



TAYLOR'S
UNIVERSITY

Wisdom · Integrity · Excellence



CRiT

Centre for Research
and Innovation in Tourism

Asia-Pacific
Journal of
Innovation in
Hospitality and
Tourism
APJIHT

Vol 10 No 2 2021 (September)

PP 17711/04/2013 (032291)



ASEAN TOURISM
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

Review Paper

Sustainable Tourism Development in Vietnam: A case of Hue

Abhishek Singh Bhati, Thanh Hung Nguyen, Anandita Goswami and Zilmiyah Kamble
James Cook University, Singapore

© The Author(s) 2021. This article is published with open access by Taylor’s Press.

Abstract: This study aims to further integrate sustainability into the social and cultural practices of Hue. It offers an analysis of current strategies that inform decision-making in Hue’s tourism sector and makes suggestions that could further improve the existing policies. Even though Hue is a city with great potential, it is facing a number of challenges brought on by environmental degradation and uncontrolled urbanisation. Researchers point to a number of issues that impede the social, economic, and environmental development of Hue. Attention is paid to cultural events and sustainable urban development. Findings suggest that current cultural preservation efforts offer a solid foundation for future cultural development though community participation and cultural education are needed to facilitate further growth. This descriptive study employs comprehensive literature review and the Four Sphere sustainability framework to guide data collection and analysis. Further, thematic analysis is used to interpret the various aspects of the current tourism development strategies in Hue. This holistic approach highlights how different policy decisions within Hue guide the destination’s development and its ability to preserve and support its human, natural and cultural capitals.

Keywords: Hue, Vietnam; Four Sphere framework, cultural tourism, sustainability, tourism development

Suggested citation: Bhati, A. S., Nguyen, T. H., Goswami, A., & Kamble, Z. (2021). Sustainable tourism development in Vietnam: A case of Hue. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism*, 10(2), 79–94.

Introduction

Sustainability is a central theme in many policies and a key consideration for city governments (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). The term gained popularity in the late 1970s due to the persistence of problems associated with the exploitation of natural resources, environmental pollution and global inequalities (Caradonna, 2014; Kidd, 1992; Saarinen, 2014). According to Savage (2006), “sustainable development” as a

Correspondence: Abhishek Singh Bhati, James Cook University, Singapore.
Email: abhishek.bhati@jcu.edu.au

concept was first introduced by Gro Brundtland in “Our Common Future” prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987. It is now firmly established as a popular concept among academics, intellectuals, non-government organisations, as well as government and state commissions (Caradonna, 2014; Saarinen, 2014).

Sigala (2008) notes that sustainability in tourism is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary concept. The continuous growth of global tourism and its significant impact on local and international communities highlights a need to guide and sometimes even limit tourism growth in certain locations (Saarinen, 2014). In order to overcome the existing conflicts between the industry, other stakeholders and resource use, various participation processes and sustainability models have been developed.

Early sustainability models highlight the interdependence of three spheres: economic, social and environmental (Keiner, 2005; O’Connor, 2007). Later models adopted an additional “institutional” focus designed to help regulate the three spheres. O’Connor (2007), for example, employs a “political sphere” which deals with conflict resolution and governance through the emergence of conventions, rules and institutional frameworks. This work employs a comprehensive literature review (CLR) as a methodology to investigate sustainability practices in Hue. The CLR is guided by the “Four Sphere” sustainability framework (see Methodology). The aim is to identify opportunities and threats in Hue’s tourism sector as well as provide some recommendations that could support current development strategies. This holistic approach shows how different policy decisions within Hue guide the destination’s development and its ability to preserve and support its human, natural and cultural capitals. The life of the city and all its spheres present a complex network that is intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole. The use of the Four Sphere sustainability framework to guide literature review helps provide a more comprehensive picture of current working practices within the tourism industry of Hue.

Hue, the ancient capital of Vietnam (1802 to 1945), was not only the political but also the cultural and religious centre under the Nguyen Dynasty (UNESCO, 2020). It is well-known for its rich cultural heritage and is home to two UNESCO-recognised masterpieces: The Complex of Hue Monuments (UNESCO World Heritage Site), and Nha Nhac (Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity) — a wide range of musical and dance styles performed at the Vietnamese royal court (UNESCO, n.d.). Today, Hue is the capital of Thừa Thiên-Huế Province in central Vietnam and is considered one of the key localities in the Central Economic region as well as an important location on East-West Economic Corridor connecting Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos (Thua Thien Hue Portal, 2021). It has an important strategic position, situated roughly half way between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh.

