

TOURISM AND THE PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE SITES IN VIET NAM A CASE STUDY OF A WATER BUFFALO FIGHTING FESTIVAL AND ITS TOURIST ATTRACTION

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The traditional festival is one of the most important keys to understanding not only Vietnamese religions, ways of living, ways of thinking but also social structure at certain times of Vietnam society. All of cultural, spiritual, and social activities through times are crystallized in these festivals and thus they are seen as the living cultural heritages of the Vietnamese people's worldview and way of life.

Tourism is a developing industry in the country. The government realises that, although it is clearly important, tourism is an inevitable trend to develop. There are many benefits as well as advantages, though some bad impacts need to be considered, especially upon culture and Vietnamese traditional identities.

The tourism development is important to the development of Do Son and festival as well. In the case of the WBFF, it could be said that tourism helps local community rediscover their own cultural heritage.

In conclusion, it is ideal if the WBFF gets two purposes tourist development and cultural preservation. Tourism and conservation are logical partners, given the critical role of both natural attractions and a clean, safe environment in attracting and satisfying visitors. Festivals and events have a role to play in marketing the importance of parks and conservation areas, controlling activities, and generating revenue for conservation purposes.

1. Traditional Festivals in Vietnam: A Heritage

Vietnam traditional festivals are based on the lunar calendar. The festivals are celebrated in accordance with the rhythm of nature, before or after harvests or crops in spring or autumn. Rituals are performed to ask or to thank the

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community's deity for a good harvest. Discussing Vietnamese identity, Dao The Hung argues that the festivals take place in spring and autumn in anticipation of a bumper crop and prosperity, following the seasonal cycle. Most festivals are held on the same lunar date each year. Many are held during the full moon, that is the 15th day of the lunar month. Some occur on the date of the crescent moon, that is, on the 7th day of the month. Some are held every 36 years; others every 12th year, in accordance with the animals of the zodiac, during every year of the rat, or the tiger, etc. Most of Vietnamese festivals are held in village-scale or inter-villages scale so they are seen *village festivals*.

The traditional festival is one of the most important keys to understanding not only Vietnamese religions, ways of living, ways of thinking but also social structure at certain times of Vietnam society. All of cultural, spiritual, and social activities through times are crystallized in these festivals and thus they are seen as the living cultural heritages of the Vietnamese people's worldview and way of life.

2. Literature as the Relation between Tourism and Festivals

Tourism and festivals are discussed by many authors, especially in anthropology, psychology and sociology. Smith (2001) say 'Tourists leave home because there is something that they want to get away from, and they choose to visit a particular place because they believe that they will experience something positive there that they cannot easily experience at home.' (Smith and Brent 2001, pp.42-43) MacCannell (1999) argues 'All tourists desire this deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel.' (MacCannell, 1999, p.10) and 'All tourist attractions are cultural experience' (MacCannell, 1999, p23). Thus festivals have the potential to attract tourist and the water buffalo fighting festival (WBFF) would appear to have the necessary attributes to attract tourists.

Uysal and Gitleson (1994) go further into the relationship between festivals and tourism by saying that 'festivals are traditional events that are staged to increase the tourism appeal to potential visitors.' (Quoted in Formica, 1998, p.136). And Getz (1990) also claims that 'Festivals and special events are the cultural resources of an area that make possible the successful hosting of attendees. These events are usually organized to create a positive image of a place and to bring money in to the local economy. Such cultural and heritage events are also viewed as part of the new wave of "alternative tourism" (Getz, 1990). The WBFF is an example to demonstrate this relation. One of the key purposes for the local government to recover the festival was for tourism in the year of global tourism 1990. They hoped that by publicizing images of the festival as an alternative activity, tourists would pay attention to it and enjoy it. The festival is the objective and the main reason for visiting. The resort will benefit from the time and money that tourists spend around the festival and in the festival itself.

