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**FEATURE**

**The Sustainability and Best Practices  
of Wellness and Spa in Cebu:  
A Case Study**

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**Abstract.** *The emergence of BPO companies and export-oriented companies in Mactan Export Processing Zone increased the target market for wellness and spa. Although the spa business is thriving, it may not be for long since the challenge of service-business management begins with a design that effectively meets the needs and desires of an attractive group of customers. This is what they do not have. This study is anchored on John Elkington's pillars of the triple bottom line of sustainability (environment, social, and economic performance). It aimed to explore the experiences of the 10 managers/owners of wellness and spa in Cebu for the year 2018. This study utilized five sources of data: (a) documents from spa's standees and brochures; (b) online website records, such as threaded discussion records; (c) journals of observations and photos, (d) face-to face interviews, including the researcher's narrative log (transcription); and (e) artifacts such as newspaper clips. The data were analyzed using Yin's pattern matching technique. The emergent themes that described the best practices were in the areas of service delivery, personnel recruitment, products used, facilities, and competence of service providers. It further revealed themes on resource allocation, finance, social, environmental, and political-legal aspects of the business as elements of sustainability. The study proposed a guideline for sustainability for wellness and spa in Cebu.*

**Keywords:** health, sustainability, wellness & spa, Cebu, Philippines,

**Introduction**

The emergence of BPO companies and export-oriented companies in Mactan Export Processing Zone increased the target market for *wellness* and *spa*. However,

even though the spa business is thriving, it may not be for long because the challenge of service-business management begins with a design that effectively meets the needs and desires of an attractive group of customers (Frei, 2020).

The business life of most spa businesses in Cebu is limited to 1 to 2 years only, even though most spa businesses advertised almost the same services. This made entrepreneurs reflect on how to start right if one invests in the wellness and spa business. For one, the wellness and spa business requires an enormous amount of investment and resources. The resources include facilities, human resources such as managers and staff (mainly therapists), the products used, and machinery. The investments are in terms of promotion and development and investment in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Fontanari and Kern, (2003) state that in Eastern Europe, enormous amounts of cash are invested in the “infrastructure of health-tourism.” These are considered as “long-term support factors” as well as “decision-making factors,” which are necessary for the alignment of the specific services that will be offered to the needs of designated “target groups” (pp 20-28). The concern of sustainability, therefore, is how to provide for the long-term needs of wellness and spa as a business entity.

Most sustainability-minded wellness and spa businesses used sustainability principles to guide their values and actions through leading by example and through sustainability campaigns. Six Senses Zil Pasyon Spa introduced stainless steel straws as a villa amenity to campaign for a plastic-free future (E-Hotelier, 2019), with each straw offered in a hand-made pouch made by local women supporting a local community. The Philippine’s Amuma spa popularized the “hilot sa kawayan” (bamboo massage) in providing a stimulating massage using oiled bamboo sticks alternately with the firm and soft massage sensations to normalize blood circulation and boost immunity. There are also many services available to its customers, such as the ventosa or cupping therapy, which is an ancient form of traditional therapy that uses cups with suction to stimulate the *qi* or the flow of energy in the different body parts. The hot stone massage involves the use of a smooth, heated stone, usually basalt river rocks, because of its smoothness and heat retention properties. These stones are placed on specific points of the body while giving a hand massage. Visiting a spa is one of the earliest forms of tourism (Smith & Jenner, 2000). Those who are planning to invest in wellness and spa should identify their target customers as part of their marketing strategy to ensure continuous client visits to the spa, thereby ensuring the financial stability of the business.

Spas started many years ago and were employed for healing. Spas were considered integral to the social structure (Vierville, as cited in Tawil, 2011). In this study, spa clientele includes men, women, children, and olds alike. The current spa

operation is a mixture of old customs and beliefs blended with contemporary amenities and services. For the current generation, the significance of avoidance of stress, the practice of a vigorous way of life, and rest have been accepted by more people, and the wellness and spa service addresses such need.

Harmsworth (as cited in Tawil, 2011) claims that the spa market is one of the fastest-growing leisure sectors, where societal trends and aspirations find instant reflection in the developments on both the demand and supply sides. The market is very fragmented, each segment catering for different customer needs, which continuously change in line with social and lifestyle changes. (p. 173)

Both the demand and supply in the wellness and spa point to the growth of the industry. Today, health is considered the absence of disease, and many are practicing a healthy lifestyle (Fisher, as cited in Fontanari & Kern, 2003).

