

Development Process of the Community-based Tourism: From Two Case Studies in Central Vietnam*

Nguyen Quang Tan, Ubukata Fumikazu, and Nguyen Cong Dinh

Abstract - This research aimed to examine how the community-based tourism (CBT) can or cannot lead to sustainable development, by comparing two case studies in Central Vietnam. The data were obtained through the 2018 field surveys in Hong Ha and Thuy Bieu communes, Thua Thien Hue province. The obtained data were compared by applying a three-stage framework of CBT development process. The results show the initial differences between the two cases did not affect the tourism performances during the first (set-up phase) and second (take-off phase) phases of CBT development. It was in the third phase (commercial phase) that brought two cases into different performances. The fallback trend in Hong Ha can be explained by the limitation of business capacity and disappearance of external sectors, which are also the partial consequences of the initial phases of CBT development. These results indicate the large influence of external private sectors in CBT development.

Index Terms: Central Vietnam, community-based tourism (CBT), private sectors, sustainable development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is estimated to be the world's biggest industry [1]. Too often, however, tourism to the developing world only adds to the difficulties facing local people including displacement, cultural degradation, distorting social structures and environmental degradation [1], [2]. Therefore, there is a need for a new approach to tourism which starts from the needs, concerns, and welfare of local communities [3]. A form of tourism that advocates an approach opposite to conventional mass tourism, the community-based tourism (CBT) emerged as a possible solution to address those issues [2].

Unfortunately, whilst the CBT schemes have been widely adopted for over three decades, there has been limited research into the effectiveness of using tourism to deliver economic development and indigenous people objectives [4]. To a national extent, although Vietnam is the latest fashionable destination for tourists and recorded the fastest growth in tourist arrivals in Asia [5], recent reports suggest that most tourism benefits have accrued to richer groups, instead of poor people [6]–[8]. Also, there are very few

studies of the actual contribution of CBT to either conservation or community livelihoods [9].

This research therefore aimed to examine how CBT can or cannot lead to the sustainable development of local community, by providing two case studies of the CBT development process in Thua Thien Hue province, central Vietnam. In the analysis, the author especially tried to focus on the following key stages and elements that enable or hinder the process of CBT development.

II. METHODOLOGY

In order to conceptualize the development process of CBT, the author firstly developed a three-stage framework of the CBT development process (see Fig. 1), by modifying and combining two pieces of literature; the tourism area life cycle developed by Butler (2005) and the stakeholder value creation model created by Kujala et al (2016). This is the process in which (1) tourism value potentials are found (set-up phase), (2) related stakeholders are prioritised in order to produce tourism values (take-off phase), and (3) the stakeholders develop tourism values (commercial phase).

Second, the author compared two cases of CBT

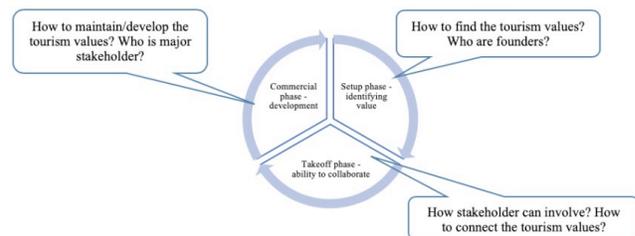


Figure 1. The research framework – development process of the CBT. (modified from Butler (2005) and Kujala et al (2016))

development; Hong Ha commune of A Luoi district and Thuy Bieu town of Hue city, Thua Thien Hue province. Although there has been a decline in the number of travelers in the former, coupled with a shortfall of tourism income, both of these cases managed to obtain some achievements of CBT development.

Third, field surveys were conducted in March, July and August 2018 (see Fig. 2). In Hong Ha, the author conducted semi-structured questionnaires and key notes methods with 67 participants of local members, visitors and tourist operators. Obtained information was cross-checked with local government at the district level. In Thuy Bieu, the research focuses mainly on understanding the process of the CBT development in order to compare with the former case and to point out key-elements in the whole process.

