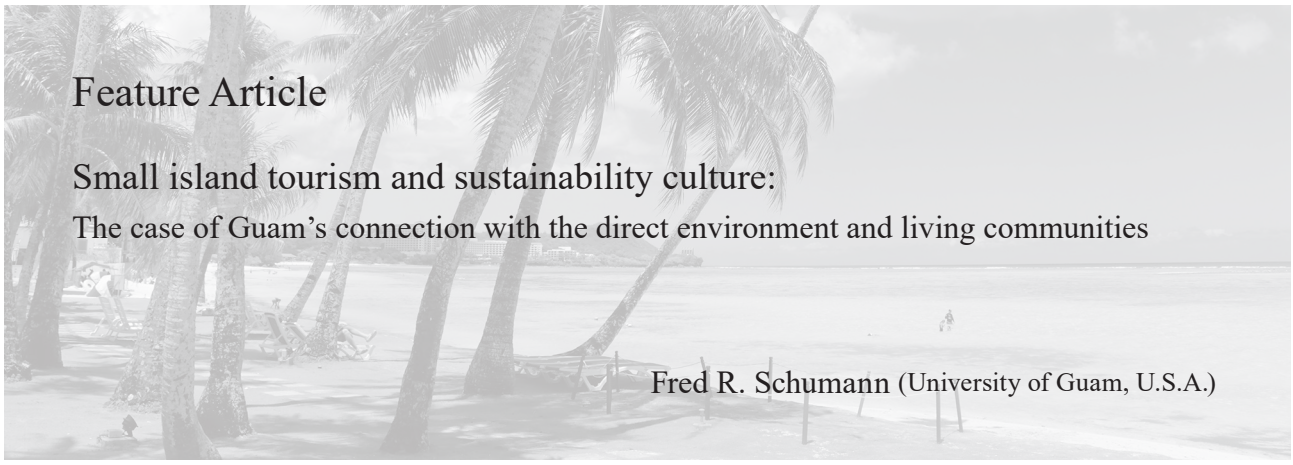

Feature Article

Small island tourism and sustainability culture:
The case of Guam's connection with the direct environment and living communities

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1. Introduction

Following the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many communities worldwide are confronting numerous interconnected crises. These crises bring with them issues of justice and injustice, as people from diverse demographic groups are affected in different ways. Industries, particularly those dominant within their communities, can build ethical and sustainable connections with their living communities through collaboration to manage and transition through the many challenges. As an economic sector, tourism plays a dominant role in many economies. Tourism combines industries such as travel, accommodation, food and beverage service, transportation, recreation, and entertainment. Its benefits include generating revenue from tourist spending, boosting local economies, creating jobs, and increasing tax revenues for infrastructure development.[1]

The tourism sector is not without its faults; however, its negative impacts have led to calls for "sustainable" tourism, which aligns with broader sustainable development policies that emphasize its environmental, social, and economic dimensions.[2] Both sustainability and economic growth are essential for a thriving tourism destination that benefits its community. This idea is supported by the UN's Brundtland Report[3] and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasize promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth, including tourism.[4] Although it is not recognized in traditional industry classification systems, tourism remains essential in many countries and territories and has the potential to help address these challenges.[5] This may ring truer in small-island destinations with fewer than one million people, where tourism relies on tourism for economic development and employment generation.

Small islands typically attract visitors seeking a pristine, natural environment, a sort of "get-away" unlike their urban, mainland home. The term ecotourism is often used to describe travel to such places. The question of whether ecotourism is an oxymoron[6, 7] has been discussed for decades, largely due to the potential for overtourism and the expansion of one's carbon footprint during travel to the destination. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education."[8] As such, greater consideration must be given to the designation of destinations as ecotourism sites. Higgins-Desbiolles et al.[9] have argued that tourism must be understood in its broader context and the contribution it may make to both causing and countering structural injustices and the need for a greater engagement in multi-logical, multi-layered, and critical thinking in tourism studies. The well-being of residents and the educational dimension of ecotourism must be incorporated into the design of eco-friendly destinations. In this context, this paper examines Guam and its past and current efforts to build sustainable and ethical connections within its community through tourism, followed by recommendations.

