



International Journal of Science, Architecture, Technology and Environment

Tides of Change: How Hospitality Education Turned Coastal Residents into Tourism Human Resources in Leyte, Philippines

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63680/ijstate0626111.113>

Abstract

This phenomenological study assessed post-training outcomes of a community–university extension project between Leyte Normal University (LNU) Tourism, Hotel, and Restaurant Management (THRM) Department and coastal residents of Sabang Dagat, Dulag, Leyte, Philippines. Twenty local women with no prior industry experience were trained as staff of Camp Surf, a ten-room community-owned beach resort developed through the ABS-CBN Foundation’s corporate social responsibility initiative. Using NVivo-patterned thematic coding on in-depth interviews with fourteen purposively selected participants, four themes emerged: (1) Experiential Learning Validation, (2) Competency Acquisition across core hospitality departments, (3) Aspirational Capacity Building, and (4) Livelihood Transformation. Findings affirm the transformative potential of community-based tourism training (CBTT) in contexts of educational deprivation and extend theory in empowerment, human resource development, and sustainable tourism management. Recommendations are forwarded to LNU, LGU Dulag, and TESDA.

Keywords: Community-based tourism training, post-training assessment, empowerment, phenomenological research, NVivo thematic coding, tourism, human resources hospitality education, Philippines

Introduction

The global hospitality and tourism industry is among the most economically consequential sectors worldwide. Even amid the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, international tourist arrivals rebounded to approximately 88 percent of pre-pandemic levels by late 2023 (UNWTO, 2023), underscoring the sector’s structural resilience. Within this recovery context, community-based tourism enterprises (CBTEs) have attracted growing scholarly and policy attention as vehicles for inclusive economic development, particularly in geographically marginalized coastal communities (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Tolkach & King, 2015; Novelli et al., 2017).

In the Philippines, Eastern Visayas’ coastlines — including Sabang Dagat, Dulag, Leyte — are increasingly positioned as surf tourism destinations. Yet the promise of tourism-led growth is persistently constrained by a human capital bottleneck: communities possess exceptional natural capital but lack the trained workforce

necessary to operationalize competitive hospitality enterprises (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Tolkach & King, 2015). This structural gap is precisely what motivated the present intervention.

The Leyte Normal University (LNU) THRM Department, under a Memorandum of Agreement with the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Dulag, delivered structured training to twenty coastal residents managing Camp Surf — a resort developed by ABS-CBN Foundation's corporate social responsibility program. Participants, predominantly women aged 20–51, had no formal industry experience. Training modules addressed four competency domains: front office management, housekeeping, food and beverage service, and culinary arts. This study evaluates the effectiveness of those modules through a post-training phenomenological assessment, applying NVivo-patterned thematic coding (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) to examine training transfer, competency acquisition, and livelihood impact.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To describe the lived experiences of camp employees following training sessions by LNU THRM educators and students.
- To identify and thematically categorize competencies acquired across the four operational departments.
- To document participants' self-identified learning needs for subsequent training cycles.
- To assess the perceived impact of the LNU–LGU Dulag partnership on daily livelihood, self-efficacy, and community productivity.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Collaboration and Service-Learning Theory

Ledwith (2020) conceptualizes productive collaboration as characterized by joint planning, transparent decision-making, reciprocal trust, and a shared co-defined purpose. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) further position universities as civic partners in service-learning exchanges, a model elaborated by Fried et al. (2020) as “community–university co-production” wherein both partners contribute expertise and both benefit from outcomes. These constructs undergird the LNU–LGU Dulag arrangement.

3.2 Psychological Empowerment Theory

Fawcett et al. (1995) conceptualize empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process enabling individuals and communities to control their circumstances. Zimmerman (2000) refines this into three analytically distinct dimensions: intrapersonal empowerment (belief in one's capacity to act), interactional empowerment (critical awareness needed to navigate environments), and behavioral empowerment (actual community participation). All three dimensions are evidenced in the present study's findings.