People change in their attitudes (Messerli & Oyama, 2004). This change in their attitude towards health is a measure of the modernity of society (Tawil, 2011). With more health-related concerns, people in the workforce need to relax to fight the stress that goes with their job and to minimize the anxiety that results from the pressures of their job.

Wellness and spa businesses in the local setting have also changed enormously with globalization. The effects of globalization, which is the improvement of telecommunication and travel, give rise to more tourists that look for a place to relax and be pampered. This is also ushered by the technological advancement in transportation that promotes travel at a lower cost. With the coming in of various tourist seeking pleasure, one choice offered for them is the spa services available in their destination. With globalization, many new multinational organizations placed their branches in many developing countries like the Philippines. The emergence of the business processing industry in Cebu lured many businesses to engage in wellness and spa businesses. Many multinational manufacturing firms also locate their companies in Mactan, thereby increasing the workforce that needs the spa services. There are also more English as second language (ESL) schools that proliferated within the island of Mactan, hiring local English-speaking professionals. Together with their foreign students, they frequented the wellness and spa establishments. As observed in Mactan Island and Metro Cebu, clients visited the spa to relieve the stress they got from their work. The traffic problem of the metropolis that add to the pressure that every employee has to tackle every day necessitates one to find solace in a wellness and spa during the early afternoon when the traffic is at its height and hope to return to their homes at the late evening when traffic already subsides.

The emergence of classy travelers, both local and foreign, with various needs, also ignites the growth in spa-related tourism where spa clients have high expectations. After successful visits to a spa, Harmsworth (2004) observed that 90% of spa clients have returned for another visit. Messerli and Oyama (2004) commented that spa clients look for new and different meaningful experiences characterized by more quality conscious, fully informed, and independent clients that are hard to please.

Additionally, Grihault (as cited in Tawil, 2011) said that “along with greater health awareness, uptake of alternative therapies, and more environmental and psychological awareness, that drive demand for spa holidays, it also addresses the need for time out, rejuvenation, and deeper experience” (p. 157). Thus, it solved the need for a time-out to rest, rejuvenation, and renewal with deep experience. Being a spa enthusiast, the researcher is an avid spa guest hopping from one wellness and spa to another, enjoying the different services it offered. It can be observed that after a few months or a year, a new spa outlet is seen, the business closes, or new management takes over. It raised questions about its sustainability, which is always at risk. The study aimed to explore the experiences of wellness and spa managers and owners on the sustainability of the wellness and spa in Cebu and to discover their best practices for the calendar year 2018, to propose a guide for a sustainable business in the wellness and spa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on Elkington’s (as cited in ALhaddi, 2015) triple bottom line of sustainability (environment, social, and economic performance). Every business commits to focus not only on their profit but also on social and environmental concerns. It seeks to understand how the firm’s level of commitment to its CSR has an impact on its environment over time.

### **Review of the Literature**

According to Smith and Puczko (2008), the term *spa* relates to the Latin word *sanitus* or “aqua,” which means “health through water.” According to Brown (2019), wellness means a state of wellbeing with optimal health and vitality, which includes a good diet, exercise, and treatments like massage and bodywork that keep one functioning at their best. The growth of the wellness and spa business has undergone great change depending on what historical period the wellness and spa operates. According to Gilbert and Van De Weerd (1991), the modern age is when the awareness of holistic spa was already known. This awareness of the different views of spas depends on the country that they operate in and the services the customer looks for. These were categorized as customers who want “pleasures like massages,

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herb baths, and exfoliating scrubs” that made them feel relax, enjoy the pleasure with “service beyond expectation;” (Blanich & Barrows, 2007, p. 7). These people aim to avoid a particular health problem from recurring, thus balancing their physical and mental health (Bhanich & Barrows, 2007).

In Cebu, in particular, most wellness and spa businesses offered ventosas or cupping therapy (Sandberg et al., 2017), believed to remove air trapped within the muscle. This is an old Chinese substitute treatment using localized suction on the skin to remove sluggish blood flow clogged in a particular part of the body. It stimulates healing for different lung-related problems such as cough and colds, bronchial diseases, body malaise, swelling of organs, and gastritis. It is believed to be capable of balancing the *chi* and enhancing physical wellbeing.