2. Sustainable tourism framework

While many educational institutions, particularly those that provide skills training, focus on the business dimension of tourism, other dimensions of tourism warrant attention. A holistic view is essential for a long-term outlook that includes all stakeholders, particularly residents of destination communities hosting visitors. Sustainable tourism development in any destination relies on four components of the VICE model[10], as shown in Figure 1.

The four components are described as the following: V is for visitors of the area, I stands for the service providers and businesses involved in the tourism industry, C (community) represents the local community, the population of the area who may or may not be directly related to tourism but living in the area they experience the benefits or harmful effects caused by tourism developments, and by their lifestyles influence the tourism experience offered to visitors. E (environment) encompasses the natural and built environments available to visitors, industry, and the local community, and these environments continually change in response to the activities of these groups.[11] In typical discussions of tourism, the focus is often on the "I" or the industry, with the business aspects of tourism (hotels,

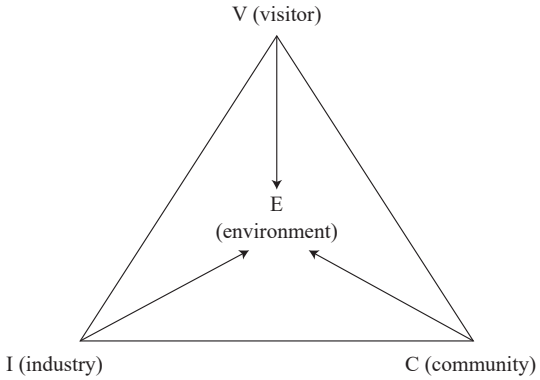

Figure 1: The VICE model
Source: Reproduced by the author based on Climpson (2008).[12]

airlines, retail, etc.) taking center stage. However, tourism involves more than the businesses associated with the industry; it is sustainable only if its interests do not conflict with those of any of the four components identified above.

As shown in the triangular model, the Visitor, Industry, and Community components are directly linked to the physical environment in which tourism activity occurs. Technological solutions are often presented to address environmental issues. However, a holistic approach should be considered, as all model components are interlinked. What about efforts to integrate sustainable consumption and production patterns into tourism policies or improve transparency in the carbon footprint being communicated to consumers? This requires critical thinking, leading to a transition to greener, more sustainable forms of tourism. In other words, an emphasis on technological solutions to achieve net zero does little to address inequalities that exist in the community, nor does it recognize the complexity of a tourism transition[13] to have tourism be a part of the broader objective to develop a more sustainable and responsible ecosystem. The tourism industry will face numerous challenges in addressing this transition over the coming decades. It will also require a philosophical shift in how destination stakeholders view tourism's place in their community, including the transfer of control to community-based organizations to ensure a sustainable, fair, inclusive, and just tourism transition.[14]

This fair, inclusive, and just process will involve the participation of the main actors in a tourism destination, namely its residents. Monitoring residents' attitudes toward tourism is critical to ensure that government, the private sector, and other stakeholders are aware of residents' perceptions of the tourism industry and its effects on their quality of life. This discussion must address the importance of social exchange theory for understanding the relationship between community and industry within the model. The theory has its roots in sociology and psychology but is very relevant to the tourism industry. This theory was introduced in 1958 by American sociologist George Homans, who published an article titled "Social Behavior as Exchange," based on the notion that relationships between people are formed through cost-benefit analysis.[15] The theory, as applied to tourism, indicates that residents are willing to engage in exchange with tourists if they believe they are likely to gain benefits without incurring unacceptable costs. If residents perceive that the positive impacts of tourism outweigh the negative impacts, they are more likely to participate in the exchange and, therefore, endorse future tourism development in their community.

