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Stakeholder Perceptions of Riverine and Montane Ecotourism Development in Da Nang, Vietnam

Abstract

The study explores Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ecotourism in Da Nang, Vietnam, particularly in riverine and montane areas. The city's commitment aligns with SDGs, providing a blueprint for post-2015 development. With a focus on ecotourism, Da Nang aims to create jobs, preserve local culture, and monitor impacts according to SDGs. The research unveils stakeholders' views on ecotourism, emphasizing its potential for employment and cultural preservation. Concerns persist over environmental impacts like water pollution and deforestation. Informal discussions highlight challenges like local displacement, rising prices, and the need for a sustainable plan. The paper suggests promoting environmental stewardship, community engagement, and service provisions. Acknowledging its theoretical nature, the study paves the way for future quantitative analysis, urging continuous research for Da Nang's sustainable ecotourism development.

Keywords: ecotourism, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), stakeholder perception, riverine and montane, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Da Nang is a coastal city in central Vietnam. It is recognized for its beaches, friendly people, and cultural heritage. The location is a great opportunity for Vietnam to continue to build on its successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as it transitions into the post-2015 development agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Within the SDG framework, riverine (marine-based) and montane (mountain-based) ecotourism development may create jobs, promote local culture and products (SDG 8.9), and stimulate tools to monitor impacts (SDG 12.8/12. b.1). Furthermore, ecotourism may promote conservation and safeguard the sustainable use of freshwater (SDG 15.1) and mountain ecosystems (SDG 15.4).

The city's tourism industry saw an average growth of 5.5% in revenue in 2016 – 2019. Tourism contributes significantly to the city's gross regional domestic product (GRDP), which was 31.4% in 2019 and created significant employment (50,963 in 2019). Post-Covid, the city's primary priority is the tourism sector (Hoang et al, 2022). Local authorities and investors in Da Nang are focused on natural resources (mountain and marine-based tourism) for sustainable tourism development (Thu & Dinh, 2022).

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This paper focuses on SDGs applied to riverine and montane ecotourism development in Da Nang. The goal and purpose of the SDGs is a holistic approach to economic development that counts not only on economic growth but also on ending extreme poverty, social fairness and justice and environmental sustainability. The SDGs considered in this paper include Goal 8.9: *By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.* Goal 12.b.1: *Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that create jobs and promote local culture and products.* Goal 15.1: *By 2030, ensure the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, particularly forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements.* Lastly, Goal 15.4: *By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, to enhance their capacity to provide essential benefits for sustainable development.*

All that being said, the study's research objective can formally be stated as follows: *To examine stakeholder perception concerning riverine and montane ecotourism in Da Nang, Vietnam.* The study has one testable hypothesis, which can be expressed as follows: *Stakeholders have both positive and negative views regarding riverine and montane ecotourism in Da Nang, Vietnam.*

The following section briefly overviews the literature on this topical area. This will be followed by sections that discuss the study's methodology and the research results. This is then followed by a section that discusses the study's results. The final section provides some concluding remarks and a discussion of the study's key limitations and implications for future research projects in related areas.

2. Literature review

This section of the paper is divided into two subsections. The first subsection briefly discusses tourism and then focuses on the SDGs as they apply to tourism. The second subsection focuses specifically on ecotourism in Da Nang, Vietnam, which constitutes the “meat and potatoes” of this research project.

2.1. Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals

Tourism is a suitable approach to adapting to climate change, maintaining ecological processes, minimising environmental impacts from tourism activities, harmonising economic goals with conservation, and promoting national and regional cultural identities (Hardy et al., 2002). Tourism implies well-paying employment, poverty reduction, gender equity, preservation of one's history, and protection of the environment (Tien et al., 2019). In practical terms, there is a widely held consensus on the significance and value of tourism in national growth policies, and it is increasingly assuming an essential role in the global policy agenda (Lisha et al., 2021).

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has 17 goals with 169 targets to achieve its objective of global transformation (United Nations, 2023). The 17 SDGs are co-integrated—as they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others and that development must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability (United Nations, 2023). Currently, Vietnam ranks 55 out of 169 countries with an overall score of 72.8 on the SDG index (Sachs et al., 2022). It is rated 0-100 for different indicators, of which almost 80% are above the score of 50, while SDG 9 and 15 lag in innovation, infrastructure, and life on land.

