

Analysis and recommendations for people's participation into community-based tourism in Pu Luong Nature Reserve – Thanh Hoa, VN

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Abstract

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Title of the thesis Analysis and recommendations for people's participation into community-based tourism in Pu Luong Nature Reserve Area – Thanh Hoa, Vietnam		
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Abstract Community-based tourism not only contributes to the economic development at the locality, but it also serves as a medium to encourage and entice community members and visitors to preserve the originality of nature, conserve the authenticity of traditional values and breath-taking landscape. The objective of this research paper is to analyse and evaluate the current state CBT practice by the local community at Pu Luong Nature Reserve area and subsequently assess driving and influence factors as well as perceived barriers or hurdles obstructing their prospective participation. The research outcome shows that the local community's participation into the practice is currently to some extent restricted and classified as relatively passive or functional in exchange for financial incentives. The paper identifies and evaluates four influence factors driving the community's participation and commitment while some suggestions and recommendations at a macro-level have been put forward to enhance and strengthen the consensual engagement in tourism operations in the future.		
Keywords CBT, participation, sustainable tourism, Pu Luong, Vietnam		

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and theoretical motivation

During these extraordinary and turbulent times of the global health crisis of coronavirus pandemic, tourism industry is self-evidently perceived to be taking a heavy toll due to the raging and sweeping impact from the Covid-19 coupled with a vast multitude of other natural disasters (Kose et al., 2021). According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation – World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex released January 2021, that international tourist arrivals nosedived by 74 percent resulted in an estimated loss of approximately 1.3 trillion US dollars in export revenues. (UNWTO, 2021a) In the meantime, the UNWTO Panel of Experts foresee growing demand for open-air and nature-based tourism activities, with domestic tourism gaining ever-increasing popularity and interest.

Hailed as “non-smoke” industry, tourism has become an integral part in human’s socio-economic and cultural life in conjunction with the world’s burgeoning economy. Not only is tourism an industry that supports to improve the standard of living but it is also a crucial factor to facilitate the cultural exchanges amongst people of different regions, countries, and continents. Hence, tourism has undoubtedly captured the focal point or even pivotal pillar in the development strategy of various nations, turning it into a significant contributor to the growth and economic health of the country as a whole. The beneficial impact of tourism can be seen and proven particularly in those areas where inactive economy and patchy conditions of poverty are prevalent. Tourism plays a key role in boosting the local flow of revenues, ramp up the efforts towards poverty eradication, bridging the gap between the urban and rural areas, and bringing about a stable life for residents those disadvantageous areas.

In addition, disadvantaged areas in Vietnam are commonly referred to as upstream regions of rivers whose fauna and flora system has tremendous effects on the climate, weather and the habitats of countless species and animals. Widely considered an imminent catastrophe for life on earth, this is an alarming issue in Vietnam’s mountainous areas where obsolete customs, poverty and insufficient knowledge about the environment have been a hindrance to the environmental protection attempts and catalyst for the deterioration or even destruction of the living spaces for both human beings and other species alike. As a result, the promotion and development of community-based tourism while taking the activity of natural preservation into consideration are firmly believed to facilitate the process of poverty eradication, reduce the dependence on the nature and subsequently result in fruitful outcome for the local economy and life. In such a scenario, human beings live in harmony with

the nature, minimizing the potential impacts of human-induced activities and benefiting from the magnificence and abundance that nature has to offer to attract travellers, tourists, and visitors to the area. This is expected to be a vital circle for sustainable development in which the nature supports humans without sustaining considerable impacts in the end.

Also, ecotourism in general and community-based tourism in particular is a responsible form of tourism, which is based on the nature to support the efforts to reach natural preservation and local community development while contributing to sustainable growth, wildlife protection and economic benefits. Thus, community-based tourism has become the target for various countries in which developing countries are thought to be significantly benefit. Community-based tourism, which first emerged in Vietnam since 1997, has brought about substantial economic benefits and fruitful social results for the local residents over the past two decades. Covid-19 pandemic has driven the global tourism industry to the edge and forced it to adopt a makeover approach to adapt to changes, opportunities and challenged simultaneously. Yet, it is comparatively apparent that community-based tourism has been gaining traction despite the current circumstances, luring both international and specifically domestic visitors. While the imminent and development of community-based tourism help diversify touristic activities and services, it is also expected to further boost the intrinsically inherent strengths of indigenous cultural aspects and improve the standard of living for the local community as a whole. In particular regions in Vietnam, community-based tourism is attributable to the creation of considerable socio-economic benefits which embolden the connection in community life of ethnic minorities of, namely, Sin Chai (Lao Cai), Ba Be National Park (Bac Kan), Buon Don – Dak Lak and A Luoi (Thua Thien Hue). (Thang, N. & Hoa, N., 2012)

In recent years, community-based tourism has gaining traction in the region in general and in Vietnam in particular, largely due to the fact that the process of industrialisation and urbanisation at such a burgeoning rate plays as a precursor to people's motivation to seek out to peaceful places in the countryside to escape from the hustle and bustle of the fast-paced city life, enjoy the precious tranquillity and immerse themselves in the local unique indigenous culture. Community based tourism associated with rural and sustainable tourism offers visitors with broader exposure to the local culture, significant fist-hand experience in agriculture-inspired activities and genuine involvement in traditional handicraft making process while grasping the better understanding of the surrounding rural landscape, customs and cultural treasures and heritages. Reversely, the local community does not necessarily participate in the business in sole exchange for financial incentives and benefits, they also play a pivotal role in contributing to socio-economic activities while promoting the traditional values to the outside world, as well as in making great strides in protecting and conserving

the natural resources and regional culture. According to Article 3, Law on Tourism enacted in 2017 (Vietnam's National Assembly), community-based tourism is defined as the sort of economic activity which is developed based on the grounds of the destination community's cultural values and controlled as well as governed by the local people as the key stakeholders to ultimately implement, exploit and benefit. (National Assembly, 2017)

To simply put, the development of community-based tourism signifies the activities which are designed to meet the tailor-made demands by tourists and visitors alike in order to strike a balance between generating financial benefits and preserving/ promoting inherent intrinsic cultural values passed down from previous generations. (TIES manual, 2006) It has been widely perceived that community-based tourism has huge capability to bring about eminently positive effects towards the local community on a vastly large scale, such as:

- Succeed in addressing chronic and troublesome employment situation together with improving the standard of living through raising the average income benefited from selling tourism products to tourists and visitors
- Stimulate the injection of financial means acquired from tourism income taxes towards upgrading existing infrastructure and public facilities
- Make coherent cross-sector connection to expand the market reputation and enhance/ accelerate goods and services consumption
- Tap into hidden local potentials while promoting and preserving invaluable aspects of local culture (Cuong, N. & Huong, B., 2007)

Taking all the aforementioned factors into consideration, the thesis topic is decided to paint an overall picture of the community-based tourism in the area of Pu Luong National Reserve. It is an interconnected system of economic and environmental factors whose firm connection has been proven: fauna and flora, landscape, soil and other business and cultural activities happening on the ground and in the vicinity, which undoubtedly has significant impact on the remaining variables. Based on the detailed research, a selection of recommendations and improvements is due to be put forward with a view to enhancing and strengthening the efficiency and efficacy of CBT activities and services on site. This will eventually boil down to a concerted goal of making community-based tourism a strategic economic industry for the area, accelerating the eradication of poverty, promotion of appropriate and proportionate natural resources exploitation, and preservation of traditional indigenous cultural values of the local community in Thanh Hoa province. Last but not least, it is expected to protect the unspoilt environment of Pu Luong National Reserve, stimulate the economic steam as well as drive, and to further sustain the widespread fallouts of the

coronavirus pandemic so as to ensure a sustainable space for people to make a living out of these concrete and enduring preconditions. (Telfer & Sharpley, 2016)

1.2 Objectives and contribution of the study

The research is intended to discover solutions to existing problems and recommendations to improve and diversify community-based tourism services. This will eventually lead to contributing to the preservation of biodiversity and indigenous cultures, raising the income standard for the local community, encouraging residents to engage in managing and protecting the forests, and promoting efforts to eradicate poverty as well as attain sustainable development in the long run in Pu Luong National Reserve. Despite abundant yet rather abundant potentials, the image of Pu Luong National Reserve as well as community-based tourism activities there have not been recognized invested adequately. The thesis is also dedicated to further developing and promoting tourism to travellers particularly within the country, given the extraordinary times of coronavirus pandemic.

With a view to reaching and fulfilling those prescribed goals, the research delves into the fundamental concerns of orientating and planning of CBT to diversify services on offer and focus on upgrading the available ones. Questions are posed to find out what problems are prevalent from the current state on the field and kinds of improvements to be made in order to have better community-based tourism services and experience as a whole. The research topic is expected to be approached from both the macro-level perspective of authorities as well as other stakeholders involved in the process, namely businesses, locals, and tourists.

In practice, this research attempts to propose solutions in a bid to cope with issues arising from the current practice on the field as well as the tourism products in use themselves. This is done in line with theoretical framework and methodology so as to improve the efficacy in operation of touristic activities at Pu Luong National Reserve area while suggesting fresh ideas on other products and services to allure more visitors. Simultaneously, the study also comes up with propositions regarding the efforts to enhance the cross-functional links to speed up the practice of community-based tourism given the grounds of appropriate exploitation of traditional academic values on the site, as well as looking to contribute to restoration efforts towards local intrinsic values of the time which are on the verge of vanishing forever.

In addition, solutions, and propositions with respect to infrastructure improvement, technical backgrounds, supplementary services to be put on offer to cater to customers' needs and demands meanwhile protecting the natural environment as well as other local cultural values of huge significant. Other models of the same kind in Vietnam could follow suits should

the exemplary case in Pu Luong function properly, presumably paving the way for a new chapter in the tourism industry in the post-Covid era.

1.3 Thesis questions and delimitations

The scope of the thesis is narrowed down and limited to community-based tourism activities in the Pu Luong National Reserve. The target is accordingly adjusted to pinpoint the current development situation on the field, explore the tremendous potentials for community-based tourism and ultimately produce general evaluation on a broad picture of opportunities and challenges alike. The results of this research and process are expected to be mutually beneficial and useful for both the local authorities and stakeholders, which are essentially regarded as key players over the course of development in the locality and for community-based tourism in particular.

The research covers an area of 9 communes in Pu Luong National Reserve, where CBT activities are prevailing and actively underway in terms of current planning and available services. Hence, businesses operating in the area whose commitments to CBT are not recognised or clearly stated will be omitted from the research's point of view. To ascertain the nature of the research and fulfil this requirement, the confirmation prior to the implementation with those in charge of tourism on the field is needed. Besides, the theoretical part is allocated to cover the fundamentals of community-based tourism from which the empirical part can be carried out in a thorough and precise manner to facilitate the case study. This is expected to answer the ultimate question of the research: *What kind of action plans are needed to upgrade and strengthen community-based tourism activities in the area of Pu Luong National Reserve?*

To eventually answer the above question, this research is intended to approach the topic by means of a subset of various questions:

- What is the theoretical framework of community-based tourism to support this sort of business at Pu Luong National Reserve?
- To what extent does the current level of participation by the local community into the process have tangible impacts on the whole practice?
- In what ways will the research findings contribute to finding solutions and proposing new approaches to further develop the potentials of community-based tourism at the chosen site?

The main body of the research will be allocated to deal with above concerns and questions, attempting to bring about a broader picture of the current situation as well as viable plans for future development.

1.4 Structure of the study

This research paper primarily consists of four chapters, one of which delves into distinct themes specified as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction presents the general background, theoretical motivation and ultimate objectives of the research coupled with its contribution to the existing practice of community-based tourism on the field while mentioning thesis questions and delimitations to be responded to within the scope of the study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review, as its name, briefly introduces theory foundation on which the case study will be observed and analysed, ranging from definitions, concepts of community-based tourism, its stakeholders, and contributors as well as the extent of the local participation into the process. This will subsequently be utilised to reflect onto the current situation at the site of choice in order to evaluate whether these packages of theory can be deemed applicable and feasible in practice. In addition, the models developed by Jules Pretty, Sherry Arnstein and Cevat Tosun on the extent/ level of participation in tourism activities, for instance, community-based tourism will be presented in the simplest terms, which is expected to serve as a reference to reflect onto the case of choice.

