

**Reflective Report on Summer 1 Research Project:
An Assessment of the Environmental Viability of Ecotourism within Boracay,
Philippines**

Name: Jasmine Relf (LaidLaw Cohort 2023)

Course: Geography and Political Science

Word count: 1930 (2200 max)

I. Overall structure and methodology of research relating to experience conducting research

The structure and methodology of my research had two main components: literature review and interviews. The literature review was the more enjoyable part of the research process. It allowed me to become much more knowledgeable on the topics of research. I did find difficulty in deducing what specific research was relevant and important to include. It was also much more time intensive than I had initially assumed. The second portion of research was the interviewing process. This was extremely difficult as it took a lot of time and liaising to actually have interviews. In my planning I wish I would have reached out to people as early as possible. I also find that my strengths generally align with communicating with people and I enjoy interacting with other people. That being said, I found that I was often nervous and anxious when it came to interviewing the participants which provided a more personal difficulty. Overall, there are definitely areas throughout my methodology and structure of research that could have been elevated, but as my first time conducting a research project I am happy with how the process as a whole went.

II. Findings of the research

The investigation concluded that ecotourism could potentially be environmentally viable for Boracay Island. The exclusionary policy was somewhat a success. The literature review allowed for understanding into how ecotourism can be a beneficial conservation strategy as it aligns environmentalist and development goals. The review provided a models and frameworks as to what is necessary for ecotourism to be environmentally viable. The case study analysis and interviews illustrated how the policy lead to a greater sense of community, and environmental stewardship that was not present previously. That being said the policy was extreme and resulted in socio-economic consequences, meaning that it shouldn't be a recommendation for all tourism hotspots to employ. There needs to be further collaboration between NGO's and the government to ensure that the measures employed by hotels and the community continue to be effective. It cannot be expected for Boracay Island to be entirely regenerated after such a short period of time. However, the ecotourism within Boracay has sparked a push for sustainable tourism nation-wide. While it is not a perfect solution to the widespread environmental degradation, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

III. Final project comparison to original proposal

My original proposal for research essentially consisted of conducting literature reviews, an on-site survey of Boracay Island, and interviews to deduce the efficacy of ecotourism at reducing environmental degradation. When curating this proposal I did not take into account the time frame of receiving the grant. By this time, if I was to book all the necessary flights, and accommodation it would use all of the available excess travel funding. Through consulting the Laidlaw team and my supervisors it was decided that it would be most beneficial to not do onsite research, and to instead conduct this portion of the research in my second summer. This was the biggest difference between my original proposal and my final results. Teamwork and collaboration played a key role in this stage, as I had to rework and reorganise my plans to make my entire research project able to be remote. I did this through consulting the laidlaw team and my supervisors extensively.

Despite this drawback very early in the project, I still did my best to try and achieve the same intended outcomes. The research paper helps to gain greater understanding about whether ecotourism is in fact an effective strategy into combating environmental damage. From this lens, the paper still brings a new lens to the existing literature, providing greater understanding into the unique policy of Boracay Island. This research can most definitely be elevated, and explored much further, but this paper provides an essential starting point for further investigation to be done.

IV. Learning about myself as a researcher

During this summer, I learned a lot about not only the process of research, what things are important, but also myself as a researcher. Going into laidlaw, I didn't comprehend enough how much preparation goes into research. I understood, and prepped extensively for my structure and information about my research project. I, however, did not enjoy the sheer amount of administrative work I had to do before my research. This included the ethics approval process, risk assessments and in general just having to get approval for so many different aspects of research. If I had the opportunity to do this process again, I would definitely get on top of doing these approvals as soon as possible. I think that at the time, I didn't appreciate how time-intensive these forms are, not to mention including the amount of time it takes to even just get in contact with my supervisors, let alone the approval itself. At times I was constantly missing something, and my lack of experience became very clear

from the beginning of the project. I had to learn to accept that I didn't know what I was doing all the time, and that was okay. This was stressful for me, but I had to keep asking questions, and my supervisors were happy to help and were very understanding which I was grateful for. As a researcher, this taught me the importance of humility, and collaboration. In the starting stages, it was so key for me to reach out for information and help when I needed it. Another integral learning moment for me was organisation. I was conducting interviews, which took a lot of logistical work that I had not anticipated. Dealing with creating meetings, appropriately following up, and even just finding the contact information proved a difficult task for me. This was a drawback simply because I had not prepared for this aspect of research, and severely underestimated how much time and effort it would take. I have learned now the importance of organisation, communication and even networking for research. As a researcher in the general sense, I was in my element when it came to literature review, writing, and the physical interviews, but found weaknesses when it came to the administrative portions of the project. I am happy that now I understand further how the research process works, and I have a much greater appreciation for researchers as a whole.

