



Promoting The Role of Fishing Communities in Developing Fishing Village Cultural Tourism in Thanh Hoa Province

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Article DOI: 10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0205

DOI URL: <https://doi.org/10.55677/SSHRB/2026-3050-0205>

KEYWORDS: Community-based tourism; Fishing communities; Fishing-village culture; Thanh Hoa; Sustainable development.

ABSTRACT: The article examines the contribution of the fishing communities to the development of fishing-village cultural tourism in Thanh Hoa Province. The research indicates that the fishing communities of Thanh Hoi have unique cultural values (the whale-worshipping ritual festival and traditional crafts)-a strength of the sustainable tourism development based on a review of the community-based tourism theory and a field survey conducted on the community. Nevertheless, the extent of fishermen involvement in tourism activities is low and mostly passive or drawn in in the presence of a dependency on state, and deficiency of professional skills and poor connections with the stakeholders. To address these issues, the article proposes that the position of fishing communities should be enhanced as significant actors-no only to enhance livelihoods but also to preserve the culture of fishing-villages. Lastly, it suggests some of the solutions: strengthening of fishermen tourism-skills training; the development of community-based tourism models in the Thanh Hoa region associated with fishery villages; policy and resource-based provision to strengthen the engagement of the community in the tourism value chain; and the coordination of the actions of the government, enterprises, and communities towards sustainable fishing-village cultural tourism.

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Published: February 09, 2026

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I. INTRODUCTION

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is taken as an orientation of sustainable development based on the authentic involvement of the local population and equitable benefit distribution systems. The existing legal framework of Vietnam sets up the CBT as a community-based model of development, grounded on the cultural values of the locals and under management of the community, arranged to be operated, and the community benefits to gain, and sets conditions, standards, and guidelines of implementation clearly on the grassroots level (National Assembly, 2017; Government, 2017; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021). New policy directions focus on capacity building, service standardization, linking service values to the heritage, and conservation of heritage in CBT sites, thereby offering sustainable livelihoods to vulnerable populations and the locals in the rural, mountainous, and coastal regions (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). On the academic front, international and domestic reviews confirm the centrality of the community in product design, destination governance, and benefit distributions and the extent of involvement and empowerment as the determinant variables of the experience quality and sustainable development outcomes of CBT models (Walia, 2021; Tieng, 2022; Tan et al., 2023; Quang et al., 2023).

In this respect, Thanh Hoa, which is a gateway province to the North Central region, is a long coastline with the fishing villages being dispersed across Hau Loc, Hoang Hoa, Quang Xuong, and Nghi Son where the fishing communities have created a very distinct fishing guild culture through long term settlement and livelihoods highly reliant on the sea. This cultural area unites ritual activities, beliefs, and knowledge of fisheries, and also common livelihoods, including fishing, seafood processing, fish sausage manufacturing, and weaving fishing apparatus. Routine activities, including hauling nets in the early mornings, early morning fish markets, and preparing of coastal specialities, offer interesting experiential content in the community based cultural and experiential tourism products (Walia, 2021; Tan et al., 2023). The field study of Thanh Hoa in the coastal communities depicts that the locals have cultural capital and incentives to be involved in tourism activities, but the levels of participation fall short across household groups and depend on capacity, resources, and market connections (Ly, 2024). The fact that similar coastal regions in

the Central region have similar ecological and cultural characteristics supports the argument that coastal CBT should be addressed through social entrepreneurship, enhanced empowerment, and the connection of the conservation of heritage and the maximization of product and market value chains (Van Tuyen et al., 2023).

Tourism is one of the primary economic sectors that Thanh Hoa seeks to make, and the government has pursued a strategy of diversifying its products range to limit its seasonality, such as community-based ecotourism and cultural tourism in the coastal villages areas (Trung, 2022; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). One of the promising ways of preserving the coastal heritage and at the same time creating more livelihood opportunities to the residents is through development of fishing guild cultural tourism, which is perceived as tourism founded on the cultural resources of the people who engage in the fisheries. However, the importance of fishing communities in the process of development of local tourism has not been actualised yet. A large portion of households is not part of the value chain or is involved in a passive way, receiving very little in terms of benefit relative to their cultural and social contributions (Ly, 2024; Quang et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2023). This gap necessitates the definition of levels of participation, institutional, capacity, and market barriers, and empowerment, which is responsive to the cultural and livelihood context of the fishing communities.

