

**DIVERSIFICATION INTO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION
IN RURAL AREAS: A CASE STUDY FROM DANANG, VIETNAM**

Thu Thi Trinh & Hung Duc Bui

Research Institute of Central Region, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Danang

Abstract: Tourism has been a focus of diversification for a considerable period of time and widely promoted as a supporting alternative for local economy in response to increasing agriculture values in rural areas. Rural tourism is likely to become a powerful force of change in the economy restructuring in Viet Nam. Research on diversification into tourism development and the significant roles of the local involvement and its community participation in rural tourism development in Central Viet Nam, a developing country, should be fully explored and assessed. This paper describes the diversification and development of this form of rural community-based tourism on the outskirts of Danang city, Hoa Vang rural district, based on 26 informants, highlighting the nature of the rural diversification, the background of rural community's participation/involvement in tourism diversification. In identifying this the paper contributes to a literature on how rural tourism products evolve in developing countries, for not only deeply understand and firmly grasp government' policies in building new-style rural areas, promoting rural residents' involvement, diversifying resources sustainably for new rural construction associated with agricultural structuring but in retaining rurally cultural patterns of life and raising awareness of the commercial and social values of traditions.

Keywords: Rural tourism, diversification, community participation, sustainable development, Vietnam

Introduction

Tourism has been placed among the largest industries in the world so far and has the potential to contribute to sustainable rural development which is well recognized, particularly by job creating, including employment for rural women and marginalized groups, creating better opportunities for local people to gain larger and more balanced benefits from tourism development taking place in their localities (Tosun, C; 2000). Tourism has also been recognized for its ability to bring development to rural areas (Sharpley & Sharpley, 2004; Sharpley; R, 2006). Tourism development has affected the community in certain ways as it can be a source of conflicts and can potentially harm the environment as well as create adverse impacts on local values and on the increasing cost of living (Nunkoo; R & Ramkissoon; H, 2009) that seems vulnerable to these cultural, social, and environmental aspects. There is growing evidence that many tourism destinations are now reaching a stage of maturity which produces conflicts thus, communities are reacting negatively and even resisting further or continued development (Reid, D. G., & Sindiga, I. 1999). In particular, approach to rural community within tourism development has taken the concept of sustainable tourism that has emerged based on above aspects with the aim of reducing the negative effects of tourism activities and has become almost universally accepted as a desirable and politically appropriate approach to rural tourism development (Atun, R. et al; 2018).

There is a widespread recognition of the need to diversify the tourism product and develop alternative forms of tourism in rural tourism development in Viet Nam. The agriculture industry is the most important activity, by employment, in almost all of Viet Nam's rural areas, and much of rural life is carried on around agriculture. The development of rural tourism has been promoted as a supporting alternative and adding agriculture values for the local economy. In

addition, the core of the charm of rural tourism in Vietnam is agriculture production, rural lifestyles/values and culinary art from the participation of local's communities of rural areas.

Key research questions have been debated on questions regarding rural tourism diversification and community participation, this research mainly aims at “what types of diversification in rural areas”, the nature of awareness and preparedness of the rural community concerning the development of rural tourism diversification in their area, “how much participation/ involvement of community or level of community participation at certain destination can have in the rural tourism development process sustainably? Is there a way that this situation can be rectified so that the needs and power of citizens and residents in a rural community can be satisfied and every-day life not diminished? These questions seem to be a research gap and have not been insightfully addressed in research on rural tourism in rural areas within the urbanization processes in rural areas in Vietnam Central. This paper presents the results of a qualitative study carried out among 26 informants of Hoa Vang, a rural district located in Danang city, Vietnam. The research on which this paper is based was interested in contributing knowledge towards an understanding of CBT development, community involvement in rural areas in Central Vietnam in general.

