	122,786	10.39%
8	Singapore	121,083	3.44%	98,305	23.17%
9	Canada	106,345	3.02%	99,012	7.41%
10	United Kingdom	96,925	2.75%	91,009	6.5%
11	Malaysia	79,694	2.26%	68,679	16.04%
12	Germany	58,725	1.67%	55,912	5.03%

Source: Philippine Department of Tourism [www.visitmyphilippines.com](http://www.visitmyphilippines.com)

However, it should be highlighted that despite these impressive numbers, the country has been unable to achieve the targeted 5 million international arrivals as laid in the targets of the Philippine Medium Term Development Plan 2004-2010 for the year 2010 where the country has attracted just 3.52 million arrivals or an under-performance of almost 30%. (NEDA, 2004)The Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2010 that has affected most of the Western economies has been blamed as the main reason for the lower than expected numbers.

In Southeast Asia, comparative numbers for 2009 also fail to compare favorably with the rest of Southeast Asia. Philippine tourist arrivals of 3.02 million had a market share of just 4.90% compared to Malaysia (38.4%), Thailand (23%), Singapore (12.2%), Indonesia (10.25%) and Vietnam (6.08%) according to the United Nations' World

Tourism Organization. (Rufino, 2011) This 2000s figure is a non-improvement as the country held 3.5% of total Asia-Pacific tourism traffic in the 1980s. (Choy, 1991). It should be noted that just like its neighbors', the Philippines offers almost the same types of destinations – sun, sea, sand destinations that are climate-dependent that are usually located in coastal areas or in small islands. The destinations virtually product substitutes for one another.

Domestic travel has likewise kept its role as a generator of large volumes of travel within the country's borders as a total of 14.1 million travelled in 2006 from 11.3 million travelers in 2004. (DOT, 2006a, 2007) Comparative estimates show that domestic travelers outnumber foreigners four-to-one which is quite significant, especially during downturns. This has been shown in 2004-2005 reporting period where despite a double-digit decline of 13.11% was recorded for inbound tourism, a 20.3% increase in domestic travel has made up for the decline of international arrivals. (DOT, 2006a) Despite these impressive numbers for domestic tourism however, the figures are conservative estimates at best. This is because unlike foreign tourist arrivals where there is a very high degree of accuracy as data is based on immigration arrival cards, domestic tourism figures are based on surveys and estimates from participating accredited tourism establishments. (Rufino, 2011) This could well likely mean even higher figures for domestic tourists as not all maybe captured in the statistics.

Such distinction between international tourists and domestic tourists has implications on product planning, pricing, taxation and development as it is usually assumed that foreigners will most likely have to pay higher prices and taxes. For such price discrimination and taxation for instance, countries that are able to distinguish between international and domestic tourist flows can opt to tax or price products differently for foreigners and its citizens. (Forsyth & Dwyer, 2002) Anecdotal evidence suggests that such price discrimination exists in tourism destinations in the Philippines, but formal literature and studies regarding this phenomenon is lacking. It would be an interesting research area should this be pursued among research circles.

Such discrimination could likewise have planning implications as to how destinations are planned and developed. For whom should destinations be marketed? Should businesses cater to foreigners or Filipinos? How much economic returns can be had? Tourism as a viable industry to boost incomes has largely been the reason for the pursuit of the said industry by the Philippine government as outlined by the former administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo for the former president's medium term development plan for 2004 to 2010. (NEDA, 2004) Indeed, tourism has been recognized as one of the tools for poverty alleviation where 26.5% of the 94-million people live in deprivation. This is generally in line with the assessment of the UN agency World Tourism Organization that tourism will contribute not only to reduction in poverty reduction but also in climate change mitigation. (WTO, 2011)

These possibilities of tourism are what the Philippine economic planners are still pre-occupied with when it comes to tourism as an engine for growth and its importance for development. This observation is generally in line with the present literature that a lot of planning made for tourism is still generally based on project development models, problem-solving planning processes, "boosterism" approaches rather than newer eco-centric and sustainable or community-based approaches. (Getz, 1986)

