

## POVERTY TOURISM IN ISLA RETA, BRGY 23-C, DAVAO CITY

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### ABSTRACT

Slums are the city's estranged sections, hence they have never previously been promoted as tourist attractions. Tourists now travel to these locations in search of unique experiences. Additionally, a brand-new category of tourism known as "poverty tourism" or "slum tourism" has emerged. The purpose of this study is to clarify how residents of these locations describe their communities and their attitudes toward tourists. The study preferred qualitative research, and the data collection method employed was the interview methodology. 29 participants from Isla Reta, Davao City provided the study's data, which were then evaluated using the qualitative data analysis application NVivo. According to the findings, locals described Isla Reta as a location with a lot of crime, poor structure, and people who come to take pictures but who are treated well by the locals.

**Keywords:** Poverty, tourism, poor, area, Isla Reta

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Slum or poverty regions emerged during World War II, grew in the years that followed, and eventually became a serious issue for the cities. Even while the slums are seen of as a short-term solution to the city's housing woes for migrants, they also carry with them economic, cultural, and social issues. Davao City, which is considered to be a world city, is affected by the squatting issue just as much as other major cities worldwide and in the Philippines. Even while squatting has negative effects on a community, it might be viewed differently from a tourism standpoint. Tourists have begun to explore the many parts of a city for factors including the desire for authenticity (Dyson, 2012) and the anticipation of novelty (Freire-Medeiros, 2008; Meschank, 2011). The individuals who now reside in squatter homes are found in one of these places, which is also referred to as the city's slum districts. These areas, which are typically different from tourists' own lifestyles, are thought of as the new trend and attraction area, far from being the city's showcase. But do these locations provide the same level of tourist attractions for locals as they do for tourists?

Squatting began as people moved from villages to cities. The housing shortage was brought on by migration. Shady housing was used to fill housing gaps left by legal housing procedures (Triveno, 2016), and local governments aided with this issue by supplying infrastructure and public services (Yldz, 2005). After World War II, there was a rise in squatting in the Philippines as people moved from the countryside to the metropolis. The housing crisis was brought on by migration, which also gave rise to the idea of the shanty dwelling. However, the idea of a shanty dwelling had never been associated with anything bad. Instead, it describes the lifestyles of people who haven't yet adapted to city life but are expected to do so in the future; it describes people who don't yet have enough housing but who want to do so in the future. The term of social exclusion and discrimination, on the other hand, is frequently used to define slums (Kızıltan, 2003; Erman, 2004).

The word slum (varoş) comes from Hungarian and defines the areas situated outside of the city walls (Yücel, 2016). The word is used to describe the inhabitants of shanty houses and it is started to be used in daily life after the events of March and May 1995. However, it became a definition that includes, but that is not limited to, the neighborhoods where the poor lives within the city center. Therefore, shanty towns (gecekondu) are also accepted as slums (Yücel, 2016; Kızıltan, 2003) and the slum concept gets started to be used in place of slum concept (Erman, 2004). However, although they are used interchangeably, shanties and slums are different concepts. The slum concept in Hungarian is defined as the living spaces of the Jewish people residing in Venice during the 10th century and the areas where entry and exit points are controlled are defined as ghettos. Over time, these regions become regions of exclusion and minority immigrants and possess a homogeneous population structure (Karaman, 2003). The word shanty is a word specific to Philippines and started to be used in the everyday spoken language after the 1940s (Keleş, 2015). The word is also conceptualized due to its social characteristics (Çakır, 2011). Thus, today squatting is a phenomenon experienced by all countries around the world (Keleş, 2015), but also every shanty settlement is unique (The World Bank, 2006; Yıldız, 2005). Slum tourism, which started to take off after the 1990s in a number of locations throughout the southern hemisphere (Steinbrink, 2012; Frenzel & Koens, 2012), is thought to be a form of specialty travel (Frenzel, 2012, 2014; Amo, Jayawardena & Gaultier, 2019). Slum (ghetto) tourism is the term for trips to urban regions that suffer with poverty and violence (Dürr & Jaffe, 2012; Rolfes, 2010).

