Key Challenges of Sustainable Tourism Development
Case Study: A Residential Point of View from Ho Chi Minh City (Sai Gon)

Nghi Trinh
This thesis was commissioned by the author’s home university in cooperation with TOUR-IST – competence centres for the development of sustainable tourism and innovative financial management strategies to increase positive impacts of local tourism in Thailand and Vietnam. The thesis’s findings contributes knowledge to the TOURIST+ project in the aim of better training in sustainable tourism for different tourism stakeholders in HCMC.

The thesis studies the key challenges that sustainable tourism development in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) has to face currently in the scope of the local residents. The research question is: “How do people living in HCMC, both locals and expats, perceive tourism and what are their wishes to help the city execute a more sustainable tourism industry and to avoid ‘overtourism’?”

Construction of the thesis consists of six chapters: “Introduction”, “Ho Chi Minh City (Sai-gon)”, “Sustainable Urban Tourism”, “Research Implementation”, “Research Analysis”, “Conclusion and Recommendation” and following are “References” and “Appendixes”. The research methodology is qualitative case study using a qualitative questionnaire to gather empirical data. The questionnaire was written in both English and Vietnamese and distributed via online platforms.

The questionnaire’s results were then analysed using direct quotation analysis method. The findings showed that to the scope of local residents, the most severe problem that the city has been facing relates to environmental issues and following is economic matters. The most positive tourism impact relates to social and cultural matters. ‘Overtourism’ seems to be not yet a serious problem in the city. However, ‘overtourism’ signals have been happening mainly around the backpacker’s quarter – Bui Vien/De Tham Streets, which could be a seriously big problem and start spreading out to other parts of the city in a near future.

Keywords
sustainable tourism, urban tourism, overtourism, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam
Table of contents

1 Introduction ..........................................................................................................................1

2 Ho Chi Minh City (Sai Gon) .............................................................................................3
   2.1 Basic Information & Brief History .............................................................................3
   2.2 Tourism Situation .......................................................................................................4

3 Sustainable Urban Tourism ..............................................................................................7
   3.1 Sustainable Tourism .....................................................................................................7
   3.2 Urban Tourism .............................................................................................................8
      3.2.1 Rebranded Cities, Urban Competition and Alternative Strategies for Development ..................................................................................................................9
   3.2.2 Public Sector in Urban Tourism ............................................................................10
   3.2.3 Tourism Development and Cultural Genuineness ..............................................10
   3.3 Overtourism ................................................................................................................12
      3.3.1 What is ‘overtourism’? .......................................................................................12
      3.3.2 ‘Overtourism’ Myths .........................................................................................13
      3.3.3 Strategies and measures to address cities’ visitor growth ..................................14
      3.3.4 Recommendations for policies making process ...............................................15
   3.4 Tourism Impacts .........................................................................................................16
      3.4.1 Economic Impacts .............................................................................................16
      3.4.2 Social and Cultural Impacts .............................................................................19
      3.4.3 Environmental Impacts ....................................................................................22

4 Research Implementation .................................................................................................26
   4.1 Methodology - Qualitative Research Approach .......................................................26
   4.2 Qualitative Questionnaire ........................................................................................27
   4.3 Data Collection and Analysis ....................................................................................28
   4.4 Reliability and Validity .............................................................................................29

5 Results Analysis ..............................................................................................................31
   5.1 Respondents’ Basic Information .............................................................................31
   5.2 Overall Picture of Tourism in HCMC / Saigon .......................................................33
      5.2.1 Historical Heritage .........................................................................................34
      5.2.2 Tourism Developing Strategies & the City’s Branding ....................................35
   5.3 The Locals’ Perspectives on Tourists .....................................................................35
   5.4 Tourism’s Impacts on HCMC .................................................................................37
      5.4.1 Economic Impacts .............................................................................................37
      5.4.2 Social and Cultural Impacts .............................................................................38
      5.4.3 Environmental Impacts ....................................................................................41
   5.1 Questionnaire Respondents’ Recommendations .....................................................42

6 Conclusion & Recommendations ......................................................................................45
Appendices

Appendix 1. Webropol Questionnaire

Appendix 2. Strategies and measures to address visitors’ growth in cities (UNWTO, 2018)

Appendix 3. Twelve recommendations for policies making process to cope with ‘overtourism’ (UNWTO, 2018)

Appendix 4. Facebook Link to TOURIST – competence centres for the development of sustainable tourism and innovative financial management strategies to increase positive impacts of local tourism in Thailand and Vietnam
1 Introduction

According to a report of United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), number of tourists traveling to South East Asia has increased by 10% in the first four months of 2018, the highest among different regions across the globe. Among countries in the area, Thailand and Vietnam are the biggest tourist hubs generating lots of opportunities of employment to locals as well as expats. However, sustainable tourism operation is still weak, which is a serious problem regarding the rapid regional tourism growth. Therefore, it is crucial to study the level of local sustainable tourism operation and have a better plan for raising people’s awareness of executing the traveling industry in a sustainable manner.

As a fact in author’s home university, there have been many theses written about sustainable tourism in well-known beach holiday cities in South East Asia, but it’s a different case in terms of sustainability in urban areas and big industrialized municipalities. That led to the need of this thesis's researching topic, which is to study the key challenges that Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is currently facing in the scope of local residents.

The thesis was commissioned by author’s home university in cooperation with TOURIST – competence centres for the development of sustainable tourism and innovative financial management strategies to increase positive impacts of local tourism in Thailand and Vietnam (as written in TOURIST’s official Facebook page. Link in “Appendices”). The TOURIST project has eleven universities and institutions from Europe and South East Asia involved (FH Joanneum Gesellshaft mbH - Austria (project coordinator), The University of Alicante - Spain, Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences - Finland (author’s home university), Hue University - Vietnam, University of Social Sciences and Humanities Hanoi - Vietnam, University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ho Chi Minh City - Vietnam, Kasetsart University - Thailand, Burapha University - Thailand, Payap University - Thailand, Prince of Songkla University - Thailand and The Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute).

As mentioned, the focal point of this thesis is HCMC, Vietnam. The general objective is to find out the key challenges that sustainable tourism development in HCMC has to face. The research question is: “How do people living in HCMC, both locals and expats, perceive tourism and what are their wishes to help the city execute a more sustainable tourism industry and to avoid ‘overtourism’?” The thesis contributes knowledge to the TOURIST+ project in the aim of better training in sustainable tourism for different tourism stakeholders in HCMC.
In order to tackle down the thesis’s objective and research question, the composer decided to construct the thesis into six chapters: “Introduction”, “Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)” which briefly provides with the city’s history as well as tourism statistics of Vietnam in general and HCMC itself; “Sustainable Urban Tourism” which is the theoretical framework giving insights into sustainable tourism, urban tourism, the new notion ‘overtourism’, as well as tourism impacts; “Research Implementation”, “Research Analysis”, “Recommendations and Conclusions” and following are the “References” and “Appendixes”. The research methodology is qualitative case study using a qualitative questionnaire to gather empirical data. The questionnaire’s results was then analysed using direct quotation analysis method.
2 Ho Chi Minh City (Sai Gon)

This chapter will give a general overview of HCMC’s history and tourism situation. As more and more international organizations start operating their businesses in this Vietnam’s economic and financial hub, it has become dynamic and hectic more than ever before with huge amount of people arriving from overseas for work as well as visitation.

2.1 Basic Information & Brief History

Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is a large commercial municipality in the south of Vietnam (Figure 1). Altogether the city has 24 districts or towns (Danh Mục Quần Huyện, 2019). It could be considered as a megacity now due to its size of 2061 square kilometres and huge population. According to an official announcement made by the city mayor Nguyen Thanh Phong in August, 2017, HCMC has been packed with 13 million people and population density was 6200 people per square kilometre (Vu, 2017).

Figure 1: Ho Chi Minh City Map (worldatlas.com, 2015)

HCMC is a relatively young municipality compared to other cities like Ha Noi or Hue for example. The former name “Sai Gon” was documented for the first time in 1698. Due to its ideal geographical location, topography, and climate, this area rapidly became a converging point for traders coming from all over the world. Sai Gon Port was built in 1862 and trading points like Ong Lanh Market, Ray Market, Ben Thanh Market and Sai Gon Market quickly became familiar to foreign traders. HCMC is where the heroic resistance against
aggressors and the struggling process for independence of the Vietnamese Nation began. It was also where Ho Chi Minh Campaign triumphantly finished on 30 April 1975. At the first session of the 6th National Assembly of Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, in July 1976, the name of the city was officially changed to Ho Chi Minh City (Ho Chi Minh City, 2019).

2.2 Tourism Situation

In general, Vietnam is one of the fastest growing tourism industries in Asia with its tourism economy worth over 12 billion USD per year. The country has received more than 100 billion USD of foreign direct investment which has been attracted to the country since the late 80’s. It has been one of many Asia’s rising stars for its economy development, with a population of over 97 billion (Vietnam Population (LIVE), 2019) and the growth of the country’s tourism business has been remarkable. This fact has to be set in contrast with Vietnam’s history of conflict with French past colonization and the following war with the United States (the Vietnam War) which ended in 1975 with a huge lost in population (around two million people who served the military and five million civilians got killed). Later on, the communist controlled the country which resulted in on-going internal conflict. With all these facts, Vietnam was unlikely to be seen as a potential candidate for tourism development before the 80’s (Page, 2015). However the country has made it to its current peak at economy and tourism growth.

Vietnam’s international arrivals had increased from 92,500 to just over 1 million from the year 1988 to 1995, then the number had been more than doubled from almost 4.2 million in the year of global economic crisis 2008 to 6.8 million in year 2012. Arrivals were mostly dominated by Chinese inbound travellers, followed by South Korean, Japanese and the American (Page, 2015).

The country since then has been remaining among one of the fastest growing regions worldwide, while it was also a primary driver of Asian tourism (i.e. the continent in general achieved 7% growth per annum in 2011-2012 and South-East Asia with 9% of growth, compared to Vietnam’s growth of approximately 14%). Hence, Vietnam is one of the core drivers of global tourism growth in the region. By 2020, the local state expects international arrivals to reach 10 million and by 2030 the expected number is doubled (Figure 2). This is a rapid growing rate and high expectation from the state. Those facts surely challenges the development of sustainable tourism for Vietnam overall (Page, 2015).
The majority of the rapid growth could be credited to the free-market reforms (Doi Moi – renewal campaign) in 1986, a policy that created liberalization for Vietnamese economy after the reunification. These were created in advance of the broader commitment between the ASEAN trading bloc’s countries to form a free trade area in Asia. The swift expansion of Vietnam’s tourism economy has been associated with its impressive growth in tourism capacity and infrastructure. In the year of global economic crisis 2008, there were 130 companies invested in 68 leading projects related to tourism varying from hotels, to casinos, resort and golf course developments. The majority of investment has been aimed at country’s economic hubs such as Ha Noi and HCMC, which attract approximately 21 billion USD of capital investment. In the specific case of HCMC, the city has an ambitious strategy for its tourism development which is to receive over 3 million visitors per year. Investment in Vietnamese tourism has also been benefited from abroad aid budgets which were running at 2.2 billion USD per year in 2007 and in 2008, a project alone received 11.1 million USD of aid for the Great Mekong sub-region’s Sustainable Tourism Development programme to assist five poorest area of the country to get advantage from tourism-orientated economic development (Page, 2015).

