

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY – BASED TOURISM IN CON CUONG DISTRICT, NGHE AN PROVINCE

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Abstract. Community-based tourism (CBT) is now considered as a beneficial type for local sustainable economic development. CBT not only helps local residents protect Eco-environment resources but also offer chances to preserve and promote unique cultural features of the locality. Some provinces of Vietnam have developed successfully CBT in mountainous areas with many ethnic minorities such as Lao Cai, Ha Giang etc. This type of tourism has brought practical effects which not only promote the strengths of indigenous culture of ethnic groups, but also contribute to poverty reduction and improve the lives of many local people. The study focuses on analyzing the situation, thereby proposing some feasible solutions to develop community based tourism in Con Cuong district, Nghe An province.

Keywords: Tourism, community-based tourism, Con Cuong district, Nghe An province.

1. Introduction

CBT is defined in Law on Tourism 2017 (taken effect from January 01, 2018), as “a form of tourism that is developed on the basis of community’s cultural values managed, used and benefited by a local community”.

In the world, there have been many studies on CBT. In 2003, in the study *Tourism in Destination Communities* (CABI), Shalini Singh, Dallen J. Timothy & Ross K. Dowling mentioned the impacts of tourism activities on three aspects of destinations including: natural, cultural, social, and economic environments as well as the relationships between tourism and destination communities. In addition, the authors also emphasized the impacts of tourism on destination communities, thereby pointed out the opportunities and challenges for destination communities in tourism development [2].

In 2006, in the research on *Community Development through Tourism* (Landlinks), Sue Beeton provided a basic system of tourism theory and community-related issues in tourism development through effective combination between community planning, business planning and tourism planning [3].

Etsuko Okazaki (2008), Kobe University published the research project: *A Community*

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-based Tourism Model: Its conception and Use in which proposed a model of community-based tourism based on the synthesis of a basic system of community theory, community participation, and community-based tourism. Especially, the author referred to the theory of social capital in the research in order to apply theoretical models to real-world situations in Palawan, Philippines [4].

In spite of also researching on CBT, Liedewij van Breugel (2013) focused on researching the participation of community members in tourism projects, analyzing the relationship between participation and satisfaction of communities through results of tourism by case-studies with communities, namely Mae La Na and Koh Yao Noi in Thailand (*Community-based 6 Tourism: Local Participation and Perceived Impacts, a Comparative Study between two Communities in Thailand*) [5].

In general, such researches on CBT and community-based tourism development mainly directed at the disadvantaged community groups of destinations with a great attraction from values of tourism resources. These researches have pointed out the advantages as well as difficulties in developing CBT through the research and assessment of tourism resources of destinations in association with local community factors; have studied the impacts of awareness and attitudes of communities on tourism development or have studied the involvement of local communities in tourism activities and impacts of CBT on all aspects of local life.

Con Cuong is a mountainous district located in the western part of Nghe An province. This is a highland district with favorable geographical location and conditions for developing agriculture, forestry and tourism. The district has been included by UNESCO in the list of sites in the Western biosphere reserve in Nghe An and Con Cuong provinces as the core of the reserve, with the center being Pu Mat National Park.

Although this is a poor district of the country with a huge number of ethnic minorities, Con Cuong has made a new breakthrough in the strategy of socio-economic development and district economic restructuring thanks to the efforts of the entire district as well as attention of the central and local authorities. Economic sectors that need to be invested are agriculture, forestry, trade and tourism. In particular, CBT in association with the advantages of resources, people and customs of ethnic minorities has really become an important highlight in the district's economic picture.

Despite the district has gained positive results in the development of community-based tourism, the income of people doing community based tourism depends on tour operators and guiders. This results from small-scaled activities in a spontaneous and unprofessional manner, badly-organized investment and no specific support mechanism from its competent authorities.

2. Content

2.1 Data and research methods

2.1.1. Data

The data is calculated and analyzed from sources such as: Statistical Yearbook of Nghe An Statistical Office, reports of the People's Committee of Nghe An province, Department of Tourism of Nghe An province, People's Committee of Con Cuong district. Primary data are collected and then processed, calculated and summarized into

tables for comparison, comment and analysis. All data in the period of 2010-2018 are collected and survey results are conducted in 2019.