Chapter 3: Pu Luong and its case study analysis coupled with the previous part can be considered the backbone of the whole thesis paper, in which the details of the case study will be presented, analysed, and judged from the perspective of a local-cum-potential visitor. The general information on the site will be given in terms of geographical features, current operation and tourism activities based on the outcome of the primary survey. This is followed by an analysis of the results of the survey and questionnaire, with special attention paid to the evaluation of participation levels by the locals constructed on the foundation of model by Jules Pretty. Simultaneously, quantitative method is applied to the results of the survey so as to observe the practical application and current situation of tourism activities on the site.

Chapter 4: Conclusion encapsulates the general information on the case study, key output of the survey and questionnaire associated with analysis results and proposed recommendations for the exemplary case of Pu Luong National Reserve. These suggestions can be

deemed essential for the locals and authorities to devise plan with a view to further developing tourism on such a regional scale while pursuing sustainable goals regarding natural conservation and traditional value protection as per guided by the essence of CBT.

This research paper is dedicated to delving into the current situation and perceptions of local residents the Pu Luong Nature Reserve area about their potential participation in the process while seeking to apply some of the following requirements and ambitions in theory into practice. To put it in layman's terms, community-based tourism is, consequently, theoretically expected to involve and empower community to ensure ownership and transparent management as well as establish partnerships with relevant stakeholders to gain recognised standing with authorities concerned. Also, the local community once involved in the practice is believed to improve by means of CBT the social well-being and maintenance of its members and prospective residents' human dignity. To this end, authorities and key stakeholders in the process are required to have clear vision and consistent commitments to including a fair and transparent benefit sharing mechanism in place while making every effort to enhance linkages to local and regional economies, making it a wider network of mutual effects and support at any time. Furthermore, the sense of sustainability will be secured provided that principal players in the circle must respect the local culture, custom and tradition while making concrete and audacious commitments to contributing to natural resource conservation, working towards financial self-sufficiency and eventually enhancing the quality of visitor experiences by strengthening meaningful host and guest interaction.

2 Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Research methodology

Qualitative research method is utilised to execute the thesis paper, in which literature reviews as secondary data are cited from verified and high-quality sources by both domestic and international authors. The selected information can be retrieved from a wide range of publications, such as: printed books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and online articles. In addition to citations from trustworthy sources to solidify the theoretical framework, the research paper also uses the primary data obtained from questionnaires disseminated to local businesses and residents.

As per aforementioned, the research paper is done with the qualitative research method in which both primary and secondary data are used. With regards to primary data, it is self-evidently obtained via questionnaires and interviews with the former making the vast majority of information gathered, whereas secondary one is chosen from scores of trusted sources, for instance, printed books, magazines, and newspapers to online articles, journals and other research papers by varied authors. The secondary data is singled out based on the prerequisite of verified, trustworthy and reliable nature of information. This altogether does not account for more than 25 to 30 percent of citations and references.

The data is processed in form of graphic illustration upon being gathered so that the current situation of CBT activities and services on the field can be highlighted and pinpointed. The outcome of the survey is expected to be beneficial to the process of coming up with recommendations and suggestions to possibly potential challenges for the time being.

In addition, the questionnaire is designed in a way that centres on the local businesses to further attain their insights into the tourism activities as well as the issue of local participation in question. It contains invaluable information pertaining to the satisfaction level of visitors, degree, or scope of participation of Pu Luong residents into community-based tourism, and methods taken by travel companies to promote Pu Luong image to prospective customers.

Besides, the theoretical framework is built based on the foundation of fundamental definitions of the field, for instance, community and community-based tourism. This section is dedicated to delving further into the features and characteristics of CBT, such as: goals, principles, preconditions to achieve, stakeholders involved in the process and so forth. These theories need to be dealt with utmost care prior to the case study since it is advisable to grasp a thorough understanding of the basic matter of fact to have subsequently proper applications to the real case study. The ultimate goal of the research is to seek answers to

the question: *What recommendations and improvements needed to further boost community-based tourism activities and services in the area of Pu Luong National Reserve.*

These components are crucially essential to proceed with an analysis of models developed by Jules Pretty (primarily), Sherry Arnstein and Cevet Tosun into the case study of the research, from which recommendations can be drawn at the end of the thesis paper. The theoretical foundation is deemed as the criteria and standards to make reference to the case so that a picture of potentials, challenges and current state of the case's CBT situation can be painted.

2.2 Community-based tourism

2.2.1 Definitions

Community based tourism (CBT) is a broad terminology whose varied definitions and its overarching implications on the whole tourism industry have been long observed by academicians and those involved in the sector alike. It has firmly believed by a great many people of technical background that CBT signifies the process of deploying the local community and its residents at the destination site to proactively partake in tourism activities with a view to do business, preserve – protect – promote tangible and intangible cultural values, conserve the ecosystems and social environment to eventually develop tourism as well as spread the region's image and reputation. (Telfer & Sharpley, 2016)

According to a survey conducted by AC Nielson in 2018 with a sample mix of 400 respondents in total, in which domestic tourists accounted for 50 percent while those of foreign nationalities made up for the remaining half of the questionnaire population. (ESRT manual, 2012) The survey, carried out in major tourism hubs of Vietnam, shed lights on some of the positive aspects and outlook yet fundamental in painting a vivid picture of community-based tourism in Vietnam. The results indicated that 65 percent of those inquired expressed their desire to get exposed to the culture and heritage of the locality, roughly 55 percent of the same pool of answers pointed to the need to submerge in nature, rest and recharge batteries while an average of 84 percent of the participants demonstrated their interest in the local scenery and landscapes. Besides, in contrast to 70 percent of those in favour of environmental protection efforts, an absolute proportion of 97 percent of respondents stated that they were definitely willing to spend more for such environmentally friendly holidays that could lead to tangible benefits for the disadvantaged, say, poor people. Last but not least, approximately a half of those who partook in the survey asserted the idea of extra spending on cultural and heritage exposure, and supporting local charitable associations, respectively.

According to Luchetti and Font (2013), community-based tourism is a domain of tourism activity in which local people play as the key stakeholders to develop and manage while the economic benefits incurred from it remain at the local level to support the livelihood of residents. It can be perceived from this point of view is that it emphasises the primary role of locals in the matter of nurture and boost the development of tourism on their regular place of authority. From the very rudimentary point of view, the tourist accommodation, in the meantime, is merely required to meet fundamentally sufficient standard with simple settings and basic amenities of continuous connection to decent mobile services in case of emergencies as well as constant access to the Internet for booking purposes.

Also, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2006) puts forward the notion of CBT as a type of tourism activity whose tremendous responsibility should be committed and ascertained with regards to natural reserve in which the nature and well-being of locals are accordingly protected. Besides, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) proposes that CBT signifies a sort of touristic activity where local community plays a crucial and pivotal role in controlling and managing while staying involved in all relevant acts. The development, tourism management and ratio of benefits generated from CBT can be found at the hands of the community itself. In the meantime, CBT is likely to face the potential objection from the local community should they see it as a waste of time and effort, and to no avail speaking of significant advantages incurred in the process. In these circumstances, community-based tourism emerges as an utmost effort to directly transfer the fruits of tourism to the local community, particularly in developing countries. (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009) Hence, not only the local community a key stakeholder but it also plays a critical part in defining goals and objectives of CBT, namely, conservation and sustainable development in the long run. (George et al., pp. 43-56)

Hence, to simply put, community based tourism is regarded as the combination of local/community tourism and sustainable tourism, which refers to the prerequisite that sustainable tourism can be implemented on the condition that the local community is entitled to participate and contribute proactively to the development and management process of this business for while bearing in mind that the vast proportion of benefits created over the course of CBT implementation flows to the locals themselves. (Hall, 2013)

It was stated during one of the conferences held in 2012 by Vietnam National Administration on Tourism titled "Sharing experience and lessons learned from the initiative to develop community-based tourism" (ESRT manual, 2012) that CBT promotes the notion of developing tourism with the active participation of the local community in order to preserve the in-

indigenous culture, sustainable nature coupled with raising the public awareness and empowering the destination community. Benefits and fruitful results from the process will be obliged and shared with the locals while given the collaboration, support and assistance from the central government and international organisations.

It is indicated in the guiding manual published by Institute for Research and Development of Rural Business Sector in Vietnam (2012, p.3) that CBT rests on the idea that it is owned, organised, and directly managed with a view to bringing about economic benefits and environmental protection by means of introducing visitors to characteristic features of the region, say, breath-taking scenery, unique culture, and local specialties. Community based tourism is expected to trace its foundation on tourists' curiosity, needs and demands to further explore the daily life of people of different ethnic backgrounds. In the meantime, it is widely believed to be an alluring force to tempt city-dwellers away to the countryside, redirecting them to escape the hustle and bustle of the fast-paced urban life and to enjoy the rural landscape for a given period of time. (Dangi & Jamal, 2016) In addition, Mountainous Development Institute puts forward a compelling definition of community-based tourism as follows: "The ultimate goal of community-based tourism is to conserve the tourism resources at the destination site for the sake of sustainable tourism development in the long run. This type of tourism promotes the proactive participation by the locals and encourage them to get involved in the process while making every scheme available to create employment and opportunities to harness all those existing potentials. (Cuong, N. & Huong, B., 2007)

Community based tourism, according to a report by APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), community-based tourism is a genre of sustainable tourism advocating strategies aimed at impoverished vulnerable group of residents within the scope of the community. Initiatives on tourism with the sense of local community participation are designed to seek the local contribution in conjunction with the functioning and management of smaller projects as a means towards poverty eradication and improve the alternative-cum-disposable income for the inhabitants. These initiatives on CBT, at the same time, instigate the corresponding respect towards local customs, traditions, and culture as well as other natural heritages. In general, the target rural areas of CBT are typically classified as poor, impoverished and economically marginalised regions where the local awareness of sustainable growth with collective responsibility in terms of economic benefits and environmental protection awareness are seen as relatively restricted. (National Tourism Administration, 2013)

Despite the existence of a multitude of other definitions, community-based tourism can be put in layman's terms as a type of tourism with an obvious sense of sustainability and supportive participation by the local community, in which the local residents are expected to act

as critical stakeholders of landowners/ managers, entrepreneurs, service and produce providers and employees. The desirable goals of this are to empower the local community in such areas as touristic resource exploitation, management and natural conservation while allowing them to benefit partially from the income incurred or garnered from the whole process to eventually alleviate the rate of poverty and impoverishment, improve the disposable income and the standard of living for the community residents as a whole. On the other hand, tourists as another stakeholder of CBT are allowed to explore the local habitats and wildlife while learning to respect traditional cultures, rituals, and wisdoms. This in turn leads the community to the adequate awareness of the commercial and social values packaged in the surrounding living environment of their regular premises when it comes to natural and cultural heritage through tourism activities, which are long thought to serve as a pivotal component to foster the community both on economic and ecological aspects. (Thang, N. & Hoa, N., 2012)

Given the current rate of vaccinations and border reopening, multiple experts and researchers expect a significant rebound in 2022, driven by unleashed pent-up demand, while hopes are pinned on the fully recovery in the latter half of 2023 and early 2024 with several focusing on the sense of sustainability and the further expansion of community-based tourism from across all relevant spectrums. (UNWTO, 2021b)

2.2.2 Characteristics of community-based tourism

It can be obviously perceived that principal partners or stakeholders in community-based tourism are local government/ council, tourism administration agency, conservation agency, travel agents, non-governmental organisations, the local community, and tourists. Each of these components bear a corresponding responsibility whose influence can be exerted during the course of the subsequent implementation. The local council involves in or be responsible for the decision-making process speaking of the project's execution and management whereas the community members, relevant partners and tourists are held accountable for preserving the cultural and natural resources of the locality. Members of the community are entitled to enjoy the shared benefits from tourism activities.

Community-based tourism can be characterised by the limited scope of business and operation, narrow niche market in terms of customer segments and quantity. As a result, all products and services derived from this must be developed and launched in line with natural and cultural conditions of the area. (Huong, 2013)

This feature raises an inherent mix of challenges towards the nurture and implementation of community-based tourism despite the promising prospect of beneficial impact and advantageous influence on the social, economic, and environmental scale. These overriding concerns are suggested to be dealt with successfully to eventually tap into tourism resources and potentials while attempting to make the conceived hurdles from becoming insurmountable.

