# Barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam

**By**

**Thi Van Nguyen**

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Tourism Department, School of Humanities and Creative Arts
Flinders University
South Australia

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to identify barriers to the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. To achieve this aim, the study was guided by five objectives: to examine the understanding of local tourism officers about ecotourism; to examine their perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay; to investigate the current situation of ecotourism development in this area; to examine local government's roles and responsibilities in involving in ecotourism development; and to identify the obstacles to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in this area.

Qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews demonstrate that local tourism officers have an insufficient understanding of ecotourism as they mainly associate ecotourism with nature-based tourism, with little impact by humans on the natural environment. However, they are not particularly aware of other core components of ecotourism such as it supports environmental education, sustainable management and benefits the local community. Although most of local tourism officers acknowledge the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, they only appreciate the conservation aspect of ecotourism, but are not fully aware of other benefits of ecotourism.

The findings of this study show that the region has great potential to develop ecotourism, but this type of tourism is just in its infancy. The existing ecotourism services and activities in this area are small-scale, poorly executed and unattractive; and tourism entrepreneurs and the local communities' have only a minor involvement in ecotourism.

The findings of this study indicate that although local authorities have recognized the necessity to focus on ecotourism development for sustainable tourism in the Ha Long Bay area, and have just designated several potential areas for ecotourism development in the region, they have not yet introduced any guidance or appropriate strategies and policies to implement it.

With regard to the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, this study points out six main issues, including (1) the limited understanding about ecotourism, lack of professional skills and competence among local tourism officers, (2) the limited awareness of ecotourism among local community and tourism operators, (3) the lack of commitment to ecotourism implementation by local authorities, (4) the lack of communication, cooperation and coordination between local authorities and other stakeholder groups, (5) the lack of stakeholder involvement in ecotourism, and (6) the lack of resources for ecotourism development.

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my original work and that I have used no other sources except as noted by citations. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and in a list of references.

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Thi Van, Nguyen

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BCG: | Boston Consulting Group |
| DCST: | Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism |
| FFI: | Fauna & Flora International |
| GDP: | Gross domestic product |
| HLMD: | Ha Long Bay Management Department |
| IUCN: | International Union for Conservation Nature |
| JICA: | Japan International Cooperation Agency |
| MCST: | Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism |
| MDC: | Marine Conservation and Community Development |
| NGOs: | Non-Governmental Organizations |
| QD-UBND: | Decision-People' Committee |
| QNDT: | Quang Ninh Department of Tourism |
| TIPC: | Tourism Information and Promotion Center |
| UNESCO: | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| USAID: | The United States Agency for International Development |
| VNAT: | Vietnam National Administration of Tourism |
| WWF: | World Wide Fund and Nature |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research background

The rapid growth of tourism, especially mass tourism has resulted in increased and adverse impacts on the environment (Buckley & Font, 2001; Fennell & Dowling, 2003; Hill & Gale, 2009). Ecotourism is recognized as a positive approach in promoting conservation and achieving sustainable development (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). Generally, ecotourism is perceived as nature-based, ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial and generates tourist satisfaction (Fennell & Dowling 2003; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). Along with these characteristics, ecotourism has become one of the fastest emerging sectors of the tourism industry (Hill & Gale, 2009; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001); and is suggested to be on the rise due to the increased ecological awareness of consumers and the need for sustainable tourism development (Page, 2002).

Addressing ecotourism development within a destination, requires the involvement of a number of stakeholders, including all levels of governments, the private sector, ecotourists, local communities and non-governmental organizations (Beeton, 1998; Black, 2007; Buckley, 2003; Fennell & Dowling 2003). Among them, the local government is identified as a major player who can exert a significant influence on sustainable development and ecotourism in a

destination (Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Briedenhann, 2007, Connell, Page, & Bentley, 2009; Dinica, 2009; Dredge, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013). However, local government often faces numerous challenges when involved in ecotourism development at a destination (Fennell, 2003). Thus, the identification of these obstacles would help destination planners and decision-makers discover appropriate measures to overcome difficulties and achieve successful ecotourism development.

Ha Long Bay Natural World Heritage is a destination where local authorities are striving to address the development of ecotourism in an attempt to enhance the conservation of the natural environment and sustainable tourism activity in this area. Although the region is endowed with valuable natural resources, which provide a great potential for ecotourism development, this type of tourism is yet to be well exploited. Most of the ecotourism products in this area are currently small-scale, detached, irregular and unattractive; hence, ecotourism has not yet made a significant contribution to the destination (BCG, 2013). Local government is a key stakeholder in ecotourism development and management at a destination (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). However, little attention from tourism literature is devoted to the local government's contribution in the context of ecotourism development, while other stakeholders, such as local communities have received prominence as detailed in previous studies (Campbell, 1999; Er et al., 2012; Fletcher, 2009; Jalani, 2012; Lai & Nepal, 2006; Mendoza - Ramos &

Prideaux, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999; Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012; Su et al., 2014). Furthermore, little focus from previous studies was purposively directed at the investigation of barriers to local government's involvement in addressing ecotourism development; and there are no specific guidelines from the existing tourism studies that indicate how to identify the impediments to local government's involvement in ecotourism development. With the purpose of identifying the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam, this research would contribute to fill the knowledge gap in the local government perspective with regard to ecotourism development and help the local authorities find a way to foster ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area.

## 1.2 Research aim and objectives

The main purpose of this study is to identify the factors which hinder local government's involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. In doing this, the study is guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the understanding of local tourism officers with regard to the concept of ecotourism.

- To examine their perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in the Ha Long Bay area.

- To investigate the current situation of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area.

- To examine local government's roles and responsibilities in their involvement in ecotourism development.

- To identify the obstacles that local government encounters when being involved in ecotourism development in this area.

### 1.3 Dissertation structure

The dissertation is organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter one presents the research background, which captures local government's involvement in ecotourism development. It also provides the rationale for researching this area and presents the research aim and objectives. The research structure is outlined at the end of this chapter.

Chapter two presents a review of the existing literature that relates to this study. The chapter starts with the examination of the definition and principles of

ecotourism. It also indicates the main theories relevant to local governance in tourism, especially in the context of sustainable tourism development, including stakeholder theory, collaboration approach and the tourist area life cycle model. Local government's roles and responsibilities in tourism are also demonstrated. Finally, the obstacles to local government's involvement in ecotourism development are discussed.

Chapter three presents the research methodology adopted for this study; these include the qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews, a single case study, purposive sampling, research data collection and thematic data analysis. The chapter also provides an overview of the research context with a detailed description of the location of the focus area, local tourism administrative structure and the notion of ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area.

Chapter four discusses the analysis and findings of this study. It begins with an examination of local tourism officers' understanding of ecotourism and their perceived importance of ecotourism in sustainable tourism development. It also investigates local government's roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. The current situation of ecotourism development in the focus area is also analyzed. Lastly, the obstacles to local government's involvement in this area's ecotourism development are identified in this chapter.

Chapter five presents the conclusion to this research with a summary of the research findings to address the research aim and objectives. It includes the research's theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the chapter indicates the limitation of the study and offers recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to this study. In order to explore those factors that hinder the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development, the chapter begins with the review of definitions, principles of ecotourism and the relationship of ecotourism with sustainable tourism. Next, it highlights the theories that are essential to local governance with respect to sustainable tourism development; including stakeholder theory, collaboration approach, and the tourist area life cycle model. In this chapter, local government's roles and responsibilities in sustainable tourism development and ecotourism are also discussed. At the end of the chapter, the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development identified by previous studies are examined.

## 2.2 The understanding of ecotourism

Ecotourism has been recognized as one of the most impressive growing sectors of the tourism industry (Dowling & Fennell, 2003; Hill & Gale, 2009; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). However, it is difficult to achieve a consensus on how to interpret ecotourism (Cater & Lowman, 1994; Fennell, 1999, 2008; Page, 2002;

Weaver, 200). Therefore, it is important to review the literature related to the definitions and principles of ecotourism as well as determine the relationship between ecotourism and sustainable tourism development.

### 2.2.1 Definitions of ecotourism

Some research highlights that the origins of the term "ecotourism" are not entirely clear (Fennell, 1999, 2008; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). While some scholars suggest that "ecotourism" only appeared in the late 1980s, others claim that the term was first used in 1965 by Hetzer, who identified the four "pillars" of responsible tourism to include: diminishing environmental impacts, respecting host cultures, maximizing the benefits to local communities and maximizing tourists' satisfaction (Fennell, 1999, 2008; Honey, 1999; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). However, other opinions argue that ecotourism might have originated with Millers's work of 1987 on national park planning for eco-development in Latin America (Fennell, 1999, 2008; Honey, 1999; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001).

Similarly, not only the origins of ecotourism are arguable, but ecotourism definition also suffers from a lack of consensus (Black, 2007; Fennell, 1999; Hill & Gale, 2009; Honey, 1999; Horner, 2004; Page, 2002); with more than 80 different definitions of ecotourism in the tourism literature (Fennell & Dowling, 2003; Hill & Gale, 2009; Page, 2002). However, the first formal definition of

ecotourism is generally said to be credited to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) (Fennell, 1999, 2008; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). According to Ceballos-Lascurain (1987, p.14), ecotourism can be defined as:

> "travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both, past and present) found in these areas".

In this definition, the visitor perspective is centric and ecotourism is considered the reason for travel rather than a specific criterion of visitor behavior; and well-preserved natural destinations as an object of study rather than a setting for leisure (Hill & Gale, 2009). More recently, different ecotourism definitions have appeared and are expressed in various ways from general and ambiguous to specific and prescriptive; and the descriptive features are often illustrated in the definition (Weaver, 2008). Table 2.1 offers a chronological example of ecotourism definitions proposed by a number of authors since the late 1980s.

## Table 2.1: Selected Ecotourism Definitions

| Source | Definition |
|---|---|
| Valentine (1992) | Nature-based tourism that is ecologically sustainable and is based on relatively undisturbed natural areas, is non-damaging and non-degrading, contributes directly to the continued protection and management of protected areas, and is subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime |
| Scarce, Grifone & Usher (1992, p.14) | An enlightening nature-travel experience that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities |
| Ecotourism Society (in Lindberg & Hawkins 1993, p.8) | Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people |
| Allcock et al. (1994, p.17) | Nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. This definition recognizes that "natural environment" includes cultural components and that "ecologically sustainable" involves an appropriate return to the local community and long-term conservation of the resource. |
| Goodwin (1996, p.288) | Low impact nature tourism, which contributes to the maintenance of species, and habitats either directly by providing revenue to the local community sufficient for local people to value, and therefore protect, their wildlife heritage area as a source of income. |
| Fennell (1999, p.43) | A sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas. |
| EAA (2000a) | Ecologically sustainable tourism, with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas, that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation |
| Blamey (2001) | Ecotourism is:<br>• nature based<br>• environmentally educative and<br>• sustainably managed. |
| Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism 2001 | Sustainable tourism that<br>• contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage |

| | |
|---|---|
| (in Buckley 2003a, p.xiii) | • includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation and contributes to their well-being<br>• interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination for visitors<br>• lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small groups |

Source: Adapted from Weaver (2008)

The definitions shown indicate that there is no consensus on the precise meaning of ecotourism. Compared with the early definition in Ceballos-Lascurain (1987), ecotourism in the recent definition moves from visitors' motivation towards contributing to the well being of destinations, showing an evolution in terms of the conceptualization of ecotourism over time. Furthermore, it can be seen in the majority of definitions presented in Table 2.1, that the three common elements of ecotourism are nature-based, environmentally educative and sustainably managed; and concur with the definition by Blamey (2001). Other components, such as the benefits of local and tourist satisfaction can be considered as typical features of ecotourism, and are included in the definitions of Lindberg & Hawkins (1993), Allcock et al. (1994), Goodwin (1996), Fennell (1999) and Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism 2001 (in Buckley 2003).

In his explanation of the three core elements of ecotourism, Page (2002) highlights that ecotourism is based on the natural environment with a focus on its biological, physical and cultural features; with environmental education and

interpretation as crucial tools in creating enjoyable and meaningful ecotourism experiences. At the same time, it enhances environmental conservation awareness of tourists, communities and industry; resulting in ecotourism potentially showing how tourism as a whole may be made more ecologically sustainable.

### 2.2.2 Principles of ecotourism

Wallace & Pierce (1996) suggest that true ecotourism should address six principles (See table 2.2).

**Table 2.2: Principles of ecotourism**

| | **Principles of ecotourism** |
|---|---|
| 1 | A type of use that minimises negative impacts to the environment and to local people |
| 2 | The awareness and understanding of an area's natural and cultural systems and the subsequent involvement of visitors in issues affecting those systems |
| 3 | The conservation and management of legally protected and other natural areas |
| 4 | The early and long-term participation of local people in the decision-making process that determines the kind and amount of tourism that should occur |
| 5 | Directing economic and other benefits to local people that complement rather overwhelm or replace traditional practices (farming, fishing, social systems, etc.) |
| 6 | The provision of special opportunities for local people and nature tourism employees to utilise and visit natural area and learn more about the wonders that other visitors come to see. |

Source: Adapted from Wallace & Pierce (1996, pp. 840 - 851)

Similar to the ideas put forward by Wallace & Pierce (1996), Dowling (1996) suggests ecotourism, as distinct from any other forms of tourism, should encompass five core principles, which include: (1) be nature-based; (2) be ecologically sustainable; (3) be environmentally educative; (4) be locally beneficial; (5) and generate tourist satisfaction. Among the five principles proposed by Dowling (1996), the last one related to tourist satisfaction is the point of difference in the principles adopted by Wallace & Pierce (1996). It demonstrates a remarkable consensus of these two authors on the core principles of ecotourism. Moreover, Dowling (1996) contends that among his five principles; the first three characteristics are identified as substantial for a product to be recognized as "ecotourism" while the last two are considered as desirable for all forms of tourism. The five core principles suggested by Dowling (1996) have been recognized as typical criteria of ecotourism by a number of authors, including Hill & Gate, 2009; Page, 2002 and Newsome et al. 2002.

### 2.2.3 Ecotourism and sustainable tourism development

The term "sustainable tourism development" has been derived from the more general concept of sustainable development formulated in 1987, in the Report "*Our Common Future*" of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). In this report, sustainable development was defined as

"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 41). In Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry in 1995, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainable tourism as:

> "Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological process, biological diversity, and life support systems" (WTO, 1995, p. 30).

In its early conception, sustainable tourism was generally perceived as alternative tourism (Weaver, 2001). Accordingly, ecotourism, as a subset of alternative tourism, was also considered as a subset of sustainable tourism (Fennell & Dowling, 2003; Weaver, 2001). Two sustainability principles that are commonly emphasised in the ecotourism context are that ecotourism should support local economies and support conservation (Weaver, 2001). In their analysis of ecotourism and sustainability, Fennell & Dowling (2003) argue that ecotourism should be viewed as a niche form of tourism, which stimulates sustainable development principles. While other authors advocate that "ecotourism" is a subset of sustainable tourism, Black (2007) argues that "…the terms 'sustainable

tourism' and 'ecotourism' are often used interchangeably, and this leads to confusion" (p. 2). Black (2007) also emphasizes that:

> "Of course, ecotourism fully embraces the principles of sustainability, and genuine ecotourism should probably not just incorporate but exemplify sustainability, but ecotourism is certainly much more than just sustainable tourism…" (p. 2).

With respect to ecotourism's close relationship with sustainable tourism, the World Ecotourism Summit in Québec (Canada) in 2002, acknowledged the prominent role of ecotourism in reference to the general sustainability of tourism activities (Weaver, 2006). The Québec Declaration on Ecotourism recognized that ecotourism represents all the issues of sustainable tourism, but concentrates more on specific ecosystems and traditional cultures (Weaver, 2006). Additionally, Weaver (2006) suggests that ecotourism – as a pivotal player in sustainability issues, should be a focused area for tourism research in the future, and contribute to achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Although ecotourism is often associated with sustainable tourism and environmental conservation, Hill & Gale (2009) recognized earlier concerns with a flawed aspect of ecotourism when they identified that ecotourism frequently relied on long-haul travel. Aviation is currently said to be the most unsustainable mode of transport as it is a major concern for global climate change with long-

haul flights having high impact in terms of volume of greenhouse gas emission into the upper atmosphere (Hill & Gale, 2009) Furthermore, a number of academic papers are critical of the fact that the tourism industry sometimes uses the word “ecotourism” purely as a marketing and advertising tool, given the apparent general perception that it is a “good thing” without providing customers with any environmentally friendly experiences (Beeton, 1998; Black, 2007; Honey, 1999; Horner, 2004).

## 2.3 Theoretical considerations in local tourism governance

A tourism destination relies on the co-existence of multiple stakeholders (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005; Ruhanen, 2013); these include the different levels of governments; tourism organizations, tourism industry operators, tourists and local communities (Ruhanen, 2013). Among them, the role of the public sector, particularly local government is acknowledged as fundamental and influential within a destination (Brokaj, 2014; Dinica, 2009; Dredge, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013). However, different stakeholders involved in tourism, in general and in ecotourism, in particular have their own power, purposes and interests; and each player can have influence upon the system (Fennell, 2008). If the interests of all participants in the tourism development process are taken into account and harmoniously balanced, the whole industry can achieve long-term outcomes in

return (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Thus, the consideration of stakeholder theory is important when examining local tourism governance as the theory provides managers or planners with a conceptual framework for managing stakeholders. Furthermore, the collaboration approach is also significant for tourism planning, management and development at a destination since collaboration is recognized as essential in leading the tourism industry towards sustainable development (Graci, 2013). Last but not least, the destination life cycle model is considered an efficient tool enabling tourism policy-makers to set up viable and inclusive plans for a tourist destination (Mason, 2016).

### 2.3.1 Stakeholder theory and tourism

The stakeholder theory was founded by Freeman (1984) as a means for the strategic management of organizations in the late twentieth century (Wagner et al., 2011). The term “stakeholder” first came into use in the management field by the Stanford Research Institute (now SRI International, Inc.) in 1963 (Freeman, 1984). According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders comprised “shareowners, employees, customers, suppliers, lenders and society” (p. 32). Two decades later, the term has become increasingly popular with businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations and even with the media (Wagner et al., 2011).

Freeman (1984) views “a stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives…” (p. 46). Freeman (1984) emphasizes that to be effective, the organization needs to cope with the groups that can exert influence over an organization’s direction or implementation and the groups that the organization can affect. Three levels of analysis must be taken into account with stakeholder theory, including: (1) identification of the stakeholder and their respective interests; (2) the processes necessary to manage the organization’s relationships with its stakeholders; and (3) management of a set of transactions or bargains among the organization and its stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). The essence of Freeman’s definition of stakeholder theory represents the importance of redistributing both benefits to stakeholders and important decision-making power to stakeholders (Stieb, 2009).

Donaldson and Preston (1995) argue that stakeholder theory is managerial and constitutes fundamental elements of the stakeholder management philosophy. Based on stakeholder theory pioneered by Freeman (1984), Donaldson and Preston (1995) further developed three aspects of this theory: descriptive/ empirical, instrumental and normative. The descriptive/empirical aspect of stakeholder theory is used to describe and explain specific characteristics (e.g. example size, type) or behavior of an organization (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The instrumental aspect of the theory identifies the connections, or lack of

connections, between stakeholder management and the achievement of the organization's goals and objectives (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The normative aspect is the core of the stakeholder theory and is used to "interpret the function of the corporation, including the identification of moral or philosophical guidelines for the operation and management of corporations" (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 71). Hence, in reference to the normative approach, an organization participates in activity because it is the right thing to do. From this perspective, stakeholder identification is made on the basis of the stakeholder's interest in the organization, not the organization's interest in the stakeholder. The normative approach illustrates that "each stakeholder group has a right to be treated as an end in itself, and not as means to some other end, and therefore must participate in determining the future direction of the firm in which [it has] a stake." (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p. 73).

According to Donaldson & Preston (1995, p. 74), the three aspects of the stakeholder theory are viewed as being "nested within each other". More importantly, these three aspects indicate the need to identify the interest of all stakeholders. Donaldson & Preston (1995) argue that not all stakeholders need to be involved equally in the decision-making process, but all interests need to be identified and understood. Moreover, (Clarkson, 1995) highlights failure to identify the interest of any primary stakeholder group may lead to the failure of the whole process.

The application of stakeholder theory to tourism is significant as it allows identification of those who are stakeholders in tourism development and how planners and developers should involve the identified stakeholders in the development of tourism (Byrd, 2007). Moreover, stakeholder theory is integral to sustainable tourism development since a main factor to the successful implementation of sustainable tourism development in a destination is the support of different stakeholders (Byrd, 2007; Walifo et al., 2013). Applying stakeholder theory may enable planners or policy-makers at a destination to effectively include the interests of all stakeholder groups in the tourism plan or policies; thereby reducing potential conflicts and supporting them to be involved in the tourism development process (Byrd, 2007). Furthermore, Byrd (2007) highlights that an emphasis on stakeholder involvement may tackle perceived diverse issues in tourism development, such as top down decision making where only "experts" make decisions; or competing interests within the decision-making system where resolutions may or may not reflect the interests of the public. More importantly, participation may result in the reduction of main conflicts between stakeholder groups (Byrd, 2007).

Waligo et al., (2013) shares the same idea as Byrd (2007) by arguing that "the lack of or ineffective stakeholder participation is a major obstacle to sustainable tourism realization" (p. 1). The case study of the Cornwall Sustainable Tourism Project (CoaST) in south-western England shows that "stakeholders are

instrumental to achieving sustainability objectives, stakeholder views are pivotal for the development of effective stakeholder involvement strategies" (Walifo et al., 2013, p. 351). Walifo et al., (2013) also identifies the main factors influencing stakeholder involvement in sustainable tourism, including "leadership quality, information quality and accessibility, stakeholder mindsets, stakeholder involvement capacity, stakeholder relationships and implementation priorities" (p. 351). Based on stakeholder theory, Walifo et al., (2013) has suggested a multi-stakeholder involvement management framework, including six steps: scene-setting, recognition of stakeholder involvement capacity, stakeholder relationship management, pursuit of achievable objectives, influencing involvement capacity, and monitoring stakeholder involvement; embedded in three levels: attraction, integration and management. This framework is acknowledged as a guide to efficiently recognizing stakeholder issues, providing them with relevant supports and motivating them to be involved in sustainable tourism development (Walifo et al., 2013).

Stakeholder theory is also applied in the field of ecotourism development (Wei & Yang, 2013). The development of ecotourism requires ecological environmental consideration and sustainable development; but these perspectives are often difficult to address because of the varying interest demands of the major stakeholders participating in tourism development and "people's self-interest psychology" (Wei & Yang, 2013, p. 1447). In the case study of ecotourism

development in ShiShanYang in China, Wei & Yang, (2013) argued that a balance between environmental protection and development could be achieved with the joint efforts of each stakeholder group. The four main stakeholders involved in ecotourism development in ShiShanYang in China were local government, tourism enterprises, local residents and tourists (Wei & Yang, 2013). Based on stakeholder theory, Wei & Yang (2013) proposed an ecotourism development model that encouraged these four key stakeholder groups to "join together to participate and benefit under the principle of maintaining the ecological environment and ensuring the sustainable development" (p. 1450).

The model suggested that through relevant incentives and regulations, the four stakeholders' interests would progressively be directed towards balance in tourism development practices and generate maximum interest under ecological requirements (Wei & Yang, 2013). Using the model to develop ecotourism in ShiShanYang, it was recommended that local government play a vital role in ensuring coordination, balancing power, and to consider the appropriate distribution of benefits (especially the interests of local residents), set up mechanisms for participation and decision-making, goal setting and standard determination (Wei & Yang, 2013). Local residents, generally have limited knowledge and are motivated by short interest views on sustainable tourism, so it is necessary to provide education on the importance of ecological protection and support participation in sustainable ecotourism development. The local

community's involvement in this development would not only help improve its economy, but also enhance the local culture and increase its sense of ownership (Wei & Yang, 2013). While tourism enterprises, by nature, usually pursue economic benefit as a priority goal; they sometimes ignore the protection aspect and over-exploit or damage the environment when providing tourism activities. Thus, the model suggests incentives and administrative constraints would enable tourism enterprises to be more responsible for environmental protection while at the same time, generating revenue (Wei & Yang, 2013). It is also important to make enterprises aware that the degradation of ecological environment will cause a reduction in tourist arrivals and hence have a detrimental effect on their business. Being responsible for the environment is beneficial for the tourism industry (Wei & Yang, 2013). Lastly, eco-tourists look for high quality ecological experiences; so to ensure satisfaction, the industry needs to be involved in protecting ecological attractions and creating an eco-tourism environment (Wei & Yang, 2013).

### 2.3.2 Stakeholder collaboration and coordination

The stakeholder theory enables collaboration among key stakeholders who are crucial in sustainable development (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Sauter & Leisen, 1999). Stakeholder collaboration is widely acknowledged as an approach to deal with the problems related to a lack of understanding and limited shared common

goals between diverse participants in tourism development (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Walifo et al., 2013). In the tourism context, stakeholder theory, collaboration approach and partnership between destination stakeholders are identified as the essential elements that may enhance mutual benefit and sustainable development (Aas et al., 2005; Graci, 2013; Hall, 1999).