V. Learning about myself as a leader

Leadership took more of a backseat in this portion of Laidlaw. When I say this, I refer more so towards the fact that throughout my research I was working alone, and therefore wasn't directly involved in leading anyone in particular. That being said, this did not mean I didn't learn anything about myself as a leader. This project is more so geared towards me learning more about my character, strengths and values, and how those then can be applied and shape myself as a leader. In particular, I think that this project helped me understand and appreciate my ability to problem solve. I had to deal with many different drawbacks in my research. I managed to be flexible and take this opportunity in my stride to make the best out of my situation. I believe that this is an extremely integral skill to have as a leader, and I can't wait to have further leadership experience to utilise the lessons I learned surrounding problem solving. In particular, I had problems with administration. I had initially planned to do on-site research, but after receiving my grant money it was at a point where it would be too resource intensive to be able to go and do this portion of research. I then had to rework my initial research proposal and structure to compensate for this section no

longer playing a role in my plan. Initially I was disappointed, but I am proud of my ability to creatively rework my plan to allow for me to the best of my ability stick to my proposal to achieve results that would be as significant as possible, while still being remote. As a leader, this was a key point of growth and it exhibited to me how important it is to keep a level head and accept that not everything is going to go according to plan all the time. I do wish that as a leader, I held myself more accountable throughout my working time. I found that initially I was very structured in my work, with consistent goals that I aimed to uphold each day. Towards the end of research however, I found that I was much more fluid in my work, and was being less effective, and overall feeling more burnt out than I wish I was. Ultimately, as a leader I want to be able to uphold a structure and goals all the way throughout the project, so I can not only hold myself accountable, but also my team members. Therefore, looking to the future I want this ability to stay organised and focused to be a key goal for myself as a leader.

VI. Comparison to goals set out in my Personal Development Plan (PDP)

In the early stages of the Laidlaw program I curated my PDP with goals that I aimed to achieve, or at least make efforts towards, throughout my research project. I made sure to outline specific actions that I had to do each day/week, such as journaling, creating lists, and meditating. I enjoyed this aspect of my research. The goals allowed me to accurately address problems that I consistently face throughout my academics and take time that was solely dedicated to handling them. I was surprised at my level of self-awareness. A lot of the goals that I focused on, and my weaknesses that I wrote about, were reflected in my research project. I anticipated facing personal challenges that I would not have predicted, but I actually hit the nail on the head with my PDP.

One of my first goals that I had was to be more efficient and productive with my time. I specifically wanted to achieve this through writing down achievable tasks to complete each day in the morning. This goal came with its own set of successes and challenges. I found that I was happy in the general sense how productive I was throughout the research process. There is obviously still room for improvement, and I could have been even more efficient, but regardless I am proud of how productive I was. That being said, I found that throughout my work, I struggled to find specific tasks to write down. My style geared more towards just doing research, and then remembering something else I had to do and then just

doing it. I struggled to just stick to a plan that I had made at the beginning of the day. My style of research was more geared towards organised chaos. Upon reflection, I wish I had made more effort to stick to the structure I had laid out, as I think it would perhaps reap more benefits and be less stressful than my personal method. Looking towards my third year at college, I definitely want to implement more structure into my working habits and see whether this would be effective for me. While I still was happy with my work ethic and productivity, I do think that I could have been more focused and intentional with my time spent researching.

Another goal was specifically to reach out to group members and ask for help more regularly. My task was to make contact with my ALS group at least once a week. My meetings and connections with my ALS group were very constructive and helpful, and I am happy with how much interaction I had with them. That being said, I do think that I didn't reach out for help or advice nearly enough. Throughout the process, I realise now that I didn't take advantage of all the resources that Laidlaw provides. If I was to do this project again, I would have kept more consistent contact with my supervisors, and with Joel and Orla in the Laidlaw program. My research overall felt as though I was in this project alone, and I had to deal with and do everything by myself. While it turned out okay, it became very monotonous and towards the end of the summer I felt burnt out. This could have been remedied by making more of an active effort to reach out to these people. If I had taken more of a collaborative approach, I would have perhaps found greater excitement and joy during the summer, and it would have alleviated much of the stress that I faced.