According to tourism data from the Department of Tourism of HCMC, the number of foreign tourists visiting the city was estimated to be over 2.2 million in the first quarter of year 2019 with a total tourism revenue at approximately VND40 trillion (USD1.72 billion), a
number which equals to 26.6 percent of 2019’s target (Thi Hong, 2019) and makes up almost half of 5,968,880 arrivals from overseas to the whole country in the same period (Ministry of Culture, 2019).

HCMC has been listed as one of the fifteen fastest-growing tourist cities on Earth (Quy, 2018). The biggest city of Vietnam has its international tourists arrivals forecasted to reach 10.2 million by 2025, which is doubled compared to the number of 5.5 million of the year 2017 (Quy, 2018). It has been reported from Airbnb – an accommodation service mobile application that allows people to list their private homes/facilities for tourists’ holiday renting, that HCMC is among the five most exciting destinations for independent travellers (Ministry of Culture, 2019).

Figure 3 & 4: HCMC during rush hours. The city attracts visitors from overseas due to its cultural diversity (photo credit: Khang Lam, taken on 22.5.2019)
3 Sustainable Urban Tourism

In this chapter, the notions of ‘sustainable tourism’, ‘urban tourism’ and ‘overtourism’ will be discussed respectively and intensively as knowledge bases for research conducting.

3.1 Sustainable Tourism

Studying about tourism is the study about the way people get away from their daily routines and habitats, about the installation that respond to travellers’ demand, and last but not least about the impact that they have on economy, environment and society of their host destinations. Nowadays, a vast number of people in developed countries, side by side with a tremendously increasing number of people in developing world, do travel at least once in their lifetimes. Travelling has become something far from a privilege of only the rich, but instead an act that is accepted, acquainted or even expected part of the lifestyles of a large and rapidly growing group of people (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Because of that fast growing trend in the industry, it is definitely crucial to study not only tourism, but also how to do it in a sustainable way. Tourism will only be sustainable when it is operated and developed in consideration of both visitors and local residents (UNWTO, 2018).

There are several important reasons for gaining people’s attentions to urgent assessment of sustainability in tourism industry. The fragile ecological systems and cultural sensitivity of tourism attraction sites are urgently in need of consistencies in monitoring and tourism impacts evaluation. Additionally, the industry’s dynamic, unsteady and unpredictable characters are urging reasons for tourism executors to carry out consistent assessments and monitoring of a progress towards a more sustainable development in tourism (Asmelash and Kumar, 2018).

In World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) “Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism”, the development of a sustainable travel industry has been stated that it should meet the needs of current tourists and host territories, at the same time protect and enhance future opportunities. Sustainability in tourism is envisioned to be the leading factor of all resources management in the manner that fulfils economic, social and aesthetic requirements while preserving the integrity of culture, crucial ecological mechanisms, biological diversity and life-supporting systems. (UNWTO, 1998).
Dated back in the 80’s, the concept of sustainable development has gained its real meaning since the publication of the report “Our Common Future” by the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987). In the report, sustainable development has been broken down to five core contents:

- People have the capacity to gain sustainable development by themselves.
- A long-term vision is necessary. Sufficient resources and good environment are crucial for upcoming generations.
- There must be a healthy balance between the rich and poor countries. People’s basic needs must be fulfilled.
- People must all, especially in the rich countries, change their attitudes and lifestyles to support a sustainable ecologically adapted environment.
- Development is a process that can be governed towards a sustainable future.

That we can see in those five contents, it has been mentioned particularly about people in rich countries as the target of adjusting their awareness in terms of tourism behaviours and mind-sets. That is no surprise since while searching for sources to compose this theoretical subchapter, the author was astounded by the number of materials mentioning about the interrelationship between tourism and the oppositional pairs of First and Third World, rich and poor countries, and developed and underdeveloped countries.

During the 1950’s and 1960’s, with problems like underdevelopment, elimination of poverty and economic growth dominating the globalization plan of the industrialised nations, more direct and disciplinary practices relating to development were institutionalised. Advanced development theories of underdevelopment alongside modernisation were introduced with a new geo-political imagery. By this means the world was in an order of binary oppositional forms, namely the North vs the South, the First vs Third World, centre vs periphery and developed vs underdeveloped territories. All in all, the theory of modernisation envisions development as a growing movement toward more institutionalised complex formations of ‘modern’ society, which could be expedited by a series of technological and economic interventions. The benefits in concern will ultimately be dripped through the middle class to the underdeveloped groups (Liburd and Edwards, 2010).

3.2 Urban Tourism

There are thousands of cities in the world that attract tourists. However, when talking about the cities’ core tourism characteristics, there are three large categories of tourism cities: resort cities, historic cities and rebranded cities (Spirou, 2011).
The resort cities, as the name has described it all, mainly serve guests travelling to enjoy their vacations, who are attracted by the cities’ weather condition and natural environments. These cities rely heavily on their idealistic locations and work hard to exploit the expanding of tourism potentials to grow their attractiveness. Many of these cities develop infrastructures that are capable to serve a great amount of guests (Spirou, 2011). For instance, in Vietnam there are quite many resort cities (or islands), namely Nha Trang, Phu Quoc, Da Nang, Hoi An and Phan Thiet, etc.

On the other hand, the tourist-historic municipalities utilize the advantages of their unique history to promote them as an attraction to worldwide tourism market. They do promotion for a different type of amenity which is their past to appeal both leisure guests and business visitors (Spirou, 2011) (for instance, Ha Noi with a history of more than a thousand years and also the country’s head administrative centre of politics and bureaucracies).

The last type, the rebranded cities, however has to go through a broad investment and development in their physical appearance as well as how they present themselves to both their own residents and external visitors (Spirou, 2011).

3.2.1 Rebranded Cities, Urban Competition and Alternative Strategies for Development

The rebranded cities need to face a lot of challenges which are mainly in the fields of urban identity and urban competition. They need to figure out the answer for their question of how to convert themselves from strong and nationally/globally identifiable manufacturing economies into tourism destinations. The core aspect of this question is actually how to make the potential tourists convinced that the cities’ new services and sense of attractiveness are truly viable. The local leaders must respond and act about the structural situations and urban progresses upon their authorities. Moreover, their vision needs to be re-regulated to align with their quest of achieving the new tourism status (Spirou, 2011). HCMC falls more to this category of tourism cities than to historical type comparing to Ha Noi for example.

Together with the above-mentioned approach, the rising of urban tourism needs the cities to adapt to the entrepreneurial and business centric mind-sets. Consequently, the cities would transform themselves to something as similar as corporations which must work hard and smart for their image building and branding activities, product promotions and preparation to deal with changes if they want to survive and shine in the competitive market. Apparently with this new economic perspective, the financial stakes are tremendously
high. Thus, the local lawmakers need to reform their policies in order to help not only service providers, but also active participants so that they can have updated and clear guidelines to follow in local economic affairs (Spirou, 2011).

3.2.2 Public Sector in Urban Tourism

The public sector plays a substantial role in the development of urban tourism in two broad areas. The first area relates to expenses for governor offices of tourism, as well as the city’s units that take care of tourism promotion and marketing strategies. These departments also take part in coordinating and managing the cities’ attractions and events. They are basically formed to work as dedicated units of the government, or are formed within separations of development in economy, social affairs or commerce. The second broad area concerns the public financing of crucial infrastructures that will supply services promoting tourism. The services consist of sport venues, beautification, parks and convention centres (Spirou, 2011).

3.2.3 Tourism Development and Cultural Genuineness

Tourism has been widely criticised because of its developing impacts in order to attract visitors to destinations. It has made the local cultural genuineness decrease over time. More specifically, people can easily see that tourism as a consumption-driven industry whose primary concern is profit, is the main factor that creates the decline of spatial and cultural uniqueness. Many researchers have pointed out that travellers nowadays has been exposed to a significant number of homogenous phenomena, which are the consequences of cultural replication that are covered under the label “traditional tourism”. On their way to re-create their branding image and get benefits from the economic development potentials, cities has been manipulating their own urban culture and recklessly convert it into their “unique” attraction. In consequence, it makes both the physical environments and the experiences consisting of the tourist's visiting in lack of rationality, and in fact, those are just part of a patched-up postmodern lifestyle (Spirou, 2011).

On its way of trying to create its individuality, modern urban tourism development has been falling into the trap of mediocrity. Urban streetscapes have to endure the same prescribed methods and as a consequence, this has created a culture of sequential replication, tourist bubbles or McDonaldization. Specifically, the concept of McDonaldization has gained huge attention due to its relevance to the concept of tourism. The fast food restaurants employ the same principles which also dominate a number of other social sectors. In
order to obtain rationality, diverse cultural expression has become objected to the domination of commodification. Sociologist George Ritzer has developed his theory of ‘McDonaldization’ to the extent of which he termed ‘globalization of nothing’, which is shift from ‘something’ to ‘nothing’. Society’s formations are increasingly portrayed by the loss of indigenously perceived and locally monitored content. Alternatively, nowadays’ social realities retain conditions lacking of substance. Therefore, the familiarity to ‘nothing’ has emerged to the prominent mode of social interaction. According to Ritzer, the core problem is “loss amidst monumental abundance (of nothing)”. He argued that “the proliferation of nothing in tourism leads to boredom as an ever-increasing portion of the world comes to be characterized by the same empty forms (indoor shopping malls and hotel chains)… the loss of something (in this case, tourist attractions true to local traditions) in the face of the massive expansion of nothing (hotel chains with no ties to the local area)” (Spirou, 2011).

The correlation between tourism and cultural genuineness is surely complicated and still a subject of on-going debates. The tricky question of this problem is, are there ways to avoid the cultural degradation during tourism development process which usually create tourist traps or spaces which are lack of authenticity? There are ways of course, but it is quite tricky to really tackle down the problems due to a few complicated issues. One of those issues is that the economic drivers of the tourism sector are so strong that usually make even the locals involved in the delivery of tourism attractions prioritize the financial returns and benefits but their local cultural preservation. Another issue could be stated out is that due to globalization, tourism production’s reconstituted system has allowed more and more new types of highly influential concentrated consumption patterns to grow. These have put lots of pressure on preserving indigenous culture and potentially change the community’s values and cultural practices of a destination (Spirou, 2011).

However, there are solutions for the problems as said. One of the suggested ones can be applying volunteer tourism to culturally authentic settings. This solution can help protecting the local environment by engaging tourists to specific locales. By doing so, more sustainable outcomes can be expected (Spirou, 2011). There is an analysis which have said, “…with volunteer tourism, intense rather than superficial social interactions can occur; a new narrative between host and guest is created, a narrative that is engaging, genuine, creative and mutually beneficial. The narrative and traditional interaction between host and tourist is thus potentially rewritten as the tourist experience is actively constructed by the host as well as the tourist.” (McIntosh and Zhara, 2007).

Another variation of this approach can be found in creative tourism which support the tourism active engagement. To be more specific with this variation, “creative tourism involves
not just spectating, nor just ‘being there’, but reflexive interaction on the part of tourists.” (Richards and Wilson, 2006).

In recent years, a phenomenon in urban tourism, which has been discussed intensively in numerous reports, platforms and articles, is ‘overtourism’. In the following sub-chapter, the phenomenon will be introduced and discussed alongside with its myths, indicating measurements as well as recommendations for solution.

### 3.3 Overtourism

#### 3.3.1 What is ‘overtourism’?

Too much of a good thing will surely become excessive and harmful. This saying does apply to tourism. When people only concentrate on the good side of developing economies based on tourism and push it to grow rapidly without proper control from both the state’s policies and the residents’ awareness, they neglect the harm that the industry can generate to their destinations’ tangible and intangible properties.