Literature Review

The term diversification (from the Latin *diversus*, “different”, and *facio*, “to make”) means ‘simultaneous change and development of activities that are not connected with the company’s core businesses. Translated from the English diversification, from *diverse*, means ‘different (...) diversity; difference (...), a business technique (...) used to better serve the customers’ heterogenic cultures. Diversification includes enlargement of the scope of products, distribution of financial capital among different persons, penetration of banks through investments, development of new industries, etc. Diversification is also usually associated with changes to the characteristics of the company’s product, the company or the market, (...) development of new products that represent (...) a change in the structure of the product market (...) (Ansoff, I; 2010; p. 113). For the purposes of this paper, the term diversification into rural tourism development is a broad one and covers much more than developing in agriculture, forestry and fishery as rural development is a multi-dimensional concept that primarily connotes a phenomenon of positive change taking place in the rural areas (Singh 1999).

On the other hand, rural tourism as a diversification of rural economy provides opportunities for expanding rural economic activities, generates an influx of money from urban areas and from abroad, and maintains the service base in the region (Bojnec, S; 2013). Rural tourism is situated on the diversification of rural territories with natural and cultural attractions such beautiful lakes, mountainous, natural forestry parks and similar, whereas rural tourism is supplied by different profit enterprises and non-profit oriented organizations in rural community and rural areas. More rural than farm diversification is important for rural tourism development where important is concentration of tourist suppliers, tourist products and services and attractions that create positive beneficial externalities for rural tourist destination and for a single supplier. In particular, rural tourism diversification by its very nature draws outside capital into the local rural community which can lead to positive economic benefits that may be the essential attributes for the survival of a rural community undergoing economic transition (Hjalager, A. M; 1996) and as a process leading to sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the rural people, especially the poor” and a “communal” type of lifestyle.

Salazar (2012) has noted that the concept of ‘community’ can present a highly contested debate when applied to tourism, rural development and involvement of local residents, owing to its vague meaning. For example, the concept has been criticized for its presumed assumption that

communities are homogeneous entities with clear delineations and with in-built ability to reach consensus (Smit 1990). However, it has been argued that communities can represent very complex and heterogeneous structures wrought with deep rooted issues of conflict, power and power relations (Reed 1997). Taylor (1995) also notes that communities in developing countries may have different lenses through which they view the boundaries of their own sense of community. Literature addressing the importance of community in tourism planning and related activities continued to grow throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, participation is understood as 'not only about achieving the more efficient and more equitable distribution of material resources: it is also about the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the process of learning itself in the service of people's self-development (Connell, D; 1997, p 250). Midgley (1986) did research on stages in the emergence of a participatory tourism development approach in the developing countries has indicated participation that "requires the voluntary and democratic involvement of people in (a) contributing to the development effort (b) sharing equitably in the benefits derived there from and (c) decision-making in respect of setting goals, formulating policies and planning and implementing economic and social development programs" (Midgley, 1986, p. 25).

Community participation which is a bottom-up approach by which communities are actively involved in rural tourism projects to solve their own problems, has been touted by various stakeholders as a potent approach to sustainable tourism development since it ensures greater conservation of natural, rural and cultural resources, empowers host communities and improves their socio-economic well-being. As such, neither a function of government alone, nor a single powerful rural tourism organisation can develop a successful tourism destination; instead, it is recognised that in tourism destination planning, decision-making and management, stakeholders must collaborate and participate (Bornhorst, Brent, & Sheehan, 2010). Within a tourism destination research, stakeholders can include: the government (international, national, regional and local); government departments with links to tourism; international, national, regional and local tourism organisations; tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; non-tourism business practitioners, and the community including local community groups, indigenous people's groups and local residents (Saito, H., & Ruhanen, L; 2017). The local community as a majority, areas has been involved in the planning, development and management of the tourism destination areas (Pawson, S., D'Arcy, P., & Richardson, S; 2017). Viljoen & Tlabela (2006) posit that the strategy of using rural tourism to diversify underdeveloped areas arise out of the insufficiency of agricultural livelihoods and the attendant need to search for new sources of income and economic opportunity. As such, it is always important to understand the context within which tourism in the rural areas is presented as a diversification strategy (Mitchell & Ashley 2010) and to know if tourism is introduced to diversify the national or local economy with no specific efforts to make it benefit the local communities within which it develops; or diversification of the tourism product is meant to expand the profitability of tourism industry with local communities tagged in for populist purposes; or whether tourism diversification aims to meaningfully engage the local communities for their own benefit ahead of the interests of the wider tourism industry and national economy.

