

# Chapter 2

## Partnerships Towards Sustainability: The Revival of Boracay's Wetlands



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**Abstract** The past decade has seen significant growth in the tourism and hospitality literature on corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, limited literature exists on public and private partnerships in the revival of tourist destinations, with no cash outlay from the government, towards sustainable tourism development. This case study addresses this gap by looking into how government agencies and private organizations, through their CSR, worked together to rehabilitate Boracay wetlands. The focus is on the rehabilitation of the nine wetlands, and in particular wetland number 2 into a conservation park that features endemic tree and animal species rescued from extinction.

In the process, the chapter identifies antecedents that lead to the involvement of particular organizations and stakeholders. It highlights traditional values and the primacy of the family, in pushing CSR onto the agenda. It accentuates the enabling function of the state and the importance of partnerships as mechanisms for CSR delivery. It is argued that considering all these factors, underpinned by social learning, lead to a good understanding of CSR for the environment in the Philippines and assist in ascertaining the place and trajectory of corporate social responsibility for sustainability among businesses in the Asian region.

**Keywords** Corporate social responsibility · Public and private partnerships · Boracay wetlands · Social learning · Sustainable tourism

### 2.1 Introduction

The past decade has seen significant growth in the tourism and hospitality literature on corporate social responsibility (Font & Lynes, 2018). This growth in scholarship has emerged notwithstanding debates on the nature of corporate social

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responsibility (CSR), its overlap with other concepts such as business ethics and difficulties in its measurement (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014; King et al., 2019; Mitnick et al., 2020). The broad interest in this field of study has led to a robust characterization of Western models of CSR. Among the early frameworks, including Carroll's in 1991, CSR was seen as forming a pyramid that covers the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions of business operations. There were explicit and implicit aspects (Matten & Moon, 2020). As corporations tried to meet the "triple bottom line", they sought opportunities to adhere to global standards of transparency and accountability (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014).

Certainly, these ideas have found their way into Asia via institutions such as foundations that tended to replicate their experience (Sciortino, 2017), to the extent that CSR initiatives of local companies has been dubbed as "Western mimicry" (Srisuphaolarn, 2013). Nonetheless, questions have been raised regarding this hegemonic interpretation. It is emphasized that Asian values and ideals impact distinctly on CSR, and hence, should be the focus of studies (Pang et al., 2018).

This chapter contributes to the discussion by looking into the implementation of CSR initiatives in a Philippine tourism destination, Boracay Island. The whole island was closed for 6 months in 2018 to be rehabilitated after years of environmental destruction. The specific objective of the case study is to analyze public and private partnership in the revival of a wetland, with no cash outlay from the government, in the journey towards sustainable tourism development in the island. The analysis is carried out from the analytical lens of social learning.

In the process, the case study identifies antecedents that lead to the involvement of particular organizations and stakeholders. The analysis shows that the degraded nature of the ecosystem itself, and a clear cognition that a lack of resources or capacity would constrain actors from acting independently, galvanizes the action of stakeholders and influences the way rehabilitation and CSR is implemented. Driven by an internal desire to improve the general condition, private companies engage in CSR. Sustaining their participation are deeply-held family values to give back to communities, a goal which matches the state's aspirations. Besides calling attention to the role of the family and the state, the study points to the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, bound together by the common purpose of addressing serious environmental degradation, as a mechanism for CSR delivery.

It is argued that considering these factors, all underpinned by social learning, lead to a good understanding of CSR for the environment in the Philippines. Moreover, the paper provides insights into how distinct CSR traditions in the Asian region are compared to the West, as well as assist in ascertaining the place and trajectory of corporate social responsibility for sustainability among businesses in the Asian region.

## 2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism

Scholars have been noting the significant growth in the CSR literature in tourism and hospitality. Font and Lynes (2018), in a recent review of the extant literature, tracked close to 370 published articles in the Web of Science database, 70% of

which were published in the preceding 5 years. Working on a different database, Wong et al. (2019) also note a prolific period of research for tourism and hospitality academics between 1995 and 2018, with the hotel industry topping the list in terms of industrial field.

This healthy growth in research has emerged notwithstanding debates on the nature of CSR. Like some discourses in tourism, the space occupied by CSR is contested (Mitnick et al., 2020) and the scope of firms' socially responsible behavior is difficult to define and measure (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014; King et al., 2019). Yet, some scholars suggest that CSR has achieved its conceptual development and could be replaced by corporate sustainability (Abad-Segura et al., 2019).