In 2016, Skift, a daily electrical homepage of the global travel industry launched in 2012, was said to have created (and later trademarked) the term ‘overtourism’. Since then, there have been several definitions arose to describe the new term of the traveling industry’s glossary. According to the UNWTO’s 2018 report about ‘overtourism’ (UNWTO, 2018), the term can be defined as:

“The impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way”, or

“Destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably. It is the opposite of Responsible Tourism which is about using tourism to make better places to live in and better places to visit. Often both visitors and guests experience the deterioration concurrently.”

There are many reasons that lead to ‘overtourism’, namely a few (Erschbamer, Innerhofer and Pechlaner, 2018):

- Changing in demographic
- Digitalization
- Urbanization that leads to migration to urban centres
- Increasing mobility
• There is an increasing number of budget airlines that provide flights to destinations around the world with very low fare costs, which help people from different social classes of a society travel much more and very easily.

• People live longer and healthier. They also have more freedom in terms of their personal and financial statements. Thus, the traveling time-span of a human has been extended much longer than in the past, until his or her very old age.

• In countries with large populations like India and China, there is a rapidly growing amount of people who want to travel not only domestically but also overseas.

All in all, the above-mentioned points result in the case that not only the most well-known destinations getting overloaded, but also the second-tier places becoming crowded with tourists (Erschbamer, Innerhofer and Pechlaner, 2018). This is of course not a pleasant experience for the local residents in less well-known places. They don’t have a habit of seeing tourists trotting around their neighbourhood so it must be a nuisance for them when so many strangers start coming to their areas, trotting around and many times interfere to their personal spaces and lives.

3.3.2 ‘Overtourism’ Myths

There are also myths about ‘overtourism’ that need to be rejected in order to understand the phenomenon more precisely in accordance with a better plan for solutions. If those myths cannot be indicated and rejected by using thorough understandings of a comprehensive picture, it will be a huge hindrance for tourism managers to solve the very current problems of the worldwide tourism industry.

First of all, city congestion caused by tourism is not only about the quantity of visitors but also about the capacity of a city to manage them. It is useful to have a clear outline of three main factors regarding the city’s capacity that lead to ‘overtourism’. First factor is the issue of seasonality. Too much tourists at a time will put harsh pressure on a destination and its locals as they could feel that there are no possibilities to find any pleasant places where they can get away from the alien crowd. Second factor is too much unfavourable tourist’s impact on the destinations, for example buses stopping near attraction points or on the street and the large crowd that usually comes with those buses can unintentionally block the streets. It also results in problems like noise disturbance, turbulence and other kinds of nuisance that are often perceived as caused by tourists (even though it could be generated by the locals themselves). Third factor of the outline is that too much of physical impact of tourism industry can cause turmoil, including for examples, the over-proliferation of accommodation businesses, retails or facilities that are only aimed at tourists (UNWTO, 2018).
The second myth of ‘overtourism’ is that city congestion caused by tourism is usually a localised issue rather than a citywide problem. In fact, in some of the most visited cities, it is not hard to find places that have from very few to no tourists at all and those places sometimes can locate right next to the tourism hotspots of the cities. To solve the problem, it is crucial to carefully examine which locations are actually congested and the nature of the congestion (UNWTO, 2018).

The third myth is that congestion is only a tourism problem, which is absolutely not true. Residents and commuters also compete with the short-termed visitors in terms of spaces, facilities and services. Moreover, the problems which are usually associated with tourism congestion do not always concern only the tourism sector but also others, for example the expansion of the short-termed accommodation services via new online platforms does leave a big impact on the real-estate market. Therefore, in order to address the tourism congestion issues, one needs to take it as a much more complex issue than how it is often recognized and treats it in a broad manner within the general city’s agenda (UNWTO, 2018).

The belief that technologies and other smart solutions are ultimate ways to solve the issue of city congestion is the last myth of ‘overtourism’ concerns. It is true that hi-tech in responds to city’s congestion problems are important and usually perceived as the most effective solution to tackle down the issue. However, technologies themselves are not enough. In order to address the urban challenges, there needs to be intensive cooperation between several parties and different stakeholders. It is a long term effort specially when there are conflicting interests among the stakeholders (UNWTO, 2018).

3.3.3 Strategies and measures to address cities’ visitor growth

The UNWTO’s report of “Overtourism? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions” (2018) has suggested eleven strategies along with their according measurements in order to cope with ‘overtourism’ strategically (see appendix 2 in “Appendices”) (UNWTO, 2018).

The first three strategies are generally to distribute tourists to different parts of a city, in different seasons using time-based dispersion and to attempt to encourage the visitors to try alternative itineraries and attractions to avoid urban congestion in high seasons (UNWTO, 2018).
The fourth strategy relates to reviewing and adapting regulations. The measures of this strategy suggest to use regulations to govern the way local tourism businesses operate their activities, to define the city’s and also typical city’s areas’ and attractions’ carrying capacities in accordance with managing the flow, the distribution as well as the travelling behaviours of visitors. The following strategy is to boost up or even discourage some specific visitor segments. It also stresses that the repeat-visitors are the segment that needs to be focused (UNWTO, 2018).

The sixth as well as the seventh strategies relate to the relationship between tourism and the local communities. They suggest ways to secure the benefits of local communities from tourism businesses and to create urban experiences that are enjoyable to not only the travellers but also the locals (UNWTO, 2018).

The next two strategies are to deal with the connection and engagement with the local stake holders and the city visitors. To the local stakeholders, it is important to make them feel included in the tourism execution by implementing different programmes, discussions as well as researches in order to raise their urban tourism awareness and let them contribute their thoughts and wishes. It is also crucial to re-unite the disconnected communities of the local society. The same objectives are applied to the city visitors, but additionally they should also be provided with the appropriate information about the local public facilities and infrastructures regulations and restrictions (UNWTO, 2018).

The last two strategies are to improve the city’s infrastructures and facilities and to establish the supervising and responding measures. Tourism are heavily influenced by its city’s infrastructures and facilities. Therefore those factors need to be thoroughly developed and protected in order to serve well the tourism generators and participants. The supervising and responding measures suggest to use different tourism indicators, big data and technologies to monitor and evaluate tourism performances and impacts, and also to use contingency plans for peak seasons and emergencies (UNWTO, 2018).

### 3.3.4 Recommendations for policies making process

The strategies and their implementations proposed above are able to help with the managing of urban tourism growth. However, the long-term sustainability of urban tourism really depends on the implementation of the key policy measures as listed below (see more in appendix 3 from “Appendices”) (UNWTO, 2018).
Make sure to align the urban tourism policies with the city’s worldwide agenda, the United Nations New Urban Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Create a long-term plan strategically targeting at sustainable urban tourism

Decide which levels of tourism impacts on the city are acceptable via a participatory process in which all related stakeholders are involved

Establish governance models which engage all levels of administrations, the private sector as well as the local communities

Nourish communication and collaboration mechanisms among all of the relevant stakeholders

Provoke the integration of the indigenous communities in the tourism value chain which promotes their engagement in the sector and guarantees that tourism will translate into prosperity and decent job opportunities

Regularly monitor the perception of the locals towards tourism business as well as advertise them the sector’s value

Promote supervising and evidence-based decisions and planning of important issues

Invest in technologies, innovations and partnerships

Advertise innovative products and experiences that allow the city to diversify time and space demands and attract the right visitor segments

Plan in advance via methods such as strategic vision and scenario planning

Perceive visitors as temporary residents in accordance with the creation of a city for everyone

3.4 Tourism Impacts

Following the TBL theory, tourism impacts on HCMC will be respectively studied according to economic, sociocultural and environmental fields in this sub-chapter.

3.4.1 Economic Impacts

Tourism brings both positive and negative impacts to destinations. Regarding to economic impacts, the following attributions are usually considered to be positive effects (Mason, 2008):

- Contribution to foreign exchange income
- Contribution to government revenues
- Generation of employment
- Contribution to local development
Those benefits can be appraised at a national, local or regional scale.

On the other hand, the negativities that tourism can occur to a destination are (Mason, 2008):

- Inflation
- Opportunity costs
- Over-dependence on tourism

In terms of inflation, it correlates with the price increases in real-estates and also food, which can occur as consequences of tourism. The price points of these commodities can grow high when tourists demand for extra in local products and services at a tourism destination (Mason, 2008).

In the case of opportunity costs, it refers to the cost of engaging and investing in tourism rather than other forms of economic movement (Mason, 2008).

Over-dependence on tourism may happen, for instance, in small states that tourism is perceived by the government as the prominent way to develop. Time goes by and the emphasis and relying on tourism becomes so significant that literally there is no other substitute approach to development. Consequently, the destinations turn to heavily dependent on tourism that any adjustment in demand or way of development may lead to a major crisis in economy (Mason, 2008).

Another major factor that needs to be mentioned when discussing about tourism impacts on economy is scale. When tourism is operated in different scales, the results can be very distinctive even when they have been generated from the similar processes. The amount of jobs in tourism are likely to increase steadily in the early part of the twenty-first century, unlike job opportunities in other economic sectors. However, the macro-level figures do hide the uneven characters of tourism in a global scale. For example, Europe alone was the most important tourist attracting continent with over half of all international visitor arrivals in the early part of this century, and most international visitors were actually from other European countries (Mason, 2008).

Talking about the interrelation between tourism and economic development is also talking about the fact that tourist development does give increase to different advantages and costs in different areas. Many of those differences are derivable to variations in the economic systems of destinations, the institutional framework which surround tourist development and their geographic locations. The most prominent difference is the one between developed and developing countries (First and Third World). The developing territories usually have low levels of income, unequal distribution of income and affluence, pretty
high levels of unemployment and underemployment, also low levels of industrial development which are restricted by the small size of the domestic market, an excessive dependence on agriculture for export income, and high levels of external ownership of manufacturing and service industries (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

The tourism industry in developing countries is mostly quite a new activity which has evolved to substantial levels in a very brief period of time. This has created a huge burden on local infrastructures and human resources. In many cases, the infrastructure does not have the adequacy and quality to serve the growing level of tourists and bear with the increase demand for tourism (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

In the developing countries like Vietnam, it has been periodically argued that the transformation from traditional agricultural economy to an industrialized one is crucial for modernization and economic growth to happen. The transformation for sure demands a huge amount of capital and foreign income or loans. Nevertheless, a lot of developing territories have a strong historical role of exporting elementary commodities and that kind of export has often been deficient to meet the financial needs of the suggested economic conversion. This fact has encouraged governments in the Third World to use tourism as a way to acquire the financial resources that are needed for the general economic growth (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

Additionally to general arguments regarding the capability of tourism to generate foreign exchange, tourism’s advocates have been more specific in their advocacies. The proponents of tourism development in developing world have claimed that tourism can simultaneously relieve the lack of foreign income that restrains the economic growth and relieve problems of urban unemployment. In the long run, tourism can supply with a price and earnings elastic substitute for traditional exporting which face a more insecure future. As a result of those arguments, the promotion of tourism as a superior way to achieve economic growth has been widely approved, especially among law makers in Third-World countries. Consequently, the traditional agricultural economies in many of the developing countries are now parting way to tourism. By doing so, it makes those countries or regions become more dependent on the tourism segment as a mean to obtain economic diversity (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

On the other hand, tourism has never escaped judgments. Usually the benefits of economic growth which is attained from tourism are not the biggest concerns of the critics, but
they have their other arguments that still continues to gain a considerable amount of support. Their main concerns are rather the negative non-pecuniary impacts of tourism (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

3.4.2 Social and Cultural Impacts

Social and cultural impacts of tourism are topics that always catch attention of tourism stakeholders. As two sides of a coin, tourism does have both positive as well as negative impacts on destinations and their local societies. In terms of sociocultural benefits, tourism contributions to destinations include (Weaver and Lawton, 2014):

- boosting cross-cultural understanding
- incentive value of tourism in preserving indigenous culture and heritage
- promoting social balance via positive economic influences

For further understanding of the first tourism benefit of promoting cross-cultural appreciation, when people have limited or no connection to other cultures than their own or the ones they are usually familiar with, they easily hold stereotypes, or broad and often distorted behavioural generalisations about a particular culture and its people. When there is lack of direct experience, stereotyping can generate a set of guidelines used to signify what can be expected when encountering people from that specific culture. It could be pleaded that direct contacts and communications between tourists and local residents will resolve the misunderstanding or misconceptualization about that culture and allow both visitors as well as locals to perceive one another as individuals or possibly also as friends (Tomjenovic, 2010). Therefore, tourism in this case can be seen as stimulation for cross-cultural comprehension since a large number of people come into contact with other people from other various cultures both domestic and overseas. Moreover, there is another manifestation of cross-cultural understanding which is the perception of tourism as a key factor to world peace as well (Weaver and Lawton, 2014). The more people from different cultures in different parts of the world can understand each other, the more empathy they also give away and problems of cultural conflicts can be more easily solved in peace.