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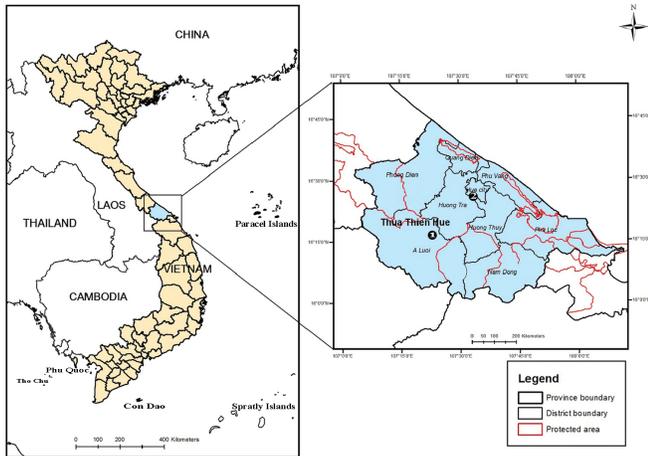


Figure 2. Location map of case studies [8], [9]. (note: (1) case study in Hong Ha commune, (2) case study in Thuy Bieu commune)

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of the CBT in Research Site

The legal context for tourism development in Vietnam

Since the introduction of renovation policy in 1986, the market-oriented mechanism has refreshed the economy of Vietnam and a vehement energy has been nourished. Tourism has become the great concern of the Vietnamese government. More specifically, the Master Plan of tourism development for the period 1995-2010 ratified by the Prime Minister in 1995 and the state decree on tourism coming into effect since 1999 have highlighted the target of the government to boost tourism to be a spearhead economic sector while maintaining the natural conditions and the cultural values to entice domestic and international tourists [10]. According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, there were over 85 million tourist arrivals in 2017 in Vietnam, increasing double compared with 2014 and triple than in 2012 [21]. The National Tourism Strategy (see [22]) emphasizes the development of ecotourism, nature-based tourism and cultural tourism provides realistic directions for tourism development. The community tourism, therefore, has emerged as a fresh component in the tourism industry of Vietnam. With the diversity of natural resources impregnated by “commercialization and mass-tourism outfits” and richness of cultural heritage, Vietnam has boasted its favorable opportunities for developing ecotourism [10].

Yet the CBT in Vietnam is currently at an early stage [11]. It is therefore challenging for people to find a satisfactory compromise between preserving the natural environment and exploiting it properly for tourism purposes [12]. If short-term economic benefits are prioritized over conservation of biological resources, ecotourism development can jeopardize the ecosystems instead of promising socio-economic and cultural benefits. In an endeavor to prepare Vietnam for the integration into the global tourism market, it is imperative to create strategic plans and standards for CBT as “the fastest growth among the various branches of tourism industry” in an environmentally effective as well as economically beneficial way [7], [9],

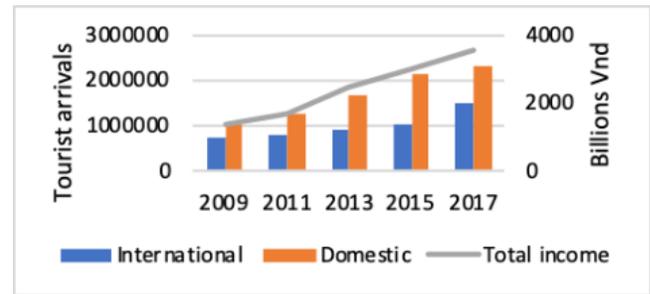


Figure 3. The tourist arrivals and income statistics in Thua Thien Hue province (Source: TTHDoT, 2018).

[10], [13]. In order to foster a sustainable ecotourism in Vietnam, it is crucial for all stakeholders (Government, tourism industry, private sector, host communities and tourists) to respect the intrinsic values of natural resources and follow the principles introduced.

Tourism development in Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam

Located in the central part of Vietnam with an area of over 5000 square kilometres and a coast line of 120 kilometres, Thua Thien Hue is one of Vietnam’s centres of culture and tourism [23]. The province is most renowned for its scenic beauty and ancient cultures. The complex of Hue Ancient Capital is most famous as a masterpiece of ancient urban architecture in Southeast Asia and has been world heritage listed by UNESCO [13]. Moreover, Thua Thien Hue is known for its pride in preserving its traditional cultures through staging festivals, trade villages, and promotion of minority group cultures, particularly those of Katu, Paco, Ta Oi and Van Kieu. Its Nha Nhac (royal music) was also world heritage listed by UNESCO [25].

