**TOURIST**

**FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS REPORT**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project Acronym: | TOURIST |
| Full Project Title | Competence centres for the development of sustainable tourism and innovative financial management strategies to increase the positive impact of local tourism in Thailand and Vietnam |
| Project No.: | 585785-EPP-1-2017-1-AT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP |
| Funding Scheme: | Erasmus+ |
| Project Coordinator | FHJ |
| Work Package | WP 1 - Comparative analysis of the tourism industry and sustainable tourism efforts in  Thailand (TH), Vietnam (VN) and the EU |
| Work Package Leader | UA |
| Target group | All project partners |
| Document | FOCUS GROUP guidelines |
| Compiled by | Oana M. Driha & Noelia López |
| Document version | 3rd version |
| Status | Ongoing version |

**SECTION 0 - INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONCEPTS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

|  |
| --- |
| In order to help participants to better understand the nature and content of the discussion, some basic information is presented as follows:  - Introduction to the project: Objectives, organizational structure, activities that have been implemented,...  - Introduction to the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism and its importance in Vietnam's tourism development progress;  - Introduction to the purpose of the discussion and introduction of participants. |

In addition, participants should be asked in different aspects based on the following sections:

**SECTION I: SWOT analysis of sustainable tourism and financial management strategies**

|  |
| --- |
| 1. **Strengths**  * Regarding the strengths of the sustainable development of marine tourism and culture in Vietnam, it is necessary first to mention the institutional and policy advantages that reinforce the development of these types of tourism. Specifically, the Government has issued Decree No. 109/2017 / ND-CP on the protection and management of the World Heritage cultural and natural sites in Vietnam in 2017; Law on Environmental Protection No: 55/2014 / QH13 in 2014 and Tourism Law No. 09/2017/QH14. In addition, the Ministry of Tourism is also publishing sustainable development strategies in 2020; Vietnam tourism development plan 2020 vision to 2030; Tourism development strategies to 2020 as well as development and conservation plan of World Heritage sites in Vietnam. * Additionally, Vietnam has established National Advisory Council for Tourism and Steering Committee for Tourism Development at both national and local level in some localities. Moreover, the Central Resolution No. 8 of the Politburo also mentions the strengthening and support for tourism development. On the other hand, the Government has established a Tourism Development Assistance Fund to promote tourism as a key economic sector in accordance with the national development vision and orientation in the coming years. * In addition to the strengths of the institutions and policies, it can not fail to mention the diversity of natural and human resources of Vietnam. Dubbed the "golden forest", "silver sea", Vietnam is privileged with rich resources for the tourism industry. Moreover, Vietnam is considered a destination of heritage thanks to 26 heritage sites recognized by UNESCO to date. In particular, the most outstanding heritage site is Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park (Quang Binh) in terms of natural heritage; the ancient city of Hue (Thua Thien Hue) in terms of cutural heritage; and the complex of Trang An (Ninh Binh) in terms of mixed heritage... * Besides, Vietnam also has unique and attractive natural resources as well as natural and cultural heritages in comparison with other countries in the world. * The Vietnamese people are also an indispensable strength. The people here include local communities, indigenous cultural values, human resources in the tourism sector. * Up until now, significant improvements in infrastructure including roads, public transportation systems, international airports, seaports, etc. have effectively facilitated the tourism industry as well as improving the tourism service quality. * In addition, the political stability and social security are also a great advantage for the tourism industry in general and Vietnam’s tourism in particular. Vietnam has been selected as one of the safest tourist destinations in the world as safety needs are the most basic needs if not the most interest of tourists today. * From the point of view of the businesses, they believe that tourism enterprises have offered rich and diverse marine and cutural tourism products, bringing many choices for visitors.   **2. Weaknesses**   * Despite the promulgation of the regulations on tourism, the policies have been outdated, slow in renewing and updating. In spite of the sustainable development strategy of Vietnam 2020, there is no sustainable development strategy for Vietnam. At the same time, the implementation of strategies and mechanisms is ineffective. This can be due to the lack of resources and finance during the implementation process. * In fact, despite the fact that Vietnam has a diverse tourism destination system, no DMOs management board has been established to better manage and advise on tourist destinations, especially marine and culture destinations. * Besides, there is lack of support and linkage among stakeholders due to the lack of coordination mechanisms and awareness, especially between the public and private sector. In addition, in order to strengthen and develop the tourism industry, beside natural resources, human resources, especially experts and financial resources, are very important. The lack of and weaknesses in these two may result in ineffective marketing and promotion of Vietnam’s destinations. * Another notable weakness in the sustainable development of marine and culture tourism is the lack of major infrastructure and support such