2.1.2. Research Methods

The paper combined following methods such as: data collection, analysis, synthesis and comparison. In particular, the author uses two main methods:

- Investigation: Using the questionnaire to directly survey 40 households in 04 villages, such as: Khe Ran (Bong Khe commune), Nua and Pha villages (Yen Khe commune), Xieng village (Mon Son commune) of Con Cuong district regarding the situation of community based tourism, assets and income of households which engage in CBT, advantages and difficulties in CBT development, local residents' proposal, etc.

- Managerial consultation: This method is performed by interviewing with the President of the People's Committee of Con Cuong district, the Head of the Industry and Trade Department, the Head of the Culture Department, the Head of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Head of the Agriculture and Head of 04 villages in Con Cuong district. The total number of interviewed managers is 10. The interview content is mainly related to: Strategies and policies for CBT development, challenges for CBT development and current and future CBT development solutions.

2.2 Research results

2.2.1. The main advantages of Con Cuong district in terms of CBT development

Con Cuong district is located in the southwest of Nghe An province, 130 km far from Vinh city. It borders with Quy Chau district to the north, with the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the South, with Tuong Duong district to the southwest, with two districts of Anh Son and Quy Hop to the east. In 2017, the district has an area of 1,738.08 km², a population of 71,126 people, accounting for 10,5% of the area and nearly 2,3% of the population of Nghe An province.

2.2.1.1. Natural conditions and natural resources

Con Cuong is located in the North Central climate sub-region featured by monsoon tropical with two seasons: hot season (heavy rain) from April to October and cold season (little rain) from November to March of the following year, and two transition seasons. The summer is strongly influenced by the southwestern monsoon winds that are very dry and hot, the winter is influenced by the cold northeast monsoon with drizzle. Con Cuong is also directly affected by the mountains of southwestern Nghe An, so it has its own characteristics of weather elements. Cold and dry weather often occurs early and lasts long.

Con Cuong has a dense river system with a density of about 4-6 km/km². Due to the heavy rainfall, its rivers and streams have plentiful water resources and steep terrain with high potential. Ca river is the largest river flowing through the district (with the length of 30 km through the territory of the district). The river has many waterfalls, rapids, streams and streams located among the mountains. Tributary system in both sides of Ca river including Khe Choang, Khe Thoi, Khe Vang, Khe Chai, Huoi Co, Huoi Lac, Khe Cong, Khe Xoang, Khe Don, Khe Co, Khe Met, Khe Hien, Khe Hoi, etc. forms the fish-bone network of rivers and streams. Especially, Giang River originating from the Truong Son mountain range as a vertical line, irrigating the fields in Mon Son

provides water and embellishes the natural picture for Con Cuong with more lines and vividness.

As a mountainous district, Con Cuong has a large potential of forests; its forestry land area in 2017 was 161,2 thousand hectares, accounting for 88,65% of the total natural land area. With the forest cover of 80%, its forests have nearly 12 million m³ of timber, over 140 million corks, bamboos and many precious woods such as Po Mu, Sa Mu, Tram, Lat Hoa, and Ken Ken. Animals include 64 species of mammals, 137 species of birds, 25 species of amphibians, and 45 species of fish. In particular, there are many species included in Vietnam's Red Book such as: Sao La, Langur, White-cheeked Gibbon, Tiger, Gaur. Con Cuong is rich in forest types, flora and fauna along with natural beauty spots such as: Khe Kem waterfall, Bo Bo waterfall and 67 thousand hectares of forest belonging to Pu Mat national park, more than 6 thousand hectares of Pu Huong nature reserve.