SDG 12 is responsible for consumption and production, whereas target 12.8 aims to measure and ensure that countries are present in their educational systems programs that advocate and educate on sustainable development. Indicator 12.b.1 is the implementation of standard accounting tools to monitor the economic and environmental aspects of tourism sustainability. SDG indicator 12.b.1 measures the level of statistical capacity at the national and global levels to credibly and comparably monitor the sustainability of tourism, especially the economic and environmental dimensions. It has the added advantage of monitoring and encouraging the attainment of target 12.b. one and supporting the monitoring of other targets related to tourism, notably

SDG 8.9. It does so by tracking progress on the implementation of two standard accounting tools relevant to sustainable tourism—the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) and the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)—which enable the derivation of key indicators on tourism's economic and environmental impact; SDG 8.9.1 derives from the tourism satellite account (Our World in Data Team, 2023).

SDG Goal 15 aims to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss. Only one of the 17 SDGs concerns the environment, i.e., SDG 15. Nine targets (15.1–15.9) followed by three means of implementation (15.a–15.c) cover ecosystems (wetlands, drylands, mountains); natural resources (forests, genetic resources); environmentally sensitive issues (land degradation, invasive species, wildlife trafficking); and solutions thereto (reforestation, biodiversity accounting, pursuit by local communities of sustainable livelihood opportunities, (Dale, 2017). Goal 15 can be considered central in the architecture of the 2030 agenda, as natural resources and their sustainable management are relevant to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals and necessary to avoid severe disruptions to ecosystems, societies and economies (Chazdon & Brancalion, 2019).

Over the last century, humanity has reshaped Nature in unprecedented ways and at an increasing pace. Population growth, industrialization, urbanization, infrastructure, and agricultural expansion all impact landscapes, affecting ecosystem resilience by reducing overall habitat size and quality and leading to ecosystem degradation. Once a habitat is too fragmented, biodiversity suffers, leading to ecological dysfunction and the possibility of species extinction (United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, 2019). While, at first glance, primarily focused on environmental matters, Goal 15 is of much broader significance. Together with Goals 6, 13, and 14, it can be considered central in the architecture of the 2030 Agenda, as natural resources and their sustainable management are not only relevant to achieving all Sustainable Development Goals but necessary to avoid severe disruptions to ecosystems, society and economies (Chazdon & Brancalion, 2019). The importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the linkages of environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development and the need for mainstreaming of ecological protection and appropriate action (Klein, M., & Szychalska-Wojtkiewicz, M. 2020). As (Chazdon & Brancalion, 2019) argue, protecting and restoring ecosystems is imperative to mitigate the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, which impact all aspects of life.

Goal 15.4 measures the average share of each important site for mountain biodiversity covered by designated protected areas. Due to the vital role of SDG 15 in accelerating the overall progress toward SDGs, emphasizing and promoting SDG 15 is a prudent, achievable, and necessary action (Reyers & Selig, 2020).

2.2. Ecotourism in Da Nang

Da Nang tourism has implemented development-oriented planning focusing on the Son Tra - Ngu Hanh Son coast, the Da Nang Bay, the Hill area, and the Son Tra Peninsula. Ecotourism zones (Suoi Hoa ecotourism area, Ngam Doi ecotourism area, Nui Than Tai ecotourism area, Hoa Phu Thanh ecotourism area, Tien Sa ecotourism area) create a variety of tourism products associated with nature and the environment, providing many options for tourists, tourism activities and events (Thu & Dinh, 2022). The Vietnamese Government has recognized the potential of ecotourism and has implemented initiatives that have contributed to growth in this sector (Dang, 2023).

