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## Creative tourism entrepreneurs: A new perspective on village tourism at Hoi An world heritage site

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**Abstract:** *A World Heritage site recognized by UNESCO, Hoi An is well-known for its cultural heritage tourism development while there has been no much attention given to the contribution of creative tourism entrepreneurs and the village tourism that has become an unique part as a “creative making place” for visitors. This paper aims to contribute to knowledge about the village visit experience and to investigate the experiences provided for visitors hosted by creative tourism entrepreneurs that are an important step in providing sustainable products to make visitors more aware of the consequences of their actions through interpretation and the information provided at villages of a heritage site. The paper reports the findings of in-depth interviews conducted with 15 creative tourism entrepreneurs and 20 visitors at 04 traditional villages at Hoi An. The findings also sought to understand the reasons for becoming creative tourism entrepreneurs the management of creative tourism business in relation to their role in providing village tourism opportunities. The management implication was also highlighted in this paper in term of exploring social capital and business rationales to support a future for creative tourism entrepreneurship and village tourism development in Hoi An ancient town.*

**Key words:** Creative tourism entrepreneurs, village, sustainable development, heritage site, Vietnam

### Introduction

The demand and the rise of the experience economy has led to transformations of many sectors, including hospitality & tourism though it brings with it both positive and negative impacts (McKercher, 1993), with its changes in relationships between host communities, visitors, natural

environment, and expressions of culture (Lindberg, K., et al., 2001). Hence, the concept of creative tourism arose in sense that traditional cultural tourism needs to re-invent itself to meet the desire of tourists who are in search of a more meaningful experience with the local community. Creative activities, cultural sceneries, events, and local skills have been named as sources of memorable experiences, then creative tourism could be used to diversify the destination offerings (Richards, G; 2011).

Hoi An city brings together more than 50 traditional occupations, has 1 craft street and 4 traditional craft villages in which 3 villages (Pottery Village, carpentry village, vegetables village) are recognized as National Intangible Heritage. In particular, tourism development in Hoi An World Heritage Site is associated with cultural heritage conservation in the direction of preserving its landscape and lively space of craft and traditional villages, and bespoke occupations. Responding to activities and tourism policies within the framework of Hoi An as a Green destination and aiming to become a "creative city" of UNESCO in the future, according to Decision No. 1395 dated April 16, 2021 of the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, approving the construction plan "Theme project to develop a network of creative cities within the UNESCO creative city system", Hoi An city at the same time continues to preserve and creatively promote the cultural and occupational values, arts, creating more unique tourism products in developing village and creative tourism goals.

Research on creative tourism has mainly focused on the demand side of the phenomenon (Ali, F., & Kim, W. G., 2015). while the experiences of creative tourism place-making actors, especially

artisans and entrepreneurs, have not received much academic attention. The hosted village stay experience has also not been considered in the context of alternative creative types or practices, such as hosting on art workshops, organic farms, offering special cooking class, eco-farming attractions or craft - making experiences. However, as creative tourism markets everyday rituals and practices, there is a risk of commoditization, of commercializing everyday life that may be higher in creative tourism than in other forms of tourism (Richards, G., 2021).

This paper examines the experiences of 10 creative tourism entrepreneurs and 20 visitors at 04 traditional villages: Kim Bong Carpentry Village, Thanh Ha Pottery Village Tra Que Vegetable Village, Cam Thanh Water Coconut Bamboo Village at Hoi An world heritage site. The context is also of importance in understanding how new village-based creative tourism businesses, entrepreneurship have emerged. Indeed, the process might be described as parasitic as these new developments are dependent upon the success of Hoi An as an ancient city. Additionally, the paper refers to other factors including the roles of the entrepreneur communities as placemakers differentiate their offer to tourists; creative tourism place-making for tourists, level of social capital that generates an ability to capitalize on such opportunities in the sustainable development