It is essential to acknowledge coordination as a substantial role of the government in the tourism industry because the key task of tourism planners is to enhance involvement and collaboration of various stakeholders in the planning process from outside of the organizational contexts in which they work (Churugsa et al., 2007). Coordination within and between the different levels of government is necessary to prevent duplication of resources between the various government tourism institutions and the private sector, and to establish effective tourism strategies (Hall, 2008). Moreover, government often plays a significant role in helping coordinate private sector activities (Hall, 2008).

Gray (1989) argues that both cooperation and coordination often happens as part of the process of collaborating. Collaboration is one core element to stimulate the collective good of stakeholders in tourism (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Graci, 2013; Hall, 2008). Collaboration has been defined by Gray (1989) as a process of joint decision making among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain. This definition represents five major elements which

include: (1) the stakeholders are interdependent; (2) solutions emerge by dealing constructively with differences; (3) joint ownership of decision making is involved; (4) stakeholders assume collective responsibility for the future direction of the domain; and (5) collaboration is an emerging process (as cited in Graci, 2013; Hall, 2008; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Selin & Chevez, 1995).

Gray (1989) details a three-phase framework for the collaboration process, including problem setting, direction setting and implementation. The first of these requires multiple stakeholders reach an agreement on what the problem is, and the importance of working with others to find a solution to that problem. The second phase, of direction setting, concentrates on setting up rules, groups and consensus between the stakeholders. The third phase of collaboration is associated with the implementation of the chosen course of action, requiring external support and structure, and includes monitoring for compliance (Hall, 2008; Graci, 2013; Gray, 1989; Jamal & Getz, 1995).

Collaborative planning approaches are increasingly acknowledged as pivotal for sustainable tourism development (Aas et al., 2005; Churugsa et al., 2007; Hall, 1999; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Hall (2008) argues that "collaboration becomes a means of involving all affected parties to search for common interests and outcomes" (p. 124). In addition, Gray (1989) states that "joint ownership means that the participants in collaboration are directly

responsible for reaching agreement on a solution" (p. 13); and this concept is significant for partnership effectiveness (Hall, 2008, p. 124). Selin & Chavez (1994) notice that "partnerships form a complex system of interrelationship between agencies and interests that is constantly changing" (as cited in Hall, 2008, p. 124).

In an example of ecotourism policy in the United States, Edwards et al. (1998) has identified various government tourism agencies that have collaborated successfully with bodies not involved in ecotourism-related policies, or activities (as cited in Hall, 2008). Graci (2013) is another empirical study, which illustrates that collaboration, in line with multi-stakeholder partnerships contributes significantly to tourism sustainable development; and the case of the island of Gili Trawangan, Indonesia is a good example of such successful collaboration (Graci, 2013). Gili Trawangan is a small island located amongst the Gili Islands, off the coast of Lombok in Indonesia and in the west marine protected area Nusa Dua Park (Graci, 2013); consequently, this destination is primarily focused on dive tourism. After a large part of this island had been sold to westerners, Gili Trawangan experienced explosive growth, especially in tourism but with subsequent catastrophic impacts on the environment (Graci, 2013). The major challenges on the island have been associated with waste management, coral reef degradation, beach erosion, unplanned or unauthorized development, illegal fishing and tension between the westerners living on the island and the locals

(Graci, 2013). Based on the principles of Gray's collaboration theory, Selin & Chavez (1995) developed a model of the evolution of tourism partnerships, which included five stages: antecedents, problem setting, direction setting, structuring and outcomes. Following this model, a partnership was established between major stakeholders involved in tourism: local government, expatriate businesses, local businesses, local community and tourists all of whom substantially contributed the effective sustainable tourism development on this Island (Graci, 2013).

Additionally, cooperative management is recognized as a meaningful tool of tourism governance, where cooperation can be considered as foundational to this model (Fennell, 2008). In a tourism context, cooperation has been viewed as "working together to same end", or more generally "working together"; and where a number of different levels can be involved in the cooperation to reach a predetermined end (Fennell, 2008). Tipa & Welch (2006) argue that "cooperative management is based on the interaction between equal partners in decision-making, in which each group retains its distinct identity and independence throughout the process" (as cited in Fennell, 2008, p. 154). A good example of the value of cooperation in ecotourism is illustrated through the case study of the Omora Ethnobotanical Park, a protected area of Chile (Fennell, 2008). This park is a successful case study of a private-public arrangement structure that addresses conservation at three levels, including: "interdisciplinary scientific, informal and

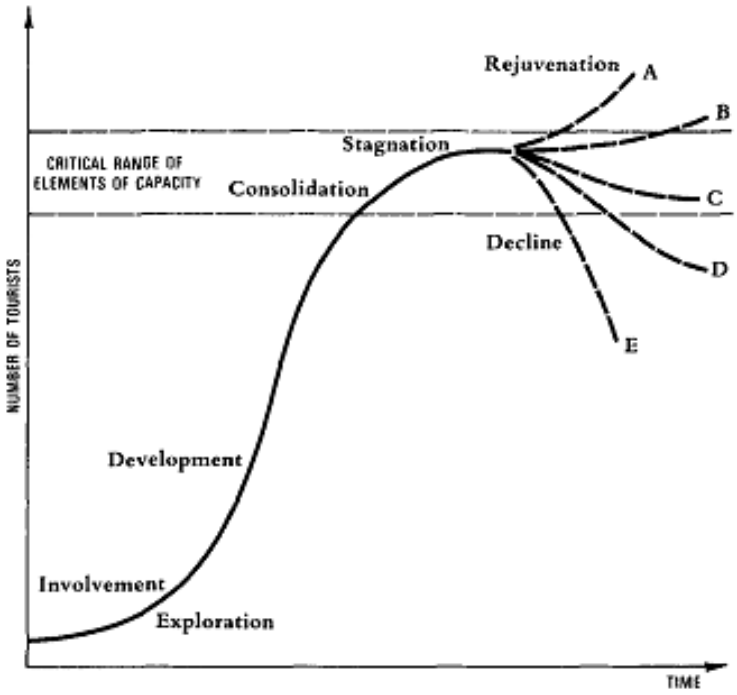
formal education, and biocultural conservation, with delivery of programs on traditional ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, and ecotourism" (Fennell, 2008, p. 155). The private-public partnership is regarded as a relationship in which a government funded initiative is used to support the private sector in offering a public service traditionally provided by government. As a result, it may enhance greater efficiencies in tourism marketing and promotion, ensuring greater cooperation in achieving common goals (Hall, 2008).

### 2.3.3 Destination life cycle model and tourism planning and management

One of the key mandates of local government is tourism planning, development and management (Dredge, 2001; Hall, 2008). It is beneficial to consider the tourism area life cycle model when examining the local governance perspective within a specific destination as the understanding and application of this model can have a considerable influence on destination development and management.

The Destination Life Cycle model, which describes the development of tourist areas through a series of stages, was proposed by Butler (1980). On the basis of the Product Life Cycle, Butler's model is developed and illustrated by an asymptotic S- curve with six stages (See Figure 2. 1), and includes (1) the exploration, (2) involvement, (3) development, (4) consolidation, (5) stagnation and (6) decline.

**Figure 2.1 Hypothetical evolution of a tourist area**




Source: Adapted from Butler (1980, p. 7)

Each stage in this framework is featured by identifiable attributes. In the exploration stage, the destination would be characterized by a small number of adventurous tourists who despite the lack of access and poor public facilities, are attracted to the destination mainly by its unique natural and cultural features (Butler, 1980). In the involvement stage, some interaction between local community and tourism enterprises starts to provide basic tourist services. Advertising is enhanced which improves tourist knowledge about the destination and the initial market area begins to be shaped (Butler, 1980). The development stage is featured by the rapid development of additional tourist facilities and

further targetted advertising aimed at generating the market tourist areas. In this stage, the tourist trade is mainly controlled by large external players; the tourist numbers at peak season may be equal or higher than the permanent local population with the rise of local residents' objection against tourists (Butler, 1980). In the consolidation stage, tourism revenue substantially contributes to the local economy, but the growth rate of visitor numbers starts to slow down. The recreational business districts are well-defined but old facilities go out of fashion and the destination needs to make a concerted effort in marketing and advertising to broaden the visitor season and market area (Butler, 1980). The stagnation stage begins when the number of tourists and capacity level of the range of variables reach a peak. In this stage, the destination image will be well-established but the area is no longer in vogue. The occupancy rate of hotels is low, and is coupled with the high rate of change in property ownership. Much energy will be devoted to conserve the levels of visitation (Butler, 1980). In the post-stagnation stage, two scenarios (rejuvenation or decline) may happen, depending on how successfully local management actions are made (Butler, 1980).

Butler's model suggests that tourism areas experience a '*birth to death cycle*' (Cooper, 1994); however, rejuvenation may occur, provided there is a radical change in the attractions on which tourism relies, for instance, the case of Atlantic City in the United States shows that it was successfully transformed from a seaside vacation area in decline to a revitalized city through gambling casino

infrastructure (Butler, 1980; Butler, 2006). Butler also highlights that although the evolution of tourist areas can be conceptualized, “not all areas experience the stages of the cycle as clearly as others” (Butler, 1980, p. 10). For example, the shape of the cycle is expected to vary in accordance with a range of factors, including the rate of development, numbers of visitors, accessibility, government policies and the number of similar competing areas (Butler, 1980; Butler, 2006). It is noted that the model suggests that a change of attitude depends on the actions and decisions of those who are responsible for planning, developing, and managing tourist areas (Butler, 1980); and local government is considered as a key player in the performance of these tasks at a destination (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

The tourist area life cycle model is usually applied to the field of management destination. Based on the application of the tourism area life cycle model by Butler (1980) and the use of a teleological model, Oreja Rodríguez et al. (2008) analyzed the life cycle of the island of Tenerife as a destination and then suggested two main strategic decisions to be made by the regional government to regulate tourism activity and improve supply to the island. These decisions enhanced the sustainability of natural, cultural, human and infrastructure resources in this maturity destination, therefore prolonging its consolidation stage. Tenerife may be used as a good example for other island destinations

experiencing the potential stagnation stage of the life cycle model (Oreja Rodríguez et al., 2008).

Similarly, Irwana Omar et al. (2014) used the tourism area life cycle model proposed by Butler (1980) to examine the tourism life cycle of Langkawi Island, Malaysia. The findings of this paper illustrate that the Langkawi destination has passed four first stages of development and is now placed in the consolidation stage (Irwana Omar et al., 2014). The paper highlights a number of characteristics suggested by Butler (1980) for each stage have been observed in the tourism development process in this island. It is noted that government is acknowledged as the key stakeholder playing a crucial and influential role in tourism development in this destination as it moves through one stage to the next (Irwana Omar et al., 2014). The application of a tourist area life cycle model is helpful for this case study as it shows that the destination would move to the stagnation stage in the near future; so major stakeholders, especially local governments and the private sector should take appropriate measures to extend the consolidation stage (Irwana Omar et al., 2014). A recommendation for future development of this destination focuses on environmental, economic and social sustainability, and suggests a “bottom-up” approach that enhances the involvement of local residents in the decision-making process (Irwana Omar et al., 2014).

In summary, Butler's theory or the destination life cycle model is one of the most important theories in tourism planning and management (Mason, 2016). The model is not only helpful to identify the stage where the tourist area is at, but is also significant in forecasting what might occur in the short and long term; allowing tourist destination managers to take remedial actions for each stage (Mason, 2016). Moreover, Butler's model is particularly important to tourism policy-makers and planners as he suggests that tourist destinations will probably fall into decline unless revitalization is undertaken (Mason, 2016). As per the examples mentioned, the tourist area life cycle should be taken into consideration within local tourism governance as it enables local authorities to predict the future of the destination and help them take appropriate actions at each stage.

## 2.4 Local government's roles and responsibilities in tourism

A strong focus of literature in tourism highlights the pivotal and influential role of local government in a destination (Bramwell & Lane, 2010; Briedenhann, 2007, Connell, Page, & Bentley, 2009; Dinica, 2009; Dredge, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013). Like governments at other levels, the role of local government in tourism is generally related to legislation and regulation, planning, tourism promotion and coordination (Beeton, 1998; Brokaj, 2014; Fennell & Dowling, 2003; Klodiana et al., 2012; Ruhanen, 2013). To be more precise, local government has a wide range of roles and responsibilities associated with tourism, such as developing

and implementing local policies; undertaking land use planning, infrastructure planning; managing environment and health issues; and planning, delivering and managing tourism products and services within a destination (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). In short, local government assumes great responsibilities for addressing tourism development and management at a destination (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

In addition, local government undertakes responsibility to develop the image of the areas and regions they represent, and to promote these to the world (Dredge, 2001). In order to succeed in this objective, local government needs to pursue economic growth and the improvement of the well-being of local communities (Dredge, 2001; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Many local government areas consider tourism as a vehicle for local economic development (Dredge, 2001; Dredge &Jenkins, 2007). In this context, local governments in many places are becoming more proactive in a wide range of activities to foster tourism, such as destination marketing, supporting local tourism industry networks, attracting investment for tourism development, developing and enhancing tourism products (Dredge, 2001).

In the context of neoliberal economic management in the 20$^{th}$ century where the role of private sector in the economy has been enhanced and strong centralized planning processes have been replaced with fragmented planning and policy processes frequently based on single issues, the local government's roles and

responsibilities have been considerably expanded (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Local government has shifted from their restricted traditional role in servicing and infrastructure provision to engaging with new responsibilities for addressing sustainable development (Dredge, 2001; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Ruhanen, 2013). Particularly, local government plays a greater role in driving the sustainable development agenda in the context of a tourism destination since they are responsible for most of development planning aspects associated with tourism (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Moreover, it is suggested they have a better understanding and deeper knowledge than others about their human and natural resources (Brokaj, 2014; Klodiana et al., 2012; Ruhanen, 2013).

With respect to policy, local government performs a range of major functions, including "land use planning, environmental management, infrastructure provision and economic development, that influence the achievement of sustainable tourism development" (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007, p. 303). Furthermore, the United Nations Environment Programs - UNEP (2003) identifies local government to be a key player in implementing national and regional policy frameworks and is a major partner in the discussion about local development and resource management. Therefore, local government has a crucial role in negotiation among entreprise, community and government interests and can act as a leader in sustainable tourism development (as cited in Dredge & Jenkins, 2007).

Ecotourism has a close relationship with sustainable tourism, and together they can enable the balance of protection and development issues. Many destinations in the world have focussed on this type of tourism (Wei & Yang, 2013). Local government is recognized as one of the major stakeholders involved in ecotourism: they are governments of all levels, private sector, non-governmental organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors, tourists and local communities (Beeton, 1998; Black, 2007; Buckley, 2003; Fennell & Dowling, 2003). Being recognized as a key player in ecotourism development, local government is mandated to draw up adequate regional ecotourism policies and strategies; identify the main access to tourist sites and to internal transport systems; specify local ecotourism attractions and types of ecotourism activities (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). The regional ecotourism planning needs to guarantee the incorporation of economic, social and environmental factors and ensure public consultation in the design of the regional ecotourism plan, as well as including goals of tourism development and environmental protection (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). In terms of ecotourism management, local government is responsible for formulating suitable policies, management plans, regulations, interpretation for visitors; managing visitor growth and protecting vulnerable ecosystems (Fennell, 2008). Local government can also take an important role in enhancing the collaboration between tourism operators, other service providers and NGOs to educate tourists about the significance of ecological protection and exert influence on their behavior at destinations (World Ecotourism Summit, 2002).

## 2.5 Barriers to the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development

Local government encounters a range of challenges in addressing ecotourism (Fennel, 2003). Many of these obstacles are similar to the barriers that local government faces in developing conventional tourism. These include the lack of communication and cooperation, lack of stakeholder involvement, lack of commitment to implementation, lack of resources, lack of awareness and limited capacity in task performance (Fennel, 2008; Dredge, 2001; Silva & McDill, 2004; Wang, Cater, & Low, 2016; Wei & Yang, 2013). An examination of these obstacles would support finding effective solutions for improving local governance in ecotourism development.

### 2.5.1 Lack of communication and cooperation between local government and other stakeholders

A lack of communication between stakeholders is identified as one of the main obstacles to the development of ecotourism at a destination (Silva & McDill, 2004) and is a problem that often happens in many ecotourism projects. A representative of government officials in a case study in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the United States reported that, “trying to create communication between [stakeholders] is sometimes the biggest, ultimate challenge”, and “we really need a sustained communication effort that gives people the opportunity to

get together and talk about tourism [development]" (Silva & McDill, 2004, p. 299). The lack of communication may result from the failure to include "a cross section of stakeholders in the planning process" and from the lack of interest or limited awareness of local residents in ecotourism projects (Silva & McDill, 2004).

Ineffective communication between stakeholders may lead to the mistrust of local authorities' tourism plans or programs by tourism enterprises and local citizens (Silva & McDill, 2004). Furthermore, the lack of communication may result in the limited understanding about ecotourism which may impede involvement by local residents in ecotourism (Wang, Cater, & Low, 2016). For instance, in the case study in Taomi village in Taiwain, local authorities organized many meetings to discuss ecotourism development, but due to the lack of efficient communication, they failed to attract many participants to the meetings and the opportunity to enhance the local community's knowledge of ecotourism (Wang et al., 2016). A villager in this study said, "I could go and take part in these meetings, but there was hardly anybody who wanted to do that. I think they felt that ecotourism was something very boring; and even if they listened they wouldn't be able to understand what was going on anyway" (Wang et al., 2016, pp. 5-6).

The problem of communication can be solved if stakeholders acknowledge the benefits of ecotourism for the area, if their roles in ecotourism development are recognized and if cooperation between related stakeholders is enhanced (Silva & McDill, 2004). Ecotourism would be supported more broadly by local communities if local government itself was aware of the benefits of ecotourism benefits promoting it as a vehicle for the local economy. Tourism businesses, in turn, would support ecotourism by providing environmentally friendly tourism services and experiences (Silva & McDill, 2004). A lack of cooperation between various stakeholders involved in the ecotourism network (e.g. public sector, private sector, agencies and local communities) may result in barriers to successful ecotourism development (Fennell, 2008). Therefore, ecotourism-related stakeholders should work together to strengthen the sector and bring benefits to all participants (Silva & McDill, 2004).

### 2.5.2 Lack of the active involvement of stakeholders in ecotourism

Not many tourism enterprises are willing to become involved in the ecotourism industry and this is for a range of factors (Silva & McDill, 2004). For instance, not all tourism suppliers have enough experience specific to ecotourism as this sector requires good marketing skills, good financial resources and some specific skills and abilities (Silva & McDill, 2004). Business interviewees in Silva & McDill (2004) commented that: “business owners in the ecotourism sector must

be hard working, determined, patient and persistent to achieve their business goal" (p. 300). Additionally, the success of ecotourism greatly depends on the level of cooperation between tourism enterprises and the local community, and the public sector. All these factors mentioned can discourage many tourism operators from engaging in ecotourism (Silva & McDill, 2004).

Another important stakeholder group associated with ecotourism is the local community. However, in some cases, the host communities can hinder ecotourism development because it may happen that local residents are inhospitable towards visitors (Silva & McDill, 2004). In the case study in Silva & McDill (2014), "visitors to the community are sometimes viewed as "outsiders" or treated as "intruders" in the community"; and as one interviewee said, "We are very parochial here….". Another commented, "We don't want anybody to come here. We are happy with the way things are." (p. 299). The unfriendly attitude of the local community is likely to adversely affect ecotourism development because it has a negative influence on visitor experiences resulting in the reduction of the number of visitors to the region (Silva & McDill, 2004). Therefore, the support and involvement of the local community in the planning and provision of tourism services is crucial for ecotourism development (Silva & McDill, 2004).

### 2.5.3 Lack of resources

The potential of ecotourism development in a destination depends mainly on the local natural resources (e.g. lakes, rivers, forests, and wildlife) and historical and cultural sites of interest. Nevertheless, the environmental deterioration caused by tourism activities may lead to the scarcity of natural resources for ecotourism at a destination (Nianyong & Zhuge, 2001). For example, linked to the high-speed development of tourism, the phenomenon of littering in nature reserves in China by tourists has had a sharp increase and has placed enormous pressure on the natural environment in this country (Nianyong & Zhuge, 2001).

Lack of financial resources is also identified as a common barrier to ecotourism development, especially in developing countries. For instance, the study of Nianyong & Zhuge (2001) highlights that lack of budget from the government is an immense challenge for ecotourism development and management in nature reserves in China. Firstly, China faces a shortage of start-up funds to introduce ecotourism activities in natural reserves and then funding from the government and private sectors for scientific research into ecotourism and environmental protection is limited. These issues result in constraints upon the implementation of ecotourism development and management at these sites (Nianyong & Zhuge, 2001).

### 2.5.4 Lack of commitment to implementation

Nature conservation is one of the principles of ecotourism, but local government often has a dual mandate of economic development and natural conservation; hence, it is difficult for them to find a balance (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). To some extent, tourism policies pursued by local governments often focus more on economic growth and infrastructure improvement rather than on the environmental management and protection (Brokaj, 2014; Hall, 2008; Ruhanen, 2013).

Silva & McDill (2004) suggest there is a lack of planning and programs for assisting the ecotourism sector in the case study in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the United States. It is remarkable that local authorities usually place emphasis on the strategies or sectors that generate more jobs than ecotourism because ecotourism is often perceived as being only able to offer low paying and seasonal jobs (Silva & McDill, 2004). One interviewee in the study of Silva & McDill (2004) commented that: "I am not aware of any state or local government programs directed towards tourism. Occasionally, an agency will offer a grant program, but county programs are mainly aimed at manufacturing. Small service providers [in the ecotourism sector] are left to manage on their own…The trouble is that tourism jobs are low paying, minimum wage jobs. Tourism cannot compete with other industries." (p. 298).

### 2.5.5 Lack of awareness about ecotourism and limited capacity in task performance

The limited understanding of the concept and principles of ecotourism may hinder government officer motivation to commit to ecotourism development (Fennell, 2008). Even though ecotourism has a close relationship with sustainable tourism development, local government encounters a number of obstacles when adopting sustainable tourism development approaches, such as the difficulty in transforming the concept of sustainable tourism from theory into practice, the lack of knowledge by destination stakeholders about the requirements for successful sustainable tourism (Brokaj, 2014; Ruhanen, 2013). This inadequate understanding may lead to limited capacity of local government agencies to address ecotourism in the area. The weaknesses in task performance by local government agencies are often associated with planning, marketing, cooperation, education, and training programs (Silva & McDill, 2004). For instance, the interviewees in the study of Silva & McDill (2004) complained about the scarce marketing strategies established by local tourism promotion agencies, resulting in a limited ecotourism attraction base in the area. They suggested that “tourism promotion agencies should focus more on developing itineraries for ecotourism activities”; and that “agencies should plan more ecotourism packages in cooperation with local business” (Silva & McDill, 2004, p. 298).

Silva & McDill (2004) mention that the ineffective planning and lack of education and training programs to support tourism enterprises and the local community may constrain ecotourism development. The interviewees in the study of Silva & McDill (2004) commented that local government agencies failed to provide the private sector with necessary information and training associated with the ecotourism sector. They are also critical of the bureaucratism of some government officers, for example they comment that, “Many agency employees had not fulfilled their promises to business owners”; and “agencies had failed to include all stakeholders in planning for tourism” (Silva & McDill, 2004, p. 301). Additionally, there have been criticisms over local government, such as not being proactive (Dredge, 2001), governments’ top-down planning and decision-making (Cooper, 1995; Dredge & Jenkins, 2007; Reid & Sindiga, 1999; Ruhanen, 2013), and short-term policy-making lacking strategic direction and coordination (Ruhanen, 2013). Alternatively, Fennell & Dowling (2003) highlight that some institutional factors can hinder local government’ performance in addressing ecotourism; for instance, the institutional arrangements that structure the roles and responsibilities of local government; and the lack of control over national and international level policy are recognized as a common challenge to local government’s power.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the aspects identifying barriers to the involvement of local government in ecotourism development. These include the exploration of common perceptions of ecotourism, key theories applicable for local tourism governance in the context of sustainable development, the roles and responsibilities of local government in tourism and barriers to local government's performance in addressing ecotourism.

The chapter has emphasized the fact that although ecotourism is defined in various ways, most ecotourism definitions encompass those elements which are nature-based, environmentally educative, and sustainably managed. The principles of ecotourism generally address these elements but also include those showing benefit to the local community and generating tourist satisfaction. Additionally, ecotourism has a close relationship with sustainable tourism development. Ecotourism embraces sustainability principles; and presents itself as a form of tourism that fosters the sustainable tourism development approach.