In terms of festivals as a heritage, Hitchcock (1997) argues that 'Host communities are custodians of local heritage and possess local knowledge that contributes to the destination's vitality and long term sustainability.' Furthermore Boissevan (1979), relating heritage to tourism and referring to the case of Malta, believed that 'tourism helps people rediscover their own cultural heritage' (In Getz 1990). However, using festival as a heritage for tourism purposes is not simple and easy. Getz (1990) insists that 'the social and cultural benefits of festivals and events relate to their roles in fostering community development and cultural traditions and in providing leisure opportunities. The economic benefits of event tourism also have potentially positive effects on the viability of communities and the ways in which people work and play. But there are also some significant potential costs and problems.' (Getz 1990, p.59) McLaren furthermore claimed that 'The globalisation of tourism threatens indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights, their cosmovision, technologies, religions, sacred sites, social structures and relationships, wildlife, ecosystems and basic rights to informed understanding - reducing indigenous peoples to simply another consumer product that is quickly becoming exhaustible. (McLaren 1999, p.3 in Smith 2001, p. 200).

In the same vein, Getz (1990) noted that many authors have worries about the negative influence of tourism on traditional cultures. These effects are often most visible in the area of cultural productions such as rituals, music, dance, and festivals, and particularly those that incorporate traditional costumes. Residents of destination areas quickly learn that culture can be a commodity for which tourists will pay a great amount, resulting in either the transformation of occasional, sometimes sacred events into regular performances. What also occurs is the modification of rituals into forms of entertainment that are easier to perform or to please the audiences more. "In both cases, the rewards become monetary and divorced from their cultural meanings". (Getz, 1990, p.60) Getz concludes 'however, there is little agreement on tourism being bad for cultural events or on how and why negative effects occur. MacNaught (1982, 373) argued that the debasement of cultural events varied with the success people have in adopting strategies that preserve their primary values while at the same time exploiting them selectively in the marketplace. Noronha (1979) believed the Balinese of Indonesia were able to keep the meanings of sacred performances separate from the tourist shows for which they have become famous. And the Canadian Press (1989) reported how Alberta Indian bands planning a native cultural festival vowed to keep religious ceremonies out of public view' (Getz, 1990, pp. 60-61). It is useful to be mindful of all these discussions because the WBFF is actually on the way of commercialisation through tourism. What will eventually remains is a question for the local authority and the residents. Predicting the good and bad factors in advance is a good way to develop the tourism in this area.

3. Some Findings:

3.1. The WBFF and Its Important Role in Do Son

In 1990, the festival was re-staged thanks to two main purposes. The first one was for preserving and promoting the cultural values of local community and the second one was for attracting tourists. Two of these purposes have a close relation to each other and are two key roles of the WBFF.

In terms of the former role, it is clear that Do Son has its own history and culture. It is definitely understandable that local residents with their fishing industry, and ways of living that memories should be preserved over time. They need to keep all of these for themselves and they are happy to keep and preserve them. After a long time suffering from wars and poverty, now they have their chance to revive their culture. Nowadays, everything seems to be on the side of the local residents to re-open the festival. These include open policies from the government to preserve and enhance community values, economic growth, tourism development, and infrastructure improvement.

One of important reasons is that local authorities realize the above-mentioned role. In their approach, restoring community cultural traits has many meanings and benefits. The first one is that when local culture is revived, local resident will be happy with it. The outcome is they will do everything better thanks to their positive mood. The policies such as tax or even family planning will be easier to implement. The second one is that, the WBFF has many cultural traits that enhance community spirit. For example, local residents think that to win the games in the festival, they should have a happy, prosperous family; they should be good to other local residents; they should not argue with others or behave badly to them. And that is all local authorities need for a peaceful community.

As a role of enhancing community culture, the WBFF is a good mirror to revive other festivals in this area. Thus the WBFF has the momentum to revive cultural identities of local resident and it is important to be the first one and it is something to be proud of.