Southeast Asian geographies like Da Nang have tremendous potential for developing a viable ecotourism product based on abundant available natural assets (Van Tra et al., 2022). Among respondents, ecotourism was among the top five responses, and the tourism asset should be developed first in Da Nang. Yet, ecotourism development in coastal areas must be carefully planned, managed, and regulated to mitigate possible deleterious natural resource impacts while stewarding positive conservation and social outcomes from this market

(Fujita, & Samejima, 2016). Some key elements in Da Nang and its emphasis on sustainable ecotourism include: Some key elements in Da Nang and its focus on sustainable ecotourism include:

2.2.1. Environmental conservation:

Da Nang places great emphasis on preserving its natural resources. Efforts are made to protect the coastline, marine ecosystems, and biodiversity. Sustainable practices include proper waste management, minimizing plastic usage, and promoting energy-efficient initiatives. This is not just a city planning strategy; it's a testament to Da Nang's dedication to ensuring that tourism development does not come at the cost of the environment. The collaboration between local authorities and organizations serves as a model for responsible, sustainable tourism, setting a precedent for other regions to follow suit in balancing the allure of tourism with the imperative to protect the planet (Lipscombe & Thwaites, 2002).

2.2.2. Cultural heritage preservation:

Visitors to Da Nang are not mere spectators; they are encouraged to immerse themselves in the local culture, creating authentic and meaningful experiences. This engagement is not just a transaction but a journey into the heart of the community. The emphasis on supporting local artisans and businesses is a pivotal aspect of this ethos, transforming tourism from a passive exploration to an active contribution to the socio-economic vitality of the region. By fostering such interactions, sustainable tourism in Da Nang becomes a conduit for cultural exchange and mutual enrichment, and it preserves the city's cultural identity for generations to come (Hong, 2002).

2.2.3. Community empowerment:

In the realm of sustainable tourism in Da Nang, a core emphasis lies in empowering and uplifting local communities, viewing them as passive participants and integral contributors to the tourism narrative. The approach is rooted in a commitment to fostering genuine opportunities for economic growth within these communities. An array of concerted efforts is deployed to engage residents in various facets of tourism activities actively. This inclusive strategy extends to innovative community-based tourism initiatives designed to showcase the region's unique cultural and natural assets and ensure that tourism dividends are distributed equitably among the residents. This approach strives to create a more inclusive and sustainable tourism ecosystem by actively mitigating socio-economic disparities. Furthermore, beyond economic considerations, these initiatives aim to instill a sense of pride and ownership among the local populace, fostering a deeper connection with their cultural heritage and the sustainable development of their shared environment (Ha & Le, 2019).

2.2.4. Collaboration and certification:

Da Nang's journey towards sustainable tourism involves a dynamic collaboration among diverse stakeholders, reflecting a collective commitment to responsible practices. Government agencies, local communities, tourism operators, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) converge in a concerted effort to envision and actively shape sustainable tourism in the region. Their collaborative endeavours extend beyond mere coordination, aiming to establish a robust framework for sustainable tourism development that aligns with stringent international sustainability standards. Notably, this cooperative spirit manifests in endorsing and actively promoting certification programs, such as eco-labels for accommodations and tour operators. These programs serve as tangible markers of commitment to responsible tourism practices, embodying the shared vision for a tourism landscape that harmonizes with environmental preservation and community well-being (Toan et al., 2023).

By embracing sustainable tourism practices, Da Nang seeks to protect its natural and cultural treasures, improve the well-being of local communities, and create a positive experience for visitors. It is essential for both tourists and locals to actively participate in these efforts to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism in the region. (Tseng et al., 2018) also show that effective tourism development could lead to sustainable

development in Vietnam. In addition, (Adongo et al., 2017) also posit that tourism development is the foremost factor for sustainable development. Moreover, a study by (Holladay et al., 2020) also examines how sustainable development depends on tourism development.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study site

Da Nang is the third largest city in Vietnam, situated across 35 kilometres of coastline alongside the East Sea (Figure 1). It is surrounded by the central mountains and is intersected by numerous rivers. The area's population is estimated to be around 1.3 million individuals (European Union-Environmentally and Socially Responsible Tourism, [ESRT], 2015). Da Nang is known for its tropical climate, with an average temperature of 25.6 degrees Celsius (78 degrees Fahrenheit) and an average humidity level of 84.3%. The primary period of tourism activity occurs after the rainy season, from August to December, and generally extends from January to August, commonly known as the dry season. This climatic condition fosters extended periods of high temperatures during the summer months, particularly along their rivers, lagoons, and tropical coastlines. The city of Da Nang is experiencing significant growth, contributing to its rapid ascent in the rankings of the top ten tourist destinations in Asia (Nguyen, 2016).