as public toilets at tourist sites, public facilities such as buses, shuttle buses, etc. At the same time, access to the destinations is quite poor both in terms of traffic system and communication system, online access. These restrictions greatly affect the development of the tourism industry recently. * Vietnamese people can be a strong advantage, but can also be a weak point in the tourism development in Vietnam. In fact, tourism is growing rapidly, but tourism experts are seriously lacking. Besides, the labor force, especially high quality labor force, has not met the development needs of the tourism sector, human resources training is sparse, only a few institutions training tourism level formal education, the rest are in the culture, college, vocational secondary, .. Human resources are not only limited in terms of qualifications but also in terms of skills, especially in foreign languages. Tourism businesses in particular and the tourism industry in general are highly in need of workers with foreign languages skills ​​to better suit the tourism industry characteristics and the enterprises’ needs. * Following the issue of people, the participation of local communities is crucial, but their perceptions and competence are uneven and limited at some points. This is due to the fact that their development vision is rather short-term and there is no long-term plan for livelihoods from the tourism sector. * Tourism products lack the characteristics as well as not properly exploit the valuable national resources. Besides, the facilities, means of support for interpretation and interpretation are mostly display, exhibition, etc. which can limit the experiences for domestic and international tourists. * Although the marine tourism and cultural products are quite diverse, the quality of these products could be improved and upgraded in many respects.   **3.** **Opportunities**   * Regional integration is opening up a great opportunity for the development of Vietnam's tourism industry. Vietnam is now a member of the ASEAN Economic Community and participates in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), if it takes advantage of it, tourism will play an important role in promoting the country's economic development, accelerating the integration process and affirming Vietnam's position in the international arena. * In addition to regional integration, globalisation is also promoting the development of the tourism industry today. With the open policies of many countries in the world, the trend of tourism is changing and heading more strongly towards Southeast Asian market. * Apart from opportunities for development cooperation regionally and globally, Vietnam has attracted great attention and support from international organizations. This is understandably expected because Vietnam is known to be a destination of culture and heritage but with limited resources, especially financial resources. Therefore, there are a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations that have concerned about and offered both professional and financial support for Vietnam’s tourism development in particular and the national development in general. * Vietnam's tourism sector has also implemented a number of policies to promote and enhance the development of the domestic tourism industry, most notably the Visa support policy. In 2017, Vietnam’s tourism set a record to reach 12.9 million international visitors to Vietnam for the first time, growing nearly 30%. One of the reasons for this notable breakthrough growth is that the government has continued to exempt visas for five Western European countries and implemented electronic visa policies. It can be said that the visa exemption policy for five Western European countries is like the "magic wand" that helps Vietnam tourism bloom after a sharp decline in international visitors in 2014 and the first half of 2015. * The significant growth in domestic and international tourism investment also offers great opportunities. Major tourism corporations in the world are considering Vietnam as one of the countries with favorable investment conditions to develop high quality tourism products and services. * Another opportunity not to be missed is the advancement of science and technology today, especially the Industry 4.0 technology. This is a tremendous opportunity for Vietnam to improve tourism industry and bridge the gap with other countries in the world.   **4. Threats**   * The primary challenge of the tourism industry is the indigenous cultural values ​​of the affected local community. Secondly, due to the development of multinational tourism corporations, many communities are displaced from the local tourism development process. For example, they can not find jobs or can not provide tourism products or services themselves to contribute to local tourism development. * The next significant challenge is the market. Although the establishment of MRA-TP is very crucial and has brought a number of benefits to the development of tourism of Southeast Asian countries. However, it is important to look at the implications that it may bring to the indigenous people, especially for local labour force. * Another challenge worth mentioning is that irresponsible tourism in some key markets and lack of institutional control leads to unbalanced and unsustainable development in some parts of marine and culture tourism in Vietnam. * The competition of high quality human resources from other countries is also a remarkable challenge for the tourism industry in Vietnam as mentioned above, human resources in Vietnam are lacking and weak in skills. , level and attitude. In addition, excessive tourism activities can also put pressure on the environment, waste management, pollution and, in worse case, climate change. * The competitiveness of other regional and international destinations is also a challenge that needs to be addressed, particularly in Southeast Asian markets due to their cultural, natural and human resemblance. |