This paper aims to fill the above gap by: (i) reviewing theoretical framework underlying community based tourism and proposing an analytical framework of the role of fishing communities in tourism development; (ii) analyzing the present situation of the role of fishing communities in Thanh Hoa in the development of fishing guild cultural tourism and identification of unique cultural values that can be exploited; (iii) discussing the obstacles and challenges that define the degree of participation; and (iv) identifying a set of solutions to enable communities and empower them to further develop fishing guild cultural tourism in Thanh Hoa.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Theoretical Background and Analytical Framework

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is proposed as a type of tourism development, which positions the local people in the middle of creating products, managing the destinations, and distributing benefits and, therefore, achieves sustainability objectives on economic, cultural, and environmental levels (Walia, 2021; Tieng, 2022; Tan et al., 2023). The scholarly sources focus on active involvement and empowerment of the residents as preconditions of converting cultural capital and indigenous knowledge into the competitive advantage of a destination, as well as enhancing the quality of life and resilience of a community (Quang et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2023; Walia, 2021). The legal framework of Vietnam acknowledges and provides a meaning of CBT as a type of tourism designed to take place on the principles of community cultural values, managed by the community, organized to operate, and enjoyed by the community with the provision of guidelines and policy direction (National Assembly, 2017; Government, 2017; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021, 2024).

In the culture of fishing guilds, fishing guild culture is defined as a set of ritual practices, beliefs, folk knowledge, handicrafts, and lifestyles which are strongly associated with marine livelihoods. When structured with reference to the principles of CBT, these elements crystallize into a pool of socio-cultural products which can be converted into unique experiential tourism products (Van Tuyen et al., 2023; Van Tuyen and Phuong, 2025; Walia, 2021). Bidirectional interaction between the tourism and the community culture demonstrates that, as the residents have a meaningful role in the value chain, the incentives to conserve, renew and pass the local heritage are increased, and more socio-economic benefit is shared among the community (Tieng, 2022; Van Tuyen et al., 2023).

Community participation theories point at the fact that participation levels include passive and symbolic types of participation at the one end and active and co decision making levels at the other end of the hierarchy. In Vietnam, systematic reviews on CBT show that there is a direct correlation between the level of participation and the quality of governance, visitor experience, and the sustainable development performance (Tan et al., 2023). Observations of the coast communities have shown that most of the localities remain under the threshold of involvement where local residents continue to have insignificant voices in the planning and management with the benefits obtained not corresponding with cultural and social efforts (Quang et al., 2023; Ly, 2024). The policy and development interventions are thus meant to increase the level of participation through empowerment in making decisions, business having transparent benefit sharing systems, and the capacity of the community to organize and conduct business in tourism (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024; Tieng, 2022).

On the basis of these strategies, the analytical frame of role of fishing communities in fishing guild cultural tourism is based on four axes. The first one is the degree of participation in the whole tourism value chain such as initiation, planning, service organization, monitoring, and governance with distinction between active and passive participation. Second is donations by the community in terms of cultural values, indigenous knowledge, labor resources, and social networks. Third is the economic gains in terms of jobs and income, social gains in terms of cohesion and status and cultural gains in terms of conservation and reproduction of practices, which are assessed at the household and community levels. Fourth are influencing factors, such as endogenous capacities and resources of residents, policy mechanisms and institutions to implement them, the degree of business involvement, and the motivations of the visitor market (Tan et al., 2023; Walia, 2021; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024; Quang et al., 2023). The national legal aspect is inculcated as a contextual variable that influences the organizations arrangement and the

level of local empowerment, which gives grounds to evaluate the present situation and indicate gaps in the intervention in the Thanh Hoa case study (National Assembly, 2017; Government, 2017; Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021, 2024).