Therefore, residents' willingness to engage in exchange with tourists is an essential consideration for the sustainable development of a tourism destination. Not only is it a common courtesy to monitor the comfort levels and perceptions of hosts who are expected to welcome visitors, but resident participation is also critical to success factors such as enhancing the visitor experience, minimizing economic leakage by supporting local businesses, and maintaining cultural authenticity. This is important for all destinations, particularly in rural and small-island communities.

2.1 Special case for small island developing states (SIDS)

Many islands worldwide have become popular vacation destinations for the fast-growing urban populations in major metropolitan areas in the developed world. In particular, small islands, or Small Island Developing States (SIDS), have become popular among international travelers as less-crowded destinations. According to the United Nations[16], Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are a distinct group of 39 States and 18 Associate Members of the United Nations regional commissions that face unique social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. This group is impacted by global events, such as climate change, even though the aggregate population of all the SIDS is 65 million, slightly less than 1% of the world's population. Small islands face other challenges.

Small islands in various parts of the world share similar positive and negative characteristics with respect to their economies. Some negative characteristics include size constraints/small domestic markets, remoteness, instability/natural disasters, and import dependence. In many cases, some of the shared positive characteristics may be the attractions of natural beauty and unique and distinct culture(s) and the relative ease of implementing domestic policy in restructuring service sectors, thus making tourism a viable strategy for economic growth.

As one of the positive characteristics mentioned above, cultural uniqueness must be considered when discussing the positive attributes of island tourism experiences. Throughout history, many islands have experienced colonization and the influence of mainland institutions. Although the island institutions that emerged during the withdrawal of colonial rule frequently brought together diverse ethnicities, indigenous governance and claims to cultural distinctiveness have often remained central to such islands and archipelagos,[17] thereby shaping visitor experiences. Residents of small-island destinations have the opportunity to collaborate to present the cultural experience to visitors authentically. Because tourism relies heavily on residents' goodwill, their support is essential to its

development, successful operation, and long-term sustainability. Monitoring resident attitudes toward tourism development is thus essential to the successful development of the destination. This is especially true in Micronesia, where small-island populations are critical to welcoming visitors and providing high-quality services that support a vibrant tourism economy.

2.2 Guam is a small island developing state

Guam is located in the northwest Pacific Ocean, approximately 6,100 kilometers west of Hawaii, 2,400 kilometers south of Japan, and 3,020 kilometers southeast of South Korea. Guam's economy is primarily supported by tourism, the military, and government spending. The island is a popular destination for international visitors from Asian metropolitan areas. In the year before the 2020 COVID-19 travel restrictions, Guam was the most-visited Micronesian island, receiving a record 1.63 million tourists in fiscal year 2019.[(18)] These tourists originated primarily from South Korea (45%), Japan (40.8%), the US (5.8%), and Taiwan (1.7%).[(19)]

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in late 2019, Guam, like small island territories and nations in the Pacific, faced numerous challenges in its tourism industry. In 2019, Guam's tourism industry represented 60% of the island's annual business revenue. However, at the height of the pandemic, the island experienced a "complete collapse" of the industry, with over a 95% decline in visitors,[(20)] while more prominent destinations shifted to domestic tourists to keep businesses afloat and community members employed. Five independent Micronesian countries – Kiribati, Nauru, Palau, FSM, and RMI – each closed their international borders early in the pandemic and subsequently remained virus-free or recorded just a small handful of cases,[(21)] while Guam, with less-restrictive borders, emerged as the region's COVID-19 epicenter in the first months of the pandemic.

3. A brief history of Guam's tourism development

The advent of tourism in Guam as a significant economic driver began in the early 1970s. Demand was created by Pan American flights that began departing from Japan's Haneda airport to Guam in 1967.[(22)] Over the next 40 years, a succession of international airlines sought to capitalize on demand for travel to Guam, eventually reaching 1.63 million annually by 2019.[(23)] Tourist source markets became more diversified during this period, with South Korea overtaking Japan as the largest source market. Today, the island is an air transportation hub for passage to and from Asia, Micronesia, and the United States.