One dimension of this debate pertains to regional and cultural differences in the way CSR is conceived and practiced. That is, researchers find that the orthodoxies of CSR in the West are not similar with those of Asian countries. In the first place, it has been observed that there has been an overwhelming focus on European and US cultures (Kang et al., 2015). From the Western tradition, Carroll (1991) framed it as forming a pyramid of corporate social responsibility that covers the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions. Under this approach, the main concern is about "how companies make their money, not only how they spend it once they have made it" (Sharma, 2013, p.14). Matten and Moon (2008) conceptualized CSR as comprising the explicit and implicit. As explained, explicit CSR "describes corporate activities that assume responsibility for the interests of society [and] consists of voluntary corporate policies, programs and strategies" (p. 410); implicit CSR "describes corporations' role within the wider formal and informal institutions for society's interests and concern [and] consists of values, norms, and rules that result in (often codified and mandatory) requirements for corporations" (p. 410). Corporations seek incentives and opportunities to adhere higher standards of governance, accountability and transparency (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), as they try to live up to the triple bottom line imposed by tripartism, neocorporatism and law (Matten & Moon, 2020).

The robust growth in the Western literature can be contrasted to the sparse literature on CSR in Asia (Pang et al., 2018). This is not to say that CSR has not spread in the region or has remained as largely a Western hegemonic phenomenon (Srisuphaolarn, 2013). It is rather prominent and is reflected in a spectrum of activities. In a 10-country study of CSR in Asia, Sharma (2013) describes these activities as ranging from philanthropy, legal compliance, self-regulation and business models that respond to social needs including the private provision of public goods, social enterprises, green technology and others. Of late, many business leaders have been looking into sustainability and social responsibility, going so far as to adopting ISO standards on social responsibility, energy management and environmental management (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014). Sciortino (2017) observes that through philanthropic forms, many Asian companies concentrate generally on education via the provision of scholarships and construction of buildings, and to a lesser extent, medical care. Sciortino adds that there is minimal support for arts and culture, human rights, gender equity and mitigating environmental impacts. To Sharma

(2013), all these suggest that Asian CSR is focused on giving back to communities, and not geared towards structural change.

Within the Asian context, this variation has been attributed to many factors, not least of which is the national political and socio-cultural milieu. Recent studies in the tourism and hospitality sector confirm this claim. For example, Horng et al. (2017) extol Confucianism as the basis of Chinese tradition and culture, and the foundation for ethics in business organizations. They emphasize the connection of tourism-related issues on stakeholders, philanthropic practices, financial performance, and others with Confucianism as “the axis of Chinese social operation” (p. 1276). They argue that ethics as influenced by Confucianism is the fundamental element of CSR, rather than a tertiary-level element of Carroll’s CSR pyramid. In Indonesia, Rahmawati et al. (2019) raise the importance of spirituality in CSR in Balinese tourism industry, arguing that it facilitates the creation of a favorable external environment, provides inspiration for business leaders and complements the governance of stakeholders and issues. Nonetheless, it must be said that individual stakeholder perception might play a role. The study by Latif et al. (2020) cautions that the “way tourists understand CSR is quite homogenous across different geographical contexts,” (p. 11), thereby suggesting that researchers rethink the national differences argument.

Another major factor cited is family connection. As emphasized by researchers, the family remains as the locus of business and philanthropic activities among Asian countries (dela Rama, 2012), and in East Asia, not only are family units the more popular ownership form, they also are able to exercise excess control over other shareholders, such as in *chaebols* in Korea (Choi et al., 2019). El Ghouli et al. (2016) hypothesize that the power of controlling families to expropriate minority shareholders reduces CSR activities, while their concern to enhance the family’s reputation through CSR would have the opposite effect. Another mechanism by which families influence CSR is through the formation of foundations connected to family corporations. Sciortino (2017) observes that these entities are generally supported by members of a single, oftentimes multi-generational family who maintain ties with the family enterprises. Huge Southeast Asian family foundations such as the Tahir Foundation in Indonesia and Ayala Foundation in the Philippines, all strongly connected with conglomerates, are prime examples.

The family brings to the fore the identity of stakeholders who have been the subject of CSR investigations. In their review of CSR research in tourism and hospitality, Font and Lynes (2018) note the “fundamental role that stakeholders play within a firm’s CSR practices” (p. 1028). The prominence of stakeholders is a nod to Freeman’s stakeholder theory, commonly used in CSR papers, which emphasizes the responsibility of businesses to stakeholders rather than shareholders (Khatter et al., 2019). Thus, investigations have been carried out regarding the relationship of CSR with host communities (Bohdanowicz et al., 2011), employees (Holcomb et al., 2007; Tsai et al., 2012; Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014), customers (Latif et al., 2020) suppliers (Sanfiel-Fumero et al., 2017) or a combination of these stakeholders (Truong & Hall, 2017; Kang et al., 2015).