Stakeholder theory provides destination managers and planners with a conceptual framework for managing the various stakeholders involved in the tourism industry. In addition, on the basis of stakeholder theory, collaboration theory, cooperation, coordination and stakeholder partnerships have been developed, and these are acknowledged as the essential management approaches in the tourism

context since these may lead to mutual benefits and sustainable tourism development.

Likewise, the Destination Life Cycle model has been identified in this chapter as an important tool for tourism planning and management. Based on the principles of the Product Life Cycle, the model suggests that tourist areas generally experience six stages, including exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation; and each stage has its specific characteristics. The theory allows destination managers and planners to identify where the tourist area is in its life cycle; and more importantly, the model indicates that after stagnation stage tourist destinations probably go into decline, unless revitalization action is taken.

The chapter has also pointed out the importance of local government's roles and responsibilities in tourism planning, management and development. Generally, in the tourism context, local government acts as planner, regulator, promoter, coordinator and educator. In particular, it plays a vital role in sustainable tourism development within a destination, as it is responsible for most of socio-economic and tourism development planning at destination level and most notably has a deep understanding and knowledge about local people and natural resources.

Local government's roles and responsibilities in ecotourism have also been outlined in this chapter. Local government is considered as a major player in ecotourism planning, management and development. More importantly, local government should adhere to the principles of ecotourism when addressing ecotourism at a destination. The local ecotourism development agenda should ensure the following elements: sustainable development, public involvement in the decision-making process, nature conservation, environmental education and generation of local benefits.

Barriers to local government involvement in ecotourism have been identified at the end of this chapter. These include the lack of communication and cooperation between local government and other stakeholders, lack of active involvement of stakeholders in ecotourism, lack of resources, and lack of commitment to implementation. Furthermore, other obstacles have been revealed; these are associated with local government institutions' limited awareness of the ecotourism concept and hence a reduced capacity in performing tasks related to ecotourism development such as planning, marketing, education and training and the decision-making process.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a detailed explanation of the methodology adopted in collecting data for this study. It illustrates the research aim and objectives. Then, the chapter provides an overview of the research context with a detailed description of the location of the focus area, its tourism management structure and the ecotourism situation in this area. It also presents an interpretation of research design including methodology and methods incorporating purposive sampling and sample size, and research data collection. Finally, the chapter describes the steps of the data analysis process.

## 3.2 Research aim and research questions

The main purpose of this study is to identify those factors which hinder the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. Some researchers have previously investigated barriers to local government involvement in tourism planning and sustainable tourism development (Brokaj, 2014; Dredge, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013). The findings of this research is generally associated with the perceived roles and responsibilities of local government in tourism; the problems of transforming

tourism theories into practice; the limited capability of tourism officials; lack of tourism resources; and lack of collaboration and communication between tourism stakeholders (Brokaj, 2014; Dredge, 2001; Ruhanen, 2013). However, little attention in the tourism literature is paid to the investigation of the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development. There are no specific guidelines available from existing tourism studies to indicate how to identify impediments to local government's involvement in ecotourism development. Thus, the following research questions have been developed for this study to achieve the research aim.

1. What is the definition of ecotourism perceived by local government in Ha Long Bay area?
2. What is the current situation of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area?
3. What is the perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay World Heritage site from the local government's viewpoint?
4. What are the roles and responsibilities of local government in their involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area?
5. What challenges does local government face by their involvement in ecotourism development in this area?

## 3.3 Research context

### 3.3.1 Location and tourism stature of the target study

The focus of this study is the Ha Long Bay area, located on the East-North coastal corridor of Vietnam, 160km from Hanoi to the East, and is part of the island resources system of Quang Ninh province (See Figure 3.1). The province's coordinates are longitude 106º25' to 108º25' East and latitude 20º40' to 21º40' North with 195 km from East to West and 102 km from North to South. The province has borders with four provinces of Vietnam and with one province of China. In the West, it borders with the provinces of Lang Son, Bac Giang and Hai Duong. On its southern border is the city of Hai Phong with the province Guangxi of China on its northern border (BCG, 2014).

Ha Long Bay is a spectacular archipelago with a total area of 1,553km$^2$ including 1,969 different islands, 90% of which have significant limestone deposits. To the west and north west, Ha Long Bay spreads from Yen Hung district in Ha Long city to Cam Pha town in Van Don district; to the south-east and in the south, the Bay is bounded by Cat Ba island, Hai Phong province (halongbay.com.vn).

In 1962, Ha Long Bay was acknowledged as a national scenic spot by the Ministry of Culture and Information of Vietnam. Also, the Bay is a unique tourism resource with outstanding values of international stature: In 1994, Ha Long Bay was included in the UNESCO's List of the World Natural Heritage

Sites for its globally outstanding aesthetic qualities. In 2000, Ha Long Bay was again recognized as a World Natural Heritage Site for its geological value (halongbay.com.vn) with the core area covering an area of 434 $km^2$, including 775 islands, of which 411 are named. It is bounded by Dau Go Island (in the west), Dau Be Island (in the south) and Cong Tay Island (in the east) (UNESCO). The World Heritage Area is surrounded by a buffer zone of about 5 - 7 km in width from the protection line to the sea, on a moving scale of 1-2 km.

In July 2003, Ha Long Bay was ranked by The World Most Beautiful Bay Club as one of 29 most beautiful bays on earth. In 2011, Ha Long Bay was voted as one of the 7 new natural wonders in the world by the New 7 Wonders (BCG, 2014). Many national and international scientists consider Ha Long Bay to comprise many biological, historical and cultural values in addition to its previously recognized aesthetic quality and noteworthy geology. All these values provide a strong foundation to build and develop various types of tourism products and services in the Ha Long Bay area now and in the future (BCG, 2014). Ha Long Bay's name is one of the greatest tourism development strengths/competitive advantages of the Quang Ninh province. To date, Ha Long Bay and Hue, the ancient capital are leading destinations of choice for international tourists coming to Vietnam (BCG, 2014).

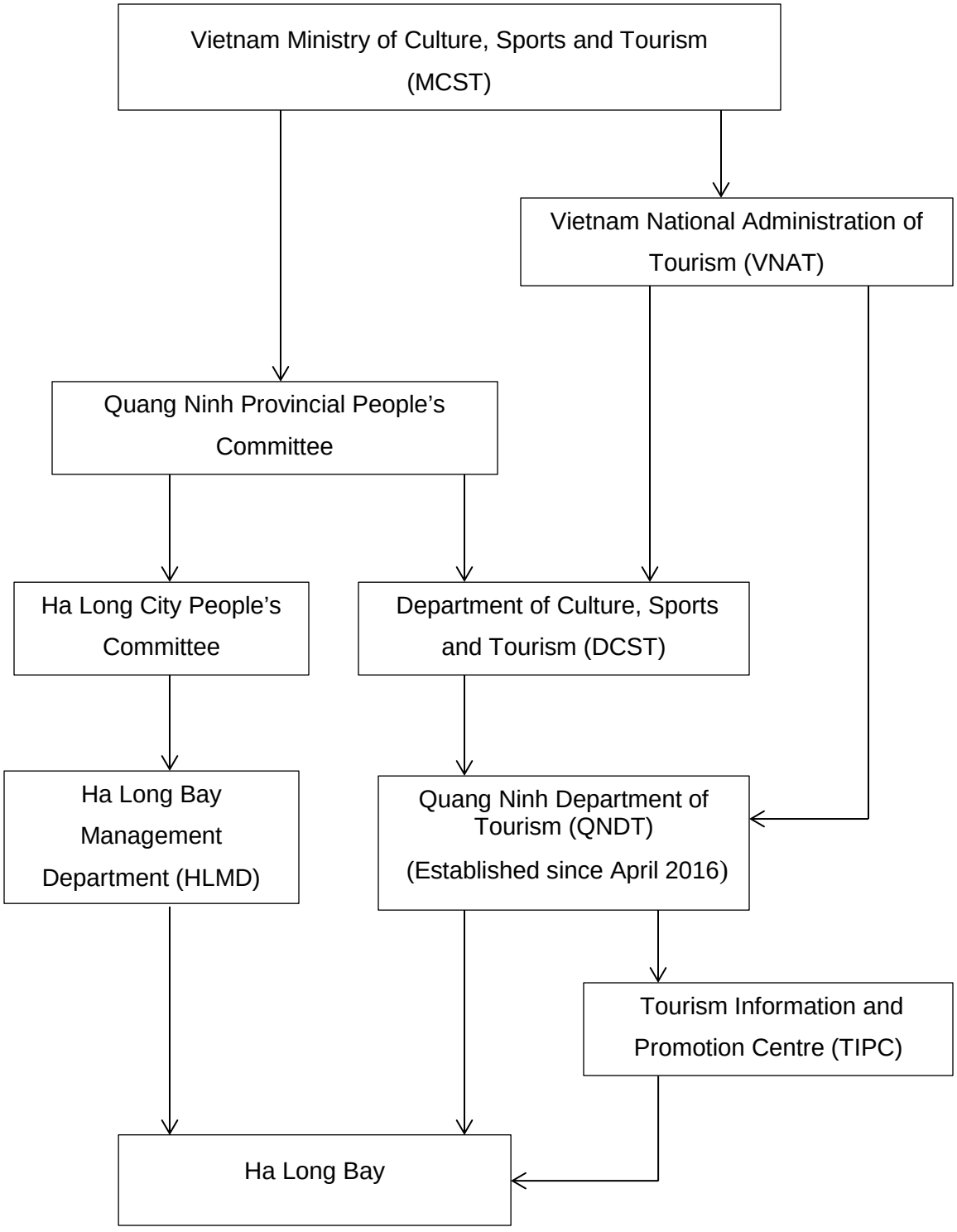
**Figure 3.1: Map showing the location of Ha Long Bay in Quang Ninh province, in northeast Vietnam**

Source: http://vietnamheritagetours.com/halong-bay-vietnam-vietnam-world-heritage-site

### 3.3.2 Tourism governance in Ha Long Bay, Quang Ninh propvince, Vietnam

Tourism in Vietnam falls under the administration of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Hildebrandt & Isaac, 2015; MCST). Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) at the central level is responsible for the execution of all tourism-related activities stipulated by the Tourism Law of Vietnam and for the development of the national tourism master plan (Hildebrandt & Isaac, 2015). At provincial and district levels, tourism is the responsibility of the provincial People's Committees and administered by the provincial/local Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism (DCST) or Departments of Tourism. The administrative tourism structures in Ha Long Bay area, Quang Ninh province are illustrated in Figure 3.2 below.

**Figure 3.2: Administrative tourism structures in Ha Long Bay area in Quang Ninh province, Vietnam**




Source: From MCST, Quang Ninh Portal, Tourism Law of Vietnam, VNAT

Ha Long Bay is a key tourism asset in Quang Ninh province (BCG, 2014). The Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site is directly administered by the Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLMD); and its tourism development is under the governance of Quang Ninh Department of Tourism (QNDT). HLMD was established on 12th September 1995 under Decision No. 2796/QD-UBND of Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee. This agency was affiliated with the provincial People's Committee until January 2015, but then shifted to be under the Municipal People's Committee of Ha Long City by Decision No. 3736/QD-UBND issued by the Province. This agency is mandated to be responsible for the management, conservation and promotion of all values of Ha Long Bay area. Professionally, HLMD is under the leadership of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the National Committee for UNESCO Vietnam (halongbay.com.vn).

Separated from the Quang Ninh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, tourism in Quang Ninh province is now administered by Quang Ninh Department of Tourism (QNDT), established on 28th April 2016 under Decision No. 1270/2016/QD-UBND of Quang Ninh Province. QNDT is under Quang Ninh provincial People's Committee, and assigned to have the responsibility for tourism planning, development and management in Quang Ninh province, including Ha Long Bay area. Generally, QNDT is mandated to formulate and issue regulations, master-plans, plans, strategies and policies on tourism

development; implement, inspect and audit tourism activities in the area; and promote local tourism destinations (Quang Ninh Portal). Professionally, QNDT comes under the leadership of the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Quang Ninh Portal). Quang Ninh Tourism Information and Promotion Centre (TIPC) is an agency under Quang Ninh Department of Tourism. The Centre is responsible for communicating, marketing and advertising Quang Ninh provincial tourism, including Ha Long Bay (Quang Ninh Portal).

### 3.3.3 Tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area and ecotourism

#### *3.3.3.1 Achievements and challenges of Ha Long Bay tourism*

Tourism is the main engine of economic growth of the Quang Ninh province. The province is endowed with abundant natural and cultural tourism resources (McKinsey, 2013). Ha Long Bay and Bai Tu Long Bay are the key natural assets of the province with unique geological formations and beautiful scenery. Major cultural tourism assets in Quang Ninh are Yen Tu relic - the centre of Buddhism in Vietnam and more than 500 cultural and historical monuments classified at national and provincial levels (McKinsey, 2013). These resources have driven the strong growth of the tourism industry in the past five years; and tourism has contributed 5% to the GDP of Quang Ninh (McKinsey, 2013).

The Ha Long Bay brand attains its global strength largely because of its UNESCO World Heritage status and is widely regarded as one of the top tourist attractions in Vietnam. Ha Long Bay is rated as a top 25 destination in Asia by the TripAdvisor online rating website, as top five in Southeast Asia and as number one in Vietnam by Lonely Planet (BCG, 2014). Due to the attractiveness of Ha Long Bay, the number of tourist arrivals in Quang Ninh has been growing fast from 2 million in 2001 to 7 million in 2012 at cumulative annual growth rate of 12% (BCG, 2014). The province receives a good stable ratio of international tourists, steady at around 35% of total visitors during the above period with most of them coming from other Asian and western countries (BCG, 2014). In 2015, the province received more than 7.7 million tourists, of which were 2.8 million foreigners (DCST, 2015). The majority of tourists to the province go to Ha Long for its world-famous UNESCO site Ha Long Bay (BCG, 2014). At the national level, a survey conducted by BCG (2014) shows that 67% of respondents who had visited Vietnam, had visited Ha Long Bay. In terms of income, Quang Ninh province has had substantial growth of total tourism revenue over the last 5 years. Table 3.1 shows the tourist numbers in the province from 2011 to 2015 and total tourism revenue during this period.

**Table 3.1: Number of visitors to Quang Ninh province and tourism revenues from 2011 to 2015**

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total visitors to Quang Ninh province | 6,459,000 | 7,005,000 | 7,500,000 | 7,500,000 | 7,767,000 |
| Total tourism revenue of the whole province (in US $) | 161,136,363 | 197,590,909 | 227,272,727 | 250,000,000 | 308,409,090 |

Source: Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Quang Ninh province (Provincial tourism annual report of the years 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015)

Coupled with the rise of tourist arrivals, tourist boat numbers on Ha Long Bay have risen dramatically over the past 10 years. While there were 251 boats operating on Ha Long Bay in 2011, this number had nearly doubled and reached 527 in 2013, 189 of which were overnight boats (BCG, 2014). All these developments have resulted in the serious impacts on the environment of the Bay. Environmental degradation is one of the major challenges that need to be addressed quickly in the Ha Long Bay area; as overcrowding and pollution from hospitality and industrial activities such as coal mining and cement manufacturing, may result in the province risking its UNESCO status (BCG, 2014).

BCG (2014), claims that with the continued increase in numbers of tourists to the bay, satisfaction has declined and many tourists now complain of excessive crowding and pollution on the bay. The quality of the scenery suffers through congestion due to the large number of boats. Ti Top beach and Sung Sot cave are extremely crowded with tourists reporting they can see up to 100 boats around them at night, and complaints about poor water quality are common (BCG, 2014). More importantly, increasing environmental degradation and unmet tourist expectations pose threats to Ha Long Bay's brand. Pollution is causing discontent among tourists from around the world with negative reviews on TripAdvisor, such as "The water is filthy brown green, polluted by all sorts of visible materials. You are not even allowed to swim." and "The water is green and full of rubbish. There is a sheen of oil over the bay" (BCG, 2014, p. 81).

Clearly, the balance between development and conservation is a serious challenge that needs to be addressed as soon as possible by the local authorities; especially as the core tourism resource of Quang Ninh is a World Heritage Site. This challenge becomes critical when the province expected target is 10.5 million tourism arrivals including 4 million foreigners by 2020 and 23 million including 10 million foreigners by 2030 (BCG, 2014; Mckinsey, 2013). In this regard, it is crucial that the province locates efficient solutions which balance development and conservation interests in the future. Ecotourism is regarded as a potential solution.

#### *3.3.3.2 Ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area*

Tourists have become increasingly concerned with minimizing the environmental impacts of tourism activities. Ecotourism is currently considered to be one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry from data based on recent research of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (as cited in BCG, 2014). Facing the serious environmental challenges in Ha Long Bay area, Quang Ninh province is moving towards sustainable development and ecotourism for the purpose of mitigating negative environmental impacts while delivering a satisfactory experience to tourists (BCG, 2014). The Detailed Planning of Conservation and Promotion of the Values of Ha Long Bay Heritage to 2020 approved by Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee on 27$^{th}$ April 2015, defines ecotourism as one of the key types of tourism which must be stimulated in the Ha Long Bay area. Furthermore, the Proposal of Development of Tourism Products in Quang Ninh province to 2020, with a vision towards 2030 and approved by Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee on 4$^{th}$ July 2014, specifies that ecotourism is the focused form of tourism in Ha Long Bay area for the future.

Quang Ninh Province has high potential to develop ecotourism, particularly in Ha Long Bay area. According to BCG (2014), the resource is classified into two main ecosystems with distinct characteristics capable of forming unique tourism products and organizing ecotourism activities; these include a forestry ecosystem

(forests, mountains, lakes, dams, springs, waterfalls); a marine ecosystem in Ha Long Bay and Bai Tu Long Bay with many kinds of coral, seaweed and algae and the coastal mangrove systems concentrated in Ha Long Bay, Quang Yen Town, Van Don, Tien Yen, Dam Ha, Hai Ha.

Although Quang Ninh province has many resources to develop ecotourism and local authorities demonstrate a firm commitment to drive ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area, ecotourism in Quang Ninh province currently is still in its early stages (BCG, 2014). There are a number of businesses participating in organizing ecotourism activities in Quang Ninh province but they are generally "small-scale, detached, irregular, unprofessional and unattractive" (BCG, 2014, p. 79). Additionally, ecotourism is in a very competitive market in Southeast Asia where the well-established tourism destinations, including Langkawi continue to have a strong pull with international tourists for their international name brands and developed tourism offering (BCG, 2014). The competition with other sites within Vietnam is also intense, thus Quang Ninh province must seek adequate strategies to be able to foster ecotourism in the area and strengthen its position.

## 3.4 Research design

### 3.4.1 Research methodology

This research aims to investigate the thoughts, opinions and perceptions of the local governmental tourism officers in Ha Long Bay area about the barriers to their involvement in ecotourism development within this destination. Thus, qualitative methodology is appropriate for this study since qualitative research emphasizes "the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman, 2004, p. 266). Jennings (2010) also suggests that qualitative methodology is a popular approach in social research as it enhances the understanding of social-cultural phenomena in their context with deep examination. Therefore, it is adopted in this study to enable the researcher to gain a deep understanding of participants' viewpoints on the barriers to their performance in addressing ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area.

Moreover, qualitative methodology has been applied to this study as the population of the research is relatively small and the researcher has mainly focused on the senior local tourism officers, who play an important role in driving ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area. Jennings (2010), believes that qualitative methodology may help the researcher have an insight into the perspectives of a small number of participants, thereby assisting the researcher in having a profound understanding of their views and in analyzing their experiences though their opinions.

This research has used the single case study approach as it is suitable for the purpose of the research. According to Yin (2009), the case study method is relevant for the research in that "your questions require an extensive and in-depth description of some social phenomenon" (p. 4); therefore, by using this method, the researcher will be able to capture the holistic view of the barriers to local government performance in the context of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Additionally, the literature demonstrates that to some extent a single case study can be the basis for significant explanations and generalizations (Yin, 2009); thus this study might make a useful contribution to fill the gap in local governance perspective in ecotourism.

### 3.4.2 Sampling and sample size

The major feature of qualitative research is its strength to examine a phenomenon in depth; and this method is usually perceived as "purposive" (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Hence, the selection of participants in qualitative research should rely on clear criteria and achieve a particular purpose associated with the research question (Cleary et al., 2014). Ritchie & Lewis (2003) also mention that a non-probability sample is commonly used in qualitative research and the selection of participants is generally based on specific criteria or is purposive. The selected sample units should have distinctive features that will help the researcher fully explore and understand the key themes of the study (Ritchie &

Lewis, 2003). Accordingly, purposive sampling was used in this study to fulfill the research aims and objectives.

Samples in qualitative research are commonly small in size (Cleary et al., 2014; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Different from quantitative research, sample size is not essential to qualitative research as statistical inference is not the major outcome of qualitative research; however, the latter is rich in detail and "phenomena need only to appear once to be part of the analytic map" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 83). The population of the current study is approximately 120 people who are all employed as state tourism officers in the Ha Long Bay area (Statistics from Quang Ninh provincial Department of Home Affairs). The key informants of this study numbered 20 senior local tourism officers; enabling representation to be achievable as according to Veal (2005), the sampling size accounting for 10% to 20% of the population should satisfy the tourism research (as cited in Jennings, 2010). Additionally, large numbers of participants in qualitative research may lead to redundancy with regards to information (Jennings, 2010). Furthermore, this study targeted the participants with rich professional experience and whose information allowed the researcher to fulfill the research objectives.

### 3.4.3 Data Collection

An interview is the most commonly used method in qualitative research and it enables the researcher to gain a deep understanding of core issues (Bryman 2004; Jennings, 2010). A semi-structured interview is a popular method, described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as "an interview with the purpose of obtaining description of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 3). Semi-structured interviews have been employed in this research for collecting primary data. This method was deemed appropriate for the purposes of the project as using a list of guided questions, allowed the researcher to investigate the specific topics with a deep understanding of the thoughts and views of participants (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, Ayres (2008) emphasizes that the semi-structured interview provides the researcher with more control over the focus of the interview than unstructured interviews and allows more flexibility in responses to each question compared to structured interviews and questionnaires. Additionally, Jennings (2010) claims that although this method offers the themes for the interviews; it does not constrain the respondents in raising their own ideas or opinions in the conversation. Finally, this type of interview enables follow–up questions for further clarifications and provides a more relaxed interview setting (Jennings, 2010).

In this research, semi-structured interviewing has allowed the researcher to better understand participants' viewpoints on key themes, including the definition of ecotourism; the perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay area; their understanding of the roles and responsibilities in addressing ecotourism; challenges to their involvement in driving ecotourism and their recommendations for a better performance of their functions in ecotourism development. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher has been able to interact well with participants and build up primary research data. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, secondary data has also been collected in this study to achieve the research objectives. Secondary data provides the researcher with the background to the research context and it also enables the researcher to explore the past and current social trends as well as forecast the future of events, trends and patterns (Jennings, 2010). Secondary data used in this study includes tourism textbooks, academic journals relevant to the research area, national and provincial tourism reports and documents, such as Vietnam tourism law, Quang Ninh provincial annual tourism reports, provincial socio-economic and tourism master plans and tourism strategies. This data has been mainly collected online from tourism-related journals and from the websites of government and provincial institutions. The advantage of using secondary data is considerable because many sources such as government and institutional documents are reliable and available for use free of charge; helping the researcher save time and

money to collect them (Jennings, 2010). Using joint secondary and primary data, enabled the researcher to clarify the core themes of the study.

Interviews were conducted using Skype video calls; significantly saving time and money, as by doing so the researcher did not need to travel back to Vietnam to carry out interviews. Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour (2014), suggest with technological advancement, "over the last few decades, the online interview such as Skype has overcome time and financial constraints, geographical dispersion, and physical mobility boundaries, which have adversely affected onsite interviews" (p. 1). Skype as a synchronous online service offers the researcher the possibility of audio or video interviewing through computer or smartphone; and even more importantly, Skype interviews may enhance participation by interviewees who have time and place restrictions for face-to-face interviews (Janghorban et al., 2014). Skype interviews offer a similar level of authenticity of verbal and nonverbal cues as face-to-face-interviews because the visible impression also may be well managed in the online interviewing process (Janghorban et al., 2014).

With respect to seeking permission for the research, the researcher contacted the Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Quang Ninh province requesting permission to conduct interviews with local tourism officers. After receiving his written permission to approach potential participants (enclosed as

appendix B), the researcher visited the official website of Quang Ninh province and the websites of provincial and municipal tourism-related institutions where the contact details of their key staff are displayed to make a list of potential participants. These sites are <www.quangninh.gov.vn>, <http://halongtourism.com.vn>, <http://www.halongbay.com.vn> <http://halongcity.gov.vn>. The introduction to and request for participation in the project were sent via email to the potential participants. Consent to be interviewed was indicated by a return email response. The researcher contacted 32 people and 20 participated in the interviews with the researcher, including eight senior officers from the Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLMD), six key officers from Quang Ninh Department of Tourism (QNDT) and six key officers from Quang Ninh Tourism Information and Promotion Centre (TIPC) (detailed interviewees' profiles are enclosed as appendix F). The interviews were conducted in the Vietnamese language, as many of participants could not speak English. Eighteen interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission and transcribed by the researcher; notes were taken by the researcher in two other interviews. Data was collected from 13 June 2016 to 8 August 2016 and the duration of an interview was between 40 and 50 minutes.