In terms of tourism, it is for many people the main purpose to revive the festival. It is not an accident that the WBFF re-opened in 1990, the year of world tourism. And from the year 2000, the WBFF was chosen as one of fifteen famous Vietnamese festivals which are used to attract tourists (especially foreigners) The organisers could know the important role of the festival in attracting tourists, and as a heritage, the festival is seen as a resource of culture, economic, social, and politics of the local and it is unique as well that so in the beginning, they tried to combine the festival with tourism activities. Clearly, as one of most famous Vietnamese festivals, the WBFF can be seen as an attribute of Do Son resort in terms of attracting tourists.

Obviously, the festival could not become the main tourism activity in Do Son due to its short time performance (two times a year and two or three days for each

time). But it could be the reason to attract tourists to come to Do Son when it is listed and promoted, as Getz (1990) mentioned 'Events do not actually have to attract tourists to the area to play an important role in tourism development. In many cases the tourist will be looking for something to do while in an area, or can be lured to an event even though he or she did not previously desire to visit it.' (Getz, 1990, p.6) In reality, whenever the WBFF is taking place, many visitors come to Do Son (by 30%) not only to join in the festival but also to enjoy other activities such as exhibitions, fairs, or other entertainments. As the same as the case of Ottawa festival, the WBFF contributes to a perception that Do Son is 'a nice place to visit during the summer, a place where you have a good chance of coming across something interesting.' (Coopers and Lybrand 1989, p.21) Furthermore, Do Son hopes that, as Getz (1990) suggests, the festival will help to extend the peak season or introduce a new season or become a new kind of "alternative tourism".

The WBFF role is seen through many other aspects. It could be its economic role in terms of attracting more visitors to the area. It can be seen as social and cultural role while it consolidates community values. Or it has a political role in which local resident, other resident or even visitors come together and perform their community duties well. However, whatever you look at its role, the WBFF has two main roles: for the local culture and for tourism.

3.2. The WBFF - Tourism Development and Cultural Preservation

Tourism development is important to the development of Do Son and the festival as well. In the case of the WBFF, it could be said that tourism helps the local community re-discover its own cultural heritage. Craig-Smith and French claim that 'tourism can produce a win-win situation for both tourists and hosts. Not only does the tourist derive benefits from a vacation but so too do the members of the host community. Tourists have to be transported, fed and accommodated; activities which generate income and profit for others' (Craig-Smith and French 1995, p.36). They insist 'tourism has also been upheld as a saviour of indigenous art and craft traditions. Most holiday-makers have an inbuilt desire to return home with some tangible object to remind them of their fleeting visit to far off locations. Photography partially fulfils this desire, but the purchase of locally made objects gives greater levels of satisfaction' (Craig-Smith and French 1995, p.39), and 'while both the natural and built environments are important attracters, there are by no means the only reasons to travel. One of the greatest fascinations for people is how other folk live and custom and culture have enticed people to travel from earliest times' (Craig-Smith and French 1995, p.126).

Obviously, the WBFF is an advantage of Do So resort. It is an event and traditional festival that many people know. Its reputation creates its fame. Its fame generates its customers, especially when it is listed as one of the most famous

Vietnamese festivals. These are used to attract foreign tourists. 'It is apparent that major events can have the effect of shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favourable perception as a potential travel destination. With global media attention focused on the host city, even for a relative short duration, the publicity value is enormous, and some destinations will use this fact alone to justify great expenditures on attracting events' (Getz 1990, pp.14-15).

In reality, though Do Son is a Vietnamese tourist attraction, this resort and the festival does not perform enough to attract tourists. The master and detailed plans are attempting to deal with that situation. From my point of view, it is ideal if the WBFF gets two purposes: tourist development and cultural preservation. Tourism and conservation are logical partners, given the critical role of both natural attractions and a clean, safe environment in luring and satisfying visitors. Festivals and events have a role to play in marketing the importance of parks and conservation areas, controlling activities, and generating revenue for conservation purposes.