Within the above context, there is a noticeable strand that deals with sustainable tourism and CSR. Scholars have noted the involvement through CSR of the tourism industry, particularly hotels, with sustainability issues although this engagement is observed to sometimes fall short of requirements with regard to fragile destinations (Sanfiel-Fumero et al., 2017). According to Khatter et al. (2019), there is momentum in the adoption of environmentally sustainable policies and practices (ESPPs) but the degree to which hotel establishments implement these measures remain uneven due to internal factors such as firm size and variation in the intensity of external pressures received. Their own analysis of ESPPs among hotels in Melbourne, Australia show that most hotels in the study did not effectively report their activities. Moreover, they found a link between the size and affiliation of the hotel and website-based environmental disclosures, observing that larger hotels tend to display environmental information more than lower star rated properties. This is supported by research on Asian luxury hotels by Cherapanukorn and Focken (2014) who assert that while the properties are keen “to be seen as caring for the world” (p. 206), they are motivated in their CSR activities by the need to sustain the basis of their operations.

Compared to accommodation establishments, NGOs and governments are noticeably absent from CSR assessments. This is unfortunate, since in the Asian context, governments have been observed to play a role in encouraging CSR (Sharma, 2013), even if the extant tourism literature ignores their contribution (Font & Lynes, 2018). This is due not only to the heavy presence of government in the corporate sector via ownership, control or links to the market, but because of policies and regulations that provide an enabling environment for CSR to thrive. In China, for example, state-owned enterprises comprise the bulk of the economy. Thus, the relatively youthful CSR in China has been labelled as “top-down”, that is, national government through meta-governance, steers its implementation through local governments and state enterprises (Tang et al., 2018).

In the Philippines, CSR has had a much longer history. Some scholars trace its beginnings to the 1960s, describing that period as the decade of donations whereby companies ameliorated social problems by giving donations to charitable institutions (Rafael, 2015). The ensuing years saw the growth and development of CSR in response to societal forces, which gave birth to a diverse set of organizational channels. According to Anonuevo (2013), the usual means is for companies to form their own foundations, incorporate themselves into a network of companies such as the Philippine Business for Social Progress or Philippine Business for Education, work within a network of foundations such as the League of Corporate Foundations, or engage themselves in the activities of a consortia. A frequent object of investigation are conglomerates (e.g. Azanza, 2009; Buera 2012; Anonuevo, 2013) which have been observed to engage mainly in philanthropic activities.

Research and publication on CSR activities of the local tourism industry is largely confined to non-academic medium, but some players in the industry are known to engage with communities. These include Philippine Airlines Foundation which capitalizes on its air assets to assist in social development, for example, by airlifting aid to victims of calamities or flying indigent patients for medical

treatments. Another is El Nido Foundation, attached to El Nido Resorts in Palawan, which undertakes environmental conservation and social amelioration programs such as reef restoration, malaria control, skills training and market linkaging with members of the local community in El Nido. While CSR is argued as a myth in the country, from “a lack of ethics” and being focused on the “front stage” (Lorenzo-Molo, 2009), it is noteworthy that efforts by such organizations as El Nido Foundation have been recognized with awards for sustainability.

No doubt, such honors were facilitated by active partnerships with other organizations. As previously explained, collaboration by like-minded corporations, foundations, donors, universities, and other actors is a feature of Philippine CSR. This by no means suggests that working together for CSR is the norm across the international tourism industry, as a cursory review of the academic literature shows little evidence thereof. The closest is the work by Buijtendijk et al. (2018) who developed a framework, inspired by Actor Network Theory, to investigate the development of a web-based carbon management application in the Dutch travel industry. The paper showed how the collaboration involved many tour operators and research centers over many years and described the unfolding of the eco-innovation over four overlapping moments beginning with the emergence of collaboration on uniform carbon measurement through to rising disputes among representative spokespersons.

Collaboration among stakeholders to address intractable problems such as environmental degradation, and the open-ness of the government for such coordination mechanism has been argued as evidence of social learning (Islam et al., 2018). As an analytical framework, it is usually categorized into first- or second-order learning, or single- and double-loop learning (Schäpke et al., 2017). Dwyer (2018) notes its importance in changing mindsets of tourism stakeholders from engaging in extractive activities to one of rejuvenating destinations. With a focus on the interaction among actors, social learning has been applied within the tourism context to study the dynamics of stakeholders (Dela Santa, 2015; Wray, 2011; Koutsouris, 2009) and to examine conservation management in wild animal populations in response to anthropogenic stimuli (Higham, 2012). Other applications include analysis of social learning as a contributor to tourism destination governance, where Islam et al. (2018) found that social learning was instrumental in building consensus following communicative actions such as debates among stakeholders of a protected area in Bangladesh. The collaborative processes associated with social learning, they argue, have led to a better understanding of structural and ecological challenges facing the protected area, and via single-loop through to triple-loop learning, have resulted in behavioral as well as policy changes towards sustainability. Hoppstadius and Möller (2018) acknowledge that the social aspects involved in learning and sustainability are complex and intricate processes, particularly when conceptualized with spatial considerations in mind and related to everyday life. The outcome, they suggest, are sustainability views that connects the professional with the personal backgrounds of individuals. These concepts find resonance in the rehabilitation of Boracay’s wetland described below; hence, applied as the analytical lens through which the restoration is analyzed.