**Table 2 Major tourist destinations in terms of volume within the Philippines  
2008-2009**

Destinations	2009			2008			Growth Rate		
	Foreign	Domestic	Total	Foreign	Domestic	Total	Foreign	Domestic	Total
Cebu	624,666	991,316	1,615,982	649,599	946,639	1,596,238	-3.84%	4.72%	1.24%
Camarines Sur	308,235	1,258,212	1,566,447	197,444	523,580	721,024	56.11%	140.31%	117.25%
Metro Manila	962,849	479,334	1,442,183	963,977	386,812	1,350,789	-0.12%	23.92%	6.77%
Baguio City	40,758	729,429	770,187	49,122	765,853	814,975	-17.03%	-4.76%	-5.50%
Davao City	55,090	614,774	669,864	52,538	603,123	655,661	4.86%	1.93%	2.17%
Boracay	217,288	432,271	649,559	229,456	404,807	634,263	-5.30%	6.78%	2.41%
Cagayan de Oro	29,533	330,334	359,867	24,764	301,079	325,843	19.26%	9.72%	10.44%
Zambales	76,203	247,068	323,271	80,401	228,081	308,482	-5.22%	8.32%	4.79%
Bohol	97,926	215,391	313,317	82,888	199,610	282,498	18.14%	7.91%	10.91%
Puerto Princesa City	27,026	241,916	268,942	21,946	199,790	221,736	23.15%	21.09%	21.29%
Carmiguin	9,490	258,286	267,776	11,087	241,964	253,051	-14.40%	6.75%	5.82%
Cagayan Valley	12,570	254,392	266,962	12,829	253,850	266,679	-2.02%	0.21%	0.11%
Negros Oriental	46,708	193,491	240,199	42,180	178,865	221,045	10.73%	8.18%	8.67%
Ilocos Norte	12,758	180,334	193,092	20,440	162,763	183,203	-37.58%	10.80%	5.40%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,521,100</b>	<b>6,426,548</b>	<b>8,947,648</b>	<b>2,438,671</b>	<b>5,396,816</b>	<b>7,835,487</b>	<b>3.38%</b>	<b>19.08%</b>	<b>14.19%</b>

Source: Philippine Department of Tourism [www.visitmyphilippines.com](http://www.visitmyphilippines.com)

In the fourteen top destination markets within the country, six are located in islands located outside two largest islands of Luzon and Mindanao. Cebu in the central Philippines is the biggest tourist draw for 2009-2008 is in itself composed of several hundred islands and has established itself as a major destination for East Asia, most notably South Korea. Boracay Island in Aklan province is singularly the most visited island resort in the country and measures just a little over one thousand hectares. Since the 1990s, it has already experienced strains on its social, economic, natural and governance environments where according to studies commissioned by the Canadian Urban Institute and the Department of Tourism, all carrying capacities have been exceeded. (Trousdale, 1997)

The concern that other small islands will fall to unplanned development that has befallen Boracay Island is therefore not misplaced. Governance and the application of appropriate planning and development approaches and technologies are considered as an antidote to the degradation of a destination's various environments. (Trousdale, 1999) This is considered as the weakest link in the planning of tourism in Boracay Island a symptom of the weaknesses in the Philippine land use planning system.

Legal and Policy Bases for Planning and Tourism

### **National-Local Governance and Planning Relationships**

One cannot begin to assess the Philippine planning system without taking a look at the context of the political economy that has given rise to the present state of affairs. The tide of reforms during the People Power presidency of Corazon Aquino from 1986-1992 has given rise to the landmark Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act 7160) passed as law in 1991. The Philippines under Aquino then in a state of transition from the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship that was characterized by centralized governance. The said law has empowered local government, albeit criticized as 'too much, too soon' as major national government functions have been 'devolved' or passed on to the then ill-equipped local government units (LGUs). At the heart of this legislation was the perceived need to decentralize and unload major national government services to local governments that were presumed to have a better understanding of their constituencies. (Brillantes, 2004; Lutz & Caldecott, 1996)