2.2. Research Methods

The research takes an interdisciplinary methodology as it incorporates a review of secondary sources with field work so that it can construct scientific foundation and methodological analysis of the problem of community-based tourism and fishing guild culture. The documentary materials incorporated policy frameworks, legal documents, and the academic studies related to the issue, whereas the field data were gathered by using structured observation and semi structured interviews in a few representative fishing communities in Thanh Hoa involving fishermen, village and commune leaders, and cultural officers, in order to capture the livelihood and cultural practices, the levels of participation, and the expectations about the participation in the tourism. Qualitative content analysis was used to process all information under the approach of triangulation and comparison of the survey results with the existing knowledge to extract similarities and differences, thus evaluating the current role of the community, defining the barriers and enabling conditions, and concluding on root causes based on the proposed framework. It is based on the obtained results, and a set of viable solutions to the study area is proposed. The limited time and resources of the survey make it an exploratory survey, which will be akin to field evidence to supplement arguments in the study.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. The current state of fishing community participation in fishing guild cultural tourism in Thanh Hoa

The level of participation of the fishing community in tourism activities is low as evidenced by the empirical evidence of Thanh Hoa coastal communes. Tourism does not directly touch on most of the households or they only tend to be involved in piecemeal processes with minimal value added. The current participation trend has an aspect of coerced or passive participation implying that participants are mobilized and lack a lot of decision-making authority, and this state of affairs has changed very little than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic (Ly, 2024). This trend can be considered a mechanism of participation that remains extensively formalistic and has not moved to an empowerment-based model that would allow the community to introduce product creation and quality governance connection in the value chain (Tan et al., 2023; Quang et al., 2023).

Root causes are determined on three dimensions. First, there is still a sense of dependence of the institution. Most fishers want the government or business to coordinate all the tourism activities, and they will only be involved when requested and this makes them less proactive and less self-organising (Ly, 2024). Second, vertical and horizontal relationships between the value chain are weak. There is also little cooperation with tour operators, middle organizations, and the creation of collective organizations like cooperatives or community tourism, which complicates the situation in terms of reaching markets, as well as standardization of the quality of services (Ly, 2024; Tan et al., 2023). Third, the economic benefits of tourism to the households that engage in fishing are not favorable as compared to the conventional fisheries. Even in the period when the tourism sector was stagnant by the pandemic, the fisheries income could still be preserved by many households, and thus, in the post-pandemic period, there was no real push to trigger a livelihood change towards tourism (Ly, 2024).

Table 1. Selected contextual indicators of Thanh Hoa's tourism sector related to the foundation for implementing community based tourism (2024 to 2025)

Indicator	Value	Notes
Visitors in the first six months of 2024	9,780,600 visits	Estimated at 70.9% of the 2024 annual plan
Total tourism revenue in the first six months of 2024	19,848.5 billion VND	Up 30.2% compared with the same period in 2023
Target for 2024	13.8 million visits; 32,387 billion VND	Province wide plan
Estimated results for 2024	15.3 million visits; 33,815 billion VND	Report in early 2025
Tourism workforce (2024)	56,300 people	Share trained or upskilled: 82.6%

(Source: Author's survey results)

One of the systemic bottlenecks is capacity constraints. Educational level and inadequacies in professional tourism skills including visitor communication, service management, safety and hygiene, foreign languages make the community to have a challenge in higher value links. This is also supported empirically by other coastal communities including Nhon Ly (Binh Dinh) indicating that such a situation was prevalent and implies the generality of capacity barriers during the transition to a community-based tourism model (Quang et al., 2023). There is still lack of voice of the community in planning and decision making on tourism development that poses the risk of token involvement and diminish quality of consensus at the grassroots level. Demand empowerment and openness in the benefit sharing mechanisms thus become a key factor of policy change (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024; Tan et al., 2023).