Study Area, Research Materials and Methods

Hoa Vang is the only rural district of Da Nang city in the South Central Coast Vang is also the only rural district of Danang city. Da Nang city is in a strategic position as the middle of the country, it borders Thua Thien Hue province to the North, Quang Nam province to the West and the East Sea to the East. The city is 759 km away from Ha Noi to the North and 964km away from Ho Chi Minh city to the South. Da Nang is the largest transportation local point in

the Central Region in terms of railways, waterways, roads (National Highway 1A, 14B), and international air routes.

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery, Trade and Services are the ones local people in Hoa Vang district are mainly engaged in terms of livestock breeding in small scale, cultivation of rice maize, potato, cassava, etc. This district is now building on its achievements in new rural development to boost economic growth and improve people's living conditions and it is one of the first rural districts in Vietnam to achieve the new rural development program. Additionally, considering economic development, a spearhead target, Hoa Vang has focused on restructuring, industrializing, and modernising agricultural and rural areas and prioritizing high-tech, safe, and clean agricultural products of high economic value.

Additionally, some types of tourism activities offered are typified outdoor recreational activities generally with famous attractions like Ba Na Hills, Than Tai Mountains, hot water springs; rural & ecotourism; and recently since 2018, model of rural community-based eco-tourism has been developed, including those related to the appreciation of nature and forestry and agriculture (e.g., hot spring and hill paradise, orchard tours, festivals and traditions of Co Tu ethnic minority group), educational activities (e.g., school tours, traditional trade villages) while agri-tourism is in the plan of the government to combine agriculture and tourism. Within 20 kilometres far from Da Nang city, eco-rural tourism activities, the striking points of this rural area, create attractive tourist destinations that engender visitors' experiences of a "simpler" time of which eco community-based tourism is now expected and likely to be the focus to become a key component for the local rural livelihood improvement. It has been found that visitors want to escape the hustle of city life and connect with natural and cultural traditional ones to enjoy a rich leisure experience that is often perceived as being "authentic". They want to learn, connect with meaning, and meet genuine people engaged in a rural/agricultural lifestyle (Kline et al, 2007). Hence, as in this study area, Hoa Vang rural areas provided products unique to a district as evidenced in Figures One



Figure 1: Advertising tourism activities offered at Hoa Vang district, Danang city

Past studies carried out by tourism researchers on rural community-based tourism have often used positivistic methodologies and quantitative approaches. This is not surprising given that tourism in general has been largely dominated by quantitative research designs and methods, and a fondness for surveys (Ballentyne, Packer & Axelsen, 2009). However, in considering appropriate research methodologies, it was apparent from the outset that quantitative, reductionist types of approaches do not reveal the complex attitudes, values and behaviours of those farm families who elect to diversify in a developing country such as Vietnam (Ainley, Phelan & Kline, 2011, Yin 2002).

A case study approach was adopted as being appropriate in situations where the researcher has little or no control over a contemporary set of events (Yin, 2002) and equally is pertinent where little is known about a subject and hence it is not possible to develop hypotheses for testing

(Ryan, 2012). As is not uncommon, once the data had been collected and analysis commenced other elements not previously considered emerged as possessing importance. Consequently, local knowledge and an ability to re-contact informants proved useful, and the additional data relating to educational background of the informants became part of the analysis reported in this paper. It should also be stated that currently the Vietnamese tourism authorities are specifically targeting the development of rural tourism as a means of combatting poverty (UNWTO, 2017a, VNAT, 2016) and in their efforts have identified the importance of community-based tourism. This present research therefore adopted a qualitative method based on in-depth interviews with providers/rural households while adopting a community approach, meaning that rural community-based tourism was considered within its local economic/social/environmental context. The approach was centered on a phenomenographic, or perhaps more correctly a quasi-phenomenographic approach. This is consistent with prior research into the nature of agri-tourism and community-based experiences of tourists and providers/farmers (for example, Ainley & Kline, 2014).

