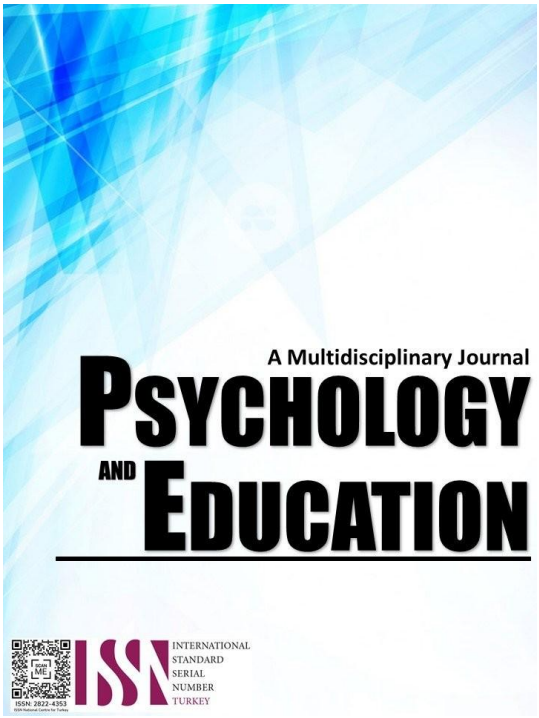
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM: ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN COTABATO CITY



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 46
Issue 9
Pages: 1262-1267
Document ID: 2025PEMJ4526
DOI: 10.70838/pemj.460910
Manuscript Accepted: 08-14-2025

Psych Educ, 2025, **46**(9): 1262-1267, Document ID:2025PEMJ4526, doi:10.70838/pemj.460910, ISSN 2822-4353

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Research Article

Shaping the Future of Tourism: Administration and Development Strategies in Cotabato City

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Abstract

Tourism plays a pivotal role in driving local economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability, particularly in developing cities (UNWTO, 2022; Dela Cruz & Santos, 2020). This study evaluated the extent of implementation of tourism development strategies and the level of attainment of tourism development objectives in Cotabato City, Philippines. Guided by a descriptive quantitative research design, the study utilized a researcher-made survey instrument administered to 100 respondents, including key stakeholders, tourism personnel, and local government representatives. The assessment focused on four strategic components—policy formulation, fund support, and logistics—and three core objectives: promotion of tourism-related programs, ensuring the well-being of the Filipino people, and upholding the right to a balanced and healthy ecology. Findings revealed that tourism strategies were highly implemented, particularly in logistics (M = 3.46) and fund support (M = 3.46), while policy formulation received a moderate implementation rating (M = 3.38). In terms of objectives, all categories were rated highly, with the highest mean scores recorded in the protection of natural resources (M = 3.70) and cultural heritage (M = 3.59). These results align with the perspectives of Hall (2020) and Richards (2021), who emphasize that sustainable tourism thrives when cultural identity and environmental assets are prioritized. Nevertheless, specific indicators—such as the promotion of bayanihan spirit and provision of recreational spaces for families—garnered relatively lower scores, suggesting opportunities for targeted improvement. Overall, the findings indicate that Cotabato City has established a solid foundation for sustainable tourism development through consistent funding, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. The study recommends strengthening community-based participation, enhancing family-oriented facilities, and diversifying funding strategies to foster inclusive and resilient tourism growth, echoing global best practices in destination management (UNWTO, 2023; Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

Keywords: *tourism, tourism development, tourism project, tourism activities and program, physical, networking and linkages, Cotabato City, Philippines*

Introduction

Tourism remains one of the most dynamic sectors in the global economy; however, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 triggered unprecedented disruptions in travel, forcing destinations to reassess their strategies for recovery and long-term resilience. Globally, research has shown that destinations with integrated approaches — combining sound infrastructure, targeted marketing, robust safety protocols, and meaningful host-community engagement — have demonstrated faster recovery in visitor arrivals and improved competitiveness compared to those with fragmented efforts (UNWTO, 2021; Hall et al., 2022).

