

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM LEGISLATION IN VIETNAM: SITUATION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

LEGISLAÇÃO SOBRE TURISMO SUSTENTÁVEL NO VIETNÃ: SITUAÇÃO ATUAL E IMPLICAÇÕES POLÍTICAS

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism is becoming an inevitable trend in the tourism development strategies of many countries to ensure a balance among economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. In Vietnam, although the tourism legal system has gradually approached the principles of sustainable development, the effectiveness of implementation in practice remains limited. This study aims to analyze the current legal framework on sustainable tourism in Vietnam, assess its application, and point out inadequacies in the enforcement process. Through analysis, comparison, and synthesis of current legal regulations, combined with a review of tourism management and development practices in some localities, the study clarifies outstanding issues, including the lack of synchronization of the legal system, ineffective monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, and the limited role of local communities in sustainable tourism development. On that basis, the article proposes a number of solutions to improve the law on sustainable tourism in Vietnam, focusing on strengthening the responsibilities of relevant entities, improving implementation effectiveness, and approaching international standards. The research results contribute to providing scientific arguments for the development and improvement of legal policies on sustainable tourism in Vietnam.

Keywords: Tourism Law, Sustainable Tourism, Development Policy, Vietnam.

Resumo

O turismo sustentável está se tornando uma tendência inevitável nas estratégias de desenvolvimento turístico de muitos países, visando garantir o equilíbrio entre crescimento econômico, proteção ambiental e justiça social. No Vietnã, embora o sistema jurídico do turismo tenha gradualmente se aproximado dos princípios do desenvolvimento sustentável, a eficácia de sua implementação na prática ainda é limitada. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar o atual arcabouço legal do turismo sustentável no Vietnã, avaliar sua aplicação e apontar inadequações no processo de fiscalização. Por meio da análise, comparação e síntese das normas legais vigentes, combinadas com uma revisão das práticas de gestão e desenvolvimento turístico em algumas localidades, o estudo esclarece questões pendentes, incluindo a falta de sincronização do sistema jurídico, mecanismos ineficazes de monitoramento e sanção e o papel limitado das comunidades locais no desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável. Com base nisso, o artigo propõe uma série de soluções para aprimorar a legislação sobre turismo sustentável no Vietnã, com foco no fortalecimento das responsabilidades das entidades relevantes, na melhoria da eficácia da implementação e na aproximação aos padrões internacionais. Os resultados da pesquisa contribuem para fornecer argumentos científicos para o desenvolvimento e aprimoramento das políticas legais sobre turismo sustentável no Vietnã.

Palavras-chave: Direito do Turismo. Turismo Sustentável. Política de Desenvolvimento. Vietnã.



1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of increasing globalization and climate change, sustainable tourism has become a key strategic orientation to ensure harmony among economic growth, environmental protection, and social development. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as the process of developing tourism that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations, through the rational use of resources, the conservation of biodiversity, and respect for local socio-cultural values. In this context, the legal framework plays a key role in orienting, regulating, and ensuring the implementation of the principles of sustainable tourism in practice.

In Vietnam, tourism is identified as a key economic sector, making an important contribution to GDP growth and job creation while promoting regional development. The Law on Tourism 2017, together with relevant legal documents on environmental protection, cultural heritage, land, and investment, has initially formed a legal foundation for sustainable tourism development. However, the practice of tourism development in recent years has shown that many problems have arisen, such as the overexploitation of tourism resources, environmental pollution at destinations, conflicts of interest between enterprises and local communities, and a lack of synchronization in management and law enforcement mechanisms. These limitations pose an urgent need to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the legal system for sustainable tourism in Vietnam.

Additionally, in the context of Vietnam's increasingly deep integration with the region and the world, many gaps remain in the internalization of international commitments related to sustainable development, environmental protection, and responsible tourism. Compared with international practices, Vietnam's legal regulations on sustainable tourism still lack specific, binding mechanisms for tourism enterprises' environmental and social responsibility, substantive participation by local communities, and monitoring tools to assess sustainability at destinations. This is a theoretical and practical gap that needs to be studied systematically.