In 1970, the Guam Tourist Commission (established in 1963) was renamed the Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB). GVB was then established as a public, nonprofit, membership corporation. It was tasked with the mission "to efficiently and effectively promote and develop Guam as a safe and satisfying destination for visitors and to derive maximum benefits for the people of Guam." It established a Research Department within the Bureau to collect, analyze, and evaluate data on the visitor industry.[(24)] GVB has become the industry's primary source for data dissemination and serves as a critical bridge linking the government, the tourism industry, visitors, and the local community. Today, GVB aims to enhance residents' quality of life through tourism and often takes pride in its motto, "making Guam a better place to live, work, and visit."[(25)] Under GVB's leadership, Guam's culture is significantly visible in promoting the island's attractiveness as a tourism destination. The Cultural Heritage and Community Outreach Division of the Guam Visitors Bureau actively provides and maintains avenues to further develop and strengthen Guam's culture and heritage within the tourism industry.

One of the tools GVB uses to ensure they are "making Guam a better place to live, work, and visit" is the Survey of Tourism Attitudes of Residents (STAR), or the STAR survey. GVB had been monitoring how residents perceive tourism in their island community every 4-to 5-year period, but due to various reasons relating to budget constraints and shifting priorities, the surveys have not continued with the scheduled frequency since 2010. However, in 2017, GVB resumed the survey, resumed tracking changes in attitudes recorded in prior surveys, and investigated current issues, concerns, and developments within the tourism industry. The latest STAR survey was published in 2019.[(26)]

3.1 Just another 4S (sun, sand, sea, and shopping) destination?

In the early years of Guam tourism, outbound visitors from Japan and other East Asian source markets sought international destinations that differed from their metropolitan environments. An escape to a beachside resort in a pristine environment, where they can shop for duty-free goods, was an attraction. Guam, as a U.S. territory, met all requirements and was only a 3.5-hour flight from Japan's international airports. Over time, infrastructure improvements, lower airfares, a weakening yen, and other factors led to increased international travel to sun, sand, sea, and shopping destinations, including resorts in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. To minimize price competition among tourists, the Guam Visitors Bureau focused on promoting culture and history as a differentiator to attract less price-sensitive visitors.

Tourism to Guam peaked just before COVID-19 brought tourism to a standstill in Guam and other Micronesian islands that depended heavily on tourism arrivals for much-needed revenue. The pandemic was one of the many external factors that significantly affected tourism activity in Guam and in many other small-island destinations.

4. Managing external forces

Coastal areas, which serve as major attractions on many small islands, are among the most visited tourist destinations worldwide, primarily for sun-and-beach tourism, which generates millions of annual visits to these ecosystems. Guam is an island with coastal areas that are popular for human settle-

ment and desirable residential and resort development. Combining tourism and residential activity can degrade coastal environments due to human pressure, as these areas are often destroyed by anthropogenic activities.[27] Not only do Guam residents face such threats, but they also face challenges from natural forces that small-island residents frequently encounter.

4.1 Natural forces

Guam has a tropical rainforest climate and two distinct seasons: wet and dry. The weather is generally hot and humid throughout the year, with slight seasonal variations in temperature. The island lies on the path of typhoons, and it is common for the island to be threatened by tropical storms and possible typhoons during the wet season, although typhoons can occur year-round. The latest super typhoon to hit Guam (Mawar in May 2023) caused extensive damage to vegetation, structures, and infrastructure.[28] Such weather events make Guam vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather, thereby affecting food production and food security. Food availability in Guam is mainly contingent on conditions favorable to imports, including policy, weather, and trade.[29]

4.2 Anthropogenic forces

Climate and weather events, including the effects of climate change, affect the stabilization element of food security in Guam. Climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and alter water and land resources, including suitable farmland, freshwater availability, and fisheries. Throughout the Pacific, climate change is expected to contribute to increased tropical cyclone speeds, greater rainfall variability, greater storm- and extreme-weather event-related damage or destruction of farmland, coastal inundation, freshwater salinization, shifting fisheries, and increased disease incidence.[30] Another force, unrelated to climate change but still derived from human activity, is the changing landscape of Guam resulting from military activity.

