

# PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THAI NGUYEN AND THE CITY OF VICTORIA

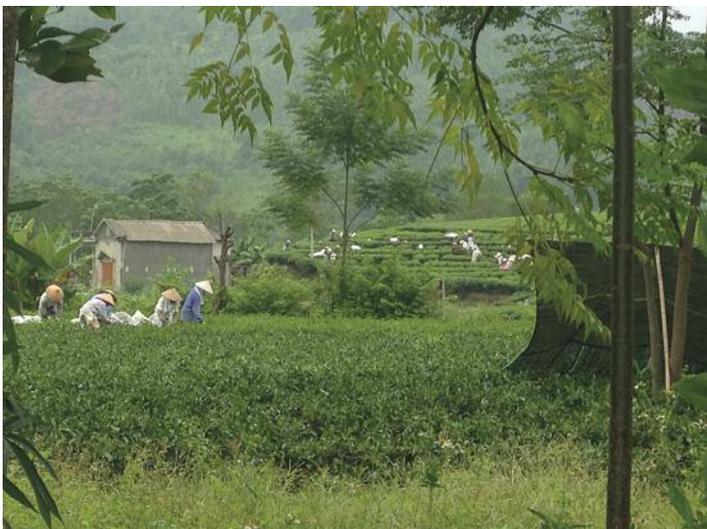
## STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Overview of the project

#### 1.1. Summary

Thai Nguyen is a Category I city located in Thai Nguyen province in the north of Vietnam, with a population of over 330,000 and an area of more than 18,000 hectares. It is the centre of politics, economy, culture, education, science and engineering, health and tourism for the region, and the services of the province and the northern highlands are located within this city. Currently, the city comprises 28 administrative units and communes. The economy is focused mainly on trade and services (48.42%), as well as industry and construction (47.78%); there is a small component in agriculture and forestry (3.8%).

Thai Nguyen was formerly known as a city of iron and steel production; however, steel production has been decreasing, and the city is now looking for opportunities to develop its economy in another direction. There is a great potential for tourism; the area has many natural landscapes and historic sites, and includes the famous Tan Cuong Tea Region. Recently, with support from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Association of Cities of Vietnam (ACVN), Thai Nguyen joined four other Vietnamese cities to implement local economic development (LED) strategic planning through the Municipal Partners for Economic Development (MPED) program. Thai Nguyen was partnered with the City of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Experts from the City of Victoria supported the construction of Thai Nguyen City's Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development for the period between 2015–2020, which states, "...Thai Nguyen will become an attractive tourist destination,



a place for enjoyment, relaxation and experiencing in Vietnam and also in Southeast Asia, with high quality and prestige; contributing to the socio-economic development of the community in Thai Nguyen City."

The main objectives of the City's Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development are to build up action plans and set up projects to help develop tourism as a central focus for LED, contributing to the success of targeted socio-economic indicators, and the use of tourism assets and resources of a Provincial City Type I.

#### 1.2. Project methodology

The strategic plan for the city's tourism model used a multi-level analysis and an agreement between stakeholders. The model consists of three elements as shown in Figure 1.



The experts employed several methods to analyze resources and assets. They conducted **field research**, including the surveys, to gather data for the inventory and assessment of potential, the current state of tourism development in the City of Thai Nguyen and its vision for 2020. They also completed a **literature review**, including the synthesis and analysis of achievements, shortcomings, the trend in tourism development regional and worldwide that could inform new directions and measures. Thai Nguyen **consulted** experts and local consultants in the field of tourism and related fields in the form of scientific seminars and exchange of experience meetings. The city analyzed its **inheritance**, meaning the findings of related projects in the province and tourism development models of some localities with similar natural conditions. Finally, the city completed **diagramming and mapping**, using MapInfo software system to construct the plan maps.

The strategy took over two years to complete. In August 2012, experts from Victoria and Vietnam, together with stakeholders of Thai Nguyen City, analyzed the state of the city's tourism. The following month, Vietnamese consultants conducted a survey, collecting data about the city's tourism. In late summer, experts from Victoria and Vietnam, and a group of Thai Nguyen specialists drafted the Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development of Thai Nguyen City till 2020. From January to March 2014, stakeholders, including city government leaders, some

sectoral leaders of the province, professional staff of the city, businesses, the National Tourism Association, the Association Business of Thai Nguyen, some farmers in Tan Cuong Tea Region, the City of Victoria and ACVN commented on the draft plan.