The more formal part of the study was to capture the lived experiences of the local community (Truong, Hall & Garry 2014), officials and leaders about rural community-based tourism diversification Hoa Vang district. In addition, published and unpublished secondary material sources were used. Total of 26 were carried out with members of communes, the researcher visited potential participants at their homesteads/ shops/restaurants and extended the invitations to any individuals fitting the set criterion at the time while others were met while taking a walk around the villages/communes who have taken part in tourism activities from tourism product diversification at their areas (mainly food & beverage services, tour guide festival supporters, villages' crafters ..) and have not run directly any tourism initiatives by their own. The choice of gathering participants together was to enable a flexible and relaxed environment where rich information could be shared through interactions and exchanges with others and the researcher has observed over time these communes often and find it easy to open up about their views and opinions and to enhance the quality of information gathered. The researcher used a guide comprising a list of themes to be discussed. A total of six key interviews were also conducted that included; tourism department's heads, District Office Development, commune's board chairpersons and tourism experts. These individuals were selected as key informants on the basis that they were presumed to be involved in the daily operations of tourism activities here and, therefore, to possess rich knowledge of the conditions of the rural community-based tourism development and diversification process.

Key Findings and Discussion

Profile of Respondents

The first finding emerged when asking about informants' socio-demographics. The majority of these informants (51%) have farming background in agriculture, forestry and fishing and their family members tend to shift and would like to work on tourism and service industry like food & beverage, transport, travel agency, small family businesses. Others (38%) are still keen on farming and agriculture development and tend to advance technology application in agriculture within the diversification activities. Two main generational distinction can be observed where the parents are the "traditional working farmer generation" and the next generations is likely to change to the "high – tech agriculture and business generation" and "service business" that also wish to retain the farm land located in a rural setting. Further similar themes from interviews indicated that farmers/rural locals are optimistic with the government' policies on diversification and "building new-style rural area program" in which rural residents have supports in healthcare and education. And the improved infrastructure may encourage more investment in high-tech farming and tourism into their rural areas and may increase their

livelihoods. They have these positive beliefs (a) residents/households are seemingly more involved in/aware of direct interactions/activities with commune’s leaders on new-style rural area program and diversification, (b) are better able to understand the value of the rural resources/ farm land and a need for its protection which (c) they perceive as a new economy restructuring/development and diversification into tourism in their rural living areas and their livelihoods.

Demographic of agri-tourism providers (N=26)		Numbers	Percentage
Gender	Male	14	
	Female	12	
Education	Post-graduate	2	
	Degree/bachelor	8	
	High school graduate	10	
	Secondary and below	6	
Sources of Household income	Agriculture and Forestry/ Farming/fishing	14	
	Administration	3	
	Small business/service providers	6	
	Industrial workers	3	
	Others	2	
Age	Others	6	
	< 18 -25 years old	2	
	26-35	4	
	36-45	10	
	46-55	8	
	56-65	3	
Vulnerable households	> 65 years old	0	
	Poor households	0	
	Social Policy families	6	
	Households with disabled persons	3	
	Women headed households	10	

Table 1. Socio-Demographics of the Respondents

In terms of education, the majority of participants were high school graduates (40%) and approximately 38% of the informants had completed tertiary education mainly majoring in construction and vocational education. Data also showed that women headed households (40%) and men tend to join high-tech farming while women are likely to start small service business (open small shops, food & beverage). The typical feature is that there are nearly 34% of the informants are social policy families and households with disabled persons that they get annual supports from the government to prevent them from poor households. They tend to

increase the livelihoods thanks to the diversification of farming and off-farm income (part-time jobs/outsources at construction sites/ service industry). Nonetheless, it was stated by over half of the participants that the supports of government towards social policy families and household with disabled persons were an additional income and support for the family; though the amount was not too much but it was the encouragement and the priorities for them to make an ends meet and in business they have done or have plans to do in near future from different aspects that include education, healthcare and in farming.