## **Literature review**

### **Village and creatvie tourism entrepreneurs**

For the purposes of this article, the terms ‘village-based tourism’ and ‘creative tourism’ have been used interchangeably simply to avoid repetition, but essentially this paper is related to creative tourism in the four (4) traditional villages. There are theoretical overlaps between village -based and creative tourism. Creative tourism is understood as tourism that offers visitors the chances to gain their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences, activities connected to the

destination in fields such as music, visual arts, drama, sports, gastronomy, spiritual activities, languages, art-workshops, or writing. Interactions between hosts and guests that develop creative potential and new skills are meaningful experiences by tourists as well as locals. Thus, creative tourism and village community-based tourism are complementary. Both incorporate destination resources, meaningful interaction between hosts and tourists, and preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, creative tourism may address three issues of community-based tourism: lack of financial resources, unequal power relations between hosts and guests, and loss of cultural identity. Creative tourism is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as ‘travel directed towards an engaged and authentic experience, with participative learning in the arts, heritage, or special character of a place, and it provides a connection with those who reside in this place and create this living culture’ (UNESCO, 2006, cited in Richards, 2011). This definition stresses the consumption of creative tourism experiences and points out the social and interactional process involved. Creative tourism businesses worldwide have their own categorization based on their popular characteristics. For example, “Creative Paris” categorizes the creative activities into “art, music, culinary, design, etc. Yet, creative tourism relies on the development of innovative places, activities and the creativity of entrepreneurs and other actors. The emergence of creative places often occurs because of esthetic, ethical and psychological factors rather than rational calculus (Fuchs & Baggio, 2018).

On the other hand, associated with each of these are activities, and hence they propose the addition of stakeholder interests in their understanding of creative tourism and among those stakeholders are tourists, residents, entrepreneurs, and government (Trinh, T. T., Ryan, C., & Bui, H. D; 2020). Of these entrepreneurs and residents are not mutually exclusive categories; yet equally an entrepreneur can also be external to the city, rural region or a

migrant attracted to the region by the very development of tourism (Li, H., 2016). While it is undeniable that a supply-led perspective is important in this context, as most of these creative tourism businesses are operated by creative people such as artists, 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' or 'cultural creatives'.

Many creative entrepreneurs have multiple identities and, for example, may simultaneously be artisans, managers, and marketers. In other cases, artisans may be managed by an enterprise and the business operator plays a bridging role between the creative business and participants in tourism (Bakas et al., 2019). The mode and orientation of entrepreneurship in creative tourism may be at the core of the place-making process and influence outcomes.

Surprisingly, creative entrepreneurs are hardly considered when it comes to placemaking and tourism (Nieuwland, S., & Lavanga, M; 2020) though they are discussed as central players in creative placemaking, often the residents of that city or area, the ones making a certain area attractive in the first place. It is suggested that creative entrepreneurs, particularly, would create facilities that both the residents and tourists can enjoy (Van der Borg et al., 2005). What is of more importance of the roles in terms of that fact that those facilities might be sustained due to tourism because there would not be sufficient demand or critical mass otherwise (Braun et al., 2018) and can therefore be considered important stakeholders when it comes to a more sustainable development of the city. Hence, creative village- based tourism entrepreneurs may contribute, both to a more sustainable process of creative placemaking and creative tourism (Kostopoulou, 2013).

### **Creative tourists, creative experience at village**

While referring to tourism motivational theories and buying behavior, Ryan (2000) attempted to look at the tourist experience from different perspectives due to the variety of tourists products consumed and number of suppliers involved at the

place of delivery. A complementary relationship established between the objective (place) and the subjective (tourist experience of that place) makes sense in totality, even in the contemporary times and tourist experience was termed as 'messy' and indicated that "they may be unclear in meaning when located within the totality of an individual's experience, and are all the more messy because, paradoxically, tourist experiences can be rich, enriching and cathartic" Ryan (2000 pg. 43-49).