### 3.4.4 Data analysis

Unlike quantitative analysis, there are no obvious rules or procedures for analyzing qualitative data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The choice of methods adopted to analyze data depends on the focus of the research and the nature of the gathered data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The data collected through semi-structured interviews in this study was evaluated by thematic analysis, considered the most common approach in qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2012; Ritchie & Levis, 2003). Ritchie & Levis (2003) claim that the thematic framework encompasses four main steps including (1) identifying initial themes or concepts; (2) labelling or tagging the data; (3) sorting the data by theme or concept; and (4) summarizing or synthesizing the data. In this study, the data was collected from a small number of participants, so it was manually analyzed. Furthermore, due to time restrictions, the data analysis was performed in Vietnamese; therefore, the manual analysis was more effective than using computer assistance software. For instance, NVivo software is very popular for qualitative research analysis, but Vietnamese is not on the list of its assisted languages; thus, an analysis of Vietnamese data by this software is not applicable. All audio-recorded data was transcribed by the researcher. The data analysis was carried out in Vietnamese and the data findings were translated into English at a later date.

To start the analysis process, the researcher first carefully read the interview transcripts to identify the core themes and sub-themes from the data. Then, the

researcher meticulously read the interview transcripts sentence by sentence in order to explore their context. Sentences which had similar meanings were attached with the same labels that identified those themes referred to within a specific section of data. In the next step, the data was sorted by theme; this meant that labelled data with similar content or properties was placed together. Finally, the data was synthetized. At this stage, the labelled and sorted data was carefully inspected by the researcher to ensure that its meaning was relevant to the themes before the data was summarized in a clear and logical structure. While reducing the amount of data, the key term, phrases or expressions used by the interviewees were retained as much as possible and the textual interpretation would be as near as possible to the original expression. Then, the data findings were translated from Vietnamese into English by the researcher.

To ensure the validity of the data, in the context of this study, the researcher emailed each interviewee with a transcript of his (or her) conversation to ensure the accuracy of the content of the data. In order to address reliability of data, and to clarify that its objective was to ensure the stability of the findings as well as present an informed conclusion over time (Yin, 2009), the researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study and the question structure to avoid any error answers from the participants. Moreover, during the interview the researcher tried to establish a friendly ambiance by not using too formal a language and having an approachable attitude, facial expressions and gestures, and engaged in

positive interaction with each participant in order to encourage the involvement of the participants in conversation; and to enhance the credibility of their answers.

The data findings were then to be examined against existing literature reviews to gain an insight into the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development. In other words, while this study is mostly based on the primary data to achieve the research objectives; it also refers to secondary data to contextualize the findings of the research and to acquire a full understanding of the background of the major issues investigated by the researcher. Jennings (2010) contends that secondary data sources can be considered as the basis of the whole research project and may include public documents, archival documents, administrative documents, formal studies and reports. More importantly, it can enable researchers to contextualize phenomena and give the researcher the possibility of retesting or reinterpreting the data or empirical materials to specify the credibility of the original research (Jennings, 2010).

### 3.5 Ethical consideration

Ethics in the conduct of research mainly focuses on protecting the rights of participants involved in research (Jennings, 2010). To address the ethical issues in this study, the researcher has strictly adhered to the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Jennings, 2010).

Before the first contact, the researcher sent potential participants an information sheet, explaining the goals of the project and detailing expectations of participants. Also in this paper, the researcher clearly indicated that participation was completely voluntary, that participants could withdraw their consent from the research at any time and they had the right to refuse to answer any questions without consequences. To ensure informed consent, the researcher needed to obtain a written consent form from each participant before interviews were conducted.

The information sheet clearly informed the participants about the research purpose, the benefits as well as any burdens or risks of the research, the amount of time involved and how the findings would be used. Prior to each interview, the researcher reiterated the research aim to ensure clarity of purpose; and interviewees were always asked for permission before conversations were recorded.

Other aspects relating to informed consent and to ethical data collection the researcher considered important in this study were anonymity and confidentiality. These two terms sometimes can be interchangeable (Jennings, 2010). However, De Vaus (2002) argue that they are different and defines them as “Anonymity means that the researcher will not and cannot identify the respondent….and confidentiality simply means that the researcher can match

names with respondents but ensure that no one else will have access to them" (as cited in Jennings, 2010, p. 109). To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the information relating to participants' involvement in this project and the data provided by them was not disclosed outside the research. To ensure that the interview situations remained confidential, the interviews were conducted in a confidential place such private meeting rooms, in a secluded area of a café or in participants' own homes. With respect to anonymity, the participants were coded with an interview number and the abbreviation of the institution where they are employed to avoid using names in the research. For example, the first participant from Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLMD) was coded as 01HLMD. The interview recordings were stored on a password-protected PC to which only the researcher and the supervisor had access.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology that was used in this research. A qualitative methodology was employed in this research as the project aimed at understanding individual thoughts, opinions and perceptions in the context of their social realities. This method was appropriate for this study as it enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development and why these barriers were created.

This chapter has provided a general view of the research context. The target study is the Ha Long Bay area – a well-known tourist destination in the Northeast of Vietnam. Due to its spectacular scenery and its recognition as Natural World Heritage Site by UNESCO, this destination has experienced a rapid development. On the one hand, this achievement has been significant for local economy; on the other hand, this has led to adverse impacts on the environment in the area. Ecotourism is targeted by local authorities as a potential solution to balance tourism development and environmental conservation and to foster sustainable tourism development in the area. Although the region has enormous potential for ecotourism development, this form of tourism is still in the initial stage and it is not yet effectively established. Thus, finding the way to develop ecotourism in this area is an important and urgent task for local authorities.

Purposive sampling was applied in this research allowing the researcher to approach suitable participants who had rich knowledge and experience in the area of the research. In line with the purpose of the study, the research data collection was mainly based on semi-structured interviews. Twenty senior local tourism officers were selected to be interviewed online through Skype to address the research questions with due regard to ethical considerations. The analysis of the manually collected data was carried out on the basis of thematic analysis approach with the findings ultimately transcribed from Vietnamese to English by the researcher herself.

# CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the main research findings on the barriers to the involvement of local government in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. It examines the local tourism officers' understanding of ecotourism, their perception of the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development and their roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development. It also discusses the current situation of ecotourism development in the focus area and identifies the obstacles to local government involvement in its development in the Ha Long Bay area. Concurrently, the chapter refers to and compares these findings with the previous studies associated with local governance in tourism in general, and in ecotourism in particular, to be able to generalize the research findings.

## 4.2 The incomplete understanding of ecotourism concept among the local tourism officers

The findings show that in general, the respondents have an incomplete understanding of ecotourism and their viewpoints are not unified. In defining ecotourism, the majority of respondents associated it with nature-based tourism

that has little impact by people on the natural environment. The following quotes are the representative comments of the respondents of this study about their understanding of ecotourism:

> I think ecotourism is a type of tourism based on natural resources without the forceful intervention of people (17TIPC).

> In my opinion, ecotourism basically is a type of tourism linked with the environment and nature, …the principles of ecotourism, I don't know about that (13QNDT).

Some other participants pointed out the elements of environmental conservation and sustainable development in their definition of ecotourism. Only few participants mentioned the components of local culture and involvement of local community in ecotourism; and none of them talked about the tourist satisfaction element. When being asked about the principles of ecotourism, almost all of respondents did not know what the principles of ecotourism were. Additionally, there is a misunderstanding of ecotourism with other types of tourism by an interviewee, who claimed that ecotourism can be used interchangeably with nature-based tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism and green tourism.

These findings reflect the complexity of the ecotourism concept as do the diversity of ecotourism definitions highlighted by many authors, including

Fennell (1999), Fennell & Dowling (2003), Hill & Gate (2009), Page (2002) and Weaver (2008), who explored over 80 different definitions of ecotourism in the tourism literature. Despite a lack of consensus with regard to an ecotourism definition in the tourism literature (Black, 2007; Fennell, 1999; Hill & Gate, 2009; Honey, 1999: Horner: 2004: Page, 2002), there are some common agreements on the core elements of ecotourism, which are nature-based, environmentally educative and sustainably managed (Beeton, 1998; Fennell, 1999; Weaver, 2001). Nevertheless, the majority of participants of this study only defined ecotourism as a type of tourism based on natural resources coupled with little human impact on the environment illustrating that their understanding of ecotourism is both narrow and limited. Furthermore, Dowling (1996) suggests that ecotourism should be guided by its five main principles, which include those previously mentioned with the addition of benefitting local communities and generating tourist satisfaction. However, most of participants in this study lacked knowledge around these principles.

## 4.3 The perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in the Ha Long Bay area – a view of local tourism officers

The findings demonstrate that local tourism officers generally acknowledge the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area as ecotourism supports conservation of Ha Long Bay's natural resources

and environment. They argue that ecotourism is a type of tourism that has little impact on the environment, so this helps preserve Ha Long Bay's natural resources. Others mention that ecotourism would require less construction of tourism facilities than other types of tourism, therefore, it could enhance the primitive state of Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site. Furthermore, they state that ecotourism is important as it may help reduce the congestion of tourist flow at some popular caves and grottos and beaches on the Bay. The following statements illustrate how the respondents of this study perceive the importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in the Ha Long Bay area:

> Ecotourism plays a vital role for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area because it meets the criteria of tourism development in Ha Long Bay: which means that development should be aligned with conservation to preserve Ha Long Bay's values for the future generations (07HLMD).

> Actually, tourism activities here comprise mainly mass tourism and that adversely influences the ecological environment. In my view, ecotourism may reduce the stress on the environment and the overload of tourists at some popular sites on the Bay such as Thien Cung and Sung Sot cave and Titop beach (04HLMD).

Only few respondents perceived ecotourism to be important because it can help to raise the awareness of local community and tourists about the protection of natural environment and the promotion of local traditional culture. In relation to this point, one interviewee stated that:

> In the context that tourism is experiencing a rapid development, ecotourism is fundamental for sustainable tourism development here as it contributes to preserve the natural and cultural resources and increase the awareness of locals and tourists about the conservation of the ecological environment and traditional cultural features (18TIPC).

These findings are consistent with Fennell & Dowling (2003) who suggest that ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters sustainable tourism development principles. However, when discussing the relationship of ecotourism with sustainable tourism, Weaver (2001) asserts that the two principles of sustainability frequently emphasized in the ecotourism context are that ecotourism should support local economies and conservation. In contrast, the World Ecotourism Summit in Québec in 2002 suggested that ecotourism addresses all the issues of sustainable tourism, but focuses more on specific ecosystems and traditional cultures. With reference to the tourism literature, it can be observed that the local tourism officers in Ha Long Bay area perceive ecotourism to be important as sustainable tourism development but fail to look further than the conservation aspect of Ha Long Bay's natural environment and ignore other important principles of ecotourism that enhance sustainable tourism development such as its significant contribution to local economy and the preservation of traditional cultural attributes.

## 4.4 Current situation of ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area and forecasts for its development in the future

The findings of the research illustrate that the Ha Long Bay area has potential to develop ecotourism; but at this early stage only small-scale ecotourism activities exist. The majority of respondents shared the same opinion that the Ha Long Bay area is endowed with diverse resources that are strategically useful for potential ecotourism in this area. The concept of ecotourism is relatively new and eco activities have only been implemented by a few tourism operators who want to target the Western market. While local government pursues ecotourism as a solution for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area for the future, currently they are only at the initial phase of implementation. They are yet to equip tourism enterprises with general guidelines for developing ecotourism in the region in systematic manner. At present, there is little investment from the public and private sector in ecotourism in this area. The following quotations illustrate the current situation of ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area:

> Ha Long Bay area has the enormous potential for developing nature-based tourism such as ecotourism. Its resources include a unique limestone island system, coral reefs, mangrove forests; particularly the area possesses numerous endemic plants recorded in the Red List. However, at present only few of resources are harnessed for ecotourism and ecotourism activities here is still unprofessional and not well managed by the local governmental agencies (09QNDT).

> Ha Long Bay area contains the fundamental elements to develop ecotourism. For example, the area has unique scenic beauty, many grottos and caves and nice beaches; and it is also rich in cultural and historical tourism assets. For instance, Ha Long Bay was a cradle of primitive Vietnamese people through three consecutive cultures, namely Soi Nhu, Cai Beo and Ha Long; and Ha Long also has the original characteristics of fishing community. On the other hand, the endemic plants in Ha Long Bay recognized by UNESCO also constitute an advantage to ecotourism. Nevertheless, currently ecotourism is not yet very developed in the whole province nor in Ha Long Bay area (12QNDT).

The findings show that there are few options for ecotourism tours in the area and the existing ecotourism activities available appear poor and unattractive as at this time only a few operators are involved in offering ecotourism services. Most of them are lacking in experience in ecotourism organization and development. In relation to these points, some respondents of this study reported that:

> The existing types of ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area are still poor, the main activity here now is visiting the Bay by boats and admiring landscapes (20TIPC).

> In my opinion, ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area is just at a start. The main ecotourism activities there include: visiting caves and grottos, kayaking, visiting fishing villages by bamboos boats; but I think these activities are unprofessionally organized (03HLMD).

In the discussion of how to improve the current problem of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area for the future, the majority of respondents commented that local government should be a key player in this field. They mentioned that although the region has unique resources for ecotourism, the region is facing acute problems, such as the scant awareness of sustainable tourism development by tourism stakeholders, the serious degradation of natural environment, limited tourism infrastructures and the lack of professional skills of the labor force in the tourism industry. Therefore, to foster ecotourism in this area in the future, local authorities need to successfully deal with all these problems. The issues were pointed out by some respondents from this study as is shown by the following comments:

> The potential for ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area is great. Nevertheless, in the next 5 to 10 years, ecotourism will not reach a state of much improvement as ecotourism is a new concept and local authorities must succeed in raising the awareness of sustainable tourism development, dealing with the environmental pollution and the lack of infrastructure with stakeholder groups. In 10 to 20-year period, if all the above issues are well addressed, ecotourism development in this area will be remarkable (20TIPC).

> Ha Long has the enormous potential to develop ecotourism, as tourists' demand for ecotourism increases expodentially. There are good opportunities for ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. However, this development will only become achievable in 10 to 20 years if the Province successfully tackles environmental issues and has the appropriate incentives to attract

> investors in ecotourism and increase capacity-building for tourism human resources, especially labor in ecotourism (04HLMD).

Conversely, other participants feel more optimistic about the future of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. They believe that ecotourism is the future trend of global tourism; therefore, the public and private sector must be focused systematically on this type of tourism in the area. Some of the participants believe that the Ha Long Bay area has the great potential to develop ecotourism currently and because the Province favours sustainable tourism development, appropriate strategies and policies to ensure ecotourism development in the area, it will be set up in the near future. Some of the informants of this study stated that:

> In the coming 10 to 20 years, I believe that ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area will be much better because even you want it or not, this is the common tourism development trend in the world. So, destinations must offer tourism products that match customers' desires to be able to attract them, such as ecotourism (13QNDT).

> In 10 to 20 years, ecotourism will be developed in the Ha Long Bay area as Quang Ninh province is directed toward sustainable tourism development and shifting from the "brown" development to the "green" one. Coupled with this, the advantages in natural tourism resources and the increased demand in ecotourism from tourist markets will foster ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area in the future (02HLMD).

The above findings link with Butler (1980)'s Destination Life Cycle model, which suggests that in its early stage, tourist services and facilities at a tourist area are limited and the destination attracts tourists mainly because of its natural features. Butler (1980) also emphasizes that planners and policies-makers play a vital role the development of a tourist area; this viewpoint is consistent with the findings of this study, which indicate that despite the Ha Long Bay area having great potential in natural resources, the area will move from a young ecotourism destination to its advanced stage providing the right actions are taken by local government in order to address the environmental issues, there is an increased ecotourism awareness by related stakeholders and the tourism labor force upgrades its qualifications. More importantly, some participants of this study argue that the move of local government to a more sustainable development direction would considerably contribute to the achievement of ecotourism development in this area.

## 4.5 Local government's roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area

Local government (at the provincial level under central authorities) is responsible for planning, designing and implementing tourism development strategies within the region. It aligns to national tourism strategies ensuring that local tourism agendas include ecotourism development (Vietnam Tourism Law, 2005). In

terms of local government's roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, the majority of the local tourism officer participants in this study assume existing statutory mandates and functions in their institutions are adequate and appropriate; however, they need to better undertake and promote these responsibilities in fostering sustainable tourism and ecotourism development in this area. In relation to this point, some respondents of this study stated that:

> In my opinion, the existing statutory mandates and functions of the Quang Ninh Tourism Department are appropriate. We do not need to add any more responsibilities. However, we need to find out the effective measures to address sustainable tourism development (13QNDT).

> In fact, I do not think we need to supplement any roles or responsibilities to Ha Long Bay Management Department. The existing mandates are sufficient and appropriate. Only thing is how to promote all of these functions and duties to boost ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area (01HLMD).

In an examination of how local government fulfils its roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, the findings show that the Province has established a Regional Tourism Master Plan to 2020 with vision towards 2030, with an emphasis on the need to develop ecotourism for sustainable tourism in the region. The Plan also identifies potential ecotourism

attractions and designates ecotourism sites in the region. The Province has also formulated the Detailed Plan for the Conservation and Development of Ha Long Bay's Values, which assigns priority zones for ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay. These development plans are the responsibility of local government as land use planning and specifying local ecotourism attractions are key functions of local government's ecotourism development (Fennell & Dowling, 2003). More importantly, this plan would provide local government with the strategic direction and foundation for their further involvement in ecotourism development. The following accounts illustrate local government's implementation towards ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area:

> Recently, Quang Ninh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group (Thai Lan) has drawn up the Tourism Master Plan for Quang Ninh province to 2020, with vision towards 2030, which points out the necessity to develop ecotourism in the region to ensure sustainable development and designates the areas appropriate for ecotourism development (13QNDT).

> The Province has issued the Proposal for developing tourism products in the region that was suggested by Quang Ninh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism. This Proposal recommends many areas suitable for ecotourism development, including in Ha Long Bay area (10QNDT).

> The Detailed Plan for Conserving and Developing Ha Long Bay World Heritage's Values approved by Quang Ninh province in 2015 points out several priority areas for developing ecotourism in Ha Long Bay for the purpose of pursuing sustainable tourism development (02HLMD).

Although attractions have been identified and designated as ecotourism sites in the region, the Province is yet to introduce any specific strategy, plan, mechanism or policy to foster ecotourism development in this area. These are essential tasks that the local government needs to undertake to boost ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area as the establishment of an effective regional ecotourism policy would help balance stakeholders' interests, thereby encouraging their involvement in ecotourism. Furthermore, it would enhance the conservation of the natural environment, benefit host communities and promulgate environmental awareness (Fennell and Dowling, 2003). Fennell and Dowling (2003) agree that local government is a key player in ecotourism development at a destination and is responsible for framing appropriate regional ecotourism planning, policies and strategies. In addition, the regional ecotourism planning needs to incorporate a range of economic, social and environmental factors. The following comments of some respondents illustrate that Quang Ninh province ought to introduce further specific guidance, strategies, mechanisms and policies for ecotourism development in the region:

> The development of ecotourism products and ecotourism sites is just illustrated in the provincial Tourism Master Plan and in the feasibility study. Actually, in the region, there is not yet a general guideline or strategy for ecotourism development. The province needs to shape policies to attract private sector's investments (09QNDT).

> The Province is lacking an appropriate mechanism and clear policies on ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Indeed, my institution, the Ha Long Bay Management Department also has not yet arrived to put forward a concrete proposal for a comprehensive development of ecotourism as indicated by the Master Plan for Ha Long Bay Conservation and Development (02HLMD).

> It is necessary to establish incentive policies in terms of financial and technical support to encourage the involvement of tourism entrepreneurs and local community in ecotourism (01HLMD).

Local government assumes the responsibility for destination marketing and tourism promotion (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Such activities help to enhance the image of an area and strengthen the destination's impact in the marketplace (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). However, in the context of the Ha Long Bay area, the findings show that local government does not perform ecotourism marketing and promotion well. Currently, the provincial tourism promotion agency is mainly focused on providing tourists with information related to ecotourism in the region, such as ecotourism attractions, activities, access and accommodation

through its website, guidebooks, brochures, tourism fairs and in face-to-face communication with tourists at the visitor information centre. There is not yet an overall marketing strategy or any specific promotion campaigns for stimulating ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. While the provincial Tourism Department has provided local tourism service providers: taxi drivers, souvenir sellers, and staff at restaurants and on tourist boats with instruction to enhance good customer service, local government has not yet organized any public campaign to increase the awareness of local community and tourism enterprises of the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Nor has there been any educational training for furthering their knowledge of ecotourism development. Some participants stated that this issue is a result of the lack of general guidelines from the Provincial People' Committee for ecotourism marketing and promotion in the area and there are few ecotourism products to advertise. On this point, some respondents of this study commented:

> With regard to ecotourism advertisement, Quang Ninh Tourism Information and Promotion Centre has only concentrated on providing ecotourism-related information on websites, guidebooks, brochures and tourism fairs. The Centre informs tourists about ecotourism products at tourism office when it is asked (18TIPC).

> Currently, Quang Ninh Tourism Information and Promotion Centre is yet to have any specific promotion campaigns for ecotourism; this is because of the lack of an overall guideline from the Province for this. Moreover, there are not yet many ecotourism products or projects available that the Centre can advertise for (16TIPC).

## 4.6 Barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area

The findings in this study related to those factors which hinder local government involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area are grouped around common themes, which are then classified into six categories ranging from limited understanding about ecotourism to the lack of resources. The main types of barriers identified in this study include: (1) the limited knowledge about the ecotourism concept, lack of professional skills and competence among local tourism officers, (2) the low level of ecotourism awareness amongst local residents and tourism operators, (3) the lack of commitment to ecotourism implementation by local authorities, (4) the lack of communication, cooperation and coordination between local tourism-related departments and other stakeholder groups, (5) the lack of active involvement of tourism enterprises, local residents and tourists in ecotourism, and (6) the lack of resources for ecotourism development.

### 4.6.1 Limited knowledge of ecotourism concept and lack of professional skills and competence among local tourism officers

The findings earlier presented in the section 4.2 demonstrate that the majority of participating local tourism officers in this study have an incomplete understanding and have different opinions of the ecotourism concept from those suggested by tourism literature and the industry. Consequently, this can result in barriers to their successful involvement in ecotourism development because local government is mandated to draw up the regional ecotourism strategies, planning, Masterplans and incentive policies to develop ecotourism in the region (Vietnam Tourism Law, 2005). As they do not fully understand the concept of ecotourism, it is difficult for them to effectively fulfil these tasks.

Additionally, the findings show that coupled with their limited understanding of the ecotourism concept, their lack of experience, professional skills and competence also create obstacles to successful involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. The participants commented that many local tourism officers lack the skills and competence for task performance. As ecotourism is a new type of tourism in Ha Long, local tourism officers with limited knowledge and poor experience in ecotourism development find it difficult to be able to formulate relevant regional plans, strategies and incentives for developing ecotourism in this area. This phenomenon was also examined in Silva & McDill (2004), revealing that the inadequate knowledge of local

government agencies about ecotourism may restrict their ability to plan, devise strategies and policies, communicate these to relevant stakeholders and provide marketing, education and training programs. In relation to these points, the respondents of this study commented that:

> Another obstacle is the lack of professional skills and the limited ability in task performance of many local tourism officers. We should recognize this weakness. It is clear that not all tourism officers can fully understand the requirements for the development of different types of tourism, especially ecotourism (12QNDT).

> It can be seen that the knowledge and experience of local tourism officers about ecotourism development is still limited. Therefore, it is hard for them to shape the appropriate policies for ecotourism development in this area (10QNDT).

The lack of professional skills and abilities of many local tourism officers is also illustrated through the ineffective tourism marketing and promotional activity. This weakness is identified by some participants as a difficulty for ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Some respondents commented that the regional marketing and promotion for ecotourism in the country and abroad is poor and unprofessional. There is yet neither a general marketing strategy nor specific promotional campaign for advertising Ha Long Bay ecotourism in Vietnam and abroad. Therefore, it is difficult for both potential investors and tourists to approach necessary information about Ha Long Bay ecotourism. The tourism websites of some local tourism-related institutions are said to be not

professionally designed and lacking in information. On this issue, the respondents of this study made the specific comments such as:

> Another obstacle is the ineffective marketing and promotion done by local authorities for tourism in general and ecotourism in particular. These activities are unprofessionally organized not only in Vietnam, but also abroad. Therefore, it is unlikely for tourists to get access to accurate information about Ha Long Bay ecotourism (12QNDT).

> The marketing or promotion from the province for ecotourism is not well organized. This leads to the lack of information for tourists and consequently this impedes choice of ecotourism products from Ha Long. Furthermore, the tourism websites of some governmental tourism-related agencies, for example these of Ha Long City and Ha Long Bay Management Department are very poor in tourism information; these do no provide tourist with an overview of Ha Long Bay tourism. I think this weakness needs to be improved as soon as possible (01HLMD).