This has led to the concentration of fishers in the value chain of the cultural tourism fishing guild in either simple labor phases or taking part in the events through mobilization, with them never participating in product design, operating management, and quality control. The benefit of their contributions to the economy and social aspect remains low in relation to their cultural input and local expertise (Ly, 2024; Tan et al., 2023). The pivotal issue to the objective of building fishing guild cultural tourism is to establish a system that will transform the passive to the empowered and active and the community to the major player in the development.

In the context of the scale and labor capacity of the tourism sector increasing fast in the province (Table 1), the passive level of participation and the lack of empowerment of fishing communities on the fishing guild sites can be explained as a paradox in the implementation of the policy which requires intervention in the value chain linkages, community capacity building, and the structure of benefit distribution institutions adapted to the conditions in the coastal environment (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024; Ly, 2024; Tan et al., 2023).

3.2. Cultural values of Thanh Hoa fishing guild culture and its potential for tourism development

Flexus of festival and belief heritage, crafts and folk knowledge, livelihood, and cuisine form the cultural value system of the fishing communities in Thanh Hoa and upon which the cultural tourism products can be shaped using a Community Based Tourism (CBT) approach. According to this model, the cultural resources of indigenous communities, which have already been converted into tourism by involving local people in their meaningful activities, will be able to generate income, identity, and capacity building at the same time (Walia, 2021; Tieng, 2022; Tan et al., 2023; Quang et al., 2023). There is evidence of the effectiveness of CBT models that is stored in the coastal communities of Central Vietnam; these models should be strongly correlated with the local social entrepreneurs, adhere to the customs of belief and rituals, and have clear systems of benefit sharing (Van Tuyen et al., 2023; Van Tuyen and Phuong, 2025).

Well-known festival and belief customs of the fishing guild communities of Thanh Hoa are vividly captured in the Cau Ngu Festival in the Commune of Ngu Loc (Hau Loc) through the procession of the Long Chau ritual boat and a system of symbols of gratitude to the Sea Deity as an indication of the integrating ability and sea awareness. The festival venue is held every year at the Diem Pho heritage complex and draws high populations of residents of the seaside. In September 2017 the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism inscribed the event as a national intangible cultural heritage, which implies the representativeness of this practice on provincial and interregional levels. The festival reinstates community energy and support networks and the discipline of seafaring livelihoods, delivering valuable material to the production of performance and ritual based experiences in cultural tourism product chains (Walia, 2021; Tan et al., 2023; Van Tuyen and Phuong, 2025).

Among the residents of the fishing guilds crafts and folk knowledge: net and net mending, wooden boat building and repair, seasonal knowledge of weather and sea conditions through winds and tides, are a body of knowledge capital that can be converted into experiential and apprenticeship practices and visit workshops and heritage story-telling. It has been shown in Nhon Ly (Binh Dinh) that fisheries experience modules are better at generating added value than unprocessed goods, in case residents have been trained in skills of interpretation, safety, and hygiene and communicating with visitors (Quang et al., 2023). The cuisine of fishing villages, such as fermented shrimp paste, sour flavors, eel salad, shrimp cakes, sea crabs, and clam porridge, is also related to the lives of fishing villages and the bond with the sea, which makes the range of products extended to those of food tours and cooking courses held at home or in small processing plants (Tieng, 2022; Tan et al., 2023).

Mutual support systems and community spirit in seafaring livelihoods like shared capital to build boats, supportive boat crews and rescue funds are some of the unique social values by fishing guild members. Both of them are a social resource in the CBT governance and a plot in the creation of learning and inspirational lessons regarding solidarity and maritime sovereignty (Van Tuyen and Phuong, 2025). In the case of Thanh Hoa, this structure, located in the system of fishing villages, along a 102-kilometer coastline with numerous estuaries and rich system of cultural heritage, is able to create clustered product routes that combine festivals, traditional activities, fish markets, and seasonal food (Ly, 2024; Tan et al., 2023).

