



Exploring Youth Perspectives on Ecotourism in the San Bernardino Islands: Insights into Sustainability and Conservation

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ABSTRACT

Youth engagement in ecotourism plays a crucial role in advancing sustainability, yet their perspectives remain underexplored, particularly in culturally and ecologically significant settings in the Philippines. This study examines how youth from Bulusan, Sorsogon in the Philippines experience and interpret ecotourism in the San Bernardino Islands (SBI), a remote and relatively unexplored ecotourism site. Using a psychological phenomenological approach, the lived experiences of ten youth participants aged 15 to 24 were investigated through in-depth interviews and with results thematically analyzed. Findings reveal that youth conceptualize ecotourism as a purposeful and reflective practice, anchored in environmental responsibility, cultural pride, and ethical decision-making. Themes such as redefining adventure with purpose, active environmental participation, appreciation for untouched nature, and ecotourism as cultural continuity emerged as central to their narratives. The study highlights a generational shift toward value-driven and community-oriented tourism practices. By foregrounding the voices of youth in Bulusan, this study deepens understanding of how local identities shape sustainability and ecotourism practices in the SBI. This study contributes a youth-centered framework that integrates behavioral-participatory, affective-experiential, and cognitive-reflective meanings of ecotourism and explains how these shape pro-conservation intent in the SBI.

RESUME

O envolvimento dos jovens no ecoturismo desempenha um papel crucial na promoção da sustentabilidade, mas suas perspectivas ainda são pouco exploradas, principalmente em contextos cultural e ecologicamente significativos nas Filipinas. Este estudo examina como jovens de Bulusan, Sorsogon, nas Filipinas, vivenciam e interpretam o ecoturismo nas Ilhas de San Bernardino (SBI), um local remoto e relativamente pouco explorado para esse fim. Utilizando uma abordagem fenomenológica psicológica, as experiências vividas por dez jovens participantes, com idades entre 15 e 24 anos, foram investigadas por meio de entrevistas em profundidade e os resultados foram analisados tematicamente. As descobertas revelam que os jovens concebem o ecoturismo como uma prática intencional e reflexiva, ancorada na responsabilidade ambiental, no orgulho cultural e na tomada de decisões éticas. Temas como a redefinição da aventura com propósito, a participação ambiental ativa, a valorização da natureza intocada e o ecoturismo como continuidade cultural emergiram como centrais em suas narrativas. O estudo destaca uma mudança geracional em direção a práticas turísticas orientadas por valores e voltadas para a comunidade. Ao dar destaque às vozes dos jovens em Bulusan, este estudo aprofunda a compreensão de como as identidades locais moldam as práticas de sustentabilidade e ecoturismo na Bacia do Rio São Lourenço (BRS). Este estudo contribui com uma estrutura centrada na juventude que integra os significados comportamentais-participativos, afetivo-experienciais e cognitivo-reflexivos do ecoturismo e explica como estes moldam a intenção pró-conservação na BRS.

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Introduction

Ecotourism is increasingly regarded as a strategic pathway for sustainable development (SD), integrating environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and economic opportunity. This is particularly relevant in biodiverse and culturally significant areas such as the San Bernardino Islands (SBI) in Sorsogon, Philippines. Despite a growing body of research on ecotourism, limited attention has been given to how youth perceive and engage with it, especially in uninhabited or remote areas like the SBI. This study addresses that gap by exploring youth perspectives on ecotourism, with a focus on its cultural, environmental, and social dimensions. A bibliometric analysis by Jin and Gao (2025) confirms this research gap, which is further supported by Ardhita and Ferdiansyah's (2024) review of marine ecotourism, highlighting the lack of focus on youth participation. Region-specific studies, such as that of Stanciu et al. (2022), also emphasize the need for broader geographic and demographic representation in ecotourism research.

As a form of sustainable tourism, ecotourism offers a strategic response to persistent social challenges such as poverty (Makindi, 2016). The San Bernardino Islands, located off the coast of Bulusan, Sorsogon, consist of two main islands and several smaller islet fragments. The main island lies approximately at 12.7536° N latitude and 124.2839° E longitude. These islands are notable for their ecological richness and historical significance, featuring diverse marine ecosystems, cultural traditions, religious festivals (Dumilag et al., 2023). These attributes suggest that the San Bernardino Islands hold potential for meaningful ecotourism, particularly in facilitating engagement with local customs, languages, and ways of life. This aligns with Chand's (2020) broader argument that ecotourism can foster mutual respect and cultural understanding when rooted in local heritage. These features suggest potential for local economic development (Lindberg et al., 1996), a point further underscored by studies highlighting the SBI's ecotourism capacity (Dumilag et al., 2023).

Adding to the islands' cultural appeal is the historic watchtower, also called a *Parola* (see Figure 1), built in 1887 and currently managed by the local government unit (LGU) of Bulusan. This structure serves both as a navigational aid and a cultural landmark, enriching the historical narrative of the SBI (Surban & Marbella, 2022; LGU Bulusan, 2019). Cultural traditions remain vibrant in the area, exemplified by the annual feast of San Bernardino de Siena, celebrated every May 20 by Barangay Central. This event includes a religious procession to and from the islands, reflecting the community's enduring faith and strong historical ties to the area.

The environmental dimension of ecotourism underscores the connection between tourism and ecosystem preservation (Phelan, 2020). Although the primary goal of ecotourism is to minimize negative impacts and support conservation, achieving this balance requires thoughtful implementation. Issues such as habitat degradation and overcrowding can

undermine conservation goals if not addressed through sustainable practices (Admasu, 2020; Chan et al., 2021). A critical element of these efforts is the participation of local communities, including young people, in planning and implementing ecotourism programs. The literature increasingly recognizes local perspectives as central to the long-term success of ecotourism (Dangi & Gribb, 2021).

This inclusive approach aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and Goal 13 (Climate Action). Youth are not only recipients of sustainable tourism efforts but also active contributors to the preservation of environmental and cultural heritage (United Nations, 2015). Within the participatory development framework, young people are seen as vital stakeholders whose insights and engagement strengthen local resilience and sustainability (Checkoway, 2011). Their perspectives offer valuable insight into the complex relationships among environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and ethical tourism.

Figure 1.

The Historic Lighthouse on the San Bernardino Islands (SBI), Sorsogon, Philippines

Note: Captured by Sorsogon State University SBI team, 2024.



Beyond environmental protection, ecotourism promotes low-impact travel, respect for local traditions, and educational opportunities, while also encouraging the inclusion of community voices in decision-making processes (Kiper, 2013; Weaver, 2001). In heritage-rich and remote locations such as the SBI, ecotourism offers a holistic platform for integrating natural beauty, cultural identity, and social cohesion through intentional and participatory practices. In this context, youth engagement is both strategic and essential, as their perspectives and capacities are critical to shaping the future of responsible tourism.

The social dimension of ecotourism explores its broader impacts on local communities, cultural values, and societal dynamics (Kunjuraman et al., 2022). When implemented effectively, ecotourism can stimulate social development by generating employment, supporting local enterprises, and fostering community participation (Kumar, 2023).

Community involvement in tourism planning promotes respect for social structures and local customs while cultivating a sense of ownership and stewardship over shared resources (Sonjai et al., 2023). Such participatory approaches help prevent issues such as cultural commodification and inequality by empowering communities to guide tourism in alignment with their values and priorities (Kunjuraman et al., 2022; Sonjai et al., 2023).

In the case of the SBI, ecotourism, SD, and community engagement are inextricably linked. Responsible tourism is envisioned not only as a tool for economic growth but also as a mechanism for cultural and environmental preservation (Xu et al., 2023). This vision emphasizes the active participation of local communities, especially youth, in shaping tourism models that reflect and preserve the region's distinct heritage. By directing resources and opportunities toward community-led efforts, ecotourism becomes more than an economic driver; it becomes a catalyst for inclusive and holistic development (Samal & Dash, 2023).

The youth perspective introduces a vital dimension to the ecotourism discourse. As younger generations increasingly engage with technology, their participation in traditional outdoor ecotourism activities may decline, with some preferring virtual forms of interaction (Lim et al., 2023). This shift underscores the importance of understanding how young people in the SBI perceive and participate in ecotourism, particularly in relation to environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Their views offer critical insights into the evolving relationship between tradition and modernity and serve as a guide for maintaining local identity in the face of global change.