3.3 Kirkpatrick–Phillips Training Evaluation Framework

Training effectiveness is assessed through the four-level Kirkpatrick (1994) model extended by Phillips' (2003) Return on Investment (ROI) criterion: (1) Reaction — affective responses to training; (2) Learning — knowledge and skill acquisition; (3) Behavior — transfer to workplace performance; and (4) Results — organizational and community outcomes. Applied alongside qualitative phenomenological methods, this framework enables holistic evaluation beyond quantitative metrics alone (Grossman & Salas, 2011).

3.4 Sustainable Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Scheyvens (1999) and Tolkach and King (2015) define CBT as a modality in which communities exercise substantive control over enterprises and retain a majority of generated benefits. Sebele (2010) characterizes well-managed CBTEs as “win-win” contexts where conservation and livelihood goals reinforce each other, while Manyara and Jones (2007) caution that without sustained capacity-building, participatory management structures frequently fail — the precise challenge the LNU intervention sought to address.

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

4.1 Human Capital and Service Quality in Hospitality

The rise of digital accommodation platforms (Airbnb, Booking.com) has compelled traditional hospitality establishments to differentiate through service excellence rather than price (Zervas et al., 2017; Guttentag, 2019). Frontline service personnel are consequently the most critical determinant of guest satisfaction and brand loyalty (Kandampully et al., 2015; Solnet et al., 2019). In resource-constrained CBTEs, behavioral training combining declarative knowledge with procedural practice is documented to yield the most durable competency acquisition outcomes (Solnet et al., 2019; Baum, 2019).

4.2 Structural Challenges in Community-Owned Tourism Enterprises

Community-owned tourism enterprises face endemic challenges including managerial complexity, accountability deficits, and skills gaps (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Stone & Stone, 2011). Tolkach and King (2015), examining Pacific island CBTEs, document that geographically isolated, female-dominated workforces face compounded disadvantages from restricted access to formal training and market-standard service benchmarks. The Camp Surf case is paradigmatic of this pattern: exceptional natural capital paired with severely constrained human capital.

4.3 University-Community Partnerships and Tourism Development

Service-learning partnerships between universities and tourism communities generate bidirectional benefits: academic institutions gain applied research contexts while communities receive capacity-building support (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Fried et al., 2020). Mason and Cheyne (2000) document that effective partnerships yield enhanced employment, community cohesion, and self-esteem. Stronza and Gordillo (2008), in a comparative ecotourism study, identify self-esteem enhancement and heightened organizational capacity as the most consistent partnership outcomes.

4.4 Training Transfer in Low-Literacy, Experiential Contexts

Training transfer — the application of acquired competencies to job performance — is predicted by training design features, individual motivation, and work environment factors (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Grossman & Salas, 2011). For low-literacy adult learners with no prior industry exposure, experiential and situated learning modalities yield the highest transfer rates (Kolb, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Burke and Hutchins (2007) confirm that practicum-based instruction with immediate workplace application — the approach employed by LNU THRM — optimizes training transfer in comparable community settings.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design

This study employs a phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018) to illuminate the lived experiences of participants navigating a wholly novel occupational environment. Two independent management and education experts validated the research instrument for alignment with research objectives and epistemological fit.

5.2 NVivo-Patterned Thematic Coding

While analysis was conducted manually, the procedure followed Bazeley and Jackson's (2013) node-based methodology in three phases: (1) First-cycle open coding — verbatim transcripts read iteratively with initial codes assigned to meaning units; (2) Second-cycle axial coding — codes clustered into conceptual categories and provisional themes articulated; and (3) Theme verification — cross-referenced against a supplementary focus group discussion and triangulation interviews with the resort manager and two board members (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Node paths follow standard NVivo hierarchical notation.

5.3 Setting, Sampling and Participants

The study was conducted at Camp Surf, Sabang Dagat, Dulag, Leyte. Purposive sampling selected fourteen participants across four departments: Front Office (n=2), Housekeeping (n=5), Food and Beverage Service (n=4), and Culinary Operations (n=3). Table 1 presents full participant profiles.