Table 2. Indicators of fishing guild culture and livelihoods in Thanh Hoa and implications for tourism transformation

Value group	Empirical evidence in Thanh Hoa	Indicators or figures	Product implications
Coastal space	A 102 kilometer coastline and seven estuaries along the coast, including three major ones: Lach Truong, Lach Hoi, and Lach Bang	102 km; 7 estuaries	Organize seasonal routes linking fishing villages, fish markets, and estuary ports, and connect destinations along estuaries
Festivals and beliefs	The Cau Ngu Festival in Ngu Loc (Hau Loc) is held annually at the Diem Pho heritage complex, features the Long Chau ceremonial boat procession, and is recognized as a	National ICH inscription (2017); participation by thousands of fishers; timing follows the local festival calendar	Festival performance and ritual experience packages with heritage storytelling, along with photography products and ritual workshops

	national intangible cultural heritage (September 2017)		
Marine livelihood capacity	Ngu Loc Commune currently has nearly 400 fishing vessels, with more than 200 large boats regularly engaged in offshore fishing	about 400 boats; more than 200 offshore boats	One day as a fisher experiences, visits and practice of marine safety, and environmental education
Intangible heritage resources	Province wide inventory results record 719 intangible cultural heritage items across seven categories	719 items; 7 categories	Select and stage suitable sea folk songs, chants, and performances for tourism, and build a seasonal events calendar

(Source: Author's survey results)

When structured in experience module, connected by route and seasonality, and attached to the criterion of community service, culturally tourism products such as the festival and belief heritage and fisheries knowledge capital of Thanh Hoa fishing guild can create competitive differentiation. There is a requirement of an empowerment mechanism and capacity building that allows residents to assume interpretive and co governance roles and market linkages that can incorporate the indigenous cultural values into the tourism value chain in a sustainable way (Walia, 2021; Tieng, 2022; Tan et al., 2023; Van Tuyen et al., 2023).

IV. DISCUSSION

Thanh Hoa has a picture of fishing guild cultural tourism development that is formed as a result of the concurrent existence of strengths and bottlenecks. The fact that there is a lot of socio-cultural resources, systems of festival and belief practices, crafts, cuisine, and communal spirit present a unique source of product design. Simultaneously, resident active participation is low, professional and service competencies are low, and there is a poor community voice in decision making so that these benefits cannot be translated into sustainable development value. The main necessity will be the accurate outline of the main limitations and adaptation of the development model to the local environment to turn the roles of residents not to the supporting role but to the co-creating products and co-governing the destination.

The ability and consciousness of the residents are deemed the fundamental issues that determine their capability to be part of the tourism value chain. There is a need to have demand led training programs, where training is linked to selected product modules including cultural interpretation, safety and hygiene, visitor communication, household-based service operation, and group organization and such that would hasten practical competencies, confidence, and capacity to assume higher value-added links. At the institutional level, the demand is to put in place an empowerment-based governance structure, such as the creation of co governance institutions on the village and commune levels with differentiated representation, substantial consultation processes, public and transparent flows of benefits, rules of allocation based on contribution and need, and mechanisms of setting aside community funds to be reinvested in heritage conservation, essential infrastructure and social welfare. Gender organization and division mainstreaming can be used to confine the burdens of women that are not visible as the tourism industry grows, and also, benefit the quality of service provided by different stakeholders due to multi stakeholder involvement.

At the product design level a living conservation framework is needed with an adaptive management toolkit that addresses cultural, social and environmental impacts. There is need to establish limits of carrying capacity in space and time, establish heritage interpretation standards and codes of conduct between visitors and residents and operate cyclical impact monitoring mechanisms to and adjust experience modules in a timely manner by season and by market group. The existing policy framework provides the possibility to revise the model, stimulating the development of the principles of the public private cooperation, where the business facilitates the market connectivity, communication, and training, and the community is still able to remain the main service provider and co governor. With the ability of these interventions to focus concurrently on capacity building, strengthening participation and benefit sharing institutions, and regulating cultural and environmental effects, there is a possibility of the switch of passive participation to empowered and active participation by fishing communities of Thanh Hoa.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