This study examines youth perceptions of ecotourism in the San Bernardino Islands and how these perceptions reflect broader understandings of SD, conservation, and cultural heritage. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: (a) How do youth define and understand ecotourism in the SBI? (b) How do they perceive its value across cultural, environmental, and social dimensions? and (c) How do they perceive the sustainability and conservation practices associated with SBI ecotourism? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the development of a more inclusive, youth-informed model of sustainable tourism that is responsive to the ecological and cultural realities of the SBI.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in psychological phenomenology (Larsen & Adu, 2021) to explore youth perspectives on ecotourism in the SBI. Psychological phenomenology, as conceptualized by Husserl (2001), seeks to understand how individuals cognitively and emotionally engage with a phenomenon by identifying its essential structures of meaning. This approach was deemed appropriate for examining how young people conceptualize and experience ecotourism across cultural, environmental, and social

dimensions, particularly in relation to SD and conservation practices. Phenomenological inquiry emphasizes rich, descriptive accounts of lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Groenewald, 2004), enabling the researchers to capture and interpret the subjective meanings that youth attach to their encounters with SBI. The study also adopted interpretive practices aligned with Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) qualitative research framework, facilitating a contextualized and in-depth exploration of cognition and meaning.

To ensure transparency and rigor, the study adhered to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007), which guided the reporting of reflexivity, participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. The research team consisted of two male investigators with graduate-level qualifications and formal training in qualitative research, all of whom were experienced educators and one male as transcriber. An established relationship existed between the researchers and participants, as several individuals were former students of the lead researcher from prior teaching engagements in Bulusan, Sorsogon. This familiarity fostered a sense of trust and openness during the interviews. Nonetheless, the potential for bias arising from this relationship was carefully acknowledged and mitigated through reflexive strategies, including bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) and the use of reflective journals, to ensure that prior interactions did not influence the interpretation of participants' narratives. Reflexive journals were maintained before and after each interview to document emerging insights, emotional responses, and contextual observations. These practices supported analytic reflexivity and contributed to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Participants

Ten participants (six males and four females), aged 15 to 24 years, were purposively selected from Bulusan, Sorsogon. This age group aligns with the United Nations' (2023) definition of youth. Given that the SBI are uninhabited, the researchers delimited the study to youth from Bulusan who have firsthand ecotourism experience in the area. Participants were considered eligible if they had visited the islands at least once between 2019 and 2023. Recruitment was conducted in coordination with the local government unit to ensure diverse community representation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. For those under the age of 18, written parental or guardian consent, along with youth assent, was secured. All individuals invited to participate consented to the study, and no participants withdrew during the research process.

Research Instruments

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted by the research team. The interview protocol was designed to elicit youth perspectives on the cultural,

environmental, and social dimensions of ecotourism, as well as their views on SD and conservation.

Open-ended questions allowed participants to articulate their definitions of ecotourism and share their lived experiences. For example, participants were asked, *“How would you personally define ecotourism in the context of the SBI?”* – a prompt intended to encourage individualized understandings. To explore the value and meaning of ecotourism experiences, the following questions were posed: *“Can you share an experience where you derived cultural value from participating in ecotourism activities in the SBI?”* and *“What aspects of your experience made it meaningful to you?”* These questions aimed to elicit reflections that captured the emotional, cultural, and social aspects of youth engagement. Environmental and conservation-related values were examined through prompts such as, *“Have you observed or participated in activities in the SBI that promote environmental awareness or conservation?”* and *“How do these practices affect your view of ecotourism?”* In addition, perspectives on development and sustainability were explored through questions like, *“What SD initiatives associated with ecotourism in the SBI do you believe have a positive impact on the islands?”* and *“How should tourism in the SBI be managed in the future to ensure the preservation of its natural resources?”*

The structure of the interview guide was intentionally flexible. Probing techniques were employed to deepen the discussion, clarify meanings, and explore emerging themes. This flexibility allowed participants to guide the flow of the conversation, while maintaining alignment with the study’s research objectives.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to data collection, participants were fully informed of the study’s objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. Written informed consent was obtained from all adult participants, while parental consent and youth assent were secured for minors. Interviews were conducted in person at locations selected by the participants to ensure comfort, privacy, and openness. An assistant / transcriber was present during each interview to take notes, a practice that was explained to participants beforehand. As a result, no audio recordings were made. To compensate, field notes were used to capture nonverbal cues, environmental context, and reflexive observations from the researchers. Each interview session lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, providing ample time for extended reflection and narrative development.

All identifying information was paraphrased or excluded to protect participant confidentiality. Although follow-up interviews were not conducted, participants were invited to engage in member checking. They were presented with a summary of the preliminary findings and asked to verify the accuracy of the interpretations or offer clarifications. Data saturation was considered reached after the tenth interview, at which point no new themes or insights emerged.

Data Analysis

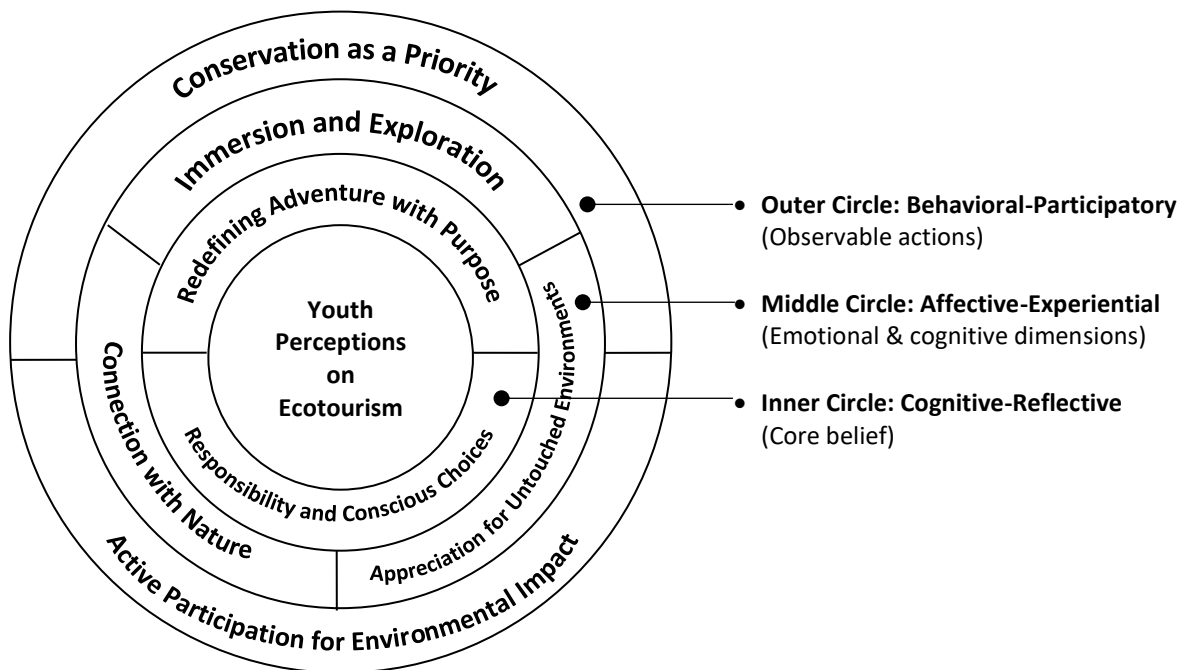
Thematic analysis was conducted following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and rereading interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and meaningful insights. Manual coding was performed without the use of qualitative analysis software. A combination of inductive and a priori coding approaches was applied. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge directly from the data, while a priori coding was informed by the study's conceptual framework. Predefined codes included categories such as Youth Perceptions on SBI Ecotourism, Cultural, Environmental, and Social Dimensions of SBI Ecotourism among Youth, and Perceptions on SD and Conservation Practices among the Youth. Themes were developed through an iterative process of comparison, synthesis, and refinement of coded data segments.