**SECTION II – Sustainable Tourism and Innovative financial management strategies**

|  |
| --- |
| **1. What types of touristic products/services are offered in your region/country?**  The tourism industry in Vietnam is rich in products and services and is divided into seven areas with specific products / services for each regions, namely:  - Midland and mountainous areas: Cultural and ecological tourism in association with exploring cultural identities of ethnic minorities.  - The Red River Delta and the North East Coast: Tourism of scenic seas, cultural tourism, urban tourism.  - The North Central Coast: cultural and natural heritage, marine tourism, eco-tourism, cultural and historical tourism and border tourism.  - The South Central Coast: beach and island tourism, cultural heritages tourism, sea culture and sea cuisine tourism.  - Central Highlands: eco-tourism, convalescence, cultural tourism.  - South East region: Urban tourism, MICE tourism, cultural and historical tourism, ecotourism and marine ecology.  - The Mekong Delta: ecotourism, exploitation of cultural values ​​of rivers, marine ecosystems, islands, MICE tourism.  However, in practice, there is mixed and non-synchronized development between regions leading to the overlap and lack of specificity in Vietnam's tourism products / services.  **2. Does the touristic product (of your region/country) have a corporate/regional/national image?**  Strategies for the distribution and commercialization of multi-channel tourism products in Vietnam are quite clear as these activities are mainly organized by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.  **3. Who is directly involved in the production process of these tourism products/services?**   * The stakeholders directly engage in the production of tourism products / services are domestic and international tour operators, hotels and restaurants. Local government agencies do not directly create products that are just under the management and consulting roles. * Of course, the person who directly performs and provides the tourist products / services is the employee/staff. However, their skills and attitudes are not high enough to ensure the quality. In particular, foreign language skills are the biggest obstacle to the service delivery and the quality of tourism services. A really concerned situation in the tourism industry of Vietnam is Vietnam is a promising market and attracting the attention of many other markets in worldwide, however the language barrier is a huge challenge to the process of develpment in tourism, especially in communicating and providing tourist products / services to visitors. * • Besides, IT staffs are not well qualified. They mainly use IT platforms for essential activities in their life and rarely use it in their daily work.   **4. What other actors (firms, administrations, etc.) are indirectly involved in the production process?**  **5. What kind of infrastructures is used? What type of infrastructure is needed for developing touristic activities without facing any issue in satisfying tourists’ expectations?**  Infrastructures being mainly used to serve the development of tourism include:  • Networks and means of transport;  • Communication systems;  • Electricity, water supply;  .......  **6. Could you please specify: (a) The type of tourist/consumer – approximately how many are national and how many are international tourists? (c) What are the most relevant requests/expectations of tourists? (d) Up to what level do you think tourists´ expectations were/are fulfilled? (e) Do you measure in any way the satisfaction level of tourists?**  **7. What impact do you think tourism is having in your region/country?**   * Economy (tourism contributes to economic growth, improving employment rates and reducing unemployment, quality of work generated through increased tourism, increased living standards and human development, increased attractiveness. destination for foreign investors, etc.); * Society (tourism helps improve the health service system, safety, crime, preservation / damage of cultural heritage) * Environment. Tourism has both positive and negative impacts on the environment, but depending on the region and level of tourism development, the level of impact will vary.   **8. What financial sources are used in order to develop the tourism activities in your region/country? Is access to financing this kind of activities an easy task? What are the main conditions to obtain financial support in this area?**   * Most of the financing to develop tourism activities in Vietnam is mainly from tourism enterprises (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, etc.). * There is little financial support from the government, but mainly on consultants, experts and institutions..   **9. Are there any particular aspects in your region/country to which more attention should be paid in order to make tourism more successful and sustainable?** |