There are two main types of cupping therapy, according to Al-Bedah et al. (2018). The dry cupping involves creating an open fire with the flammable substances like tissue paper and alcohol placed directly on the skin while quickly placing the cup upside down over it, thus creating a vacuum that pulls and draws the skin that is believed to contain air from the muscles that caused pain. As soon as the hot air pressure cools down, it constricts while pulling the skin up, creating a vacuum because of a lack of oxygen. For ease in applying the cupping tools, oil with herbal is used to massage the skin before the therapy. The second type of cupping therapy is wet cupping. This technique creates a mild pressure by applying a heated cup on the skin for 3 minutes, after which the cup is removed, and the therapist performs a minor incision using a cupping scalpel. A second suction is performed to extract a small amount of blood; then, the incision is treated with antibiotics to prevent infection.

Another favorite local service offered to spa customers is the Swedish massage and hot stone massage. Both used the same technique with different goals. Choosing the style of massage depends on the needs and tastes of customers. Swedish massage is an oil massage that uses a range of specific massage movements. The hot stone massage follows the same massage movements as the Swedish massage. The only difference is the use of lava stones dipped in boiling water, creating a warm massage. According to French (2011), many different strokes can be applied by the massage therapist. An elongated suave stroke using one or both hands is called effleurage. A kneading movement is called Petrissage, which aims to separate layers of connective tissue enhancing blood and lymph circulation, thus tone and relaxes muscles. Percussion is described as tapping movement to enhance local blood circulation, while friction is a rubbing movement used on scar tissue and other pressure points. When applying pressure, it can be described as light, medium, and heavy, depending on the muscles and tolerance of the client.

The concept of wellness and spa varies in the different cultures around the world, like in Southern Europe, where seaside wellness utilizing sunshine, sea air, and seawater as a therapy to improve clients' wellbeing is famous. In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, they introduce physical fitness combined with wellness that includes eating healthy foods, a break from work and recreation, and mixed with spiritual activity like yoga and meditation. There is an increasing shift towards self-responsibility and a balanced approach to life (Smith & Puczko, 2014).

In many Asian countries, spiritual activities such as yoga, meditation, and massage are more integrated into everyday life than they are in most Western countries. In most Asian countries, the use of energy flows is a more accepted form of healing like the *reiki* and *shiatsu*, while in some countries, the balance creation for living space such as *feng shui* and *vasati* was prominently practiced. In the Philippines, physical fitness is observed to be practiced by the middle class and upper class of society as a means of relaxation.

Water is shown to play a significant part in the practice of Spa in Asia. Japanese' "Onsen" (hot spring) or South Korean's *jimjilbang* (bathhouse) culture has a long tradition both within spiritual and secular society. Water is also used for ritual purification by Hindus in India. Some parts of China are rich in mineral springs, many of which are currently being developed for tourism. In Middle Eastern and North African countries, religion has a more central focus of life, where spirituality is not seen as an 'optional extra' (Smith & Puczko, 2014). For example, all Muslims are expected to undertake the Haj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during their lifetime.

Enhanced physical wellness may come from physical healing using spas or medical interventions like medical trips to India. Several Asian countries, like Thailand and the Arabic Gulf cities like Dubai, have become famous for their recent developments in medical tourism facilities. In the United States of America, England, Canada, and Australia, the use of "day spas and beauty Centers" is spreading like wildfire. They emphasized more on the application of makeup to treat clients, relaxing and indulging in beauty treatment than medical treatment. However, there are also clear growth trends in occupational wellness like "work-life balance" and stress management to enhance spirituality. The concept of "MediSpa," which is most of the time, an outpatient beauty clinic is often located in malls, has become popular, especially in North America (Smith & Puczko, 2014).

In the Philippines, many wellness and spa establishments are now located in malls for the convenience of their clients. Just recently, the wellness and spa assumed different uses. They are used for medical purposes, described the service using spa procedures (Langviniene & Sližienė, 2010). The Health and Wellness Tourism

Industry has been recognized by the Philippine government for its potential of creating jobs and enhancing economic growth. The Philippine Statistic Office plans to monitor the contribution of the wellness and spa business as an emerging economic sector in the national development. However, the Philippine Statistical System does not have the information to provide a significant evaluation of the health and wellness tourism industry (Virola & Polistico, 2007).