> The marketing and promotion for tourism and as well as ecotourism are not sufficiently invested by local authorities and these are not professionally implemented. Moreover, there is not yet an overall marketing strategy for tourism in the long term in our region (14QNDT).

These findings support the view of Silva & McDill (2004) who draw attention to the links between ineffectual task performance and planning, making policy and marketing. In the US case study, in Pennsylvania and Maryland undertaken by

Silva & McDill (2004), the interviewees criticized the lack of professional skills and capabilities of local tourism promotion agencies in establishing marketing strategies; this resulted in a restricted ecotourism attraction base in this area. This case study also pointed out the lack of education for supporting enterprises and local community and the problem of ineffective planning by local authorities, for instance, not all related stakeholders were included in the tourism planning. As a result, the private sector and local community were unable to access the necessary information related to the ecotourism sector hindering its development in this region.

### 4.6.2 Low level of awareness of ecotourism among local residents and tourism enterprises about ecotourism

The findings identify that the lack of ecotourism awareness among related stakeholders, particularly local residents, is one of the main barriers to local government performance in addressing ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Where the local community does not have an understanding of the benefits of ecotourism, there is no incentive to be involved in ecotourism projects. Where there is little concern for environmental protection, certain activities in the region may have an adverse effect on sustainable tourism development. This finding has also been raised in a study conducted by Wang et al. (2016) who contend that the limited knowledge of ecotourism amongst local

residents in Taomi village in Taiwain hindered its involvement. On this point, the respondents of this study commented:

> The knowledge of local tourism officers about ecotourism is still poor and the awareness of tourism enterprises and local communities about ecotourism is also limited. This is among the main obstacles to ecotourism development in the area (09QNDT).

> Local residents are not very aware of ecotourism and sustainable tourism; therefore, they take many actions detrimental to the environment, such as dropping litter or directly discharging wastewater into the Bay (15TIPC).

The findings indicate that not only local community, but also local tourism enterprises in the Ha Long Bay area have restricted views of ecotourism, resulting in their limited involvement in ecotourism activity. Only few companies serving European and American markets engage in providing selected ecotourism tours; these involve visiting fishing villages on the Bay by traditional bamboo boats; offering tourists the authentic experiences of the fishing community's life; visiting pearl culture farms; sailing on lakes and lagoons on the Bay and visiting some remote islands and mountainous areas. However, most of these activities are small-scale, irregular, unappealing and not professionally organized. More often, most tourism operators focus on mass tourism by providing sailing excursions to admire Ha Long Bay's landscape and trips into the caves and grottos on the Bay. In relation to this point, one respondent of this study stated:

As I have previously explained, almost all enterprises in Ha Long do not fully understand the ecotourism concept. Only some companies that are serving European and American tourists are little aware of ecotourism, community-based tourism and sustainable tourism. Others are not much aware of both existing tourism resources and environmental protection; so they are mainly targeting mass tourism. Actually, in Ha Long now, only enterprises that are linked with customers from the developed countries that have a high demand on ecotourism get involved in ecotourism activities; but these are only in the initial stage (13QNDT).

In my view, there are only some local tourism operators, which have participated in ecotourism activities, but these are in small-scale and not very professionally organized. One typical example of these is Indochina Sail Company that is providing tourists with the tour visiting Vong Vieng and Cua Van fishing villages by bamboo boats, making tourists practise fishing by rod and net and having tourists enjoy the experience of a daily countryside life tour at Yen Duc village. Other businesses offer the tour visiting pearl farms, lakes and lagoons on the Bay (02HLMD).

### 4.6.3 Lack of commitment to implementation

The results in this study illustrate that the commitment of the Province to the adoption of sustainable tourism approach in general and to the implementation of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area is not strong; this is one of the main obstacles to ecotourism development in this area. Some participants in this study commented that although on the official documents, the Province appeared to be pursuing sustainability for socio-economic and tourism

development, in practice the Province is more focused on economic growth rather than environmental protection or ecotourism development. The respondents of this study observed that the projects for leisure, entertainment or infrastructure are given more priority from local government than ecotourism projects. This issue was also emphasized in the study of Brokaj (2014), Hall (2008) and Ruhanen (2013) who claim that in general, many tourism policies pursue more economic interests rather than environmental protection. Fennell & Dowling (2003) add that local government often has a dual mandate of economic development and natural conservation; thus, it is very challenging for them to find a balance between development and conservation. However, in the case of Ha Long Bay, the low level of commitment from local government to the implementation of ecotourism development to some extent may result from their limited understanding of how ecotourism can benefit their economy as suggested earlier. This finding is consistent with the argument of Fennell (2008) who claims that the lack of knowledge of ecotourism benefits by government tourism officers may stop them in persevering with ecotourism planning. The following accounts demonstrate the low level of commitment by local government to ecotourism implementation in the Ha Long Bay area:

> The need for a high economic growth is another obstacle to ecotourism development because people want to achieve the rapid economic development; consequently, they would be less concerned about the protection of natural resources and environment……. Generally speaking, on paper the province

is pursuing the vision and goals of sustainable development, but in practice its implementation does not always go in this direction (13QNDT).

In my view, ecotourism has not yet developed here and it is not yet a real focus of the Province. For example, the Eco-museum project is a driving force to foster ecotourism activities in the Ha Long Bay area; however, up to now, this project does not run well because of the lack of investment and attention from local authorities to it. On the contrary, tourism resorts, theme parks and infrastructure projects have been more prioritized than ecotourism projects (01HLMD).

Currently, the investments of the Province are lacking far-reaching vision; the Province has focused more on the projects that can bring quick benefits. For instance, both the project of filling up Bai Chay Sea done by the Royal Joint-Stock Company in the past and the current massive investments of SunGroup for the tourism projects in Ha Long, appear to be more in for the short-term interests than sustainable development (06HLMD).

### 4.6.4 Lack of communication, cooperation and coordination

The lack of communication and cooperation between local authorities and tourism enterprises is another substantial barrier to ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area. The respondents of this study observed that the local tourism-related departments do not have regular communication with the private sector in order to understand their requirements and expectations. Therefore, the regional tourism policies and regulations imposed by local government seldom

match the expectation of tourism businesses. These agencies, such as the Provincial Tourism Department, Ha Long Bay Management Department, Provincial Tourism Information and Promotion Centre have little communication with tourism enterprises, especially travel agencies, tour operators, tourist boat companies and other tourist service providers to be able to inform them about the regional ecotourism strategic directions and planning. Hence the opportunity to raise their awareness on the importance of ecotourism and sustainable tourism development is lost. As a consequence, there is a lack of effective cooperation between local government and tourism businesses in ecotourism development in this area and only a moderate interest and involvement of the private sector in ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area. On this issue, the respondents of this study made some specific comments:

> It seems that the local government departments currently are separated from the local tourism enterprises. They are not updated on the need for development from the tourism market. For instance, the tourism-related departments did not recognize some tourist sites that are suggested by many tourism operators and are in high demand from the tourist market. I think the link with tourism enterprises is very important (01HLMD).

> In my opinion, the cooperation between the local government departments and the private sector, especially travel agencies with regard to ecotourism development is not very well attached. I think they need to work together in

> order to clarify the expectation of both sides and jointly set up action programs for ecotourism development (17TIPC).

Furthermore, the participants in this study also indicated that there is a lack of coordination within different local governmental departments and between Quang Ninh province with other neighboring regions in terms of ecotourism development. This limited coordination leads to an overlapping of roles and responsibilities and scant consensus between them in the implementation of ecotourism policies. Tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, is under the leadership and management of various governmental departments. In the Ha Long Bay context, tourism is influenced by the following local sub-departments: Ha Long Bay Management Department, Tourism, Culture and Sports, Transport, Natural Resources and the Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development and so on. Therefore, a need for good coordination between these institutions is crucial for local ecotourism development. Furthermore, tourism is linked regionally, however, the coordination between Quang Ninh province and other neighboring regions in ecotourism development is not strong impacting on the implementation of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. In relation to those points, the participants of this study stated that:

> One of the barriers to ecotourism development in Ha Long is the lack of appropriate coordination within related government institutions on site. I can say

> that currently their coordination is not close; consequently, their functions are sometimes overlapped and they have not a common view (12QNDT).

> The coordination within local government institutions in Ha Long and between them and other related departments in neighboring regions is not close; therefore, to some extent this hinders Ha Long tourism development in general and ecotourism development in particular (14QNDT).

These findings are consistent with those raised by Fennell (2008) and Silva & McDill (2004), which claim that the lack of cooperation between different stakeholder groups, including the public sector, private sector, non-governmental organizations may result in barriers to successful ecotourism development at a specific destination. Additionally, Churugsa et al. (2007) stress that coordination is an essential role of government in tourism because a key mandate of any tourism planner is to encourage the involvement and cooperation of the diverse stakeholders in the tourism planning process. Hall (2008), believes coordination for tourism needs to be considered both within and between the different levels of government to avoid the overlap between these agencies and with the private sector to support effective tourism strategies.

Issues with communication and cooperation between local government and other stakeholder groups has been discussed previously with a focus on problems between local government and local community, Silva & McDill (2004) and

Wang et al., (2016). In the case study in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the United States conducted by Silva & McDill (2004), the lack of communication by local government resulted in a lack of interest from local residents in ecotourism projects. Similarly, in the study of Wang et al. (2016), the villagers in Taomi village in Taiwain were not aware of the benefits of ecotourism and not interested in ecotourism projects due to the lack of effective communication between local authorities and local community. However, it is evident that in the case of the Ha Long Bay area, the participants consistently raised the issue of lack of communication and cooperation between local government and tourism enterprises. It should be noted that the context of the the Ha Long Bay area is different from the other studies where specific ecotourism projects have been available, but in Ha Long ecotourism planning is still in its early stage with access to only a few ecotourism projects. Thus, communication and cooperation between local authorities and the private sector in this phase is fundamental to discovering common ground and establishing specific ecotourism projects before attracting the involvement of the local community.

### 4.6.5 Limited involvement of tourism enterprises and local community in ecotourism due to their short-term interest view

The findings demonstrate that local tourism enterprises' involvement in ecotourism is limited because ecotourism requires a long-term investment,

however, enterprises often pursue short-term and immediate economic gain rather than long-term sustained benefits of ecotourism. In relation to this point, the respondents of this study commented:

> Ecotourism development asks for a long-term investment; however, businesses often pursue a short interests view. Therefore, not many tourism enterprises want to invest or participate in ecotourism (11QNDT).

> A return from profits of ecotourism take longer than for other investments; for instance, the investment in a tourist beach can gain profits much faster than in ecotourism. Enterprises often prioritize the options that have prompt profits (06HLMD).

The limited involvement of entrepreneurs in ecotourism was also discussed in the case study in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the United States undertaken by Silva & McDill (2004). However, in this study, Silva & McDill (2004) focused on the unattractive features of ecotourism as discouraging factors to tourism businesses' participation in ecotourism. They argue that ecotourism has unique characteristics that not many firms have enough knowledge and experience to run a well organized ecotourism business. Participants of the study in the Ha Long Bay area, on the other hand, identified the pursuit of fast profits by the local tourism operator as a barrier to their willingness to be involved in ecotourism. The context of these two case studies is different as the lack of involvement of tourism enterprises in ecotourism in the case of Ha Long Bay was viewed from

the local government perspective, while in the study of Silva & McDill (2004) it was examined from the viewpoint of tourism enterprises.

The findings also show that the short-term interest view is another cause of limited involvement in ecotourism by local residents in the Ha Long Bay area apart from lack of knowledge about ecotourism as earlier presented. Some participants of this study have observed that the local community has a familiarity with the practice of exploiting the natural resources for their own economic benefits; hence, they are not very interested in participating in ecotourism activities that are associated with the specific criteria or rules for the protection of the natural environment and resources. Furthermore, local people mainly get involved in ecotourism activities with the expectation of generating immediate economic incomes, not for sustainable tourism development. Therefore, they would easily abandon an ecotourism enterprise when their hope of fast income is not achievable. These findings agree with the perspectives of Wei & Yang (2013) in the case study of ecotourism development in ShiShanYang in China. Wei & Yang (2013) claim that local residents appear to have limited knowledge and awareness about sustainable tourism development and often have a “short interest” view. To deal with this situation, Wei & Yang (2013) argue that it is necessary to educate them and raise their awareness of the importance of ecological protection and sustainable development. It is useful to make them understand that by being involved in ecotourism, it will not only provide them

with sustained economic benefits, but also contribute to preserving their traditional culture and enhance their sense of ownership. An improved awareness would help them be more involved in ecotourism (Wei & Yang, 2013). In relation to this issue, some respondents of this study commented that:

> Local people have been more familiar with the exploitation of natural resources for earning their living; so they do not support ecotourism that generally goes along with the principles of protection of natural resources and environment. Moreover, they would easily stop joining ecotourism activities when their expectations from that are not satisfying (18TIPC).

> Local people get involved in ecotourism mostly by pursuing economic benefits, not by supporting sustainable development (08HLMD).

The lack or ineffective participation of related stakeholders is identified as a major barrier to successful sustainable tourism development and ecotourism development at a destination (Waligo et al., 2013; Wei & Yang, 2013). According to Fennell & Dowling (2003), local government as a key player in ecotourism development at a specific destination can perform a crucial role in identifying stakeholders' demands and balancing their interests in order to involve them in ecotourism development processes. The previous studies demonstrate that Stakeholder Theory founded by Freeman (1984) is an effective instrument helping destination planners, managers and policy-makers attract related stakeholders into tourism development, in general and particularly in

ecotourism development, as the theory provides them with a conceptual framework for managing stakeholders' interests (Byrd, 2007; Waligo et al., 2013; Wei & Yang, 2013). For instance, in the case study in ecotourism development in ShiShanYang in China, Wei & Yang, (2013) has suggested an ecotourism development model based on Stakeholder Theory. This model shows how the relevant incentives and regulations would be an effective tool for encouraging the private sector, local residents and tourists to take part in the ecological protection and sustainable tourism development. Local government has a crucial role in interacting and establishing mechanisms to get these stakeholders participating in ecotourism (Wei & Yang, 2013). Coupled with Stakeholder Theory, Collaboration Theory pioneered by Gray (1989) is also acknowledged as a fundamental approach to tourism development and management since it enhances mutual benefits among related stakeholders; thereby fostering sustainable tourism development (Aas et al., 2005; Graci, 2013; Hall, 1999).

In the context of the Ha Long Bay area, where ecotourism is just in its initial stage, the leadership of local government needs to be proactive to balance the interests of other stakeholders and encourage them to be active participants in ecotourism. In this phase, the involvement of the private sector in ecotourism is also critical for increasing investments in ecotourism and providing tourists with available ecotourism products and services. Natural tourism resources in the Ha Long Bay area are mainly publicly owned and managed, not individually; thus

local residents' involvement in ecotourism can be achieved through their partnership with tourism enterprises providing tourists with ecotourism services. They also can support ecotourism through their engagement in preserving the local tourism resources and environment.

### 4.6.6 Lack of involvement of tourists

Some participants of this study identified the lack of involvement of tourists as an obstacle to ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. They commented that currently, the majority of tourists to Ha Long Bay come for sightseeing and leisure purposes. Only a small percentage of tourists pursue interests in ecotourism. Furthermore, the domestic and Asian markets account for a dominant proportion of tourists to Ha Long Bay area, but in reality, the demand of these markets in ecotourism in this area is still small. Most of ecotourists to Ha Long Bay come from the European and American markets and additional, groups of pupils or students and researchers who are interested in ecotourism in Ha Long Bay for study purposes. Some respondents from this study observed that:

> Currently, not many tourists to Ha Long Bay choose ecotourism products. In fact, according to the survey data of the EU project, the average stays of tourists in Ha Long Bay area reaches 2.5 nights, but the percentage of tourists who participate in discovering the local natural and cultural experiences is still small.

> Most of tourists come to Ha Long simply for visiting the Bay, having a relaxing time and enjoying the local cuisine (18TIPC).

> A large proportion of tourists to Ha Long Bay come from the domestic and Asian markets; however only few Asian tourists participate in ecotourism tours here. In general, tourists who come from western countries are more interested in ecotourism in Ha Long (09QNDT).

> The number of international tourists have participated in ecotourism activities in Ha Long Bay area is still limited. Ecotourism is mainly a subject of interests of the groups of pupils and students, and researchers from the field of environment, agriculture and forestry (16TIPC).

The low demand for ecotourism experiences in the Ha Long Bay area is because ecotourism in this area is just in its infancy and ecotourism-related services are still few and unappealing. This finding is in line with Butler's (1980) tourist area life cycle model, which suggests that the exploration stage is characterized by a low level of tourist visitation, due to destination's tourist product infancy. Furthermore, the model also indicates that in the following stages of involvement and development, the increased marketing efforts from the destination would generate growing support and acceptance of the product by the market (Butler, 1980). So, in the context of Ha Long Bay area, more focused marketing and advertising from the local tourism industry, especially from local authorities and tourism enterprises would be critical for increasing the awareness of the tourist

market about ecotourism products in the Ha Long Bay area; thereby contributing to stimulate their demands and extend the tourist market areas.

### 4.6.7 Lack of resources

#### *4.6.7.1 Lack of resources due to the environmental degradation*

The environmental degradation, resulting from socio-economic activities, tourism and local residents' daily life is identified by a number of participants as a serious challenge for ecotourism development. To be precise, Ha Long Bay seawater is polluted by rubbish, domestic wastewater and the coal mining industry. Moreover, the projects of land reclamation for the purpose of urbanization and tourism development have narrowed the Bay and mangrove forests and increased the amount of deposits at the seabed. These have negatively affected the Ha Long Bay ecological environment and reduced the resources for ecotourism development in this area as ecotourism is primarily based on the natural resources and environment (Fennell, 1999; Page, 2002; Weaver, 2001). On this issue, the participants in this study stated that:

> The Bay is contaminated by rubbish and domestic wastewater; and the reclamation projects for infrastructure, urbanization and tourism have narrowed the buffer zone of Ha Long Bay World Heritage and have increased the volume of deposits at Ha Long Bay seabed (03HLMD).

> The environmental sanitation in Ha Long Bay area is inadequate; rubbish and wastewater from domestic and socio-economic activities are not yet collected and thoroughly treated. This is one of the obstacles to ecotourism development (04HLMD).

> The region has been focusing on mass tourism development, this leads to environmental problems; so facing this challenge is a difficulty for ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area (15TIPC).

Furthermore, the displacement of all fishing villages from Ha Long Bay to the mainland from 2004 has created difficulties for ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Ecotourism is also closely linked with the local cultural characteristics (Dowling, 1996; Hill & Gate, 2009; Page, 2002); however, because of this displacement, tourists are unlikely to have an authentic experience in the real fishing community's life. One interviewee of this study gave the opinion that:

> The current experience of the daily life of fishermen in Ha Long Bay offered to tourists is mainly "staging" because local authorities have moved all fishing villages from the Bay to the mainland since 2004; so this experience would not be real and authentic (04HLMD).

#### *4.6.7.2 Lack of infrastructure*

The findings demonstrate that the lack of basic infrastructure poses difficulties for ecotourism development. The participants commented that the potential ecotourism sites are often situated in the remote areas lacking access, electricity and water. In order for ecotourism to develop, government should invest in building basic tourism infrastructure, but the government budget for this is small; therefore, these sites do not attract tourism operators. These findings are in line with a proposition of Silva & McDill (2004) who point out that lack of necessary infrastructure such as access, roads, trails, electricity, water and overnight accommodation may thwart ecotourism development even if the destination has the beautiful landscapes and wildlife preferred by ecotourism. On this issue, some interviewees of the study commented that:

> The potential sites for ecotourism development are often situated in natural and remote areas that are usually deprived of basic infrastructure such as road, access, electricity and water supply (11QNDT).

> The existing tourism infrastructure is not sufficient in comparison with the potential of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area (14QNDT).

Other respondents identified legal procedures as an obstacle to the public and private investment in building infrastructure for ecotourism activities within the Ha Long Bay World Heritage site because the investment must satisfy the

principle of preserving the status quo of the core zone of Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site. Any construction in this site must follow the strict procedures and requirements and be approved by several related institutions at the central level, including the Government, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and UNESCO. This procedure, therefore, is not very attractive to investors. On these points, the respondents of this study stated that:

> A barrier to our involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area is the difficulty to invest in infrastructure for ecotourism. We must stick to the principle of preserving the primitive state of the absolute protected area of Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site (05HLMD).

> The development of ecotourism in Ha Long Bay also needs the necessary infrastructure investment in order to ensure convenience and safety for tourists and so on,…while infrastructure investment in the core area must follow strict procedures; for instance, it must be approved by the Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism, by the Prime Minister and by UNESCO as well…. this procedure is not attractive for investors (04HLMD).

#### *4.6.7.3 Lack of financial resources*

The participants of this study identified the lack of financial resources as one of the main obstacles to local government's performance in addressing ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. The participants pointed out that local

authorities are facing a shortage of funds for investment in basic infrastructure for ecotourism. As the provincial budget allocated for marketing and promotion for tourism, including ecotourism is very small; they cannot organize large-scale and effective tourism marketing and promotion campaigns in the country and abroad. The budget allocated for tourism research, including ecotourism is also limited presenting a challenge for local government's job in developing this type of tourism in this area. On this point, the respondents of this study commented as follows:

> The difficulty is that governments must invest in basic infrastructure for ecotourism development, including access, electricity, water supply and environmental sanitation; but the governmental financial resources for this are insufficient (11QNDT).

> One obstacle to the local ecotourism development is the lack of finance for effectively marketing and promoting ecotourism domestically and internationally (17TIPC).

> The funding for tourism research in general and for ecotourism research in particular is limited. This is an obstacle for the good development of ecotourism in this area (10QNDT).

These observations are consistent with the viewpoints of Nianyong & Zhuge (2001) who point out that developing countries often face a shortage of funds for ecotourism development and management. Because of the lack of financial

resources, investment for start-up ecotourism projects at the nature reserves in China was limited and the budget allocated for scientific research on ecotourism was small; this has partly influenced ecotourism development and management in this country (Nianyong & Zhuge, 2001).

## 4.7 Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. In doing so, the study was guided by five objectives, including the local tourism officers' understanding about ecotourism, their perceptions of the importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay area, the current situation of ecotourism development in this area, local government's roles and responsibilities in addressing ecotourism development and obstacles to local government's involvement in ecotourism development.

The findings of this study demonstrate that local tourism officers have an insufficient understanding of ecotourism as they mainly associate ecotourism with nature-based tourism, which has little impact from humans on the natural environment but they were not very aware of other core components of ecotourism, such as environmental education, sustainable management and benefits for the local community. Although most of the local tourism officers

acknowledge the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, they only appear to appreciate the conservation aspect of ecotourism, and are unaware of other benefits of ecotourism.

In terms of the current situation of ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area, the results of this study show that the region has great potential to develop ecotourism, but this type of tourism is just in its early stages. The existing ecotourism services and activities in this area are on the small-scale, not well invested and unattractive, and furthermore, tourism entrepreneurs and local community involvement in ecotourism is still limited.

The findings of this study indicate that local government officers are generally satisfied with the roles and responsibilities that their institutions assume. However, although local authorities have recognized the necessity to focus on ecotourism development for sustainable tourism in the Ha Long Bay area, they have just implemented the initial phases of the ecotourism development process. They have designated several potential areas for ecotourism development in the region, but they have not yet introduced appropriate strategies and policies to implement it.

With regard to the barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, this study points out six main issues, including

(1) the limited understanding about ecotourism and lack of professional skills and competence among local tourism officers, (2) the limited awareness of ecotourism among local community and tourism operators, (3) the lack of commitment to ecotourism implementation by local authorities, (4) the lack of communication, cooperation and coordination between local tourism-related departments and other stakeholder groups, (5) the lack of involvement of tourism enterprises, local residents and tourists in ecotourism, and (6) the lack of resources for ecotourism development.

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents summaries of the main research findings which address the research aims and objectives. It also clarifies the theoretical and practical implications which underpin the research content. Finally, the limitation of the research and the recommendations for the future research are identified in this chapter.

## 5.2 Conclusion to the research

The aim of this research has been to identify the barriers to the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. To achieve this aim, five research objectives were developed as outlined below:

1. To examine the understanding of local tourism officers about ecotourism.
2. To examine their perceived importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in the Ha Long Bay area.
3. To investigate the current situation of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area.

4. To examine local government's roles and responsibilities in their involvement in ecotourism development.
5. To identify the obstacles that local government encounters when involved in ecotourism development in this area.

Local tourism officers in the Ha Long Bay area have an insufficient knowledge of ecotourism and their understanding about ecotourism is not unified. In general, most of them defined ecotourism as environmentally friendly nature-based tourism and only a few of them were aware of other core elements of ecotourism, such as conservation, environmental education and sustainable management. Furthermore, almost none of the respondents knew about the principles of ecotourism, which is considered fundamental knowledge and the basis for any ecotourism implementation by planners and policy-makers.