These thematic categories captured the multidimensional nature of youth perspectives on ecotourism. To ensure dependability, the coding process was collaborative, with differences in interpretation resolved through discussion and consensus among the research team. Credibility was reinforced through member checking, in which participants reviewed a summary of the thematic findings and confirmed the accuracy of the interpretations. Reflexive journals and field notes were also utilized to enhance analytic transparency and support the triangulation of findings.

Results and Discussion

Youth Perceptions on SBI Ecotourism

Youth perspectives on ecotourism in SBI revealed seven interrelated themes, structured into three overarching domains: Behavioral-Participatory (observable actions), Affective-Experiential (emotional and cognitive dimensions), and Cognitive-Reflective (core beliefs) (Figure 2). These themes, derived from verbatim narratives, offer a layered understanding of how young people define and engage with ecotourism in SBI.

Figure 2.*Youth Perceptions of Ecotourism: A Three-layer Framework.****Behavioral-Participatory (Observable actions)******Conservation as a Priority***

A prominent theme that emerged from the data is the youth's strong emphasis on conservation as a defining feature of ecotourism. Participant 6 articulated, "An ecotourism parang adventure na mas mapapaharagni ka sa kalikasan" (Ecotourism is like an adventure that brings you closer to nature), highlighting the intrinsic connection between ecotourism and environmental stewardship. This perspective illustrates a belief that participation in ecotourism is inherently aligned with the preservation of nature. For the youth, ecotourism is not simply about leisure or exploration, it is an act of solidarity with the natural world. The statement suggests that engaging in ecotourism is tantamount to assuming a role in environmental advocacy, thereby framing young travellers as partners in conservation.

This insight reflects a broader self-perception among the youth as active agents in sustaining ecological well-being. Their engagement in ecotourism is not passive or detached; rather, it is marked by deliberate consciousness of their impact on the environment. This is further supported by Participant 7, who framed ecotourism as a responsibility, and by Participant 9, who referred to it as "purposeful tourism." Together, these responses reflect a consistent narrative: youth perceive ecotourism not only as escapism, but also as a platform for contributing meaningfully to conservation. This aligns with literature highlighting increased environmental awareness and advocacy among youth populations (Fajar et al., 2023). Ultimately, these accounts underscore a deepening environmental ethic among young ecotourists, one that elevates the role of tourism from mere enjoyment to environmental engagement.

Active Participation for Environmental Impact

Closely connected to the theme of conservation is the notion of active participation, which the youth view as an essential component of ecotourism. Participant 4 offered an insightful remark: *"Yung pagkakaintindi ko po sir ng ecotourism, merong mga turista tapos meron din silang mga activities na para sa environment, halimbawa yung tree planting"* (Sir, the way I understand ecotourism is that tourists engage in activities there that benefit the environment, like tree planting). This statement illustrates a grounded understanding that ecotourism entails not only observing nature but actively engaging in practices that contribute to its protection.

Tree planting, as mentioned, is emblematic of the youth's conceptualization of ecotourism as purposeful and participatory. The youth expect ecotourists not just to visit natural sites but to physically partake in their sustainability (transforming leisure into action). Such acts symbolize more than just environmental support; they reflect a moral and communal commitment to the preservation of place. This view is consistent with literature that positions ecotourism as a form of engaged, rather than extractive, travel (Baloch et al., 2023; Chin et al., 2000).

Participants 8 and 9 echoed this sentiment by characterizing ecotourism as an "adventure with a purpose," suggesting that unlike traditional tourism, which may passively consume destinations, ecotourism demands intentionality and responsibility from its participants. Notably, they framed tourists as stewards, rather than beneficiaries, of the places they visit. This distinction reshapes tourism as a reciprocal relationship in which both the destination and the traveler benefit, one through preservation, the other through meaningful engagement.

Affective-Experiential (Emotional & cognitive dimensions)

Immersion and Exploration

A prevailing theme in the participants' reflections on ecotourism is the sense of deep immersion and active exploration within natural environments. This is powerfully illustrated by Participant 1, who remarked, *"An ecotourism parang pag-explore sa environment o paligid kasama mga living things"* (Ecotourism is like exploring the environment or surroundings with living things). The response positions ecotourism not as a routine recreational activity but as an avenue for immersive and transformative engagement with the environment. For the youth, ecotourism represents an experiential process of discovery, an active endeavor that fosters awareness, interaction, and a more intimate understanding of nature.

The metaphor of exploration reinforces the idea that ecotourism, as perceived by the youth, is not passive or consumerist in nature. Instead, it serves as a platform through which they can navigate and learn from the complexities of the natural world. Participant 5 echoed this sentiment, describing ecotourism as *"an adventure na may rason"* (an adventure with a purpose), implying that exploration is both meaningful and intentional. These statements

demonstrate that ecotourism resonates with young people not only because it offers recreation, but because it enables purposeful engagement with ecological systems (Kiper, 2013).

As previously noted, Participant 10 highlighted an appreciation for the 'untouched' qualities of the environment, which complements the theme of immersive exploration: *"Related siya sa environment, yung untouched na kahit parang madumi, pero yung dumi niya ay natural kaya ang sarap tingnan at pag-aralan"* (It's related to the environment, the untouched ones, even if they seem dirty, their dirt is natural, so it's delightful to observe and study). This response reframes cleanliness and beauty from an ecological lens, emphasizing authenticity and ecological integrity over artificial presentation. Collectively, these narratives suggest that immersion in ecotourism is not limited to physical presence but extends to emotional and intellectual appreciation, inviting participants to critically reflect on what it means to interact responsibly with nature (Chan & Saikim, 2022; Funa, Gabay, Estonanto et al., 2022; Funa, Gabay, Ibardaloza et al., 2022).

Appreciation for Untouched Environments

Participant 10's account also underpins a profound appreciation for untouched and unaltered environments, a theme echoed across several interviews. Their observation elevates the concept of "natural dirt" as something worthy of admiration, not disdain: a perspective that challenges common tourist expectations of neatness and perfection. This theme suggests that for the youth, rawness and imperfection in nature signal authenticity, which in turn enhances the educational and experiential value of ecotourism. Their reverence for unspoiled areas indicates not only aesthetic appreciation but ecological literacy, a recognition of the importance of maintaining biodiversity and minimizing human interference.

This idea is further substantiated by Participant 3, who stated that ecotourism is about going to a place *"para maimod an natural environment nan maparani sa mga hayop nan iba pa na living organisms"* (to see the natural environment and observe animals and other living organisms). The emphasis on witnessing biodiversity firsthand underscores the youth's desire to learn directly from nature, further illustrating their growing environmental consciousness. For them, untouched environments are not only valuable in terms of beauty but also as living classrooms where ecosystems can be observed and understood (Ajoon & Rao, 2020).

The appreciation for these environments extends beyond passive enjoyment. It is driven by an ethical imperative to protect what is natural and fragile. The responses of Participants 10 and 3 exemplify this belief, collectively reflecting a cognitive shift among youth: that untouched ecosystems are worthy of admiration, study, and protection precisely because of their authenticity and inherent ecological value.

Connection with Nature

The theme of connection with nature emerged as a deeply personal and motivating factor for youth participation in ecotourism. Participant 3's statement, *"An ecotourism sir, para sa ako, ini an pagkadto sa lugar para maimod an natural environment nan maparani*

sa mga hayop nan iba pa na living organisms” (Ecotourism, for me, is the act of visiting a place to appreciate the natural environment and observe various animals and other living organisms), captures this connection with clarity and sincerity. It reveals a desire not simply to witness nature but to engage with it on a meaningful level.

This theme signals a departure from detached, tourist-centered experiences, instead favoring a model of ecotourism rooted in environmental empathy. Youth are not merely spectators; they are participants seeking to establish relationships with the spaces and species they encounter. The idea of “connection” here implies a sense of belonging and responsibility that informs how they behave as ecotourists (Stanciu et al., 2022). This emotional and cognitive engagement adds another layer of meaning to their experiences, making ecotourism both a reflective and formative journey.

Cognitive-Reflective (Core belief)

Redefining Adventure with Purpose

A core insight from the youth narratives is a reimagining of “adventure” within the ecotourism experience. Rather than viewing travel as thrill-seeking or escapism, young people now frame it as a mindful, ethical, and value-driven pursuit. Participant 8 encapsulated this transformation: *“An ecotourism para siyang pag-redefine san adventure... di lang ini para sa ato, kundi para sa lugar na inkakadtuan ta”* (“Ecotourism is like redefining adventure... it’s not only for us but also for the place that we visit.”) This sentiment reflects a growing recognition that ecotourism entails more than personal enjoyment, it involves reciprocity with the environment and host communities.