Stemming from the above issues, this study aims to analyze the current state of the law on sustainable tourism in Vietnam, clarify the results achieved, limitations, and causes in the process of developing and enforcing the law. On that basis, the article proposes solutions to improve the law to promote sustainable tourism development, in accordance with Vietnam's socio-economic conditions and in line with international standards. The results of the study are not only of academic significance but also provide scientific arguments for policy making and for improving the efficiency of state management in the field of sustainable tourism.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism development has become an inevitable trend in the context of globalization, as the tourism industry plays an increasingly important role not only in economic growth but also in cultural preservation and environmental protection. In the face of population growth, climate change, and the increasing and diverse demand of tourists, the tourism industry is forced to adopt a sustainable approach to ensure long-term development, minimizing negative impacts on natural resources and human values.

Although there are many approaches and definitions of sustainable tourism, most views agree that sustainable tourism development should achieve a balance among three main pillars: economic, social, and environmental. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, it was determined that “sustainable tourism is a well-designed and managed tourism industry that can significantly contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development and is closely linked to other industries, which can create many jobs and trade opportunities” (United Nations General Assembly, 2012). According to this definition, sustainable tourism not only creates jobs and promotes trade but also contributes to the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage, and it improves the quality of life of local communities. The development of sustainable tourism is therefore not only economically significant but also has long-term value in maintaining ecological balance and protecting national cultural identity.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have defined sustainable tourism as follows: “sustainable tourism is tourism that must take into account the full range of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of tourists, the tourism industry, the environment and indigenous communities” (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). This comprehensive definition emphasizes the interconnectedness among stakeholders and requires a balance between development and conservation. Accordingly, sustainable tourism development must not only meet the needs of the current generation but also ensure that it does not harm future generations’ ability to benefit from tourism.

Tourism activities should therefore not only focus on short-term economic benefits but also be planned and managed responsibly, taking into account the long-term impacts on the environment, society, and related economic sectors. A sustainable tourism industry not only contributes to the preservation of ecosystems and cultural heritage but also creates a foundation for the stable, long-term development of the locality and the country. This requires that planning and the use of resources be based on scientific

principles, ensuring harmonious interests among parties without degrading the natural environment or destroying indigenous cultural values.

In Vietnam, the concept of sustainable tourism was codified in the Law on Tourism in 2017. According to Clause 17 of this Law, “sustainable tourism development is tourism development that simultaneously meets socio-economic and environmental requirements, ensures the harmony of interests of entities participating in tourism activities, and does not harm the ability to meet future tourism needs” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic Vietnam, 2017). This definition emphasizes the responsible exploitation and management of resources, ensuring that economic development goes hand in hand with environmental protection and the preservation of national cultural identity. Thus, sustainable tourism is not only the task of the State or enterprises but also requires the active participation of local communities and tourists in protecting resources and preserving the long-term value of the destination.

2.2 Characteristics of sustainable tourism development

First, ensuring a balance among economy, society and the environment. Sustainable tourism development is not only about economic growth but also must protect the natural environment, maintain cultural identity and improve the quality of life of local communities. A truly sustainable tourism industry can contribute positively to GDP and create jobs without damaging the ecosystem or degrading traditional cultural values. Therefore, harmony among the three pillars of economy, society and environment is a key factor in the long-term tourism development strategy.

Second, the rational exploitation and conservation of resources. The use of tourism resources should be carried out in a scientific and planned manner to avoid overexploitation, environmental degradation, and resource depletion. Measures such as limiting the number of visitors, applying environmentally friendly technology, developing ecotourism, and raising awareness of resource protection among communities and tourists are necessary. In fact, many nature reserves around the world have implemented policies to control visitors, use e-tickets, and encourage green tourism to minimize negative impacts on the environment.

Third, ensure long-term sustainability. Unlike short-term tourism development models that maximize resource use, sustainable tourism aims for long-term benefits, ensuring the preservation of development potential for many generations. This is reflected in the planning of environmentally friendly tourism infrastructure, the use of renewable energy, effective waste management, and investment in educational programs to raise awareness of sustainable development among both local communities and tourists.

Fourth, cohesion and respect for local culture. Sustainable tourism not only avoids distorting local culture but also plays an important role in preserving and promoting traditional cultural values. If managed properly, tourism can become an effective means of honoring cultural heritage, promoting national pride, and bringing economic benefits to the community. Conversely, if development is uncontrolled, cultural values can be commercialized and transformed in a negative way.

Fifth, effective management with the participation of many stakeholders. Sustainable tourism development requires an effective management mechanism, with close coordination among state management agencies, enterprises, local communities, and tourists. Policy development, implementation supervision, and a clear division of responsibilities among parties are necessary conditions to ensure that tourism development takes place in accordance with the sustainable orientation, protect common interests, and minimize negative impacts.