The Cebu Health and Wellness Council expressed the need for the active involvement of the Spa and Wellness Association of Cebu to build a robust coalition as a group in selling Cebu as a prime tourist destination for those seeking wellness treatment and health recuperation. Cebu accounts for 20% of the country's tourists, while 10% reflects the target for medical tourism for the country (Sandberg, 2017). The Spa and Wellness Association of Cebu is composed of members from day spas, resort spas, fitness gyms, wellness clinics, yoga studios, and vegetarian cafes. More than 20 hotel-based spas and more than 200 wellness centers offer body scrub, facial treatment, healing, and body massage services. The Cebu Health and Wellness Council estimated an under-investment for the past years resulting in a deficiency in medical facilities and services. A related problem to this is the continued migration of Philippine healthcare workers to other parts of the world that makes travel to the Philippines for such a purpose expensive. However, the government and other non-governmental organizations are addressing the issue. Unfortunately, there has been no financial support for this as of the present (Sandberg, 2017). The issue of sustainability is a noteworthy discussion as a prelude to the plan of the Cebu Health and Wellness Council to promote Cebu as a prime destination for tourists seeking health and wellness treatments and recuperation.

This study explored the experiences of owners and managers of the wellness and spa on issues regarding the sustainability of wellness and spa businesses in Cebu and discovering their best practices. It further addressed the following:

1. What is required for a wellness and spa to become sustainable?
2. Why do they think this is important to achieve sustainability?
3. How do those characteristics of sustainability help to achieve its best practices?
4. Propose a sustainability guide for the wellness and spa in Cebu?

## Methodology

This section contains the research design used. This covers the sampling technique, the participants of the study, data collection, and analysis. The ethical principles in this research are also presented.

### Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design. Two key approaches guide a case study methodology: one proposed by Stake (1995) and the second by Yin (2003, 2006). Both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) base their approach to case studies on a constructivist paradigm. Constructivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one's perspective. According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) the focus of the study is a contemporary phenomenon; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. Yin (2003) categorizes case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive. He also differentiates between single, holistic case studies and multiple-case studies. This study is an exploratory study that deals with why wellness and spa establishments have a short lifespan in business, what it takes to have a sustainable business, and how sustainability is practiced that resulted in the company's best practices to flourish.

Once the case has been determined and the boundaries placed on the case, it is important to consider the additional components required for designing and implementing a rigorous case study. These include (a) propositions which may or may not be present (Yin, 2003, Miles & Huberman, 1994); (b) the application of a conceptual framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994); (c) development of the research questions (generally "how" and/or "why" questions); (d) the logic linking data to propositions; and (e) the criteria for interpreting findings (Yin, 2003). In this case study, the development of the research questions followed the "how and why." The logic linking the data to the propositions such as pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis may be used. In this study, pattern matching is used, and the criteria for interpreting the findings are triangulation, trustworthiness, and ethical consideration.

### Research Setting

The study is located in Cebu City, Mandaue City, and Lapu-Lapu City. Cebu and Mandaue cities are located in the mainland province of Cebu. Lapu-Lapu City, also known as Mactan, is an island city adjacent to Cebu and Mandaue City, with hotels and resorts comprising the major business sector. Within the three cities, there



are three types of wellness and spa businesses. They are the (a) the hotel-resort-based spa that caters to 95% foreigner stay-in clients, (b) the tourist-agency-recommended spa that caters to 95% foreign tourists as recommended by the Cebu Tourist Guide Association, and (c) the stand-alone wellness and spa that caters around 95% of the residents.

Three hotel-resort-based spas in Lapu-Lapu City are part of the study. They are the top international resorts in Cebu. One is an international hotel with Spa, whose hotel chains are located around the world. It has been operating for 18 years already. It is situated in the 13-hectare area of the resort, with 1 hectare dedicated to the spa business. It has the top of a line facility with separate villas for the treatment of the clients. In between villas are the different species of trees and shrubs.

The second is a beach resort where the spa business is located, which lies within the 11-hectare property. Its Spa treatment is done in one of its villas. The third resort spa is located near the gate of the resort occupying a separate building where the treatments are done.

There are three tourist-agency-recommended spas located in Lapu Lapu City, where the majority of the foreign tourists are staying. Most of these spas are located in a building along the main road towards the beach where the resorts are located. The first tourist-agency-recommended spa is composed of 33 individual rooms and six couple rooms with 20 regular therapists and several on-call therapists. Foreign tourists come in groups of 20 to 30. The second has 25 individual rooms with 10 regular therapists and five on-call therapists. The third has 15 individual rooms with seven therapists and one on-call therapist. The three stand-alone spas are located and dispersed throughout Cebu City and Lapu-Lapu City.