For many youths, adventure is now imbued with intentionality, meaning, and moral responsibility. Participant 2 emphasized this ethical lens, stating: *“An ecotourism di lang siya simpleng bakasyon; responsibilidad ini”* (“Ecotourism is not just a simple vacation; it is a responsibility.”) Similarly, Participant 5 stressed the importance of travel with “purpose,” and Participant 9 framed it as “tourism with a reason.” These perspectives suggest a cognitive shift toward sustainability and stewardship, in which travel becomes a vehicle for both self-awareness and ecological care. Participant 6 elaborated further: *“...ang pinaka fokus an kalikasan... importante para sa conservation nito”* (“...the main focus is nature... our presence as tourists is important for its conservation.”) This statement reveals a deep integration of ecological mindfulness into their motivations for travel, showing how youth increasingly align recreational experiences with conservation principles.

Taken together, these reflections portray a cognitive transformation among young travelers: from passive tourists to purpose-driven participants. Ecotourism, in their view, is not a neutral or superficial act. It is a conscious journey shaped by ethics, learning, and advocacy. This reframed notion of adventure provides a powerful foundation for developing

youth-centered tourism education and sustainability policies that position young people as both learners and leaders in environmental protection (Baloch et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021).

Responsibility and Conscious Choices

The final cognitive-reflective theme centers on the notion of responsibility and the deliberate choices that characterize youth engagement in ecotourism. Participant 2 encapsulated this idea, stating, "*Kaipuhan ta an ecotourism lalo na sa mga kabataan niyan, kay sinda an may responsibilidad said sa future, sira man sadi an makinabang.*" (We need ecotourism especially for the youth today, because they are the ones responsible for the future, and they will also be the ones to benefit from it.) This reflects an internalized moral framework where travel is no longer divorced from consequence but viewed as an opportunity to enact ethical values and contribute positively to both nature and local communities.

This theme moves beyond symbolic statements, it highlights a sustained consciousness in how youth perceive their environmental footprint and the broader socio-cultural implications of their visits. Their engagement in ecotourism is characterized by a desire to uphold sustainability, practice respect, and leave minimal impact. This is in line with literature that describes responsible tourism as a process guided by awareness, care, and ethical intent (Mondal & Samaddar, 2022). Participant 9 reinforced this by stating, "*Yadto бага na makadto ka didto para lang diri mamasyada, an may something ka na ibabalik sa environment.*" (It's like when you go there, it's not just for leisure, you should have something to give back to the environment.) This comment underscores the deliberate, intentional stance youth adopt toward ecotourism, reinforcing that their choices, from destination selection to behavior during their stay, are anchored in a well-defined set of values.

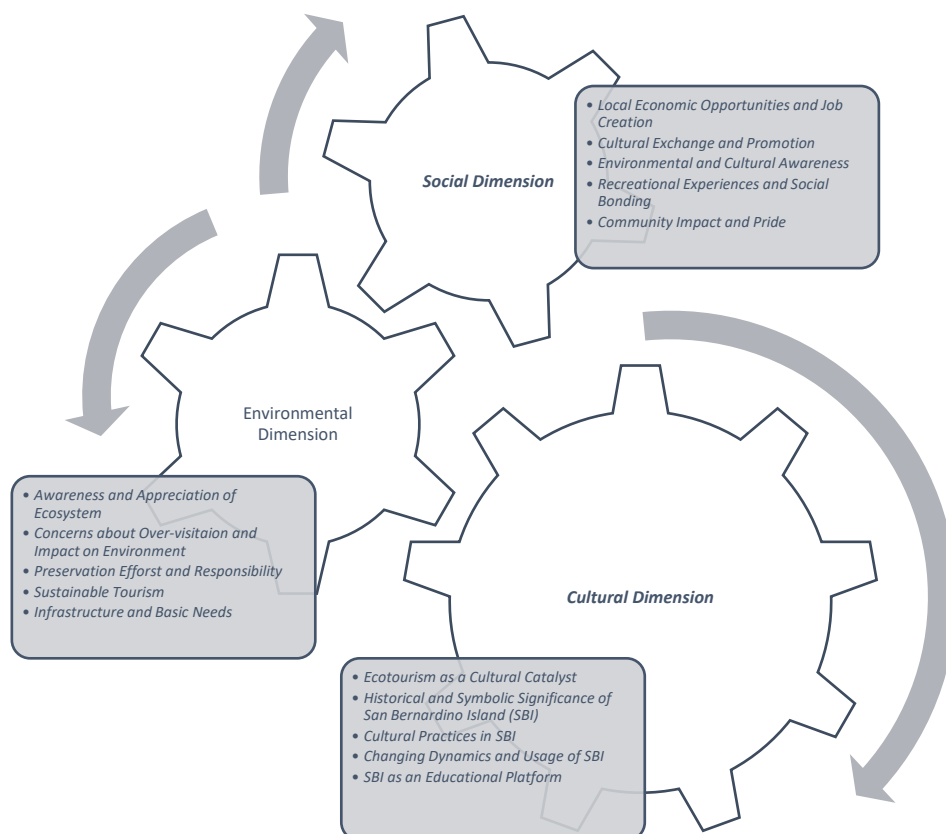
Together, these responses reveal a collective consciousness among youth that ecotourism is not a frivolous activity. It is a deliberate act of environmental and cultural solidarity, an extension of their belief in SD, respect for heritage, and ethical coexistence with the natural world. These cognitive reflections position youth not only as informed travelers but as potential leaders in advocating for more responsible and purpose-driven tourism frameworks.

Cultural, Environmental, and Social Dimensions of SBI Ecotourism among Youth

Youth responses were analytically clustered into three pillars of SD: cultural, environmental, and social (Figure 3). Within the cultural dimension, youth reflections centered on ecotourism as a catalyst for cultural continuity and innovation, the symbolic and historical significance of key sites such as the *Parola*, embodied cultural practices, shifts in usage patterns influenced by sociopolitical events, and the islands' pedagogical potential.

Figure 3.

Cultural, Environmental, and Social Dimensions of SBI Ecotourism Among Youth.



The environmental dimension encompassed ecological awareness, concerns about over-visitation, efforts toward preservation, advocacy for sustainable tourism models, and infrastructural needs. In the social dimension, youth emphasized economic opportunities, intergenerational cultural exchange, enhanced environmental-cultural literacy, recreational experiences that deepen social bonds, and the overall communal impact of ecotourism on identity and pride.

Cultural Dimension

Ecotourism as a Cultural Catalyst

Participant 1 emphasizes the profound impact of ecotourism as a catalyst for cultural evolution in Bulusan. The participant articulates, "Sa SBI, ang ecotourism nagbibigay daan para mas mapalago ta pa an kultura kan Bulusan" (In SBI, ecotourism opens the pathway for the continued growth of Bulusan's culture). This statement underscores how ecotourism serves as a dynamic force, not merely a preserver of the town's ancient culture but a facilitator of its ongoing development (Purnamawati et al., 2022). The participant goes on to elaborate, "Di lang mapipreserve an mga sinaunang kultura san Bulusan, magakakaigwa pa kita san mga bagong kwento at mga kagawian sa SBI" (It doesn't just preserve the ancient culture of Bulusan; it also gives us new stories and practices in SBI). This insightful perspective unveils the dual role of ecotourism, acting as a custodian of heritage while concurrently providing a

platform for the creation of fresh cultural narratives within the unique setting of SBI. This theme, as elucidated by Participant 1, encapsulates the essence of ecotourism in Bulusan, portraying it not merely as a static endeavor to safeguard traditions but as a dynamic force propelling the community forward. The integration of both preservation and innovation underscores the richness of cultural experiences that ecotourism brings, making it a vital contributor to the evolving identity of Bulusan.