All elements of natural conditions and natural resources give Con Cuong a beautiful natural landscape like a majestic and lyrical painting. With mostly forest cover, Con Cuong is like a green carpet. The low mountain ranges running from the northwest to the southeast create a distinctive feature in the landscape division; among a number of high peaks, the highest peak is Pu Mat (1,841 m), with species of Asian timber tropical trees on the mountain, and year-round foggy condition, lower peaks including Pu Bon, Pu Co Ca, Pu Quac, Pu Moc Coc, Pu Thanh, Pu Sa Giap, Pu Na, Pu Gai make the powerful geographical division, and create the mystery for its mountain landscape. Limestone blocks with specific forest types have disrupted the regularity of landscape distribution in the Northwest - Southeast direction. The masses of mountains, caves, limestone valleys such as Pha Tang, Pha Cau, Pha Kham, Pha Phay ... are located in the center of the territory, distributed in parallel with Highway 7 and the Ca river have highlighted in the landscape picture of Con Cuong district. This is a unique feature of Con Cuong, unlike any mountainous district of Nghe An province.

2.2.1.2. Humanities resources

In 2017, the district's population was 71,126 people, accounting for 2,3% of Nghe An province's population, population density of 46 people/km². There are 09 ethnic groups, including Thai (69,6%), Kinh (25,1%), Tho (4,8%), the remaining ethnic groups account for only 0,5% including Kho Mu, Nung, Hoa, Tay, Mong, Dan Lai.

With nearly two thirds of the total population and unique cultural features, the Thai community plays an extremely important role in preserving and promoting typical cultural values in the biosphere reserve of Nghe An West area in general and Con Cuong district in particular. Thai people have many unique cultural traits and many preserved indigenous knowledge. Ethnic musical instruments such as percussion, gong, drums, flute, trumpet, etc; Brocade fabrics and brocade fabric products; culinary culture... are crystallized cultures over generations. The inclusion of unique cultural identities in tourism development will contribute to improving the living standards of the local people through conservation and service activities.

More particularly, Dan Lai is a ethnic group with about 3,000 people living in Con Cuong district, mainly in the two villages of Co Giat and Bung. These villages in the core zone of Pu Mat National Park are isolated from other villages. The Dan Lai ethnic

group has a different sleep sitting-up pattern compared to other ethnic minorities. This practice is closely linked to the calamity suffered by their ancestors. Sleep sitting-up was to be wary of wild beasts and the pursuing army officers (they might stand up to run into the forest as soon as the army chased them). They often sit with their clasped hands to hold their forehead, or put the indigo tree under the neck to sleep from fatigue, or hold the end of the stick tightly to the forehead. Even in other activities such as childbirth, “sitting” is also involved. Today, those strange customs have been abandoned, the Dan Lai has also received the light of the external civilized world, but in them still have the pristine, “primitive” beauty of their people. On December 19, 2006, the Prime Minister of Vietnam approved a project on conservation and sustainable development of Dan Lai ethnic minority currently living in the core area of Pu Mat National Park, Con Cuong district, Nghe An , with a total budget of over 93 billion dong.

In terms of history and culture, according to the inventory results conducted by the Management Board of Monuments and Landmarks in Nghe An province in late October 2015, Con Cuong currently has a total of 41 relics, landscapes and archaeological sites. These relics and landscapes have distributed throughout the communes in the district, especially in the communes of Yen Khe, Chi Khe, Bong Khe, Don Phuc, Luc Da and Mon Son. Among these, there are many famous relics, landmarks and archaeological sites such as Tham Hoi, Nang Man and Ma Nhai These relics combine with famous places such as Pu Mat National Park, Giong River, and Moc stream and with unique cultural identities of the Thai people and the Dan Lai people residing on the localities. These are potentials for Con Cuong to develop community based eco-tourism.



The map of study area

2.2.2. Current situation of community tourism development in Con Cuong district

2.2.2.1. Tourist market

Thanks to support from project of Livelihood Diversification through Heritage Tourism in Remote Agricultural and Fishery Villages by Jica (Japan), tourism activities in general and CBT in particular in Con Cuong district have gained a clear and prosperous step and attracted many households' involvement. The number of visitors to Con Cuong tends to increase, particularly in 2010, the whole district received only 11,543 visitors by 2018, increasing to 35,383 tourist arrivals and its average annual growth rate of tourist arrivals of 15%/year.