## **Sampling**

The sampling design used is a purposive sampling technique. All participants are owners and managers of wellness and spa in Cebu, who are in the business for at least 10 years. The participants are selected because they have experience of how the wellness and spa business operates.

## **Data Collection and Instruments**

The researcher/interviewer is an instrument of a qualitative study. However, he or she is aided by an interview guide. Before the interview schedule, a preliminary meeting was set to establish open communication lines with the participants and set the scheduled interview. This study utilized five sources of data, namely, (a) documents from spa's standees and brochures; (b) online website records, such as threaded discussion records; (c) interviews in person, (d) direct observation

including the researcher's narrative log (transcription), field notes, and photos, and (e) artifacts such as newspaper clips.

During the interview, digital audio instruments were used to collect the data that were later on transcribed. Reflective notes of what the researcher/interviewer has learned from the interview are written in a journal. The interview stopped only when the data collected reached saturation. Data saturation was achieved when no new information was given by the interviewee on the questions that were asked.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis started with the preparation and organization of the data collected, which is an audio recording, which is transcribed into line numbers and printed. The process is as follows:

1. Encode all observations written in the journal and print.
2. Summarize data from participant's standees and brochures, including data from online websites, photos, and newspaper clips.
3. Review and explore the data.
4. Extract significant statements from the transcript.
5. Categorize each significant statement according to patterns and code accordingly.
6. Review the codes as it answers the sub-problems.
7. Re-group the codes to form emergent themes.

As soon as these themes were presented cohesively, interpretation and discussion follow. Finally, the audio-recorded messages were destroyed to protect the participant's confidentiality. Observations were retrieved from the journal and were incorporated into the findings and discussion part. Citations from journal articles were also included as supporting data of the findings and discussion.

### **Ethical Consideration**

This study ensured that no harm should befall the participants. The signing of the informed consent was observed. The authorization to use the private information from the study was prepared before the research data gathering, declaring that the data is for research purposes only to enhance the wellness and spa's sustainability. The study further informs the participants that the goal of the study is to develop a guideline for the wellness and spa business based on the emergent themes from the study. It ensured that the data answered the interview question on the experiences of the participants that have to be answered truthfully and that after the in-depth

interview with them, the voice recorder that was transcribed shall be destroyed to protect the identity of the interviewees. Participants were assured that their privacy would, at all times, be protected. This ensure anonymity, confidentiality, and respect for privacy. Each interview lasted only up to 45 minutes to an hour per participant. The 10 participants were told how they were selected for recruitment and how many people would be participating.

### **Researcher's Reflexivity and Trustworthiness**

The researchers made use of a reflexive journal, where the researcher/interviewer logs the details of how she may have influenced the questioning and proving of each interview as part of the qualitative research design. The researcher's journal could tell about the researcher/interviewer's prejudices and subjectivities while reminding him or her more fully on the impact of these influences on the credibility of the research outcomes.

Trustworthiness defines quality criteria in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, trustworthiness is established using triangulation of data sources, utilizing the five sources of data (a) documents, such as spas standees and brochures; (b) online website records, such as threaded discussion records; (c) interviews utilizing the transcript of interviews; (d) journals of observations and photos; and (e) artifacts such as newspaper clips. Transferability is reflected through a thick description of the findings. Dependability is assured in this study through data received from participants. Confirmability is reflected in the data interpretations of the findings that resulted from the data.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study identified the best practices as they were experienced by the participants. From the identified best practices, there were emergent themes such as service delivery, personnel recruitment, products used, facilities, and competence of the service providers that were identified and analyzed. Among the emergent themes in the sustainability of the wellness and spa were in the areas of resources, finance, social, environmental, and political-legal.

### **Best Practices Among Wellness and Spa in Cebu**

The findings revealed the best practices in the wellness and spa business. The emergent themes were in the areas of service delivery, personnel recruitment, products used, facilities, and competence of service providers.

Participants A, B, and C are the resort Spas. Participant A identified best practices among them are the customized products and spa services available according to their client's needs. Vryoni, Bakirtzoglou, and Ioannou (2017) affirmed that there are five dimensions and twenty-two items of the Servqual model that are considered predictive variables of spa centers around the world. These are as follows: willingness to help the customer (responsiveness), management support in problem-solving situations (assurance), food and beverages (tangibles), feel secure from danger (assurance), employees' commitment to the comfort of their customers (empathy), and honest and empathic treatment of customers (empathy). Thus, in tailoring its services, it shall be done by inspiring and promoting responsiveness, training for quality enhancement to improve product tangibles to be used, improving the amenities for security, and increasing employee's commitment to increase customer satisfaction.