In January 2013, while the plan was still in development, the city worked with its Canadian partners to implement a pilot project on “Community tourism development in the Tan Cuong Tea Region” that could be replicated in other areas. The Tan Cuong Tea Region was famous both at home and abroad, and in 2012, the tea brand was awarded “The Number One Tea” by UNESCO Vietnam. The idea was to build up a model of “Cultural Community Tourism Village in the Tan Cuong Tea Region” that had been piloted in villages of Tan Cuong commune. The pilot project followed seven steps:

1. Assessing the needs of local people;
2. Assessing tourism assets and capabilities of local people;
3. Forecasting by experts;
4. Reviewing the capacity of businesses;
5. Reviewing highlights of the local culture;
6. Identifying the geographical and natural environment conditions, especially in the Tan Cuong Tea Region; and
7. Identifying the potential and ability to duplicate the model.

### 1.3. Partners and stakeholders

The project was coordinated by the project team of Thai Nguyen City. City leaders directed the process through the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism — the standing unit. The beneficiaries are the local people, including men and women from four villages and hamlets in Tan Cuong commune and Phuc Triu commune (located in Tan Cuong Tea Region).

Technical assistance for the planning process was provided by the Canadian expert team from the City of Victoria, the University of Royal Roads — Canada and Open



University — Vietnam. The consultant group from Hanoi Open University Technical provided technical assistance for implementing the pilot project on community tourism. For the province’s part, the project received support from the city’s Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Those organizations that actively participated in project activities are the Provincial Association of Businesses, the City Association of Tourism and the City Women’s Union. Contributions to restoring folklore activities in community tourism villages were made by the cultural and ethnic music artists, tea production professionals and experts in local cuisine. The pilot project beneficiaries are households in the traditional tea production areas in the city, and both large and small local tea businesses.

## 2. Project results

### 2.1. Expected versus actual results

#### *Result 1: The Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development*

The Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development of Thai Nguyen City was created and presented to the City’s Standing Committee of the Communist Party for consideration. It called for investment into the tea region and other tourism assets serving the economic development of the whole city. The plan identified products such as cultural tourism, spiritual tourism (research of historical sites, temples, customs of peoples in northern areas); sightseeing (locations, production facilities, factories, gardens, plants, zoos, etc.); sports, recreation and entertainment tourism; and homestay and recreation services. Five tourism assets of Thai Nguyen City were reviewed, including statistical data: the Museum of Ethnic Culture of Vietnam, Heritage Youth Warrior 915, Phu Lien Pagoda, Ecotourism Area of Phuc Xuan, and the Tan Cuong Community Cultural and Tourism Village.

#### *Result 2: The pilot project in Tan Cuong Tea Region*

The model of “Tan Cuong Cultural Community Tourism Village Tan Cuong Tea Region” has been studied and piloted with remarkable results. **Tourism infrastructure was improved**, including over 10 kilometres of concrete roads from the city centre to Tan Cuong Tea Region that were recently built and upgraded, mobilizing 3,967 square metres of land from the local people for road construction. Additionally, **the local capacity in providing community tourism was strengthened**. Eight households and communal tea businesses in Tan Cuong and Phuc Triu were selected as eligible for the deployment of the model of homestay services. Two training sessions were held for an English club of 30 “students,” or farmers participating in the homestay project model (two sessions per week for 12 weeks). Eight training courses on food hygiene and food safety, room services and environmental protection were delivered to improve the quality of tourism services in the tea community. The eight selected families now meet all the requirements for providing

accommodation services at home: the family of Bui Trong Dai has already received five groups of visitors from Spain, France, Canada and China to stay in their home. The family of Le Quang Nghin received seven international delegations during the second Tea Festival (2013).

Another significant outcome of the project has been to increase tea production and the price of tea, which in turn increases the income of farmers. In 2014, the entire region of Tan Cuong produced 17,500 tons of tea.

Two folk music clubs were established, and members built their capacity to provide cultural interpretation to tourists. The 45 members include the San Diu ethnic group; the Kinh, Tay and Cao Lan people in Hong Thai Village II; Y Na Village I in Tan Cuong commune; and Phuc Thuan Hamlet and Khuon Hamlet II in Phuc Triu commune. With the support of folklore artisans, the clubs have collected and restored pieces of music and songs on the culture of the Kinh, Tay, San Diu and Cao Lan in different forms of traditional folk dances, such as the dance to welcome new rice, the Tac Sinh dance and the Chau Van song for tea invitations. They have used traditional musical instruments such as Tinh guitar, Phieng la, Moon-like guitar, Bau flute, Meo flute, etc. to entertain tourists, who were very interested in the performance.

## 2.2. Compatibility with program crosscutting goals

As a planning project, it is not expected that the tourism strategic plan will have adverse effects on the environment; however, it has had positive impacts on both male and female beneficiaries of the project.

With the model of “Cultural Community Tourism Village in the Tan Cuong Tea Region”, the infrastructure and housing of people have been improved. Therefore, it did have positive impacts on the living environment. On the other hand, the farmers involved in the project have changed tea production to meet VietGAP standards. This added sustainability to the project.