Participant 2 complements this perspective by expressing, "An SBI sarong makusog na opportunity para saato na mahiling nan ipaheling an saato na kultura. An biodiversity, mga kwento, nan an mga selebrasyon, mao ini an mga bagay na naghahatag saato san magayon na experience sa SBI" (SBI is a powerful opportunity for us to witness and showcase our culture. The biodiversity, stories, and celebrations are elements that provide us with a delightful experience in SBI). This reinforces the idea that ecotourism not only serves as a cultural archive but also as a vibrant platform where the community can actively share and celebrate its traditions (Phoek et al., 2021; Pollard et al., 2023). Furthermore, Participant 9 underscores the educational dimension of ecotourism, stating, "An ecotourism sarong plataporma para sa edukasyon. Di ini lang pagpapaimod san ato kultura kundi sa mga bisita sa kahalagahan san satuyang tradisyon every May 20, sa Parola (Watchtower in SBI), nan an kasaysayan san SBI" (Ecotourism is a platform for education. It doesn't just showcase our culture but also educates visitors about the importance of our traditions every May 20, the lighthouse, and the history of SBI). This aligns with the notion that ecotourism is a dynamic tool for cultural transmission, where the community actively imparts knowledge and values to visitors, fostering a deeper understanding of their way of life (Pollard et al., 2023).

The collective sentiments from Participants 1, 2, and 9 highlight a symbiotic relationship between ecotourism and culture in Bulusan. It emerges not merely as a passive preserver of traditions but as an active force fostering growth, celebration, and education within the community.

Historical and Symbolic Significance of SBI

Participant 3 articulates a profound connection between the historical Parola in SBI and the cultural fabric of Bulusan. The participant states, "An pagkadto sa historikal na Parola asin pagtiripon sa mga selebrasyon nagdadagdag nin kultura ta" (Visiting the historical Parola and attending celebrations adds to our culture). This sentiment underscores the belief that the Parola is not merely a physical structure but a living testament to the historical and cultural wealth of Bulusan. The participant goes on to highlight a crucial aspect, stating, "Di lang natural na kagayunan san palibot an maiimod; nagpapamimod man an pagkadto didto san konteksto sa kasaysayan nato nan hararom na relasyon kan komunidad didi sa Bulusan na nadadara ta sa Parola" (It's not just about the natural beauty around; it also allows reflection on our history and deepens our connection to the community in Bulusan through the Parola). This perspective expands the narrative beyond the aesthetic allure of the surroundings,

emphasizing the Parola as a symbolic portal to historical reflections and a conduit for strengthening community bonds.

The depth of this theme is further supported by Participant 10, who relates, "An SBI, bagang simbolismo man san tradisyon nan kultura san Bulusan. Kay pag naimod mo yun, napapaisip ka san kan fiesta nin San Bernardino de Sienna. Mao yun an isla an magpapadumdom pirmi sa ato san mga tradisyon san mga gurang" (SBI is a symbol of the traditions and culture of Bulusan. When you see it, you are reminded of the feast of San Bernardino de Sienna. The island constantly reminds us of the traditions of our ancestors). Both participants collectively emphasize the significance of SBI, particularly the Parola, as a tangible link to the town's history and cultural heritage. The insights provided by Participants 3 and 10 illuminate the historical and cultural richness encapsulated within the Parola in SBI. This theme transcends the physical structure (Chrastina et al., 2020; Tajer & Demir, 2022), portraying it as a dynamic entity that not only adds layers to Bulusan's cultural identity but also serves as a conduit for historical reflection and community cohesion.

Cultural Practices in SBI

Participant 4 provides an intimate glimpse into the cultural practices that form an integral part of the community's identity in SBI. The participant shares, "Ini na pagkuha namo san isda, nan pagbutang namo san mga tent, mao ini an kultura na nadadara namo sa Parola" (When we catch fish and set up tents, that's the culture we bring to the Parola). This statement illuminates how seemingly mundane activities like fishing and camping are not just recreational pursuits, but essential components of the cultural tapestry woven around the Parola. This theme unveiled by Participant 4 signifies that these activities are not merely isolated events but rather rituals deeply embedded in the community's collective identity. The act of catching fish and setting up tents becomes symbolic, representing a continuity of tradition and a tangible expression of their cultural heritage (Kunchamboo & Little, 2023).

This perspective aligns with Participant 6's observation, "Hindi naman talaga ako taga Bulusan, kaya wala ako masyadong idea sa Bulusan, pero sabi daw, merong mga religious activities sa Parola (referring to SBI). Pero nung pumunta kami, more of sightseeing and camping lang talaga... kasama ko nun yung jowa ko" (I'm not really from Bulusan, so I don't have much idea about Bulusan, but I heard there are religious activities at the Parola. However, when we went there, it was more about sightseeing and camping... I was with my partner at that time.)

Participant 6's reflection, along with that of Participant 4, reinforces the notion that activities such as fishing and camping extend beyond mere recreation. These are not just ways to pass the time; they are embedded cultural practices that help shape, express, and sustain the community's identity. In this context, the Parola serves not only as a scenic destination but also as a site of social and cultural significance; where stories, relationships, and local heritage are experienced and passed on.

Changing Dynamics and Usage of SBI

Participant 7 offers a reflection on the impact of the pandemic on cultural practices in SBI. The participant states, "Mao na yun sir na pangirisda nan pagbisita sa parola, yun na po yung kultura namo didto. Lalo na nung pandemic, kasi bawal mamasyal, minsan dun kami pumupunta para mamasyal" (That's what we do, sir, fishing and visiting the Parola, that's our culture here. Especially during the pandemic when travel was restricted, sometimes we go there to stroll). This statement unveils a theme that goes beyond the ordinary cultural practices, shedding light on the adaptability and resilience of the community's cultural identity in the face of challenges. The mention of fishing and visiting the Parola as cultural norms reflects how these activities are ingrained in the daily lives of the community.

The acknowledgment of the impact of the pandemic adds a layer of complexity to the theme. The participant suggests that, in times when traditional activities like leisurely strolls were restricted, the community adapted by finding solace in familiar places such as SBI. This adaptive behavior underlines the community's ability to pivot from the usual activities to more contemplative and prayerful moments during challenging times (Suleimany et al., 2022).

SBI as an Educational Platform

Participant 9 underscores the transformative role of ecotourism in SBI by highlighting its educational significance. The participant articulates, "An ecotourism sarong plataporma para sa edukasyon." (Ecotourism is a platform for education.) This assertion brings to light the multifaceted nature of ecotourism, positioning it as more than a means to exhibit the local culture. Instead, it serves as an interactive educational platform (Tauro et al., 2021), fostering a deeper understanding among visitors and the locals about the intricate layers of Bulusan's traditions and the historical narrative woven into the fabric of SBI. Participant 9's perspective resonates with Participant 1, who earlier emphasized the dual role of ecotourism. Both participants collectively emphasize that ecotourism is not a static display but an evolving, educational experience that immerses visitors in the living culture and history of the community. The perspectives from Participants 9 and 1 together paint a holistic picture of ecotourism in SBI, portraying it as a dynamic platform for cultural education that goes beyond preservation, inviting visitors and the local community to actively engage with and appreciate the rich tapestry of Bulusan's traditions and history.

Environmental Dimension

Awareness and Appreciation of Ecosystem

Participant 6 highlights the significance of ecotourism in raising environmental awareness: "An ecotourism sa SBI naghahatag siya awareness san ecosystem didto. Hindi lang enjoy dun, kundi ipaparealize man niya na magayon an nature" (Ecotourism in SBI provides awareness of the ecosystem there. It's not just about enjoyment; it also makes you realize how beautiful nature is). This perspective aligns with Participant 3's viewpoint, who adds, "Daghan didi an iba iba na klase san isda nan lamang dagat. May-on pa nga halo (sea snake). Kaya nga

kami didi nangisda kay mas daghan didi sa SBI an iba iba na klase na isda kesa didto sa Bulusan banda" (There are various types of fish and even sea snakes here. That's why we fish here because there are more diverse fish species in SBI compared to Bulusan). Both participants highlight the rich biodiversity of SBI, indicating that ecotourism not only raises awareness but also provides an opportunity to explore and appreciate the diverse ecosystems present, fostering a deeper connection to nature (Stanciu et al., 2022).