Local tourism officers acknowledged that ecotourism is important for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area. Almost all of them indicated that the key tourism asset of the Ha Long Bay destination is its natural heritage, so ecotourism is perceived as an environmentally friendly nature-based tourism which would have less adverse impact upon Ha Long Bay' environment; thereby contributing to the preservation of Ha Long Bay' natural resources. It's discernible that their assessment of the significance of ecotourism is accurate but not sufficient as they are less aware of other important benefits that ecotourism

can bring to the Ha Long Bay destination; for instance, ecotourism can enhance the local economy, increase tourist, community and industry's understanding of environmental conservation and generate greater tourist satisfaction.

Currently, the Ha Long Bay area has great potential in terms of its natural resources for ecotourism development, but it is still a very young ecotourism destination. Only a few local tourism operators are involved in ecotourism and the existing ecotourism products in this destination are generally poor, unattractive and unprofessionally organized.

At present, local authorities pursue ecotourism as a means of balancing development and conservation in Ha Long Bay area. However, almost all participants in this study commented that the future of ecotourism depends upon the efforts of local authorities in addressing critical issues relating to stakeholders' lack of awareness about sustainable tourism development and ecotourism, environmental degradation and limited capabilities of local tourism officers.

With similar roles and responsibilities for general tourism development, local government in Ha Long Bay area is also responsible for formulating and implementing the regional ecotourism plans, policies and strategies. However, local tourism authorities have only just arrived at the point in the Regional

Tourism Plans to begin identifying ecotourism attractions and to designate potential ecotourism sites in the whole region, including the Ha Long Bay area. They have not yet formulated any related policies and strategies to foster ecotourism development in the region. Marketing and advertising for ecotourism are also very limited and ineffective. With respect to the relevance of institutional arrangements, almost all respondents in this study indicated that the statutory roles and responsibilities of their institutions are adequate. What is important, therefore, is how local authorities promote their political power and find the right way to develop ecotourism in the region.

There are six major factors which hinder local government's involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area; these are (1) the limited understanding about ecotourism, lack of professional skills and competence among local tourism officers, (2) the limited awareness of ecotourism among local community and tourism operators, (3) the lack of commitment to ecotourism implementation by local authorities, (4) the lack of communication, cooperation and coordination between local tourism-related departments and other stakeholder groups, (5) the lack of involvement of tourism enterprises, local residents and tourists in ecotourism, and (6) the lack of resources for ecotourism development.

To some extent, the local authority's insufficient knowledge of its value, impedes a commitment to ecotourism. Coupled with their limited understanding of the ecotourism concept, the lack of experience in ecotourism development as well as lack of professional skills and ability among local tourism officers might create difficulties for them in drawing up adequate ecotourism planning, strategies and policies as well as implementing effective ecotourism marketing and promotion.

The low level of awareness among local residents and tourism entrepreneurs results in little interest and involvement in ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area. Furthermore, their limited understanding of how important ecotourism and sustainable tourism is to their local community is demonstrated by their littering and discharging wastewater into the Bay. This negatively influences ecotourism development in the region.

Local government often has a dual mandate of ensuring local economic growth and protecting the natural environment and resources; therefore, having a good balance between development and conservation is a common challenge to local governments in many destination areas. In the case of the Ha Long Bay area, the findings of this study demonstrate that although ecotourism is pursued by local authorities as a targeted type of tourism for the purpose of conserving Ha Long Bay heritage, in practice they are more in favour of the projects that can generate higher and faster economic benefits such as entertainment complexes, tourism

resorts and urbanization rather than ecotourism projects. As a result, this acts as a deterrent to ecotourism development in this area.

Local government plays a vital role in involving other related stakeholders in the tourism development process, in general and particularly in ecotourism development. However, in the case of Ha Long Bay, the communication and cooperation between local tourism authorities and tourism operators in ecotourism development is neither regular nor ineffective, so, results in a lack of consensus on the goals, objectives and ecotourism development processes in this area. This could account for the spontaneous, unsystematic and unprofessional development of ecotourism as it is in the Ha Long Bay area.

Ecotourism, and in general tourism in Ha Long Bay area is under the control of various institutions from the central level to local level. In reality, no current national policy or strategy around ecotourism development in Vietnam exists; this creates difficulties for the implementation of ecotourism development at the local level. Furthermore, the results of this study identify that poor coordination between local tourism-related departments and other departments, such as Transport, Natural Resources and Environment, and Agriculture and Rural Development may lead to the overlap of their roles and responsibilities and hence a lack of agreement between them on the implementation of ecotourism development.

The findings also demonstrate that the involvement of tourist operators and local residents in ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area is restricted due to their limited understanding of ecotourism and their short-term interest view. This creates major barriers to local government's work in ecotourism development in this area. In the circumstances of the Ha Long Bay area, where ecotourism is just in its first stages, local government as a key player in ecotourism development at a destination should be more proactive in raising related stakeholders' awareness and creating incentive schemes to encourage their involvement in ecotourism, especially tourism enterprises. The previous studies indicate that Freeman (1984)'s Stakeholder Theory and Collaboration Theory pioneered by Gray (1989) are considered as effective tools in helping local government manage stakeholders' interests and enhance their mutual benefits; thereby encouraging their participation in sustainable tourism as well as in ecotourism.

Ha Long Bay is just a young ecotourism destination, and, at this stage, not very attractive to a large number of ecotourists from diverse tourist markets. In order to increase the tourist demand in ecotourism in this area and extend the tourist market areas, the public sector and private sector need to work together to provide tourists with high quality and varied ecotourism products and substantially improve the marketing and advertising of ecotourism, domestically and abroad.

The lack of resources is also identified as presenting a range of obstacles to ecotourism development and its management in the Ha Long Bay area. These involve the issue of natural environmental degradation, lack of basic infrastructure for ecotourism and lack of financial resources. The ineffective control by local authorities over the negative impacts from socio-economic, tourism and domestic activities upon the Ha Long Bay environment seem to be the main causes of serious environmental challenges in this area. Additionally, as in many other destinations in developing countries, Ha Long Bay is facing serious budget concerns for ecotourism infrastructure development and advertising with the result that local government finds it difficult to address ecotourism development in this area.

## 5.3 Theoretical and practical implications

### 5.3.1 Theoretical implications

Local government is a major stakeholder involved in ecotourism (Beeton, 1998; Black, 2007; Buckley; 2003; Fennell & Dowling, 2003). However, there is little attention from the previous studies which positions local government in the context of ecotourism development rather than other stakeholders, for instance the local community. This research aimed to identify barriers to the successful involvement of local government in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay

area and contributes to fill the knowledge gap of the local government perspective in ecotourism development at a destination.

Some previous studies have also examined the challenges that local government faces in addressing ecotourism (Fennel, 2008; Silva & McDill, 2004; Wang, Cater, & Low, 2016; Wei & Yang, 2013). Nevertheless, these studies often discuss only one or some aspects of these obstacles, while this research investigates and presents a comprehensive picture of barriers to the successful involvement by local government in ecotourism development. They include the limited understanding and lack of awareness about ecotourism, lack of commitment to implementation, lack of communication, cooperation and coordination, lack of stakeholder involvement and lack of resources. Moreover, as previously mentioned, there are no specific guidelines from the existing tourism literature that indicate how to identify the factors which hinder local government's performance in ecotourism development. This research makes a contribution in filling this gap by developing five objectives to achieve this aim, encompassing the understanding of local tourism officers about ecotourism, their perception of the importance of ecotourism for sustainable tourism development, the current situation of ecotourism in the related destination, local government's roles and responsibilities in ecotourism development and obstacles to their performance in addressing ecotourism development.

The previous studies indicate a lack of consensus on how to define ecotourism and over 80 different definitions of ecotourism are found in the tourism literature (Fennell & Dowling, 2003; Hill & Gale, 2009; Page, 2002). The findings of this research demonstrate that the understanding of local tourism officers in the Ha Long Bay area about ecotourism definitions and principles is diverse and incomplete. Apart from the lack of efficient communication about ecotourism between the central and local governments, the complexity of how to interpret ecotourism even in the academic literature might be another cause of the limited understanding of ecotourism concept among local tourism officers in the Ha Long Bay area. Thus, this research contributes to exemplify the difficulty in understanding ecotourism theory and possibly lead to difficulty in implementing ecotourism in practice. In order to address this issue, this research suggests that supporting local tourism officers to understand the ecotourism concept and its importance should be considered a primary focus of central and provincial authorities. In turn, this would help local tourism officers better fulfil their tasks in ecotourism development at a destination. The research suggests that provincial authorites should cooperate with the tourism authorities at a central level such as Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Vietnam Administration of Tourism and Vietnam Institute for Tourism Development Research to organize education programs, training and conferences on ecotourism to increase knowledge about ecotourism among tourism officers at local level.

The application of Butler's (1980) tourist area life cycle model, clarifies the crucial role planners and policy-makers play in shaping the curve of the tourist area life cycle; but it does not suggest specific measures to help them shorten or lengthen a stage in this life cycle. This research with the focus area in the Ha Long Bay area indicates that to move from its initial stage to an advanced ecotourism destination, local authorities should play a leading role in addressing some key issues, such as raising awareness of ecotourism to related stakeholders, creating incentive policies to encourage related stakeholders' in ecotourism, solving the problem of natural environmental degradation and improving the qualifications of local tourism staff. Thus, the above findings of this research could be viewed as supplements to the perspective of practical implications of this model, especially in the destinations within the similar context to Ha Long Bay area.

### 5.3.2 Practical implications

The findings of this research point out a number of key barriers to local government's involvement in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area, related to deficiencies in understanding and awareness about ecotourism, in professional skills and competence among local tourism officers, in commitment, in communication, cooperation and coordination, in stakeholder involvement and resources for ecotourism development. On the basis of these challenges this

research suggests a range of recommendations for helping local government improve their involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area.

In the current circumstances of Ha Long Bay, raising the understanding and awareness of ecotourism-related stakeholder groups should be the primary focus. Increasing the awareness of the provincial leaders about the importance of ecotourism is fundamental as it leads to a greater commitment to the implementation of ecotourism development in the region. This would be a driving-force to ensure the entire local political system participates in the ecotourism development process. Local tourism officers should have a complete understanding of the nature and characteristics of ecotourism as this would help them formulate the appropriate regional planning, plans, strategies and policies on ecotourism development in the region. Other stakeholders, including tourism enterprises and local residents will be more willing to become involved in ecotourism if they are fully aware of the socio-economic benefits that ecotourism can bring to them and to the region.

Together with the emphasis on raising stakeholder awareness of ecotourism, the problem of poor communication and cooperation between local authorities and tourism operators also needs be overcome in order for them to achieve consensus on ecotourism development processes as well as on ecotourism goals and objectives. Furthermore, effective communication and cooperation between local

government and the private sector and the local community would help reduce the conflict of interests between these stakeholder groups, thereby enhancing their involvement in ecotourism development in the region. In addition, the success of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area also requires coordination within local government departments as tourism in general and ecotourism in particular, in the region are influenced not only by the Tourism authorities, but also by other sectors, including Transport, Culture and Sports, Natural Resources and Environment, Agriculture and Rural Development and so on. Coordination between the local government and central government is also crucial as ecotourism investment projects in the core zone of the Ha Long Bay World Heritage Site need to be approved by the central level, for instance, the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and UNESCO.

Local tourism officers are the main planners, managers and regional policy-makers at a destination; therefore, it is crucial for Quang Ninh Province to adopt the appropriate measures for improving the professional skills and competence of these staff. They should have comprehensive knowledge and relevant experience in ecotourism development to be able to perform well their roles and duties.

The environmental degradation in Ha Long Bay is a burning issue that local authorities must address if they pursue the ecotourism development there, as the

natural environment is the basis for all ecotourism activities. Raising the awareness of tourism enterprises, local residents and tourists about their responsibilities towards the conservation of the ecological environment by providing appropriate education and training would be an effective solution. Along with that, local government should also have strict regulations to enforce the protection of Ha Long Bay's environmental and natural heritage.

At present, marketing and advertising for ecotourism activity in the Ha Long Bay area is very poor. The lack of budget is identified as one of the main causes of this issue. Therefore, a larger budget allocation for ecotourism marketing and advertising would boost tourist demand in ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area, and at the same time expand the tourist market areas. Additionally, The Province should provide greater funding for investing in ecotourism infrastructure because road, access, water and electricity supply are the basic conditions for the implementation of every ecotourism project.

It is clear that the outcomes of this research are useful for local authorities to discover effective measures to achieve their success in developing ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area. For instance, the Province should organise training programs conducted by national and international ecotourism experts for increasing the knowledge of local tourism officers about ecotourism. It is a good idea for local tourism officers to further their experiences in ecotourism

development by learning from typically successful ecotourism cases in Vietnam and in the world. It suggests that the Province should establish an ecotourism association and include representatives from the public sector, private sector and local community. This association's aim would be to promote ecotourism in the region and be the bridge to strengthen communication, cooperation between the listed ecotourism stakeholders; thus, enhancing their involvement in ecotourism development. Furthermore, the association would play a consultative role in helping local government formulate appropriate ecotourism strategies, plans and incentives, which match the needs and expectations of all related stakeholders, especially tourism businesses and local residents. Finally, local authorities should organize education programs for local community and tourism enterprises to raise their awareness of the need to protect the natural environment among and introduce more effective enforcement mechanisms for preserving the natural tourism resources.

To a broader extent, this research study could be used as a good example for other destinations situated in a similar context to the Ha Long Bay area – a Natural World Heritage Site in a developing country, pursuing ecotourism to find the balance between development and conservation. The barriers identified for the local government's involvement in ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area and the recommendations suggested by this study to overcome these obstacles could be viewed as a useful experience for other destinations in similar contexts.

## 5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

Due to the restriction of time and finance, the interviews were not conducted face to face, but online by using Skype video calls; thus, in some interviews it was hard for the researcher to have control over participant distraction. The quality of voice recording was occasionally not perfect due to weak internet connections mainly from the Vietnamese end. Therefore, in order to avoid these issues, it is recommended that future research study should be carried out in face-to-face interviews if time and budget will allow it.

Another limitation of this study is that as many participants were unable to speak English, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and the findings translated into English. Thus, it prevented the researcher using computer assistance software in data investigation for the qualitative research analysis. Moreover, it is difficult for the researcher to interpret the exact meanings of collected data in the findings due to incompatibility issues between these two languages. Therefore, in order to achieve absolute accuracy in analyzing data, the data collection and data analysis might be better undertaken in the same language.

As previous studies have paid little attention to the local government perspective in the context of ecotourism development, particularly in the area of identifying the barriers to its involvement, the literature review for this study might not reflect all phenomena that has emerged from the findings of this study. Moreover,

for the purpose of filling the knowledge gap about the local government perspective in the context of ecotourism development, this research has focused only on local government while there are other stakeholders involved in ecotourism development, including tourism enterprises and local residents. For this reason, it is suggested that future research include the private sector and local community to be able to make a broader assessment of the obstacles to ecotourism development within a destination.

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# APPENDICES

# Appendix A

# Permission Request and Interview Protocol

**DR. SANGKYUN (SEAN) KIM**
**PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), AS, PGCert**

Senior Lecturer in Tourism
Honours Coordinator
Postgraduate Coordinator
Department of Tourism
School of Humanities
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +618 8201 3039
Fax: +68 8201 3635
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

5th January 2016

Mr. Ha Quang Long
Director of the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism
Quang Ninh province
Vietnam

Dear Mr. Ha Quang Long,

I am Mrs. Nguyen Thi Van, who is a Masters student in the Tourism Department at Flinders University, Australia. I am writing to you for asking your permission to conduct interviews with about 20 senior local governmental tourism officers in Ha Long city, Quang Ninh province, Vietnam as part of my Master research project at Flinders University. The proposed timeline for interviews will be between 1 June and 31 July 2016.

The purpose of the research is to investigate the barriers to ecotourism development from local government perspective in Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam. The main research questions to be addressed are as follows:

i. Identify the main barriers associated with the local governmental involvement in driving ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, Vietnam.
ii. Examine local tourism officers' perceptions of ecotourism definition.
iii. Examine the current situation of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area.
iv. Investigate local tourism officers' viewpoints on the importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay Natural World Heritage.
v. Examine the roles and responsibilities of local governments in driving ecotourism practices in Ha Long Bay area.

vi. Consider the recommendations proposed by local tourism officers for fostering the development of ecotourism in this destination.

Ha Long Bay area has enormous potential for ecotourism development; however, this type of tourism has not yet effectively exploited in this area. Local governments play a crucial role in driving ecotourism within a destination; therefore, the findings of this research would be highly significant for stimulating the ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area.

I will be pleased to provide you a summary report of my research once it has been successfully completed, if required. A proposed interview protocol is enclosed with this letter.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Yours sincerely,

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Van
Masters Student in Tourism
Flinders University

Dr Sangkyun (Sean) Kim
Research Supervisor
Flinders University

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

To implement the project “Barriers to ecotourism development from local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam”, in total 20 semi-structured interviews with key local governmental tourism officers will be conducted in Ha Long city, Quang Ninh province, Vietnam. On the basic of the authorisation of the Director of Quang Ninh provincial Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism to undertake this project, I as the researcher will directly approach potential participants through their contact details displayed at the Quang Ninh Portal (www.quangninh.gov.vn). The introduction and request for participation in the project will be sent via email to potential participants. Consent to be interviewed will be indicated by email response. Interviews will be conducted via computer-assisted communication and mobile technology devices, specifically via Skype or Viber in June and July 2016. The duration of an interview is estimated about 50 – 60 minutes.

The interviewees will be asked a set of questions as follows:

1. Could you tell me what are the main challenges or obstacles that your organization or yourself faces when driving ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area?
   - In your opinion, what are the main causes of these issues?
   - How these challenges could be overcome? (If applicable)
2. How do you define ecotourism?
   - In your opinion, what are the essential elements of ecotourism?
   - Which principles does your organization or you adopt when performing ecotourism practices in your destination?
3. Could you tell me about the current situation of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area?
   - In your opinion, why is this situation?
   - Please give me some examples of ecotourism activities in your destination.

- How is the involvement of private sector, local communities or NGOs in ecotourism activities in your destination?

4. What is your viewpoint on the importance of ecotourism for sustainable development in Ha Long Bay natural World Heritage?

   - Please explain why do you think so?

   - What do you think about the potential for ecotourism development in the area?

5. Could you tell me what are the roles and responsibilities of your in developing ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area?

   - How do you perform these roles and responsibilities? (In term of effectiveness).

   - In your opinion, are these roles and responsibilities adequate? If not, do you have any suggestions to improve it?

6. Do you have any recommendations for a better fulfilment of local governments' functions in fostering ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area?

   - Please give me your reason why you put forward these recommendations. (If applicable) .

# Appendix B

# Confirmation Letter

# (Correspondance Granting Permission)

## PERMISSION LETTER

**To whom it may concern**

I have received the letter dated on 5th January 2016 submitted by Mrs. Nguyen Thi Van regarding the request for permission to conduct interviews with about 20 local governmental tourism officers in June and July 2016, in Ha Long city, Quang Ninh province, Vietnam as part of her Master research project at Flinders University, Australia.

Through a good explanation provided in this letter, I have understood the purpose of this research project and have appreciated its potential benefits for Ha Long Bay destination. Thus, I have agreed to her request to conduct the interviews on proposed timeline.

**Signature:**

Hà Quang Long

Mr. Ha Quang Long
Director of Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism
Quang Ninh Province
Vietnam

# Appendix C

# Ethics Approval

# FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

| | |
|---|---|
| Project No.: | **7119** |
| Project Title: | Barriers to ecotourism development from local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam |
| Principal Researcher: | Mrs Thi Van Nguyen |
| Email: | nguy0569@flinders.edu.au |
| Approval Date: | 9 February 2016 |
| Ethics Approval Expiry Date: | **31 July 2019** |

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

# Appendix D

# Letter of Introduction

**DR. SANGKYUN (SEAN) KIM**
**PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), AS, PGCert**

Senior Lecturer in Tourism
Honours Coordinator
Postgraduate Coordinator
Department of Tourism
School of Humanities
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +618 8201 3039
Fax: +68 8201 3635
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

# LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Sir/Madam

This letter is to introduce **Mrs. Thi Van Nguyen**, who is a Masters student in the Tourism Department at Flinders University, Australia. She will use her Flinders student email address that is nguy0569@flinders.edu.au to contact with you.

She is undertaking a research leading to the production of a thesis on the subject of "*Barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam*".

She would be most grateful if you would volunteer to assist in this project, by granting an interview which covers certain aspects of this topic. No more than one hour on one occasion would be required.

Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since she intends to make an audio recording of the interview, she will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed, and that the recording will not be made available to any other person.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on +618 8201 3139, by fax on +68 8201 3635 or e-mail sean.kim@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sangkyun (Sean) Kim
Senior Lecturer in Tourism
Department of Tourism

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 7119 here following approval). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.*

**Letter of Introduction translated into Vietnamese**

**DR. SANGKYUN (SEAN) KIM**
**PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), AS, PGCert**

Giảng viên cao cấp về Du lịch
Điều phối viên danh dự
Điều phối viên sau đại học
Khoa Du lịch
Trường Nhân văn
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +618 8201 3039
Fax: +68 8201 3635
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au
CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

# THƯ GIỚI THIỆU

Thưa Ông / Bà

Bức thư này giới thiệu bà **Nguyễn Thi Vân**, là học viên Thạc sỹ, khoa Du lịch của trường Đại học Flinders, Úc. Bà Vân sẽ sử dụng địa chỉ email sinh viên trường Flinders của mình (nguy0569@flinders.edu.au) để liên lạc với Ông/Bà.

Bà Vân đang thực hiện đề tài "*Các yếu tố cản trở sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái từ quan điểm của chính quyền địa phương: Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam*".

Bà Vân rất mong Ông/Bà hỗ trợ bà Vân thực hiện đề tài này thông qua việc Ông/Bà chấp thuận tham gia phỏng vấn về một số nội dung liên quan đến chủ đề trên. Buổi phỏng vấn dự kiến sẽ không kéo dài quá sáu mươi phút.

Ông/bà có thể yên tâm rằng mọi thông tin sẽ được xử lý với độ bảo mật cao và danh tính các thành viên tham gia phỏng vấn sẽ không được thể hiện trong báo cáo kết quả của đề tài. Ông/Bà hoàn toàn có quyền ngừng tham gia cuộc phỏng vấn vào bất cứ lúc nào hoặc từ chối trả lời các câu hỏi ngoại lệ.

Bà Vân có dự định ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn để phục vụ cho việc phân tích dữ liệu nghiên cứu. Do vậy, bà Vân rất mong Ông/Bà cho phép được ghi âm cuộc hội thoại. Sự chấp thuận của Ông/Bà xin được thể hiện trong Giấy xác nhận Đồng ý Tham gia Nghiên cứu đính kèm. Tên và các thông tin cá nhân của Ông/Bà sẽ được tiết lộ và sẽ không có ai khác ngoài bà Vân với tư cách là tác giả của đề tài nghiên cứu được sử dụng nội dung ghi âm.

Nếu Ông/Bà có thắc mắc hoặc muốn biết thêm thông tin liên quan đến đề tài nghiên cứu này, xin liên hệ với tôi theo địa chỉ ghi ở trên hoặc qua điện thoại số:+618 8201 3139, Fax: +68 8201 3635 hoặc e-mail: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au.

Cám ơn sự quan tâm và hỗ trợ của Quý Ông/Bà.

Kính thư,

Dr Sangkyun (Sean) Kim
Giảng viên Cao cấp về Du lịch
Khoa Du lịch

*Đề án nghiên cứu này đã được Ủy ban Xã hội và Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Hành vi của trường Đại học Flinders phê duyệt (Mã số phê duyệt của Đề án: 7119). Để biết thêm thông tin liên quan đến việc phê duyệt Đề án, đề nghị liên hệ với Cán bộ Điều hành của Ủy ban qua số điện thoại: 8201 3116, Fax: 8201 2035 hoặc qua email: human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

# Appendix E

# Information Sheet

**DR. SANGKYUN (SEAN) KIM**
**PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), AS, PGCert**

Senior Lecturer in Tourism
Honours Coordinator
Postgraduate Coordinator
Department of Tourism
School of Humanities
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +618 8201 3039
Fax: +68 8201 3635
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au

# INFORMATION SHEET

**Title:** Barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam

**Investigator:**
Thi Van Nguyen
Department of Tourism
Flinders University
Ph: +618 8201 3039
Email: nguy0569@flinders.edu.au

**Project Supervisor:**
Dr SangKyun (Sean) Kim
Department of Tourism
Flinders University
Ph: +618 8201 3039
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au

**Description of the study:**

This study is part of the project entitled *Barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.* This project will investigate what challenges does the local government in Ha Long Bay area face when performing ecotourism practices in this area, how they perceive the importance of

ecotourism for sustainable development in this area, what are their roles and responsibilities in driving ecotourism development, and what are their recommendations for a better fulfilment of their role in fostering the development of ecotourism in this destination.