2.3 The role of sustainable tourism development

First, contributing to economic development and improving the quality of life in local communities. As tourism develops in a sustainable direction, there is not only the opportunity to participate in this industry but also to benefit from job creation, infrastructure improvements, and a significant contribution to the country's GDP, all of which improve livelihoods. More importantly, sustainable tourism ensures that local people have the right to participate in the decision-making process related to tourism development, thereby ensuring fairness in the distribution of benefits.

Second, protect the environment and natural resources. If left unchecked, tourism can pollute the environment, destroy landscapes, and degrade biodiversity. Sustainable tourism limits the negative impacts of exploiting natural resources, including reducing the use of single-use plastics, controlling the number of visitors in environmentally sensitive destinations, and using renewable energy in accommodation facilities.

Third, preserving and promoting cultural values. Sustainable tourism helps protect many cultural heritages of historical value, preserves national identity, and promotes cultural exchange between communities. It also brings economic benefits and plays an important role in educating and raising awareness among tourists and locals about respecting indigenous culture.

3 METHODOLOGY

The article mainly draws on current legal documents (laws, decrees, and guiding circulars), academic documents from domestic and international research, in-depth

articles, and reports and statistical data from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and international organizations such as UNWTO and UNESCO.

The article mainly uses the analytical and synthetic method to systematize legal regulations and policies related to sustainable tourism development.

Additionally, the article uses the legal comparison method to compare the provisions of the Law on Tourism 2017 with relevant legal documents to determine the level of synchronization and applicability in practice.

Furthermore, the article also uses practical research methods and comparative jurisprudence to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of Vietnam's sustainable tourism policy.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Legal basis for sustainable tourism development in Vietnam

The legal bases for sustainable tourism development in Vietnam are reflected not only in the Tourism Law but also in many other relevant legal documents, including specialized laws, decrees, strategies, plans, and action programs. These legal regulations provide a fundamental orientation for tourism activities to develop in a balanced and harmonious way, balancing economic interests with environmental protection and the preservation of cultural identity.

- Constitution of 2013

As the original law, the 2013 Constitution lays the foundation for the entire Vietnamese legal system. In the field of tourism, the Constitution does not directly stipulate but has established basic principles closely related to sustainable tourism development. This legal foundation affirms the role of the environment in socio-economic development in general, including tourism. For the tourism industry, which directly uses these natural resources, the above regulation requires that tourism development go hand in hand with the responsibility to protect and use these resources effectively and sustainably over the long term.

- Law on Tourism 2017

As a specialized legal document that comprehensively regulates tourism activities, the Law on Tourism of 2017 provides a clear orientation for sustainable tourism development. Article 4 of the Law defines one of the basic principles of tourism activities as: "Sustainable tourism development, according to strategies, planning, plans, with focus and focus." This is a clear orientation, ensuring the sustainable, long-term, stable, and responsible development of the tourism industry. The Law also provides many specific

regulations to implement this principle. The Law on Tourism of 2017 has become an important foundation for implementing a sustainable tourism development strategy.

- Law on Environmental Protection 2020

Tourism can have a positive impact but also pose a significant risk to the environment if not effectively controlled. The Law on Environmental Protection of 2020 has added many specific regulations to regulate economic and tourism activities in a sustainable direction.

- Law on Cultural Heritage 2024

One of the pillars of sustainable tourism is development that supports the conservation of cultural heritage. The Law on Cultural Heritage clearly stipulates that “respecting, protecting and promoting the value of cultural heritage” (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2024) is the obligation and responsibility of the State and the whole society. This law serves as a legal barrier to the commercialization of heritage and ensures that cultural tourism products are built on the basis of respecting and preserving the original value of heritage.

- Normative documents under law and international conventions

In addition to the significant statutes outlined above, the system of legal documents further contributes to establishing a comprehensive legal framework for the development of sustainable tourism. For instance, Decree No. 168/2017/ND-CP, dated December 31, 2017, specifies several provisions of the Law on Tourism; Circular No. 06/2017/TT-BVHTTDL, dated December 15, 2017, elaborates on certain articles of the Law on Tourism.

Additionally, Vietnam is a member of many international conventions, including the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity; the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted in 1972, and others. These international commitments not only enhance Vietnam's position in the international arena but also create a driving force for the internalization of sustainable tourism development standards into the national legal system.