Ivanova; P (2013) further highlighted that tourists increasingly demand unique experiences as tourists seek to engage more actively with the culture of destinations (Richards, 2008) and wish to adopt some aspects of local lifestyles, to search for more interactive, educational and fulfilling experiences rather than just being served by the travel industry while on holiday (Ivanova. P; 2013). However, there are few papers about creative tourists' needs and expectations. There is a fine line between diversification and commoditization as creative tourism outcomes. These address taxonomy of creative tourists (Tan, Luh, & Kung, 2014), their motivations and expectations (Tan et al., 2013), and consumer trends which have led to the development of creative tourism (Richards, 2021). Research on case studies addressed insights of creative approach in the light of cultural routes, music, festivals, visual arts, crafts, museums, drama, sports, gastronomy, spiritual activities, language learning and local cultural associations in work of Richards & Marques (2012), of Richards (2011) that are explicitly mentioned in few creative tourism definitions. Ivanova (2013, p. 109) goes further, claiming that "any experience related to the culture of the place visited, which requires the active participation of tourists and challenges them to develop their creative potential is considered a creative experience. Hence, additional knowledge is required on if and how creative tourism can be developed in villages without commoditizing everyday life. So far, studies which combine creative tourism and village community-based tourism have focused on the planning and innovation process. Such changes partially relate to the numbers and backgrounds of the tourists.

Increasingly in countries such as Vietnam, domestic tourists are new entrants into the middle classes, and in addition many visitors may come from overseas. Many of these latter tourists are experienced in travel and hence demanding of perceived authenticities, comfort, and information. Thus, as an attraction, creative tourism represents an economic function for both the owners and an experience function for the visitor and is part of the change in the model of innovation, creative economy/ industry towards sustainability and multi- functionality.

### Research context of Hoi An

The Hoi An World Heritage area covers 30 hectares (ha) and possesses a buffer zone of 280 ha, and planning currently dates from the 2012 Master Plan that traces potential development to 2025. Linked to Hoi An is the adjacent UNESCO Cu Lao Cham Biosphere Reserve and the intention is to create a community that integrates ecology, culture and creative village- based tourism which has more than 50 traditional occupations, has 1 craft street and 4 traditional craft village in which 3 villages (Pottery Village, carpentry, vegetables villages) are recognized as National Intangible Heritage and the old city is still preserved as a non-traffic zone, with a mix of small retail outlets in a traditional Asian manner (Trinh et al., 2014).

Table 1: Number of visitors to four traditional villages in Hoi An – Period 2018- 2021

Tourism Village	Visitors			
	2018	2019	2020	2021
Thanh Hà Pottery	612.759	707.549	87.353	4.250
Cẩm Thanh Coconut Forest	625.261	897.529	165.366	200.000
Kim Bồng carpentry	41.245	15.800	12.500	100
Trà Quế Vegetables	22.081	19.130	4.543	1050

Source: Quang Nam Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021

Table 1 showed the tourism statistics in which the visitors increased dramatically until 2019 and there was a sudden decrease in 2020 till now due to the Covid 19 pandemic. These villages are the striking tourism destinations of Hoi An and a revenue source for local labour. For these four villages, Hoi An, Quang Nam province holds the greatest potential of increasing the numbers of tourists to the greater Hoi An- Quang Nam- Danang region and represent an opportunity to develop village-based creative tourism and thereby gain additional income as well as sustainable development.

### Methodology

In this study, local entrepreneurs, place makers and tourists engaged in creative tourism in village communities were interviewed. This research study adopted a qualitative method of gathering data using in-depth interviews and the village- based community approach (Fretz & Shaw; 2011), meaning that creative tourism was considered within its local economic/ social/environmental context. The approach was centred on a phenomenographic, or perhaps more correctly a quasi-phenomenographic approach (Trinh et al, 2020) and this is consistent with prior research into the nature of creative village experiences of tourists and providers (Ainley and Kline, 2014). Therefore, it involves living and interacting with a group of people to understand how they create meanings.