In terms of infrastructure, the new stadium is good for tourists in general and foreign ones in particular because foreigners and guides, tour organisers can feel easier to attend the festival without any problem of poor seating or security. Roads, transportation, electricity, water supply will not be problems more in the near future. However, the quality of hotels should be upgraded. Other things such as a golf course and a tennis course could be seen as other additional activities, and should be built to support the festival. Temples, communal houses and other places having relations to the festival should be upgraded and have guide information in at least four languages: Vietnamese, English, French, and Chinese, the languages of the main customers of the festival.

Social and cultural aspect should be considered in the process of tourism development. Ringer claims that 'Overall, the economic implications have been positive, through the raising of individual income levels, the generation of employment in industries linked to tourism (e.g. handicraft and garments) and overall infrastructure improvement. However, it is not clear whether the overall increase in community income should contribute to improved community welfare' (Ringer, 1998, p.74), and according to Geriya (1993), 'in order to guarantee improved community welfare, tourism income should contribute more broadly to the enhancement of education, the maintenance of the environment and the continuation of religious rituals' (in Ringer, 1998, p.74). The festival is the image of Do Son residents and the resort. This image should be lively and keep its identity. The ritual aspects and the festivities should be combined to attract both kinds of tourists - the one who like festivities only and the other kind who want to "discover the local culture on a deeper level". Cultural preservation is one type of sustainable tourism. Do Son resort should believe that the WBFF is one advantage to compare with other towns where do not have such an interesting traditional

festival. The festival image promotion should be more active and frequent. There is no reason to quit the festival when the image is in their hearts and they are proud of it. If integrity is retained the festival will exist forever.

In terms of management and politics, the local tourism organisers and political leaders have an important role in reviving the festival and maintaining it. The key thing is that, all of them realize the role of the WBFF and try to keep it for the community. The problem is the way they want the festival to look like and the way they want to combine with tourism. Over-commercialisation and over-traditional protection are not the ideal way. The contemporary culture is different from the yesterday, and the tomorrow's will be different from today. We should not require everything is the same through time. So the policies should be flexible to the situation to attract more foreign tourists to come, and try to get away of the term 'social evils' due to the foreign tourists. The organisation board needs to be restructured by added higher positions for leaders of Hai Phong, Ministry of Culture and Information, and Vietnam Agency of Tourism into the management board. The WBFF is held by Do Son district, at the local level, and it has more opportunities to attract foreign tourists when it is held by the city and the ministries. More investments, suitable and open policies are new blood for Do Son tourism and the WBFF.

The economic aspect is very important to the festival's existence. Although local residents hold the festival themselves, do not need money from the local government, it only for their tradition, pride, and joy, that the festival needs money at least to keep their operation board running, upgrade infrastructure and so on. Obviously if the local resident can get money from their festival while enjoying it, they will be happier with this, and the festival could be bigger and bigger over time. Host-guest interaction could be better when the hosts know that the guests are helping them to save their traditional culture. The hosts will then be more willing to welcome tourists. In turn, tourists are likely to be happy and want to come to a friendly resort. Investors and sponsors also want to join in for their benefits. Thus the image effectiveness and economic benefit are closely related. To do that, commercialising and promoting the festival is necessary. A WBFF museum should be built to be open for visitors. Trade fairs, exhibitions should take place at the same time with the festival. The WBFF image on the souvenirs, presents such as comb made from buffalo horns, WBFF pictures made from shell could be sold. These things will bring more jobs and money to the community.

The activities diversification is needed to make Do Son more attractive to tourists, and become other reason to come to the WBFF. With only the WBFF it is hard to turn Do Son into an attractive resort. As was mentioned, golf, and tennis course could be an answer. Cable cars, water sports, aquarium, eco-tourism are serious plans.

Tour guides should be trained, taught about the festival (rituals and festivities, history and myths) and how to attract tourists to the festival and other places that related to the WBFF. They should have knowledge about cultural tourism in the area. And of course they should speak foreign languages fluently to the foreign tourists.

The principle is that we should develop tourism while preserving the festival's identities. Keeping the festival for the local community is the duty of not only local resident and local government but also tourists regardless Vietnamese or foreigners. The tourism needs the festival as it is a heritage of the community, and the festival needs tourism for its existence. It will be a win-win situation if we use the WBFF in a proper way.

