

# Epilogue

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In the postpandemic era, sustainability has been mainstreamed in policies, strategies and practices of enterprises, destinations, and government. The better normal emerged because of paradigm shifts. Value creation is prioritized over volume generation to create sustainable jobs and investments. Customization of products and services to meet the growing demand for sustainability by the visitors has emerged as a core program of destinations. Resources have been calibrated toward products and markets that generate highest economic, social, and environmental returns, when matched with destination readiness and capabilities.

Tourism has become more inclusive across the value chain of primary and support activities, demonstrating its power and potentials to create and magnify opportunities and returns for stakeholders involved in the exchange. No author ever mentioned that value chain upgrading toward sustainable tourism would be easy. It is quite the opposite. Challenges in terms of lack of resources and capacity and presence of information asymmetry and moral hazards have been encountered along the way. MSMEs have become more resilient because of investments in their own innovation and their collaboration with the bigger players and the government. Institutional and governance innovations serve to create an improved system of incentives for stakeholders, small to large groups, private sector, and community groups, to invest their resources and participate in tourism by addressing those challenges.

The footprints of tourism, big or small, positive or negative, are highly visible at the destination level – in the “small” places like Intramuros, Binondo, Samar, and Nueva Ecija that the authors revisited during their journey. These “small” places and initiatives have transformed into resilient “big” and global destinations. The authors have used the power of data – proper collection, analysis, and presentation – to show how the “smallness” of the destination can actually make big impacts on sustainability. Data prove to be critical in the due diligence process.

Indeed, it is a daunting task to ensure that no one is left behind, that Philippine tourism’s trajectory is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals and the country’s *Ambisyon 2040* for Filipinos: *Matatag, Maginhawa*

at *Mapanatag na Buhay* (by 2040, Filipinos enjoy a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life).<sup>1</sup> But it can be done. Women are strong advocates and champions in environmental and cultural protection and conservation. The informal sector (e.g., Binondo, Manila) is an essential part in the inclusive tourism business as a result of the opportunities, right incentives, and capacity development investments. Property rights system has become instrumental in defining boundaries and incentives for resource allocation, access, and use, especially in protected areas. Sustainable tourism in the Philippines thrives because these property rights are well-defined. Sustainable tourism is the major partner in financing the conservation of our tourism resources for the future generation.

Beyond the better normal described above, sustainable tourism is supported by a productive and resilient pool of talents, able to cope with the challenges of technological advancements and climate change impacts. Tourism networks even though complex are widespread, strong, and effective in reducing the disparities in development between urban and rural destinations and between small and large players. They are instrumental in spreading tourism's benefits, in clustering resources for shared growth, and in making destinations smarter and sustainable. How these elements have evolved and woven to become part of the better normal story is the subject of another journey.

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<sup>1</sup><https://2040.neda.gov.ph/about-ambisyon-natin-2040/>