Table 1. Results of tourism activities in Con Cuong in the period 2010 - 2018

No.	Criteria	Unit	2010	2015	2018
1	Total tourist arrivals	Arrival	11,543	16,292	35,383
1.1	International tourist	Arrival	241	548	1,083
	- Over-night	Arrival	173	279	986
	- Day-time	Arrival	68	269	97
1.2	Domestic visitor	Arrival	11,302	15,744	34,300
	- Over-night	Arrival	6,836	10,715	17,680
	- Day-time	Arrival	4,466	5,029	16,620
2	Number of room	Room	98	102	253

Source: Processed from [3], [4].

The majority of tourists to Con Cuong are mainly domestic tourists, accounting for 96.9% of total tourists. However, the number of international tourists has increased rapidly; in 2018 there were 1,083 international tourist arrivals, an increase of 4.3 times compared to that in 2010, the average annual growth rate is 20% / year.

In recent years, the large number of tourists mainly have visited Pu Mat National Park, and then combined with visiting tourist sites in the buffer zone of the national park. Therefore, in addition to eco-tourism development, CBT also has had favorable conditions for rapid development.

Table 2. Results of CBT in Con Cuong in the period 2010 - 2018

No.	Criteria	Unit	2010	2015	2018
1	Total tourist arrivals	Arrival	1,092	6,430	10,072
1.1	International tourist	Arrival	164	247	1,077
	- Over-night	Arrival	42	104	986
	- Day-time	Arrival	122	143	91
1.2	Domestic visitor	Arrival	928	6,183	8,995
	- Over-night	Arrival	23	542	4,650
	- Day-time	Arrival	905	5,641	4,345

2	Number of stay facilities	Facility	1	1	4
2.1	Number of homestay supported by the project	Facility	1	1	1
2.2	Number of local homestay	Facility	0	0	3

Source: Processed from [3], [4].

Con Cuong has initially attracted investment projects of tourism products and services development funded by Muong Thanh Group, VSC Tourism Company. In particular, the CBT model has continued to expand and develop. As of 2018, only Nua village has 23 households and Pha village has 8 households engaging in CBT. The number of tourists enjoying the community tourism experience is increasing; that contributes to improving jobs and income for the local people.

Particularly, CBT activities in Con Cuong district has had a significant development in terms of the total number of tourists, especially international visitors, which has increased rapidly compared to 2015 (247 people), nearly 4.4 times.

2.2.2.2. Revenue from Tourism

Table 3. Revenue from CBT in Con Cuong district for the period of 2010-2018

No.	Criteria	Unit	2010	2015	2018
1	Revenue	Million dong	354	645	1,943
1.1	Stay	Million dong	45	84	220
1.2	Beverage	Million dong	205	376	1,007
1.3	Artistic performance	Million dong	56	92	521
1.4	Shopping	Million dong	48	93	195
2	Structure in revenue from tourism of Con Cuong district	%	2.5	3.4	6.9

Source: Processed from [3], [4].

The constantly increasing revenue from CBT contributes to the overall economic growth of the locality as well as encourages organizations and local people to step up activities and diversify types of services in order to meet the increasing demands of travelers. The achievements of local tourism have contributed greatly to the implementation of the Resolution by the provincial Party Committee and the Con Cuong district Party Committee on developing Con Cuong district into an eco-urban area by 2020.

2.2.2.3. The impact of CBT activities on local residents

Through questionnaire of 40 households and 04 heads of villages Khe Ran (Bong Khe commune), Nua and Pha villages (Yen Khe commune), Xieng village (Mon Son commune) and 6 managers from the functional departments of Con Cuong district on the impact of CBT, 100% of the respondents said that CBT development in Con Cuong district has both positive and negative impacts.

With regard to benefits, CBT has provided employment opportunities for local communities; facilitated local economic development through the sale of tourism

products and services (brocade products, bamboo and rattan products, agricultural products, medicinal herbs, etc); contributed budget to tourism conservation and development; supplied goods to local markets and services; and improved the image of localities in the country and around the world.

In terms of drawbacks, CBT has also come with many risks such as increasing living costs and land prices; disrupting the natural environment; increasing pollution, waste, and noise; traffic congestion on festive seasons; high rate of crime; loss of community identity and degraded cultural values.