In the Philippine context, the tourism industry suffered a significant decline in inbound arrivals in 2020, leading to a sharp drop in its contribution to national GDP. The Department of Tourism (DOT) reported that from 8.26 million foreign arrivals in 2019, the figure fell to 1.48 million in 2020 and further declined in 2021 before gradually recovering in 2022–2023 (DOT, 2023). This prompted the national government to recalibrate its policies through the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2016–2022 and its successor framework, focusing on sustainable recovery, competitiveness, and inclusivity (DOT, 2022).

Cotabato City, strategically located in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), is endowed with diverse cultural heritage, natural attractions, and unique traditions that can serve as drivers of local tourism development. Despite its potential, empirical studies specifically examining the city's tourism administration remain scarce. While related literature on nearby destinations — such as South Cotabato's Lake Holon ecotourism (Garces et al., 2021) and community-based cultural tourism in Maguindanao (Santos & Lopez, 2022) — offer insights, there is still limited research that systematically analyzes Cotabato City's policy implementation, infrastructure readiness, marketing strategies, safety and security measures, and stakeholder participation.

Recent studies emphasize that tourism infrastructure, when complemented by effective promotion and marketing strategies, significantly boosts destination appeal and arrival rates (Agustin et al., 2020; Kim & Lee, 2021). Similarly, safety and security measures, particularly health protocols and risk communication introduced during and after the pandemic, are critical for restoring tourist confidence (Bae & Chang, 2021). Moreover, cultural and natural attractions remain key competitive assets, but their development must be community-driven to ensure sustainability (Tolkach & Pratt, 2022). Stakeholder involvement, including local government units, private sectors, and community groups, plays a pivotal role in achieving inclusive growth and equitable benefit sharing (Garces et al., 2021; Santos & Lopez, 2022).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to evaluate the administration of tourism development in Cotabato City by focusing on the extent of implementation of strategic components — policy formulation, fund support, logistics, marketing and promotion, safety and security, and stakeholder involvement — and determining their impact on core objectives: increased tourist arrivals, tourism revenue, investment

growth, and destination competitiveness. By situating the study within the post-2020 tourism recovery context and drawing from both national and global literature, the research seeks to fill a critical knowledge gap and provide evidence-based recommendations for aligning local tourism initiatives with national recovery priorities.

Methodology

Research Design

The study will make use of the descriptive design. The descriptive design is suitable since it will utilize quantitative analysis, including surveys and statistical tools, to analyze the gathered data. The study is descriptive since it will describe the implementation and strategies of the tourism development.

Respondents

The respondents of the study will be selected from 100 bona fide residents of Cotabato City, and the group will be composed of barangay local government officials, local government officials, and community members, preferably working in the local tourism industry, such as pasalubong making and selling.

The sampling technique that will be used in the study is the quota sampling technique, wherein a total of 100 individuals will be selected as respondents from the total population. It is a non-probability sampling technique and is most appropriately used to limit only the number of respondents based on the capacity and access of the researcher in selecting the respondents.

Instrument

The researcher will formulate a researcher-made survey instrument under the guidance of the research adviser. It will be composed of 3 main parts. The first part of the instrument will be composed of closed-ended statements about the implementation of the tourism development. The second part of the instrument will be composed of closed-ended statements about the strategies of tourism development. The third part of the instrument will consist of a closed-ended statement regarding the objective of tourism development. The survey questionnaire will use the 4-point Likert scale to measure the degree of choice of the respondents.

Procedure

The data gathering process will undergo a series of activities.

The first step in data gathering will be the preparation and sending of all communication letters for permission to conduct the study from the right authorities, such as approval by the Dean of Graduate College and the Local Government Head of Cotabato City.

The second step will be the actual data gathering process, which will be facilitated by the researcher personally. It will be done through personal distribution and retrieval of the survey questionnaire by the researcher to the respondents. Proper ethical considerations, such as obtaining consent and conducting a brief orientation on the purpose of the study, will be observed for the respondents.