Another best practice mentioned by Participant A was in personnel recruitment. Their requirements are college degree holder of medical courses such as a physical therapist, nursing, med-tech, and graduates of other medical programs, empowering them to use their professional judgment and decision making by offering them their choice of wellness and spa treatment. Furthermore, Participant A practiced one of the three pillars of the triple bottom line of sustainability, which is concerned with environmental enhancement. As part of their CSR, Participant A promoted local linkages such as having a local manufacturer as a supplier of the products to be used in the spa; for example, the virgin coconut oil used on the spa is manufactured and packaged by Cebuano mothers, giving them income-generating projects. In the delivery of massage services, they were proud that they used only human touch. They have competent therapists, guest relations staff, and support staff to provide the guest's needs to personalize the service delivery. Lastly, they invest heavily in providing one hectare of their property solely for the Wellness and Spa consisting of eight single villas, six couple villas, and one grand villa that can be converted into an overnight villa with herbs, shrubs, and trees to provide the area with the lush green leaves that breath the atmosphere of the environmentally friendly facility. The five pools were composed of jacuzzies, a whirlpool, a saltwater pool, and a thermal pool.

Participant B lies within the 11 hectares of one of the largest privately-owned waterways in the world with the clean elegance of colonial plantation architecture. The resort, together with the spa, had been in operation for the past 20 years or more.

Its wellness and spa is located within one of the major facilities near the rushing sound of the salt waterfalls. They were also proud to say that one of their best practices was implementing the guest satisfaction rating. Participant B hires college graduates as a therapist.

Participant C (resort spa) witnessed the growth of Lapu-Lapu City's economy. It started as a hotel with spa, utilizing a marketing strategy to assure the desired customer occupancy. Its sustainability is about meeting the current needs while at the same time preserving and contributing to the future.

Participants D, E, and F belonged to the tourist-agency-recommended spa. They identified their best practices in handling marketing mix and marketing strategy to acquire customer data from tourism agents. 95% of their guests are foreign tourists, so they depend on walk-in foreign tourists brought in by the local tourist agents to attain financial stability. They also invested in properties and equipment (products used), with as many as 25 to 33 single beds or enclosure and 5 to 7 couple beds to serve a bus full of tourists scheduled for treatment every day. They only have 7 to 20 therapists but have stand-by therapists from another local stand-alone spa.

Participant G, H, and I belonged to the stand-alone spa that caters to 95% of local guests and sparingly accepts foreign walk-in guests. Their best practice was in the areas of training. They trained therapist applicants according to the standard procedure that the local spa is known for in the area. Some of the known massage procedures used were Filipino *hilot*, Thai massage, Swedish massage, and *ventosa* massage. They also said that a clean environment of the Spa contributed to its sustainability.

### **Sustainability Issues of Wellness and Spa**

The findings also revealed the themes that emerged as factors of sustainability. These are resources, finances, social, environmental, and political-legal issues. They helped sustain the business of wellness and spa in Cebu.

**Resources.** Resources include the physical facilities used to operate the wellness and spa-like building and the surrounding environment from when the guest steps into the spa. Cleanliness is the common characteristic that spa has to maintain. The stand-alone spa did not have the lavish facilities of the resort Spa but maintained the cleanliness, relaxing sound of water, and quiet atmosphere that their guests were looking for. The three types of spa may differ in the products that they used because the resort spa and the tourist-agency-recommended spa were using coconut virgin oil in all its treatment because of its organic and herbal properties, the stand-alone spa used various types of oil like mineral oil and lotions combined. The human resources composed of the therapists, front desk guest relations, and cashier were

hired and trained differently in the three types of spa. The resort spa hired medical graduates to join their workforce because part of their service is the professional assessment of the wellbeing of their guests before the application of the treatment. Decision making skill is the important factor in the application of such treatment. In the tourist-agency recommended Spa and stand-alone Spa, the qualifications of their therapist and staff were not as high as the resort spa. They accept high school level for as long as they possess a positive attitude towards their assigned tasks. They trained them according to the standard of the spa. All types of spa encouraged and required the therapists to take the TESDA NC II for accreditation and apply for a Department of Health license as a therapist.