2.2.3. General assessment

It is said that development of CBT model is the direction of many localities in the Western region of Nghe An. Although this model is quite strange to many places, it is a potential tourism one in poverty reduction and offering many benefits to the local people in Con Cuong district. However, the current CBT development in Con Cuong district is still inadequate. Although the number of visitors has increased, the length of stay is quite short. Visitors mainly enjoy the cultural experience of cuisine, living habits, watching and exchanging cultural and artistic activities with the local people but have not used many other services in the community. Therefore, the spending of tourists is still small; Moreover, the infrastructure, material and technical facilities as well as tourism promotion are outdated, inconsistent and disconnected. At CBT places such as Nua, Xieng and Khe Ran village, there is almost no tour guide; at present, VSC Tourism Company in Con Cuong is initially implementing this item. This is a huge limitation in travel services.

2.2.4. Some solutions to promote the development of CBT in Con Cuong district

2.2.4.1. Forming on-spot human resources for tourism

The main objective of developing CBT model in Con Cuong district is to create more jobs and to transform the economic structure for the local people, to help people develop tourism services in order to reduce poverty, Therefore, it is necessary to train and employ local people. It should encourage local residents to promote their friendliness, hospitality, and organize short-term training courses on tourism, communication and foreign language skills for them.

2.2.4.2. Sharing economic benefits with the community through tourism revenue and job creation for local residents

Direct economic benefit sharing is to deduct a part of tourism revenue to invest in the local community. It should take a priority for investment in welfare works for the community which has been mostly affected by tourism activities: Communes and villages with roads toward tourist destinations and with quality of roads, production and animal husbandry activities of the people affected directly by tourism activities. Such works or investment items should be integrated with the purpose of environmental protection such as hoardings, posters, sign boards, etc.

2.2.4.3. Improving sanitary and environmental conditions, limiting human impacts on the local natural and ecological environment

Conservation of resources is one of the principles of community tourism development, which is also a principle to ensure the sustainable development of tourism

activities in general and community based tourism activities in particular. In fact, most of the households here throw waste in the area close to their homes, not having a waste collection system that directly affects the environment. Therefore, the solution for garbage collection and disposal proceeds as soon as possible to avoid negative impacts on the environment.

2.2.4.4. Tourism promotion

CBT in Con Cuong district is a new model, so it is really necessary to apply different forms of promotion and advertisement to introduce the destination.

- Building tours and routes, including information on: attractive tourist routes; accommodation and beverage facilities including addresses and photos for travelers to choose and contact.

- Promotion via the mass media: make promotional films to broadcast on TV stations, produce articles, photos, report on newspapers, social networking sites...

2.2.4.5. Connecting with and supporting tour operators to take guests to the West Nghe An region

Providing directly full information to tourism companies by means of promotion such as brochures, newspapers, radio, television and publications. Among these, special attention is paid to Internet media, social network like facebook, picasa, etc. On the other hand, in order to solve the shortage of information, CBT sites must organize Famtrip tours and invite tour operators to participate to introduce, promote and receive their feedbacks on tourism products and services in the area.

2.2.4.6. Building and creating specific CBT products of each tourist destination

Tourism destinations should prioritize the construction of a number of typical tourist products such as cycling in the village, new tourism products such as kayaking, Zipline through the river of VSC travel company, or other products such as: Experience for fishing, weaving, brocade weaving ... Building a booth to introduce local specialty products, etc.; building a model of the village as a active museum for the local community.

3. Conclusions

It is affirmed that Con Cuong is a western district of Nghe An province with all favorable conditions for CBT development. Although in recent years, the number of tourists here has increased; its tourism activities are spontaneous and underdeveloped in comparison with its inherent potential. Firstly, its tourism promotion is still limited. Secondly, facilities and accommodation are temporary and insufficient; this is unable to meet the conditions for meals, accommodation, sleeps, breaks for long-term stay guests. Moreover, there is no close coordination among branches and industries in order to create uniformity in tourism development. CBT development in Con Cuong in some periods is still spontaneous. Therefore, the orientation of tourism development in general and CBT in particular in Con Cuong district is necessary to preserve and promote its outstanding natural and cultural values.

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