As an unincorporated territory of the United States, Guam hosts multiple U.S. military bases that occupy approximately 30 percent of the land. Two large base installations are on the island—Naval Base Guam and Andersen Air Force Base — with excess, unbuilt land remaining largely undisturbed and serving as an informal nature reserve for Guam's endangered species.[31] However, the reserve area is threatened by the ongoing military relocation of up to 15,500 U.S. Marines from Okinawa, Japan, and civilians working for the Department of Defense, reservists, National Guard personnel, and their dependents.[32] This controversial military buildup is viewed as either a tremendous threat or a potential golden goose, and the controversy raises serious environmental, demographic, and economic concerns.[33]

Adding to the controversy is the history of the seizing of ancestral lands by the US military after World War II and the potential limiting of resident and visitor access to cultural sites due to military exercises and firing range practice. Some residents view Guam as a military colony of the United States, with residents having US citizenship but no voice in the decisions that have put a third of their island under US military control, leading some to state that on militarized Guam, U.S. strategic concerns affect virtually all aspects of life. (ibid.)

While the buildup continues, residents are concerned that the island could become a target of warfare as geopolitical tensions rise in the Pacific region. Guam is currently experiencing what Galtung[34] calls a "negative peace," that is, an absence of conflict, as opposed to a "positive peace," which looks beyond the absence of violence and allows a more dynamic picture of the actual state of well-being, incorporating key components that make up the greater well-being of society. This brings to the forefront the island's state and its role in building ethical and sustainable connections with its living communities. Positive peace is "peace that exceeds the absence of violence, as characterized by the presence of justice, fairness, and well-being in individual and group interactions,"[35] which is a preferred form of peace. Both natural and anthropogenic forces shape how the island interacts with its direct environment and human communities. Managing these external forces is critical to building positive connections with the island living community, and tourism, as its primary industry, can play an essential role in supporting this effort.

5. Building ethical and sustainable connections

Guam continues to depend on tourism as a driver of its economy. By most accounts, tourism stakeholders strive to maintain its pristine island environment, unique CHamoru culture, and visitor-friendly image as its main attractions. These efforts return us to the original questions posed at the beginning of this paper. The questions "How is Guam doing to build ethical and sustainable connections with its living communities?" and "Are the environment, culture, and people being included in conversations concerning Guam's tourism development?" will be addressed in the following sections.

5.1 New directions and sustainability culture

Sustainability culture discussions often include indigeneity and relationships with the land, perhaps more frequently in the Pacific islands. Despite climatic, linguistic, and material-culture similarities, each Pacific Island culture represents a complete and distinct worldview. The three-way division of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, according to Gegeo[36], is a colonial imposition that reduces Pacific Islanders to characteristics of physical spaces as perceived by outsiders. Our ancestors were once indigenous somewhere in the world, wherever we may currently reside. Being indigenous to a place means having a depth of knowledge, understanding, and connection to that place. Indigeneity also includes a sense of stewardship and responsibility for managing that place and working respectfully with its nonhuman inhabitants.[37] Recognizing the importance of sustainability in small islands, Guam's education and political leaders have initiated collaborative efforts

over the past decade to safeguard the environment for future generations.