Additionally, Participant 8 echoes these sentiments with a concern for environmental protection: "Kun may makaradto didto sa SBI, dapat limitahan an mga tawo. May carrying capacity dapat kasi maiistorbo din yung mga hayop dun. Or dapat may side lang ng island na dun magcacamping, may part naman na hindi maxado naiistorbo" (If people visit SBI, there should be a limit. There should be a carrying capacity because it might disturb the animals there. Or there should be a designated side of the island for camping, with another part left undisturbed). This response emphasizes the need for a balance between visitor enjoyment and the preservation of the natural habitat. These perspectives highlight a shared understanding among participants that ecotourism in SBI serves as a means not only for enjoyment but also for fostering environmental awareness and appreciation, emphasizing the need for responsible and sustainable interactions with the ecosystem.

Concerns about Over-visitation and Impact on Environment

Participant 2 articulates a crucial concern about the sustainability of ecotourism in SBI, recognizing the delicate balance between improvement and potential negative impacts: "Gustuhon ko man tagala maimprove ang ecotourism sa SBI, pero nababahala ako sa epekto kan sobra-sobrang pagbisita. Kaipuhan muna nato siguruhon na may mayad na plano para protektahan man an SBI" (I really want ecotourism in SBI to improve, but I'm worried about the impact of excessive visits. We need to ensure there's a good plan to protect SBI). This concern echoes the sentiments expressed by Participant 7, who addresses the potential environmental consequences of increased tourism: "Ang problem lang po sir kung dumami na ang pumunta dun, dadami rin ang basura. Yung mga basura pwede makaon san mga hayop" (The problem, sir, is if more people go there, there will be more trash. The trash can harm the animals). Participant 8 also echoes these concerns, emphasizing the need for limitations on the number of visitors to prevent disturbance to wildlife.

These responses underscore the shared apprehension among participants regarding the environmental impact of uncontrolled tourism in SBI. Participant 2's emphasis on the necessity of a well-thought-out plan aligns with the broader theme of responsible tourism. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these concerns through strategic and protective measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of ecotourism in SBI. This awareness among participants highlights the need for careful planning and sustainable management to mitigate potential negative consequences on the environment.

Preservation Efforts and Responsibility

Participant 4 provides a thoughtful perspective, emphasizing the collaborative efforts required for the preservation of SBI: "Dahil man sa mga initiatives san gobyerno na maproteksyonan an lugar, naimod ko talaga an importansya san SBI. Enjoyon ta an SBI, pero diri paglimutan an ato responsibilidad na ayuson man" (Because of the initiatives of the government to protect the area, I really see the importance of SBI. We enjoy SBI, but we shouldn't forget our responsibility to take care of it). This participant's viewpoint resonates with Participant 10, who addresses practical aspects of responsible tourism: "Need din sir dun ng mapagkukuhaan ng tubig. Wala kasing mainuman dun kaya dapat may dala dala kayong tubig pag pumunta dun. Nung pumunta kami dun may basurahan din kaming dala, para mapanatili din ang kalinisan ng lugar" (There's a need for a water source there. There's no water to drink, so you should bring your own water when you go there. When we went there, we also brought a trash bag to maintain the cleanliness of the place). Together, these responses highlight the collaborative nature of responsible tourism, where both local government initiatives and individual actions play a crucial role (Mulyani et al., 2021). Participant 4 underscores the importance of enjoying SBI while actively participating in its preservation, aligning with Participant 10's practical approach of bringing necessities and maintaining cleanliness. This shared perspective emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between enjoyment and responsibility, portraying ecotourism in SBI as a shared endeavor that requires both appreciation and active involvement in environmental conservation (Chan et al., 2021).

Sustainable Tourism

Participant 5 contributes a crucial perspective, emphasizing the need for sustainable tourism in SBI: "Dapat hingayadon talaga an turismo sa SBI pero dapat imudon man an sustainability, kay para maimod man san mga masunod na henerasyon an kagayunan san SBI" (Tourism in SBI should really be promoted, but sustainability should also be considered, so that the opportunities in SBI can be seen by the next generations). This participant advocates for a balance between promoting tourism and ensuring sustainability, highlighting the intergenerational aspect of preserving the opportunities that SBI offers. This viewpoint aligns with the concerns raised by Participant 2 regarding potential negative impacts from excessive visits. It also resonates with Participant 8's emphasis on the importance of limitations on the number of visitors to prevent disturbance to wildlife. Together, these perspectives form a cohesive narrative around the necessity of sustainable tourism practices.

Infrastructure and Basic Needs

Participant 10 contributes valuable insights, emphasizing the practical infrastructure needs for visitors in SBI: "Need din sir dun ng mapagkukuhaan ng tubig. Wala kasing mainuman dun kaya dapat may dala dala kayong tubig pag pumunta dun. Nung pumunta kami dun may basurahan din kaming dala, para mapanatili din ang kalinisan ng lugar" (There's a need for a water source there. There's no water to drink, so you should bring your own water

when you go there. When we went there, we also brought a trash bag to maintain the cleanliness of the place). This perspective aligns with Participant 3's observation about the diverse marine life in SBI, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the natural environment. These responses collectively shed light on the practical needs for infrastructure, such as water sources and waste management, to enhance the overall ecotourism experience in SBI. Participant 10's emphasis on bringing essential items like water and trash bags exemplifies a proactive approach toward maintaining cleanliness and minimizing the environmental impact of visitors. This underscores the importance of not only appreciating the natural beauty of SBI but actively contributing to its preservation through responsible actions and preparedness.

Social Dimension

Local Economic Opportunities and Job Creation

Participant 1 aptly underscores the transformative potential of ecotourism in San Bernardino Island (SBI), expressing a positive outlook on its economic contributions: "An naiimod ko po kung mapapaunlad an ecotourism sa SBI, mabukas ini san oportunidad para sa lokal na negosyo nan trabaho" (I believe that ecotourism can contribute to the development of SBI. It opens opportunities for local businesses and jobs). This sentiment aligns with the observations of Participant 8, who notes that ecotourism has broader positive effects beyond the economy: "An ecotourism may positibong epekto dae lang sa ekonomiya. Ini nag-create nin pag-amit asin orgulyo sa komunidad. Nakakakita kami kun paano ini nagbabago kan satuyang komunidad sa paghatag trabaho asin suporta sa lokal na negosyo" (Ecotourism has a positive effect not only on the economy. It creates usage and pride in the community. We can see how it changes our community by providing jobs and supporting local businesses). These responses collectively emphasize the belief among the youth that ecotourism serves as a catalyst for economic development in SBI, not only generating job opportunities but also instilling a sense of pride and positive change within the local community. This theme illustrates a shared conviction in the potential economic benefits of ecotourism in SBI.

Cultural Exchange and Promotion

Participant 2 sheds light on the dynamic role of the youth in facilitating cultural exchange through active involvement in ecotourism projects: "An pagiging aktibo sa mga proyektong ecotourism san mga Kabataan didi sa Bulusan, mahatag ini san way para mashare man namo an culture san bulusan sa mga turista" (Being active in ecotourism projects gives us a way to share the culture of Bulusan with tourists). This perspective is further echoed by Participant 10, who highlights the role of ecotourism in fostering an exchange of cultures: "Dianis man na paagi ang ecotourism sa SBI sir para magkamayon po san exchange san culture di lang mga kaugalian didi sa Bulusan, kundi mga kaugalian din san mga bisita" (Ecotourism is a way to facilitate an exchange of cultures not only between the locals in Bulusan but also with the customs of our visitors). These responses collectively underscore the active

participation of the youth in promoting and sharing the rich cultural heritage of Bulusan through ecotourism initiatives. The theme of cultural exchange emerges as a shared perspective among participants, emphasizing the potential for ecotourism to serve as a platform for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between the local community and visitors (Funa, Gabay, Ibardaloza et al., 2022).