The new law has increased the corporate powers of the LGUs giving them immense fiscal independence as they will be automatically allocated their share of government funding called the Internal Revenue Allotments (IRA), taxation powers, manage economic enterprises, raise funds through bonds and pass its own laws in so far as these still abide with the Philippine Constitution. (Brillantes, 2004; Lutz & Caldecott, 1996) Currently there are 17 regions in the country which have a total of 80 provincial governments, 138 city governments, 1,496 municipal governments and a further 42,026 barangay (village) governments encompassing a population of 94 million people as of 2007 census. (NSCB, 2011)

In terms of planning, the code was meant to encourage capacity building, encourage various stakeholders to participate in the various forums for development, education and crafting of development agenda within the respective government units. (Brillantes, 2004; Lutz & Caldecott, 1996) With the devolution of the provision and oversight of major services like health, education, security and protective services, along came complaints that local governments are not ready and are not technically equipped to handle the previously national government functions. However, it became clear that decentralization will be realized only in a long and sometimes painful process of adjusted as decentralization is a lot more about capability building among all else. (Brillantes, 2004)

### **The Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP)**

Since then, the country's local governance system has learned to cope with the devolution of central government functions, including tourism and land use planning, which also affects the use of natural resources for tourism. The emphasis on land use planning is enshrined in the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act 7160) Sections 447 and 458. ("Republic of the Philippines Act 7160 Local Government Code," 1991) It is further emphasized in the issuance of Joint Memorandum Circular 001 Series of 2009 that reminded LGUs, regional directors of the Department of Interior and Local Governments (DILG) to harmonize the creation of Comprehensive Land Use Plans (CLUP) and Comprehensive Development Plans (CDP). (DILG & HLURB, 2009) It is generally believed that not all of the towns and cities have updated CLUPs and in one of the projects that this author has been involved with, the town's latest CLUP dates back to 1982.

In the CLUP, the joint memorandum circular specifies that the CLUP: "shall not only cover the entire territorial jurisdiction of the LGU (both land and water) but also the spatial requirements of different development sectors to serve as guide for detailed allocation of space and location of various activities and facilities." (DILG & HLURB, 2009)

The CDP on the other hand is expected to originate from the approved CLUP and: "shall cover the five development sectors namely: Social, Economic, Environment, Physical/Infrastructure and Institutional and their respective sub-sector." (DILG & HLURB, 2009)

Tourism is a sub-sector under the Economic component of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

All towns' and cities' CLUPs that are able to muster the support of its respective councils will have to be submitted to the provincial governments that have jurisdiction over them and will then be collated into a cohesive Provincial Land Use Plan. Before the onset of decentralization set by the LGC 1991, the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB) had the approving powers for CLUPs crafted by the cities and municipalities. (EO72, 1993) Before a crafted CLUP is passed to the respective provincial governments however, it should be able to fulfil the minimum requirements of CLUP guidelines set by the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB). (EO72, 1993) The HLURB is a

*THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES  
2001-2010: A CASE REVIEW*

national agency that had oversight and regulatory functions in the formulation of comprehensive land use plans, housing and to some extent, urban development. The agency is under the supervision of the larger department of Interior and Local Government.

These functions have been devolved to the provinces with the implementation of the LGC in 1991. Completed CLUPs will have to be presented to the Provincial Land Use Committee for approval. Once this has been approved, the province will then collate all municipal and city CLUPs and create a cohesive Provincial Physical Framework Plan or simply known as the Provincial Land Use Plan. This Provincial Land Use Plan is then submitted to the Regional Development Council (RDC) taking into consideration the overall land use and development strategy that the region is pursuing and is integrated into the Regional Physical Framework Plan (RPF). (EO72, 1993) The national representative of the Department of Tourism, usually the provincial or regional director, sits as one of the seven national government agencies in the Provincial Land Use Committee. (EO72, 1993)

The CLUP is mandated to have a time frame period of 10 years, well beyond the three consecutive term limits of a municipal or city mayor (a term of office is three years). The Comprehensive Development Plan is prescribed to have a minimum planning horizon of six years. Further down, an Executive-Legislative agenda inspired from this CDP is supposed to be undertaken within the 3-year term of the elected mayors, vice-mayor (as head of the legislative council) and the town councillors. (DILG & HLURB, 2009)