Table 1. Research Participant Profiles

Code	Age	Education	Civil Status	Department	Section Role	Prior Exp.
BK	30	College — Commerce	Married	Front Office	Clerk	None
TG	25	High School	Married	Front Office	Clerk	None
BG	20	High School	Single	Housekeeping	Room Attendant	None
IY	42	High School	Married	Housekeeping	HK Staff	None
HQ	50	Elementary	Married	Housekeeping	Room Attendant	None
SE ⁺	38	High School	Married	Housekeeping	Room Attendant	None
QK	40	High School	Married	Housekeeping	HK Staff	None
SS	32	College — Bus. Mgmt.	Married	F&B Service	Service Attendant	None
NU	35	High School	N/A	F&B Service	Waiter	None
SE ²	50	Elementary	Married	F&B / Cashier	Service Att./Cashier	None
HM	48	High School	Married	F&B Service	Service Attendant	None
SL	48	Elementary	Married	Culinary	Kitchen Staff	None
CH	47	Elementary	Married	Culinary	Kitchen Staff	None
HB	51	Elementary	Married	Culinary	Kitchen Staff	None

Note. SE⁺ and SE² are distinct participants in different departments sharing the same initials.

5.4 Data Collection and Ethical Safeguards

In-depth interviews were conducted at participants' workplace during non-peak hours, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Anonymity was preserved via alphabetic codes. Participants were informed of their unconditional right to withdraw. Data were stored securely with access restricted to the research team. Researcher reflexivity was managed through bracketing strategies: the focus group was facilitated independently of individual interviews, and verbatim recordings rather than researcher paraphrase formed the sole coding source.

6. RESULTS: NVivo-PATTERNED THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Four major themes emerged from the coding process. Table 2 presents the aggregate NVivo coding matrix.

Table 2. NVivo-Patterned Coding Matrix — Summary of Thematic Nodes

Theme	NVivo Node	Sub-nodes	Sources	Refs	Coverage (%)
Theme 1: Experiential Learning Validation	\Training Impact\Practical Value	Confidence building; Skill recall; Peer reinforcement	14	22	38.4
Theme 2: Competency Acquisition	\Skill Development\Operational Skills	Housekeeping; F&B service; Front office; Culinary	14	31	41.7
Theme 3: Aspirational Capacity Building	\Future Learning\Identified Gaps	Guest relations; Complaint handling; Catering; Mixology	11	18	29.2
Theme 4: Livelihood Transformation	\Partnership Outcomes\Socioeconomic Impact	Income stability; Self-efficacy; Community cohesion	14	25	44.1

Theme 1: Experiential Learning Validation

The most consistent initial response across all fourteen participants was an affirmation of the practical utility and direct applicability of training content — mapping to Kirkpatrick's (1994) Reaction level. Zimmerman's (2000) intrapersonal empowerment construct is clearly evidenced: participants articulated a shift from occupational uncertainty to confidence-informed action.

Theme: Experiential Learning Validation

Participant / Role	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
BK & TG Front Office	"We are happy with this partnership because now we are sure that we know the right thing in dealing with customers, especially with those who are 'pasaway' (non-compliant), who chose not to follow our rules and regulations."	\Training Impact\Practical Value	Confidence through rule application

Participant / Role	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
SS & SE² F&B Service	<i>"Because of our LNU partnership we realized that there are a lot of things that we need to learn to manage our restaurant."</i>	\Training Impact\Practical Value	Awareness of knowledge gap
BG, IY & HQ Housekeeping	<i>"I am very thankful of working with LNU THRM educators because we learned more about dealing with guests and with our co-workers in the housekeeping department."</i>	\Training Impact\Practical Value	Gratitude and interpersonal skill recognition

The consistent articulation of thankfulness and practical value resonates with Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) finding that heightened self-esteem is a predictable early outcome of structured tourism partnerships, and with Baum's (2019) argument that affective engagement is a precondition of durable skill acquisition in informal hospitality training contexts.