Despite thoroughly researched frameworks and conceptual models in existence, there has been broadly agreed that a divergence between theoretical matters and practice is still commonplace. (Dangi & Jamal, 2016) Financial means and technical resources are regarded as the backbone of the whole process in which the local community practically finds it hard to proceed with initiating and developing community-based tourism without the unwavering support for external actors and stakeholders. (Harrison, 2001; Jones, 2005) Thus, the community are themselves encouraged to be in partnership with a great variety of factors from multiple sectors to acquire accessible approach to conditions needed for the initiation and implementation of this business type. Under the circumstances of Vietnam, these actors can be named as aforementioned: government organisations, international aid agencies, non-governmental organisations, the tourism industry, other businesses, and academics/ academicians. (Long, 2012) Apart from these actors, the local community and the project stakeholders are strongly recommended to collaborate with the private sector in exchange for relevant expertise, namely business and marketing skills, as well as tourism funding and technical support. (Kayat, 2002) In the meantime, the close cooperation with the public sector is expected to result in policy and legal frameworks as well as superstructure/ infrastructure development, supervision, and high-level assistance (Asker et al., 2010).

Due to the multilateral nature, the difference in or even conflict of interest is constantly considered imminent given the complexity and existence of interest divergence amongst stakeholders. It is self-evident that the actions taken by external contributors are not always in accordance with the community's desired humanitarian concerns yet rather driven by their own self-interests. (Ashley et al., 2001) To simply put, the priorities of external entities are not necessarily the same as those sought by the community itself, which might put the whole process in jeopardy and misunderstanding or in the worst case, insurmountable conflict of interest amongst concerned parties. In reality, several community-based tourism projects have failed in meeting the common goals of both the community and collaborative forces, which initially pointed towards small-scale projects for community development and environmental conservation yet later found out to be distorted into miniscule pieces of cooper-

ation as a consequence. (ESRT Manual, 2012) The mishandling and implementation undoubtedly leads to inevitable deprivation of self-reliance and autonomy of the community, which is regarded as the core value and sense of concept for community-based tourism.

In the context of Vietnam, a sizeable pool of challenges can be observed over the course of past years regarding the initiation and implementation of community-based tourism. Firstly, the urgent need to obtain unrestricted access to natural resources should be met in terms of planning, zoning, and restructuring to tailor the specific demands of the respective customers. This is largely due the fact that prior consensus with the local community in using the available infrastructure at the premises of personal ownership is regularly seen as a stumbling block for authorities on site to proceed with their own plans. Secondly, community-based tourism can only be made profitable and lucrative business should the relevant stakeholders consider it a win-win situation and at all times seek a mutually beneficial with the local community in terms of standard of living and means of support. Those involved are supposed to do substantive research and thorough surveys on the field before executing any tangible plans so that the end-goals of this kind of project are for the needs and demands of the general public and current market; and in strict accordance with satisfying all the socio-economic targets on a local as well as regional level. (Campbell & Shackleton, 2001)

Thirdly, key players in community-based tourism are required to build up management system and community coordination with high level of efficacy. In coping with this challenge, the promotion of community participation is utterly important in deciding the success of the whole process. People's involvement packed with their opinions and voices are in need of being heard by means of regular workshop or sharing sessions with local authorities and inhabitants in attendance. The panel of administrative authority and representatives is suggested to exchanges views and discussions with the community, seeking ways to further harness more practical and appealing opportunities into subtle slices of the process, such as providing more services or diversifying those already on offer. Fourthly, the poor management of financial aid sources are sometimes to blame for the deterioration of community-based tourism projects. Heavy dependence symptoms can exhibit when the project is strongly funded in the beginning but gradually left disorientated once sponsors put the support to an end. Hence, community-based tourism entities are required to work closely and actively with sponsors in order to achieve the state of self-dependence and sustainability as soon as the local or foreign aid organisations decide to stop all the supportive channels in terms of finance. (SNV Asia Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism Network, 2007) Fifthly, the capability of local communities in coordinating and managing community-based tourism en-

terprises in Vietnam is still considered limited and prone to a substantial number of drawbacks. The dearth of proper level of management and development in terms of products and services is seen as a major hurdle towards the growth of the business associated with potentials to raise the income base. These issues can be pertinent to those of human resources capability: constrained understanding about tourism's operational scheme, needs and demands of prospective customers, limited awareness of the necessity of environmental protection, limited abilities in developing and controlling the operation of business in general and tourism products in particular, narrow access to the broader market and lack of promotional efforts towards potential services to offer as well as on-site experience (e.g. communication skills, expertise and professional requirements), and the chronic and inherent shortage of funding and financial sources. (Carbone, 2005)

Also, sharing benefits amongst stakeholders and key players is constantly proven to be troublesome. It is widely believed that the weak role played by those entities is primarily to blame for the contribution and responsibility of tourism businesses, especially travel agencies and tour operators when it comes to boosting the developmental pace of community-based tourism. In other words, scores of businesses have appeared not to be sparing sufficient keen interest into community-based tourism and its derivatives. The combined efficiency of community-based tourism is undoubtedly a small part of the tourism sector's emerging sub-section with marginal market while there have been concerns that a sizeable proportion of benefits from it will circulate to re-invest in nature conservation and community development. (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014) This, as a consequence, dampens investors' interest and desire to make inroads into this business, especially those from the private sector. In addition, market analyses have shown that community-based tourism is a potentially viable sector to be nurture within the community or region. Yet, the movement and flow of foreign tourists have been restricted against the backdrop of coronavirus and stringent regulations in place, which signifies a stagnant period of implementation during these extraordinary times. Thus, there is an increasing need for further closer cooperation between the central and local governments in gradually slackening rules and applying more incentives to reactivate and boost the growth of community-based tourism in the coming times. (Dodds et al., 2018)

Last but not least, delayed process of implementation stemming from the governmental bureaucracy and protracted benefit generation occasionally makes it harder for the general public and investors alike to pay attention to community-based tourism projects. As per mentioned above, benefits from implementation process can be deceptively easy to garner but it turns out to take a long time to materialise while a portion of them is to be allocated and redirected into conservation and culture promotion. Local people, to the best of our

knowledge, inevitably expect to see the project bear fruits or turn profitable as soon as possible so as to get by or finance other improvements or upgradation needed to carry on with the existing endeavours. Together with all these challenges, the bureaucratic nature of public administrative agencies sometimes complicates the situation for both locals and enterprises speaking of procedural documents/ papers and legal matters. An imminent waste of time and effort can be predicted in cases where there is a lack of understanding about administrative procedures, licenses, and cross-checking/ confirmation with all those parties concerned. (Jones, 2005)

2.2.3 Development objectives of community-based tourism

According to Mountainous Development Institute, the package of community-based tourism must contain the following goals at the outset of the process to be put into consideration: a tool for conservation efforts, a medium for improving the quality of life and standard of living, a means to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding of people outside the community about such issues as shared property of forest, inhabitants in and within the proximity of forests, bio- and/or organic agricultural, and human rights for tribal members. Besides, it should be the favourable opportunity for the locals to get involved, speak out, discuss, and figure out solutions to community matters while providing a sustainable channel for locals to have income and serving as an alternative to bridge the social and economic gap of rural communities. (Stone, 2015)

In the meantime, principal targets of community-based tourism have been repeatedly confirmed both theoretically and practically given the specific circumstances of Vietnam as follows:

- Community-based tourism must be developed and promoted in line with the constant evolution of the general tourism industry to contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural resources, including biodiversity, water resources, local identity, and ethnicity.
- Community-based tourism is supposed to be committed to generating movement in the elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given locality with the aim of becoming an economic pillar and adding to the regional economic growth via increasing revenues from tourism and producing other benefits for the local residents.
- In addition to inducing local economic development, community-based tourism is entitled to promises to deliver quality tourism experience to customers while sticking to sustainable and responsible approach to the environment.

- Community-based tourism must be defined with the support and indisputably the proactive participation from the local people.

Given the inherent and obvious nature of community-based tourism coupled with above objectives, it is regarded generally as a tourism activity which is owned, operated, and managed or coordinated by the community at the community level that contributes to the well-being of communities through supporting sustainable livelihoods and protecting valued socio-cultural traditions and natural and cultural heritage resources.

2.3 Participation level of local businesses/ residents into the practice

The more tourism industry pays attention to the sense of sustainability, the more participation by the local community is to be further promoted and encouraged thanks to their ownership of tourism resources both naturally and culturally. The community, therefore, are entitled to partake and enjoy benefits from these activities in order to ultimately play a pivotal role in boosting the region's tourism industry in particular and sustainable development in general. Not only is the local community the inherent owner of existing resources, but they are also the driving force cum primary labour force with minimum costs to be employed in projects to develop tourism, which is considered a keen interest by investors when it comes to bringing about expense efficiency in their investments. (Higham & Millier, 2018) Meanwhile, properly trained local inhabitants are subject to becoming professional workers in community-based tourism thanks to their immense knowledge about the locality, becoming an active member to welcome, receive, guide, and cater to customers' needs and demands in an impeccable manner. On a broader scale, Haywood (1988) asserted that the participation and entitlement to benefits generated from community-based tourism projects are projected to be considerably attributable to the enforcement of policies and strategies by the central government, for instance, those pertaining to environmental protection, remote and mountainous areas' socio-economic stimulus scheme, poverty reduction and eradication, resettlement programmes for ethnic minorities, stability to national self-defence and social order, and so forth.

2.3.1 Brief introduction about the notion of community participation

The participation of the local community has been cited by several research as one of the most effective and efficient medium in promoting the sense of sustainability of community-based tourism at the destination site. In terms of definition, Goodwin in a book titled *Taking responsibilities for Tourism* published in 2011 admitted that there has been widely accepted that several ways of understanding are currently in existence depending on distinct objec-

tives that divert the attention to varied perceptions. Under the umbrella of process, the participation of the community inarguably asserts an influence on planning, implementation and sharing of development progress. Also, it can be defined as a framework or fundamental scheme in which the inherent capability of the community is to be strengthened with a view to addressing issues they have been faced with and ultimately igniting the sense of self-adaptation. (Joppe, 1996) Meanwhile, the proactive involvement can be perceived as an essential tool to proceed with decisions taken by another party concerned in order to devise fresh ideas for new products and services. These points of view can be encapsulated to put forward a common perception on the participation by the local community in community-based tourism as a long-haul process from its infancy when the community realises and conceives thoroughly its roles, benefits of tourism activities to their livelihoods and place of residency until the point where the inhabitants on the field are practically involved in those activities in different ways and manners: form, extent, and timing. (Knight & Cottrell, 2016)

With regards to the form of participation, Thammajinda (2013) listed out and did a summary of diverse activities with local participation from more than 10 countries and territories, classifying them into three principal categories: planning, implementation and enjoying the benefits from tourism. Specifically, *planning* – the process in which residents are empowered to make decisions regarding tourism development orientation – has been mentioned by a great deal of research as an ideally promising form of participation for community-based tourism. Local participation into planning and project initiation is seen as the direct involvement in in-person debates or meetings at the site, election of management or administrative board/ club/ group/ team, etc. to discuss about tourism and/or set up investment funds. Additionally, local presence in business activities comprises providing existing hospitality services, investing in tourism projects to seek benefits, found community organisations or unions to manage travel agencies of the community, supplying goods and services to companies in need, and so forth. Besides, the community's partaking in promotion campaigns can be assigned as deigning webpages, project's websites, activities and possible itinerary, sightseeing spots and routes, producing videos and reportages about community-based tourism, designing posters and placards, leaflets, flyers, pamphlets and brochures, etc.

In the meantime, Tosun (2006) suggested that there are three ways to classify the form of local participation in developing tourism on site, namely, participation ladder of Arnstein (1971) or participation spectrum proposed either by Pretty (1995) or Tosun (1999). The researcher also indicated that the proactive participation allows local communities at destination sites varied in terms of development speed to get involved into a process in which they can come up with ideas and make relevant decisions concerning tourism development, taking into account the sharing of benefits induced from this whole process while identifying

the form and scope to which the growth rate can be referenced. The ultimate goal is to empower the host community, which is in this research referred to as a collection of inhabitants residing in a certain or particular geographical area, identical to each other in terms of existential conditions and materialistic production, ideology, culture, and proper care and sharing of duties, obligations and benefits within that community.