Hue is a medium-sized city with a population of 358,754 people (in 2018) and is listed as one of the greenest Vietnamese cities: “ASEAN green city” in 2014 and “ASEAN green tourism city” in 2018 according to its official portal (thuathienhue.gov.vn). The Perfume River divides Hue into two parts: the old city (also known as the citadel) located in the North, and the modern city located in the South. Hue is part of the Phong Nha, Da Nang and Hoi An tourism cluster and is currently listed as one of the ten “Best Vietnam tourism destinations” by Tripadvisor (2021). Yet it faces fierce competition from nearby tourism centres such as Phong Nha, Da Nang and Hoi An, and even Nha Trang and Da Lat. Hue’s economy is highly dependent on the service sector which accounts for nearly 50% of total economic activity, of which tourism is the most important industry (TTHDT, 2019). Due to its rich cultural heritage, Hue has a unique identity and provides a valued contribution to the economy and society. Recent “green” initiatives help improve the overall environment. An overview of current policies and an in-depth analysis of sustainable practices might help further promote this incredible destination and inform future policymakers and conservation managers.

Methodology

This explorative study tries to identify ways to support sustainable development of tourism in the city of Hue. It employs the CLR method proposed by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) to systematically review available secondary data. Guided by the sustainability framework designed by O’Connor (2007), this paper helps discover current strategies that inform decision-making in Hue’s tourism sector and makes suggestions that could further improve the existing policies.

Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) state that the literature review process is a formal data collection tool. As a data collection tool, the literature review involves activities such as “identifying, recording, understanding, meaning-making, and transmitting information” (p. 49). The CLR approach suggests that a summary of both quantitative and qualitative findings from as many available individual sources as possible provides optimal results. CLR recognises that meaning-making can occur from any aspect of a work as long as it contains quantitative and/or qualitative information. In this study, the authors place an emphasis on qualitative and quantitative data collected from sources broadly identified as economic, social, environmental and political. These four sources or, rather, spheres contain an interdependency outlined by O’Connor (2007), who claims that the economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of human activity relate to the concept of “capital”. The maintenance of “four capitals” is a framework of actions for strong sustainability.

The research findings are categorised into four sections, each section focusing on a specific capital and its interactions with other political, environmental, and socio-cultural factors. The economic section focuses on employment rates, average

income, and other economic factors that help enforce strategies that affect tourism in Hue. The political discussion concentrates on policies, local initiatives and political scenarios that support sustainability in Hue. The social and environmental sections focus on social capital and environmental management. Since the four spheres are very much interdependent, the boundaries are fuzzy and some overlap is inevitable.

Thematic analysis has been used to identify divergence and convergence of regulations, development strategies and competencies in Hue. Thematic analysis is a comprehensive process that helps identify themes (patterns and ideas) and compact the diverse data into a succinct narrative structure (Alhojailan, 2012). A narrative helps combine the otherwise broad findings into a meaningful description. Themes are dependent on interpretation, so some research bias is unavoidable. To minimise the bias, only those themes that were present in all research findings have been selected. Researchers used judgement sampling during data collection as a time- and cost-effective method that can deliver a wide range of data which is particularly useful in exploratory research (Taherdoost, 2016).

Results and Discussion

Economic Potential

Vietnam's turbulent modern history encompasses several wars and uprisings. The instability within the region often brought on economic and political crises (Beresford, Jamieson, Hardy, & DiGregorio, 2003). Previously, a predominantly agrarian community, Vietnam launched a series of economic reforms in 1986 (Đổi Mới reform programme) designed to help the country transition to a market economy (Riedel & Comer, 1997). The country is still in "transition" though considerable economic breakthroughs have been achieved in recent decades. Today, Vietnam maintains a relatively stable annual GDP growth rate of over 6% (since 2015) though COVID-19 brought a sharp economic decline (Trading Economics, 2021).

The transition from planned economy to a more open, market-type system led to a reconstruction of the economic sectors offering a bigger role to the service sector, particularly tourism (Alpert, 2005). In the 1990s, Vietnam incorporated tourism into its main socio-economic policy (Cooper, 2000). Ever since, tourism remains one of the country's major economic sectors. Over the past years, Vietnam has emerged as a world-class tourism destination that offers a variety of experiences, from natural wonders to cultural offerings (UNWTO, 2015).

Hue's tourism industry has been maintaining a stable growth since the early 2010s, mostly due to the promotional efforts of main travel organisations that focused their attention on regional development (Vietnam Travel, n.d.; Vietnam National Administration of Tourism [VNAT], 2011). Social media has also given

a boost to regional tourism. The UNESCO status meant new investments and economic opportunities (Chuong, 2014). The relatively stable economy in the late 2010s gave Hue's tourism industry a chance to grow and flourish. Job opportunities in tourism helped reduce the city's unemployment rate.

