

GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 8: Prospering**
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality*

**Linking tourism, livelihood improvement,
heritage and conservation through
community-based tourism in Da Nang,
Vietnam**

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Linking tourism, livelihood improvement, heritage and conservation through community-based tourism in Da Nang, Vietnam

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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

Da Nang, Vietnam

CHAPTER

8: Prospering

SUMMARY

Da Nang is the largest and fastest-growing city in central Vietnam and an economic powerhouse. Not all of the city's residents have benefitted from its explosive growth, though. As the city's economic base shifts away from industry and construction and towards the services sector and development pressures on coastal land have increased, communities in the city's centuries-old fishing villages find themselves increasingly vulnerable. This case study describes an action-research project which gathered data and documented the fishing communities of the city, facilitated peer exchanges and community networking with other fisherfolks in the central region of Vietnam and supported the building of city-wide partnerships between the Da Nang Architecture University, the Da Nang Department of Tourism and the network of fishing communities. Currently, this partnership is in the process of co-developing community-based tourism initiatives in four fishing villages, a process which is empowering these communities and will allow them to both contribute to and partake in the city's prosperity.

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, and Da Nang University. "Linking tourism, livelihood improvement, heritage and conservation through community-based tourism in Da Nang, Vietnam". *GOLD VI Pathways to Equality Cases Repository: Prospering (2022)*. United Cities and Local Governments.

Rapid urbanization turned **Da Nang** into the largest and most dynamic city in the central region of Vietnam. The prosperity of this city is often portrayed through its impressive economic growth figures, which consistently surpass the national averages. The sustained economic growth, alongside several local government welfare programs targeting low-income households, has shown a significant effect on poverty reduction: only 0.5% of the population of Da Nang is poor (General Statistics Office, 2015). Such economic progress is the result of the strategic role of this young and centrally governed city in the national economic development, its alignment with broader policy targets towards industrialization and modernization, and increased national and foreign investment. Da Nang is promoted as a “world class tourist destination city” and a “smart city”, a vision that has encompassed a shifting economic base. The gradual growth of service industries – and particularly the hi-tech industry, real estate development and tourism sectors, has overtaken the city’s traditional industrial and construction sectors. This transformation is also expressed in a stark decline in the agriculture, forestry and aquaculture sectors, which fell from 9.74% to 1.68% of the city’s economy in only two decades.¹

Such indicators tell a story of success. However, certain communities have been left behind in the city’s strategic development direction. The transition of the city into a service economy, as well as local sectoral policies that sought to industrialize the fishing sector within a time span of 4 years (2016-2020) resulted in the restriction of small vessels - including the traditional “basket boats” - and nearshore fishing.² These measures had a devastating impact on the approximately 2,300 households living in traditional fishing village communities who mostly rely on artisanal,



small-scale fishing, and cannot meet the requirements set by the government to transition into larger-scale fishing schemes.³ These changes in the industry, along with the pressure of intensified development on the coastal land these communities occupy, have implied the displacement of many centuries-old fishing village communities and their relocation into distant

When the French colonial authorities levied taxes on boats in Vietnam, the fishermen couldn’t afford to pay them, so they designed circular woven “baskets” that could also function as boats. Those boats, called in Vietnamese “*thung chai*” are used by fisherfolk in Da Nang and along the coast of central Vietnam to this day.
Source: Da Nang Architecture University

1. World Bank, 2011

2. Danang Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2017

3. Phan, Vo, Chu, Le, & Nguyen, 2021

public housing complexes. Without access to the sea and to their boats, these fishing families have lost their traditional livelihoods and plunged into greater poverty. The traditional fishing villages of Da Nang, which for centuries have been a feature of the city, are on the verge of extinction, along with all the community traditions, knowledge and assets that go with them.

The research-action project *Knowledge in action for urban equality – KNOWled* by the Da Nang Architecture University (DAU), in partnership with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights and The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, sought to contribute to the increased recognition of traditional fishing communities as a pathway toward greater urban equality. **The project has involved four main strategies:**

1. Data gathering and documentation

The project was initiated through the identification, mapping, classification and documentation of 18 fishing communities and their cultural and socio-economic assets, history and traditional knowledge. The initial data produced by the research showed that the traditional fishing communities of Da Nang are experiencing different threats: some fishing villages have disappeared entirely and their former residents are scattered across the city. For these communities, the project focused on collecting data and information based on community knowledge for archival and academic documentation and to contribute to a general database on the city's history and heritage. For fishing villages that have remained in their original locations and still own clear valuable community assets, the research studied their strategies to protect their natural and cultural heritage under the pressures of increasing urbanization.