2.3.2 Influence factors of local participation into community-based tourism

First, the awareness of the local community of available resources and tourism activities plays a pivotal role in identifying and recognising the importance business-orientated operations. The significance that tourism perception brings about refers to the ability to attract more investments and capital funds for local tourism, strengthening human resources and boosting the reception capability of the destination's community. Second, it is evident that economic benefits are persistently behind growth drive and forces of any business projects which are bound to boost quality job creations and make employment accessible to a wider range of jobseekers in the region. The development of tourism is usually accompanied by the flourishing of job vacancies and improvement of inhabitants' living standards. (Ngo et al., 2018) Third, prerequisites on procedural framework and policies are considered the backbone for the success of each and every economic endeavour, including community-based tourism. The proactive participation from locals is prone to activation should the central and regional governments have favourable and beneficial policies towards tourism stimulus, capital funding and lending support scheme, investments on infrastructure and superstructure, levy/ taxation alleviation programmes as well as technical guidance on occupation switch or transfer. Fourth, household capabilities are deemed as essential in this process since they are diverse and distinctive by nature. These can be named in multiple ways, such as: human resources (labour's quantity and quality), social capitals (kinship and relationship), natural capitals (lands in the household's ownership), material capitals (existing facilities, tools, and devices) and financial capitals (money). Last but not least, unwavering support from non-organisations, travel agencies in terms of guest provision, finance and experience to boost tourism is another host of driving factors behind community-based tourism. (Pansiri, 2005)

Nevertheless, there are broadly confirmed that efforts by the local community are occasionally hindered by various reasons. According to Tosun (2000), the hinderance affecting the participation of the local community into community-based tourism can be divided into three types: constraints on the administrative and operative level, restrictions on structure and hinderance on culture and perception. Theoretically speaking, these barriers and hinderances are not mutually exclusive, which is regarded as the reason behind the systematic

reluctance to practical engagement by the community. First, hinderance on operational level pertains to administrative procedures, public administration and bureaucracy in tourism development, and a dearth of smooth collaboration amongst relevant parties as well as a persistent lack of information for the local residents. Second, framework and policy-level constraints consist of a perceived absence of appropriate legal packages, human resources, financial sources, maintenance expense allocated for the frequent participation and the fall-out of potential dominance from external factors and opponents. In addition to the aforementioned limitations, the barriers in terms of culture and perception signify the limited capability of the disadvantaged and the poor, disregard and barred awareness from the local community itself.

2.3.3 Utilisation models to be applied in the case study

To evaluate the case of Pu Luong National Reserve from a broader and more comprehensive perspective as well as to single out an appropriate assessment scheme for the level of local participation in line with the research objectives, a juxtaposition of three omnipresent models is tabulated with a view to pinpointing the discrepancy in those proposed by Pretty, Arnstein and Tosun in the Table 1 below.

It can be seen that while Arnstein's assessment ladder considers the participation for the perspective of the last receiver, the one proposed by Pretty elaborates into the user's participation approach without any limits on target users as opposed to city dwellers in the model of Arnstein. The level of participation in Pretty's model ranges from low to high as per shown in the Table 1 whereas the classification module by Tosun is deemed typically general, failing to delve into details of each level of participation.

7	Self-mobilisation	8	Citizen control	Degrees of Citizen Power	Bottom-up Active participation Direct participation Participation in decision making Authentic participation Self-planning	Spontaneous participation
		7	Delegated power			
6	Interactive participation	6	Partnership			

5	Functional participation	5	Placation	Degrees of Citizen Tokenism	Top-down Passive Formal Mostly indirect Degree of tokenism Manipulation Pseudo-participation Participation in implementation & sharing benefits Choice between proposed alternatives & feedback	Induced participation
4	Participation for material incentives	4	Consultation			
3	Participation by consultation	3	Informing			
2	Passive participation	2	Therapy	Non-participation	Top-down Passive Formal Mostly indirect Participation in implementation but not necessarily sharing benefits Choice between proposed yet limited alternatives or no choice Paternalism Non-participation High degree of tokenism & manipulation	Coercive participation
1	Manipulative participation	1	Manipulation			
Jules Pretty (1995)		Sherry Arnstein (1971)		Cevat Tosun (1999)		

Table 1: Model comparison of ubiquitous typology of community participation (Pretty.J, Arnstein. S., & Tosun, C.)

Hence, this research paper adopts the model of Pretty to classify the level of participation into community-based tourism at research site of Pu Luong National Reserve. Detailed criteria for 7-step model by Pretty (1995) as follows:

- ◆ Criteria for Step 1 (Manipulation): The community is bound/ entitled to no rights or duties to consider, evaluate, or predict about the future of the project. Relevant information is only shared and disseminated by external stakeholders while the community is merely informed of general information about tourism development initiatives and that local authorities are due to change or switch the means of living and livelihoods of people via tourism products and services.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 2 (Passive participation): The community is provided with information and required to answer questions concerning the development projects for local tourism sector when inquired by external organisations and agencies with no responsibility, role or influence over the content to be processed for these activities. Processed information is confidential to the community members.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 3 (Participation by Consultation): Community members are allowed to freely take part in discussion sessions with the theme of switching the traditional means of living to devising tourism products and services at the locality, except the decision-making process.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 4 (Participation for Material Incentives): Community members work at hospitality facilities, providing goods, foods, and tourism services spontaneously in exchange for material/ financial incentives. As a result, the community is believed to stop their participation once these supportive incentives have been ground to a halt.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 5 (Functional Participation): The community is engaged in particular functional groups: management, entertainment, cuisine and gastronomy, guiding, specialty production under the strict supervision of the local council or external organisations. The participation nature at this scale is relatively restricted as it is bound by decisions made or executed by force.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 6 (Interactive Participation): Community members are permitted to be part of the decision-making process as well as have their voice and say in important decisions or policies. Locals and the community of tourism enterprises participate in analysis, planning, information dissemination and enactment of pertinent policies for tourism development at the site.
- ◆ Criteria for Step 7 (Self-mobilisation): Community proactively put forwards ideas and suggestions as well as seek advice, guidance, and support from external entities, holding the controlling rights over decision making, self-investment and expansion of their own businesses. This highest level of participation is immune against any intervention

and impact from outsiders, which serves as a sticking point or cornerstone to have profound changes to the whole system.

In a nutshell, these steps, or levels of participation in developing tourism activities can be seen as a lengthy yet thorough process to reflect, identify and consolidate the roles of community in planning, implementation, supervision, and evaluation of all activities whose imminent or potential impacts are highly likely to occur within the tourism environment. With the aim of analysing influence factors toward the participation by local community, specifically households and enterprises into community-based tourism, a small-scale survey in terms of in-person interviews and online questionnaires has been carried out amongst enterprises' representatives and households whom have or have not participated in tourism activities.

3 Case study of Pu Luong and analysis

3.1 Overview of geography and overall tourism situation

3.1.1 Geographical position and demographical information

Established in 1999 to protect the area's biodiversity, Pu Luong Nature Reserve is situated on the cusp of Hoa Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces, straddling mountain ranges to make it an impeccable yet popular getaway destination on the bucket list for several travellers. Pu Luong appeals to visitors, primarily domestic tourists, thanks to its relatively untouched and unspoilt beauty and verdant landscape, which serves as an alluring feature to those wanting a weekend or holiday escape from the fast-paced hustle and bustle of the urbanity.

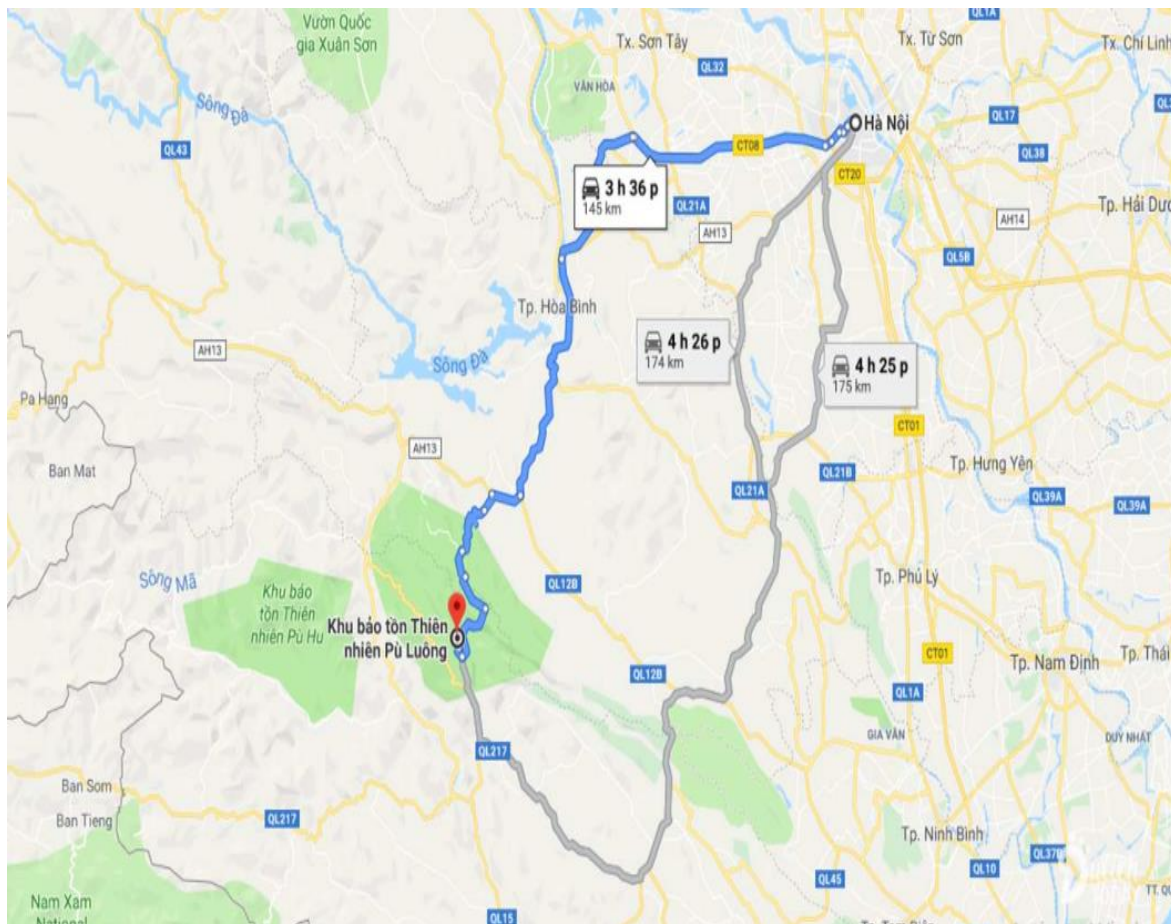


Figure 1: Pu Luong National Reserve position in relation to the capital Hanoi (Google Maps)

The lesser-known ecotourism and trekking spot with rustic and supremely serene charm is approximately four hours by coach (roughly 160 kilometres) from Hanoi to the south, the

capital of Vietnam. Vast ranges of mountains, fertile valleys and pristine jungles are dotted alongst a narrow highway on which scores of small villages and quaint, yet tranquil hamlets are scattered.