Seeing the potential, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) started a number of initiatives to further promote the area. The Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism development programme funded by the European Union (EU) offered some interesting opportunities for Hue. Among important developments were the conversations about tourism workforce development (Le, 2016). For instance, the Vietnam Tourism Occupational Standards meeting was held in 2016 in Hue.

In 2016, the average monthly wage in Hanoi was 281 USD, and in Ho Chi Minh, 265 USD, which is higher than in Hue (Stotz, 2021). Yet the average cost of living in Hue is also low, even by Vietnamese standards. For example, eating in Hue is inexpensive compared to Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi. Meals will normally cost around 20,000–40,000 VND or around 1–2 USD. A large portion of traditional Hue dishes include rice and noodles. Vietnamese sandwiches are likewise famous, particularly among Vietnamese youth. One sandwich would cost around 10,000 VND (approx. 0.50 USD). Hue is renowned for its local Huda lager, a jug of which will usually cost around 7000–15,000 VND (0.33–0.75 USD). These low prices are very attractive and draw tourists to Hue. The city welcomes around 2.5 million tourists annually, of whom 1.5 million are international tourists (Kusakabe, Shrestha, Kumar, & Nguyen, 2014); its GDP increased by 12% in 2012, and the tourism sector on its own contributed to 48% of the GDP (Kusakabe et al., 2014).

However, insufficient and low-skilled labour and lack of cooperation between numerous tourism stakeholders, such as local government, tourism operators, cultural agencies, transportation, and accommodation restrict the development of Hue. The proximity of other attractions outside of Hue add to the competitiveness within the region. This could cause the travel sector to bear high input costs in opening new attractions, and imbalanced profit growth may occur among tourism-related industries. Collaborative stakeholder action and how tourism affects other activities is very significant in maintaining sustainability, note Moscardo and Murphy (2014). To address the labour shortage in Hue, the tourism industry has begun hiring employees from other regions such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. Hue's industry needs more incentives to attract workforce from the region. In addition, labour development efforts need to extend to cultural training and cultural education to help tour guides become more knowledgeable and experienced when introducing the culture and heritage of Hue. Some steps have already been taken in the right direction, for example, the "Hue - A Homeland of Happiness" plan (2010–2020). Initiatives such as these improve community participation and raise awareness about

the importance of collaborative support of local tourism initiatives (Hue News, 2020a).

Among prominent themes in this section, we found “skills shortage”, “competitiveness” and “lack of cooperation”. Yet a number of “positive” themes have also caught our attention: “local tourism support”, “importance of culture”, “preservation and development initiatives”. Our recommendation is to continue working with the workforce and think of a comprehensive incentive plan for well-performing workers (supporting “work-life” balance). The participation of the local youth (e.g. student volunteers) might be very beneficial for the industry. Their energy and innovation might offer some new solutions to existing problems. Also, students would gain some early work experience which improves their chances for employment. Moreover, offering government grants and support to local talents could bring in new people to the industry further improving its diversity. The continuous support of local tourism organisations, including the development of necessary online marketing skills (free education programmes), would be of benefit to local tourism.

“Political” Capital and Government Initiatives

This section highlights the regulatory mechanisms that exist within Hue, including governance and socio-political organisations. As mentioned previously, the country is still in a state of transition. The economy and social life experience a noticeable level of government interference. That being said, new reforms and policy initiatives take place all the time. For example, the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2011–2020) aims to offer more sustainable development, political stability, improved healthcare, and opportunities for cultural development — to further boost the image of Vietnam in the international context, with a special focus on the service sector. Having the appropriate plans and policies that govern both socio-economic and environmental spheres adds stability and improves sustainability (O’Connor, 2007). In Vietnam, there is a clear emphasis on the goal to “concentrate on developing some advantageous service industries that have high density of knowledge and technology such as: tourism, maritime, aviation, telecommunications, information technology and health” (Vietnam’s Socio-Economic Development Strategy, n.d.). Government cooperation with international organisations and agencies offers new resources and improves the financial and political climate within the region. In addition, the central support of environmentally friendly initiatives is greatly affecting the image of Hue.

Resolution No. 54 of the Politburo and the Government’s Action Plan on building and developing Thua Thien Hue to become a city under central government have oriented the development for Hue on the basis of preserving and promoting the values of ancient capital’s heritage and Hue cultural identities, with the characteristics of ecology, environmental-friendly, and smart landscapes (Hue News, 2020a).

Despite active government participation, some mistakes are likely to occur. Tourism can create negative consequences for both the economy and people due to mismanagement, corruption and lack of market-oriented planning. There is always a risk of “overtourism”, environmental degradation, cultural degradation, and other negative impacts including alienation of local residents (due to rising rents, noise, prices) (Moscardo & Murphy, 2014).