Figure 1
The star represents the location of Da Nang, Vietnam



Source: Holladay et al. (2020); US State Department.

3.2. Research design

A series of interviews involved 16 individuals representing governmental and private entities (Table 1). Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview script. The selection process was conducted by considering a network of professionals who were regarded as possessing expertise in the tourism industry of Da Nang. The selection of the participants was influenced by the recommendations provided by the tourism faculty at Duy Tan University located in Da Nang, which actively participated in this research endeavour.

Table 1
Interviewees (n = 16) by organizational type

Type	n	% of sample
Travel agency	4	25
Academia	4	25
Ministry of Culture, Sport & Tourism	3	19
Resort	2	13
National Museum	2	13
Destination Marketing Organization (Da Nang City)	1	5

Source: Holladay et al., (2018)

A group of three researchers conducted every interview within the interviewee's designated workspace, typically their office or place of business. One research team member conducted the interviews, while the other two contributed by asking follow-up questions and taking notes. The interviews were conducted in English, with the assistance of a Vietnamese research team member who provided translation services as required. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes. These formal interviews were sometimes supplemented with informal discussions before or after the formal event.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder after obtaining consent from the interview participants. Subsequently, the interviews were digitized and transcribed by hand into Microsoft Word documents. The data were then coded utilizing NVivo 11; NVivo is a specific software program under computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS tools aid qualitative researchers in various tasks such as data collection, organization, analysis, visualization, and reporting (Dhakal, 2022).

3.3. Coding process

The initial step in examining qualitative research involves coding the dataset (Limna, 2023). Coding entails assigning labels and categorizing a dataset's distinct portions or "chunks" (Dhakal, 2022). NVivo enables users to systematically arrange, organise systematically, and structure coded data hierarchically employing nodes (Tang, 2023). For the initial coding, relevant text from interview transcripts was selected and assigned to specific nodes. These nodes were created based on the content of the interviewee's responses, enabling the identification of important themes. Utilizing the coding stripes tool within NVivo (Johnston, 2006) facilitated ease of analysis, consistency, and completeness.

The process of thematic coding involved the coder selecting relevant text from interview transcripts and assigning them to specific nodes. This step helped identify recurring themes and patterns across different interviews. These nodes were created based on the content of the interviewee's responses, enabling the identification of essential themes (Kraiwanit et al., 2023). The themes were derived through an iterative process of reviewing the coded data, identifying patterns, and refining categories. Triangulation was employed to enhance the validity of the findings. This involved cross verifying the themes with the notes taken during the interviews and the informal discussions held with participants.

The nodes, themes, and corresponding text were subsequently used as a framework for more comprehensively examining stakeholders' perspectives (Babbie, 2013). The coding process was carried out exclusively by the

lead researcher. The analysis mentioned above was subsequently reviewed by the remaining two researchers, both actively involved in the interview process, as previously mentioned.

3.4. Research results

Three major themes emerged across all interviewees and are relatable to the SDGs. First, most stakeholders believe ecotourism can create jobs and promote local culture. Second, stakeholders recognized that ecotourism development would require planning for proper implementation and the mitigation of environmental impacts. Third, the use of local rivers and mountains for ecotourism and conservation was addressed. Finally, in some cases, there were also informal conversations with interviewees/stakeholders before or after meetings in taxis and during meals. These informal discussions are addressed in the final subsection of this section of the paper. It is worthy of mention that this section includes several direct quotes from survey participants. Since English is not the first language of the study participants, some of the statements in quotation may not be grammatically sound.