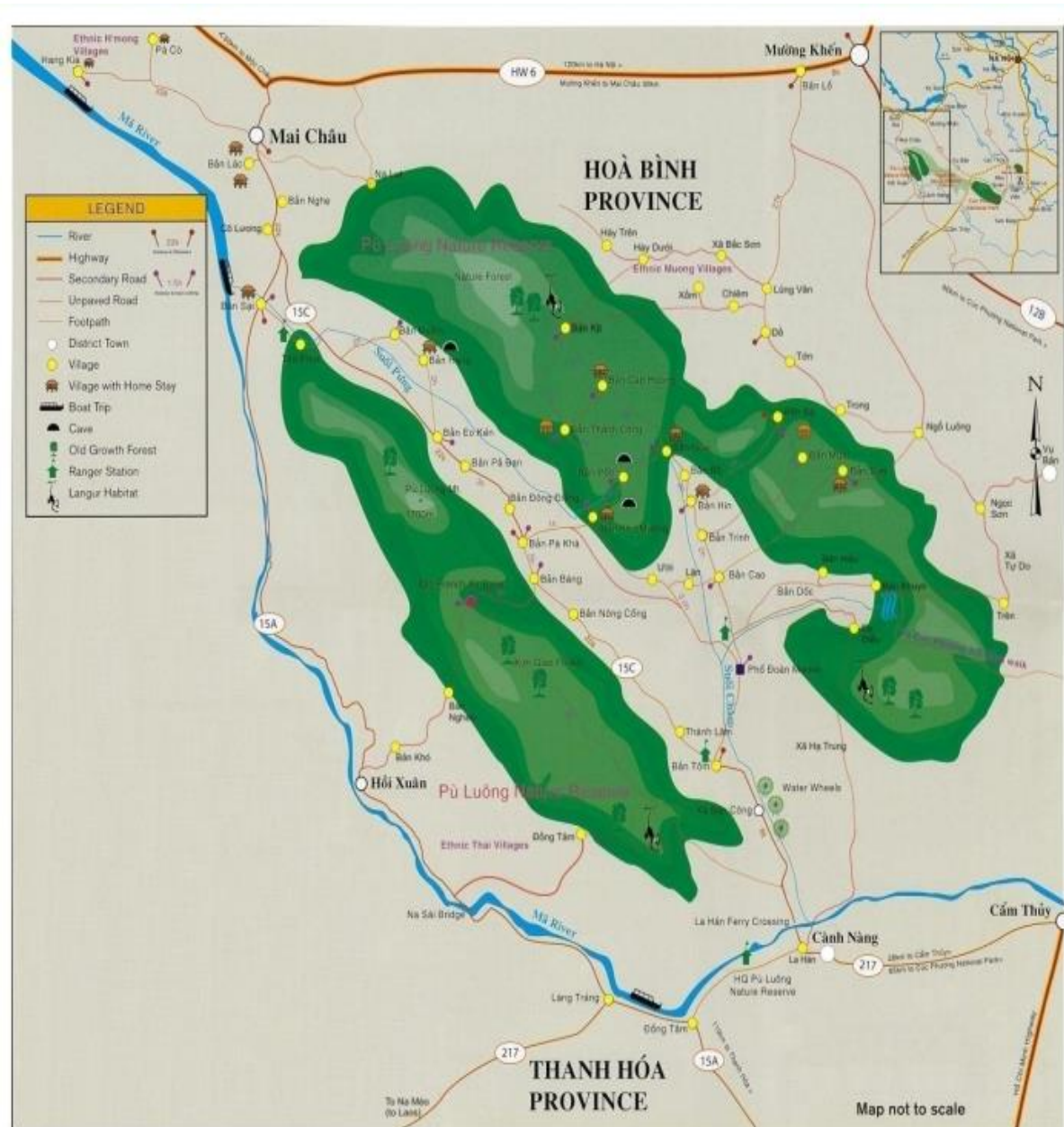


Figure 2: Map of Pu Luong National Reserve (Source: Internal map of Pu Luong National Reserve Administration Board)

Pu Luong Nature Reserve is located at the northernmost point of Ba Thuc district, Thanh Hoa province. This nature reserve straddles two communes of Thanh Son (Ba Thuc district) and Phu Xuan (Quan Hoa district), positioning itself in the natural space of borderline region of three provinces of Thanh Hoa – Son La – Hoa Binh. Pu Luong is within the close

proximity of renowned Cuc Phuong National Park to the east-northeast (Hoa Binh side) while the west-northwest is in vicinity of Quan Hoa district and the south faces Lai Li Lai Lang hillside. The nature reserve of Pu Luong is 130 kilometres away from central Thanh Hoa province to the north-westerly direction while the downtown point of Ba Thuoc district is roughly 10 kilometres to the foot of Pu Luong mountains. The total area of core region is estimated at 17,000 hectares, covering nine communes of two separate districts: Ba Thuoc and Quan Hoa.

With respect to the demographical characteristics, the area covering Pu Luong Nature Reserve is home to a multitude of ethnic minorities, in which Thai people accounts for the vast majority of nearly 60 percent and Muong people makes up for approximately two-fifths of the whole population. The marginal percentage of two percent for the remainders does not mark a demographic difference on the same picture at Pu Luong. Due to these demographic features as well as old-fashioned rituals and obsolete custom, the poverty rate in this area is alarmingly high at 90 percent despite the fact that this area is considered a treasure trove for sustainable tourism and community-based tourism alike.

According to the internal documents provided by the local authorities at Pu Luong, the labour force, specifically the population groups within the working age, accounts for relatively 40 percent. However, the employment and occupation structure are rather simplistic and monotonous with the vast majority of people making a living out of agriculture (planting rice and other crops, livestock and cattle rearing/ herding). A minimal proportion of the population makes ends meet by handcrafts, services in health and medicine, education, and services.

3.1.2 Current situation of tourism activities at Pu Luong Nature Reserve

According to the survey outcome and statistical figures provided by the Administration Board of Pu Luong Nature Reserve, tourists flock to Pu Luong Nature Reserve during October and December the most, when rice harvest season kicks in and the new year celebrations are about to start. The region usually observes the number of visitors plummeting in September when the rainy weather dampens the mood of prospective travellers and outdoor activities are severely limited.

The below pie chart illustrates the proportion of tourists to Pu Luong Nature Reserve in 2019 which was the moment before the coronavirus pandemic waged an all-out war on Vietnamese economy in general and tourism industry in particular. It can be self-evident from the graph that the absolute percentage of travellers belong to those of foreign nationalities, mainly from European countries, North America, Japan, and South Korea.

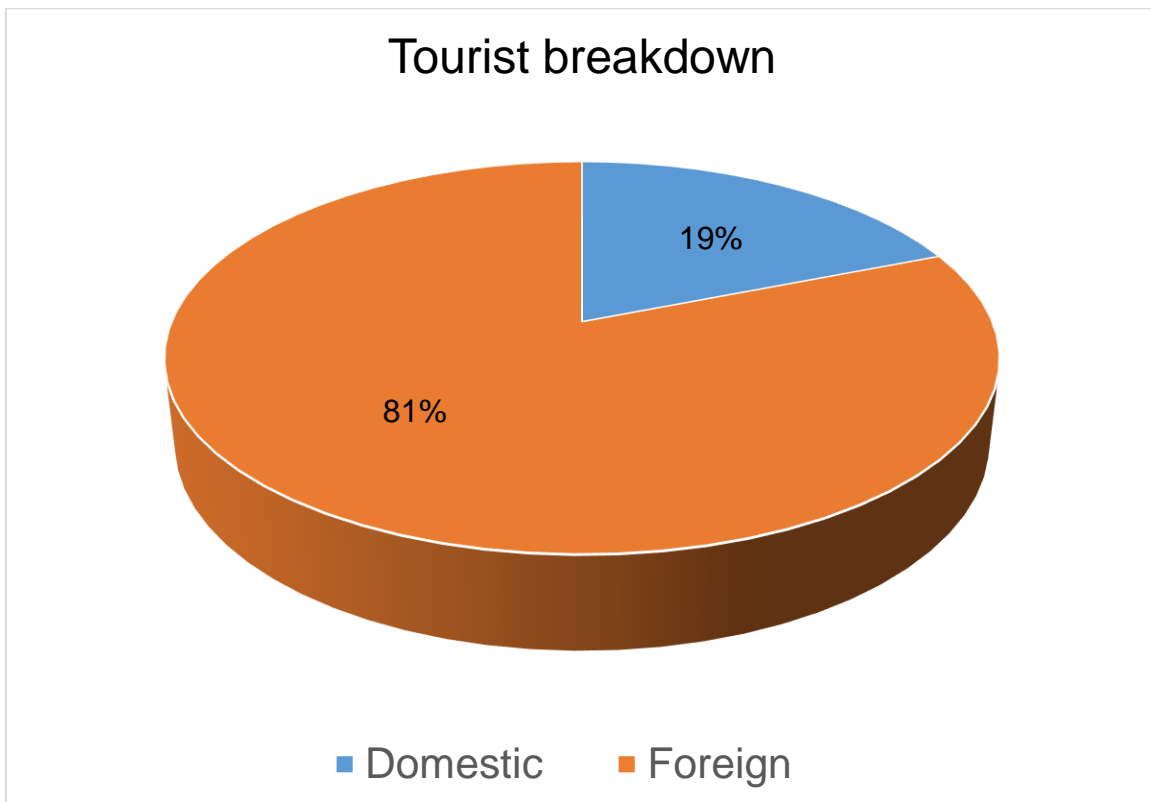


Figure 3: Tourist breakdown at Pu Luong Nature Reserve in 2019

Pu Luong Nature Reserve proves itself to be a ravishing destination amongst adventurous domestic youngsters, with the number of young visitors to the region in recent years on the constant rise. At the point of this research in the making, it can be observed with a high level of certainty that there has been a slight shift in the structure of tourists, moving towards a larger proportion of domestic thrillers and scientists as well. Not only does the primitive landscape attract ordinary people thanks to its arresting and spectacularly breath-taking beauty, but Pu Luong also allures scientists and academicians to pay a visit to study the untouched areas in the limestone mountain ranges. This gradual change can be attributable to the fallouts of COVID-19 restrictions both globally and locally, making it painstakingly challenging for foreign tourists to come by. In the meantime, local visitors are encouraged and triggered by the curiosity of this off-the-beaten-path place.

3.2 Empirical research and data analysis

3.2.1 Data collection methods

This section is dedicated to delving into the research methodology, data collection and analysis methods which are to be used in the subsequent case study at Pu Luong Nature Reserve to observe how theoretical framework presented in the previous parts can be applied into practice. Results of the survey and interview will be illustrated and shown in the succeeding sub-section to give broader and more detailed insights into the whole process.

Notwithstanding the tumultuous times of coronavirus and the induced travelling restrictions, the survey was chosen to be implemented in the forms of both online and offline, which required the author to pay an actual visit to the area so as to be able to carry out interviews in person. The rationale behind this combination of approaches can be traced back to the minimal exposure to social media and technological means and hesitancy to have an active involvement into the Internet, which is occasionally referred to as presumably perceived technophobia or Internet-shy syndrome. This sentiment was considered one of the hindrances or major stumbling blocks over the course of data collection and the research paper as a whole, leading to protracted process and delayed submission of the report.

While the online form of the survey was published at the start of July onto selected businesses' websites and social media accounts, for instance, Facebook, Instagram and Zalo (a sort of messaging app popular in Vietnam), the field trip to the area for in-person data collection and interviews was made at the beginning of October when some of the stringent measures on movement were slackened and relaxed. Thanks to reliable and trustworthy relationships, the author of the research succeeded in enticing business owners and restaurateurs to inquire regular customers who previously used services at their site. This was tremendously significant and meaningful for the research author to gain further thoughtful insights and verifiable data in conjunction with the method to use encoded QR to boost the completion rate, albeit slowly and less effectively than the other two approaches.

The field trip and efforts to carry out the onsite survey and questionnaire were consistently impeded by the intermittent breakout of community transmissions leading to disruption and imposed restrictions on the freedom to travel between places and regions within Vietnam. Nonetheless, the author was able to collect sufficient data calculated in theory beforehand to proceed with the analysis process and debunking the genuine issues on the field, which were deemed useful, beneficial and of great significance to the prospective research.

3.2.2 Design of the survey and data analysis methods

Vietnamese had been chosen as the main language of the survey as the vast majority of clients and stakeholders is originally from the country and quite specifically in the local area within the scope of this research. The primary source of data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire with entirely multiple-choice questions, in which the emphasis was intended to be placed on respondents' understanding about community-based tourism and the current practice state of it in the locality. In addition, side interviews with those concerned as well as references and archives from Pu Luong Nature Reserve Administration Agency were implemented to obtain further insights for the data collection process.

The questionnaire was made up of 11 questions, in which the first four were designed to be acquainted with the sample's target and participants. The rest of the survey was allocated to delve into exploring the understanding and perceptions about community-based tourism and its practice in real life on the site, seeking varied answers regarding the level at which the local participation into process has been perceived and influence factors of the whole practice. The questions concluded with a rating task for interviewee to mark the position where the participation by stakeholders of community-based tourism in the field has been generally accepted. Questions and further details of the survey can be found in the *Appendix 3: Questionnaire in the survey at the end of this thesis paper*.