The Vietnamese government works on promoting practices that are more environmentally friendly. For example, the “Hue – A Homeland of Happiness” plan (2010–2020) already achieved some sustainability goals. In 2020, Hue received yet another “green” award, this time ASEAN Clean Tourist Awards 2020 (Hue News, 2020b). Hue’s commitment to low-carbon growth and sustainable development are visible through different programmes and local strategies. Hue’s government has also been diversifying tourism products and encouraging sustainability within tourism. Some of the new initiatives include increasing investments in infrastructure (e.g., opening monuments and conservation centres, renovating historical sites), facilitating new tourism product development with an emphasis on cultural tourism, marine tourism, and ecotourism, and organising local festivals (e.g., Hue Traditional Craft Festival) in Hue (Kusakabe et al., 2014; VNAT, 2019a). These initiatives encourage the involvement of different tourism suppliers, specifically small private enterprises (Thang, 2004).

The main initiatives by Hue’s government, according to the official website, include long-term and short-term strategies. Short-term strategies include supporting software literacy and advanced marketing tactics, providing safety and improving tourist experiences. Long-term strategies focus on physical and social development. In order to carry out such strategies successfully, effective cooperation of numerous stakeholders is paramount (Chuong, 2014). Other long-term development strategies include more employment opportunities, engaging local communities in decision-making, fostering respect towards historical heritage sites, culture, and traditions; resource efficiency, and environmental support initiatives.

A potential challenge lies in the fact that Vietnam is guided by a communist ideology. Strong elements of communism and bureaucracy create favourable conditions for corruption and nepotism (Karklins, 2005), which does not improve the investment attractiveness of the region. Businesses are required to go through tedious bureaucratic procedures to obtain any authorisation from the government which impedes growth. The international perception of the country’s politics affects tourism numbers. While local promotion campaigns and accessibility attract Chinese tourists — the biggest sources of revenue for Hue’s tourism — it is also a concern for the future in terms of geopolitics (see conflicts between the Chinese government and the Vietnamese government in mid-2014). While China is a very important market for Vietnam, and Hue in particular, diversity within international arrivals

should be encouraged. This will help build up the resilience of the economy. New tourism markets and increased diversity will make Hue's tourism less dependent on politics which can potentially bring in new investors and opportunities. Less stringent government control (e.g., less bureaucracy) and more independence for local businesses (certain decentralisation of decision-making) will improve Hue's tourism sector and support its sustainable development.

Society and Cultural Diversity

This section focuses on the social organisation of Hue and its rich cultural traditions. Hue owes a lot of its popularity to ancient sites, gardens, cuisine, landscapes, climate, and people — all this creates a unique cultural profile. Hue, sometimes referred to as “Festival City of Vietnam”, hosts several renowned festivals (Hue Travel Tour, n.d.; Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). Festivals play an important part in tourism development, particularly in regional areas (Radomskaya, 2018). They can help with seasonality and can improve the cultural “visibility” of regional tourism destinations (Liu, 2014; Radomskaya, 2019). Combined with rich cultural and natural heritage, tourism events in Hue are an effective destination development strategy. Further support of this sector, including additional promotion campaigns, could greatly benefit the region.

Hue has many cultural monuments and ancient sites that can satisfy the “spiritual needs” of both residents and tourists (Logan, 2005; Nguyen & Cheung, 2014). The Complex of Hue Monuments and the layout of the old city are important aspects of the cultural and social life in Hue. The long history of Vietnam is reflected in the numerous monuments and heritage sites. The Hue Citadel has three areas, that is, the imperial city, the civic city or the capital, and the Forbidden City (Vietnamitas en Madrid, n.d.). The urban development of Hue was carried out in three different periods: the monarchy (under the Nguyen lords and emperors), the colonial period up to 1945, and the modern period (post-1945) (Seasite, 2017). The time of the Nguyen lords in Dang Trong (1533–1789) mark the beginning of Hue's “royal” ambitions (palaces, temples, city walls), notes Tuyet (2011). Under the Nguyen emperors (1802–1945), the development of the city continued and it expanded to occupy considerable areas on both sides of the river.

Hue's cultural traditions were influenced by foreign countries such as China (e.g., fengshui principles) and France (colonial influences that can be seen in villas and residences along the river). Overall, the city has a diverse architecture capable of attracting many cultural enthusiasts. Religious architecture together with numerous pagodas make Hue an important centre of Buddhism in Vietnam. The “natural” settings of Hue such as the Perfume River and NguBinh Mountain also play a very important role in Hue's life.