4.2 Situation of the sustainable tourism development framework in Vietnam

4.2.1 Principles of sustainable tourism development

First, exploit and use resources rationally. The 13th Party Congress document states: “Associate cultural development with tourism development, make tourism a key economic sector, and at the same time protect and preserve cultural resources for future generations” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Clause 2, Article 20 of the Law on Tourism 2017 stipulates: “rational and effective exploitation and use of tourism resources

and conservation of historical-cultural relics and natural heritages towards the goal of sustainable development associated with environmental protection and response to climate change”. Decision No. 509/QĐ-TTg, dated June 13, 2024, of the Prime Minister approving the “Tourism system planning for the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2045” emphasizes the viewpoint of “developing sustainable and creative tourism, on the basis of green growth to protect the environment, respond flexibly and effectively to risks, climate change” (Prime Minister, 2024). This underscores the importance of planning tourism development in a methodical, long-term way, ensuring a balance between economic development and environmental protection. Tourism planning must comply with the principles of protecting natural resources, preserving cultural heritage, and safeguarding the interests of local communities. Planning requires the participation of many stakeholders, from state management agencies to enterprises and individuals. In addition to long-term planning, environmental impact assessments before implementing tourism projects play an important role in the rational use of tourism resources. According to Article 29 of the Law on Environmental Protection 2020, tourism projects, especially those that may affect natural ecosystems, must conduct environmental impact assessments. This is an important legal basis for guiding tourism activities in a sustainable direction.

Second, minimize excessive consumption of natural resources. Implement resource-saving measures, use renewable energy, and manage waste effectively to reduce adverse impacts on the environment. This helps ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry while protecting natural resources for future generations. Resource-saving measures include installing water-saving systems in hotels and resorts and optimizing energy use in accommodations and tourism facilities. According to the Prime Minister’s Decision No. 147/QĐ-TTg: Approving the Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030, tourism enterprises are encouraged to apply “green technology” to save energy and reduce environmental pollution. The application of modern, environmentally friendly technologies, such as solar energy systems, water-saving devices, and efficient waste treatment, will contribute to the sustainable development of the tourism industry. Additionally, the use of public transportation and vehicles powered by renewable energy in tourism is also an important solution to help minimize negative impacts on the environment and natural resources.

Third, to protect and maintain biodiversity, society, and cultural and humanistic values. Tourism activities must be in accordance with local natural, social, and cultural characteristics, promoting local identity. Governments and enterprises need to coordinate with local communities to maintain traditional customs and practices and protect natural ecosystems. Vietnamese law has set out important regulations to maintain and protect these values in tourism activities. In particular, the Law on Cultural Heritage 2024 clearly

stipulates the rights, obligations, and responsibilities of individuals and organizations for cultural heritage, as well as the management, exploitation, use, and promotion of cultural heritage values, on the basis of ensuring that the original elements constituting relics are not affected and the integrity of the inherent values of cultural heritage is maintained (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2024). The Law on Environmental Protection 2020 clearly outlines the task of environmental protection in tourism activities. Eco-tourism areas must be planned to protect natural ecosystems and maintain biodiversity. This requires tourism enterprises to implement measures to minimize negative environmental impacts, such as controlling infrastructure construction, using clean energy, and protecting endemic flora and fauna. The 2017 Tourism Law emphasizes the importance of preserving local cultural identity in tourism development. The law clearly stipulates that tourism activities must respect the customs and practices of the local community and, at the same time, promote the preservation and promotion of intangible cultural values such as festivals, traditional arts, and indigenous cuisine.

Fourth, integrating tourism development and socio-economic development master planning. Sustainable tourism development must be placed within the country's overall socio-economic development strategy to ensure harmony among economic growth, environmental protection, and the preservation of cultural identity. The planning must ensure harmony between tourism development and other economic sectors, avoiding conflicts of interest among stakeholders. The 2017 Law on Tourism includes specific regulations on tourism planning and sustainable tourism development. The regulations emphasize that tourism cannot develop in isolation but must be integrated into the country's general policies and strategies, and that tourism must be integrated into regional and local planning.

Fifth, tourism development must be linked to improving and promoting local economic development. Sustainable tourism must deliver practical benefits to local communities through job creation, service development, and income enhancement for citizens. This improves the lives of the community and creates an incentive for them to participate in the conservation and development of sustainable tourism. The 2017 Law on Tourism clearly stipulates that residential communities are provided with conditions to invest in tourism development, restore and promote cultural traditions, folk arts, traditional handicrafts, and produce local goods to serve tourists. This is an important legal basis for local authorities to promulgate policies to develop tourism. With its interdisciplinary characteristics, sustainable tourism development not only brings economic benefits to the industry but also entails many related industries and fields, promoting the economic development of the whole region.