The number of participants, which specifically points to the size of the sample, was determined using the formula put forward by Linus Yamane (mentioned in the following section). All of the data collected and gathered would then be processed using statistical application of SPSS, in which two scoring tools named Likert and Anova were utilized to compare relevant variables and factors. The backbone concept of the research was the model developed by Jules Pretty to relatively evaluate the level of participation by the local community; hence, descriptive statistics analysis has been singled out as an ideal approach to better highlight the results and situation.

The dataset's perceptions and assessments about community-based tourism based on their actual observations and experiences were reflected on the rating scale of 1-5 in terms of their insights and perspectives on corresponding inquiries. The primary data were subsequently tested and processed using the statistical software of SPSS to make relevant comparison and correlations between essential factors to establish the link between theoretical framework and practicality of the case in question. The analytical results were also produced in conjunction with independent samples t-test and one-tailed test to paint a clearer picture of the situation on the field through statistical perspectives.

The research methodology employs both qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate and delve into the participation of the local community (households and businesses) into community-based tourism. In the next step, the in-person interviews and questionnaires (online and offline) took place over the course of three months from July to September (2021) due to the travelling restrictions imposed against the backdrop of tumultuous period of COVID-19 in Vietnam. The survey population is restricted within the boundaries of Pu Luong National Reserve while the sample is calculated based on the formula proposed by Linus Yamane (1986).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \cdot e^2}$$

n: sample size – N: population size – e: acceptable sampling error (e=9%)

In the case of Pu Luong National Reserve, the population size N is 130 (figures provided by the local authorities), which points to the sample size of roughly 60 individuals, households, and enterprises to be surveyed. The acquired answers were subsequently collected and processed using SPSS applications (introduced during the course of Quantitative Research Methods delivered by Tuuli Mirola), in which Likert scoring system and Anova have been deployed to produce some comparisons amongst relevant variables.

The process of building the questionnaires and evaluation framework is expected to eliminate superfluous factors, supplement, and rename some to make them compatible with the real situation at research site. The research outcome of this paper comes to a consensus over the following factors: people's perception of resources and tourism operations, framework, and related policies by the authorities towards tourism industry as a whole, household features and characteristics and economic benefits. The research models evaluating the extent to which the local participation into community-based tourism can be affected is illustrated in the graph below:

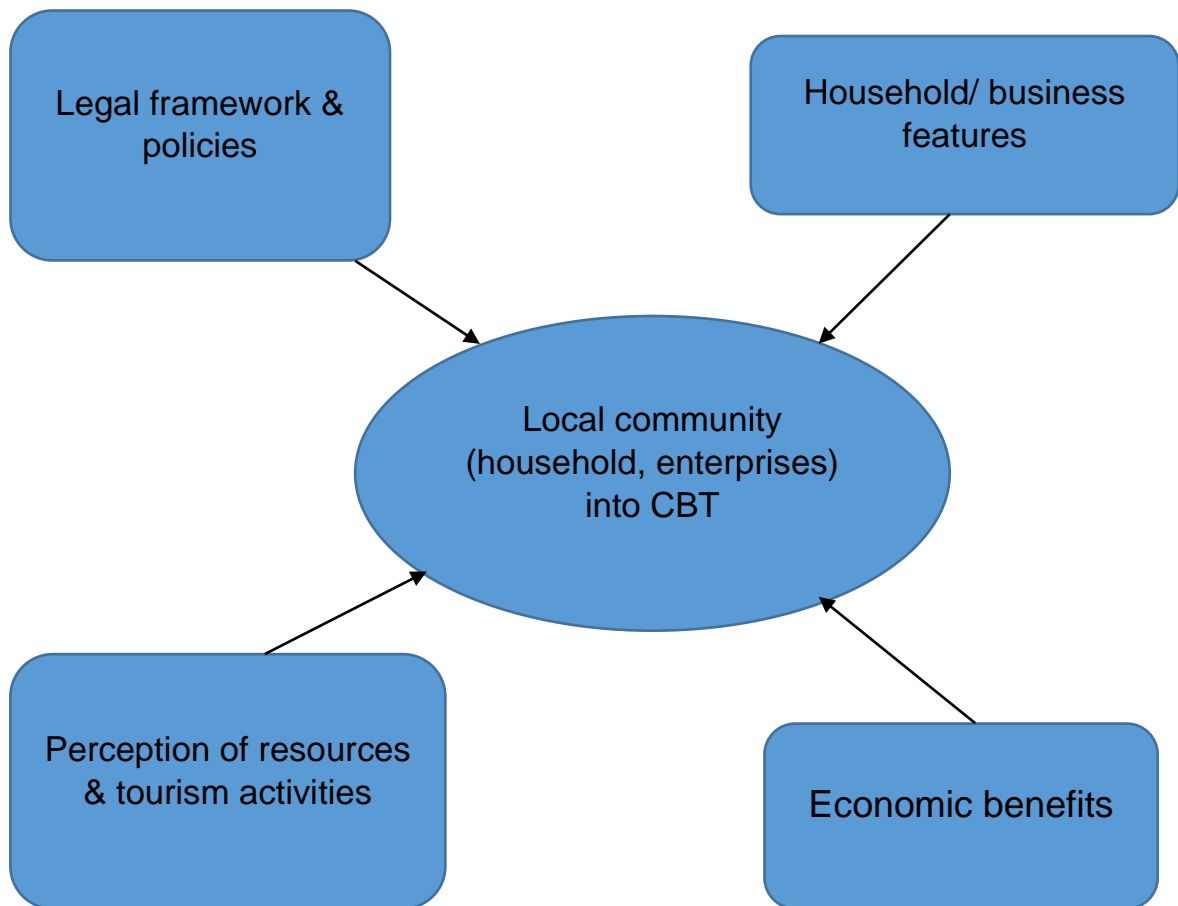


Figure 4: Research model of influence factors on local participation in CBT

The research survey has been purely based on the above model to come up with ideas and questions, capturing the majority of the criteria in the questionnaires. Detailed criteria and influence factors are interconnected in a sense that respondents are believed to find it straightforward to visualise and materialise the content and the goal of the survey with utmost care and ease.

3.3 Analysis of survey results and research outcome

3.3.1 Current situation on the local participation in community-based tourism

This research utilises Jules Pretty model to evaluate the level of participation of the local community into planning for boosting the region's tourism sector, ranging from the bottom level of manipulative participation to the highest self-mobilisation, which is on par with each set of the questions in the survey. Respondents were explained about each step on the Pretty's ladder and asked to tick the proper level on which they currently stand. The result of this part can be found in the table below.

Self-mobilisation	7.3
Interactive participation	7.5
Functional participation	24.3
Participation for material incentives	25.9
Participation by consultation	8.9
Passive participation	12.7
Manipulative participation	13.4
Scope/ Degree of participation	Percentage

Table 2: Degree of participation of local community into community-based tourism

It can be drawn from the table that people's participation is at its highest level (25.9 percent) on Step 4, corresponding "*Participation for material incentives*". The data is associated with the fact that locals are only willing to take part in tourism activities once they see the economic benefits or be enticed and sufficiently paid. Tourism is expected to boost quality job vacancies, render employment available and better than conventional means of living, and eventually induce local economic development. This will undoubtedly lead to significantly improved source of income in conjunction with make-over infrastructure and service facilities (accommodation and lodging establishments). The form of representation for this level can be experienced through the spontaneous provision of services or participation into the process of delivering services at hospitality and tourism enterprises. The survey was also

able to pinpoint one feature to paint a broader and clearer picture of employment in the region: seasonality. As a matter of fact, the number of workers and labourers fluctuate wildly during low-season and harvest months, which makes the pool of employment volatile and susceptible to significant changes.

Step 5 of "*Functional participation*" followed the previous step with a marginally lower percentage of 24.3 percent of respondents currently seeing themselves in this regard. The step refers to the functionalised groups in which local inhabitants are willing to join and bear responsibility for each separate roles, for instance, management, entertainment, cuisine, and gastronomy, guiding, specialty production under the close supervision of the local council or external organisations. Respondents of this scale are characterised by the longstanding residency in the region with moderate capabilities and skills in terms of academic level, professional tourism, and communicative skills in foreign languages with visitors. Besides, the income stability is firmly believed to be insecure since tourism activities and related operations are heavily subject to constant changes and annual seasonal features.

In addition, two highest levels of the spectrum (*Interactive participation* and *Self-mobilisation*) garnered the smallest proportions of 7.5 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively. At *Interactive participation* level, local inhabitants who have been academically trained and highly educated (say, tertiary education) hold critical posts in the local council to make important decisions and be proactively engaged in strategic planning and development mapping for the region's tourism sector. The participation in the process to this group is seen as an advantage to acquire information, prior opportunities, financial materials, and social relations while serving at the same time as an obligation and pledge to the local administration. The objective of this interactive participation is to seek multifaceted opinions and perspectives towards strategic and development planning in the field while taking advantage of prior experience in the sector to benefit the local community in question. This group of survey participants are entitled to control the decision-making process and determine the approach to which the existing tourism resources are due to be exploited and utilised for the sake of local members in various manners. The role people of this level play is perceived to have a significant impact on virtually both planning and management of tourism operations at the locality. In the meantime, respondents identifying themselves at the highest level of *Self-mobilisation* (Step 7) have an obvious tendency to proactively come up with ideas, initiatives, and business plans in an independent way from external stakeholders and organisations, for instance, local authorities, administration agencies on projects and tourism in general).

In short, the local community's participation in supplying and providing tourism services as well as development planning at Pu Luong Nature Reserve area is largely seen as superficial, relatively passive, and not on par with roles that there are presumably bound to bear in tapping in tourism potentials and that is highly likely to derail the growth path towards unsustainability.

3.3.2 Tourism services provision situation

As the survey results have shown, the local participation into community-based tourism is largely seen as limited with the provision of accommodation and eatery, and tour guiding making up the largest proportion. The participation at this scale is obviously monotonous and spontaneous, leaving other roles and responsibilities at higher level at chance and unanswered, for example, decision-making, active organising, building plans to be implemented over the course of community-based tourism's development.