A similar operational arrangement exists in the provincial and national layers of governance with the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) as the national-level 'counterpart' of the CDP that coincides with the term of the president of the republic. Furthermore, the CLUP as the towns' and cities' blueprint that has been accepted and passed by the local council needs to be implemented via a Zoning Ordinance crafted by the local council. (DILG & HLURB, 2009) Also there has been criticism that despite the fact the country is archipelagic, emphasis on planning is still on land use with the water component largely ignored. This is an important critique that relates strongly to tourism as the country is largely known for its water-based attractions. It would be interesting to note however that despite the requirement for LGUs to have their respective CLUPs, the national government has not passed a single national land use plan or act (NLUP) through congress despite several versions of the bill in the archives of Senate and the House of Representatives. (PIDS, 2011; Senate, 2010) The newly elected president Benigno Aquino III has made this as a priority legislative agenda in his inaugural state-of-the-nation address in June 2010 with a one-sentence declaration that 'a National Land Use Plan should be passed' (translated from the Filipino speech). (Aquino, 2010) Various stakeholder groups have been campaigning for the passage of a law in land use planning that is national in scope. (Go, 2011; Interaksyon.com, 2011)

### **The Environmental Planning Profession**

The environmental planning profession, more popularly known as urban and regional planning in the United States and town and country planning in the United Kingdom, is a relatively new regulated professional specialization in the Philippines. Presidential Decree 1308 has been signed into law in March of 1978 and is known as the Environmental Planning Law despite the fact that it was a Martial Law order coming from then president Ferdinand Marcos and not coming from the classic definition of a congress-led legislation. ("Republic of the Philippines Presidential Decree 1308 Regulating the Practice of the Profession of Environmental Planning in the Philippines," 1978) Critics of Marcos also have said that the former president just embraced planning

as a way to consolidate his rule and well as his cronies, that included Imelda Marcos who once served as the governor of Metro Manila. (Shatkin, 2004)

The decree was instituted primarily to establish the profession and develop a pool of manpower and experts to facilitate social, economic and social reforms that was the thrust of the administration at the time. The decree specified among others, the definition of environmental planning as a profession, scope of practice, the creation of the Board of Environmental Planning, examination and registration requirements, and the role of planning firms. ("Republic of the Philippines Presidential Decree 1308 Regulating the Practice of the Profession of Environmental Planning in the Philippines," 1978) The Philippine Institute of Environmental Planners (PIEP) formed in 1969 had lobbied 'assiduously, conscientiously and meticulously' in order to have the decree passed by the president in 1978.(PIEP, 2011) However, it took another 15 years for a Board of Environmental Planning Examiners to process and execute licensing examinations and certifications to be put in place in 1993. (PRC, 2011) By this time, the Local Government Code of 1991 was already two years old. In 2001, the PIEP has called for an amended environmental planning charter (PD1308) as it not in keeping with the times. (Cal, 2001)

The LGC of 1991 while recognizing the need for sensible land use planning is silent and does not specify the qualifications of staff that would be involved or employed as planning and development officers in the municipal, city or provincial planning and development offices. In fact, there is no government position that specifies an environmental planner as a qualification. (Cal, 2001) Cal noted that a huge number of LGUs have yet to prepare their respective CLUPs and for those with existing ones, the quality is below standard. The headcount for environmental planners in 2001 was around 400 professionals. The roster of planners in 2011 is now around 800 according to the PIEP secretariat and the organization plans to have a survey of planning specializations of planners in the future as no such listing is currently available. (Raralio, 2011) .

In a lot of these cities and towns, an architect or engineer sits as the planning and development officer which may not be enough in terms of technical capability to manage islands marked for tourism development. The existence of a profession that government has no demand in its roster of required professionals in the civil service is a surprising state of the art of the planning profession. This is congruent with the findings of Shatkin (2008) where he argues that countries in Southeast Asia have come to a acquiescing position that although governments provide the legal and policy frameworks, they expect the private sector as key agents in urban development. (Shatkin, 2008) Some evidence suggests that for most of the urban planning professionals, working in the private sector is a much-desired alternative due to higher compensation and career advancement, especially in big real estate firms owned by anyone of the prominent families in business. (Shatkin, 2008)

However, the decentralization process that has been put in motion coupled with increasing strain on the use of resources, land use, population pressures, urbanization, disasters and climate change adaptation, and in this particular case island tourism is creating the need for more planners and their place in the Philippine bureaucracy.