**SECTION III – Current and past efforts in Sustainable Tourism and Innovative financial management strategies**

|  |
| --- |
| **1**. **What is IMPORTANT to be developed in your region/country in order to promote a more Sustainable Tourism?**   * Firstly, it is important to creat good products/service and have specified character of each region; * Secondly, it is necessary to research markets more deeply and thoroughly, especially in the context of the current situation because Vietnam is the destination of many new markets but some markets are not suitable with Vietnam. This will bring some negative impacts on the sustainable development of Vietnam tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to study and select the tourism markets carefully and more effectively, so the policies and activities of advertising and destination marketing of Vietnam can really bring positive results. * Thirdly, it is necessary to promote and improve the quality of qualified human resources and skills to meet the needs of regional and international markets; * Fourthly, it is necessary to increase state budget for tourism development, especially sustainable tourism. * Enhancing public-private partnership is always a very important issue to promote the development of the sector. * Sixthly, upgrading the infrastructure for tourism and it can be done if the fourth thing should be taken care of and implemented first; * Last but not least, it is important to establish centers for capacity building for sustainable tourism development and innovative financial management strategies to increase the positive impact of Vietnam tourism.   **2. What is URGENT to be developed in your region/country to increase the sustainability of tourism industry?**  Based on these important issues, the following arrangements should be made, in order of priority, to increase the sustainability of the country's tourism industry:  1. Strengthening public-private partnership  2. Human resources  3. Destination products  4. Marketing, market research  5. Increase the State Budget  6. Upgrading infrastructure  7. Establish a capacity building center for sustainable tourism development and innovative financial management strategies to increase the positive impact of local tourism in Vietnam.  **3. Which are the most important TARGET GROUPS that can influence the internal and external stakeholders in developing Sustainable Tourism?**  The most important target groups involved in sustainable coastal and cultural development in Vietnam are the government, local people, enterprises and tourists. In other words, there is a need for coordination between all stakeholders from inside (government, local people, enterprises in the country) and outside (international enterprises and tourists).  **4. Are there any standards in Sustainable Tourism and Innovative financial management strategies in the region/country?**  Vietnam still does not have standards for sustainable tourism development and financial management, but tourism development activities are subject to the following principles:  1. Environment: The best use of environmental resources plays a key role in the development of tourism, maintaining essential ecological processes, and helping to preserve natural and natural biodiversity.  2. Society and culture: Respect the social and cultural honesty of local communities, preserve cultural heritage and traditional values ​​that have been built and are alive and close. Contribute to intercultural understanding and sharing.  3. Economic: Ensuring long-term economic viability, providing socio-economic benefits to all beneficiaries and being equitably distributed, including occupations and opportunities for stable returns and social services for local communities, and contribute to poverty reduction.  **5. Could you please mention any past efforts in Sustainable Tourism and Innovative financial management strategies in the region/country?**  Up to now, Vietnam has made a lot of efforts to develop sustainable tourism in many different tourist destinations across the country. For example, in the central region, the project "Sustainable and Responsible Tourism in Central Vietnam" is implemented by the ILO and UNESCO with funding from The Government of Luxembourg, One Plan Fund- One UN in Viet Nam from 2014-2016. This project has contributed to the improvement of skills, employment support for employees and increased competitiveness of enterprises in the tourism sector for local socio-economic development, especially towards TB groups. vulnerable populations include local women; increased sales of handicrafts to local artisans, especially women's groups; hotel and travel services are geared towards poverty reduction, promoting inland and rural tourism; preserving and promoting cultural resources for the tourism market; and raise the awareness of the community about sustainable tourism.  This is just one example of many of Vietnam's efforts to develop sustainable tourism. However, almost all projects have interventions and support from government agencies. non-governmental organizations in the world.  **6. What are the current efforts in Sustainable Tourism and Innovative financial management strategies in the region/country?**   * Under the role of a travel agent, Mr. Khanh fully agrees that his tourism development contributes to local communities to help preserve and protect the area where they live. The company also uses local human resources, namely guides at points, other labor positions such as guard, labor, etc. * In fact, my business (Viettravel) regularly encourages employees to save energy powers. In terms of the size of the tour groups, the company always ensured moderate quantity and received the acceptance of the local community to ensure the capacity of the destinations. * The company regularly recommends its customers buy local products to support the local community. At the same time, tour guides also provide such responsible guidance information to their clients both before and during the trip. * The company's guides always inform our clients about the cultural or religious issues they should care about before arriving at a domestic or international destination to avoid causing discomfort to the local community. * The company also makes sure that none of our suppliers exploit children or have committed human rights violations. |