Creative tourism is arguably particularly complex, as it touches intangible cultural values and unpredictable expressive processes. The authors spent their weekends at selected locations and participated in creative activities offered to tourists and on special events such as art workshops, farming festivals, tourism events organised by the city government, annually cultural - exchange events and via the availability of interviewees, home stays, and guides, visiting various villages that enables to sense a constant trade-off and highlighted the diversity of the context and our role was that of participants

observers who “participated in a group’s core activities but not as a full member” (Bryman, 2012, p. 442) and to be engaged in informal interactions with locals, entrepreneurs and tourists

The more formal part of the study was with 15 creative tourism entrepreneurs who delivered creative tourism initiatives and 20 visitors at four (04) traditional villages at Hoi An as described below (Table 2). Each formal interview was digitally recorded with the consent of informants and once collected the captured observations were then later inserted, where appropriate, into other raw verbatim interview transcripts to provide a richer account and to help with interpreting the data.

**Table 2: Profile of entrepreneurs and tourists**

Socio-demographics of the respondents.				
Creative tourism entrepreneurs (N= 15)			Creative tourists (N= 20)	
Gender	Male	10	Male	8
	Female	5	Female	12
Age	<18–25	0	<18–25	7
	26–35	6	26–35	5
	36–45	6	36–45	4
	46–55	3	46–55	2
	56–65	0	56–65	1
	> 65	0	> 65	1
Education	Post-graduate	3	Post-graduate	6
	Degree	11	Degree	8
	High school	1	High school	4
	graduate		graduate	
	Secondary and below	0	Secondary and below	2
Qualificati on major background	IT	3	Business	5
	Architect/Art	4	IT & Engineer	2
	Business,	6	Graphic Design	3
	Hospitality		Environment	4
	&Tourism	2	Student	6
	Engineering			

Regarding the entrepreneurs, the questions asked included: 1. Demographic information of the participants: 2. Feelings and attitudes/perceptions of change and adaptation to changes after Covid19 pandemic and perceptions of the speed and process of tourism development of a world heritage site; 3.

Queries about the motivations and thoughts/experiences about their current business/diversification of their making place/villages into tourism creative activities and understanding their present tourism product called crative tourism in the light of sustainable development of a world heritage setting.

Regarding the visitors, the questions asked included: 1. Demographic information of the participants; 2. Feelings and attitudes/perceptions of change and adaptation to changes after Covid19 pandemic and perceptions of the speed and process of tourism development of a world heritage site ; 3. Queries about the motivations and experience/ understanding/perceptions about their visit/ travel into tourism creative activities in the light of sustainable development for a world heritage setting.

Prompt questions such as ‘What do you think....Can you please give an example?’ ‘What do you mean by that’ or ‘Can you tell me a little more why you think so/say so?’; modes of questioning consistent basically with a phenomenographic approach (Marton, 1981).

## Findings and discussion

This research innitally explored with the process of analyzing and recording facts/ themes before the formal survey and this paper reported the qualitative approach. Data obtained commonly among entrepreneurs and visitors includes: 1/ the profiles of entrepreneurs and. Visitors/tourists (Table 2); 2. The decrease in numbers of visitors which affect the revenue of tourism & hospitality businesses within the pandemic; 3/ The local labour forces working at tourism villages and workshops are seriously affected and the roles of entrepreneurs for enthusiasm, optimism in creative tourism development to sustain these local skilled artisans/craftmen/ farrmers communities; 4. The village venture as a new aspect and entrepreneurs as placemakers of creative tourism; 5. Social captial actualization and entrepreneur networks are

core values to preserve the culture heritage and sustainable development of Hoi An; 6. Place making, digital and virtual tours combined with onsite/ hand- on experience at villages in enhancing tourist' experience of engagement, education, entertaining and creativity.