**Finance aspects.** The three types of spa differed in the way they acquired their customers and in their investment approaches. The resort spa is highly financed, and they practiced management approaches to achieve their profit objectives. Not so much with the other two types. Their services vary according to their marketing strategies and the marketing mix used. For the resort Spa, they used an integrated marketing communication approach based on the resort's marketing plan that they created. They allow their guests to have a unified and seamless experience interacting with the resort's marketing office. This includes branding, advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing, and social media through their respective mix of tactics, methods, channels, media, and activities. They used the newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google, Youtube, Pinterest, Foursquare, and Weibo. For the tourist-agency-recommended spa, they use branding, direct marketing, social media, and more on relationship marketing by establishing contacts with tourism agents and tourist guides who bring guests to their establishments. Although the price of the services varies according to the type of guests that came in, for group guests, they gave commissions to tourist guides and the agency. The rates for foreign guest is higher than that for locals. That is why they do not post the rates outside their establishments.

In his study, Marinov (2014) concluded that spas in a hotel are not profitable. Profitability is between 6% and 9%, and it is not enough to get a fair return on investment within a reasonable time. The investment is worth only if it is used to extend the season of operation of the hotel, to increase its average annual employment, or to increase the selling price of a room in the hotel. That is why in the Philippines, it has to be coupled with integrated marketing to increase sales.

**Social aspect.** The relationship of the spa with their community is identified based on the activities they prepared for them. Most of the resort spas engaged in community work by adopting communities for their corporate social responsibility. For the participant from resort Spa, they engaged in the community by the products (virgin coconut oil) that they used, which were processed by selected community

workers like mothers who worked for their supplier of the products that they used. This helped in the income generation of the community workers hired by the suppliers. Spas that develop their own company's passion for quality service, as stated by Blesic, Cerovic, and Dragicevic (2011), also help strengthen community and identity by incorporating corporate social responsibility to achieve service quality. Participant A showed their support for their corporate social responsibility programs by using indigenous materials locally produced to help mothers who are the beneficiary of the program. Because they control the production of their supplies like oil, they can assure product quality incorporated with the service quality to come up with service beyond the customer's expectation.

**Environmental aspect.** The use of virgin coconut oil reflects good environmental practices that resort spas started as their contribution to the environment. All the participants have practiced the maintenance of a clean and green environment within the spa. The spas have either actual or the sound of trickling water. Participant A decided to go green by installing energy-efficient lighting and low flow faucet aerators; providing skincare products free from ingredients known to pose health risks using coconut oil; practicing recycling in the use of office supplies; avoiding the use of soaps and detergents that contain phosphate; and encouraging staff to walk instead of using the cart around the spa area and the use of alternative pesticide in the resort.

**Political legal aspect.** Just like all business entities, the wellness and spa cannot exist without the required business permit issued by the local government units. They followed the requirements set by the Office of the Building Officials to be able to secure the necessary permit to operate, sanitary permit, and others. They are required to register the business with the Bureau of Internal Revenue office and file the required taxes regularly. They are also required to register the business with the Department of Industry, Department of Tourism, and Department of Health.

The factors of sustainability for wellness and spa are as follows:

1. Resource allocation
2. Finance
3. Social
4. Environmental
5. Political-legal

The areas are the best practices:

1. Service delivery
2. Personnel recruitment
3. Products used
4. Facilities
5. Competence of service provider

### **Conclusion**

The sustainability issue in the wellness and spa evolved around the management of resources, finances, social and environmental factors, and political-legal aspects of the business. A well thought and careful management of these resources, coupled with the financial support of their investors and with the local government unit's sustainable intervention and other stakeholders' support like the Cebu Health & Wellness Council and Spa and Wellness Association of Cebu are necessary for its sustainability.

The sustainability of the wellness and spa depends on the management's vision of how they see themselves as a business enterprise soon, how to be able to achieve those visions using their crafted strategies they call plan of operation. Such plans are implemented employing their objectives to produce the best practices they can be proud of in their business life.

### **Recommendations**

This study leads to the following recommendations:

1. Design a sustainability model as reflected by the emergent areas of sustainability for wellness and spa in Cebu.
2. Based on the model, propose the wellness and spa sustainability guidelines to the wellness and spa association in Cebu.

For future research, this study recommends the following:

1. Identify competencies needed for wellness and spa.
2. Develop advocacy strategies in the promotion of the wellness and spa in Cebu.



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