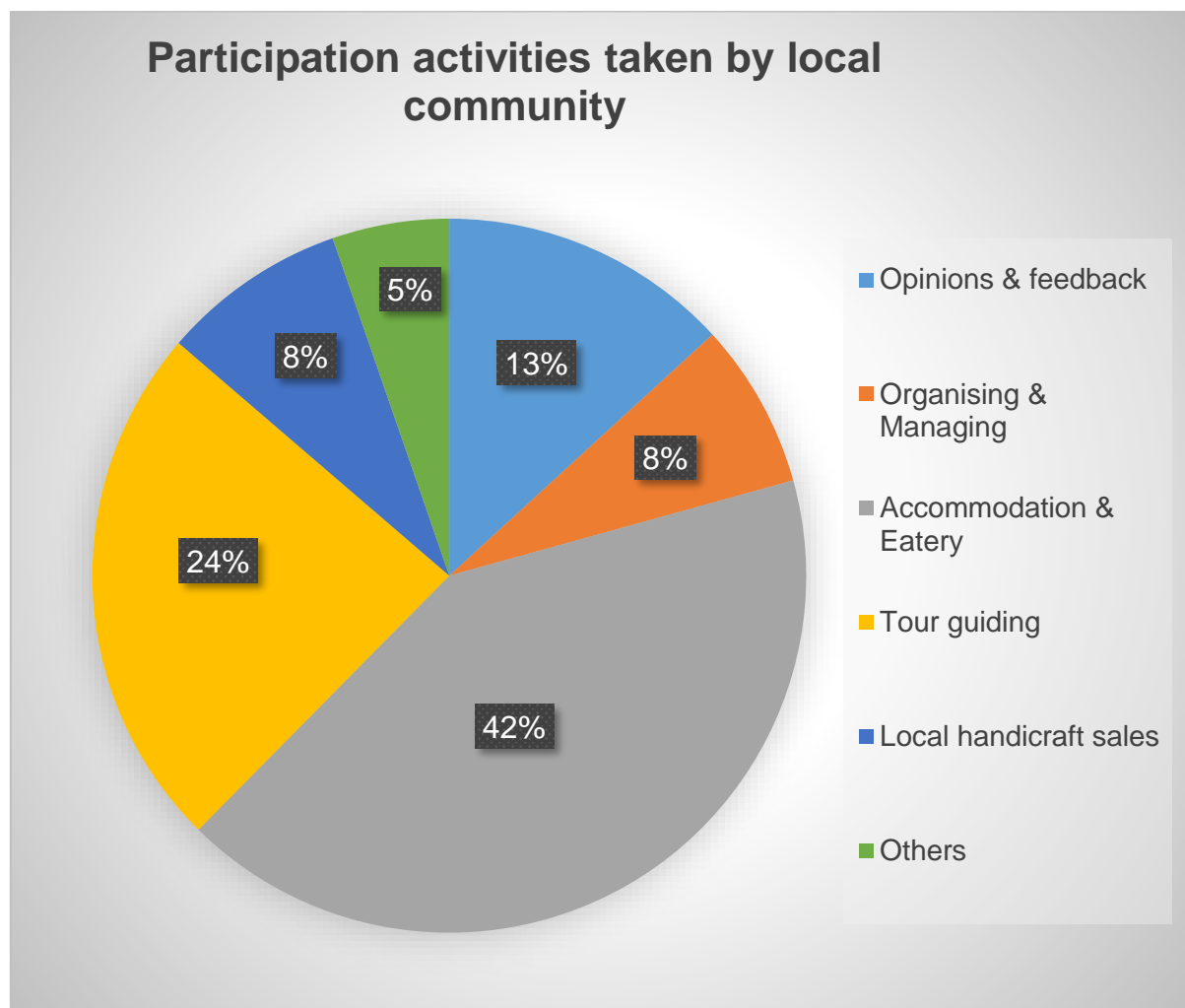


Figure 5: Activities held by local community members at Pu Luong

As per analysed in the previous section, the participation by the local community at Pu Luong Nature Reserve, in reference to Jules Pretty's model, is classified as functional and motivated by financial incentives. To put it in layman's terms in conjunction with Diagram 3, it can easily be understood that the local participation in the process is still heavily dependent on the guidance and planning from the Pu Luong Nature Reserve's administration board and responsible agencies. Community members as well as businesses navigate themselves outside the responsibility circle and only take part in tourism activities once orientation, encouragement and substantial investment from the authorities are guaranteed.

Besides, the actual survey and in-person interviews a random pool of selected tourists to the area indicate that an approximate proportion of 60 percent of respondents 'do not' want or have plans in the foreseeable future to come back, a marginal one-third of those inquired stating that a return is imminent or likely possible while the rest of interviewees remained undecided. Visitors expect to have a more diverse and fascinating tour package with further added activities to the currently existing itinerary while traditional entertainment shows and services are suggested to be more professional. Also, the renting service for bikes and motorbikes are not adequate in relation to rising demands from customers when an urgent need to repair and upgrade the traffic routes leading to individual communes during rainy seasons lest roads and normal traffic be blocked, obstructed, or temporarily suspended posing dangerously high level of harm to locals and tourists alike. In addition to the infrastructure's poor quality, there is a persistent shortage of road signs, posts and instruction boards as people have to travel and navigate around the area in the absence of proper public toilets, mobile information booth onsite and decent connection to WIFI or LAN networks. Nonetheless, local people's sheer sense of hospitality and friendliness coupled with impeccable gastronomy of the region are amongst factors that leave the greatest impression on visitors.

In summary, it can be observed with ease that local people and businesses (mostly small) in recent years have established their mind and conception about playing as a main force for the local tourism sector, identifying themselves committed to tourism-related occupations and environment protection so as to secure their stable source of income and take the best use of available natural and human resources at the locality. However, these services and businesses prone to the inevitable effects of seasonality are widely considered monotonous, spontaneous, and copycat with instantaneous or momentous trends with virtually no concrete long-term action plan. Also, key players in the process are ill-equipped with proper skills both professional and communicative, specifically occupation-orientated set of skills and the required ability to converse and exchanged in foreign languages. This consequently

leads to a series of repercussions on small hostels, lodging establishments and hospitality providers in the vicinity of Pu Luong Nature Reserve.

3.3.3 Analysis of influence factors towards local community's participation

This quantitative survey was carried out in form of questionnaires disseminated online and offline while in-person interviews were mostly conducted in person. The results obtained demonstrate that the following factors exerts a profound influence over the interest and willingness by households and businesses into the practice of community-based tourism: local people's perceptions about existing resources and tourism activities, policies and legal framework of the authorities and those responsible for tourism management and administration agencies, household and business's typical characteristics in conformity with tourism operations, and economic benefits. These factors which are previously mentioned in the section above have a significant impact on the local people's willingness, desire, and determination to partake in community-based tourism activities.

These factors in the survey are subsequently expressed, evaluated, and tabulated with selected variables: gender, age, academic standard and occupation. The *mean* value is also critical to interpret and understand the overall picture of these contributors to community-based tourism at Pu Luong Nature Reserve. For the factor of "Local people's perceptions about existing resources and tourism activities", the measurement ranges from Level 1 signifying 'Totally disagree' to Level 5 denoting 'Totally agree'. Meanwhile, the evaluation options for the remaining factors cover from Level 1: *Absolutely unimportant* to Level 5: *Absolutely important*.

Abbreviation: Aca. Std.: Academic standard of survey respondents

Factors	Criteria	Mean	Sex	Age	Aca. std.	Job
People's perceptions	Huge and critical values of the area's rich tourism resources	4.26	n-s	n-s	n-s	*
	Resources exploitation in accordance with sustainability vision	3.19	*	n-s	n-s	ns-
	Unique features of natural resources	4.28	n-s	n-s	*	n-s
Legal framework	Proper tourism development plans in congruence with the region's potentials	4.45	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s

Policies	Region's infrastructure, superstructure, and fundamental facilities	4.28	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Management scheme and administrative procedures	4.44	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Equality and transparency about benefits sharing	4.02	*	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Cohesive discussion to connect parties concerned	4.28	*	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Response framework in case of benefit conflicts	4.21	**	n-s	n-s	n-s
Household or biz's features	Natural capitals	3.91	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Social capitals (kinship, suppliers, etc.)	3.93	*	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Finance	3.91	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Household workforce	3.97	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Facilities and available conditions	3.89	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
Economic benefits	Tourism as a sustainable means of living for household and businesses	4.65	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Employment opportunities from tourism	4.52	*	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Revenues induced from tourism activities at locality	4.57	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Induced and improved economic development at locality	4.21	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
<p><i>Note: Significance level</i></p> <p>(**) signifies $p \leq 0.05$</p> <p>(*) denotes $0.05 < p \leq 0.10$</p> <p>(n-s) means $p > 0.10$ or 'No significance in statistics'</p>						

Table 3: Influence factors to the local participation in community-based tourism at Pu Luong Nature Reserve area

In regard to the local **people's perceptions** about existing resources and tourism activities, the survey outcome shows that people highly appreciate the criteria of "Unique features of natural resources" with the mean value of 4.28 while the criteria of "Resources exploitation in accordance with sustainability vision" whose mean value at 3.19 points to a disinterest or at least alarming concern by the locals. The compelling reason for this discrepancy can be the seasonality and overheated activities during peak seasons with huge numbers of people flocking to the region in a short span of time, especially during holidays and weekend in and around harvest time. This could potentially or likely lead to unexpected congestion and overcapacity for the tourism sector at the site, which further deteriorates the situation by resulting in visitors' poor experience, degradation of landscape and surrounding environments, and the unavoidable disruption to local people's normal pace of life and minorities. Also, the noise pollution from throngs of people riding on motorcycles and cars are amongst concerns raised by the locals. People's perceptions are a pivotal and focal point affecting the desire and willingness from the local community to the practice of community-based tourism. This is in turn expected to enhance the capability to attract more capital and investments in the locality's tourism operations, nurture the future human resources and further enlarge the reception capacity of prospective tourists for the destination community. Hence, there appears to be an urgent need to devise solutions and approaches to coping with the unresolved matters.

The processed information for "**Policies and legal framework** of the authorities and those responsible for tourism management and administration agencies" indicates that survey respondents strongly value dual criteria of "Proper tourism development plans in congruence with the region's potentials" and "Management scheme and administrative procedures" with the mean of roughly 4.45. This result corresponds to a desire and proposition or simply people's voices about the need for those in authority to formulate and build up a sufficiently strong, clear, and legally binding framework by which people are obliged and required to abide and share the management responsibilities (possibly acting as co-manager/ co-supervisor) as well as benefits with pertinent parties in the process. The research author utilised *independent samples t-test* and *one-tailed test* finding out that by gender, there exists a difference in opinions and assessment by those surveyed regarding the criteria of "Equality and transparency about benefits sharing", "Cohesive discussion to connect parties concerned" and "Response framework in case of benefit conflicts". Specifically, the difference level with high statistical significance belongs to the factor of "Response framework in case of benefit conflicts", which can be blamed on the wide gap in terms of academic standard, inherent awareness and perception, and characteristic sort of employment between males and females in the survey. Males are mostly involved in onerously laborious yet well-paid

activities, such as tour guiding in the jungles or rugged mountainous terrains whereas female counterparts are seen to be more engaged in tender ones, such as selling or making traditional handicrafts or working on the fields. Also, the presence of men in managerial positions is seen as dominant over women due largely to the gap in educational backgrounds and greater exposure to news briefing sessions and policies.

Subsequently, the criteria of “**Household workforce**” garners the most attention with average points, which means local people are believed to have comprehensive or thorough awareness of their currently existing conditions required, say, general means and financial situations, to be able to take part in community-based tourism’s practice. This criterion is utterly important for respondents to consider since they reckon that the majority of residents with the area of Pu Luong Nature Reserve are regularly seen with relatively limited academic qualifications and normal means of living and persistent livelihoods are heavily dependent on the natural resources and what the surrounding environments have to offer. Comparisons and analyses amongst groups underscore the discrepancy by gender in people’s evaluations towards “Social capitals” (including but not limited to kinship, close relationships with KOLS, influencers, suppliers, and service providers, etc.) in which the role of men in the community and their wide-ranging circle of relationships in the society are reasons behind this variation.

Last but not least, the much-anticipated “**Economic benefits**” observes the dominance and popularity of three criteria out of the others, namely, “Tourism as a sustainable means of living for household and businesses”, “Revenues induced from tourism activities at locality” and “Revenues induced from tourism activities at locality” with the mean values at 4.65, 4.52 and 4.57, respectively. The results are due to be interpreted that “Economic benefits” is widely perceived as the deciding factor to the likely or imminent participation of local people into the community-based tourism. Besides, there is virtually no difference with statistical significance in listed criteria within “Economic benefits” classified by sex, academic standard, and occupation, which alludes to the fact that almost all people surveyed have a clear and well-thought perceptions as well as a keen interest in future economic benefits induced from the participation into tourism activities in general and community-based tourism in particular.

In short, all of the four groups of influence factors have undeniable impact on the decision-making process by local people into the practice of community-based tourism yet at varied extent and scope. The above interpretations specify that “Economic benefits” is the most compelling reason and driving force behind local people’s decision to become engaged in tourism at the locality. The average value or overall mean of all criteria is calculated at

approximately 4.42, in which the ever-present concern about economic benefits and advantages is the first priority and consideration amongst respondents and local residents as a whole.

3.3.4 Breakdown and analysis of hurdles towards people's participation

The below table encapsulates the outcome of the intended survey, in which respondents are inquired to deliver their feedback, views and reflections on what they considered barriers and hurdles to the development of community-based tourism at Pu Luong Nature Reserve.

All of the options have been rated on a scale from 1 (Totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), which was subsequently processed with statistical software of SPSS. The analytical results were produced in conjunction with *independent samples t-test* and *one-tailed test* to paint a clearer picture of the situation on the field through statistical perspectives.