Some of the sharings of respondents are appended below:

Respondent 1 shared his enthusiasm about his business of organic farming village and cooking classes, saying :

*..... Covid 19 pandemic has brought us many challenges as tourism is the main economic sector. However, during this hard time, we are aware of the creativity and sustainability that we value the core values of local culture, of social capital in village-based communities to develop the quality making places for tourists in long-term run. It means, our strategies looked at how to make our visitors spend more time with us via creative, educational, local lifestyle experiecene, entertaining experiences for not only individual/independedent visitors but also educational delegates of schools locally and internationally to make Hoi An a school, a place maker of creative innovation in the atmosphere of a recognised world hertige site...*

Most of the creative entrepreneurs were aware of the strategies of the creative village-based tourism in the light of core foudation of local culture and sustainable development in Hoi An and they were directly involved in the strategy and reflected on the process of making Hoi An – An Innovation City of UNESCO. Actually, traditonal villages as a unique culture of Hoi An through story-tellers and host/place makers-visitors interactions that have built a complete and innovative tourism product system, meeting market needs that often directly in tourism entrepreneurship, businesses and entrepreneurs/placemakers in creative tourism, "creative revolution". Thus, the growing demands of tourists with the speedy development of different businesses in tourism services,

accommodation and catering have sti- mulated the residents' creativity in rural areas ( Trinh et al, 2020).

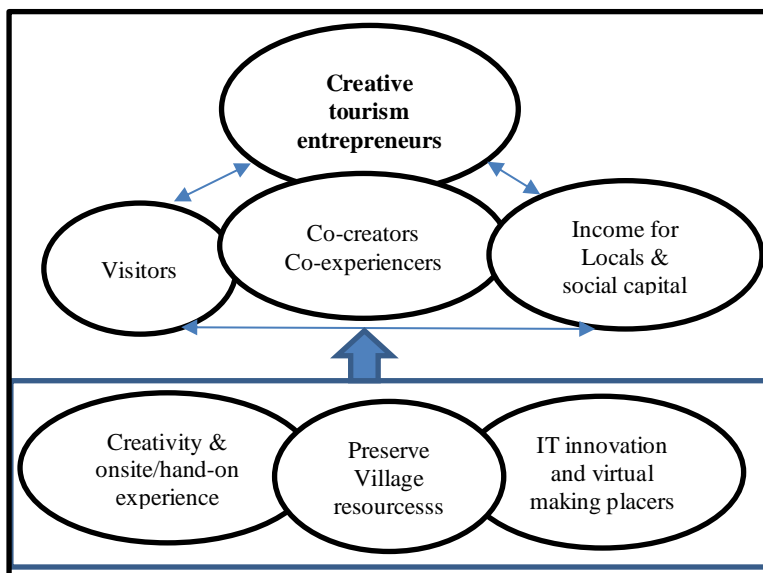
One respondent (aged 43) said:

*----- we had planned and innitally developed creative tourism place-making for tourists and treat as village communities of place to look at creating craft workshop or exhibitions better .....for the pottery and carving creation is something I value and cherish since I was young. It is something not for commercial like the mass production but we aim to unique products of creativity. The social capital here is significant as the local labour force and the communités of artisans, the professional craftsmen become the key factor to make this village, this town a “alive heritige” that we are proud of a part of contrubiting in sustainable development as being place makers..... The engagement, educational-entertaining and creativity of visitors are really appreciated to enable us have the optimitisn, the hope, the enthusiasn to create making -place better. We are thinking of an innovation in terms of digital and virtual tours cobminded with onsite/ hand- on experience at villages and visitors would have the perception of being at the experimental school of creative activities.*

The desire for educational and creativity interaction of tourists was similarly described by creative tourism entrepreneurs. Visitors' desire to meet and interact with local artisans, craftsmen, farmers, local chefs, carpenters, skilled tailor, artists.. has been found to be the key motivations for creative village- based tourism in the light of ecosys education and entertainingin Hoi An. The roles place-makers seem to become significant as a playground/place makers for creative tourists. In deed, we saw the development of small-scale creative experiences and learning activities, provided mainly by creative entrepreneurs as a supplement to other creative production- so-called under 'creative tourism 1.0' (Richard, 2021) while so far the term of Creative Tourism 3.0 has