## 2.3 Methodology

To meet the objectives of the study, a variety of methods were used. Interviews were conducted with key informants, tourism officers in the locale, representatives from the local government unit and other tourism related organizations in Boracay and select members of the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF). The interviews were assisted by and coordinated through the Philippine Department of Tourism Region VI Office and its satellite office in Boracay Island. On-site visit in the different wetlands that allowed access were done with the assistance of the tourism officer in Boracay Island. Interviews with select representatives from the visited wetlands were done to get information relevant to this study. All these were carried out in 2019 as part of wider research program to study overtourism and rehabilitation in the island. In addition, interviews with the head of Watershed and CSR Department of Energy Development Corporation and the project head of its rehabilitation project in Boracay wetland 2 were conducted in September 2020. This was to further explain and better understand the unique characteristics of its CSR, anchored on strong family values, beyond economic and social gains.

Moreover, information from published articles, books, website of the private and government institutions involved in the rehabilitation of Boracay wetlands, were used as secondary sources of data in this study. Particular attention was focused on policy documents produced by the BIATF. The idea was to strengthen, describe, and analyze the information gathered during the actual site visit in the research situ and personal interviews conducted.

Data from the fieldwork were subsequently transcribed and analyzed. Analytical codes used in the study followed social learning theories. These included key concepts such as collaboration, technical and conceptual learning, learning in everyday life, and lesson-drawing. The researchers also considered important categories associated with social learning such as the search for integrated strategies, the utilization of scientific information, and the priority placed on environmental and social issues. All these were used to interpret the ideas and alternative views of CSR and social learning as argued in the distinct Asian context and discussed in this study.

## 2.4 Findings

In April 2018, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the closure of the island to tourists for 6 months saying pollution had turned the waters of Boracay into a cesspool. To facilitate the rehabilitation of the island and ensure its ecological sustainability, Executive Order 53 (EO53) created the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF). The Task Force was composed of various government agencies with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) as the lead agency in coordinating and implementing the Medium-Term Boracay Action Plan (BAP). The plan sought to address areas requiring attention such as: strict enforcement of



laws and regulations, pollution control and prevention, sustainability of island activities, and rehabilitation and recovery of the ecosystem. “It primarily provides the strategic interventions to ensure the island’s rehabilitation over the medium term and sustainable management over the long term” according to the National Economic Development Authority Undersecretary Adoracion M. Navarro (Inter-agency task force adopts Boracay Action Plan, 2019).

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), as the lead government agency in the rehabilitation of Boracay Island, partnered with private enterprises to undertake environmental projects to achieve the government’s goal of saving Boracay environment and ecosystem. One of the projects was the restoration of the nine wetlands in the 1032-hectare Boracay Island. DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu noted how wetlands had been among the most neglected and impaired ecosystems in Boracay. This is despite their importance in regulating natural water flow in the island. Following this, DENR initiated activities, together with other stakeholders, including the relocation and demolition of all establishments and structures encroaching on forestlands, wetlands and other water bodies in Boracay (Moaje, 2020).

Wetlands are areas where the environment and the associated plant and animal life are mainly controlled by water. They are among the most valuable ecosystems on the planet (Mitsch et al., 2015). Wetlands are described as *kidneys of the landscape* because they function as the downstream receivers of water and waste from both natural and human sources (Mitsch & Gosselink, 2015). They are also important environment resource as they act as catch basins and avert flooding during heavy rains and thunderstorms. When wetlands are destroyed, the local population loses the benefits wetlands once provided, including protecting shores from wave action and preventing flooding (De Guzman, 2018).

Boracay’s nine wetlands constitute a total of 37.81 hectares. Eight are located in forest lands, and one is in an area classified as alienable and disposable, as identified in the Boracay Inter-Agency Task Force (BIATF)-drafted Boracay Action Plan. However, an older map of Boracay revealed that there are actually a dozen wetlands on the island, but the unbridled development had caused these important water bodies to vanish over the years (Mayuga, 2018). Construction involved draining the wetlands and changing their hydrology (Cruz & Legaspi, 2019). Thus, of the remaining nine original wetlands in Boracay, five have disappeared. The remaining four wetlands are occupied by business establishments (shops, resorts and boarding houses) and illegal settlers (De Guzman, 2018).

Social learning relies on cognitive gains derived from the assimilation of evidence about the world (Dela Santa, 2015). This was seen in the wetlands. After evaluating their condition, which in some cases employed experts from the academe, it was found that some of the wetland ecosystems were still intact and might actually be saved from further destruction.

However, DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu mentioned that they needed partners with resources and long-term vision to collaborate with the government. “The government, on its own, cannot guarantee our natural ecosystems’ sustainability”. This is in keeping with social learning, which emphasizes partnership and collaboration



to overcome challenges (Islam et al., 2018). Thus, a partnership with owners of private business establishments for the rehabilitation and co-management of the island's wetland ecosystem was born: The Adopt-a-Wetland Program, where the private sector committed to rehabilitate and restore wetlands at no cost to the government. The adopt-a-wetland was patterned after the successful "Adopt-an-Estero/River" program implemented by the DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB). The latter is an example of lesson-drawing in social learning, where successful models across time and space are emulated (Wolfram et al., 2019).

CSR was seen to play a big role. As DENR Undersecretary Jonas Leones explained: "we want to maximize the support coming from the private sector. Business establishments should help the government in its rehabilitation effort by making the assistance a part of their corporate social responsibility to protect and conserve Boracay's wetlands." He even stressed the idea that the private company's responsibility is not just limited to cleaning the wetlands. They encouraged private businesses to invest in structures to enhance the wetland as ecotourism areas even as the development was primarily focused on ensuring the ecological balance and environmental sustainability of the wetlands.

While private businesses took on a lot of responsibilities, the government was expected to lay the foundations. For its part, the DENR provided assistance in the processing or issuance of documentary requirements, including environmental compliance certificate, certificate of non-coverage, other necessary permits and clearances. The DENR was likewise responsible in identifying the areas where the rehabilitation plan and restoration would be implemented; clearing the area; profiling of the wetland; creating information campaign materials; preparing sustainability plan for the continuity and completion of the project.

The rehabilitation project was to last for 3 years covering three phases. The first phase involves studies on the wetlands' existing state that includes bathymetric surveys, profiling, and biodiversity assessment. The second phase is the formulation and drafting of the rehabilitation plan centered on enhancing the touristic values of the wetland while preserving the ecosystem. The third phase covers the full implementation and completion of the rehabilitation plan.

Of the nine Boracay wetlands identified for rehabilitation, five were adopted by private companies that were funding and undertaking Boracay wetlands' rehabilitation and development as part of their CSR activities. These are the Lopez-led Energy Development Corp. (Wetland No. 2), San Miguel Corp. (Wetland No. 3), Aboitiz Equity Ventures (Wetland No. 4), the Lucio Tan-controlled Boracay Tubi System Inc. (Wetland No. 6) and the Gokongwei-led JG Summit Petrochemical Corp. (Wetland No. 8).

San Miguel Corporation (SMC), partnered with DENR to adopt and restore Wetland 3 in the district of Balabag in Boracay. The rehabilitation and development of wetland 3 highlights the commitment of SMC to invest in social projects beyond its business interests. They believe that the private sector needs to do its part for communities to prosper. As most of its operations rely on natural resources, they share the responsibility for environmental preservation, protection, and sustainable development. The development in wetland 3 consists of a floating deck boardwalk,

an observation deck, an amphitheater, and a footbridge to access the viewing deck. These structures will complement and highlight the natural features and attraction of the environment that is perceived to be the most attractive among the wetlands that still exist in Boracay. In addition, they also engage in community development initiatives through resource management training programs as means to improve and develop the local's full potential, keystone of strong community life.

The Aboitiz Group, through its social development arm, Aboitiz Foundation, has adopted and rehabilitated Boracay Wetland 4. They readily agreed to be the DENR's partner as preservation of the environment is one of the long-standing advocacies of the company. Wetland 4 will be fitted with structures that will enhance the greening of the environment through its ecological footprint, water plants, fishing areas, and water aerators to increase oxygen levels in the wetland and improve the natural systems beneath the water surface. The wetland was converted into a linear urban park to enhance its touristic potential. The development features three thematic areas: recreational, highlighting low-impact eco-tourism design; educational, defining the purpose and the importance of wetlands; and experiential, enjoining tourists and locals to be active partners in the cleanup, conservation and preservation, and protection efforts of the wetland.

Lucio Tan owned and controlled Boracay Tubi System, Inc., (BTSI) a water concessionaire in the island, commits to restore Wetland 6 in accordance with the action plan of the Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation Management Group (BIARMG). BTSI has been operating in Boracay for about 20 years providing potable water in the island and operates treatment facilities for wastewater discharged from homes and other establishments in Boracay. Wetland 6 with an area of 8.5 hectare is the biggest wetland in Boracay. The rehabilitation of wetland 6, also known as the Dead Forest, will incorporate vegetative enhancement through planting mangrove seedlings. Through this initiative, 2500 seedlings were planted in the wetland, reviving its original ecosystem that provide source of food for animal and plant species in the area. A boardwalk is also constructed that will serve as an eco-park and a bridgeway allowing visitors to see the wetland and its surrounding ecosystem.