Both men and women have been included in all the involved parties in the project and have equal benefits from the pilot project. They have been involved in every step of the project, having a voice in household selection, the founding of the English and art clubs, and participation in project workshops and trainings.

## 2.3. Success factors

The success and results of the project are based on the following key factors:

**Leadership capacity:** City leaders and project team leaders were pioneers in the preparation of the strategic plans and launching initiatives. They acted as facilitators to guide and promote initiatives from stakeholders and the community.

**Smooth coordination:** Coordination was smooth among the project team, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism and key agencies such as the Provincial People’s Committee office during project implementation, allowing for many good ideas. This has attracted further attention from outsiders. Good coordination also helped overcome obstacles and challenges, such as language barriers, and the gap in qualifications between city officials and the Canadian partners.



**The involvement of the parties has been effectively mobilized.** All parties involved in the project have been mobilized from the first steps until the completion of the strategic plan.

**Support and assistance from Thai Nguyen provincial authorities** (the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism) have played a crucial role in the success of the project. They facilitated project implementation and included project initiatives in their department's work plan.

**The professional experience provided by experts from the City of Victoria** brought a new approach to strategic planning of local economic development, which has been quickly adopted by the project team. Canadian partners have also inspired the city leaders and staff to do some new types of work; this will benefit the city in the future.

**FCM and ACVN supported** the city's Project Management Board in collaboration with the Canadian and Vietnamese consultants to provide technical advice, prepare logistics for the experts' visits and document lessons learned from previous pilot projects in Ha Tinh and Soc Trang.

## 2.4. Sustainability of results

The Strategic Plan for Tourism Economic Development of Thai Nguyen City has been reviewed and accepted by the People's Council. It was included as a key input into the official document of the city's Party Congress (to be held at the end of 2015). This is very important, indicating the plan has been identified in the strategic economic development plan at the highest level of the city's authorities. Additionally, the model of "Cultural Community Tourism Village in Tan Cuong Tea Region" has attracted great involvement from local people, which will facilitate greater promotion and replication in the future. Above all, the pilot project has been recognized and been given financial support from the city government and the province for replication in the future.



## 3. Sharing the experience: What did stakeholders learn from the experience that could be adapted by other municipalities?

### 3.1. Lessons

After nearly three years of project implementation, some very important lessons have been learned:

**A participatory strategic plan with contributions from many parties will bring about comprehensiveness and create high consensus from the initial steps.** Those selected to the Project Management Board (including the head position) should have enthusiasm, responsibility and creativity. The participation of many stakeholders in strategic tourism economic development planning was a new process shared by the City of Victoria in Canada, yet it works well in the context of Vietnamese cities.

In the pilot project of "Cultural Community Tourism Village in the Tan Cuong Tea Region," **learning from others' experiences** (homestay service in Ban Lac — Hoa Binh and Sapa — Lao Cai ) was an important step in setting up the pilot model in Tan Cuong and Phuc Triu communes. **Community leadership promoted good project implementation**, such as the many ideas from the community, the selection of "leaders" like folk artists or foreign language teachers with enthusiasm to promote the project, and the selection of a few households who acted as pioneers to attract other families to follow. And implementation of the pilot project itself — before the formulation of the strategic plan — proved that **a bottom-up approach in setting up the model does still work.**

Finally, it is important to note that when implementing partner projects between a city in Vietnam and another in Canada, **there should be a key project team member with strong English skills** to act as a bridge between the two partners. The Vietnamese city should maximize the Canadian partner's experience through regular exchanges between the two sides.

### 3.2. Good practices

The model of community tourism is not new in Vietnam. Thai Nguyen has been successful because the city applied lessons learned from other localities into its own local context of well-known heritage. This shortened the process and achieved greater success. However, Thai Nguyen's strategic planning for local economic development took into account all the specific conditions of the locality, increasing the feasibility of mobilization of different resources. In this project, choosing and turning local tourist resources (natural and spiritual) into tourist assets and products to characterize the locality made all the difference. The unique features of a locality will attract tourists to it.

### 3.3. Success Stories

The model of “Cultural Community Tourism Village in Tan Cuong Tea Region” has shown the farmers where and what to start when they want to participate in the tourism industry. The formation of the English clubs to teach farmers how to speak English, a folk arts club to entertain tourists, the mobilization of people to improve infrastructure, the cleaning of laneways and houses to make the village landscape cleaner and more beautiful, etc. are some of our success stories.

### Annexes

- The Strategic Plan for Tourism Development of Thai Nguyen City
- The Project Plan
- Report on the activities of the project team

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