

Pilot project "community-based participatory tourism development" in Tam Thanh commune, Central Vietnam

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Abstract: This article introduces a pioneering public art project in some fishing villages of Central Vietnam. It was implemented in 2016 / 2017 with funds from various donors and with the support of local consultants, artists and students mainly from the fields of architecture and tourism development. Thereby, art was used as an instrument for community-based tourism development, based on a participatory approach. As a result, the Tam Thanh commune has developed into a tourism destination that contributes to local income generation.

Keywords: public art, community-based participatory tourism, Tam Ky city, Vietnam, mural village

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Tam Thanh is a fishing commune located in Tam Ky city, in Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam. It is bordered with the East Sea on one side and Truong Giang river on the other, and consists of seven villages with more than 1,600 households and over 6,000 inhabitants. The main economic activities include small-scale fishing and aquaculture, and recently tourist services.

The pilot project is based on the outcome of the City Development Strategy, which was funded by Cities Alliance. However, the pilot project was initiated and led by a group of local experts and university lecturers, with the participation of students from eight universities, well-known artists, supporters from Community Development Fund Network and volunteers, and funded by donations from private Vietnamese companies and individuals.

The distinguishing feature of the project is that project activities were not designed beforehand by the experts and lecturers, but were developed and implemented through a participatory process of, by and together with the local community, and city authority, in accordance with available resources of the community and city budget, as well as funding from private donors.

The project aims community-based tourist development through "Art for a better community" following the mural painting by the Korea Foundation. Together with Tam Thanh community and Tam Ky city government, the project implemented more sustainable solutions for a better living environment and other income-generating activities. Culture, an "alternative" approach to sustainable development as defined by Cities Alliance (2010), was identified as the means for urban development in Vietnam.

The project was formulated and implemented from September 2016 to June 2017. The main project outputs include the first-ever and biggest collection (110 pieces) of painted round/basket boats, recorded by Vietnam Guinness, a community-managed tourism cooperative with different services (homestay, round boat tour, fish-sauce making and cooking class, bike renting...) (see figures 1-5).

As a result, Tam Thanh village has become a tourist destination in Tam Ky alongside the more famous destinations Hue, Da Nang and Hoi An in Central Vietnam. Furthermore, the project provided valuable opportunities for students, mainly in architecture and tourist development, and for local public officers, to experience participatory approaches in a development project, which is still not a governance practice in Vietnam.



Figure 1 - 5: Some of the 110 painted round / basket boats

Picture source: Project archive. Photo credit: Pham Hoci Thanh.



Figure 6 (above): Street fish saleswoman on bike / Figure 7: Looking to a new horizon

Figure 8: Carefree childhood / Figure 9: Welcome to Tam Thanh



Figure 10: The gift of the sea



Figure 11: Home coming at dawn / Figure 12: After a fishing night



Figure 13: Life is good / Figure 14: A family head



Figure 15: A Korean friend / Figure 16: School of fish

Corresponding Author: Le Dieu Anh [a.ledieu@gmail.com] has been the leader of Tam Thanh pilot project. She has extended experience working as urban and community development expert in cities of Vietnam in internationally funded development projects. She worked as the project director of a Belgian funded project on canal sanitation and urban upgrading, the very first ODA project in Vietnam implemented with community participatory approach. Further, she has been the coordinator of ACHR in supporting the activities of Vietnam Community Development Fund Network of over 30 cities, which promotes the community driven approach in urban upgrading and housing development.