3.3. Conclusion

It is clearly seen that the WBFF is very important to Do Son resort and has the great asset in attracting tourism, including foreign tourists. Moreover, the festival has a role in keeping the community's values, and in enhancing a community pride, and in creating a beautiful and unique image. The WBFF is seen as a cultural event that makes Do Son different from other resort, and as we all know, the difference creates advantages. The advantages can be seen through the motivation of tourists as MacCannell (1999), Smith (2001) argued about tourists' involvement in society and culture and going out to experience new or exotic things. Tourism is important to a destination (Smith, 1989; Getz, 1990). This is totally true to the case of Do Son. It is acceptable to say that the WBFF plays a key role in terms of tourism development process because the festival is seen as important attractions that could enrich local tourism asset as Kim et al. (2001), MacCannell (1999) suggested.

Getz (1990, p. 5) accepts that 'the most basic and important aspect of event tourism is to attract tourists, both domestic and foreign.' To be realistic, one of the main reasons for reviving the WBFF is for tourism development. And as a special product for tourism, it is important to realize that, 'from the viewpoint of cultural marketing, that the product (*festival*) must meet the needs and satisfy the expectation of the intended audiences. This is an especially difficult task for festivals and events, given their multiple roles and meanings, the openness of many festivals settings, and the enormous difficulty of understanding all the motivations and expectations of benefits that a visitor might harbour' (Getz, 1990, p. 63). Because of these difficulties, the festival has been changed too much to meet all demands both hosts and guests. Examining the early hypothesis through all my findings, it is clearly accepted that despite of the important role of tourism, the changes of the festival are inevitable regardless of the existence of tourists or not. But with the help of tourists, especially foreign ones, the local culture is re-discovered as Craig-Smith and French (1995), Boissevan (1979) mentioned. The

rituals and festivities are balanced thanks to both foreign tourists' motivations of enjoying and joining into an activity, and discovering a culture.

In terms of the relationship between re-discovering cultural heritage and tourism development, it is important to remind the arguments of Getz (1990) and Hitchcock (1997) on how heritage creates social, cultural and economic benefits, and for a destination's vitality and long-term sustainability. The WBFF is, in fact, not *culture by the pound* as Greenwood (1989) mentioned. In the case of Do Son resort, it is clearly seen that tourism helps the festival to revive and partly survive, and in turn, the festival helps the tourism to develop as well. What is more significant is that the festival, as we can see in the findings, gets the win-win situation in which it has the local residents' and local authorities' support and visitors' attendances. In the resort, there is one more important tourism activity, and the local tradition is also revived. The role of tourism in reviving local customs is important (Boissevan 1979, Getz, 1990, Hitchcock 1997, Noronha 1979). Local customs are specific attributes that can create comparative advantages for a destination. Tourists leave home for that reason (Smith 2001). The WBFF is seen a successful example of tourism reviving local customs. And as being seen in the case of Do Son, thanks to the local support and visitors' attendance, the festival is yet to have tough relations between hosts and guests as Greenwood (1989) and Getz (1990) worried about. However, this worry could become true if the festival is misled and tourism becomes a burden for local residents.

To become a tourist attraction, Do Son and the WBFF have to do many things. To start with it is suggested that it should change its functions, to have open policies, and to upgrade the facilities and infrastructure and to adapt them to new additional purposes. Building the image of the WBFF is very important. This could bring fame, a good reputation for the festival and resort, and thanks to that fame, investment, sponsors, and tourists, including foreigners would be attracted. In turn, the local people will have more jobs, money and a brighter future.

To deal with the problems of achieving two purposes, both preserving the traditional festival and attracting tourists to get all criteria that Getz (1990) and Kim et al. (1999) suggested that sustainable tourism development needs to be clearly understood by all local residents, local authorities and even tourists. National cultural identity is the one thing that needs to be put forward ahead of other temporary economic benefits.

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