Abbreviation: Aca. Std.: Academic standard of survey respondents

Barriers Hurdles	Criteria	Mean	Sex	Age	Aca. std.	Job
Legal framework	Tourism development policies deemed incomplete, patchy, and improper	4.25	n-s	n-s	n-s	**
	Lack of legal framework to co-management and benefit sharing	4.74	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
Resources	Limited social preferential funds	4.18	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Sub-standard household/ biz resources (insufficient headcount, know-how, skills, capitals)	4.59	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Lack of communication and cross-party relations	4.24	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Conflict of interest and a shortage of friction resolving scheme	4.47	**	n-s	**	**
	Sub-standard superstructure and infrastructure needed for tourism	4.06	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s

Structure and Organisation of business operation	Limited revenue/ income from tourism	4.81	**	n-s	*	n-s
	Seasonality-induced unstable source of income and volatile livelihoods	4.74	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
	Persistent lack of verified information, market consultations, tourism products and projects	4.39	n-s	n-s	n-s	**
	Intricate administrative procedures and unfavourable business conditions	4.13	n-s	n-s	n-s	n-s
<p><i>Note: Significance level</i></p> <p>(**) signifies $p \leq 0.05$</p> <p>(*) denotes $0.05 < p \leq 0.10$</p> <p>(n-s) means $p > 0.10$ or 'No significance in statistics'</p>						

Table 4: Barriers/ hurdles to the local participation in community-based tourism at Pu Luong Nature Reserve area

As per indicated from the Table 4, the criteria of “*Limited revenue/ income from tourism*” attracted the attention of most respondents, with the highest mean value standing at 4.81. This is also perceived to the most outstanding stumbling block restricting the participation of local people into tourism practice. In addition, the “*Seasonality-induced unstable source of income and volatile livelihoods*” is another barrier to take into consideration, given the fact that tourism operations at the area of Pu Luong Nature Reserve are unarguably susceptible to seasonality. The indisputable seasonality is pertinent to weather conditions, fluctuation in atmospheric conditions up in the mountains, monsoon seasons and precipitations as well as the peak points during national and regional holidays. It is abundantly clear that the seasonality has its own tremendously profound effects on virtually all stakeholders or actors in the practice of tourism activities, namely, residents, region’s government, and especially visitors and the business community cum local people. In high season falling in the harvest period of June to August as well as the peak of holiday during April 30 – May 1 (Reunification Day and International Labour Day), there is a persistent disruption to existing infrastructure and facility conditions and extraordinary congestion of public means of transport due largely to the abnormally rocketing numbers of tourists flocking to the area. This undoubtedly leads to unexpected changes to normal pace of life in the region, occasionally sparking voices of discontent and objection from several inhabitants. Nonetheless,

during peak seasons, the income incurred from tourism activities merely accounts for a marginal proportion in comparison with other parties, for instance, sightseeing ticket sales, restaurants, hotels, and travel agencies. When the demands plummet during rainy seasons (October and November), those for workforce are believed to nosedive in the same manner leading to tantamount difficulties to re-organise and re-balance the regional employment situation. Dwindling income and volatile livelihoods are amongst several repercussions from the effects of seasonality.

The hurdle of “Lack of legal framework to co-management and benefit sharing” proves to be another headache for local authorities with the mean value of 4.74. Those residing in the core area of Pu Luong Nature Reserve have lived much of their lives in the region and been recognised as the presumed owners of tourism resources in the area, yet their roles, voices and benefits have consistently been overlooked. Coupled with the criteria of “Lack of communication and cross-party relations” whose mean is calculated to be 4.24, it can be concluded that developmental tourism activities have been under systematic strict supervision and top-down management from the governments and authorities while the bottom-up reflection and feedback are absent from the whole process which refers to the two-way, mutual feedback and reflection scheme.

Additionally, with the mean value of 4.39, “Persistent lack of verified information, market consultations, tourism products and projects” is seen as another barrier to the participation into community-based tourism practice since local people have been faced with a substantial deal of difficulties and challenges accessing and keeping themselves abreast of verified source of information concerning the region’s tourism development endeavours in general and travel projects in particular. The rationale of this matter of fact can be traced back to the absence of local residents at official meetings, briefings, seminars and press conferences where just a handful of selected representatives and attendees are able to take part. This indisputably results in the inevitable conflict of interests and barriers to people’s capability to obtain free and open access to trustworthy and verified information on relevant matters and issues in the community itself.

Last but not least, “Conflict of interest and a shortage of friction resolving scheme” with the average figure of 4.47 asserts a huge influence on the willing participation of households, businesses and the broader community into the tourism activities in the regions, specifically community-based tourism practice. At present, it is firmly believed that there have been some flows of conflict of interests amongst selected parties concerned, namely, conflict of interests arising within the community doing tourism’s business, friction between long-

standing residents and outside settlers, investors as well as the stalemate conservation efforts and tourism development practice.

4 Conclusion

This research is dedicated to take a closer look into the desirable participation by the local community into the practice of community-based tourism with a view to reaching goals of ultimate sustainable tourism in the end. Specifically, the participation should be in line with long-term engagement and commitment in which action plans and engaging community are expected to be built on the premises of existing resources. More proactive participation and concrete approaches to community-based tourism should be taken seriously and all relevant factors to be put into sheer consideration so that local residents are prone to be empowered both socially and economically in order to produce more added values to the practice and bring about memorable experiences for local community and tourists alike.

A mixture of quantitative and qualitative research was implemented to test the scope to which the destination community of Pu Luong Nature Reserve has been engaged in the practice of tourism activities, specifically community-based tourism. The end results of the research are to identify and pinpoint barriers affecting this participation as well as propose some recommendations to resolve the issues in due course. The analysis was based purely on the model initiated by Jules Pretty, which underscores the current level of participation at "Participation for material incentives" and "Functional participation". Local people are currently partaking in the practice of community-based tourism and other tourism activities in the form of provision of fundamental services and mostly unskilled or sub-skilled labour force during certain periods of time in a year. The pattern of engagement is perceived to be not consistent, spontaneous, and rather copycat from each other. A vast majority of survey respondents expressed their concerns and interests in tourism activities and operations, showing their willingness and engagement at varied extent and scope. Although inhabitants and residents highly appreciated the current existing tourism resources and untapped potentials in the locality, they are inclined to show their reluctance towards switching from conventional means of living to entirely tourism-based livelihoods. The reason for this rational and logical tendency is that tourism-induced income and sources of revenue from sight-seeing and hospitality serviced are widely considered low, unstable, and unsustainable when it comes to securing people's livelihoods in the foreseeable future. In addition, there has been a lack of consensus and consultation scheme to reflect the exact pace of development in the tourism sector as well as the level of adaptation those involved can meet to avert potential conflicts of interest amongst relevant parties and stakeholders. Hence, it is unanimously agreed that there is seemingly an urgent need to lay out proper legal framework and pertinent policies about management, empowerment and benefit-sharing within the area and the wider public and business community.

The survey results and research analysis identify contributing factors and constraints to local community's consensus and participation into tourism activities in the area of Pu Luong Nature Reserve, in which perceptions about available resources and tourism operations have an evident impact on the extent of concern and desire to participate from the inhabitants' side. It has been found out that factors pertaining to legal framework and proper policies, household and/or business capabilities, and economic benefits are amongst the overriding concerns and influence factors to the tourism sector as a whole in the region. Results also indicate the influence degree of each factor and their corresponding interconnections as well as links in relation with other variable to reflect and affect the community's participation. Regarding barriers and hurdles, the noticeable seasonality in tourism operations has been seen as the overarching issue to be taken into consideration, given its obvious fallout over people's unstable livelihoods. Besides, matters surrounding imminent/ likely conflicts of interests and economic frictions amongst relevant stakeholders are slowing down or at least dampening people's interest and willingness to partake in the practice.

The author of this research would like to put forward selected suggestions and concrete action plans to enhance the consensus and agreement as well as to instigate the desire and willingness from local residents to become more engaged in and committed to the development of the tourism sector at the locality. Propositions are placed in order given its sheer priority as follows: raise the awareness and strengthen the perceptions, skills, and professional expertise of people about tourism development, boost the effectiveness and efficacy of community consultations, put proper legal framework and appropriate policies in place, evaluate the cost/ expense structure and minimize the possible effects of conflicts of interests while enhancing the equitable and more equal process of benefit sharing. Also, there is apparently an urgent task for those in authority to boost external diplomacy and cohesive connections amongst parties concerned, devise unique products and services either tailor-made to specific groups of visitors or presumably intended to cater to the wider public so as to highlight the significance of local culture, traditions and custom while making every effort to support businesses, especially those classified as small and medium size and start-ups. In the end, the consensus, unanimous agreement, and mutual participation of the local community into the practice should be secured to reach goals of community-based tourism as well as the sustainability in tourism activities for generations to come.

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Appendix 1: Tables

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Appendix 3: Questionnaire in the survey



Thank you for your interest in the survey. I am Thanh-Son Mai, senior student at LAB University of Applied Sciences – Finland, majoring in Hospitality and Management Tourism. I would like to use this survey to understand your perspectives, viewpoints, and preferences for the notion of community-based tourism and the local community's participation into the practice within the area of Pu Luong Nature Reserve, Thanh Hoa, Vietnam. This survey is of huge significance for me as it serves as a tool to collect data for my bachelor's thesis, and I greatly appreciate your help in ensuring that we have action plans in place as properly as possible to enhance the sustainable practice of tourism in the area. The survey should take 10 minutes to complete.

Question 1: Which age group do you belong to?

- Under 18 years old
- 18 – 35 years old
- 36 – 65 years old
- Over 65 years old

Question 2: Which gender are you?

- Male
- Female
- Others

Question 3: Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- Employed full-time (35 or more hours a week)
- Employed part-time (Less than 35 hours a week)
- Self-employed
- Owner/founder/co-founder of a business

- Retired
- Student
- Unemployed
- Other

Question 4: Which most closely matches your current academic qualifications/ levels?

- High school diploma holder
- Vocational school or training centre
- College/ University
- Graduate school
- Other

Question 5: Have you heard about the term of Community-based tourism (CBT)?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Question 6: What CBT activities do you think the local people have been engaged so far?

- Opinions and feedback
- Organising and managing
- Providing accommodation and eatery services
- Tour guiding
- Local handicraft production and sales
- Others
- No participation

Question 7:

For the following question about **“People’s perceptions about existing resources and tourism activities”**, do you think that these criteria have been taken seriously? Please rate by ticking each criterion on a scale from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*).

	1 Totally disagree	2 Somewhat disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Somewhat agree	5 Totally agree
Huge and critical values of the area’s rich tourism resources					
Resource exploitation in accordance with sustainability vision					
Unique features of natural resources					

Question 8:

For the following criteria of **“Policies and Legal framework”**, **“Household or business’s features and characteristics”** and **“Economic benefits”**, please rate the importance of them on a scale from 1 (*Absolutely unimportant*) to 5 (*Absolutely important*).

	1 Absolutely unimportant	2 Somehow unimportant	3 Not sure or neither	4 Somehow important	5 Absolutely important
Huge and critical values of the area’s rich tourism resources					
Resource exploitation in accordance with sustainability vision					

Unique features of natural resources					
Proper tourism development plans in congruence with the region's potentials					
Region's infrastructure, super-structure, and fundamental facilities					
Management scheme and administrative procedures					
Equality and transparency about benefits sharing					
Cohesive discussion to connect parties concerned					
Response framework in case of benefit conflicts					
Natural capitals					
Social capitals (kinship, suppliers, etc.)					
Finance					
Household workforce					
Facilities and available conditions					
Tourism as a sustainable means of living for household and businesses					

Employment opportunities from tourism					
Revenues induced from tourism activities at locality					
Induced and improved economic development at locality					

Question 10:

Based on your perspectives and observations, please rate the following “**Hurdles and barriers**” to their genuine existence in the community-based tourism practice on a scale from 1 (*Totally disagree*) to 5 (*Totally agree*).

	1 Totally disagree	2 Somewhat disagree	3 Neither agree nor disagree	4 Somewhat agree	5 Totally agree
Tourism development policies deemed incomplete, patchy, and improper					
Lack of legal framework to co-management and benefit sharing					
Limited social preferential funds					
Sub-standard household/ biz resources (insufficient headcount, know-how, skills, capitals)					
Lack of communication and cross-party relations					
Conflict of interest and a shortage of friction resolving scheme					

Sub-standard superstructure and infrastructure needed for tourism					
Limited revenue/ income from tourism					
Seasonality-induced unstable source of income and volatile livelihoods					
Persistent lack of verified information, market consultations, tourism products and projects					

Question 11:

Based on your evaluation in the previous questions and hands-on experience in the field, which **degree of participation** do you think best describes the current state of willingness by the local community into the practice of community-based tourism?

- Self-mobilisation (actively engaged in virtually whole process)
- Interactive participation (entitled to decision-making)
- Functional participation (in charge of particular roles)
- Participation for material incentives
- Participation by consultation (yet exempt from decision-making)
- Passive participation (no access to verified information)
- No participation/ Manipulative participation (No rights/ duties)

This is officially the end of my survey. Thank you for sharing your important insights!