3.4.1. Theme 1: Ecotourism can create jobs and promote local culture

First, river eco-cruises were suggested, wherein tourists would dock at local villages to experience rural life. It was suggested that locals could market handicrafts and local produce to visitors. This, in turn, would stimulate pro-conservation behaviours among villagers to protect their environments as ecotourism commodities as they realized these new revenue streams. As one respondent said, *“and tourist river cruising, to develop river tours to go up to the rural areas for the rural scenery. And then [tourists] can stop to try the cuisine...have lunch somewhere, where some villages have specialities or some family product.”* Also noted was that these employment and revenue streams were essential to stakeholders who discussed the poor-rich income disparity. Another respondent said, *“Da Nang should create a triangle of attractions including Son Tra peninsula, Ba Na hills, and the Marble Mountain around ecotourism, connected to our beaches and the downtown city centre with its nightlife and indoor recreational attractions.”*

3.4.2. Theme 2: Planning for proper implementation and the mitigation of environmental impacts

Interviewees felt that planning, monitoring, and control are all within the purview of the Vietnamese government; this is a single-party socialist government under the leadership of the Vietnam Communist Party. Most stakeholders indicated few, if any, current environmental impacts attributable to ecotourism development in Da Nang. Furthermore, they felt that if such impacts were to occur (or were happening), the government would control and monitor the negative effects of future ecotourism development.

One respondent said, *“Now, there are no impacts, but there are potential threats such as water pollution and impacts to the ocean environment.”* Another respondent said, *“In Vietnam, the laws for building, etc., are stringent, and with urban planning, the government never wants tourism to impact the natural environment, and we also save it for future development.”*

3.4.3. Theme 3: Use of local rivers and mountains for ecotourism and conservation

Interviewees recognized the abundance and value of these local natural resources. With the advent of ecotourism, there was a belief that more local protection would exist. Contradictory to the earlier question about planning and impact, there were concerns about rapid city development and water pollution, especially in the Han River. There was also unease about the Son Tra Mountain development and the Truong Son Mountains. Deforestation and wildlife displacement (e.g., escape behaviour, site avoidance) were also mentioned as one respondent said, *“We are [seeing that the] social environment of the city is developing in a positive direction. However, the ecological environment, the rivers and lakes are severely polluted.”* Another respondent said, *“We need to control the [hotel construction] because the environment has many mountains and the sea and beach, with*

a lot of culture, like with fishing, and if tourists want to see [these attractions] if you keep building and building then there's nothing special."

3.4.4. Informal conversations with interviewees/stakeholders

Locals have been displaced to make room for resorts, sparking conflicts with local authorities and investors. Locals were unhappy due to rising prices and their restricted access to the coastline, rivers, and mountains. Furthermore, the deforestation of pine trees on the shoreline to make room for tourism infrastructure exacerbated problems like erosion and natural storm protection. It was also noted that tourists tended to stay within the resorts and did not engage much with the local community. Each issue contradicts ecotourism principles, such as stewardship of natural resources and promoting the local community/culture.

Another concern was the over-construction of 5-star hotels and resorts. To address this concern, it was suggested that the city prioritize three and 4-star hotels to help build local tourist connections to promote environmental stewardship community connections and provide services such as guided tours and handicraft sales. However, lacking a city master plan and budget has hampered progress toward a sustainable approach to ecotourism development in the area, which remains a significant challenge.

4. Discussion

This paper examined the application of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the context of ecotourism development in the riverine and montane areas of Da Nang. The objective and rationale behind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass a comprehensive approach to economic development, focusing on economic growth and eradicating extreme poverty, promoting social equity and justice, and pursuing environmental sustainability. Riverine and montane ecotourism development within the SDG framework may create jobs, promote local culture and products (SDG 8.9), and stimulate tools to monitor impacts (SDG 12.8/12. b). Furthermore, ecotourism may promote conservation and safeguard the sustainable use of freshwater (SDG 15.1) and mountain ecosystems (SDG 15.4).

Across all interviewees, three overarching themes surfaced that bear relevance to the SDGs. The prevailing viewpoint among interviewees was that ecotourism could generate employment opportunities and foster the preservation and appreciation of local culture. Furthermore, stakeholders noted that the successful development of ecotourism necessitated careful planning to ensure effective implementation and the reduction of environmental impacts. Occasionally, informal discussions were held with interviewees and stakeholders before or after meetings and during transportation and mealtimes. The salient points from these discussions are also emphasized in this section of the paper.

First, most stakeholders believe ecotourism can create jobs and promote local culture. For example, river eco-cruises were suggested, wherein tourists would dock at local villages to experience rural life. This would stimulate pro-conservation behaviour among villagers to protect their environments as ecotourism commodities. Locals could market handicrafts and local produce to visitors. These employment and revenue streams were essential to stakeholders who discussed the poor-rich income disparity.