indicated the integration of tourism and the creative economy/industries, leading to the development of a wider range of creative experiences of more passive forms of creative consumption by tourists (OECD, 2014). The most recent Creative Tourism 4.0 iteration is based on the co-creation of experiences facilitated through peer-to-peer networks as “relational tourism” (Richards, 2021); for example, the growing availability of creative tourism experiences on Airbnb and TripAdvisor (Carvalho, da Costa & Ferreira, 2018). The findings of this research has given an insight into the “relational tourism” as the term of “social caplity, the bonding among villages’ networks/memberships” that can be found in HoiAn ancient town as a unique place. Typically, these would be provided through small-scale workshops and courses, giving tourists hands-on experience of local creativity. Within the pandemic, the creativity and flexibility with the enthusiasm and optimism of creative tourism entrepreneurs to develop the strenghts of social capital and village communities with entrepreneur network to combine the on-site and offsite approach in term of vitural tour approach and hand-on experience to enhance the creative tourism and preservation for village resources ( human skilled labor forces, facilities,...). The adaptation of change and motivations for creative tourism is not a “seasonal business” or left-hand business/job as it used to be and become a significant part of green and sustainable development in Hoi AN as diagrammed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Hosting creative village- based tourism and Creative green destination in Hoi An



Among the new village- based creative tourism, creativity, co-creator experiences recently introduced are art workshops, art exhibitions, carpenter and pottery fieldtrip, farm work (gardening, cooking traditional dishes with ingredients/herbs/vegetables from local gardens, music, folks performance and taking a boat to the local markets), art work from handicraft creative products (including wooden carving, banana leafs, bamboo and coco- nuts), F& B culinary service, product tastings, and entertainments such as riding, hiking and sports (mountain biking, trekking). The tone of many of the comments often refers to creative camping (on-site experience and virtual tour, digital graphic application), educational-entertaining with place-making atmosphere/engagement rather than financial entities. Even though there is a growing interest in the economic and social benefits of creative tourism, environmental consequences appear to be at the fore of stakeholders of local residents’, visitors and entrepreneurs’ concerns for green destination and sustainable development (Einali, J et al, 2019). Creative tourism has not only been a safeguard of cultural heritage of the region but enables the development of virtual reality and modern tourism called Creative industry and innovation in the future that would be signifcant to be fully further explored (Pestek, A., & Sarvan, M; 2020).

## Conclusion

Hosting and place making on villages, farms and workshops has become an important part of creative tourism. Findings relating to the profile of creative tourism entrepreneurs and creative visitors through this exploratory analysis of the nature of the creative experience in a case study of Hoi An world hertiage site have provided some destination management implication to requires further substantiation.

Firstly, the policy directions of creative tourism development associated with the conservation of craft villages should be based on the advantages of space and tourism resources of cultural heritage.



Preserving and promoting the value of craft villages to develop creative tourism and cultural tourism is a relevant approach as Hoi An city has many typical craft villages that have existed for a long time, which can be mentioned as pottery, vegetable, bamboo, coconut, carpentry villages, etc. The introduction of traditional craft into creative tourism activities is considered as a positive move to diversify products to meet the diverse experience needs of tourists. Moreover, developing creative tourism associated with craft villages contributes to the conservation and development of traditional craft villages in a sustainable way, towards the building of Hoi An - UNESCO's Creative City in the future.

Secondly, the support and mutual collaboration from different communities and associations enable to a sustainable development. It is a need to consider creative tourism development associated with craft villages as a tool to support the consumption of OCOP products (one commune-one product) in the rural economic development program. The association of craft village tourism with the development of local OCOP products according to the groups of agricultural products that Quang Nam province focuses on developing, supporting the startup/entrepreneurship ecosystem, associated with the production of OCOP products on locality; especially OCCOP product groups associated with tourism such as food group with 74 products, beverages with 11 products, herbal products with 5 products, handicrafts with 10 products, fabrics - garments with 1 product, and services rural tourism with 1 product.

With any case study that seeks to develop concepts and insights into a situation not previously examined, the results may be specific to the situation. There is a need to better permit generalization by building in variables other than simply the interest of creative entrepreneurs and visitors and at similar heritage site in Vietnam.

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