Environmental and Cultural Awareness

Participant 3 illuminates the educational dimension of ecotourism, emphasizing the impact of such initiatives on the youth: "Sa paagi kan ecotourism, nakaaram kami na mga Kabataan about sa environment and local culture" (Through ecotourism, we, the youth, learn about the environment and local culture). This sentiment aligns with Participant 9's perspective, highlighting ecotourism as a platform for education: "Bilang youth lider, nakikita ko na pag maunlad na ang turismo sa SBI, pwede kami maghimo san saro na proyekto na kung saan pwede ang mga Kabataan magkaroon ng recreational activities dun, halimbawa recollection" (As a youth leader, I see the potential for tourism in SBI to thrive. We can create a project where youth can engage in recreational activities, such as a recollection). These responses collectively underscore the dual educational impact of ecotourism on the youth in SBI, providing insights into both environmental stewardship and the preservation of cultural heritage. The theme of environmental and cultural awareness emphasizes the transformative role of ecotourism in fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among the youth for the natural environment and the unique cultural identity of SBI.

Recreational Experiences and Social Bonding

Participants 4, 5, and 6 offer a glimpse into their firsthand experiences with ecotourism, emphasizing the recreational and social dimensions of these activities. Participant 4 provides a personal account: "Inagda man lang ako sir san mga kaurupod ko, pan o an saro didto katrato ko. Di man kami overnight, uwian lang po sir. Pero magayon kunta kun overnight" (I was just invited, sir, by my friends because one of them is my boyfriend. We didn't stay overnight, sir, just went home. But it would have been nice if it were overnight.) Participant 6 adds another layer to this theme by sharing a memorable encounter during their ecotourism adventure: "Nung pumunta po kami, ang kasama ko sir family member po and some friends. Nagsetup po kami didto san tent and overnight lang po. Yung dagat nung pagpunta naming grabe po an balod, nahadok talaga ako sang grabe. Pero pag pauli namo sir ok naman, panatag naman yung dagat" (When we went there, I was with family members and some friends. We set up a tent and stayed overnight. The waves were intense when we arrived, it really scared me. But when we went back home, the sea was calm). These accounts collectively underscore the recreational and social bonding aspects of ecotourism in SBI. The experiences shared by the participants depict ecotourism not merely as a journey to explore nature but also as an avenue for creating lasting memories and connections with friends and family. This theme accentuates the

importance of ecotourism in SBI as a source of enjoyment and social interaction, enriching the overall experience for participants.

Community Impact and Pride

Participant 8 provides valuable insights into the holistic impact of ecotourism on the community in SBI, emphasizing the theme of community impact and pride. This sentiment aligns with Participant 7's reflection on the social aspect of ecotourism: "kung sa social po sir, wara man kasi mga tawo didto, pero kung sino man ang kasama mo dun, magakakaroon talaga ng intimate na iristuryahan, lalo na maluya man an signal didto. Pero may signal talaga ang internet din, kaya ayos din. Wala lang kuryente kaya mabilis malowbat ang phone" (In terms of the social aspect, there aren't many people there, but whoever you're with, you'll have intimate conversations, especially since the signal is weak. But there is internet signal, so it's okay. There's just no electricity, so the phone battery drains quickly). These responses collectively highlight the broader positive changes that ecotourism brings to the community in SBI. Beyond economic contributions, ecotourism instills a sense of pride and community identity, creating a positive impact on the overall dynamics of the residents. The theme underscores how ecotourism becomes a catalyst for positive change, fostering community cohesion, and nurturing a sense of pride among residents in SBI.

Perceptions on SD and Conservation Practices among the Youth

Interview responses were categorized within the theme of "Perceptions on SD and Conservation Practices among the Youth," consisting of five distinct subcategories (Figure 4). These themes include Environmental Protection and Conservation, Community Involvement and Local Empowerment, Government Action and Infrastructure Development, Monitoring and Regulation, and Cultural Preservation and Community Identity.

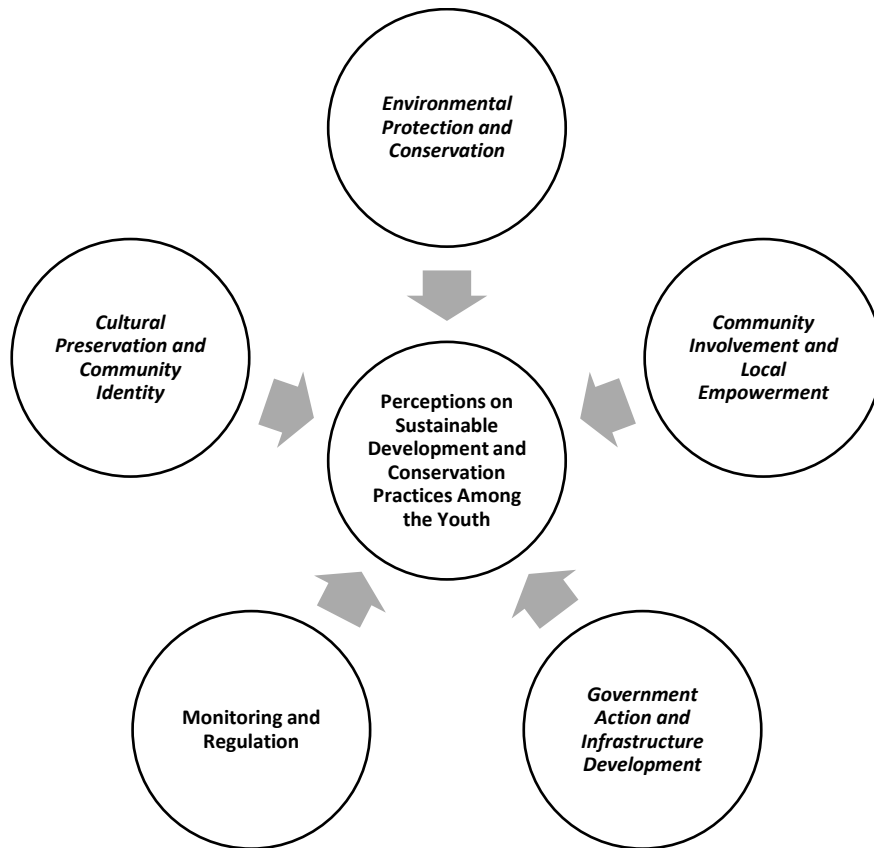
Environmental Protection and Conservation

Participant 3 articulates valid concerns regarding overpopulation in SBI: "An ako talaga iniisip na magiging dako na problema, saday lang kasi an SBI. Kaya iniisip ko na baka hanggang 100 lang na tawo an pwede didto. Kasi kun madaghanon, badi di na maiwasan na pumangit na an SBI." (I'm genuinely concerned that this could become a significant issue, given the small size of SBI. That's why I believe that maybe only up to 100 people should be allowed there. Because if it becomes overcrowded, it's inevitable that the beauty of SBI might deteriorate.) This concern aligns with the sentiments of Participant 6, who echoes the need for vigilant protection: "Maganda ang SBI, kaya lang dapat bantayan talaga nila yung mga pumupunta dun, kasi baka magkalat and eventually, masira yung natural beauty nito." (SBI is beautiful, but they really need to monitor those who go there because there's a risk of littering and eventually damaging its natural beauty.) Additionally, Participant 5 emphasizes the importance of monitoring for safety and sustainability: "Kung sustainable development ang pagiiristuryahan ta, dapat imonitor man an nagkakaradto didto diri lang hali sa Bulusan, pati sa Biri. An una sun dapat rehistrado an mga bangka nan an mga tourist guide. Safety din ito

san mga nagbibisita sa SBI." (If we're talking about sustainable development, visits there should be monitored not only from Bulusan but also from Biri. First, boats and tourist guides should be registered. This is also for the safety of visitors to SBI.)

Figure 4.

Youth Perspectives on Sustainable Development and Conservation Practices.



These sentiments collectively emphasize the critical importance of managing visitor numbers and implementing effective monitoring systems. The concerns expressed highlight a shared understanding among participants that uncontrolled visitation poses a direct threat to the current state of the environment in SBI. This underscores the need for responsible and sustainable ecotourism practices in SBI.

Community Involvement and Local Empowerment

Participant 7 highlights the pivotal role of youth engagement in the planning and execution of ecotourism initiatives in SBI: "Yung involvement naming mga Kabataan sa ecotourism ng SBI sa imod ko importante man. Kasi may mga ideas kami na makabago na pwedeng kailangan sa pagpapalano ng mga matatanda." (Our involvement as youth in the ecotourism of SBI, I think, is essential. Because we have ideas that could bring innovation needed in the planning process of the older generation.) This sentiment is echoed by Participant 9, who emphasizes the educational role of ecotourism in SBI: "An ecotourism sarong plataporma para sa edukasyon. Di ini lang pagpapaimod san ato kultura kundi eedukar man san mga bisita sa kahalagahan san satuyang tradisyon every May 20, san parola, nan an kasaysayan san SBI." (Ecotourism is a platform for education. It doesn't just showcase our

culture but also educates visitors about the importance of our traditions every May 20, the lighthouse, and the history of SBI.) These responses underscore the critical significance of incorporating the perspectives and ideas of the youth in ecotourism planning.