The second sociocultural benefit of tourism to destinations is its incentive values to preservation of culture and local heritage. The travelling industry does have the potential to encourage preserving or restoring of historical architectures and sites. This can directly happen via, for examples, entrance fees to attractions, souvenir selling or donations for preserving purposes. Indirectly, this can happen through the distribution of general tourism or other revenues to preserving and restoring efforts which are intended to attract or sustain tourist's visitation (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).
Last but not least is the tourism benefits on promoting social balance through positive economic outcomes. It is widely assumed through the generation of employment and revenue that the travelling industry advertises a level of economic development which is more conducive to the key objective of elevated social wellbeing. This advocating also occurs when a destination tries to improve its international competitiveness through offering services and health standard at a level that is acceptable to tourists from more developed countries. Although this is only implemented because of tourism reasons, local residents do benefit from its obvious and tangible advancement which are, for examples, the elimination of malaria, the introduction of electricity to a rural place, anticrime measures or paved roads to the neighbourhoods which are popular to tourists or international class hotels are located (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).

On the other hand, when talking about the other flipped side of the coin, tourism does have quite several negative social and cultural impacts on destinations. When tourism is taken to a mass development level, it easily becomes unregulated and more likely to generate severe social and cultural costs not only to destinations and their indigenous residents, but also to tourists. This is especially true when it happens in less developed countries like Vietnam or peripheral areas of emerging economies. Inappropriate tourism management will lead to high dissatisfaction among the locals. This is an extremely important problems that destinations’ managers need to take notice because it easily sparks direct or indirect reactions against tourists and tourism development in general (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).

One of the major negative sociocultural impacts of tourism to destinations is the commodification of their cultures in response to the perceived or actual demands of tourism markets (Matheson, 2008). It can be perceived as a positive impact when tourism is able to confer the tangible monetary value on a product (i.e. the culture) that already exists but does not really generate any economic returns. Nevertheless, the problems only occur when the inherent qualities and meanings of cultural artefacts and performances less substantial than the goal of earning profits from their sales and reproduction. In this case, the culture can be modified accordingly to the demands of the tourism markets and as a consequence, its authentic significance eroded or lost altogether. There are several ways as well as different phases in which negative cultural commodification can happen as a consequence of tourism development (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).

- Phase 1. Visitors are hardly seen in the community. Therefore, when they appear, they become ‘honoured guests’ and are invited to attend to or observe the authentic local ceremonies or performances free of charge. They may also be given original artefacts as honourable gifts from the local community.
Phase 2. Visitors appear more frequently and therefore less of a novelty. They are allowed to observe the local ceremonies with a small charging fee and genuine artefacts can be also sold to them at low prices.

Phase 3. A large number of visitors start to come visiting the community regularly. At this phase, local ceremonies are changed in order to appeal visitors better. Cultural performances are made at regular intervals to suit better with the tourism markets. Hence, the originality at this phase gives chances to attractions of more fake nature. Selling prices are set at the highest possible levels that are allowed by the tourism market. There will be huge amount of cheaply produced souvenirs that are also inauthentic and often imported from other places, which are made available for selling to visiting tourists.

Phase 4. The original culture’s integrity is completely lost because of the mixed effects of commodification and modernisation. In spite of measures taken to protect the culture, commodification at this point reaches to the most profound and solemn aspects of it.

At stage four of the development of cultural commodification, the locals may gain incredible amount of revenue from tourism acts. However they have to face the problem of severe cultural identity loss and the disruption of traditional norms and structures maintaining social stability (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). Additionally, conflicts may break out among the community’s members over the revenue distribution, appropriate rates of remuneration for performers and producers who may have volunteered to provide their services and other market-related matters that the society may not be able to cope with (Weaver and Lawton, 2014).

Another negative impacts of tourism on social and cultural values of destinations is prostitution or sex tourism. It can be argued that prostitution is the extreme form of commodification. Tourism development usually occurs in conjunction with the increases in certain types of crimes including illegal prostitution (Karagiannis & Madrid-Sadjadi, 2012). The temptation of earning money through prostitution lures a lot of women as well as young people into trading sex for money or tangible properties. Sex tourism, in which tourists travel to other countries or places to pay for sex, is a large and fast-growing market especially in Asia like Thailand or the Philippines. This sector of the travelling industry is undeniably exploitative and dangerous. In many places, sex tourism has accelerated the spread of HIV/AIDS. As a consequence, more children have been used as child prostitutes as they are less likely to have contracted the disease than the grown-ups (Spilsbury, 2011).
3.4.3 Environmental Impacts

Tourism occurs in the environment which comprises of both human and natural facilities. The human environment includes economic, social and cultural factors and progresses. The natural environment on the other hand is a combination of plants and animals in their own habitat. It is possible to distinguish between the two environments and it is especially helpful when we discuss about the tourism impacts. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that in a real context, the human and natural environments are intertwined. Our human activities do have effects on the natural environment, at the same time we are also get affected by the Mother Nature. (Mason, 2008)

The natural environment does have a particular role in tourism as well as the overall recreational industries. The industry does depend a lot on the environment for its success. However, this brings a dangerous irony to the sector since the richer the environment is, the more recreational and economic activities will be drawn to it. That, in high chances, will leave negative impacts on the environment. On top of that, the industry’s dynamic is growing rapidly in global scale, which generates more and more impacts to the environment. Particularly, transportation is the primary factor of the industry. The increase in car usage as well as air travel potentially have severe impacts on the environment in terms of air contamination, casualties, concretion, noise pollution, congestion, CO₂ emissions, global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain and health. Another core aspect of the sector is the infrastructures as well as other supporting physical structures and their correlated impacts on the environment. Adding up to that are the humongous amount of waste that tourism produces and its energy consuming level. For all of the abovementioned issues, it is not hard to see why the sustainability of tourism industry has been gained such huge attention from many different stakeholders of the industry (Tribe, 2011).

The tourism industry can contribute to the environmental impacts at both local and global levels. At the local level, the impacts can be classified as:

- **impacts on natural resources**
- **pollution**
- **physical impacts**
- **displacement**

In terms of **impacts on natural resources**, there are two types of resources that are distinguished in the environmental economics:

- *Non-renewable resources that have fixed supplies*: once they have been used up, there will be nothing left for the younger generations. Landscapes, views, open spaces and tranquility are some representatives of local non-renewable resources
in tourism. Those can be used up by the economic growth activities as well as tourism development itself. A crucial consideration in terms of usage of non-renewable resources is the rate of depletion and the level of resources that is passed on to the next generations.

- **Renewable resources that are able to be replenished**: one of the crucial local renewable resources for tourism development in large scale is water. The large-scale development in tourism does need a huge source of fresh water. Hence, it is important to have proper technique in terms of impact appraisal in order to deal with the water demand as well as its impact on the environment. Forecasts of water use against water renewal should be created, even though in some cases the latter may be complemented by water diversion plans. In case that water is obtained from underground aquifers, it eventually will be drained or be subjected to salt or other contamination problems if the rate of extraction surpasses the rate of reproduction. This issue is aggravated by the free access problem, in which it is not in anybody’s interests in preserving the water if everyone is drawing it from the same source. Over extraction of water sources from wells may cause saline intrusion into groundwater (Tribe, 2011).

Tourism demands can also put lots of pressures on other local resources such as energy, food and other raw materials especially in places that are already in short of supply. Over-fishing and deforestation are some possible negative impacts caused by those issues. The leisure industry also consume high amounts of energy at a local level. In particular, hotels and other accommodation businesses can require a high level of energy for their operations, for example heating, lighting and air conditioning. Some tourist attractions also use a lot of energy as well. On the whole, energy is used in the forms of electricity which is produced predominantly from non-renewable sources (especially oil and gas). Nonetheless, there are also other innovative renewable sources to produce energy such as solar, wind and hydro power (Tribe, 2011).

In terms of **pollution** problem at a local scale, the tourism industry can cause a severe level of pollution, although it is usually perceived as “the non-smoked industry” compared to other industries with chemical and smokestack manufacturing and power generation industries. The pollution issues include:

- air pollutants
- noise pollution
- solid waste
- littering
- sewage
- noxious discharges
Tourism has particular demands on air, road and rail transportation. The industry is responsible for over 60 percentages of air travel and surely is a huge source of air emissions. When people's income and living standards are increased worldwide, so are their long-haul travelling demands. Air pollution from tourism's transportation leaves impacts in both local and global scales. Globally, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are significantly high, while at the local scale, pollution around London's Heathrow Airport for example, usually exceeds European Community maximum permitted levels due to a mixture of traffic congestion and aircraft movements. This pollution concludes carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon particulates from diesel fuel and can cause people asthma and other health issues. Construction and usage of hotels, recreation and other infrastructures also usually increases sewage contamination. This has been polluting the seas and lakes, particularly in territories where sewage treatment is underdeveloped. Moreover, the tourism development can also cause serious visual pollution by using cheap and standardized buildings that could be completely out of character with local indigenous architectures, or too glossy out of harmonization with natural features in and around a destination. Cheap land and lack of thorough planning and building regulations can generate a sprawl of tourism and recreation facilities and the supporting infrastructures (Tribe, 2011).

In terms of physical impacts at local level, the development and usage of tourism amenities and infrastructures may need blasting, sand and stone mining, concretization and cause erosion, loss of natural habitats and drainage. Some ecosystems e.g. alpine regions, rainforests, wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs and sea grass beds are exceptionally fragile and sensitive to development and changes in using purposes. Likewise, the increase of marinas and beach breakwaters can cause changes in currents and coastlines. Some particular impacts from tourism activities are damages by trampling or mountain bikes on vegetation, the effect of water-based recreation on marine ecosystems e.g. coral reefs and animal distress and dislocation from safaris (Tribe, 2011).

The last principle of the local scale of environmental impacts is the displacement. Consequences generated from tourism activities can be that inflation and prices of properties may rise, which makes it superbly difficult for residents who don’t participate in the development process of tourism and therefore benefiting from wage increasing and profits to stay in the area. Those consequences are termed ‘economic displacement’ and happen in which a traditional and growing sector of the economy occur alongside with creating in effect a dual economy. The growing sector can progressively threaten the tradition one. The participants of the traditional sector can only access to very limited parts of the growing one (Tribe, 2011).
At the **global scale of environmental impacts**, there are four principals in total:

- **biological diversity loss**
- **ozone layer depletion**
- **climate change**
- **depletion in resources and peak oil**

The **biological diversity** here is the variety of plants and animal species. Developing tourism can lead to loss of this variety because animals are killed by hunting activities, removed or trampled or the natural resources such as vegetation, wildlife, mountain and water, surpass the carrying capacity of the nature. Moreover, it is also very damaging to the nature when tourists and suppliers try to import animal species that can disrupt or even destroy the local ecosystems (Tribe, 2011).