After data gathering, the tabulation of the data will be done manually with the help of the statistician. The data gathered will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20, with the assistance of the school's official statistician.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using the different statistical formulas. The analysis of the data is based on the responses collected through questionnaires. The data collected through survey questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS version 20, and interpretation was made using the mean for the implementation of tourism development in Cotabato City.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. *Mean Rating of the Extent of the tourism development implemented in Cotabato City in terms of Physical*

A. Physical	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Tri media campaign on the tourism sites.	3.40	Moderately Implemented
2. Development of Timako hill for ecotourism.	3.53	Highly Implemented
3. Promotion of native seafood delicacies of Cotabato City.	3.51	Highly Implemented
4. Promotion of Sharriff Kabunsuan day as tourist attraction.	3.60	Highly Implemented
5. Strengthen Business Friendly City to attract tourist.	3.44	Moderately Implemented
Grand Mean	3.50	Highly Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

The results indicate that Cotabato City's tourism development in physical aspects is generally highly implemented, with a grand mean of 3.50. The promotion of Shariff Kabunsuan Day ranked highest (mean = 3.60), showing the city's strong focus on cultural heritage as a tourism driver. However, the tri-media campaign on tourism sites scored the lowest (mean = 3.40), revealing moderate implementation and highlighting the need for stronger, more integrated marketing strategies to enhance visibility and competitiveness.

Table 2. *Mean Rating of the Extent of the tourism development implemented in Cotabato City in terms of Human*

B. Human	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Organize transport system for sea, land and air for tourism development.	3.45	Moderately Implemented
2. Formulate ordinances to protect tourist sites like Timako hill and Kutawato cave.	3.48	Highly Implemented
3. Formulate tourism committee to focus on tourism development.	3.29	Moderately Implemented
4. Formulate organizational structure for tourism hub in the city.	3.05	Moderately Implemented
5. Conduct tourism summit in the city.	3.09	Moderately Implemented
Grand Mean	3.27	Moderately Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development in Cotabato City in terms of human aspects is moderately implemented (grand mean = 3.27), indicating notable efforts but with significant room for improvement. The formulation of ordinances to protect tourist sites scored highest (mean = 3.48), reflecting strong legislative action for preservation.

However, the formulation of an organizational structure for a tourism hub received the lowest rating (mean = 3.05), pointing to a gap in institutional coordination. Moderate scores in transport system organization, tourism committee creation, and tourism summits further suggest the need to strengthen human resource capacity, stakeholder collaboration, and structured governance to support sustainable tourism growth fully.

Table 3. *Mean Rating of the Extent of the tourism development implemented in Cotabato City in terms of Financial Support*

C. Financial Support	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Provides income due to tourist coming in the city.	3.46	Highly Implemented
2. Provides job for local people.	3.41	Moderately Implemented
3. Provide business expansion due to visitors.	3.36	Moderately Implemented
4. Provides additional taxes sources for the LGU.	3.32	Moderately Implemented
5. Provides more income to small trans group sector due to many visitors in the place.	3.49	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	3.41	Moderately Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development in Cotabato City in terms of financial support is moderately implemented (grand mean = 3.41), indicating positive but under-optimized economic contributions. The highest-rated indicator was increased income for the small transportation sector (mean = 3.49), followed by general income from tourist arrivals (mean = 3.46), reflecting tourism's role in boosting grassroots livelihoods.

The lowest rating was for generating additional LGU tax sources (mean = 3.32), indicating unrealized fiscal potential due to informality or limited taxation measures. Moderate scores in job creation and business expansion further suggest the need for policies that formalize tourism enterprises, enhance revenue collection, and ensure reinvestment for sustainable economic growth.

Table 4. *Mean Rating of the Extent of tourism development strategies contributed in Cotabato City in terms of Networking and Linkages*

A. Networking and Linkages	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Link with Chinese chamber of commerce for support.	3.34	Moderately Implemented
2. Collaborate with PNP for safety of tourist.	3.19	Moderately Implemented
3. Coordinate international non-government agencies for assistance.	3.20	Moderately Implemented
4. Partnership with Muslim Chamber of commerce for pasalubong centers.	3.23	Moderately Implemented
5. Link with hotel and food industry for strengthening tourism industry.	3.39	Moderately Implemented
Grand Mean	3.27	Moderately Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development strategies in Cotabato City in terms of networking and linkages are moderately implemented (grand mean = 3.27), showing active but underdeveloped partnerships. The highest-rated indicator was linking with the hotel and food industry (mean = 3.39), reflecting efforts to collaborate with key hospitality stakeholders. The lowest rating was for collaboration with the PNP for tourist safety (mean = 3.19), indicating a need for stronger and more visible security measures.

Moderate scores in partnerships with local and international chambers of commerce, as well as NGOs, suggest that while networking initiatives exist, they require formalization, sustained engagement, and resource support to maximize their contribution to tourism growth and visitor confidence.