The conservation and preservation of Hue's monuments, including royal palaces, temples, and tombs, is under state management. All historic monuments

of the Nguyen Dynasty are under the direct management of the Hue Monuments Conservation Centre (HMCC), supervised by provincial communities. HMCC was founded in 1982 and is responsible for the management, preservation, and restoration of buildings and architecture of heritage value (TTHDT, 2019). While HMCC efforts are quite substantial, more could be done in terms of community participation in preservation efforts. Mkandawire and Daka (2018) point out that the cultural literacy of the community together with cultural preservation knowledge are key ingredients needed to support cultural sustainability.

Garden houses are also part of the city's cultural heritage. They are considered the "lungs" of Hue and offer green sanctuaries within the bustling city. In 2002, Hue selected the Kim Long community in the western part of the city as a site for garden houses. Recognising the tourism potential, Hue enacted a policy to ensure the conservation and preservation of the garden houses (Kusakabe et al., 2014). This has yielded a number of environmental, economic, and cultural benefits for Hue. The preservation of the garden houses is part of Hue's green development strategy (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2014).

Acknowledging the importance of social media, the government of Hue provides unrestricted internet access to the local community. People have access to Google, Facebook, YouTube and many other social media platforms. Many public places provide free Wi-Fi access to customers. City ads encourage travellers to post about their experiences. These simple steps give Hue additional communication, sharing and visibility tools necessary to promote the destination.

Uncovered "social" themes point to such sentiments as traditional, native, spiritual, well-being and community pride. Themes also bring attention to some negative points. This study has already touched upon a number of social issues (e.g., quality of employment, overbearing government, complex bureaucratic procedures, corruption) but we are yet to touch upon a theme of inequality that is also present in Hue's discourse. Inequality manifests itself in different ways, from regional economic disparities to environmental and health related inequalities within cities. In the social context of Vietnam, gender inequality raises concerns to an extent that a National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030 has been approved by the government in 2021. Vietnam Women's Union even launched a campaign "For Women's Smile" in Thừa Thiên-Huế Province (Vietnam News, 2021).

Severe flooding in central Vietnam in 2020 points to a certain "environmental" vulnerability of the local population (Nguyen, 2020). Unregulated urbanisation and deforestation contribute to the problem. Ideas such as "garden houses" could be a viable climate mitigation option while also enhancing tourism development. Destinations like Hue are increasingly vulnerable to changing climate conditions. The tourism industry in collaboration with the local government and people might provide the necessary push towards more sustainable practices.

Environmental Concerns and Sustainable Practices

Tourism industry is often comprised of a large number of SMEs (small- and medium-sized enterprises). While SMEs drive economic development, they are also very fragmented which creates additional barriers when trying to implement sustainable tourism practices (Hoang, 2019). Swarbrooke (1999) argues that the complexity of the tourism industry makes it difficult to precisely evaluate the negative environmental impacts associated with SMEs. In addition, small tourism businesses are more concerned with short-term benefits rather than long-term sustainability. Bhati and Pearce (2016) argue that tourism industry is often blamed for not doing enough to raise awareness among tourists of issues associated with sustainable practices. Swarbrooke (1999) adds that the tourism industry is only getting on the sustainability “bandwagon” because the concept is gaining increasing recognition as a marketing tool. In recent years, however, there is a genuine trend among tourism professionals to support and promote sustainable development. Every major tourism agenda involves talks about sustainable practices (UNWTO, n.d.).

Good transportation system is essential in attracting tourists. A survey conducted by an EU-funded tourism development program revealed that 94% of the international tourists would not revisit Vietnam due to the inconvenient transport system (ETurboNews, 2014). Only four airlines operate in Hue’s Airport: Vietnam Airlines, VietJet Air, Jetstar Pacific Airlines, and Austrian Airlines. The first three provide domestic flights and only Austrian Airlines provides international flights, but only to Luang Prabang, Laos (Tripadvisor, 2015). For this reason, international tourists find it difficult to access Hue. For domestic tourists, several modes of transport are available, including airplanes, trains, and buses. Several trains run between Hue and major cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, and Da Nang (Vietnam Discovery, 2021). Yet an increase in flights or trains will put an additional strain on the environment. CO₂ emissions from passenger transport is already a problem in Hue which suffers from traffic congestion that creates difficulties for both locals and tourists when traveling within the city (Vietnam news, 2012). In this regard, Thanh, Van Dao, and Ly (2020) call for a rigorous analysis of existing logistics in order to solve some of the transportation issues in Hue.

There are other challenges within Hue, such as uncontrolled urban development and monument degradation (VNAT, 2011, 2019b). Moreover, the growth of SMEs looking for quick profits negates some of the positive results from sustainable management policies. Since the 1950s, numerous buildings have been constructed due to the social and economic needs of the city. While new tourism infrastructure has been built (e.g., Huong Giang Hotel, Century Hotel), some ancient colonial buildings have been either redesigned or lost (Seasite, 2017). Loss of cultural authenticity is a significant problem for many destinations with rich cultural heritage and a growing population.