In terms of **ozone layer depletion** which is in the upper atmosphere and protects lives on Earth by absorbing destructive wavelengths of the Sun’s ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Specifically, skin cancer is the consequence of UV radiation overexposure. Tourism industry has been contributing to the ozone depletion mostly due to emissions from aircraft travelling (Tribe, 2011).

**Climate change** (global warming) in global scale seems to have been worsening since the increase in the production and effects of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. These GHGs act like an insulation layer in the atmosphere and trap the Sun’s heat. CO₂ is one of the most serious GHGs. It is formed when fossil fuels like coal, oil or natural gases are burned (in industry, generation of electricity an automobiles). On top of that, since vegetation is a significant source of CO₂ absorption, deforestation and its loss of plants for air clearance contribute to the accumulation of CO₂ on Earth (Tribe, 2011).

When referred to environmental issues in Vietnam, Lonely Planet mentioned that the people consciousness in not only in HCMC, but also in all over Vietnam is low. However, the pollution has not been only occurred because of the growth of tourism, but also by the industrialization, high-speed growing economy and outrageous population booming in the last few decades after the war and the country’s reunification. Now with the strong development in tourism, it brings a lot of benefits to the locals and the city state’s income, but at the same time contributes such burden to the already exist environmental issues (Lonely Planet, Sep, 2009).
4 Research Implementation

In order to achieve the goal of finding what the key challenges of sustainable tourism in HCMC are, the chosen research method was qualitative approach with a case study using open-answered oriented questionnaire to collect empirical data. The collected data will be analysed using thematic analysis with direct quotations from respondents’ answers.

4.1 Methodology - Qualitative Research Approach

The word “methodology” refers to the way we approach a certain issue and seek for the answers to that issue. In social science fields, the word applies to how research is carried out. The methodology that we choose is formed by our assumptions, curiosities and intention. Debates over methodology are usually debates over hypotheses and purposes, over theory and point of view (Taylor, Bogdan and Devault, 2016).

There are two prominent theoretical viewpoints which have governed the social science scene. The first one is positivism, which originated in the social sciences to the great theorists of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. The positivists look for evidences or causes of social events apart from individuals’ subjective states.

The second prominent theoretical perspective is phenomenological, which has a long history in philosophy and sociology. The phenomenologists are pledged to interpreting social phenomena from the doer's own point of view and analysing how the world is experienced (Taylor, Bogdan and Devault, 2016).

Positivists and phenomenologists take on different kinds of issues and look for different types of answers. Hence, they need to use distinctive methodologies to serve their work in researches. The positivists seek for causes of phenomena via methods that are able to produce data suitable for statistical analysis, such as surveys, inventories and demography. On the other hand, the phenomenologists’ tasks are to seek for understandings via qualitative methods which generate to more descriptive data, for example participant observation, comprehensive in-depth interview, and others. This is definitely in contrast with positivists’ approach. The phenomenologists’ main aim is understanding the reasons and beliefs behind people’s actions on a more personal level (Taylor, Bogdan and Devault, 2016). In conclusion, the positivists’ main research method is quantitative approaches and the phenomenologists’ is qualitative approaches.

When discussing with the commissioner of the thesis, the author was told that the commissioner was keen on finding out the challenges that sustainable tourism development
has to face in HCMC via studying about the perspectives of people who live in HCMC, both locals and expats, but of tourists with short stays, on tourism impacts on their city. Hence, it was crucial to study in-depth what people living in HCMC for long terms have been observing and feel about the city's tourism movements and what they wish to change for a better tourism future. In order to achieve as many appropriate, informative and valuable answers as possible, it was optimal to choose the phenomenologists’ method of approaching and studying a phenomenon, which is qualitative research approach, to conduct the study.

4.2 Qualitative Questionnaire

Questionnaire is considered to be the most handy and low-cost method of collecting data from people and could be utilised to cover a broad geographical region. This way of conducting research can be used to gather both quantitative or qualitative data, and especially a better way to diminish bias of researcher since there are “no verbal or visual clues” that can affect the respondents for giving their answers in any specific ways. Questionnaire can be distributed via post to a vast number of people in various geographic regions. However, the respondents can choose whether to answer the questionnaire and send it back or not (Dube, 2010). They have the absolute control on deciding to participate in the research or not even without direct communication with the researcher.

The qualitative questionnaire can be used to collect facts relating to people’s beliefs, thoughts, feelings, experiences and so on. It should be designed in a way that the respondents could have their freedom to express their points of view in responding to the questions that are asked even without any hints, clues or influences from the researcher. The questions included should be open ended in order to let the participants give their negative or positive answers based on the type of the questions. The data collected by this way is especially useful when the researchers want to study people’s feelings and thoughts regarding certain issues. This type of research method can be adopted by organizations seeking for understandings the consumers’ experiences and feelings when they use certain products or services. Respondents’ answers could make impacts on the organizations’ decisions to change their strategies in designing their products or services promptly to satisfy the needs of consumers (Dube, 2010), or in this case, their answers could be used to propose the local city’s state more appropriate strategies for developing tourism sustainably.
The prominent advantage of qualitative questionnaire is its flexibility and the ability of being worded in alternative ways to allow respondents to give their answers in their own words but just “yes or no” answers (Dube, 2010).

In the aim of this thesis, a questionnaire used for researching purpose should not be formed by questions generating “yes-no” answers. On the other hand, in order to study in-depth the phenomenon of sustainable tourism in HCMC, the questionnaire must contain questions which lead respondents to give their insight thoughts on and observation of tourism development in the city. Hence, the questionnaire of this thesis was formed with a majority of ‘WH’ word questions orienting the respondents to give their longer answers (see appendix 1 in ‘Appendices’).

A well performed questionnaire contains questions which lead the participants to feel like they are having a conversation with the researchers. Therefore, they would feel more confident to answer honestly and insightfully. The questionnaire should also be designed in a way that all questions have the same meanings to all respondents. Firstly, in order to create a good structure for the questionnaire, research’s objectives and questions should be defined as guidelines. The types of data that need to be collected and in which way should also be defined. Lastly, before asking any questions, “the sample questionnaire must be defined and the sampling method and the data collection medium must be determined.” (Brace, 2008).

Since the thesis’s case study is HCMC, the questionnaire was distributes in platforms which gathered mostly locals and expats who have lived or been living in the city. In order to help most respondents feel welcomed and inclusive, the questionnaire was formed and distributed in both Vietnamese and English, starting with the first four questions asking respondents’ basic personal information. Following basic info collection stage is six questions generating insightful content. At the end of the questionnaire, there is option for respondents to leave their contact information if they wish to receive the research’s final report (see appendix 1 in “Appendices”).

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was created via Webropol online platform in English as well as in Vietnamese. Both versions were distributed mainly via Facebook platforms from late January to early May 2019 for data collecting. The platforms were “Expats in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)” Facebook forum and the author’s personal Facebook account. The author also
have sent the questionnaire directly to some people in her private network via direct message of Facebook. Altogether there were twenty-one responses, seventeen of which were in English and four were in Vietnamese. This result was actually surprisingly matched with the target number of responses that the author and the commissioner expected at the beginning of the thesis process. The respondents gave a lot of insights in their answers to the questions, which seems to the author that people living in HCMC do pay a lot of attention to the city’s tourism movements and what those have affected different aspects of the city’s life.

For analysing the final results of the questionnaire, the optimal method chosen was direct quotation analysis. One of the most common ways to form a report of subjective analysis is to describe then discuss the overall themes in turns, which refer to instances from the collected data and utilising direct quotations in order to characterise the analysis’s themes for the readers to easily follow. It is not needed to cite every component code within each of the themes, specifically the descriptive narratives or codes. On the other hand, it is better to pay attention in those that illustrate most prominently what the theme is about, and which address the research question most effectively. The main objective of this method is not to summarize descriptively the theme’s content, but to create a narrative that reports to the readers how the findings have benefited the research’s topic (King and Horrocks, 2010).

4.4 Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research has been used widely to develop knowledge in social sciences historically. In modern time, this approach still gains prominent momentum as a useful method for cultivating knowledge in social studies as well as other related majors. Qualitative approaches are especially encouraged when the methods are mixed, the studies are formed “to be more flexible and expedient for studying practice outcomes in community settings”. It is crucial for qualitative researchers to use discipline and accuracy in designing their studies and follow the scientific method by trying their best to gain “empirical groundedness, generalizability, and minimization of bias”. By increasing the reliability and validity of qualitative research, the researchers can guarantee the quality of their studies (Franklin, Cody and Ballan, 2010).

Reliability and validity rely heavily on the skills of the researchers as well as their competencies in designing studies using the suitable methods. To increase the reliability and va-
lidity of qualitative studies, it is vital to choose the research methods which are able to ensure the accuracy in data recording and the practicality, logicality and relevance of the data interpretations (Franklin, Cody and Ballan, 2010).

In the case of this thesis report, the reliability and validity have been taken into account seriously when the research method was selected. At first, the method of interview was taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the author decided to collect the empirical data via qualitative questionnaire instead of interview, since by using this method, she could reach out to more respondents compared to conducting interviews with individuals. Furthermore, there would be no constraint in time and/or physical distances when interviews need to be set up with the participants.

The drawbacks of qualitative questionnaire, however, are that even though the possibility of reaching out to more people is higher and the possible hindrances from setting up meetings are eliminated, it is also harder to get people to give their answers in a depth that the researchers want to direct them to. As mentioned above in the theory of “Qualitative Questionnaire”, this method does give the research’s participants more freedom to generate their answers as they want to, without direct communication with the researchers or any hints or clues from them. Therefore, the participants’ answers can be more objective and closer to what they really want to express.
5 Results Analysis

In this chapter, the questionnaire’s answers will be presented and analysed by the author based on the findings in “Sustainable Urban Tourism” theoretical framework, using direct quotations method of qualitative research analysing and in the order of the survey’s questions. Both English and Vietnamese versions of the questionnaire can be found in appendix 1 of “Appendixes” at the end of the report.

5.1 Respondents’ Basic Information

Altogether in both English and Vietnamese versions of the survey, there are twenty one respondents. The first question asks respondents which age group they belonged to. The six age groups are ‘Under 20’, ‘20-35’, ‘36-45’, ‘46-55’, ‘56-70’ and ‘Over 70’. The biggest group of respondents is from 20 to 35 with seventeen people (81%). The following group is in age range 56-70 with two people (9.5%). Group ‘Under 20’ and ‘46-55’ both have one respondents each (4.76%). Group ‘36-45’ and ‘Over 70’ don’t have any respondents.

![Figure 5: Respondent’s age groups](image)

The following question asks respondents for their occupations. Almost half of them are students (ten people). Nine people are working and two are retired. Working people’s occupations vary from office worker, service employees in hotel and retail sectors, designer, teacher, architect, businessman, accountant and quality analyst.
The third question is “Where are you from?” asking for people’s nationalities. There are sixteen people from Vietnam (76%). The other five respondents are from Serbia, the UK, Switzerland, the Netherlands and America, so most of them are from more developing countries than Vietnam and in either Europe or North America.