Sixth, pay attention to human resources training. The 2017 Law on Tourism includes specific provisions to promote training and skill development for workers in the industry. The State shall adopt policies to support and encourage human resources training for the tourism industry, with special attention to high-skilled workers to meet the requirements of international integration. Additionally, tourism training institutions are also supported to improve the quality of teaching and cooperate with enterprises to ensure training is practical. Statutory agencies and organizations are responsible for participating in the process of training and fostering human resources, helping employees improve their professional qualifications, communication skills, and knowledge of the culture and tourism environment. Paying attention to human resources training not only helps improve service quality but also creates a competitive advantage for Vietnam's tourism in the region and in the world.

Seventh, implement tourism promotion responsibly. The Law on Tourism 2017 introduced specific regulations to promote tourism and develop tourism promotion activities in a professional and effective manner. Tourism promotion must be responsible and properly teach the cultural and natural values of the locality, contributing to promoting the image of the country and people of Vietnam. This Law also clearly stipulates that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall assume the primary responsibility for, and coordinate with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and relevant state agencies, in propagating and promoting the image, country, and people of Vietnam, and in advising on visa policies for tourism development. Thereby ensuring sustainable tourism promotion and development, building a national tourism brand, and creating attraction for Vietnamese tourism on the world tourism map. At the same time, tourism promotion strategies need to aim at sustainable communication strategies, encourage responsible tourists, and avoid forms of promotion that increase pressure on the tourism environment.

Eighth, strengthen the role of scientific research in tourism development. Scientific research plays an important role in evaluating and forecasting development trends and proposing solutions to optimize tourism activities. Applying research to practice helps improve management efficiency, protect resources, and enhance the quality of tourism services. The 2017 Law on Tourism also clearly stipulates that tourism development policy is to research and orient the development of tourism products. According to Decision No. 147/QĐ-TTg in 2020 on Vietnam's tourism development strategy to 2030, scientific research plays an important role in sustainable tourism development. Accordingly, it is necessary to prioritize resources for planning, human resource training, market research, promotion and development of tourism products; community tourism development; and the protection of natural resources and the tourism

environment. Simultaneously, it is necessary to regularly investigate and research the market and tourists' new needs and tastes.

4.2.2 Legal drawbacks on sustainable tourism development in Vietnam

Firstly, there is still a legal gap in sustainable tourism development.

One of the most significant shortcomings today is the lack of a clear legal framework for evaluating “sustainable tourism.” Although the 2017 Tourism Law defined the principles of sustainable tourism development, it has not yet provided a specific set of standards to determine what constitutes a sustainable tourism model in terms of the environment, economy, society, and culture. This absence makes it difficult for state management agencies to inspect, supervise, accredit, or rank tourist establishments and destinations according to sustainable criteria. At the same time, enterprises also lack a clear basis to adjust their operational behavior, so the concept of “sustainable tourism” remains only at the level of propaganda or voluntary encouragement, lacking specific legal binding.

Additionally, the mechanism for sharing benefits with the local community in tourism activities remains unclear. Although many legal documents affirm the community's role in tourism development, there are no clear, specific regulations on the ratio or method for sharing economic benefits between tourism enterprises and local people, especially in community tourism or ecotourism models. As a result, communities are often marginalized in the tourism value chain, or they benefit only at a very low level, while also suffering from negative impacts such as environmental pollution and the disruption of traditional culture.

In particular, there are no specialized legal regulations to set load-bearing thresholds and protect resources in sensitive tourist destinations such as nature reserves, national forests, and world heritage sites. While these destinations attract large numbers of tourists, their ecosystems are highly vulnerable. However, the current legal system mainly regulates environmental and resource factors separately, lacking integration with tourism law to create a coordinated framework. For example, there are no specific regulations on the maximum number of visitors allowed per day in specific areas to limit the risk of overcrowding, environmental pollution, biodiversity decline, and erosion of heritage values. In Peru, the city of Cusco, the gateway to Machu Picchu, has taken strict conservation measures to protect the cultural heritage of the Incas. Tourists are required to follow a certain route and must book tickets in advance to limit the number of visitors per day.