This project is supported by Flinders University Tourism department.

**Purpose of the study:**

This project aims to find out the main barriers associated with the local governmental involvement in driving ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area; thereby contributing to stimulate ecotourism development in this area.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You are invited to attend an interview via Skype or Viber with the investigator who will ask you several questions about your opinion on the ecotourism subject, your viewpoint on the barriers to the ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area, and your potential recommendations for the better ecotourism practices in this area. The duration of an interview is estimated between 50 and 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help the investigator with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed); and interview transcripts will be sent back to you by email for reviewing and editing. The transcript will be stored as a computer file and then destroyed once the results have been finalised. This is all voluntary.

**What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

You will have the opportunity to share your opinion about challenges that your organization and you face when driving ecotourism in your region as well as your recommendation for a better fulfilment of your task. Moreover, you will be able to access the summary report of this project once it is completed, if you require it.

**Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

A coding number will be assigned to you and your name will not be used. Once the interview has been typed and saved as a file, the voice file will then be destroyed. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed file stored on a password

protected computer that only the coordinator (Mrs. Thi Van Nguyen) will have access to. Your comments will not be linked directly to you.

**Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

No high risks and discomforts are assumed in this research project, but there would be some possible burdens for you including:

1. The researcher needs you to devote your time for participation although each interview will be about 50 to 60 minutes in duration
2. To ensure anonymity, the interviews recommended to be conducted in a private and quiet place at your home or in a café. If the interview is undertaken in your home, this can disturb your family members; and if this is conducted in a café, you may have to move to this place.

To reduce your discomfort, the researcher will be willing to organise the interviews at your preferable location and time.

**How do I agree to participate?**

Participation is completely voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to refuse the interview at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate, please read and sign the form and send it back to Mrs. Thi Van Nguyen via email.

**How will I receive feedback?**

The outcomes from the project will be summarised and given to you by the investigator if you would like to see them. You can contact the investigator by using the contact information above.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.**

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 7119 here following approval). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

**Information Sheet translated into Vietnamese**

**DR. SANGKYUN (SEAN) KIM**
**PhD, MSc, BSc (Hons), AS, PGCert**

Giảng viên cao cấp về Du lịch
Điều phối viên danh dự
Điều phối viên sau đại học
Khoa Du lịch
Trường Nhân văn
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: +618 8201 3039
Fax: +68 8201 3635

# PHIẾU CUNG CẤP THÔNG TIN

**Tên đề tài nghiên cứu:**

Các yếu tố cản trở sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái từ quan điểm của chính quyền địa phương: Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam

**Người thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu:**
Nguyễn Thị Vân
Khoa Du lịch
Trường Đại học Flinders
Điên thoại:  +618 8201 3039
Email: nguy0569@flinders.edu.au

**Giáo viên Hướng dẫn:**
Dr SangKyun (Sean) Kim
Khoa Du lịch
Trường Đại học Flinders
Điện thoại: +618 8201 3039
Email: sean.kim@flinders.edu.au

**Mô tả đề tài nghiên cứu:**

Đề tài nghiên cứu "*Các yếu tố cản trở sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái từ quan điểm của chính quyền địa phương: Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long Việt Nam*" hướng tới các mục tiêu sau: làm rõ các khó khăn thách thức mà chính quyền địa phương gặp phải khi thực hiện phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam; tìm hiểu việc chính quyền địa phương nhận thức thế nào về tầm quan trọng của du lịch sinh thái đối với việc phát triển du lịch bền vững; chính quyền địa phương giữ vai trò và chức trách gì trong việc phát triển du lịch sinh thái; và thu thập các ý kiến đóng góp cũng như những kiến nghị giúp chính quyền địa phương thực hiện tốt hơn việc thúc đẩy phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam.

Đê tài nghiên cứu này được Khoa Du lịch của trường Đại học Flinders hỗ trợ thực hiện.

**Mục đích nghiên cứu:**

Đề tài nghiên cứu này nhằm làm rõ các yếu tố cản trở chính quyền địa phương triển khai tốt việc phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long; từ đó góp phần giúp các nhà hoạch định chính sách tìm ra các giải pháp hữu hiệu thúc đẩy phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực.

**Người tham gia nghiên cứu sẽ được yêu cầu làm gì** ?

Ông/Bà được mời tham gia phỏng vấn với tác giả thực hiện đề tài nghiên cứu qua phần mềm Skype hoặc Viber. Người phỏng vấn sẽ hỏi Ông/Bà một số câu hỏi liên quan đến chủ đề du lịch sinh thái; ý kiến của Ông/Bà về những thách thức đối với việc phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long; và những ý kiến đóng góp của Ông/Bà để thúc đẩy phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại địa phương. Buổi phỏng vấn sẽ kéo dài khoảng 50 phút đến 60 phút. Cuộc hội thoại sẽ được ghi âm nhằm tạo điều kiện thuận lợi cho tác giả đề tài phân tích dữ liệu nghiên cứu. Sau khi ghi âm, tác giả đề tài sẽ sao chép dữ liệu ra văn bản và gửi lại cho Ông/Bà file văn bản để hiệu đính. Dữ liệu thu thập sẽ được lưu trữ trong file máy tính được bảo vệ bằng mật khẩu và nội dung ghi âm sẽ được hủy. Việc đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn và cho phép ghi âm cuộc hội thoại hoàn toàn mang tính tự nguyện.

**Người tham gia nghiên cứu sẽ được hưởng lợi gì?**

Ông/Bà sẽ có cơ hội chia sẻ ý kiến của mình về những khó khăn thách thức mà cơ quan đơn vị và Ông/Bà gặp phải khi triển khai phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại địa phương;

đồng thời Ông/Bà cũng có thể đưa ra những đề xuất kiến nghị giúp chính quyền địa phương hoàn thành nhiệm vụ tốt hơn. Hơn nữa, Ông/Bà có thể nhận bản tổng hợp báo cáo của Nghiên cứu trên khi Đề tài nghiên cứu hoàn thành, nếu Ông/Bà yêu cầu.

**Người tham gia nghiên cứu có thể bị nhận dạng không?**

Chúng tôi sẽ không sử dụng tên thật Ông/Bà trong nghiên cứu này mà thay vào đó là một mã số nghiên cứu. Khi cuộc hội thoại phỏng vấn được đánh máy và lưu trữ ra file văn bản, bản ghi âm sẽ được hủy. Mọi thông tin cá nhân của người tham gia nghiên cứu sẽ được dỡ bỏ; file dữ liệu được lưu trữ trong máy tính có mật khẩu và chỉ mình tác giả đề tài là bà Nguyễn Thị Vân có thể mở dữ liệu trên. Chúng tôi sẽ không nêu tên của người cung cấp thông tin khi trích dẫn các thông tin.

**Có bất cứ rủi ro hay bất lợi nào khi tham gia nghiên cứu này không?**

Không có rủi ro hay bất lợi lớn nào được nhận định trong đề tài nghiên cứu này, tuy nhiên có một số bất tiện có thể xảy ra cho Ông/Bà khi tham gia đề tài, bao gồm:

1. Tác giả đề tài cần Ông/Bà dành thời gian quý giá của mình để tham gia phỏng vấn trong khoảng 50 phút đến 60 phút.
2. Để đảm bảo việc Ông/Bà tham gia đề tài được giữ kín, tác giả đề tài đề xuất cuộc phỏng vấn được thực hiện ở nơi riêng biệt và yên tĩnh tại nhà của Ông bà hoặc ở phòng riêng tại quán cà phê. Nếu Ông/Bà tham gia phỏng vấn tại nhà mình thì điều này có thể ảnh hưởng đến các thành viên khác trong gia đình; hoặc nếu phỏng vấn thực hiện tại quán cà phê thì Ông/Bà có thể phải di chuyển tới đó.

Để giảm sự phiền hà tới Ông/Bà, tác giả đề tài sẵn lòng sắp xếp buổi phỏng vấn ở địa điểm và thời gian thích hợp nhất với Ông/Bà.

**Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu như thế nào?**

Việc tham gia vào nghiên cứu là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Ông/bà có thể trả lời “không có ý kiến” hoặc từ chối trả lời bất cứ câu hỏi nào khi phỏng vấn và Ông/Bà có thể từ chối tham gia nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào mà không có bất cứ vấn đề gì. Giấy Xác nhận Đồng ý tham gia Nghiên cứu được gửi kèm Phiếu vung cấp Thông tin này. Nếu Ông/Bà đồng ý tham gia, xin vui lòng đọc và ký tên vào Giấy Xác nhận Đồng ý Tham gia Nghiên cứu và gửi lại bản scan có chữ ký của Ông/bà cho bà Nguyễn Thị Vân qua email.

**Tôi sẽ nhận thông tin phản hồi như thế nào?**

Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ được tác giả thực hiện đề tài tóm lược và chuyển tới Ông/Bà nếu Ông/Bà muốn biết. Ông/Bà có thể liên hệ với tác giả đề tài bằng cách sử dụng thông tin liên hệ nêu ở phần trên.

**Xin trân trọng cám ơn Ông/Bà đã dành thời gian đọc Phiếu Cung cấp Thông tin này và chúng tôi hi vọng rằng Ông/Bà sẽ chấp nhận lời mời tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu của chúng tôi.**

*Đề tài nghiên cứu này đã được Ủy ban Xã hội và Đạo đức Nghiên cứu Hành vi của trường Đại học Flinders phê duyệt.(Mã số phê duyệt của đề tài nghiên cứu: 7119). Để biết thêm thông tin liên quan đến việc phê duyệt đề tài nghiên cứu này, đề nghị liên hệ với Cán bộ Điều hành của Ủy ban qua số điện thoại: 8201 3116, Fax: 8201 2035 hoặc qua email: human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au*

# Appendix F

# Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

## (By interview)

Barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam

Being over the age of 18 years, I hereby consent to participate as requested in the Letter of Introduction for the research project on an investigation of barriers to ecotourism development from the local government perspective: The case of Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details about the purpose, method, procedures, benefits of study and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
    - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
    - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
    - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.

- I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

**Participant's signature……Date……...**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher's name: Thi Van Nguyen**

**Researcher's signature:** **Date……**

**Consent Form translated into Vietnamese**

**GIẤY XÁC NHẬN ĐỒNG Ý THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU**
**(Qua phỏng vấn)**

***Tên đề tài nghiên cứu:***
*Các yếu tố cản trở sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái từ quan điểm của chính quyền địa phương: Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam*

Căn cứ Thư Giới thiệu mời tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu "*Các yếu tố cản trở sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái từ quan điểm của chính quyền địa phương: Nghiên cứu trường hợp khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long, Việt Nam*"; tôi đã trên 18 tuổi; trong văn bản này tôi xác nhận đồng ý tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu trên.

1. Tôi đã đọc các thông tin được cung cấp.
2. Tôi đã được thông tin đầy đủ về mục đích, phương pháp, các tiến trình, lợi ích của đề tài nghiên cứu, cũng như bất cứ bất cập nào có thể xảy ra khi thực hiện nghiên cứu.
3. Tôi đồng ý để tác giả đề tài nghiên cứu ghi âm những thông tin mà tôi cung cấp trong buổi phỏng vấn.
4. Tôi biết nên giữ lại bản sao của Phiếu cung cấp Thông tin về đề tài nghiên cứu và Giấy xác nhận Đồng ý Tham gia Nghiên cứu để làm tài liệu tham khảo sau này.
5. Tôi hiểu rằng:

- Tôi có thể không trực tiếp hưởng lợi từ việc tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này.
- Tôi có thể ngừng tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này bất cứ lúc nào và tôi có thể từ chối trả lời các câu hỏi ngoại lệ khi phỏng vấn.

- Danh tính và các thông tin cá nhân của tôi sẽ luôn được giữ bí mật, ngay cả khi kết quả nghiên cứu được công bố.
- Tôi có thể yêu cầu dừng ghi âm cuộc hội thoại bất cứ lúc nào, hoặc ngừng tham gia buổi phỏng vấn khi nào tôi muốn mà không có bất cứ vấn đề gì.

**Chữ ký của người tham gia phỏng vấn: ……Ngày…….**

Tôi xác nhận rằng tôi đã giải thích về đề tài nghiên cứu cho đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu và Ông/Bà ấy đã hiểu rõ việc đồng ý tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này là hoàn toàn mang tính tự nguyện.

**Tên người nghiên cứu: Nguyễn Thị Vân**

**Chữ ký của người nghiên cứu:** **Ngày……..**

# Appendix F

# Interviewees' profiles

# Interviewees' profiles

| Interview Number | Sex | Institutions | Division | Position | Interviewees' codes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Female | Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLMD) | Research Division | Senior Staff (over 15 years of working experience at HLMD) | 01HLMD |
| 2 | Male | HLMD | Caves and Grottos Conservation Center | Deputy Director – Head of the Center | 02HLMD |
| 3 | Male | HLMD | Caves and Grottos Conservation Center | Deputy Director | 03HLMD |
| 4 | Male | HLMD | Environmental Management Division | Head of the Division | 04HLMD |
| 5 | Female | HLMD | Administration Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 05HLMD |
| 6 | Male | HLMD | Bai Tu Long Bay Conservation Center | Deputy Director | 06HLMD |
| 7 | Male | HLMD | Bai Tu Long Bay Conservation Center | Director | 07HLMD |
| 8 | Male | HLMD | Marine Culture Conservation Center | Deputy Director | 08HLMD |
| 9 | Female | Quang Ninh Department of Tourism (QNDT) | Tourism Resources Development Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 09QNDT |
| 10 | Female | QNDT | Travel Management Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 10QNDT |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | Male | QNDT | Tourism Resources Development Division | Head of the Division | 11QNDT |
| 12 | Female | QNDT | Travel Management Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 12QNDT |
| 13 | Male | QNDT | Travel Management Division | Head of the Division | 13QNDT |
| 14 | Female | QNDT | Tourism Inspection | Deputy chief Inspector | 14QNDT |
| 15 | Female | Quang Ninh Tourism Information and Promotion Center (TIPC) | Tourism Information and Communication Division | Head of the Division | 15TIPC |
| 16 | Female | TIPC | Tourism Information and Communication Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 16TIPC |
| 17 | Male | TIPC | Board of leaders | Deputy Director – Head of TIPC | 17TIPC |
| 18 | Female | TIPC | Intangible Culture Development Division | Head of the Division | 18TIPC |
| 19 | Female | TIPC | Tourism Marketing and Promotion Division | Vice-Head of the Division | 19TIPC |
| 20 | Male | TIPC | Tourism Marketing and Promotion Division | Head of the Division | 20TIPC |

# Appendix H

## A sample of interview transcript (Interviewee, No.1)

# Appendix H

# A sample of interview transcript (Interview, No.1)

Interviewer: What is your understanding about ecotourism? How do you define it?

Interviewee: For me, ecotourism is a type of tourism based on the nature and natural and human resources of the area. Additionally, ecotourism also aimed at conserving these natural resources. I think ecotourism is a type of tourism that helps preserving the natural environment of the destination or of the area where ecotourism occurs.

Interviewer: So which principles does Quang Ninh province address when developing ecotourism in Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: The general objective of tourism development in Ha Long is development must go together with conversation and extend the stay of tourists, as currently the duration of tourists' stay in Ha Long is not long. Furthermore, it also aims to expand the tourism space; particularly so far, Ha Long Bay area is considered as the key area, the biggest attraction for tourists. However, now the province tends to expand the tourism space into 4 zones and increase the investment there in order to make all of them become attractive to tourists.

Interviewer: Ok, this is a general goal for tourism development in the region. How about the principles of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area? As ecotourism have its specific principles.

Interviewee: What are the principles of ecotourism? I do not often hear about that. If you know that, tell me please!

Interviewer: Generally speaking, it can be said that ecotourism encompasses five core principles, including nature-based, ecologically sustainable, environmentally educative, locally beneficial, and generating tourist satisfaction. So, in your opinion which objectives does Quang Ninh province pursue when they perform ecotourism development?

Interviewee: As I see it, now ecotourism in our region, including in the Ha Long Bay area has not yet developed in accordance with ecotourism's principles and has not yet received a big attention. For example, the Eco-museum project is a driving force to foster ecotourism activities in the Ha Long Bay area; however, up to now, this project does not run well because of the lack of investment and attention from local authorities to it. On the contrary, tourism resorts, theme parks and infrastructure projects have been more prioritized than ecotourism projects.

In terms of the local community, we have not yet any policies to support and encourage local community's participation in ecotourism projects. We often say that we want to attract them in tourism activities, but in reality, we do not implement it very well. Let take an example of fishing villages, which are a cultural heritage of Ha Long Bay that many tourists prefer to visit and enjoy the experience in there, but because we could not manage them well, we must make them move to live in the mainland. Because of that, their normal life is disturbed and their participation in ecotourism activities is heavily influenced.

With regard to local residents in Ha Long city and in the surrounding areas along Ha Long Bay, they often invest by themselves in accommodation services for tourists. There is not much assistance from local government to help them provide with tourists good quality services and good experience.

Back to the issue of developing tourism and then using its profits for the conservation of natural resources system, it is still blurry. Why is that, because we have developed infrastructure, for example the reclamation projects, or the projects to build infrastructure at tourist sites across the Bay. The regulation seems very is strict, but in fact this has created a huge impact to the environment of Ha Long Bay. The evidence is that UNESCO has recommended them so much; in fact, the recommendations made by UNECO are related not only to the tourism development projects, but also to other socio-economic development projects, including the infrastructure projects such as the reclamation project. For example, at present we are rushing the implementation of infrastructure projects; consequently, this has an adverse impact on the natural environment. Maybe, at present local authorities are focusing more on infrastructure development rather than on conservation. Which means it is not balanced.

Interviewer: Thank you very much, and what do you think about the current situation of ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: In my opinion, ecotourism is newly developed in the Ha Long Bay area, it is not yet systematically developed and not yet arrived to attract the participation of its stakeholders, especially tourism managers are not very professional. For example, ecotourism is a

type of tourism suitable for Ha Long Bay area as it is mainly based on the natural environment. However, up to now, there are not any specific policies to boost this type of tourism there. In summary, I think that ecotourism is just in the initial stage only.

Interviewer: What are the typical ecotourism products in Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: Currently you can find the following activities: climbing in Titop Island for sightseeing, rowing entered into Luon Cave area, discovering vegetation on limestone in Ha Long Bay; and now some providers start to offer diving tours to observe coral reefs or visiting and planting mangrove forests and visiting caves and grottos.

Interviewer: What do you think about the orientation of the Province towards ecotourism development in the coming time? Will it be a focussed type of tourism in the region?

Interviewee: In terms of policies on documents and papers, the Province is determined to do so, for example, the Province is striving to make Ha Long city become a tourist city, this includes the development of ecotourism in this area and it is mobilising all related resources to promote tourism development in the area of Ha Long City. Which means that now the trend of eco-tourism development is considered as a top priority, particularly in Ha Long area. Especially, Ha Long city has been assigned to formulate a resolution with regard to build Ha Long city as a tourist city, which includes also the necessity to find out the good measures to implement it, ranging from the improvement of promotional materials such as signposts or brochures, leaflets to the upgrading of infrastructure, public transport system and so on. According to

what I see, this resolution does not directly mention about ecotourism development, but it can be understood that this enhances ecotourism development and community-based tourism as well in Ha Long Bay area.

So, I think, with respect to the papers, the Province is very determined to develop ecotourism with a focus on Ha Long city area and this trend also starts to expand to other areas such as Binh Lieu, Ba Che, Tien Yen. Generally, in terms of the orientation of ecotourism development, it is clear.

Interviewer: How is the involvement of tourism enterprises in ecotourism?

Interviewee: I am not directly responsible for this aspect, so maybe my assessment is not comprehensive. However, I see some enterprises actively involved in ecotourism activities, for example, some tourist boat companies have organised for tourists participating in the environmental protection tours (such as collecting rubbish on the Bay). But, these are their spontaneous business strategies; these are not much linked with local authorities. As by the side of local authorities, they still stand isolated from enterprises.

Interviewer: Do you think there are many enterprises actively involved in ecotourism activities?

Interviewee: I cannot say exactly the number of these companies, but I think they account only for a minority.

Interviewer: How about local community participation in ecotourism activities in this area?

Interviewee: Often those who have the economic conditions, they have invested. If talking about the mass public or the whole community involved in tourism activities, it is not; this is because of the lack of

awareness of tourism as well as the lack of incentive policies. For example, from the community perspective, if they have enough financial conditions they often invest in tourist boats, hotels, restaurants or other tourism-related services, rather than in involving in the tourist activities such as site interpretation, tour guides or making tourists experience their lives. Such activities, I do not see much in the Ha Long Bay area.

Interviewer: How about local community at ecotourism sites? How is their involvement in ecotourism activities?

Interviewee: Ah, I think they are very enthusiastic about this, especially fishermen in Ha Long Bay, as before I did a survey for the purpose of developing a community-based ecotourism project and when I interviewed them, most of them said to be willing to join this project. For the local residents of other areas, I am not sure because I did not have opportunity to approach them. However, I can say that currently in general the participation of local community in ecotourism is still limited, maybe because they are not yet attracted to it. Thus, it is necessary to have strong policies or campaigns to attract them involved in ecotourism.

Interviewer: Do you know any non-governmental organizations involved in supporting ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: There are some projects related to Ha Long Bay environmental protection, for example Ecoboat project funded by FFI; but that project is over and now we maintain its operation by using our own resources. Or, I see that now there is the Project of Alliance for Ha Long Bay Environmental Protection, then in that it also has some form of sustainable tourism development based on the community.

The project indicates many areas potential to develop fisheries with the participation of local fishermen; and the sustainable agriculture may also contribute to tourism development. Those were organized by MCD (Marine Conservation Development), it is a Vietnamese non-governmental organization. This project works in partnership with many local stakeholders, including Ha Long city, Ha Long Bay Management Department, Department of Agriculture, Quang Ninh provincial People's Committee, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, etc. This project has been run since a year.

Interviewer: What is your assessment of the potential of ecotourism development in Ha Long Bay area in 5 years and in 10 to 20 years?

Interviewee: In my view, the development of ecotourism in the region of Ha Long Bay would be better in the next 5 years because over a period of 5 years, the interest of local people for ecotourism will eventually improve. From the improvement of awareness, the appropriate policies and strategies will be shaped. In the 5-year and 10 next years, it will be better because until then the infrastructure will be developed and stabilized.

Interviewer: Do you think ecotourism is important for sustainable tourism development in the Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: Yes, ecotourism is important as the main tourism assets of Ha Long Bay are the natural resources, so if ecotourism is not developed here, these resources may be lost gradually. In general, when the natural resources are lost, it is difficult to regenerate them and no more tourism development here is possible.

Interviewer: What are the roles and responsibilities of Ha Long Bay Management Department in involving in ecotourism development?

Interviewee: The main functions and tasks of Ha Long Bay Management Department (HLMD) is the State administration of Ha Long Bay. Now HLMD is moved to be under Ha Long Municipal Peoples' Committee. So, its main tasks and functions are also moved to be under Ha Long City People's Committee. Then, HLMD is the adversary body of Ha Long City. Regarding the development of tourism strategies, it is not clearly indicated in the mandates of HLMD. Currently, HLMD is mainly responsible for Ha Long Bay environmental protection, inspection and control in Ha Long Bay, scientific research or doing the daily work as ticket controller, ticket sales and protection and conservation. According to the documents and papers related to our mandates, it does not mention about the responsibitiy for developing tourism policies, but it mainly focuses on the conservation. Well I am sorry, we are responsible for developing polices on conservation and promotion of the values of Ha Long Bay World Heritage. Then the promotion of heritage values here aimed at effectively using Ha Long Bay resources for the development, so, this includes also the development of tourism. HLMD is also in charge of recommending tourist routes and sites in Ha Long Bay, developping the plans for managing Ha Long Bay Heritage, which includes tourism development. As of now, there is more such work than before.

Interviewer: What do you think about the relevance of the roles and responsibilities of HLMD? Do these need to be revised or supplemented for a better involvement of HLMD in ecotourism development?

Interviewee: In fact, I do not think we need to supplement any roles or responsibilities to Ha Long Bay Management Department. The existing mandates are sufficient and appropriate. Only thing is how to promote all of these functions and duties to booster ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area.

As our functions and tasks are already adequate, now if the Province has some policies… For example, sometimes when we built programs or projects for tourism development but we did not obtain the consent, or the financial support of the Province, so these just stop there, it goes on like that. I do not know why, but in terms of the functions and duties of HLMD, these are already appropriate and complete, we do not need to add anything.

Interviewer: What are the barriers to the involvement of HLMD in ecotourism development in the Ha Long Bay area?

Interviewee: I see that the cooperation between the state agencies, especially between my department with the private sector or tourism providers is not close. This is due to the mechanism and policy, and most importantly due to the head, if that one is committed to creating sustainable relationships, which means that this will facilitate the development of tourism enterprises, and we can pursue our objectives and strategies. I think it is the most important one. The lack of effective cooperation is a difficulty for ecotourism development because government will not invest in ecotourism projects; their roles are to provide tourism enterprises with general policies or incentives to encourage their participation in ecotourism. Therefore, without the communication and cooperation between two these stakeholder groups, ecotourism in the Ha Long Bay area cannot take off.