## **The Philippine Tourism Policy and Planning Implications**

### **The Philippines Tourism Master Plan**

The first national Philippine tourism master plan was completed in 1991 at the tail-end of Corazon Aquino's term as president and covered a 20-year period that ended 2010. (DOT, 2011b) Under the plan, the potential destinations have been clustered around entry gateways with emphasis on cities with existing operating airports as main gateways. Gateways were classified into: Primary (e.g. Manila, Cebu, Davao, Clark/Angeles City),

*THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES  
2001-2010: A CASE REVIEW*

Secondary (e.g. Laoag, Kalibo, Tuguegarao), Emerging (e.g. Legaspi, Cotabato) and Potential (e.g. Camarines Sur, Northern Palawan Coron). The tourism master plan was commissioned by the Department of Tourism and funded with a grant from the World Tourism Organization. (DOT & WTO, 1991)

This particular plan encompassed the terms of office of four Philippine presidents: Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the beginning of Benigno Aquino's. During the term of Ramos (1992-1998), Proclamation 188 was issued adopting the Tourism Master Plan as the blueprint for tourism development for two decades and mobilizing government resources to achieve the said tourism strategy. (DOT, 2011b) To provide the context, the adoption of this national tourism master plan came within a few years when the Local Government Code has just been enacted in congress in 1991 and the first board of examiners for the environmental planning profession has been established in 1993.

The implementation of the said plan would be rightly assumed to have 'hit the ground running' as the country was experiencing a fundamental change in the way government services are divided into the national and local government levels of governance. Whether this confluence of factors governance and the lack of planning professionals had some correlation with how the country has fared relatively slower compared with the rest of Asia in attracting tourist volumes in the past twenty years is a related area where research can be further explored. A new national tourism master plan is currently drafted to replace the lapsed twenty-year old plan and is expected to be released within 2011. (Atienza, 2011)

### **The Philippines Super Regions**

An overall strategy based on spatial considerations for land, water and resources use were generally non-existent until the former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo delivered the State of the Nation (SONA) address to both houses of congress in 2006. In that particular address, the president has identified five development regions that would perfectly match each geographic region's social, economic and environmental attributes to enhance each region's contribution to nationwide development.

Northern Luzon was designated as the 'Northern Luzon Agribusiness Quadrangle' that would focus on agriculture. A Luzon Urban Beltway composed of Metro Manila and its surrounding provinces was designated as the country's main industrial and service anchor region. The Central Philippines was designated as the country's tourism super region that would focus on sustainable tourism especially on its numerous small islands. This stretches from the island province of Palawan, the Western Visayas Region where Boracay Island is located, Central Visayas where the island of Cebu belongs as well as part of the Bicol Peninsula. (Arroyo, 2006)



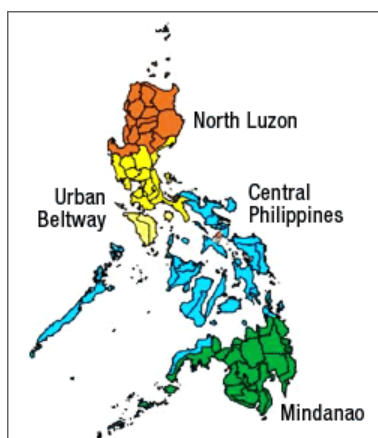


Figure 1. Executive Order 561 Philippine Super Regions

Similarly, Mindanao Island has been designated as Agribusiness Mindanao Super Region just like Northern Luzon. Finally, a virtual region connected by information technology highway from major cities in the north like Baguio, all the way down to Cebu and Davao will comprise the Cyber Corridor connecting the four other super regions. (Arroyo, 2006) This super region concept has been set into executive motion through the issuance of Executive Order 561 by the president assigning ‘development champions’ assigned to lead in the super regions’ administration of strategy. (EO561, 2006) This executive order is an attempt to spatially integrate geographic peculiarities of the various regions and match it with the known resource strengths of each – thus, Central Philippines for its numerous islands has been designated for major tourism land uses.