The leading supplier of innovative world-class petrochemical products and solutions in the Philippines, JG Summit Petrochemicals Group (JGSPG), adopts Wetland 8. The company recognizes the importance of the rehabilitation of Boracay wetlands as they provide ecosystem services, protection of the riverbanks and coastlines in the island, and promote ecological sustainability of the island. JGSPG President and CEO Patrick Henry Go emphasized the importance of government and the private sector "to work together in efforts that aim to protect and preserve our planet and the environment." The rehabilitation of wetland 8, a 1.8-hectare swamp and marshland in the district of Manoc-manoc in Boracay, is anchored on environmental stewardship and community partnership, contributes to achieving UNSDG Goal 15 on the protection, restoration, and promotion of "sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and sustainably manage forests." One of the critical components of the project is the rehabilitation of vegetation in the area. To achieve this, 483 seedlings were planted on top of the 550 seedlings distributed to residents in the district in order to sustain tree-planting activities in the wetland.

Energy Development Corporation (EDC), a leader in geothermal energy, partnered with DENR to adopt wetland 2. A brackish water swamp turned into construction dump over the years, the project seeks to rescue remaining endemic trees and animal species in Boracay by putting up a tree park with a bird-watching platform. Under the agreement, EDC spent P10 million over the three-year term in support of the government's efforts to rehabilitate Boracay Wetland No. 2 and restore its natural resources as part of its partnership with DENR. In addition, ecological path walks were constructed to manage tourist access and movement within the area that will minimize ecological disturbance. These consist of more than a thousand leaf step pads ideally positioned to manage tourist access to areas within the BWCP. A bird watch platform is also constructed to allow visitors to view the birds and bats that have been sighted in the area. EDC also built an information center for visitors that will serve as reception and exhibit areas for visitors. These will provide opportunities to orient and educate visitors on the rehabilitation efforts of the area and serve as information in promoting native plants of Boracay wetlands.

#### ***2.4.1 CSR and Social Learning in Wetland 2***

The partnerships between the private organizations and DENR continue as they have common interests, shared values, and commitment for the protection and rehabilitation of the environment, aligned with their CSR programs. The DENR identified support for the rehabilitation of Boracay wetlands from these institutions who had previous and existing projects with them. The successful outcome of previous projects that stood strongly on their CSR programs, capabilities, and resources, allowed these organizations to consider wider opportunities to help DENR carry out the rehabilitation program of Boracay Wetlands. These antecedents directed these organizations to remain as valuable partners in the Adopt a Wetland project, achieving the DENR's goal of rehabilitating the wetlands and abatement of cost to the government (Fig. 2.1).

However, the particular interest of EDC in adopting wetland 2 goes beyond the economic and social gains, often descriptive of CSR initiatives. EDC's perspective on CSR is strongly anchored on the Lopez credo and values. This is consistent with assertions in the literature that social and spatial processes of learning for sustainability connect both the private and public spheres of one's everyday life (Hopstadius & Möller, 2018). The Lopez family believes that the company should grow with the community. Atty. Allan Barcena, head of Watershed and CSR Department of EDC, explained that the "community gives us the social license to operate, hence we are active in helping them". "We have to build them, develop their abilities and connect them with other stakeholders to be more sustainable. Through education and environmental programs, we grow the company and the community as well." Barcena further explained. Due to the owner's espoused values, all members of the Lopez Group of Companies are expected to conduct business in a

**Fig. 2.1** Actual site condition of Boracay Wetland 2 prior to its rehabilitation. (Photo by courtesy of EDC)



manner that creates mutual benefits to all stakeholders, become responsible stewards of all resources, and be cognizant of their obligation to generations, present and future.

Since 1928, the distinctive Lopez values has remained unchanged. These values are guided by the ABUNSIE philosophy, an acronym that stands for: A pioneering entrepreneurial spirit, Business excellence, Unity, Nationalism, Social Justice, Integrity, Employee welfare and wellness. These values, known from generations of experience, serve as cornerstone in managing their businesses and building their framework for CSR (Figs. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4).

Consistent with these values, EDC through BINHI, its flagship environmental program committed to adopt wetland number 2, where part of the development and rehabilitation plan is to create an awareness campaign on the critical flora and fauna of the area and the importance of their coexistence in the island. These recommendations were based on the result of a rapid biological assessment of the area conducted by experts from the academe, highlighting a learning approach towards conservation management and sustainability (Higham, 2012). Foresters of the BINHI program had successfully located samples of these species and had them planted within the development site in wetland 2, also known as Boracay Wetland Conservation Park (BWCP). “The trees planted are clustered into families and there will be 29 species of trees that can be seen here, 21 of which are part of the 96 threatened species that EDC BINHI rescued from extinction and is propagating in their state-of-the-art automated nurseries” according to Atty. Allan Barcena, head of Watershed and CSR Department of EDC. “By planting these tree seedlings now, we hope in a few years’ time, Boracay will not only boast of its clean waters and crystal white sands but will also show off their native tree arboretum which can become an added source of pride by the community,” Barcena added.