Not surprisingly tourism in Thua Thien Hue has recorded significant increases. Between 2009 and 2017, tourism grew by 9% per annum in which international tourism expanded by almost 11% per annum [25] (see Fig. 3). In the first six months of 2018, it is estimated that there were 2 million visitors in Thua Thien Hue, representing an increase of 8.5% compared to the same period of the previous year (TTHPPC, 2018). The economic growth of tourism was equally impressive at 19% per annum. Hotel occupancy rate also grew more than 10% [25].

In recent years, the Department of Tourism has collaborated with major international NGOs, and WWF-Vietnam to implement community-based tourism, ecotourism and ethnic tourism in the mountainous districts in the province, including Nam Dong, A Luoi, Phu Loc and Phong Dien. These projects were regarded as models of appropriate and sustainable tourism development for local communities. The specific objectives of Sustainable Pro-Poor Tourism (SPPT) in Thua Thien Hue are described as follows:

- Support rural development by developing tourism initiatives in rural areas that contribute to poverty alleviation, sustainable resource use, rural infrastructure, cultural conservation and other community-building objectives;

TABLE I. GENERAL FEATURES OF CASE STUDIES

| General features | Hong Ha | Thuy Bieu |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Ownership | Partnership between local community and local authority | Local community established from State owned history + travel agencies |
| Total local participants | 17 | 20 |
| Distance to Hue city | 45 km | 7 km |
| Established year (official) | 2016 | 2013 |
| Total number of visitors in 2017 | 13,223 arrivals (published) | 60,000-70,000 arrivals (unpublished) |
| Main markets | Mostly Domestic (95%) | Both domestic (40%) and international (60%) |
| Tourism season | March - August | Year-round |
| High season | June, July | March, April, September |
| Tourist activities | - Homestay - Folk-art performance - Parle stream destination (swimming, camping...) | - Homestay - Sightseeing by bike (cycling) - Visiting “Ruong houses” and picking Thanh Tra at local gardens - Experience tour with locals (relaxing by herb water, enjoy traditional foods, ...) - Visiting historical monuments |
| Major stakeholders (currently) | - Local community - Local government | - Local community - Local government - Tourist agencies |

(Source: Field survey, 2018)

- Build the capacity of local partners to develop sustainable tourism;
- Create models of tourism development that contribute to poverty reduction;
- Promote sustainable resource management; and
- Support sectoral cooperation and partnerships. (Source: Depth-interview, 2018)

In two case studies

As mentioned before, two CBT destinations were chosen in the research. While Hong Ha is main case study, Thuy Bieu is considered as sub-case study with comparison purpose. It is not the intention to explain why such differences among case studies exist, nor to compare which one is better, because what qualifies as tourism in this region does not necessarily hold true in others [14] [15]. Moreover, tourism in general and the CBT in particular are more complicated in practice due to the involvement of a number of stakeholders, including all levels of governments, the private sector, ecotourists, local communities and

non-governmental organizations [16], [17]. Thus, the study just aims to consider 2 cases in a joint development process with the three steps described above.

In Hong Ha, a mountainous commune of A Luoi district, consists of five villages. It has 443 households with 1,766 people with more than 85% are ethnic minorities, including Pa Ko, Co Tu, Ta Oi living in many traditional cultures. Major festivities include Buffalo Thrusting Festival of Pa Ko people, Azakoonh Harvest Festival of Ta Oi people, New Rice (Aza) Festival, or the funeral ritual and the Anrieu ping (exhumation) ceremony. The Village’s Cultural House (Guol House) is built according to the architecture of the Co Tu people. This is the common cultural space of the village, where traditional festivals of the Co Tu people take place, such as the new rice festival held after the harvest (in October, November), and the Spring Festival. It is predicted to be a meeting point between diverse cultures and a unique landscape with more than 65% of forest [26]. In recent years, the central and local governments, in conjunction with NGOs, have been injecting into the commune much needed funds and inputs to improve its socio-economic situation and standard of living through land cultivation and settlement. At present, this ethnic group no longer suffers from hunger and paved roads connecting all villages are also readily observed. Still the commune remains poor, the proportion of households in poverty among the ethnic minority is as high as 23.25%. In this commune (A Luoi district also), there is not yet a master-plan for its tourism development although tourism has been identified by planners from provincial and district government, NGOs as well as tour operators as the key for economic development.