Tourism development strategies in Cotabato City, in terms of funding support, are highly implemented (grand mean = 3.46), reflecting consistent efforts to finance tourism initiatives. The highest-rated indicator was allocating tourism income for program development (mean = 3.53), showing strong reinvestment in infrastructure and services.

Table 5. *Mean Rating of the Extent of tourism development strategies contributed in Cotabato City in terms of Fund Support*

B. Fund Support	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Link with Chinese chamber of commerce for support.	3.34	Moderately Implemented
2. Collaborate with PNP for safety of tourist.	3.19	Moderately Implemented
3. Coordinate international non-government agencies for assistance.	3.20	Moderately Implemented
4. Partnership with Muslim Chamber of commerce for pasalubong centers.	3.23	Moderately Implemented
5. Link with hotel and food industry for strengthening tourism industry.	3.39	Moderately Implemented
Grand Mean	3.27	Moderately Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

The lowest rating was enhancing public-private partnerships for funding (mean = 3.41), indicating underutilized opportunities for collaborative financing. Moderate ratings in LGU IRA allocation and seeking DTI assistance suggest that, while funding sources are pursued, there is room to improve strategic prioritization, proposal development, and stakeholder engagement to fully maximize financial resources for tourism growth.

Table 6. *Mean Rating of the Extent of tourism development strategies contributed in Cotabato City in terms of Logistic*

C. Logistics	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Provide leaflets and posters on tourist spots.	3.29	Moderately Implemented
2. Provide signage's in strategic places for tourist destination.	3.44	Moderately Implemented
3. Construct pasalubong centers in the strategic places.	3.48	Highly Implemented
4. Provide tourist bus services.	3.53	Highly Implemented
5. Provide websites and hot lines for booking services.	3.56	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	3.46	Highly Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development strategies related to logistics in Cotabato City are highly implemented (grand mean = 3.46), indicating strong efforts in addressing tourist mobility, digital access, and cultural retail infrastructure. The highest-rated indicator is the provision of websites and hotlines for booking services (mean = 3.56), reflecting a move toward digitized tourism facilitation.

Tourist bus services (3.53) and pasalubong centers (3.48) are also highly implemented, enhancing accessibility and cultural engagement. The lowest ratings were for leaflets/posters (3.29) and signage (3.44), both moderately implemented, suggesting a need to bolster traditional promotional materials and wayfinding systems to improve overall visitor navigation and experience.

Table 7. *Mean Rating of the Level in the attainment of Objectives of Tourism Development in terms of Encourage activities and program which promote tourism*

A. Encourage activities and program which promote tourism	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Preserve natural beauty of the place.	3.40	Moderately Implemented
2. Maintain cleanliness through waste management of the place.	3.59	Highly Implemented
3. Protect natural resources in the place.	3.70	Highly Implemented
4. Additional trees planted to sustain green environment.	3.49	Highly Implemented
5. Decreases water and air pollution in the city.	3.47	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	3.51	Highly Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

The attainment of tourism development objectives related to sustainable tourism in Cotabato City is highly implemented (grand mean = 3.51), indicating strong environmental and tourism initiatives. The highest-rated indicator is protecting natural resources (mean = 3.70), reflecting the city's commitment to environmental conservation. Other highly implemented areas include waste management, tree planting, and pollution reduction. The lowest rating was for preserving the natural beauty of the place (mean = 3.40), indicating a need for improvement in landscape preservation and aesthetic planning. Overall, Cotabato City demonstrates a positive trajectory in sustainable tourism, balancing ecological stewardship with visitor experience.

Table 8. *Mean Rating of the Level in the attainment of Objectives of Tourism Development in terms of Ensure that Tourism development protects and promotes the general well-being of the Filipino people*

B. Ensure that Tourism development protects and promotes the general well-being of the Filipino people	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Provides recreational places for families.	3.39	Moderately Implemented
2. Promotes spirit of bayanihan in the community.	3.41	Moderately Implemented
3. Promotes healthy environment for the people.	3.53	Highly Implemented
4. Alleviates poverty in the community.	3.40	Moderately Implemented
5. Promotes values development to people.	3.50	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	3.47	Highly Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development's contribution to the general well-being of the Filipino people in Cotabato City is highly implemented (grand mean = 3.47), reflecting positive impacts on social and economic welfare. The highest-rated indicators include promoting a healthy environment (mean = 3.53) and values development (mean = 3.50), demonstrating tourism's role in fostering community health, culture, and identity. The lowest ratings were for providing recreational places for families (3.39), poverty alleviation (3.40), and promoting the spirit of bayanihan (3.41), indicating opportunities to enhance inclusive recreation, community participation, and equitable economic benefits. Overall, the findings highlight a solid foundation with areas needing focused improvements to maximize tourism's social impact.