The last question of the basic information section asks people the duration they have stayed or been staying in HCMC. Nine respondents answered more than 20 years, four
have stayed or been staying in HCMC for more than 10 years and the rest either visited
the city multiple times or have lived or been living in the city for more than one year or
several months. There was one person said he or she have never been to the city at all.

5.2 Overall Picture of Tourism in HCMC / Saigon

In order to get the respondents’ general perceptions, the first in-depth question asks them
to give their description of tourism business in HCMC. In this question, there is one re-
spondent didn’t give his/her insight and left it blank. Among the twenty other people, there
are some who gave very interesting insights.

In general, the common impressions of people are the city’s busyness, the cultural diver-
sity of the city and the rapid growth of tourism. Some people described those positively as
“attractive with different food cultures”, “vivid”, “more user-friendly” (as this person was
demonstrating how easier it is nowadays to grab a taxi safely thanks to Uber and Grab
companies. He also stated that there are more restaurants starting to have their menus in
English which is tourist-friendly and that could be safer for tourists in terms of food hy-
giene), “diversity in foreign languages”, “dynamic” and “potential”. On the other hand, the
negative descriptions were “crowded”, “hectic”, “chaotic”, “public transport is quite bad”,
“the market seems saturated” and “too many tours all doing the same mundane stuffs”.

Figure 8: How would you describe tourism in HCMC/Saigon nowadays?
5.2.1 Historical Heritage

There were three people mentioned the city’s colonial history and heritage buildings from French’s colonisation. The first person wrote that HCMC doesn’t have many attraction sites luring visitors except for its colonial architectures like Cathedral of Notre Dame and Independence Palace. She/he saw that visitors mainly come to HCMC to enjoy its busy urban lifestyle as well as the diversity of food culture that the city has to offer.

The second and third respondents both complaint about the fact that the old part of the city, which a lot of heritage sites and buildings from the colonisation were located, has been destroyed over time. The second respondent’s insight thoughts were:

“HCMC has no clear branding. Just a post-colonial city. The cultural heritage has been destroyed by years. The historical old town has been disturbed by the infrastructure development.”

The same respondent also complained that the state has been neglecting to educate people about the city’s history and heritage, which also include the cultural elements contributed by the Chinese minorities migrated to the city since the very early stage of the city’s formation. The third respondent even stated that “…Since more and more of old Saigon is disappearing, it is less interesting for tourists”.

Thanks to the points of view of these three respondents, we can clearly see that part of HCMC’s branding depends a lot on its colonisation history. Most of its heritage sites were built during this time when the city’s name was still Saigon. However due to lack of proper conservation plan and importance recognition from the local states, as well as unsustainable modernization and urbanization, the historical aspect of the city, which to many people is actually the most attractive, has been destroyed or disappearing.

Figure 9: Ho Chi Minh City Hall – a building built in 1902-1908 in a French colonial style. The contrast of architectural styles with the further building in the background can be seen, which are ubiquitous around the city (photo credit: Khang Lam, taken on 22.5.2019)
5.2.2 Tourism Developing Strategies & the City’s Branding

Generally, there were quite many people upset about how tourism has been executed and managed in HCMC. Three people have given similar opinions on the developing strategies of the city’s state and developers. The first respondent wrote that the city lacks of strategies for developing tourism sustainably, strict tourism governance and cohesive cooperation between attraction sites, tourism businesses and the local state. The second and third persons stated that they think the city is full of tourism potentials. However, due to lack of appropriate plan for developing tourism sustainably, the city has been wasting labour forces as well as financial resources. There was one respondent thought that the state and developers just “merely want to displace the locals and send land plots to private investors”. Another respondent shared his/her opinion that the city needs developing strategies in big scale.

In terms of HCMC’s tourism branding, it was quite a mix of negative and positive opinions from respondents. On the negative side, people thought that the city doesn’t have a clear destination branding and lacks of interesting tourism places. One has stated that he/she noticed that the majority of tourism services and activities are only limited in the central business district (CBD).

On the other hand, some people have noticed the positivity in the city’s tourism developing movements which are mostly about how the locals quickly adapt themselves to tourism activities by being internationalised with their foreign languages skills and usages as well as being diversified in tourist services.

5.3 The Locals’ Perspectives on Tourists

Generally, the respondents’ perspectives in terms of the locals’ attitude towards tourists coming to visit their city are quite positive. They mostly observed that the locals are usually very welcoming and friendly to foreign visitors.

On the other hand, besides that displaying of hospitality, many locals seem to just see tourists as potential source for their income, which generates a very ugly hosting attitude and leaves bad impressions on tourists’ minds when they visit the city. Some locals, especially people who run small businesses or street vendors which locate mostly in the central districts, treat alien visitors ubiquitously in discrimination compared to how they treat their fellow locals, for examples, in charging prices for products or services. One respondent’s observation was:
“Many locals still think foreigners should pay much more than locals. That is putting off many tourists.”

Another respondent added: “Their attitude (the locals’) also depends on the tourists’ nationalities, which leads to other stories on cultural perspectives.”

And there was also another wrote: “I think that (the locals’ perspectives) varies a lot depending on what Quan (district) and their own (the locals’) experiences they have had with visitors.”

Some respondents even categorised the locals into different groups which have different perspectives on travellers. One divided the groups to seniors and younger people. To him/her, the seniors seem to have more distorted mind-sets about tourists and often “care about how to cheat and pick-pocket tourists rather than being friendly, nice and supportive”. On the contrary, the younger generations are “very, very open-minded, welcoming, friendly and helpful to tourists. Sadly these individuals o not appear too often…”

Not in the same context of categorization that the above-mentioned respondent have, another participant still somehow distinguish “the real locals” to the rest, and stated that he/she thought those people are:

“…really nice and friendly to foreigner as they have the urge to prove to foreigners that Saigon is a fantastic place”, however “people with bad business mind-set would often mistakenly think of foreigners as their source of income”.

Nevertheless, the negativities in HCMC’s tourism are not solely created by the locals’ distorted mind-set towards foreign travellers, but also by bad behaviours and low awareness of many tourists. There are a lot of tourists, as the locals’ often refer them as “backpackers”, coming to the city and make troubles disturbing the city’s culture and society. They usually travel with low budgets and always strive to save money by any means. They could be very noisy and reckless while they join the street’s parties as one questionnaire respondent wrote:

“…noisy and party backpackers make a bad impression. Bui Vien or De Tham has bad reputation with clubs, bars and illegal activities…”

Personally, to the author, this respondent’s insight was very precise since there have been lots of news about how immoral tourism activities have become specifically in Bui Vien – De Tham area, or as unofficially known as the city’s “Western backpackers’ town”.
Prostitution and other issues make the area one of the most chaotic places in the city, and tourism contributes big part to the chaos (Pike, 2017).

5.4 Tourism's Impacts on HCMC

In this section, the respondents’ answers will be analysed dividedly in negative and positive groupings in each respective category: economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts.

5.4.1 Economic Impacts

The positive tourism economic impacts that have been observed by the questionnaire’s participants generally vary in a few topics: tourism is the boost for the city’s infrastructure development, the country’s and city’s growth in income, economy and other related industries and increase in job vacancies.

On the other hand, negative economic impacts were noted by the respondents more specifically. They gave more details into how tourism has left negative impacts on the city compared to how they did with the positivity. The matters that worry the observers were the fast growing of tourism leading to unhealthy competitions between tourism businesses, lack of cohesive infrastructure development that leads to future burdens for the economy, disorder and instability of market price, the devaluation of local currency VND (by how the locals prefer to receive foreign currencies e.g. USD, while trading their services/products with tourists), and monetary dilution to international organizations operating in HCMC.

![Figure 10: Tourism impacts on HCMC’s economy](image-url)
5.4.2 Social and Cultural Impacts

Overall, tourism has left both positive and negative impacts on HCMC quite equally in our respondents’ eyes. For the positive impacts, people have noted that thanks to tourism, the local culture has been paid more attention by the state as well as the city’s residents in terms of preservation, enhancement and introduction to international visitors. Tourism is a spectacular chance for HCMC and its residents to introduce and exchange their cultural values and heritages to people coming to visit the city from various different territories in the world. When visitors arrive in the city, they also bring with them their own indigenous cultures to the destination. To some respondents, they have stated that this to them is a good phenomenon since it helps enrich and diversify not only just HCMC’s but also in general Vietnamese culture and people’s lifestyles. As one respondent noted:

“…Some tourists come back and engage in the emerging creative landscape in HCMC with cultural hubs, co-working spaces and diverse cultural events”

Another respondent’s point also supports the above statement:

“Saigon recently has been more open-minded and welcoming to foreigners. Locals also witness new tastes of multi-international living/travelling styles in the city.”

Moreover, some respondents have mentioned that tourism plays an important role in boosting the locals to be more open minded, understanding and intellectual in dealing with foreign visitors by educating themselves new languages (mostly English but also many others) and about other cultures apart from their own. One person clarified:

“…foreigners prompt the locals to adapt to serve them. This is shown by that they learn foreign languages (mostly English) to talk, then use the language on signs, notice boards and restaurant menus etc. Nowadays you may see more than just English as a foreign language…”

Another respondent added to this point: “…helps preserving cultural heritages, boosts the local residents to educate themselves more in order to welcome guests from all over the world (language skills, cultural knowledge).”

Beside his/her similar observation that tourism is boosting the local residents’ cultural education, one respondent also added that: “Tourism enhances the diplomatic relationships, learning about each other’s cultures, as well as fair and objective points of view about each other (the locals and the foreign visitors).” Compared to what the author has learnt about sociocultural impacts while doing the literature review, this respondent’s point of
view about diplomacy and the cultural understanding and empathy is indeed an ad-
vantage that tourism has brought to not only HCMC, but also the whole country of Vi-
etnam in general.

Figure 11: Positive sociocultural impacts of tourism on HCMC

As mentioned, though there were a lot of positivity in sociocultural impacts of tourism on HCMC, there were still many drawbacks that the industry has created. The sociocultural disadvantages that the city has been enduring, according to our participants, orbit around two major topics: tourist traps – loss of destination’s identity, and the locals’ cultural degra-
dation.

Some of the key phrases from the respondents to describe how they thought tourism has developed into false formation and left bad influences on the city’s image were “too much emphasis on capitalism”, “loss of identity” and “fake streetlife for tourists”. Two respond-
ents have clarified further their thoughts on this issue. The first one stated:

“Culture has been preserved unmindfully just in order to serve tourism, which leads to false awareness of Vietnamese cultural values and heritages.”
The second person shared that: “…negative issues that both foreigners and locals can cause. Be it from minority or not, may add to the prejudices that both have on the other and leads to racism on both sides, e.g. Vietnamese taxi drivers tricking money by using a fixed counter.”

One respondent also shared the same idea of false tourism development: “Looking at how Pham Ngu Lao area (the Backpacker’s quarter mentioned in previous section), developed into a no-go area, I think impact is negative.” This person’s answer actually only aimed at the negative side of tourism social impacts and also only mentioned the degradation of tourism activities in this touristic and hectic quarter of the city. This shows that to some visitors, only one prominently bad factor is already able to leave unpleasant impressions and feelings on their minds when recalling a destination they have been to.

In terms of cultural degrading issues, the participants have given several different insights. Some people shared the same idea that the locals nowadays seem to import and absorb the new waves of foreign cultures too quickly but recklessly and unmindfully, which leads to their culture loss and degradation. A respondent shared that:

“People (the locals) tend to imitate or overestimate foreign cultures and forget their roots.”

Another one clarified further his/her point:

“Along with the improvement in economy, it can create a big change in individual behaviour, family relationships or lifestyle changes.”