Social learning centers on interactions and communications with various stakeholders (Wray, 2011). In the case of wetland 2, EDC continues to serve as an active partner of DENR and Boracay Inter-Agency Rehabilitation and Management Group

**Fig. 2.2** Boracay Wetland Conservation Park marker. (Photo by courtesy of EDC)



**Fig. 2.3** Bird watching platform. (Photo by courtesy of EDC)



**Fig. 2.4** Endemic trees planted as part of the rehabilitation of BWCP. (Photo by courtesy of EDC)





(BIARMG) through the Boracay Wetland Bayanihan Program: We Clean and Heal as One. The program provides community volunteers 5 kilograms of rice per household in exchange for weekly cleanup of Boracay Wetlands. “We aim to raise greater awareness on the need to protect and maintain the wetlands and also help residents who are experiencing economic hardships,” according to Natividad Bernardino, BIARMG general manager. In a move that shows learning in everyday life (Hopstadius & Möller, 2018), a similar program was also afforded to volunteers who joined the first food-for-work cleanup activity during April–October in 2018 when Boracay was temporarily closed to tourists for the rehabilitation of the island. The program supported by the local government of Malay and the private organizations, including EDC, provided food in exchange for work to around 120 volunteers, most of whom live within or near the wetlands. Through these initiatives, EDC takes its mission as a renewable energy provider and goes beyond sustainability by investing in programs and partnering with the government that enhance the environment and empower its partner communities in Boracay.

## 2.5 Discussion

This chapter has been concerned with analyzing the implementation of CSR initiatives involving public and private partnership. The geographic context was Boracay Island, whose wetlands were rehabilitated along with the general restoration of the island’s physical environment. The analysis showed that the degraded nature of the ecosystem itself galvanized the action of stakeholders and influenced the way rehabilitation and CSR would be conducted. These stakeholders, from academic experts, private companies to government agencies, were bound together by the common purpose of addressing serious environmental degradation of the island’s beaches and wetlands. It was also observed how CSR was based on deeply-held values by family owners. The government, admitting to a lack of resources to carry out restoration of state resources, was found to play an enabling role in CSR implementation.

These findings provide insights into how CSR for the environment is conceived and executed in the country, in ways that highlight the distinctness of Asian sustainability. The first is social learning among stakeholders for the ecosystem. The restoration of the wetlands in Boracay was a gargantuan task for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources alone to complete. Thus, partners were brought in from the private sector, who in turn mobilized their own networks, for the task. This resulted in the commitment of several stakeholders to rehabilitate the wetlands. All these reinforce previous analyses of social learning in Philippine tourism and the environment (Dela Santa, 2015), where government was observed to accept capacity constraints, to engage in horizontal communication with non-state actors, and to enhance the role of civil society in environmental policy implementation. Amidst the persistence of certain practices that impinge on governance processes



and lead to the destruction of the environment (Maguigad et al., 2015; Dela Santa, 2018), highlighted by the closure of Boracay island, it is noteworthy that certain stakeholders have been determined to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Among the stakeholders involved in CSR, two stand out in the analysis. The first is the family-controlled enterprise represented by the Energy Development Corporation, which rehabilitated wetland 2. More specifically, it is the values of the Lopez family, captured by the acronym ABUNSIE, that are found to be more important in sustaining the CSR programs of the company than regulatory compliance or adherence to global standards. Besides social learning, this is unmistakably connected to a family's concern for enhanced reputation (El Ghouli et al., 2016) as the CSR program itself is dubbed as the greening legacy not just of the company but the rest of the Lopez businesses as well. As one of the most influential families in the country whose significance dates back to Spanish Philippines (McCoy, 2015), keeping a favorable family name for the long-term is a strong concern.

The second is the government and how it has played an enabling role in CSR. It is clear from the findings that it was the Department of Environment and Natural Resources which invited private companies it had known before to partner with it in rehabilitating the wetlands of Boracay, thus, opening the gates through which CSR programs can pass. Despite general criticisms of the weakness of the state (Abinales & Amoroso, 2017), as perfectly shown by analysis of events leading to the closure of Boracay Island (Cruz & Legaspi, 2019), the government remains as the fulcrum of governance processes. In the restoration of the wetlands and the island as a whole, it was the government that provided active leadership, underscoring its centrality in resolving sustainability issues.