By contrast, although situated in the heart of Hue city, Thuy Bieu Village brings an appearance of a peaceful village with fragrant Thanh Tra pomelo gardens and hundreds of years old Ruong houses. Thuy Bieu village is far from the center of Hue city about 7 kilometers to the southwest. It is cover by Huong river with total land area of 657.3 hectares. The total population of this area is 9,929 people, with 5,344 workers, in which 79.4% are non-agricultural laborers [27]. Before 2005, tourism development in Thuy Bieu was literally unheard of. However, since 2006, and initiated and guided by the Hue City People’s Committee and related agencies, different forms of tourism have been brought into the area, leading to a rapid proliferation of guest-houses, restaurants and services selling food and beverages, and employment opportunities as tourists started to arrive. Thuy Bieu Ward today still preserves many ancient and unique structures, in which Ho Quyen Voi Re Arena is the most representative destination. But the emphasis in Thuy Bieu is probably the system of over 100 years old Ruong Houses and Thanh Tra pomelo gardens. Tourism in Thuy Bieu has become a great destination for visitors with diverse activities such as homestay, sightseeing around the village by bike and visiting “Ruong” traditional houses, visiting historical monuments (temples, village hall) and picking “Thanh Tra” fruits at local gardens.

In order to summarize, a table was created to shows general information in two cases through 10 major features (see Table I). Beginning with ownership, while tourism in Hong Ha derived from a tourism development program, as a

TABLE II. CHANGE IN STAKEHOLDERS AMONG PHASES OF THE CBT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

| Phases | Major stakeholders | |
|------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | Hong Ha | Thuy Bieu |
| Set-up phase | - Commune government | - Commune government |
| | - Community | - Community |
| | - NGOs | - Travel agencies |
| | - Schools | |
| Take-off phase | - Commune government | - Commune government |
| | - Community (more) | - Community (diverse) |
| | - Travel agencies | - Travel agencies (more) |
| Commercial phase | - Commune government | - Commune government |
| | - Community (less) | - Community (dominants) |
| | | - Travel agencies (more) |

(Source: Field survey, 2018)

top-down policy approach designed by Vietnamese government. In Thuy Bieu, local community established from state owned history and travel agencies together. It was established earlier, in 2013, and located near Hue city, and means that it has the advantage of traffic. Accordingly, the number of tourist arrivals here is more than elsewhere, with an average of 200-300 arrivals daily, of which, foreigners account for more than 60%. Moreover, this place is in a favorable position, so the tourist season is year-round. In contrast, Hong Ha is located in a mountainous area, far from the city center, and tourism has just begun to develop in the last two years. As a result, tourism only lasts 6 months per year, from March to August, with most visitors being Vietnamese (95%) and average only 13,000 arrivals in 2017.

B. Phases Changing in the Development Process of CBT

The results highlight the following three key-elements of CBT development that are worth further discussions (see the Table II).

Firstly, the CBT in Hong Ha was initiated in 2016 as a top-down policy designed by Vietnamese government. Three tourist types were found including homestay, folk art performance and nature-based tourist at Parle spring. It was predicted as the meeting point of diverse cultures with 5 ethnic minority communities and unique natural landscapes. This contrasts to the Thuy Bieu case, where the CBT development has rooted both top-down and bottom-up (and market) initiatives. This difference, however, did not affect the CBT development in the set-up phase. The tourism value potentials were found in both top-down and bottom-up initiatives.