Second, stakeholders recognized that ecotourism development would require planning for proper implementation and the mitigation of environmental impacts. They felt that planning, monitoring, and control were all within the purview of the Vietnamese Government; this is a single-party socialist government under the leadership of the Vietnam Communist Party. Most stakeholders indicated that few current environmental impacts are attributable to Da Nang's tourism development. Stakeholders felt the Government would control and monitor the negative effects of future ecotourism development.

Third, the interviewees addressed using local rivers and mountains for ecotourism and conservation. Stakeholders recognized the abundance and value of these local natural resources. Respondents noted that water pollution, especially in the Han River and the East Sea, was an issue that needed to be considered. Scholars have previously mentioned the pollution of the Han River (Dowling, 1998). Furthermore, research has indicated that resort facilities' operations are an essential contributor to water pollution and originate from on-site water (Divya & Helen, 2015). One visitor study in Da Nang indicated that sewage waste was input near the Da Nang beach(es), creating increased health risks to those entering the ocean (ESRT, 2015). Proactive management interventions are needed to alleviate reactive efforts to solve pollution issues, such as those that follow a human-induced disaster co-located with resorts (Price-Howard & Holladay, 2014).

Several other issues emerged during informal conversations with respondents and Da Nang residents who knew about the impact of local tourism. First, along the beach highway, all the resorts were built on the beach side of the road, limiting or inhibiting access to local beaches. This causes high levels of crowding in the public sections of the Cua Dai, An Bang, My Khe, and Phạm Van Dong beaches (ESRT, 2015).

Another issue was the vast swaths of coastal pine trees removed along the beaches to construct the beach resorts. These trees acted as natural barriers to flooding and typhoons and, as such, provided a sense of security for coastal residents (ESRT, 2015). Climate change has increased the vulnerability of coastal resort tourism facilities to intense storms (Honey & Krantz, 2007).

5. Conclusion

The primary purpose of this paper was to focus on stakeholder perceptions as they apply to SDGs that pertain to riverine and montane ecotourism, specifically concerning Da Nang, Vietnam. The methodology involved loosely structured personal interviews with relevant stakeholders in interest. The sample size was 16 and constituted public and private sector participants. An executive summary of the research results is provided in the succeeding paragraph.

Study participants acknowledged that ecotourism has numerous positive benefits for the local community and, consequently, the economy. Ecotourism can create jobs as well as contribute to the region's GDP. However, study participants also acknowledged that ecotourism has drawbacks, such as water pollution and deforestation, to make way for tourist facilities such as luxury resorts. Study participants stated that active steps were needed to address the general carbon footprint of tourism and ecotourism concerning this research project's study site.

Research results are consistent with the study's postulated hypothesis. Stakeholders had both positive and negative views on ecotourism. The positive opinions centred on tourism's contribution to the local economy, while the negative opinions centred on the environmental consequences of tourism. These views were explicitly expressed in the context of this study's objective, which was to examine attitudes toward riverine and montane ecotourism in Da Nang, Vietnam.

One of the study's fundamental limitations is that it is mainly theoretical and not necessarily based on actual practice. Ecotourism at the study site is not yet underway in any meaningful way. Furthermore, this study was primarily qualitative and did not include sophisticated quantitative analysis.

The study's fundamental limitations also open doors for potential extensions to the current research. It is entirely possible that stakeholder perceptions can change, for better or worse, once ecotourism is fully developed. Hence, this study could be replicated at another site like Da Nang, where ecotourism is fully developed. Stakeholder perceptions at that study site can then be compared to the results of this study to analyse similarities and differences in stakeholder perceptions. Furthermore, researchers could find a way to quantify the

current research results using sophisticated statistical tools since quantitative analysis may provide insights that may not necessarily be visible to the “naked eye.”

The researchers fully acknowledge that this study is a preliminary investigation and not the “end game” when evaluating stakeholder perceptions in the developing world of ecotourism. More research is needed before any conclusive or overarching statements can be made. The results of this study will inform the operationalization of a comprehensive, sustainable ecotourism development plan for Da Nang, Vietnam, and possibly other locales with similar objectives regarding ecotourism, which aligns with the post-2015 agenda for the SDGs.

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