These stakeholders in Guam have taken steps to advance sustainable action by establishing key working groups. Aligned with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Guam Green Growth is a public-private partnership to develop tangible solutions to sustainability challenges and contribute to a green economy for the island region. In September 2019, Governor Leon Guerrero and Lt. Governor Tenorio promulgated Executive Order 2019-23, creating an 80-member Working Group of government, academia, private sector, nonprofit, and youth partners to transition Guam toward a sustainable future. The executive order assigned the facilitation of the Working Group to the University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability.

Through the Guam Green Growth Initiative, the creation of the G3 Working Group, and the adoption of the G3 Action Framework, this collaborative effort works to develop tangible solutions to sustainability challenges and contribute to a green economy for the island region.[38] Developed in collaboration with Hawai'i Green Growth and Esri (the global market leader in GIS software, location intelligence, and mapping), the G3 Dashboard is an online portal that provides open, inclusive public access to all Guam sustainability-related projects. To track progress on the goals outlined in the G3 Action Framework, the G3 Working Group selected a series of metrics, or primary indicators, designed to measure performance and inform data-driven decisions.[39]

In addition to monitoring, other initiatives and groups for sustainable futures have emerged from recent events. During the height of the pandemic, Guam's established businesses, most either directly or indirectly dependent on tourism, relied on what Kenton[40] calls intrapreneurial employees or company employees who act like entrepreneurs to help pivot their operations to generate revenue for business survival. At the same time, new and established entrepreneurs launched enterprises to address gaps in the provision of new products and services for communities.[41] The importance of entrepreneurship in small island economies is evident in encouraging the "buy-in" of residents in support of tourism, maintaining the nimbleness needed to respond to a fast-changing business environment, and minimizing leakage and dependence on imports. Workforce development and a focus on including entrepreneurship education, sustainable practices, and Circular Economy education are helpful. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within the tourism sector play crucial yet often underestimated roles in climate change mitigation, contributing to approximately half of the sector's greenhouse gas emissions.[42]

An example of the above description is the renewed effort to pursue opportunities in agritourism to increase farm production and revenue with value-added product sales, events, and on-site activities. The growth of agritourism has the potential to address various issues facing the island, including food security, import dependence, workforce development, and waste and leakage minimization. This has been accomplished through collaborative efforts with other colleges in the Micronesian islands and domestic and international university partnerships with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).[43] The strategy of expanding agritourism to address the island's challenges aligns with the recent recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship and intrapreneurial thinking following the COVID-19 pandemic. Indigenous entrepreneurship, which incorporates Indigenous cultural ideas and practices into startup businesses, has also increased with greater resident involvement in tourism.

The emergence of indigenous entrepreneurship in Guam's tourism industry has been a positive change, especially for tourists seeking authentic experiences. Guam's political status as a U.S. territory has both stimulated and inhibited tourism and economic growth. According to Bevacqua and Farahi[44], colonialism often distorts or impedes internal economic growth in a colonized space, especially when such growth would conflict with the colonizer's geostrategic interests. Local entrepreneurs are working to establish their "third space" beyond the existing commercial tourist industry. However, access to many sites of cultural significance is restricted by military land tenure and security concerns, a feature of ongoing colonialism. Despite industry reticence, the Guam Visitors Bureau (GVB) has sought to "decolonize" Guam's image to meet tourist demand and better reflect the island's cultural reality. A historical analysis is needed to understand how these factors have impacted and continue to limit the growth of Guam's tourism industry (ibid). The growth of indigenous entrepreneurship has been bolstered by efforts to encourage residents to participate more directly as owners rather than employees in tourism commerce.