As a result, remote areas become desirable vacation spots (Frenzel, 2014), and poverty turns into a marketable product (Freire-Medeiros, 2008). However, it should be understood that not all areas of poverty in the area would be affected by slum tourism (Frenzel, 2012). When people think about unethical acts, slum tourism first makes them feel disgusted (Amo et al., 2019). Due to the fact that it is an event that disrupts one's sense of comfort and belonging in a different way than their home surroundings (Jaffe, Dürr, Jones, Angelini, Osbourne & Vodopivec, 2020). Apart from factors like authenticity and a unique experience (Freire-Medeiros, 2008; Meschank, 2011), reality (Dyson, 2012), and an educational component (Meschank, 2011), tourists also travel to these areas to experience the environment's emotional power and pressure. However, living in this region and visiting it, are different concepts. As living in the suburbs causes a number of emotional reactions, short-term tourism causes these reactions to be more temporary (Jaffe et al., 2020).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative research techniques to get a close-up look at how the locals feel about tourists who visit the slums. 29 longtime inhabitants of Isla Reta, Davao City, who volunteered for the study are involved. In non-probability sampling techniques, the snowball approach is used to calculate the participant count. The study began with the choice of a participant who satisfies the examination criteria, and this person was then asked to suggest another participant who satisfies the study criteria (Erdogan, 2003). The study's criteria are the voluntarily participating locals who have lived in Isla Reta for a long time and can offer in-depth knowledge of the island. The snowball sampling approach is used to begin the interviews, and once it is seen that the same sources and references are being used again but no new categories have emerged, the interviews are stopped. 29 forms of interview that can be analyzed are acquired during this period. The interviews took conducted on May 2023, in Isla Reta, and they typically lasted 15 to 20 minutes. In the interview form prepared at the beginning, there are also questions regarding the age, occupation and residency durations of the participants. However, approximately 60% of respondents were not willing to respond to demographic questions on privacy grounds. Therefore, demographic findings are excluded from the analysis.

Interviews are conducted face-to-face by seven different researchers. The researchers who conducted the interview are given prior training on qualitative research methods and interview processes. The researchers first briefed the participants about the study and requested permission for the interview. Interviews are recorded using a voice recorder following a permission request. Interviews recorded with the audio recorder are transcribed for analysis and analyzed using the NVivo qualitative data analysis program. The data obtained are subjected to content analysis. Separate themes and categories are created simultaneously by two independent researchers. The resulting themes and categories are compared and a consensus is reached.

## 3. MODELING AND ANALYSIS

Participants are asked to freely describe Isla Reta as it relates to the study. A word cloud is made by looking at the frequent words used in the interview texts that were acquired from these narratives (Figure 1). Turkish, not English, was used for the text. As a result, the word cloud is produced using Turkish. Phrases with fewer than two words, conjunctions, and words not directly related to the subject are all disregarded when generating a cloud of words. Additionally, terms that are repeated two times or less are excluded. Words from the word cloud that are larger and darker in font size are those that the participants used most frequently. When the use frequency of the words from the word cloud is examined, it is determined that the five words that are most used are respectively: us (f=19), culture (f=19), place (f=16), beautiful (f=14), good (f=13) (Table 2). Besides the positive words (good, nice) used by the participants and attributed to Isla Reta, the researchers also determined negative words (such as old-its use by the participants is mostly negative, it is in the meaning of old, complicated, depressed, illegitimate).