It has been established in the study that fishing communities of Thanh Hoa already have a unique pool of socio cultural values such as festivals, fisheries knowledge, cuisine, and a tight community that gives a desirable base to develop the cultural tourism products of fishing guilds. Simultaneously, it implies that the existing rates of participation are low and passive, the role of the community in it is limited, and the gaps in the capacities imply that the role of the community as the central actor remains unrealized along the entire value chain. Sustainable development must focus on the community as its center, integrate the empowerment with capacity building as well as the development of equal benefit delivery systems to guarantee the authenticity of the products, quality of the experience, and overall long-term healthiness of the model. This needs to be supported by government,

business and expertise in a coordinated and sustained way and must have a transparent governance structure, which is substantively consulted, accountable and a system of periodical monitoring and evaluation indicators to facilitate making necessary adjustments in time. The resource, identity and policy direction of Thanh Hoa are in favor. The critical issue is how to make the existing conditions operational in form of a pilot, evaluation and scaling roadmap, which depends on three pillars, which include product linked training, community organization and governance, which includes community groups or cooperatives and on site management boards, and development of product market value chains that are coupled with necessary infrastructure, preferential finance, and digital promotion. Whenever these pillars are put to practice, fishing communities would, indeed, play a role in co creating, operating and monitoring the destination, thus achieving the aim of enhancing the cultural tourism of Thanh Hoa fishing guild on a platform of fairness and sustainability.

4.2. Policy Recommendations

According to the analyses and discussion, the author comes up with a number of key solutions to the problem to promote the role of fishing communities in the development of fishing guild cultural tourism in Thanh Hoa.

To begin with, increase awareness and build capacity of fishing communities based on a product linked training strategy. The training contents are to revolve around the key modules which include cultural interpretation, visitor communication, safety and hygiene, homestay management, small scale tour organization and preparation and service of fishing village foods. A core group in every fishing village should be used to activate peer learning mechanisms in order to offer on site mentoring. Incentives to participate should be offered to include tuition waivers or reduction, travel support or compromise with marine seasons and flexible scheduling. An explicit direction of transition of partial livelihoods ought to be defined to enable fishers to retain fisheries and gradually raise the proportion of income earned by fisheries through tourism services, which consequently will strengthen the incentives towards active involvement.

Second, enhance the organization of communities and their governance and introduce the mechanism of benefit sharing on the basis of transparency and the broad representation. The destination level should involve formation of a community tourism cooperative or cooperative group, appoint a management board and come up with unified regulations on service allocation, quality standards, displayed prices, visitor reception schedule, codes of conduct and mechanisms of handling complaints. At the commune level, a community tourism management board must be established as the coordinating center on the technical support and implementation control. Periodic disclosure should be done with community finances. The common fund based on revenues should be distributed in terms of contribution and need to re-invest into heritage conservation, basic infrastructure and social welfare. Elite capture prevention mechanisms should be implemented such as inclusive consultation, reserved representation of women and vulnerable populations, and monitoring and evaluation system with indicators on the participation rates, quality of services, and cultural, social, and environmental effects.

Third, establish product market value chains, which are associated with infrastructure and financial leverages. These route and season-based core products are to be designed in terms of authenticity which includes Cau Ngu Festival experiences, one day as a fisher program that include going offshore, net hauling, fish sauce processes learning, and a seafood meal with a fishing family, early morning fish markets, visits to traditional fish sauce workshops and fishing gear craft locations, and fishing village cuisine and branded local gifts. Process manuals, safety standards, carrying capacity limits and a heritage interpretation framework should all be included in the operational standards. The market promotion is to be conducted via digital platforms, tour operator familiarization programs and satellite connection routes to Sam Son, Hai Tien and Hai Hoa so as to increase the length of stay. Homestays, conversion of boats to a visitor mode of transport, and construction of standard toilets should receive preferential financing to the households. The access roads to fishing ports, clean beach and harbor landscape, and community houses should be the priorities of public investment and social mobilization, which should also be used as heritage display spaces. Continuous improvement should be incorporated via visitor feedback systems which should be implemented in a pilot, evaluation and scaling loop.

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