As more Indigenous entrepreneurs participate in the tourism sector, traditional Indigenous sustainability practices can be shared to support the island's conservation efforts, thereby advancing a more circular economy. Recent research on circular-economy knowledge and education highlights the need for policymakers, businesses, and communities to collaborate to implement circular-economy principles and maximize Guam's economic sustainability and resilience. It also emphasizes the significance of promoting sustainable economic development in Guam and other SIDS facing similar challenges.[45]

Earlier in this paper, tourism was characterized as an oxymoron, owing to the emissions generated by long-distance travel for tourism activities. There is substantial work to do, given the challenge of reducing emissions amid growth in tourism, particularly for flights to remote destinations. Collaborative work enables the pursuit of sustainability even within an industry sector, such as the airline industry. According to Haldane Dodd, executive director of the Air Transport Action Group (ATAG), a global coalition focused on sustainability efforts within the aviation industry, with the vast number of flights taken to the air every day, it continues to be "a global dance of collaboration" just as it is to get a single flight off the ground.[46]

5.2 Recommendations

Sustainable tourism development on small islands is a complex topic that cannot be reduced to the claim that these islands are economically and environmentally vulnerable. It is also essential to question whether the concept of sustainability and planning for an island nation's economy can be seriously considered from the perspective of the tourism industry. It is necessary to acknowledge that various external environments, over which tourism exerts little or no influence, directly or indirectly affect this sector.[47]

This paper discusses past and present efforts in Guam to establish connections with the local environment and communities through involvement in the island's largest tourism economy. Based on the earlier discussions, the following five recommendations are made to strengthen ethical and sustainable connections in Guam with the direct environment and living communities through tourism industry enterprises.

- Continue to monitor residents' perceptions through surveys to assess attitudes toward tourism. These surveys should be administered at regular intervals, preferably every 3 to 5 years, to capture trends in resident attitudes and to ensure that residents' quality-of-life measures are not diminished.
- Ensure resident buy-in to secure their support for managing tourism experiences. Residents should be aware of the benefits of tourism, while stakeholders can work together to minimize impediments to residents' quality of life.
- Continue to encourage the preservation of culture through authentic representation. Cultural knowledge extraction and the use of intellectual property, properly crediting originators, are recommended. WIPO, or the World Intellectual Property Organization, is a valuable resource for guidance on these issues.
- Sustainability is often taught through a traditional STEM-based approach that emphasizes the hard sciences. A broader educational approach is recommended to include a more inclusive audience of community and business leaders, particularly those involved in the largest economic sector, tourism.
- Based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 experience, further encourage entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial activities to address food security, workforce development, and minimize waste and economic leakage. By offering educational opportunities to learn basic principles of the circular economy, business and community leaders can help move the island toward a more sustainable future by starting with small, palatable steps that are easy to understand and implement.

A suitable example illustrating the five recommendations is the case of Ulithi, a small Yapese Island in Micronesia. As with many small islands in Micronesia, Ulithi's tourism potential largely depends on its authentic cultural heritage and pristine environment, owing to its limited development. Tourism is a pathway to economic growth, but the island faces pressing challenges, including climate change and the erosion of traditional knowledge. Ecotourism and voluntourism are possible niche market opportunities for the destination. However, encouraging greater stakeholder participation and a concrete commitment to sustainability within strategic plans are necessary to build a tourism industry that supports the local culture, natural resources, and way of life.[48] This may be achieved by incorporating the five recommendations listed above.

6. Conclusion

This paper presents Guam's journey to establish positive connections with the living environment. It offers insights by introducing concepts that may be new to readers and sharing relevant experiences that may benefit stakeholders living in small island states or rural communities facing challenges similar to those of small islands. The paper also identifies proactive strategies that highlight the capacity to transform the traditional tourism industry into a more regenerative form of tourism, distinct from the linear economy model that is resource-extractive and generates waste. Moreover, the more regenerative form of tourism aims to build better futures amid the challenges faced by all island communities. Although this paper focuses on a small island, the lessons may also apply to small rural communities that view tourism as a means to revitalize their economies. Ultimately, collaboration will lead to success, just as it is "a global dance of collaboration" to get a single flight off the ground to reach tourism destinations around the world. Strengthening ethical and sustainable connections with the direct living environment and living communities is a worthwhile collaborative endeavor that should be strongly encouraged in every community worldwide.

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