Most of Thừa Thiên-Huế's infrastructure and industry lie in the coastal plain, within 25 kilometers from the coast. Due to its geography, Thừa Thiên-Huế faces a high risk of climate change-related disasters (Kusakabe et al., 2014). The Perfume River is the main source of water for agriculture and aquaculture and it provides water for the industry and population. One of the major issues with the river is that the seasonal distribution of water in its basin is not consistent. There is a very high chance of flooding during the rainy seasons, while the long dry seasons bring water supply crises. The water crisis is often aggravated by tourism and smart water regulations are becoming a necessity. Many types of climate-related disasters, such as typhoons, storms, floods, droughts and landslides have become a regular occurrence in Hue and the Huong River basin. The effects could be devastating, including loss of life and serious damage to the infrastructure and ecology (Nguyen, 2020). The prolonged dry seasons causes the salinity levels to rise, badly affecting agriculture, lagoon ecology, and aquatic resources. This saline intrusion can reach Bach Ho Bridge where Hue's water supply system is located (Hue City Water Environment Improvement Project, 2015). Moreover, the upstream "slash and burn" cultivation practices and rapid deforestation, together with the geographical and meteorological characteristics of the basin, are causing more erosion, increasing the risk of landslides and floods in the mountainous areas.

Hue also faces major challenges regarding air pollution. The air pollution in Hue could be harmful to both residents' and tourists' health. Nowadays, tourists are becoming more sensitive to pollution and environmental conditions (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). More tourists prefer destinations with greener environments. Thus, there is a risk that continued lack of pollution control might lead to lower tourist numbers.

In Hue, the need for sustainable practices and inevitable push for economic development create competing conditions. Only a continued dialogue between the local community, government and industry can facilitate sustainable development. Sustainable production, sustainable resource management, sustainable jobs, government policies and practices for sustainable development — all need to be part of the long-term strategic plan for strengthening Hue.

Conclusion

This study aims to further integrate sustainability into the social and cultural practices of Hue. It offers an analysis of current strategies that inform decision-making in Hue's tourism sector. Hue is a city with great potential, but is facing a number of challenges brought on by environmental degradation and uncontrolled urbanisation. The study emphasises the need for collaborative efforts of many stakeholders in order to facilitate change. While the international attention, including that of UNESCO, brought many

tourists to the area, it also added challenges to the already difficult task of managing sustainable tourism development in Hue. At the same time, international resources and expertise made it possible to implement and design several programmes that support sustainable development and improve quality of life for local residents.

Several issues that impede social and economic development of Hue have been discussed, including the shortage of skilled workforce and unemployment; low wages, corruption and over-dependence on the Chinese market; uncontrolled urbanisation and loss of authenticity; logistical issues, pollution and water crisis. There is a call for less centralised planning and development efforts (more local decision-making) in order to achieve sustainable tourism development and improve the investment climate. Researchers argue that access to new tourism markets and efforts to diversify international relations could build the resilience of tourism in Vietnam.

The study also highlights some remarkable achievements of urban green initiatives in Hue. Our further advice would be to implement similar strategies all over Vietnam. Additional steps need to be taken to improve city's water infrastructure including drainage and wastewater treatment in order to avoid flooding (Mu et al., 2021). A more efficient public transportation system also needs to be considered to reduce traffic congestion within the city.

One of the key tourism related recommendations would be a continued effort to support cultural tourism development in Hue. The existing cultural festivals and cultural preservation efforts already offer a solid foundation for future cultural development. Additional cultural training and education could benefit both community and tourists.

Destinations like Hue have great potential and could lead the industry in those aspects of policy that are focused on environmental improvements and cultural preservation. The city has an ability to rally people together in order to facilitate change. Communal efforts can and should be leveraged in the development process. Further research is necessary to explore ways to encourage sustainable development in Hue. Additional policy assessment and rigorous impact analysis is required to identify the most effective development strategies.