Table 9. *Mean Rating of the Level in the attainment of Objectives of Tourism Development in terms of Ensure the right of the people to a Balance and Healthy Ecology*

C. Ensure the right of the people to a balance and healthy ecology	*Mean*	*Interpretation*
1. Promotes self-identity of the people in the community.	3.47	Highly Implemented
2. Strengthens cultural practices and respect.	3.59	Highly Implemented
3. Preserves cultural heritage and places.	3.54	Highly Implemented
4. Strengthens religious practices and devotion.	3.56	Highly Implemented
5. Promotes unity of the towards culture preservation people.	3.46	Highly Implemented
Grand Mean	3.52	Highly Implemented

Legend: *4 – Highly Implemented (3.46–4.00; 76–100%), 3 – Moderately Implemented (2.46–3.45; 51–75%), 2 – Less Implemented (1.46–2.45; 26–50%), 1 – Least Implemented (1.00–1.45; 1–25%)*

Tourism development in Cotabato City strongly supports the right to a balanced and healthy ecology, reflected by a highly implemented grand mean of 3.52. The highest-rated indicators include strengthening cultural practices and respect (3.59), religious devotion (3.56), and preserving cultural heritage (3.54), highlighting tourism's role in cultural reinforcement and community identity. The lowest rating, although still highly implemented, was promoting unity for cultural preservation (3.46), suggesting opportunities to deepen community participation and collective ownership. Overall, the findings affirm Cotabato City's alignment with ecological sustainability and heritage-based tourism principles.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the tourism development strategies implemented in Cotabato City are generally "Highly Implemented" across various aspects—policy formulation, fund support, logistics, and the attainment of tourism development objectives. Among all components, the highest mean ratings were observed in activities related to logistics (e.g., provision of websites, booking services, and tourist bus services), and protection of cultural identity and practices, reflecting the city's strong commitment to building sustainable and culturally relevant tourism.

Specifically, strategies related to financial allocation from LGU funds, enhancing public-private partnerships, and constructing tourism infrastructure such as pasalubong centers and signage are actively implemented. Furthermore, the objectives related to environmental protection, promotion of cultural heritage, and improvement of public well-being through tourism are also significantly achieved, as indicated by grand means consistently falling within the "Highly Implemented" range. However, while the majority of the indicators received high ratings, some specific areas, such as promoting unity in culture preservation, preserving natural beauty, and providing recreational facilities for families, received slightly lower yet still favorable ratings. These suggest that while development efforts are on track, continuous improvement is needed in these aspects to ensure inclusivity and sustained impact.

In the light of the findings and conclusion in this study, the following recommendations were formulated: (1) strengthen grassroots participation and unity in tourism programs, as the slightly lower rating in promoting unity toward culture preservation calls for deeper community involvement, with the LGU and tourism stakeholders organizing barangay-based consultations, cultural caravans, and capacity-building programs to enhance local ownership of cultural tourism initiatives; (2) sustain environmental and heritage protection efforts by institutionalizing green practices in tourism operations and encouraging community-driven heritage mapping to identify and safeguard both tangible and intangible assets; (3) enhance public facilities and family-oriented recreational spaces, as investments in family parks, eco-recreational zones, and accessible amenities can help further the objective of promoting the general well-being of residents and tourists alike; (4) expand financial partnerships and innovation in fund sourcing, since while fund support strategies are largely in place, the city may explore alternative tourism funding mechanisms such as ecotourism grants, CSR partnerships with private sectors, and digital tourism platforms to diversify income streams for tourism development; and (5) improve promotion and awareness campaigns, as consistent awareness and promotion using both traditional and digital platforms can amplify the visibility of Cotabato City's tourism attractions and improve tourist experiences.

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