**Table 1.** Perception Against Isla Reta: Word Frequency Dispersion

| Word      | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) | Similar Words |
|-----------|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| us        | 19            | 9,84           | we, ours      |
| culture   | 19            | 9,84           | its culture   |
| place     | 16            | 8,29           |               |
| beautiful | 14            | 7,25           |               |
| good      | 13            | 6,74           |               |
| life      | 11            | 5,70           |               |
| east      | 10            | 5,18           | from east     |

|              |            |            |  |
|--------------|------------|------------|--|
| old          | 8          | 4,15       |  |
| before       | 7          | 3,63       |  |
| bad          | 7          | 3,63       |  |
| neighborhood | 7          | 3,63       |  |
| normal       | 7          | 3,63       |  |
| Davao City   | 7          | 3,63       | Davao City, to Davao City, in Davao City, Davao City's |
| income       | 6          | 3,11       | Income   |
| migration    | 6          | 3,11       |  |
| story        | 5          | 2,59       | its story  |
| region       | 4          | 2,07       |  |
| complicated  | 4          | 2,07       |  |
| urban        | 4          | 2,07       |  |
| distress     | 4          | 2,07       |  |
| municipality | 3          | 1,55       |  |
| isla         | 3          | 1,55       |  |
| illegitimate | 3          | 1,55       |  |
| past         | 3          | 1,55       | in the past, from the past                             |
| reta         | 3          | 1,55       |  |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>193</b> | <b>100</b> |  |

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the content analysis, 3 themes and 11 categories are identified. The themes are identified as social structure, infrastructure/superstructure, and the perception towards the tourism. The categories determined in social structure theme are crime rates (both high and low), ethnicity, poverty, solidarity; the categories determined in infrastructure/superstructure theme are superstructure and infrastructure deficiencies; the categories determined in perception towards tourism theme are tourist behavior, positive attitude, economic gain, tourist-local people interaction (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Themes and Categories

| Theme                             | Categories                       | Resourc | Reference |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Social Structure                  | Crime Rate                       |         |           |
|                                   | Ethnic Structure                 |         |           |
|                                   | Poverty                          | 9       | 13        |
|                                   | Solidarity                       | 6       | 7         |
| Infrastructure/<br>Superstructure | Superstructure Inadequacy        | 12      | 14        |
|                                   | Infrastructure Inadequacy        | 9       | 10        |
| Perception towards the<br>Tourism | Photographing the Attractions    | 26      | 40        |
|                                   | Positive Attitude                | 20      | 21        |
|                                   | Economic Gain                    | 19      | 28        |
|                                   | Tourist-Local People Interaction | 6       | 7         |
|                                   |                                  | 38      | 72        |
|                                   |                                  | 17      | 34        |

This study's goal is to assess the slums' potential as a source of tourism-related goods from the viewpoint of the local populace. Examined are the definition of the region and the degree to which locals approve of the need for tourism. According to the findings, locals described Isla Reta as a region with high crime rates, insufficient superstructures, a place where tourists go to shoot pictures, and where locals have a friendly attitude toward tourists.

Residents of the slum region, who are seen as being less fortunate socially, are asked to freely identify the region in the current study. The word "we" appears the most frequently as a result. The residents of Isla Reta are very spatially alienated (Yücel, 2016), yet according to them, the identity-individuality-collectivism perspective in the slums is family-country-oneself (Ardr, 2008). Having a strong feeling of community can be viewed as normal in this sense. In this study, the use of this word is supported by the word solidarity which is preferred by the people from the region while describing the social structure of Isla Reta. On the other hand, the word culture is often repeated in the definitions. Thus, the fact that the region actually has its own social culture may explain the frequency in the use of this word. It can be situated that the unique structure of the slum regions is not only due to their physical similarities, but also due to the slum culture, even within ethnic diversity.

The current study shows that the ethnic structure is highly affected and diversified through migration. As a matter of fact, the effect of migrations on the ethnic structure (Dinçer & Enlil, 2002) is considered as an expected result. The late 1980s (Adaman & Keyder, 2006; Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2009), especially the excessive migration towards Davao City, explains the change in the structure of the area. Together with the migration wave created by the voluntary migration from the South East of Philippines before the 1990s and involuntary/enforced migration after the 1990s (Çakır, 2011), the ethnic structure has lost and continues to lose its homogeneity (Yılmaz, 2006).