Open Access: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC-BY 4.0) which permits any use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

References

- Alhojailan, M. I. (2012). Thematic analysis: A critical review of its process and evaluation. *West East Journal of Social Sciences*, 1(1), 39–47.
- Alpert, W. T. (Ed.) (2005). *The Vietnamese economy and its transformation to an open market system*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

- Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2014). *Hue Green City Action Plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/179170/hue-green-city-ap.pdf>
- Beresford, M., Jamieson, N., Hardy, A., & DiGregorio, M. R. (2003). *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a transforming society*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bhati, A., & Pearce, P. (2016) Vandalism and tourism settings: An integrative review. *Tourism Management*, 57, 91–105.
- Caradonna, J. L. (2014). *Sustainability: A history*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Ceballos-Lascurain, H. (1996). *Tourism, ecotourism, and protected areas: The state of nature-based tourism around the world and guidelines for its development*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Chuong, P. (2014, Dec 31). Vietnam's tourism industry grows despite difficulties. *NhanDan*. Retrieved from <http://en.nhandan.org.vn/travel/item/3043002-vietnam%E2%80%99s-tourism-industry-grows-despite-difficulties.html>
- Cooper, M. (2000). Tourism in Vietnam: Doi Moi and the realities of tourism in the 1990s. In C. M. Hall, & S. Page (Eds.), *Tourism in South and Southeast Asia: Issues and cases* (pp. 167–177). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eco Nature Travel. (n.d.). Hue Traditional Festivals. Retrieved from <https://www.huetraveltour.com/travel-destination/hue-traditional-festivals>
- ETurboNews. (2014, Nov 3). Poor services, transport: Only 6 percent of foreign visitors return to Vietnam. Retrieved from <https://eturbonews.com/102502/poor-services-transport-only-6-percent-foreign-visitors-return-v/>
- Hoang, T. H. (2019). *Stakeholder collaboration in sustainable urban tourism development: The case of Hue City, Vietnam* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.
- Hue City Water Environment Improvement Project. (2015). Retrieved from https://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/evaluation/oda_loan/economic_cooperation/c8h0vm000001rdjt-att/vietnam07.pdf
- Hue News. (2020a, July 9). Building Hue as a destination of happiness. Retrieved from <https://baothuathienhue.vn/news/building-hue-as-a-destination-of-happiness-a88449.html>
- Hue News. (2020b, Jan 18). Hue City wins ASEAN Clean Tourist Award 2020. Retrieved from <https://baothuathienhue.vn/news/hue-city-wins-asean-clean-tourist-award-2020-a82085.html>
- Karklins, R. (2005). *The system made me do it: corruption in post-communist societies*. New York, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Keiner, M. (2005). Re-emphasizing sustainable development – The concept of ‘evolutionability’ on living chances, equity, and good heritage. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 6, 379–392.
- Kidd, C. V. (1992). The evolution of sustainability. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 5(1), 1–26.
- Kuhlman, T., & Farrington, J. (2010). What is sustainability? *Sustainability*, 2(11), 3436–3448.

- Kusakabe, K., Shrestha, P., Kumar, S., & Nguyen K. L. (2014). Advancing green growth in the tourism sector: The case of Hue, Vietnam. *Climate & Development Knowledge Network*. Retrieved from https://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Hue-Inside-Story_WEB.pdf
- Le, A. H. (2016). *Tertiary hospitality education in Vietnam: An exploratory study*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/365951>
- Liu, Y. D. (2014). Cultural events and cultural tourism development: Lessons from the European Capitals of Culture. *European Planning Studies*, 22(3), 498–514.
- Logan, W. S. (2005). The cultural role of capital cities: Hanoi and Hue, Vietnam. *Pacific Affairs*, 78(4), 559–575.
- Mkandawire, S. B., & Daka, H. (2018). Cultural preservation literacy in Zambia: A case study of the Lala People of Serenje District. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education*, 1(1), 139–174.
- Moscardo, G., & Murphy, L. (2014). There is no such thing as sustainable tourism: Reconceptualizing tourism as a tool for sustainability. *Sustainability*, 6(5), 2538–2561.
- Mu, D., Luo, P., Lyu, J., Zhou, M., Huo, A., Duan, W., ... & Zhao, X. (2021). Impact of temporal rainfall patterns on flash floods in Hue City, Vietnam. *Journal of Flood Risk Management*, 14(1), e12668.
- Nguyen, S. (2020, Dec 31). Vietnamese pick up the pieces after 2020's relentless storms. *Al-Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/31/vietnam-storms>
- Nguyen, T. H. H., & Cheung, C. (2014). The classification of heritage tourists: A case of Hue city, Vietnam. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9(1), 35–50.
- O'Connor, M. (2007). The four spheres framework for sustainability. *Ecological Complexity*, 3(4), 285–292.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Frels, R. (2016). *Seven steps to a comprehensive literature review: A multimodal and cultural approach*. London, UK: Sage.
- Radomskaya, V. (2018). *Popular culture as a powerful destination marketing tool: an Australian study* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). James Cook University, Australia.
- Radomskaya, V. (2019). Promoting cultural tourism in Australia. *Delivering Tourism Intelligence (Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice)*, 11, 109–121.
- Riedel, J., & Comer, B. (1997). Transition to a market economy in Vietnam. In W. T. Woo, S. Parker, & J. D. Sachs (Eds.), *Economies in Transition: Comparing Asia and Eastern Europe* (pp. 189–213). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Saarinen, J. (2014). Critical sustainability: Setting the limits to growth and responsibility in tourism. *Sustainability*, 6(1), 1–17.
- Savage, V. R. (2006). Ecology matters: sustainable development in Southeast Asia. *Sustainability Science*, 1(1), 37–63.
- Seasite. (2017). Architecture of the ancient capital of Hue. Retrieved from <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/vietnamese/vnculture/culture.htm>
- Sigala, M. (2008). A supply chain management approach for investigating the role of tour operators on sustainable tourism: The case of TUI. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16(15), 1589–1599.