Second, overlap and inconsistency in sustainable tourism management policies

Along with the lack of specific guidelines for practical application, the overlap between ministries and sectors in tourism resource management has made it difficult for many localities to implement sustainable tourism models. This has led to some localities developing tourism spontaneously, without a clear direction, causing negative impacts on the environment and tourism resources. Furthermore, sustainable tourism management involves many different ministries and sectors, which has led to overlap and a lack of consistency in the coordination mechanism, making the management of tourism resources difficult and leading to duplication or omissions in policy implementation. For example, some nature reserves are managed by the tourism industry and supervised by the environmental sector, leading to conflicts over the exploitation and protection of resources. Another example is coastal ecotourism projects or areas with national monuments. When enterprises want to invest in building accommodation establishments in the buffer zone of the heritage, they must simultaneously seek opinions from the Department of Tourism, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, the Department of Culture and Sports, even the provincial-level People's Committee and central agencies such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism or the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. However, due to the lack of uniform regulations on coordination, response deadlines, or the presiding agency, licensing is often prolonged or delayed due to inconsistent opinions between the parties.

Additionally, policies to encourage sustainable tourism development have not been applied consistently across the country. Some localities have effectively implemented eco-tourism and community tourism models, but many places are still developing in the direction of mass tourism, with limited focus on environmental protection and indigenous culture. The lack of detailed guidance makes it difficult for localities to implement resource protection policies, leading to uncontrolled tourism exploitation.

Third, overexploitation of tourism resources, causing environmental degradation.

Many tourist destinations in Vietnam are facing the over-exploitation of resources, which has a negative impact on the ecosystem. Some beach resorts, such as Ha Long, Da Nang, and Nha Trang, are under great pressure from waste pollution and the decline of corals and marine resources due to uncontrolled tourism activities. Furthermore, in eco-tourism areas, the encroachment of natural forests to build accommodation facilities and amusement parks is threatening the sustainability of these ecosystems. For example, many forests in Cat Ba and Phong Nha - Ke Bang are shrinking due to tourism development activities.

The unsustainable exploitation of resources not only affects the natural landscape but also has serious consequences, including soil erosion, deteriorating water quality, and biodiversity loss. In particular, unregulated tourism activities in coastal areas increase the

amount of plastic, grease, and chemical waste dumped into the ocean, directly affecting the marine ecosystem. Coral systems, home to many species of marine life, are being bleached and are significantly declining due to uncontrolled diving and the overexploitation of marine resources for tourism.

Additionally, eco-tourism areas in the forest are under pressure from the construction of too many accommodation facilities, the loss of primeval forest areas, and impacts on the habitats of animals and plants. The expansion of tourist routes and the construction of artificial structures without proper calculation can lead to ecological imbalance, increase the risk of landslides, and change the natural flow of streams and waterfalls in the area.

Fourth, the negative impact of mass tourism on indigenous culture

Mass tourism, with a large number of visitors, is changing the cultural identity of many traditional tourist destinations. Many famous tourist destinations, such as Sapa, Ha Long, Trang An, Hue, and Phu Quoc, are under pressure from overuse, leading to environmental pollution, degradation of natural resources, and deterioration of infrastructure. Cultural commercialization occurs when cultural heritage is turned into pure attractions to serve tourists rather than being properly preserved. Traditional festivals, religious ceremonies, and handicrafts are gradually transformed to suit commercial tastes, losing the original value of local culture. In some localities, handicraft villages gradually lose their uniqueness and inherent cultural value. They no longer produce in traditional ways, changing their lifestyles, activities, and behaviors to serve tourists. Therefore, tourism development needs to go hand in hand with the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values to ensure harmony between economic growth and the preservation of cultural identity.

Fifth, there is a lack of close supervision in the enforcement of the law on sustainable tourism.

In fact, many spontaneous tourist attractions still operate without complying with environmental protection and resource management regulations, even though there are legal regulations on inspection, supervision, and the handling of violations, which are still strictly enforced. This raises an urgent need for a more effective monitoring mechanism in tourism management.

The awareness of environmental protection among some enterprises and tourists is low: Some tourism enterprises and tourists still lack a sense of environmental protection. Plastic waste, water pollution, noise, and the overexploitation of resources remain serious problems in many tourist areas. Although propaganda campaigns on responsible tourism have been carried out, tourists' awareness remains limited, especially in crowded tourist destinations.