The research has opened up and contributed to broader spaces of dialogue with local government officials, who have slowly but positively changed their perceptions on the role that fisherfolks can have in the city's development. This is partly due to increased media attention and citizen debate on the environmental impact of coastal development⁴ but also due to a process of city identity-building around notions of local culture, heritage and environmental protection, which is crucial for a young city like Da Nang. This change in perception has materialized in the recognition by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the craft of making fish sauce from Nam O village an intangible national heritage⁵ and the declaration of a relics' cluster in the same village as tangible heritage of the city, by the People's Committee of Da Nang city.⁶

2. Peer exchanges, communities networking and capacity building

In the neighbouring municipalities of Cham Island (Quang Nam Province) and Ly Son Island (Quang Ngai Province), fishing communities have organized themselves in cooperatives with the support of the Marine protection board to develop alternative and complementary livelihoods around community-based tourism (CBT). These initiatives include homestays, restaurants, coffee shops, souvenir shops, handicrafts, as well as specialized tours (forest trekking, snorkelling, sunrise, and village tours), and auxiliary activities such as the formation of moto-taxi, basket boat, and tour-guide groups. The process of forming the cooperatives has strengthened the relationship among the communities, enhanced the status and recognition of the villagers as active subjects in the tourism and development sectors, and increased the average income among the fisherfolks' families.

4. Phunu Magazine, 2021

5. Da Nang today, 2019

6. Da Nang city website, 2021

The project facilitated exchange trips between the fishing communities, university students and staff, and planning authorities. Representatives from these groups travelled to Ly Son and Cham Islands and participated in several activities such as networking, capacity building and workshops at the regional and city level. During these exchanges, the main subject of discussion was the potential for CBT that is built on the recognition and development of fishing communities' culture and knowledge, and the preservation of their socio-cultural-environmental systems. The strengthening of the networks of learning and mutual support, between fishing villages in the city and central region of Vietnam, is in itself a strategy for continued learning and long-term sustainability.

3. Building partnerships and regional collaboration

The information collected by the collaborative research has been shared with and valued by professionals, experts and press agencies in the city, opening opportunities for further discussion between the university and the city authorities. Based on the first research results, DAU and the Da Nang Department of Tourism - particularly the Son Tra Peninsula Management Board (STPMB), which is responsible for managing all activities on Da Nang's coast - initiated a partnership to share data and develop joint initiatives around the protection of the fishing villages' cultural heritage. A MoU, currently under discussion, envisions that STPMB will facilitate community meetings in collaboration with local districts, prepare project proposals to get funding from the city government, connect relevant stakeholders and support students, lecturers and researchers and communities in their initiatives.

4. Co-developing community-based tourism initiatives

With 6.5 million visitors in 2018 (of which 37% were international), tourism in Da Nang is being turned into a spearhead economic sector.⁷ Da Nang's tourist offer is distinctive in Vietnam, due to the central location of the city within the country, the natural beauty of its 90km-long coastline and mountainous surroundings, its proximity to World Heritage UNESCO sites, and the advanced level of development of its infrastructure. The city's tourism strategy encompasses an increase of international flights and a focus on "expanding meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions tourism."⁸ More recently, Da Nang authorities and investors have made the choice to develop initiatives of "green tourism", by mobilizing resources to orient sustainable tourism in several areas of the city.⁹

The research-action project has identified this aim for tourism diversification as an opportunity to introduce the notion of CBT to the fishing villages, local authorities, private sector and other stakeholders in Da Nang. After the peer exchanges and several meetings, four of the 18 fishing villages who are currently part of the network in Da Nang, were selected to pilot CBT initiatives with the support of the local government.

The initiatives aim to link tourism development, livelihood-improvement, heritage conservation and environmental protection. The activities will seek to protect and promote the local traditional culture, occupations and products in the village, such as the fish sauce craft and seaweed and seafood processing. Likewise, the pilots will aim to develop community-based tourism value chains such as heritage-oriented fishing village tours,

7. Colliers International Research, 2018

8. Da Nang Today, 2019

9. Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2021

fishing tours, sea basket boating and local cuisine. The pilots will be co-designed and co-managed by four main stakeholders: fisherfolks, entrepreneurs, local government and scientists to ensure this model's sustainability.

The local government of Da Nang has played a key role in recognising the negative social impact of previous policies and the need to integrate communities that were being excluded from the city's progress. Beyond providing targeted aids that often disempower communities, supporting CBT enhances the communities' traditional knowledge, nurtures their social links and strength as community, and integrates previously excluded communities as active contributors to the prosperity, identity and overall development of the city.

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PROSPERING

This paper has been produced as a Case-Based Contribution to the sixth Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD VI): the flagship publication of the organized constituency of local and regional governments represented in United Cities and Local Governments. The GOLD VI report has been produced in partnership with the Development Planning Unit (University College London), through the programme Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW). GOLD VI focuses on how local and regional governments can address the local manifestations of growing inequalities and contribute to create “Pathways to urban and territorial equality”. The GOLD VI report has been produced through a large-scale international co-production process, bringing together over a hundred representatives of local and regional governments, academics and civil society organizations. This paper is an outcome of this process and is part of the *Pathways to Equality Cases Repository*, which collects the over 60 Case-Based Contributions produced as part of the GOLD VI report.

In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 8 on “Prospering”, which focuses on prosperity as a culturally specific and multi-dimensional concept, including income but not only. The chapter explores key drivers of urban inequality reflected in the scarcity of decent work and in social-spatial disparities in the location of different productive activities within cities. The chapter analyses how local and regional governments can increase decent work opportunities, and, drawing on the impacts of COVID-19, how they can mitigate the effects of future pandemics and of climate change on decent work, urban prosperity and inequality.

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