The youth bring a fresh and innovative approach to the table but also play a vital role in preserving and promoting the cultural and historical heritage of SBI (Sangpikul & Batra, 2007). This theme emphasizes the need for intergenerational collaboration, where the unique insights of the youth complement the wisdom of older generations, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to ecotourism development in SBI.

Government Action and Infrastructure Development

Participant 4 advocates for decisive government intervention and the enhancement of essential infrastructure: "Dapat mag aksyon an gobyerno... Halimbawa budgetan nila ang SBI... Halimbawa ayuson nira an pier didto. Kay makahahadok pag mabaludon." (The government should act... For example, allocate a budget for SBI... For instance, they should fix the pier there. It could be dangerous if left neglected.) This plea aligns with the sentiments expressed by Participant 10, who emphasizes the importance of government support: "Importante din po sir yung tulong ng gobyerno. Halimbawa po sir yung pagbigay ng budget para mapaganda yung lugar at mapalago ang turismo sa SBI." (Government support is also essential, sir. For example, providing a budget to beautify the place and promote tourism in SBI.) These voices underscore the critical role of the government in fostering sustainable ecotourism. Allocating funds for SBI's development, particularly in improving infrastructure like piers, is vital not only for the safety of visitors but also for enhancing the overall appeal of the destination. This theme underscores the imperative for proactive government action, financial investment, and strategic infrastructure development to guarantee the long-term success of ecotourism initiatives in SBI, making them both known and accessible to the community.

Monitoring and Regulation

Participant 5 underscores the necessity of stringent monitoring and regulations for SD in SBI: "Kung sustainable development ang pagiiristuryahan ta, dapat imonitor man an nagkakaradto didto diri lang hali sa Bulusan, pati sa Biri. An una sun dapat rehistrado an mga bangka nan an mga tourist guide. Safety din ito san mga nagbibisita sa SBI." (If we are talking about sustainable development, the visits there should be monitored not only from Bulusan but also from Biri. First, the boats and tourist guides should be registered. It's also for the safety of the visitors to SBI.) This viewpoint resonates with Participant 6, who also stresses the need for vigilance in overseeing visitors to SBI: "Maganda ang SBI, kaya lang dapat bantayan talaga nila yung mga pumupunta dun, kasi baka magkalat and eventually, masira yung natural beauty nito." (SBI is beautiful, but they really need to monitor those who go there, as littering could eventually ruin its natural beauty.) These perspectives collectively highlight the importance of establishing robust monitoring and regulatory frameworks for ecotourism in SBI. Registering

boats and tourist guides, coupled with vigilant oversight, not only contributes to the safety of visitors but also ensures the preservation of SBI's natural beauty (Walker & Moscardo, 2014). This theme emphasizes the need for proactive measures to mitigate potential negative impacts, promoting responsible and sustainable tourism practices in the region.

Cultural Preservation and Community Identity

Participant 10 mentioned the integral connection between sustainability and cultural values: "Hindi lang kasi environment ang kasama pag sinabing sustainability sir eh. Kasama din po jan yung kultura talaga ng mga tao sa Bulusan na pwedeng umengganyo ng mga turista. Halimbawa na lang neto yung klase ng mga pamumuhay ng mga tao, tulad ng pangingisda." (Because when we talk about sustainability, sir, it's not just about the environment. It also includes the culture of the people in Bulusan that can attract tourists. For example, the way people live, like fishing.) This sentiment resonates with Participant 9, who reinforces the idea that ecotourism serves as a platform for education about culture. These insights emphasize the broader perspective of sustainability that includes cultural preservation and community identity. By recognizing and showcasing local traditions, such as fishing practices, ecotourism can not only attract tourists but also contribute to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Bulusan (Adom, 2019). This theme underscores the intertwined nature of cultural and environmental sustainability, promoting a holistic approach to ecotourism in SBI that respects and celebrates the unique identity of the local community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study employed a psychological phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of youth from Bulusan, Sorsogon regarding ecotourism in SBI. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis guided by the COREQ framework, it revealed that youth do not merely participate in ecotourism as passive consumers, but rather as mindful and ethically driven individuals who reframe tourism as a purposeful act of environmental and cultural engagement. Their narratives reflected a deep cognitive and emotional understanding of ecotourism as an intersection of responsibility, identity, and sustainability.

Findings indicate that youth view ecotourism through layered dimensions: behavioral-participatory, affective-experiential, and cognitive-reflective. These dimensions encompass themes such as redefining adventure with purpose, active participation for environmental impact, appreciation for untouched environments, and a profound sense of connection with nature. These perspectives illustrate a generational shift in how travel and tourism are conceptualized: no longer as mere leisure activities, but as ethical commitments embedded in a broader framework of environmental stewardship and cultural pride. This reframing emphasizes the emergence of youth as agents of sustainability whose values align with the core principles of responsible tourism and the United Nations' SDGs.

In the cultural domain, ecotourism was seen not only as a means of preserving traditional practices but also as a catalyst for innovation and education. The historic Parola, annual religious celebrations, and customary practices such as fishing and camping were interpreted by participants as essential components of their communal identity. These practices, particularly when performed in the context of ecotourism, serve both as mechanisms of cultural continuity and as opportunities for intergenerational transmission of heritage. Additionally, the transformation of the islands into an informal site of learning underscores their pedagogical potential and highlights the role of youth in promoting cultural resilience.

The environmental dimension, meanwhile, foregrounded concerns over ecological degradation, over-visitation, and the need for clear regulatory mechanisms. Youth expressed strong awareness of conservation ethics, advocating for infrastructural improvements and strategic planning to ensure that tourism remains aligned with preservation goals. Importantly, their perspectives revealed that the ecological integrity of SBI is not taken for granted but is actively protected through a mix of individual responsibility and community initiatives. Bringing reusable materials, limiting environmental disturbance, and participating in clean-up drives were described not as prescribed tasks, but as moral imperatives embedded in their understanding of what ecotourism should entail.

Socially, ecotourism was framed as a vehicle for economic opportunity, cultural exchange, and social bonding. Youth recognized its potential to foster job creation and entrepreneurship while simultaneously cultivating community pride and cohesion. Through shared recreational experiences and interpersonal encounters, ecotourism becomes a platform for strengthening both individual and collective identities. Their reflections also illuminated the value of ecotourism in facilitating dialogue between tourists and host communities, particularly in contexts where digital disconnection fosters deeper interpersonal engagement.

Given these insights, this study advocates for the institutionalization of youth participation in ecotourism planning and governance. Their perspectives are not only informed by firsthand experience but are grounded in values that support long-term sustainability and inclusive development. Integrating their voices into policy, infrastructure development, and conservation strategies would enrich ecotourism frameworks with authenticity and innovation. Furthermore, educational programs designed to promote ecotourism should align with the youth's dual appreciation for exploration and responsibility, encouraging reflective engagement with both the environment and local culture.

Finally, there is value in extending this research longitudinally to examine how youth perceptions evolve over time, particularly in response to policy changes, environmental shifts, and socio-economic developments. Participatory methodologies such as digital storytelling and community-based action research may also enhance the richness of future inquiries. Overall, this study highlights the indispensable role of youth in shaping ecotourism practices

that are not only sustainable but also deeply rooted in cultural relevance, environmental ethics, and social inclusivity.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to the context specific findings on SBI and may not be entirely generalizable to other ecotourism destinations, sample size, and demographic profile of youth participants. In this case, results may not fully represent other groups of individuals. Further, results rely on self-reported data pertaining to youths' perspectives. Another limitation is the temporal aspect wherein results may change over time. However, given the limitations, this study serves as valuable information in understanding the perceptions of the youth to ecotourism that may provide insights into future research and sustainability efforts.

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