### **Tourism Policy Act Of 2009**

The Philippine Congress in 2009 passed a landmark legislation that is expected to have remarkable and wide-ranging repercussions on how tourism is going to be planned, developed and promoted, in the same way that local governance has been altered by the LGC of 1991. The Tourism Policy Act of 2009 (Republic Act 9593) has formally legislated that tourism is:

“an indispensable element of the national economy...which must be harnessed as an engine of socio-economic growth and cultural affirmation...employment...mould an enhanced sense of national pride.” (“Republic of the Philippines Act 9593 Tourism Policy Act,” 2009)

The law focused on reorienting the mandate of the tourism department and its three major agencies and reorganizing and making significant contributions to their operating budgets. The Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) is reorganized into the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) and the Philippine Conventions and Visitors Corporation (PCVC) into the Tourism Promotions Board PCVC as listed in section 25 of the law. (“Republic of the Philippines Act 9593 Tourism Policy Act,” 2009)

The law has been touted as a magic bullet to solve one of the major economic problems of the country – reduce poverty faster than the agricultural and manufacturing strategies that the country has pursued in the past with some noting that the country is a ‘natural’ for tourism given its archipelagic geography. The local media also highlighted the potential of tourism to generate at least US\$10 billion in tourism revenue while catching up with the rest of Southeast Asia in terms of tourist numbers. (PDI, 2009)

*THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES  
2001-2010: A CASE REVIEW*

Lawyer Mark Richard Evidente who has worked as staff member for Senator Richard Gordon, the chief writer of the senate version of the bill has said that the new law has fully embraced the ‘stakeholdership’ as a key component by ‘creating genuine national and local partnerships within the framework of decentralization’ and ‘creating genuine multi-sectoral collaborations’, especially with the private sector. (Evidente, 2010) The law specifically considers that some stakeholders excel in certain areas like investment and business planning and operations for the private sector and the government will focus on master planning that should ‘lead to a culture of tourism that respects people, place and identity’. This is perhaps a well-informed law as it takes into account the present configurations in locally devolved functions since the implementation of the local government code in 1991 but as usually the case for laws, the true test lies in the implementation of the law.

Unlike Environmental Planning Law where a profession has been created without the public sector having an expressed demand for it in the bureaucracy, the Tourism Policy Act in Section 42 has specified that for towns, cities and provinces that have identified tourism as a major economic activity, a position for a municipal, city or provincial tourism officer with a permanent position shall be hired. (“Republic of the Philippines Act 9593 Tourism Policy Act,” 2009) Furthermore, enhancement of the capabilities of local governments through support and training programs has been embedded in the law. In a forum organized by the University of the Philippines, Andrew Nocon, chairman of the Southern Tagalog Tourism Council during his presentation said this will definitely professionalize tourism planning, development and management as there had been instances where “a mayor’s personal assistant, wife or even driver” has been designated as tourism officers owing to the non-existence of a formal civil service requirement and designation. (Nocon, 2010)The new law addresses this gray area.

## **Conclusion**

It is recognized that tourism is part of ongoing Philippine economic policy, although growing much slower than the rest of the region and missing imposed targets in the 2004-2010 medium-term Philippine development plan. In the context of local governance, the decentralization that has resulted from the passing into law of the Local Government Code of 1991 and its eventual implementation has caught local governments unprepared in terms of capabilities in planning land uses which includes tourism as an economic sector. At the outset, the effects of governance decentralization on capabilities of local governments in planning for tourism has been largely been understudied but could be linked to the general lack of planning professionals where such qualifications are not even required in any government position. The Tourism Policy Act of 2009 avoids this dilemma by requiring a tenured position for local governments but stops short of requiring planners for the position. The Philippines likewise is in need of a national land use law to guide development in the archipelago and place order in the many possible uses of its land and water resources that includes islands for tourism use.

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*THE STATE-OF-ART OF TOURISM PLANNING IN ARCHIPELAGIC PHILIPPINES  
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