- Stotz, J. (2020, May 5). Average and minimum wage in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City. *Check in Price*. Retrieved from <https://checkinprice.com/average-minimum-wage-hanoi-ho-chi-minh-vietnam/>
- Swarbrooke, J. (1999). *Sustainable tourism management*. Wallingford, UK: CABI.
- Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5(2), 18–27.
- Thang, V.T. (2004). Tourism industry in Thua Thien – Hue. In C. V. Luan (Ed.), *Thua Thien –Hue new image in 21st century*. Hanoi, Vietnam: National Politic Publication.
- Thanh, T. T. M., Van Dao, D., & Ly, H. B. (2020). Analysis of tourist travel behavior and recommendation for active transport encouragement strategies, the case of Hue City. In *CIGOS 2019, Innovation for Sustainable Infrastructure* (pp. 1049–1055). Singapore: Springer.
- Thua Thien Hue Portal (n.d.). Strength of localities. Retrieved from <https://thuathienhue.gov.vn/en-us/Home/Socio-Economic/Socio-Economic-Detail/tid/Potential-Infrastructure/newsid/E351437A-A24F-405B-A716-A854009CA659/cid/FB12B9A8-9178-483E-BEC6-A993010223F6>
- Trading Economics. (2021). Vietnam GDP annual growth rate. Retrieved from <https://tradingeconomics.com/vietnam/gdp-growth-annual>
- Tripadvisor (2021). 2021: Best of Vietnam tourism. Retrieved from <https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Attractions-g293921-Activities-Vietnam.html>
- Tripadvisor (2015). Finding the cheapest flights. Retrieved from http://www.tripadvisor.com/Flights-g293926-Hue_Thua_Thien_Hue_Province-Cheap_Discount_Airfares.html
- TTHDT. (2019). *Report: State of Thua Thien Hue's tourism in 2018: Directions and tasks in 2019*. Hue, Vietnam: TTHDT.
- Tuyet, T. T. (2011, Feb 24). The Nguyen family. *Vietnam Law & Legal Forum*. Retrieved from <http://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/the-nguyen-family-of-dang-trong-1558-1786-%E2%80%93its-state-and-law-4330.html>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2020). Complex of Hué Monuments. Retrieved from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/678/>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (n.d.). Nha Nhac, Vietnamese court music. Retrieved from <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nha-nhac-vietnamese-court-music-00074>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2015). Vietnam National Administration of Tourism: Press release. Retrieved from <https://www.unwto.org/archive/asia/news/2015-07-14/press-release-vietnam-national-administration-tourism-vietnam-plans-15-increase-visi>
- United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (n.d.). Tourism in the 2030 Agenda. Retrieved from <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda>
- Vietnam Discovery. (2021). Hue tours, packages & excursions. Retrieved from <https://vietnamdiscovery.com/l/hue/>

- Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT). (2011, Feb 6). Hue To Build on Tourism Foundations. Retrieved from <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/3622>
- Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT). (2019a). Tourism statistic. Retrieved from <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/>
- Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) (2019b, June 9). Thua Thien - Hue continues upgrading relics as planned. Retrieved from <https://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/14196>
- Vietnam News. (2012, Feb 24). Historians condemn Hue bridge. Retrieved from <http://vietnamnews.vn/print/221229/historians-condemn-hue-bridge-renewal.htm>
- Vietnam News. (2021, March 8). Việt Nam issues new national strategy on gender equality. Retrieved from <https://vietnamnews.vn/society/896268/viet-nam-issues-new-national-strategy-on-gender-equality.html>
- Vietnam's socio-economic development strategy for the period of 2011-2020. (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/347151477448693952/text/Vietnam-SEDS-2011-2020.txt>
- Vietnam Travel. (n.d.). Central Vietnam. Retrieved from <https://vietnam.travel/places-to-go/central-vietnam>
- Vietnamitas en Madrid. (n.d.). Hue Citadel. Retrieved from <http://en.vietnamitasenmadrid.com/2011/07/hue-citadel-imperial-city.html>