It is interesting that, data showed that 75% of informants perceive how high demands in tourism is in their rural areas but they admit that they are not aware of how to get involved in tourism activities happening in their areas to see how benefits/advantages the tourism may bring although they are living nearby the famous tourists attractions.

Additionally, Hoa Vang district in Da Nang is one of 41 districts nationwide that have received the Prime Minister's certificate recognising it as a new-style rural area ahead of schedule. Hoa Vang was remarkably improved thanks to the national new rural development program. Since the end of last 2016, its poverty rate had fallen to just 2.3%. All of its communes have met all criteria for quality of education, healthcare, and culture and all rural residents are now covered by health insurance. Additionally, considering economic development, a spearhead target, Hoa Vang has focused on restructuring, industrializing, and modernising agricultural and rural areas and prioritizing high-tech, safe, and clean agricultural products of high economic value. Over the past years, the city has issued many specific policies on poverty reduction, creating favourable conditions for local businesses, armed forces, branches and authorities to mobilize all resources to support the poor directly. Thousands of local households contributed land, money, and labour to build clinics and roads and expand schools. Dang Phu Hanh, Vice chairman of the Hoa Vang district People's Committee, said: "There are a number of role models for new rural development in the community," and according to the Hoa Vang district Office of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, thousands of local people have benefitted and succeeded in escaping poverty.

The community awareness and preparedness for new-style rural development programs is enhanced and effective when agriculture practices are improved. As the results, about 11 communes have each typical agricultural product at each commune, contributing to economic development in the districts and local livelihoods improvement (Annual Report from Hoa Vang's People committee, 2019). The new-style rural area programs also encounter the diversification into tourism.

Diversification into Rural Community-Based Tourism: Community Participation /Awareness and Preparedness

Regarding the diversification into tourism, the rural community-based tourism is enhanced but having challenges, given the inherent lack of awareness among rural communities with no prior experience with tourism development towards the locals in Hoa Vang.

"We appreciate the government policies in building new-style rural area program that improve our living standards in term of health care, education and livelihood improvements. We are aware of the demands of tourism development but we have no knowledge or experience in tourism industry at all capital and the lands is also our concern..."

Other comments: "... Our district and communes look much better with large roads and lightings... we see many tourist sites have been developed from our natural potentials like hot springs, beautiful hills and amazing river.... but we wonder and we are not fully aware of the

meaning of rural community –based tourism. How can we get supports and to get involved in tourism industry in our commune and district....and get/see benefits when participating in community-based tourism..

Other comments: We are living in this beautiful rural area, but we seem not to have chances to visit famous tourist site located here/our area which is widely advertised on the Internet as we have to buy tickets to get to this site, too because this tourist site is invested by the certain Groups..... And we heard about community-based tourism development which is good, and we like to get involved here but we are not fully aware of our roles in tourism diversification and how ...

It seems that the locals/communities lack information and awareness of tourism development and diversification. The participation of people in rural community-based tourism is still reluctant and passive. Local people are mainly involved in stages of knowing (informing) while the stage of discussing, being consulting or initially participating in implementation management activities is not fully aware. Findings reveals that it is necessary to attract and improve the quality of people's participation in tourism diversification in order to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of the people and to improve rural life quality toward sustainability. In particular, the community seems not to have full awareness and preparation on the context specific constraints that could militate against future growth of the project venture and not participate meaningfully in both the planning and implementation of tourism activities. With particular reference to the community-based approach, it is usually hoped that communities would be able to determine the nature and size of rural tourism development within their own locale (Campbell 1999). Rural community-based tourism development is that the interests of the local communities should be placed at the centre of its planning process (Ying & Zhou 2007). The local community expects the development of tourism; expand and create job opportunities for the local youth; generate income to be used in starting up other businesses as well as investments in infrastructural development.