Theme 2: Competency Acquisition in Core Hospitality Operations

This theme captures granular operational skills and procedural knowledge participants attributed to the training intervention, mapping to Kirkpatrick's (1994) Learning and Behavior levels. Cross-functional coordination — frequently identified as a bottleneck in community-operated hotels (Manyara & Jones, 2007) — emerged as a particularly salient competency gain.

Theme: Competency Acquisition — Cross-Departmental

Participant Role /	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
BK Front Office	<i>"After the training we see to it that we talk and discuss our reservations and arrivals with the room attendants so we will not have a problem later on."</i>	\Skill Development\Operational Skills	Interdepartmental communication protocol
BG Housekeeping	<i>"Now I realize that we are one with front office, because we need each other. If one is missing, there will be complaints from guests, like we could not clean the rooms on time without working closely with front office."</i>	\Skill Development\Operational Skills	Systemic interdependence awareness
SE² F&B Service	<i>"I am now happy welcoming the guests in our restaurant because Maam J. taught me how to do it."</i>	\Skill Development\Operational Skills	Service initiation confidence
BG & SE⁺ Housekeeping	<i>"We realized the practicality of placing towels in the rack inside the comfort room rather than on the bed — when Maam S. explained it, we understood immediately why the systematic way is better."</i>	\Skill Development\Operational Skills	Protocol revision — evidence-based practice

The willingness to revise ingrained informal practices in favor of evidence-based procedures reflects what Argyris and Schön (1978) term double-loop learning — a qualitatively deeper form of transfer than simple

skill replication. These gains align with Nath and Raheja's (2001) formulation of service standards as the behavioral foundation against which all hospitality providers are measured.

Theme 3: Aspirational Capacity Building and Self-Identified Learning Needs

A theoretically significant finding is participants' spontaneous identification of specific future learning needs, signaling nascent metacognitive awareness and a transition from passive trainees to self-directed learners — consistent with Burke and Hutchins' (2007) concept of motivation to transfer.

Theme: Aspirational Capacity Building

Participant / Role	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
BG Front Office	<i>"I want to know more about how to handle guests who are having illicit affairs and they do not want to register at the front office but instead proceed to the cottages at once. I know it is my responsibility to let them register, but I have to please them at the same time."</i>	\Future Learning\Identified Gaps	Ethical service dilemma navigation
IY & HQ Housekeeping	<i>"We want to know how to handle guest complaints, especially when policies set by the board of directors are not customer friendly. As far as I know, other hotels allow in-room dining — how can I handle this situation?"</i>	\Future Learning\Identified Gaps	Policy-service tension and conflict resolution
SL & HB Culinary	<i>"We are looking forward to being given copies of more recipes so that we can practice by ourselves and offer them in the restaurant soon."</i>	\Future Learning\Identified Gaps	Self-directed learning orientation

The guest-handling dilemmas articulated here reflect what Hochschild (1983) identifies as emotional labor — the management of feeling as part of service work. The policy-service tensions raised by housekeeping staff constitute a structural barrier to training transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007) that cannot be resolved through skills training alone: they require organizational policy reform and frontline empowerment to exercise service recovery discretion (Bitner et al., 1990). The culinary staff's request for recipe documentation reflects an orientation toward transformative learning as theorized by Mezirow (1991).

Theme 4: Livelihood Transformation and Socioeconomic Empowerment

The fourth theme captures broader life-course impacts of the partnership, corresponding to Kirkpatrick's (1994) Results level and to the macro-level goals of sustainable CBT: locally owned economic activity that conserves natural resources while elevating community welfare (Sebele, 2010).