Secondly, the results suggested that despite having a difference in initial tourism approach, there was also a similarity between two case studies in the take-off phase. In both cases, the commune and communities had closely collaborated with each other, and even private travel agencies were involved in the activity. The local government aimed tourism policies, communities would want to improve their income generating and tourism skills, meanwhile,

TABLE III. THE CHANGE IN TYPE OF TOURIST IN THUY BIEU

| Initial phase | Derived from | At present | Derived from |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| -Coffee shops | -Community | -Coffee shops with more modern, luxury | -Community -Travel agencies |
| -Selling local products | -Community | -Selling local products with greater diversity | -Community -Travel agencies |
| -Visiting “Thanh tra” gardens | -Community | -Visiting “Thanh tra” gardens | -Community -Travel agencies |
| -Transportation by bus | -Government -Travel agencies | -Transportation by buses | -Government -Travel agencies |
| -Homestay | -Community -Government | -Homestay | -Government -Travel agencies |
| -Visiting historical places | -Community -Government | -Transportation by boats | -Travel agencies |
| | | -Picking “Thanh tra” fruit | -Travel agencies |
| | | -Local tour guide | -Travel agencies |
| | | -Cycling around the village | -Travel agencies |
| | | -Have lunch with locals | -Travel agencies |
| | | -Massage, laundries and herbal foot bath | -Travel agencies |
| | | - Making local products via training class for visitors, local teachers | -Travel agencies |

(Source: Field survey, 2018)

travel agencies could be predicted because of profit and market demands.

However, in the third and last phase, there were distinct differences being recorded among case studies (see the Table II). While Thuy Bieu has had a strong upward trend in tourism development, it seemed to be a backward step in Hong Ha. The relative fallback trend in the latter can be explained by two reasons; the limitation of business capacity in the local communities, which consist of ethnic minorities, and the disappearance of tourist operators, which is partly due to the lack of capacity and subsequent loss of trust.

C. A dilemma in Development Process of the CBT

An important evidence found in case of Thuy Bieu, where the market for CBT expanded further indicated that external private operators increased investments in this phase, instead of local government and community’s control. As a result, the type of tourist has become more diverse and supporting facilities for the tourist industry (such as laundries, massage services) have started their operations. As the CBT market became larger, however, one concern is growing; decreasing share of the benefits for the local communities [18]. In addition, there is a sign of elite capture [19]. More specifically, the development stage reflects a well-defined tourist market area, shaped in part by heavy

advertising in tourist-generating areas. As this stage progresses, while most investments were from external operators, control of localities for tourism development will decline rapidly. More specifically, some locally provided facilities will have disappeared, being superseded by larger, more elaborate, and more up-to-date facilities provided by external organizations, particularly for visitor accommodation. In essence, Butler has argued that natural and cultural attractions will be developed and marketed specifically, and these original attractions will be supplemented by man-made imported facilities, but not all of them will be welcomed or approved by all of the local population and may not be completely in keeping with local preferences [18].

As a result, the type of tourist will have changed, auxiliary facilities for the tourist industry (such as laundries, massage services) will make their appearance, as a wider market is drawn upon (see the Table III). One point could be noted is the decreasing share of the benefits for the neighboring communities living around main tourist destinations. While at an early stage most of the people who aspire to participate in tourism were trained, at this stage companies have chosen dominant members. This might also well explain why the elite group could earn the rights of running souvenir shops, setting up coffee shops/homestays or building new tourist types in the most profitable locations and thereby generating a higher income. As per Butler's assumption, a conflict can arise between the tourist center and local people or even among residents to each other [20], which involves complex processes and is beyond the scope of discussion here.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Vietnamese government has been paying attention for tourism and emphasizes the development of “green tourism” types including ecotourism or the CBT. Nevertheless, the CBT has not yet developed in accordance with its potential, and there are differences between regions. Evidences from the research indicate that though the two cases contrasted from the initial phase of CBT development, this did not affect the initial development performances in both cases. It was in the third phase (commercial phase) that brought two cases into different performances. This indicates that the continued participation of external private sectors played a very important role in CBT development. On the other hand, a rapid CBT expansion in Thuy Bieu has brought a concern of elite capture and decreasing local benefit share. This suggests a dilemma of CBT development, in which external private actors can play as hero and villain. A deliberate consideration of incorporating private sector is necessary to avoid this dilemma and maximize community benefits.

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