Tourism is considered an alternative one for the local rural livelihood improvement. In some respects, rural tourism contributes positively to the innovation of the tourist product since its small scale, 'green' issues and special facilities differentiate the product from others. But the unleashing of real potential is hampered by the fact that farmers tend to give priority to traditional agriculture/forestry and by the fact that industrialized agriculture is not easily combined with the commodifying of agricultural traditions for tourism.

“We have some concerns about the lands, livelihood assets and forestry resources as we both want to keep the lands for agricultural production in and also for tourism development/activities. We have unique traditional values here of the farmer and rural lifestyles in a rural surroundings/forestry and nice locals with the diversity of ethnic groups... We hope there is a balance for sustainable development”.

Livelihoods often occur in vulnerability contexts (e.g. shocks from the economy, land loss, health, natural disasters, pests, conflicts; trends of the population, resources, technology, government action; seasonality of price fluctuations, production, and employment opportunities). The livelihood assets are both the centre and the starting point of each individual, household, or community. They must access these assets at a certain level. These assets will change through their interactions with the legal, policy, institutional and administrative environments. These environments will determine the people's livelihood strategy and generate livelihood outcomes (Kollmair et al., 2002). The challenges and concerns for long-term and sustainable development also identified included; poor income and employment creation; poor accessibility that has to encounter the local's livelihood towards

sustainability; Livelihood is a universal concern. Livelihood assets reflect the capacity for livelihood. Livelihood assets can increase or decrease. We need to pay attention to “livelihood assets” Although there is no data specifically on deforestation due to poor livelihoods, it is possible to see from the data above that most of these causes are related to livelihoods. For example, the conversion of forests and forested lands to agriculture or rubber plantations, shifting cultivation, and forest fires are all linked to livelihoods. Thus, it can be seen that improving livelihoods plays a crucial role in forest protection and development. Cooperative efforts in the field of tourism are hampered by the fact that the organizations have not been logically placed in the value chain.

Conclusion

While the notion of diversification and rural community participation is not new in tourism studies, it continues to evolve and take forms not fully examined. For tourism to be meaningful in the process of rural development, local communities need to be involved in both the planning and implementation process (Murphy; 1985). Limitations at an operational level that may include the centralization of public management/ administration/government of tourism, as well as a lack of co-ordination or the lack of information among tourism developers, stakeholders with the local residents. Diversification into tourism in rural areas may be in the light of the notion that local and rural citizen participation must be accompanied by power redistribution in tourism development process and to explain the inherent evolutionary steps of this process. In particular, the local residents are actively involvement in process of planning, making decisions, performing and management of tourism activities in the rural areas. These points should be further identified, explored and solved in future research in rural tourism development in Vietnam. It concludes that formulating and implementing the participatory tourism development approach requires a total change in socio-political, legal, administrative and economic structure of many developing countries. This paper is an exploratory one for further analysis on the level/extent of participation among residents, the participation of the residents and consultation of community residents that can be recorded, measured and examined within two main processes of rural community participation: (a) involvement in the decision-making process and (b) by participation in the benefits of tourism for the rural sustainable tourism and diversification process/activities.

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Contributors: *Dr Thu Thi Trinh: Director, Center for Economic Studies, Research Institute of Central Region (ISSCR), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Danang, Vietnam and Dr Hung Duc Bui: Research Institute of Central Region (ISSCR), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), Danang, Vietnam*

Corresponding Authors: *Dr Thu Thi Trinh. Email: trinhthudng@gmail.com*