Relating to this topic, the author herself has discussed with her fellow friends or colleagues who are from either Vietnam or international countries, that since Vietnam is a developing country with a superbly fast growing pace, also along with the Vietnamese’s nature of being open-hearted/minded and very hospitable to foreigners and foreign cultures, they tend to very quickly adapt themselves to ‘fit in’ the globalization ‘trends’ by education, observation and also mimicking. This could be both a good as well as a bad scenario in the stream way of the country’s development. However, sometimes people are so quick in adaptation that they become ‘blind’ and just merely copy the surface phenomenon without proper root studies.

Furthermore, robbery and pickpocketing, as one respondent did mention, are also a social degradation that grow overtime partly due to the growth of tourism. This issue could fall into either cultural degradation or the downfall of the city’s tourism branding.
5.4.3 Environmental Impacts

As one participant wrote: “The negative impacts somehow outweighed positive impacts”, the outcome results of this section from the questionnaire is more negative than positive. Many of our participants shared the same thought that the more tourism develops, the more damage it brings to the city’s environment. Some of their insights were demonstrated very thoroughly.

“The proliferation in tourism sector means a demand for more products and services, which results in more waste (food waste, industrial production waste, and carbon emission), or more resources (vehicle fuels and foods...)…”

“Some natural attractions have been destroyed by mass tourism. The government should have stricter law about conservation for the next generation to still have something to be proud of.”

“…more people coming to visit also means more traffic, and more trash…”

“…with a large amount of people coming, energy, clean food or raw materials will be in short supply.”

“…Human’s travelling activities and/or sightseeing may severely damage natural resources. Even if the tourists are well-behaved themselves, it is inevitable to cause zero damage to the environment.”

Furthermore, there were also opinions that the city’s environmental problems are mainly caused by the local state and residents. According to some respondents’ observation, the state’s poor strategies on preserving the city’s natural heritages, ecosystems and environment have left bad impacts on the city’s overall environmental picture. As one respondent wrote:

“Attraction sites, hotels and resorts have been developed robustly, which lead to bad impacts on the city’s infrastructure as well as to overloading and flood. This model of development also makes the natural land slots, which are spared for harmonizing the city’s natural environment, substituted by new residential areas (Thủ Thiêm, Phú Mỹ Hưng).”

One respondent has stated his/her opinion on this matter already when he/she answered the question of HCMC’s overall tourism picture:

“The waterfront along the river and canals have been abandoned and underutilized for years…Recently the state establishes a new ferry route which has a low profile…For nature lovers, Can Gio beach was an option. Unfortunately the real-estate developers plan to develop the natural reservoir into a new “Marina Bay” of HCMC…”
Environmental issues caused by the local residents, according to some respondents, were demonstrated:

“Tourism has no big environmental impact on the city, tourist usually behave more environmental friendly than the locals.”

“…depends whether the tourists are actually aware to keep the environment clean or not. Sadly, national tourists still have to do more to keep up with foreigners.”

On the contrary, tourism also has positive impacts on environmental awareness of the locals and their state as one respondent noted:

“By creating a good image for exposure to tourists, especially foreigners, the city state makes more effort to clean up trash.”

Some other shared the same thoughts with this respondent:

“…the locals tend to create accommodation (homestay) with clean and green background to fit tourists’ needs. It somehow indirectly helps to enhance the environment.”, “…raise awareness about problems of plastic bag and garbage.” and also “high awareness of environmental protection for long-term benefits.”

One particular participant also emphasized in this section that he/she really enjoyed the trekking tours from HCMC to other surrounding provinces, which to the author’s point of view shows potential for tourism managers in HCMC to develop sustainably this form of travelling and introduce it widely to the city’s visitors. As a fact that most people coming to HCMC with mind-sets that the city can only offer urban lifestyles or tourism but natural exploration, this could be not only another way to develop tourism but also a solution for solving urban congestion during peak travelling seasons.

5.1 Questionnaire Respondents’ Recommendations

The last question of the questionnaire asks the respondents if they would like to give their suggestions to the city on how to manage tourism more sustainably in the near and long future. In this section, fourteen among twenty one participants have given their suggestions. The suggestions are summarized in four categories (public transportation – traffic issues, education, environment, regulation and heritage preservation) as below.

As the author has actually expected, there would be respondents complaining or giving their suggestions to improve the city’s infrastructures for smoother traffic and decrease in traffic jam, since traffic is a severe issue in HCMC. One respondent pointed out that the traffic routes could be designed smarter in order to avoid traffic burdens when the city’s
streets become too crowded with lots of different types of vehicles. Another added that for better tourism development, new forms of public transportation could be a good solution.

Moving on to education issues, many respondents have suggested that sustainable tourism should be widely educated to children, young people or generally all local residents of the city. The importance of sustainable tourism development should be emphasized in propagandas and in schools. Furthermore, the city’s visitors are also needed to be raised awareness on how they should behave or expect when they travel to the city. The awareness of preserving cultural and natural heritage are also emphasized by two respondents. Interestingly, one respondent has given suggestion perfectly matched with the objectives of this thesis and its commissioners:

“For long future: educate university’ students, local residents, services producers about doing tourism sustainably, control the number and quality of accommodation businesses (airbnb, motels and hotels...)."

The topic of updating and applying regulations on both private and public sectors as well as improving development strategies seemed to catch the most attention from the respondents. Some interesting suggestions for this topic were:

“Preserve the green space and broaden the service network in the city, therefore HCMC becomes polycentric city...”

“Set regulations on merchant affairs (Da Nang is pretty good at this)...Apply regulations and/or fines on simple to more complex behaviors in more touristic sites or in public (e.g. putting trash in the right place). Periodic check on merchant sites for compliance of local regulations.”

“...cooperate with young generation for marketing campaigns and open-minded ideas.”

Some other people also stressed that there should be better regulations in order to control and eliminate the unprofessionalism of many small and/or private tourism or tourism related businesses. Additionally, the state can cooperate with tourism agencies for better and more reliable destination promotions.

Other suggestions of the participants were on environmental issues and heritage preservations. In terms of the environment matters, one suggested that not only HCMC, but also the whole country can start charging people for their plastic bag consumption. By doing this, people will be more aware of their habits which leave huge impacts on the environment that they are living in, so that they can change and adjust their actions to be more environmental friendly. Added to the environmental suggestions, another respondent gave
an idea that "services could be digitalized as much as possible, e.g. buying tickets online, and/or transforming paper tickets to apps with codes".

In the matter of the city’s heritage preservation, one person has even whole-heartedly suggested: “Please keep the heritage (buildings, markets etc.) that is still there! Stop breaking down that is old!” This is actually heartbreaking for the author to receive, since she herself shares the same thought with this respondent. Has grown up and lived in HCMC for more than twenty years before moving abroad, she has witnessed lots of historical sites being taken down by the state for new infrastructure development either for the public communal benefits or for private organizations to build up their new business’s venues. This act indeed is reckless and very short in long-term vision in terms of historical and cultural heritage preservation as well as the city’s branding image.
6 Conclusion & Recommendations

In summary, the main empirical findings from the questionnaire were that according to the respondents, the most serious tourism impact on HCMC was related to the environment, followed respectively by the economic impacts and sociocultural impacts (Figure 12). To the respondents, tourism left mostly negative impacts on the city’s environment and this topic gathered their most concerns. The few positive influences that tourism has had on the city were its force for the state to advance their strategic plans for preserving and protecting the environment as well as its encouragement for the local residents to raise their environmental awareness.

HCMC’s economy has been noticed by the respondents that it’s been benefitted a lot from tourism activities and growth in recent years. However, negative impacts of tourism still left huge problems on the overall picture of the city’s as well as the whole Vietnamese economy. Most of the negativity, based on the observations of our respondents, were from the lack of cohesive and thorough plans from the state for developing tourism in the city. That has created lots of imbalances and instabilities for the economy on a mass scale.

Lastly, the sociocultural impacts on HCMC to the respondents were quite equal in terms of negativity and positivity. A lot of positive impacts of tourism on the social and cultural shifts of the city were noticed and described by the respondents in their answers to the questionnaire.

Figure 12: Tourism impacts on HCMC in the scope of the city’s residents
In terms of ‘overtourism’, this is a matter that has not been strongly focused or noticed by the questionnaire’s participants. The city’s congestion seemed to be mostly caused by the urban lifestyles of the city itself. There were no one from the participants complaining that too much tourists gathering around the attraction sites of the city or the city centre. However, some people did mention the disturbing behaviours and noises of tourists in the backpacker’s quarter – Bui Vien/De Tham. This problem may spread out to other parts of the city in the future if there are no proper strategic plans or regulations from the local state to govern and control it in advance before it becomes a big problem affecting the city’s lives as how ‘overtourism’ has done to many big touristic destinations in the world e.g. Barcelona and Venice (Figure 13).

![Overtourism](image)

*Figure 13: ‘Overtourism’ matter in HCMC*

For personal recommendations, the author mostly agrees with what she has received from the respondents to her research questionnaire. However, she does have some of her main points for suggesting improvement in strategies and awareness of the city’s tourism stakeholders. First of all, in order to execute tourism sustainably, education of people is very important. Since Vietnam has been in its stage of rapid development in not only tourism, but also in other fields, it is easy for people to forget and neglect the sustainable factors since they usually got swirled in the flow of developing. A strong knowledge base will help people from the state to the local communities move forward in sustainability without destroying too much of their heritages and resources.

Secondly is people’s perspectives on tourism business. Only with the right perspectives, people can generate good strategies for their tourism development and services, which will lead to good impression of visitors and make them want to come back or give positive word-of-mouth about the city to their networks. There are still lots of services providers in HCMC with shortsighted mindsets, who care too much about their profits rather than the overall image of the city that they partly contribute to build up. This is destructive to the city’s tourism as many respondents have also stated.
The last recommendation from the author is how the state regulates tourism activities and develops their strategies for the city growth in tourism. To many locals as well as expats living in HCMC, the city’s state still has been doing so many things that don’t support the sustainability in the city’s tourism growth at all, especially how they take down historical sites to sell the land slots to private organizations or to build new facilities, which can’t be proved if those are for better usage in the future or not. It happens the same with natural lands which are utilized for trading profits instead of generate more ‘green spaces’ to solve the severe pollution matters that the city has been facing. In order to create good image of a destination as well as do better at growing economically, the local resident’s needs, wishes and benefits should be taken to account first.

The whole thesis process to the author has been quite tough since the author formed ideas, reviewed literatures, designed the questionnaire and implemented everything alone without any project partners. There were some challenges popped up during the writing process, for instances, the forming of the theoretical framework as well as the author’s own debate on which optimal research method she should use to collect the most reliable and valid empirical data. However, the whole experience was eye-opening as well as very nourishing for her research skills and knowledge base about sustainable tourism, urban tourism and the sustainable tourism status of her hometown – Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon.
7 References


McIntosh and Zhara. (2007). A Cultural Encounter through Volunteer Tourism: Towards the Ideals of Sustainable Tourism?


Vu, V. (2017, August 17). Guess how many people are jamming into Saigon? Hint: It's as bad as Tokyo. VN Express International.
Appendix 1. Webropol Questionnaire

1. English version

**KEY CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

*in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) / Saigon*

Hello! My name is Nghi Trinh. I'm currently a senior student of bachelor degree program in Tourism of Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences, Finland.

This questionnaire was created to support my thesis about key challenges of sustainable tourism in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) / Saigon, Vietnam. The thesis is commissioned by my university in cooperation with TOURIST – sustainable tourism competent training centres dedicated to Thailand and Vietnam region. The TOURIST project is co-funded by ERASMUS+ programme of the European Union.