It seems that the local state administrative agencies currently are separated from the local tourism enterprises. They do not update the need for development from the tourism market. For instance, the tourism-related departments did not recognize some tourist sites that are suggested by many tourism operators and these are in high demand from the tourist market. There are such issues, in other words, we have not yet arrived to set up a clear direction and the overall strategy. We have not yet implemented the specific steps to connect to enterprises. I think the link with tourism enterprises is very important.

Interviewer: Apart from this above obstacle, are there any other barriers?

Interviewee: Another issue is related to the information systems for visitors from the side of local government. Here I do not mention about the private sector perspective because they advertise for themselves, but the general promotion of local authorities for ecotourism is virtually not systematic and professional. The marketing or promotion from the province for ecotourism is not well organized. This leads to the lack of information to tourists and consequently this impedes them from deciding to choose ecotourism products from Ha Long destination. Furthermore, the tourism websites of some governmental tourism-related agencies, for example these of Ha Long City and Ha Long Bay Management Department are very poor in tourism information; these do no provide tourist with an overview of Ha Long Bay tourism. I think this weakness needs to be improved as soon as possible.

Other obstacles are that we have not yet incentive policies; and there are not many entrepreneurs investing in ecotourism.

Moreover, ecotourism has not yet become a development trend, so there are not yet attractive ecotourism products here.

Interviewer: Do you have any recommendations for a better performance in addressing ecotourism development from the local government perspective?

Interviewee: Firstly, it is fundamental to increase the awareness of the provincial leaders about the importance of ecotourism in order to foster their commitment to ecotourism implementation; from that, local authorities can develop incentive policies to encourage and support the participation of entrepreneurs in ecotourism.

In addition, it needs to have policies for supporting finance, tourism skills to the local community (especially the fishing village communities). For instance, the program such as Ha Long Smile committed to raise awareness of the people involved in tourism activities.

It is necessary to improve awareness, educate local people about the tourism culture to make Ha Long become a safe and friendly destination.

# Appendix H

## A sample of interview transcript (Interview No.1) in Vietnamese language

Người hỏi: Theo bạn hiểu thì du lịch sinh thái là gì? Bạn có thể định nghĩa du lịch sinh thái như thế nào?

Trả lời: Theo tôi thì du lịch này dựa vào cái tự nhiên, những tài nguyên thiên nhiên của khu vực đấy và có cả tài nguyên con người nữa. Nhưng mà du lịch làm sao để trong quá trình phát triển du lịch thì quay lại bảo tồn hệ thống tài nguyên đấy. Theo em được biết thì DLST là loại hình du lịch bảo tồn được tài nguyên thiên nhiên nơi người ta đến, hay là khu vực phát triển loại hình sinh thái đấy.

Người hỏi: Vậy tỉnh Quảng Ninh có hướng tới những tiêu chí gì khi phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long?

Trả lời: Mục tiêu chung khi phát triển du lịch tại Hạ Long là phát triển đi đôi với bảo tồn và thêm nữa là kéo dài thời gian lưu trú của du khách, vì hiện tại thì thời gian lưu trú của khách ở Hạ Long không dài. Và hơn nữa là nhằm mở rộng không gian du lịch, đặc biệt là cho tới giờ thì khu vực Vịnh Hạ Long là trọng điểm, là trung tâm thu hút khách nhiều nhất. Nhưng bây giờ người ta có xu hướng là mở không gian du lịch rộng ra rồi đầu tư thêm để bó thành 4 phân khu mà những phân đấy đều có khả năng thu hút khách.

Người hỏi: OK, thì đó là những định hướng chung về phát triển du lịch. Thế còn riêng về du lịch sinh thái thì sao? Vì du lịch sinh thái có những nguyên tắc hay là những tiêu chí riêng khi phát triển nó. Thế địa phương mình nhằm đáp ứng những nguyên tắc gì khi phát triển du lịch sinh thái?

Trả lời: Nguyên tắc của du lịch sinh thái là gì? Em ít nghe nhắc đến nó. Nếu chị biết, chị có thể nói cho em biết được không?

Người hỏi: Nhìn chung thì du lịch sinh thái có 5 nguyên tắc chính: đó là du lịch sinh thái thì diễn ra trong môi trường tự nhiên, giữ gìn bền vững môi trường sinh thái, có tính giáo dục bảo vệ môi trường, mang lại lợi ích cho cộng đồng địa phương và làm tăng sự hài long cho du khách. Vậy tỉnh Quảng Ninh hướng tới những mục tiêu gì khi phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực Hạ Long.

Trả lời: Theo em thấy thì hiện nay du lịch sinh thía ở khu vực mình, đặc biệt là khu vực vịnh Hạ Long thì chưa phát triển theo đúng nghĩa và cũng chưa được chú trọng lắm. Ví dụ Bảo tàng sinh thái là cái hình thức phát triển để cho mình có thể khuyến khích phát triển được du lịch sinh thái tại Hạ Long. Thế nhưng mà hiện nay dự án đó không được dồn trọng tâm, không được đầu tư và không nhận được sự quan tâm của chính quyền địa phương nên nó không phát triển được. Với lại các khu nghi dưỡng, các khu vui chơi giả trí, các cơ sở hạ tầng thì hiện nay đang được chú trọng hơn những dự án du lịch sinh thái theo đúng nghĩa của nó.

Về khía cạnh của cộng đồng địa phương thì mình cũng chưa có chính sách gì để hỗ trợ, khuyến khích cộng đồng tham gia vào các dự án du lịch sinh thái. Em lấy ví dụ như làng chài, hiện nay lang chài là một di sản văn hóa của vịnh Hạ Long mà rất nhiều khách du lịch thích đến thăm, thích trải nghiệm, nhưng mà mình lại không quản lý được nên phải di dân, chuyển tất cả cuộc sống của các làng chài lên bờ chẳng hạn. Thì tự nhiên cái cuộc sống bình thường của người ta bị xáo trộn và việc tham gia của họ vào các hoạt động du lịch sinh thái cũng bị ảnh hưởng.

Thế còn về cộng đồng cư dân ở khu vực thành phố Hạ Long hay khu vực ven xung quanh vịnh Hạ Long thì chỉ có tự người ta đầu tư về về cơ sở vật chất để đón khách du lịch. Chứ nó cũng không có một hệ thống nào giúp đỡ hay định hướng cho người ta là nên như thế nào, nên như thế nào để có thể đón tiếp khách du lịch được một cách hoàn hảo, hay là cho du khách một trải nghiệm tốt.

Quay trở lại vấn đề bảo tồn và phát triển du lịch để quay lại và bảo vệ hệ thống tài nguyên tư nhiên thì nó còn mờ nhạt. Vì sao thế, bởi mình phát triển cơ sở hạ tầng, ví dụ những dự án lấn biển, hay những dự án xây dựng cơ sở hạ tầng ngay tại các điểm du lịch trên vịnh. Về quy chế thì rất chặt chẽ, nhưng thực tế nó đang tác động rất lớn đến chính môi trường của vịnh Hạ Long. Bằng chứng là UNESCO họ đã khuyến nghị rất nhiều, thực ra là khuyến nghị của UNECO thì nó không chỉ liên quan đến các dự án phát triển du lịch mà nó liên quan đến các dự án phát triển kinh tế xã hội, trong đó có các dự án có sở hạ tầng như các dự án lấn biển. Ví dụ hiện nay mình đang ào ạt thực hiện các dự án xây dựng cơ sở hạ tầng thì nó cũng có tác động đến môi trường tự nhiên. Có thể hiện nay chính quyền địa phương đang tập trung vào phát triển cơ sở hạ tầng nhiều hơn là coi trọng yếu tố bảo tồn. Có nghĩa là nó chưa cân bằng. Theo em nghĩ thì nó là như vậy.

Người hỏi: Em có thể cho biết hiện trạng phát triển du lịch sinh thái ở vịnh Hạ Long hiện nay ra sao không?

Trả lời: Theo em thì du lịch sinh thái là loại hình du lịch mới phát triển ở khu vực vịnh Hạ Long, nó chưa thành một các guồng, nó chưa thu hút được tất cả các đối tượng tham gia về nó, đặc biệt là các đối tượng quản lý về du lịch thì nó vẫn còn chưa chuyên nghiệp. Ví dụ

bình thường hình thức  du lịch sinh thái là phương phức rất phù hợp với khu vực vịnh Hạ Long vì nó dựa vào thiên nhiên là chính. Nhưng đến bây giờ chưa có chính sách nào thật là mạnh để đẩy mạnh hình thức du lich đấy. Tóm lại thì em thấy du lịch sinh thái vẫn đang ở giai đoạn ban đầu thôi.

Người hỏi: Các sản phẩm du lịch sinh thái đặc trưng hiện có ở khu vực vịnh Hạ Long là gì?

Trả lời: Hiện nay em thấy có các hoạt động sau: Leo núi ngắm cảnh ở Đảo Titop, chèo thuyền đi vào khám phá khu vực Hang Luồn, khám phá thảm thực vật trên núi đá vôi trên vịnh Hạ Long, rồi bây giờ cũng đang nhen nhóm hình thức lặn biển để ngắm san hô, hay là chỉ đơn giản là đi tham quan, trồng rừng ngập mặn hay tham quan khám phá hang động chẳng hạn.

Người hỏi: Em đánh giá thế nào về chủ trương định hướng của tỉnh về phát triển du lịch sinh thái trong thời gian tới? Đây có là loại hình du lịch cần tập trung phát triển trong thời gian tới không?

Trả lời: Về mặt chủ trương chính sách trên văn bản, giấy tờ thì tỉnh rất quyết tâm, ví dụ như đưa thành phố Hạ Long trở thành thành phố du lịch, trong đó có cả phát triển du lịch sinh thái, và có những huy động những nguồn lực liên quan để có thể đẩy mạnh để phát triển du lịch ở khu vực thành phố Hạ Long. Cái này là Tỉnh rất quan tâm. Có nghĩa là bây giờ xu hướng đây mạnh phát triển du lịch sinh thái được đặt lên hàng đầu, đặc biệt ở Hạ Long được quan tâm lắm. Đặc biệt là thành phố Hạ Long được giao là xây dựng nghị quyết để xây dựng thành phố Hạ Long trở thành thành phố du lịch, trong đó tại Nghị quyết này có đề cập đến các biện pháp để đưa thành phố Hạ Long trở thành thành phố du lịch, có nghĩa là từ công tác tuyên

truyền đến bảng biển chỉ dẫn hay là tờ rơi, tờ gấp để giới thiệu tuyên truyền hay là về cơ sở hạ tầng, cải tạo hệ thống giao thông công cộng, rất là nhiều nội dung. Theo em thấy thì đọc cái Nghị quyết này họ không nói thẳng là tập trung phát triển du lịch sinh thái, mà đây là hình thức phát triển du lịch sinh thái và cả du lịch cộng đồng nữa ở khu vực Hạ Long.

Vậy em thấy là về văn bản giấy tờ và về quyết tâm của TỈnh thì rất là mạnh mẽ và thành phố Hạ Long được giao là trọng tâm trọng điểm cho việc này, chưa kể đến các địa phương khác là vệ tinh khác xung quanh, kéo ra đến tận khu vực Bình Liêu, Ba Chẽ, Tiên Yên cũng đang nhen nhóm. Nói chung là về mặt định hướng thì là có và rất mạnh mẽ.

Người hỏi: Theo đánh giá của em thì hiện nay các doanh nghiệp du lịch trên địa bàn tham gia vào việc phát triển DLST như thế nào?

Trả lời: Về phía doanh nghiệp, em không phải là người theo dõi về mảng này. Cho nên có thể đánh giá của em nó không được toàn diện. Tuy nhiên theo đánh giá của cá nhân em thì em thấy có một số doanh nghiệp, ví dụ các đơn vị kinh doanh về dịch vụ tàu tổ chức cho khách tham gia các tour bảo vệ môi trường như nhặt vớt rác trên vịnh Hạ Long. Nhưng có vẻ như là, đây mới chỉ là định hướng tự phát trong chiến lược kinh doanh du lịch của đơn vị. Thì đấy là nó phụ thuộc hoàn toàn vào định hướng của đơn vị đấy. Chứ nó cũng chưa có gắn kết nhiều với chính quyền. Bởi vì từ phía chính quyền với doanh nghiệp vẫn còn đứng cách biệt, chưa đồng hành cùng doanh nghiệp.

Người hỏi: Số lượng các doanh nghiệp tích cực trong các hoạt động phát triển du lịch sinh thái có chiếm số đông không?

Trả lời: Em không thể nói chính xác số doanh nghiệp này, nhưng em có gặp một số doanh nghiệp như vậy, nhưng nếu nói là em gặp nhiều doanh nghiệp như vậy thì cũng không đúng; nhưng mà nói chung là cũng không có nhiều các doanh nghiệp như vậy.

Người hỏi: Thế còn về phía cộng đồng địa phương thì sao, mức độ tham gia của họ vào các hoạt động phát triển du lịch sinh thái như thế nào?

Trả lời: Thường là những người có điều kiện kinh tế thì họ đầu tư. Còn nếu nói về là đại trà cộng đồng, toàn dân làm du lịch thì chưa có, về cái ý thức và điều kiện cũng như chính sách hỗ trợ là chưa có. Ví dụ từ phía cộng đồng, em lấy ví dụ những người có điều kiện thì họ đầu tư cho phát triển tàu DL, khách sạn, nhà hàng hay là các dịch vụ du lịch liên quan đến du lịch là nhiều hơn là tham gia trực tiếp vào các hoạt động thuyết minh, hướng dẫn cho du khách hay là chính người ta làm, chính người ta làm cho du khách trải nghiệm cuộc sống của họ. Các hoạt động như vậy thì em thấy chưa nhiều ở khu vực Hạ Long.

Người hỏi: Thế còn cộng đồng dân cư tại các điểm du lịch có các dự án du lịch sinh thái thì sao. Họ có tích cực tham gia vào các hoạt động du lịch sinh thái không?

Trả lời: Ah, họ rất hăng hái, cái này thì em đã làm cuộc khảo sát, phỏng vấn, hồi đó em cũng có ý định là phát triển một số hình thức du lịch sinh thái dựa vào cộng đồng. Khi mà mình hỏi là họ có sẵn sàng tham gia không thì hầu hết câu trả lời là có đấy là về phía làng chài, các ngư dân làng chài đó, vì hồi đó em phỏng vấn tại các khu vực làng chài. Còn các đối tượng khác sinh sống bình thường ở trên thành phố thì em chưa có điều kiện để tiếp xúc với họ. Nhưng mà hiện nay sự tham gia của họ còn mờ nhạt, có thể là hiện nay họ

chưa thực sự là bị cuốn vào, được cuốn vào hay được thu hút vào trong những hoạt động đấy. Nhìn chung, sự tham gia của cộng đồng địa phương vào các hoạt động du lịch sinh thái còn hạn chế. Do vậy cần có có các chính sách hay chiến dịch thật sự là mạnh manh tính phong trào để thu hút họ tham gia vào.

Người hỏi: Thế theo em thì có các tổ chức quốc tế nào hỗ trợ cho phát triển các du lịch sinh thía tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long không?

Trả lời: Em thấy có một số dự án liên quan đến hỗ trợ bảo vệ môi trường vịnh Hạ Long. Ecoboat là một ví dụ của tổ chức FFI hỗ trợ cho tỉnh Quảng Ninh, nhưng dự án đó kết thúc rồi và hiện giờ mình tự duy trì hoạt động bằng nguồn lực của mình. Em thấy bây giờ đang có Dự án Liên minh Bảo vệ môi trường vịnh Hạ Long, thì trong đấy nó cũng có một vài hình thức phát triển du lịch bền vững dựa vào cộng đồng, ở đây thì nó có nhiều lĩnh vực trong đó có dựa vào ngư dân để phát triển thủy sản, và từ nuôi trồng thủy sản bền vững thì nó lại quay lại phục vụ du lịch. Thì cái đó là của tổ chức MCD (Marine Conservation Development), tổ chức đó là tổ chức Liên mình sinh vật biển. Nó là tổ chức phi chính phủ của Việt Nam. Dự án này làm việc với nhiều đối tác của địa phương như thành phố Hạ Long cũng là một đối tác, Ban Quản lý vịnh Hạ Long, Sở Nông nghiệp, UBND tỉnh, Sở Tài nguyên Môi trường, vv. Cái dự án đó thì chạy được khoảng hơn 1 năm rồi.

Người hỏi: Theo đánh giá của em thì tiềm năng phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long trong 5 năm tới, và 10 đến 20 năm tới như thế nào?

Trả lời: Theo nhận định của em trong 5 năm tới, sự phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long sẽ tốt hơn. Vì trong khoảng thời gian

5 năm tới, sự quan tâm của người ta đối với du lịch sinh thía sẽ dần dần vỡ ra. Từ việc nhận thức vỡ ra nó sẽ thành chính sách, định hướng đúng đắn. Trong 5 năm và 10 năm tới sẽ tới sẽ tốt hơn vì tới lúc đó cơ sở hạ tầng cũng đã phát triển và dần đi vào ổn định.

Người hỏi: Theo em du lịch sinh thái có giữ vai trò quan trọng đối với việc phát triển du lịch bền vững tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long không?

Trả lời: Có chứ, du lịch sinh thái là quan trọng chứ, vì nếu không phát triển du lịch sinh thái thì cái tài nguyên, bởi vì là cái tài nguyên du lịch chính ở vịnh Hạ Long là tài nguyên thiên nhiên là chính. Bởi vậy, nếu không phát triển du lịch sinh thái để vừa phát triển vừa bảo tồn thì mình sẽ mất dần những tài nguyên đó. Nói chung là đã mất tài nguyên thì sau này khó có thể phát triển được và khó mà lấy lại được.

Người hỏi: Hiện tại Ban Quản lý Vịnh Hạ Long có thực hiện chức năng, nhiệm vụ gì để phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long không?

Trả lời: Chức năng nhiệm vụ chính của Ban Quản lý Vịnh Hạ Long (BQLVHL) là quản lý nhà nước về vịnh Hạ Long bây giờ chuyển về thành phố Hạ Long. Thì Ban QLVHL chịu trách nhiệm tham mựu cho thành phố. Về các chiến lược phát triển DL thì nó không rõ ràng quy định trong cái chức năng, nhiệm vụ của Ban. Vì chủ yếu BQLVHL hiện tại bây giờ là bảo vệ môi trường, kiểm tra, kiểm soát trên vịnh Hạ Long, nghiên cứu khoa học, làm các công việc hàng ngày như soát vé, bán vé, bảo vệ, bảo tồn thì những cái đấy là chính. Còn theo các văn bản giấy tờ được giao, hồi xưa thì chưa có tham mưu về chính sách phát triển du lịch, mà chủ yếu là tham mưu về cái bảo tồn. À em xin lỗi, tham mưu về các chính sách bảo tồn

và phát huy những giá trị của di sản vịnh Hạ Long. Thì phát huy ở đây có cả cái việc là sử dụng tài nguyên của vịnh cho phát triển, thì trong đó có phát triển du lịch. Ban cũng có đề xuất các tuyến điểm du lịch trên vịnh, xây dựng kế hoạch quản lý di sản vịnh Hạ Long thì trong đó nó có phần về phát triển du lịch. Đến bây giờ thì có nhiều hơn trước kia.

Người hỏi: Theo em để làm tốt hơn việc phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long thì đơn vị mình có cần bổ sung thêm chức năng nhiệm vụ gì không?

Trả lời: Thực tế, theo em thì không cần phải bổ sung thêm chức năng nhiệm vụ gì cho BQLVHL, như bây giờ là đủ. Chỉ có điều là làm sao để phát huy được hết những chức năng nhiệm vụ đó để mình phát triển nó làm cho du lịch sinh thái trở lên mạnh mẽ ở khu vực vịnh Hạ Long hay không thôi.

Còn về chức năng, nhiệm vụ thì là đầy đủ rồi. Bây giờ nếu Tỉnh có các chính sách… ví dụ như là, em thấy là nhiều khi mình xây dựng được các chương trình hay dự án phát triển du lịch nhưng mình lại không xin được cái sự đồng ý, hay là sự ủng hộ về tài chính của Tỉnh cho nên là nó cứ dừng lại ở đấy, nó cứ như thế. Cái này thì em không biết là do đâu, còn về chức năng nhiệm vụ thì là đầy đủ rồi, mình không cần phải bổ sung gì cả.

Người hỏi: Theo em hiện tại cơ quan mình có gặp phải những khó khăn, trở ngại gì để phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long không?

Trả lời: Em thấy mối liên hệ giữa các cơ quan nhà nước, đặc biệt là cơ quan em với khối công ty, hay là khối doanh nghiệp mà người ta đầu tư phát triển du lịch là chưa chặt chẽ. Bởi vì các cơ quan quản lý và

các đơn vị thực sự đang phát triển du lịch là chưa liên kết chặt chẽ. Mà đây là do cơ chế chính sách, và quan trọng nhất là người đứng đầu, nếu mà người ta cam kết, người ta quyết tâm tạo ra mối quan hệ bền vững để có nghĩa là doanh nghiệp được tạo thuận lợi để phát triển, và mình đưa ra được những định hướng, cái đấy là quan trọng nhất. Vì em nghĩ thực tế nhà nước sẽ không đầu tư, nhà nước sẽ không bỏ tiền ra đầu tư cho phát triển du lịch sinh thái nhưng nhà nước có thể đưa ra các định hướng hay đưa ra các chính sách hỗ trợ để khuyến khích họ đầu tư vào phát triển sinh thái.

Các cơ quan quản lý nhà nước của mình dường như là còn tách biệt, đứng ngoài guồn quay, chưa hiểu được nhu cầu phát triển. Đấy ví dụ em lấy ví dụ đơn giản là công nhận các tuyến điểm du lịch nhé, có những điểm du lịch mà khách rất muốn đến và doanh nghiệp người ta cũng rất muốn mang khách đến, nhưng mình không cho mình cấm. Đấy thì nó đang có những hiện tượng như thế. Nghĩa là mình chưa định hướng được, kể cả các chiến lược lớn. Mình chưa có các bước cụ thể để kết nối với doanh nghiệp. Em nghĩ là cái kết nối với doanh nghiệp là quan trọng.

Người hỏi: Ngoài hạn chế về mối liên kết giữa cơ quan quản lý nhà nước và nghiệp thì em còn thấy có khó khăn, trở ngại nào khác không?

Trả lời: Còn một cái nữa là hệ thống thông tin quảng bá cho khách du lịch từ chính quyền địa phương. Đây em không nói đến khối doanh nghiệp tư nhân vì họ tự quảng bá cho họ, nhưng mà về quảng bá chung mà chính quyền quảng bá cho các hoạt động du lịch sinh thái là hầu như chưa có một cách hệ thống, bài bản. Phần tiếp thị và quảng bá của địa phương cho du lịch sinh thái chưa được tổ chức tốt. Thì từ sự thiếu hụt thông tin đó cũng gây ra cái cản trở, bởi vì khách mà không rõ thông tin thì cũng không dám quyết định lựa

chọn sản phẩm du lịch sinh thái của Hạ Long một cách nhanh chóng, thuận lợi. Em lấy ví dụ quảng bá trên internet, qua website, thì website của Ủy ban Nhân thành phố Hạ Long và của Ban quản lý vịnh Hạ Long rất kém về thông tin du lịch, mà chưa cho du khách một bức tranh tổng thể về du lịch Quảng Ninh. Cho nên là cái phần thiếu hụt thông tin đấy là mình cần phải khắc phục nhanh chóng.

Các khó khăn trở ngại tiếp theo là mình chưa có chính sách khuyến khích; cũng chưa có nhiều doanh nghiệp đầu tư phát triển du lịch sinh thái. Du lịch sinh thái chưa được tạo thành một trào lưu phát triển, nên chưa tạo ra được các sản phẩm hấp dẫn.

Người hỏi: Em có đề xuất gì để chính quyền địa phương thực hiện tốt hơn việc phát triển du lịch sinh thái tại khu vực vịnh Hạ Long không?

Trả lời: Trước tiên là phải nâng cao nhận thức của các cấp lãnh đạo về tầm quan trọng của du lịch sinh thái để từ đó chính quyền địa phương đưa ra được các chính sách khuyến khích, hỗ trợ doanh nghiệp tham gia phát triển du lịch sinh thái.

Cũng cần phải có các chính sách về hỗ trợ tài chính, kỹ năng làm du lịch cho cộng đồng địa phương (nhất là cộng đồng làng chài). Ví dụ như chượng trình Nụ cười Hạ Long cam kết nâng cao ý thức của người dân khi tham gia vào các hoạt động du lịch.

Phải nâng cao nhận thức, giáo dục tuyên truyền người dân địa phương về văn minh du lịch để xây dựng Hạ Long thành điểm đến an toàn, thân thiện.