Another result of the study is the fact that there are superstructure deficiencies in the region. Especially on the superstructure, the narrowness of the streets and the ancientness of the buildings are provided as examples. As a matter of fact, Isla Reta region has narrow streets due to its old settlement. The fact that it is located in the city center of the city and is an old settlement explains that the narrowness of the streets when compared to today's urban planning. On the other hand, most of the buildings in Isla Reta are old and ruined, which coincides with Şen (2012)'s description on the inner and outer structures of the shanty houses built in the slum areas. Although empty and abandoned buildings give the region which is subjected to urban transformation works, a unique appearance, the overall image of the region can be described as 'dramatic' as stated by Yıldız (2005). On the other hand, the lack of clear media information about the current state of urban transformation ongoing in the region4 prevents people to know what the future of the region would be.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Locals claim that tourists come to the area to visit and take pictures in the streets because of the TV shows and movies that are filmed there. In this regard, it can be argued that the area has the potential to attract film tourists, and film tourism is regarded as one of a destination's key areas of interest (Gjorgievski & Trpkova, 2012). The old Greek homes on Isla Reta became a draw when the island's urban structure from the 19th century (Dinçer & Enlil, 2002) and its status as a non-Muslim and Greek community until the 1960s (Yılmaz, 2006) are taken into account. However, when viewed as a location rich of historic structures in a city undergoing urban renewal, Isla Reta can be compared to an outdoor museum. Dinçer and Enlil (2012) assert that these buildings cannot be conserved and that the economic viability of the incoming tenants is insufficient to safeguard them. It can be claimed that a neighborhood culture is sustained by the fact that they consider themselves as a "we," despite the fact that they feel spatial estrangement because they did not construct the structures themselves. Laundry lines, which are regularly captured on camera by visitors, can also be seen in this way as a sign of the neighborhood culture.

According to the report, locals have a favorable attitude toward tourists visiting the area. As a result, it may be claimed that the local population supports tourism. The locals claimed that both the economic benefits and the opportunities for social connection that tourists provide are the real reasons why the area welcomes visitors. The literature (such as Nunkoo & Gürsoy, 2012; Sirakaya et al., 2002; McGehee & Andereck, 2004) and this data are congruent. In actuality, the locals' attitudes toward visitors are encouraged if the destination benefits from visitors in terms of social transformation (Sirakaya et al., 2002).

There are some limitations to the current investigation. Participants' knowledge of the area is the only information on which the study received data from them. As a result, it is anticipated that there would be gaps in the participants' knowledge when the region's present status is contrasted to its past. Second, despite the fact that Isla Reta has a lot of unfavorable physical characteristics, no one is expected to have a negative attitude of where they reside. Therefore, even though participants claim that there are negative aspects, it is unclear how serious and intense they are. In this regard, it is important to evaluate the likelihood of regionally biased descriptions. Thirdly, although the neighborhood is regarded as a slum area, it is unclear whether tourists are drawn there for slum tourism purposes. A visitor may visit

a location because of push-pull forces linked to film tourism but may also do so because of considerations relating to poverty. However, it is unknown what the visitors' main objectives were. But it is obvious that the location draws tourists, which the local government may cultivate as a tourism destination. Finally, Isla Reta in Davao City is the site of the associated study. Given that every suburban zone has its own distinct characteristics, it is anticipated that research conducted in various slum regions will produce a range of findings and outcomes.

Future research should assess how local governments feel about this issue. In this regard, it is suggested that local governments and neighborhood barangay staffs located inside the slums' boundaries offer their assessments. On the other hand, it is suggested that earlier research be reviewed and locals' sentiments regarding slum tourism, a form of tourism that has ethical issues, be measured in order to gauge locals' attitudes toward tourism in this area.

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