That the government relied on partners it had worked with before, such as in the national greening program, to rehabilitate the wetland shows not just the importance of social learning but also the interconnectedness of networks. It also highlights the significance of network ties in forging CSR initiatives, as clearly the Boracay wetlands would not have been on the radar of EDC had it not been for DENR. These modern concepts, which have been investigated in connection with CSR by scholars from China and Japan (e.g., Akiyama, 2010; Zou et al. 2019), find resonance in the traditional Filipino values of bayanihan, a concept associated with kinship, mutual assistance, and cooperative spirit. Many philanthropic activities and initiatives have been launched with bayanihan in mind, including the government's official policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic: Bayanihan to Heal as One Act (Republic Act No. 11469) and the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act (Republic Act No. 11494). Indeed, bayanihan is culturally ingrained as to drive collaboration for CSR.

The above discussion goes to show that the local socio-cultural context provides a fertile ground for the identification of antecedents of Asian CSR for the environment. In the case of wetland restoration in Boracay, the underlying basis appears to be the overall degradation of the physical environment and a clear cognition that a lack of resources or capacity would constrain actors from acting independently. Driven by an internal desire to improve the general condition, moved in no small

part by traditional values such as bayanihan, private companies engage in CSR. Sustaining the participation of business enterprises are deeply-held family values to give back to communities, a goal which matches the state's aspirations.

Some of these factors and mechanisms of cooperation have similarities with the Western tradition. The facilitating role of government is one. Researchers have noted how governments in the West have ensured that CSR would be possible through the provision of legal protection for investors, enhancing the competitiveness of capital markets, strengthening the role of outside shareholders, setting up standards and policy frameworks, offering fiscal incentives for CSR. Matten and Moon (2020) explain that it was government that led the way towards the emergence of European explicit and implicit CSR policies and practices. They likewise point out the changing governance status of CSR, "with closer entailment of governments in CSR regulation... and with corporations and other private regulators in the cocreation of new governance systems" (p. 10).

The new governance system referred to above speaks of collaborative structures between government and non-state actors on a range of issues including CSR. Researchers have long noted the benefits of collaboration including shared costs and benefits. A hallmark of social learning, such an approach is advocated when dealing with difficult problems such as environmental degradation and other societal concerns. CSR is no less an exception, with work on pressing environmental issues having been carried out based on collaboration (e.g., Buijtenlijk et al., 2018). It has been observed that such arrangements continue to grow in the West and are being observed as well in Asia and other regions (Matten & Moon, 2020).

Yet, distinctions can be made between the Western and Asian traditions of CSR. From the paper, the Filipino traditional values of bayanihan was strongly identified as a main driver of CSR. This is not unique to the Philippines, since it has been observed that in Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia, the traditional values of *gotong royong* is argued to drive mutual aid (Sciortino, 2017), while it is Tri Hita Karana for the Balinese of Indonesia (Rahmawati et al., 2019), and Confucianism for many countries in East Asia (Hornig et al. 2017). Furthermore, the family connection cannot be missed. Family values definitely account for far more in the region, not just in economic relations, but in philanthropic activities too. In other words, traditional Asian values associated with devotion to the family and to others set it apart from Western models of CSR for the environment.

Unfortunately, while the findings of the study emphasized the generally known philosophical similarities and differences between the East and West, it also exposed the glaring lack of engagement of the tourism industry to major environmental rehabilitation efforts. Not one of the major resorts operating in Boracay was involved in wetlands restoration, even if the wetlands were literally in their backyards; most were focused on complying with directives to correct environmental violations. This is a cheerless reinforcement to observations that the tourism industry in the Asian region is not sufficiently engaged in sustainable practices (Tolkach et al., 2016).

## 2.6 Conclusion

Moving forward, efforts must be made by stakeholders for greater engagement towards sustainability through CSR. In particular, the experience of Boracay shows the need to strengthen compliance with environmental laws, adhere to standards of compliance, disclosure and transparency. A chief concern is how to get the tourism industry engaged more deeply with sustainability issues, that is, how industry players could be encouraged to go beyond the basis of their operations. Forming social learning networks, glued by traditional Asian values of mutual assistance and togetherness, where members could assimilate new knowledge and co-construct new visions and plans could be a good step. Working closely with the government in broadening these governance mechanisms is necessary, given its centrality in the sustainability process.

The government itself is encouraged to continue with its horizontal coordination and to rope in other stakeholders in its processes. It is noted that NGOs have not been involved in the rehabilitation of wetlands, but they too can be strong partners and channels of transformative learning for sustainability. All of this is actually easier said than done. As Schöpke et al. (2017) noted, sustainability transitions even with social learning are fraught with challenges. For the Philippines, Dela Santa (2015) found that these obstacles include the persistence of traditional institutional practices, financial and human resource constraints and most of all, the resilience of features of a patrimonial state, all of which were observed in Boracay prior to its closure and rehabilitation. Perhaps, in thinking about how to shift mindsets towards a “sustainable futures” perspective (Dwyer, 2018) via CSR and related endeavors, researchers could begin reflecting on Asian values and how they might be integrated with restorative and regenerative activities.

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