There are ten questions which will take you approximately fifteen minutes to answer. Some questions will ask for your personal information. Though, your data will be kept confidential and only serves our researching purposes!

Firstly, we would kindly ask for some of your basic information:

1. Your age range:
   - Under 20
   - 20 – 35
   - 36 – 45
   - 46 – 55
   - 56 – 70
   - Over 70
2. Your occupation
3. Where are you from?
4. How long have you stayed/been staying in HCMC/Saigon?

Research in-depth questions:
5. How would you describe about tourism in HCMC/Saigon nowadays?
6. How do you think about the locals’ perspectives on foreigner tourists?
7. What positive and negative ECONOMIC impacts that you think tourism has had on the city in recent years?
8. Positive and negative SOCIAL (CULTURAL) impacts tourism has had on the city recently?
9. And lastly, positive and negative ENVIRONMENTAL impacts that tourism has had on the city?
10. What do you think could be done better to help the city have a more sustainable tourism management in both near and long future?

That is the end of the questionnaire. You can leave us your e-mail address if you want to receive the full report afterwards (optional).

Thank you very much for your time and contribution!

11. Your email address

2. Vietnamese version

NHỮNG THÁCH THỨC THỨC CHÍNH CỦA NỀN DU LỊCH BENTE VŨNG
tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh (TPHCM) / Sài Gòn

Xin chào bạn! Tôi tên Trịnh Hoàng Đông Nghi, hiện đang theo học chương trình cử nhân về Du Lịch tại Đại học Khoa học Ứng dụng Haaga Helia, Phần Lan.

Bạn khảo sát này được tôi soạn ra dưới sự tư vấn và giám sát của giáo viên điều phối để hỗ trợ luận án tốt nghiệp của tôi về những thách thức chính của nền du lịch bền vững tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh (TPHCM) / Sài Gòn, Việt Nam.

Lưu ý được uy nhiệm bởi trường đại học của tôi cũng sự hợp tác với TOURIST - tổ hợp trung tâm đào tạo nâng lục năng lực hỗ trợ phát triển du lịch bền vững cho riêng khu vực Thái Lan và Việt Nam, được đồng tài trợ bởi chương trình ERASMUS+ của Liên minh châu Âu.

Sẽ có một câu hỏi và một khoảng thời gian để trả lời. Một số câu hỏi sẽ yêu cầu thông tin cá nhân của bạn. Tuy nhiên, dữ liệu thu thập được sẽ chỉ dành cho mục đích nghiên cứu và được giữ bảo mật!

Đầu tiên, chúng tôi cần thu thập một số thông tin cơ bản của bạn:

1. Độ tuổi của bạn:
   - Dưới 20
   - 20 – 35
   - 36 – 45
   - 46 – 55
Trên 70

2. Nghề nghiệp của bạn?
3. Bạn đến từ đâu?
4. Bạn đã ở TPHCM / Sài Gòn từ khi nào (hoặc bao lâu trong quá khứ nếu bạn đã rời khỏi thành phố)?

Sau đây là các câu hỏi nghiên cứu chuyên sâu:
5. Bạn mở tả như thế nào về nền du lịch ở TPHCM / Sài Gòn hiện nay?
6. Bạn nghĩ người dân thành phố có quan điểm như thế nào đối với khách du lịch nước ngoài?
7. Theo bạn, du lịch đã có những tác động KINH TẾ tích cực và tiêu cực như thế nào đến thành phố trong những năm gần đây?
8. Ý kiến của bạn về những tác động VĂN HÓA - XÃ HỘI tích cực và tiêu cực của du lịch đến thành phố?
9. Và cuối cùng là ý kiến của bạn về những tác động MÔI TRƯỜNG tích cực và tiêu cực của du lịch đến thành phố?
10. Bạn nghĩ điều gì có thể được triển khai/ thực hiện tốt hơn để thành phố có hệ thống quản lý du lịch bền vững hơn trong tương lai gần và xa?

Bạn khảo sát kết thúc tại đây. Nếu muốn nhận được báo cáo đầy đủ khi luận án được hoàn thành, bạn có thể để lại địa chỉ email vào ở trong bến divisor (không bắt buộc).
Xin chân thành cảm ơn thời gian và sự đồng góp của bạn!

11. Địa chỉ e-mail của bạn

Appendix 2. Strategies and measures to address visitors’ growth in cities (UNWTO, 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Promote the tourists distribution within the city and beyond</td>
<td>- Generate more events in more isolated parts of the city and the surrounding areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Develop and promote tourist attractions and facilities that are in less popular areas of the city and its surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve capacity of and experience at attractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Generate a communal identity of the city and its peripheral areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Implement travel card for limitless travel in local areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **2. Promote time-based dispersion of visitors** | - Promote the entire city as ‘inner-city’ so that less visited parts of the city can catch more attention of visitors  
- Promote city experiences and boost up events’ happening in low seasons  
- Advertise dynamic pricing  
- Spare timeslots for attractive events and/or events benefitted from time-based dispersion  
- Imply advanced technologies (apps and others) to hype up the dynamic in time-based dispersion |
| **3. Encourage different itineraries and attractions to visitors** | - Promote new itineraries at the entry points as well as throughout the visitor’s journey, also at tourist information centres  
- Provide package discounts for new itineraries and attractions  
- Provide city guides and traveling booklets highlighting hidden treasures  
- Design extraordinary experiences and routes for niche visitors market  
- Enhance guided tours in city’s less popular areas  
- Develop virtual reality applications to well-known sites and attractions to complement onsite visits |
| **4. Review and adapt regulation** | - Review opening hours of attractions  
- Review regulation on large groups access to popular attractions  
- Review regulation on traffic in city’s busy areas  
- Assure the visitors to use parking facilities at the city’s edge  
- Generate particular drop-off zones for coaches in suitable places  
- Create zones for only pedestrians  
- Review regulation and taxation on new platform tourism services  
- Review regulation and taxation on hotels and other types of accommodation  
- Define the carrying capacity of the city and of critical areas and attractions etc. |
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5. **Enhance visitors’ segments** | - Take into account giving licence system to operators in order to monitor them etc.  
- Review regulation on access to specific parts of the city for activities relating to tourism |
| 6. **Stabilize local communities’ benefits from tourism business** | - Identify and aim at low-impact visitor segments according to the specific city context and objectives  
- Aim at repeat-visitors  
- Discourage visits of the city of some certain visitor segments  
- Extend tourism employment level and aim at creating decent jobs  
- Promote positive tourism impacts as well as boost up awareness and knowledge regarding the sector amongst local residents  
- Engage the locals in the new tourism products’ development  
- Carry out analysis about supply-demand potentials of the local communities and promote their integration in the value chain of tourism  
- Improve quality of services and infrastructure in consideration of the locals and visitors  
- Use tourism to stimulate development of impoverished neighbourhoods |
| 7. **Generate urban experiences that favour both locals and visitors** | - Develop the city in a way that fit the locals’ needs and desires and consider visitors as temporary residents  
- Develop tourism experiences and products engaging the residents and visitors  
- Integrate visitors facilities within local festivities and activities  
- Create and promote local city’s ambassadors  
- Advertise art and cultural initiatives to provide new perspectives on the city and increase visitation to new neighbourhoods  
- Extend opening hours of attractions |
| 8. **Improve city’s infrastructures** | - Generate a city-wide plan for a balanced and sustainable traffic management |
and facilities

- Assure that major routes are suitable for extensive visitors activities and also secondary routes available for peak times
- Improve urban cultural infrastructures
- Improve direction signs, interpretation materials and notices
- Improve public transport to serve visitors better
- Set up specific transport facilities for visitors during peak times
- Provide adequate public facilities
- Create safe cycling routes and encourage bike rentals
- Set up specific safe and interesting walking routes
- Assure that routes are suitable for the physically impaired or elderly visitors parallel with accessible tourism principles
- Protect cultural heritage and attractions
- Assure cleaning regimes fit with tourism facilities and peak moments

9. Connect with and engage local stakeholders

- Assure to create a tourism management group including all stakeholders and the group is usually convened
- Carry out professional development programmes for partners etc.
- Carry out discussion platforms for the locals
- Carry out regular research among residents and other local stakeholders
- Encourage the locals to share their own interesting experience about the city on social media
- Communicate with residents about their own habits
- Unite disconnected communities

10. Connect with and engage visitors

- Generate tourism impact awareness to visitors
- Educate visitors on local values, traditions and laws
- Provide appropriate information about traffic restrictions, parking facilities, fees, shuttle bus services etc.

11. Establish supervising

- Monitor key indicators such as seasonal fluctuations in demand, arrivals and expenditures, patterns of visitations to attractions, visitors segmentations etc.
and responding measures  - Increase and exploit the use of big data and advance technologies to monitor and evaluate tourism performance and impact
- Generate contingency plans for peak seasons as well as emergency situations

Appendix 3. Twelve recommendations for policies making process to cope with ‘overtourism’ (UNWTO, 2018)

1. Ensure urban tourism policies are aligned with the city’s worldwide agenda, the United Nations New Urban Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely goal 11 on “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and the principles of UNWTO Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

2. Make a strategic long-term plan aiming at sustainable urban tourism including the definition of the carrying capacity of not only the city but also of specific neighbourhoods and attractions. This is specifically useful to implement strategies aiming at visitor dispersion, visitor segments as well as those in which new itineraries and attractions are more effectively developed.

3. Decide what the acceptable levels are in terms of tourism impact on the city through a participatory process involving all related stakeholders. This may help the locals to benefit easier from tourism, create joint city experiences for not only visitors but also the locals, and also help in the communication plan with the locals.

4. Establish governance models engaging administrations at all levels (tourism as well as other relevant administrations), the private sector and local communities. The city infrastructure improvement particularly requires thorough cooperation with other departments. However, all of the strategies practically strongly benefit from more cooperation between multiple levels of administrations and also beyond tourism.

5. Nurture communication and collaboration mechanisms among all of the relevant stakeholders. Management strategies will be a lot more effective if all of the stakeholders can work together compared with initiatives from individual stakeholders.
6. Stimulate the integration of the local communities in the tourism value chain which promotes their engagement in the sector and guarantees that tourism will translate into prosperity creation and decent job vacancies. Integrating the locals from the very beginning will assure their tourism benefit and help bring together the local stakeholders.

7. Often monitor the perception of the locals towards tourism business as well as advertise them the sector’s value. This will make it possible to define the local concerns at an earlier stage and jointly develop management strategies to handle perceive issues.

8. Promote supervising and evidence-based decisions and planning of core issues such as carrying capacity, mobility, management of cultural and natural resources and locals’ perception towards tourism.

9. Invest in technologies, innovations and partnerships to promote smart cities – utilizing the best of technologies to address sustainability, accessibility and innovation.

10. Advertise innovative products and experiences that allow the city to diversify time and space demands and attract the right visitor segments according to its long-term vision and strategy.

11. Plan in advance through methods such as strategic vision and scenario planning. The dynamic, volatile, uncertain and today’s complicated global developments require an approach that does not just learn from the past but also identifies the driving forces of change and main uncertainties, to generate reasonable scenes.

12. Perceive visitors as temporary residents, guarantee tourism policy promote the engagement of the visitors and the residents and create a city for everyone.

Appendix 4. Facebook Link to TOURIST – competence centres for the development of sustainable tourism and innovative financial management strategies to increase positive impacts of local tourism in Thailand and Vietnam

https://www.facebook.com/SustainableTourismSEA/