Theme: Livelihood Transformation

Participant / Role	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
BG Housekeeping	<i>"I find the partnership with LNU a productive experience because I could clean the rooms faster than usual."</i>	\Partnership Outcomes\Socioeconomic Impact	Operational efficiency — productivity gain

Participant / Role	Verbatim Excerpt	NVivo Node	Interpretive Code
HB Culinary	<i>"In the kitchen, we already know that we should be careful in using our ingredients to control the cost without sacrificing the quality of the product. Through this, customers will be happy at the same time we will gain a profit."</i>	\Partnership Outcomes\Socioeconomic Impact	Cost-quality consciousness — entrepreneurial mindset

Participant HB's commentary on cost-quality trade-offs reflects internalized entrepreneurial cognition (Baron, 2006) — a level of operational understanding that Tolkach and King (2015) identify as among the most difficult yet critical competencies to develop in CBTE settings. Together with enhanced productivity and customer interaction confidence, these outcomes align with Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) documentation of heightened self-esteem and greater community organizational capacity as durable partnership outcomes.

7. DISCUSSION

The four emergent themes map a coherent developmental trajectory: from initial recognition of expert guidance value (Theme 1), through foundational competency acquisition (Theme 2), to metacognitive self-assessment and future learning orientation (Theme 3), culminating in internalized entrepreneurial values and livelihood transformation (Theme 4). This trajectory mirrors the novice-to-competent progression described in Dreyfus and Dreyfus's (1980) Skill Acquisition Model, wherein structured practice and guided reflection enable rule-dependent behavior to evolve toward context-sensitive, intuitive expertise.

The collaborative dynamics documented — joint planning, mutual trust, shared purpose — closely align with Ledwith's (2020) theoretical characterization of effective partnership and with Bringle and Hatcher's (1996) assertion that durable community capacity requires bidirectional, co-productive exchange rather than unidirectional expertise transfer. The evidence of reciprocal learning — particularly the housekeeping team's indigenization of procedural knowledge within existing practices — approximates Fried et al.'s (2020) co-production model.

A critical implication concerns the policy-service tension raised by multiple participants. Resort policies that restrict in-room dining or mandate front-desk registration in ways guests find unwelcome represent structural barriers to training transfer (Burke & Hutchins, 2007) that training alone cannot resolve. The LGU Dulag resort governance framework requires urgent policy review to empower frontline staff with service recovery authority (Bitner et al., 1990). This is a governance recommendation as much as an educational one.

From a sustainable tourism perspective, the emergent cost-quality consciousness documented in Theme 4 is particularly encouraging. Tolkach and King (2015) identify financial literacy and cost management as the competencies most frequently absent — and most often cited as proximate causes of CBTE financial failure. Their nascent presence in this study's participants suggests that the LNU THRM curriculum has planted seeds of entrepreneurial cognition that sustained training and mentoring could develop into genuine enterprise management capability (Baum, 2019; Guttentag, 2019).

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence of the transformative potential of structured community–university training partnerships in Philippine coastal tourism. Through NVivo-patterned thematic analysis of fourteen phenomenological interviews, four themes documented a meaningful process of human capital development: Experiential Learning Validation, Competency Acquisition, Aspirational Capacity Building, and Livelihood Transformation. Participants who had never stayed in a hotel or dined in a formal restaurant demonstrated, within months, cross-functional communication competencies, evidence-based service practices, metacognitive self-assessment, and embryonic entrepreneurial thinking — a testament to both participant resilience and the pedagogical effectiveness of the LNU THRM practicum model.

8.2 Recommendations

- LNU Community Extension Office: develop a longitudinal training calendar addressing participants' self-identified gaps — advanced guest relations, service recovery, banquet and catering management, and basic beverage service.
- LGU Dulag and Camp Surf Board of Directors: conduct an urgent policy review of guest-unfriendly resort regulations and empower frontline staff with structured service recovery protocols co-developed with LNU THRM.
- Training Design: provide documented recipe portfolios, operational procedure manuals, and visual job aids to support self-directed practice between formal training sessions.
- Future Research: commission a longitudinal impact assessment (24–36 months) using mixed methods — phenomenological interviews and pre–post competency surveys — to track participant development trajectories.
- Policy Dissemination: share findings with the Regional Tourism Council of Eastern Visayas and TESDA as a replicable case study in community-based hospitality training for coastal tourism communities.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and publication of this article.

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