Planning and management still have many inadequacies: Some localities are developing tourism toward excessive commercialization, losing their inherent cultural identity and natural landscape. The lack of sustainable tourism planning is evident in the construction of too many hotels and resorts that are not suitable for the ecological space. This not only affects the landscape but also creates great pressure on the infrastructure system and environmental resources.

Not making full use of ecotourism's potential: Although Vietnam has many advantages in natural landscapes, the development of ecotourism remains ineffective. Many areas have great potential but have not been properly invested in, or management among stakeholders is not coordinated, leading to unsustainable development. Ecotourism models in some localities remain spontaneous, without strict guidance and control, reducing the effectiveness of sustainable tourism development.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Sustainable tourism is not only an inevitable trend but also a strategic goal in Vietnam's socio-economic development orientation. To effectively implement the principles of sustainable tourism established in the 2017 Law on Tourism, it is necessary to implement solutions across the policy-to-practice spectrum. One key solution is to improve the system of relevant policies and laws.

Firstly, improve the system of policies and laws on sustainable tourism.

First, it is necessary to review, amend, and supplement legal regulations related to the planning, exploitation, and management of tourism resources to align them more closely with the requirements of environmental protection and cultural preservation. Establishing a clear and consistent legal framework will facilitate the effective implementation of the sustainable development goals.

At the same time, it is necessary to establish an inter-sectoral coordination mechanism among ministries, branches, localities, and entities involved in tourism activities to avoid overlapping functions and ensure coordination in management and administration. It is also necessary to issue specific guidance documents outlining criteria for assessing the level of sustainable development in destinations, tourism enterprises, and residential communities to enhance transparency and efficiency in implementation.

Additionally, it is necessary to amend and supplement the mechanism for clear decentralization and decentralization between the central and local governments in licensing, appraisal, and supervision of tourism activities, especially in areas with sensitive environmental and heritage elements. To promulgate legal documents of an interdisciplinary nature, such as the Joint Circular between the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, the Ministry of Construction,

and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, to specify the coordination mechanism, the process for settling dossiers, and to assign the presiding entity and the time limit for handling.

The above-mentioned solutions not only contribute to perfecting the legal framework and improving the state's capacity to manage tourism but also lay a foundation for promoting the harmonious development of tourism that balances economic growth, environmental protection, and the preservation of traditional cultural values.

Secondly, strengthen management of natural resource exploitation and environmental protection in tourism activities.

The exploitation of tourism resources needs to be strictly controlled to limit negative impacts on the ecosystem and the environment, thereby ensuring sustainable tourism development. First, local authorities need to develop and implement a master plan for tourism development that integrates natural resource conservation, minimizing concrete development in ecotourism areas to preserve the landscape and natural environment.

The application of green technology and environmentally friendly solutions should be promoted, including the use of renewable energy, reducing plastic waste, and building accommodation facilities to ecological standards. At the same time, programs to restore damaged ecosystems, such as reforestation and coral reef restoration, should be implemented, along with efforts to improve water quality at tourist destinations under high exploitation pressure.

Furthermore, it is necessary to strengthen sanctions for environmental violations and the illegal exploitation of natural resources to improve deterrence and awareness of compliance with the law. These solutions not only protect the tourism environment but also help maintain the long-term attractiveness of destinations, promoting the tourism industry's development in a sustainable and responsible direction.

Thirdly, preserving and promoting indigenous cultural values in tourism development.

The preservation and promotion of indigenous cultural values are key to sustainable tourism development and also create a unique attraction for the destination. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to promote the development of community tourism models in which local people play a leading role in preserving, introducing, and spreading traditional cultural identities. Experiential tourism, such as staying at homestays, participating in traditional festivals, or learning handicrafts, not only creates opportunities for deep interaction between tourists and the community but also contributes to maintaining lively cultural spaces at tourist attractions.

Additionally, governments at all levels need to establish appropriate management mechanisms to effectively control the excessive commercialization of cultural factors and

to avoid falsifying or impoverishing heritage values for short-term profit goals. Integrating educational and communication programs on cultural preservation into tourism activities has practical significance, contributing to raising awareness and fostering respect for culture among tourists as well as the community.

In particular, it is necessary to create conditions for artisans, ethnic minority communities, and local people to directly participate in the tourism value chain through activities such as restoring traditional crafts, performing folk arts, and introducing customs and traditions. This approach not only protects cultural identity but also creates opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development for the local community.

Fourth, strengthen supervision and enforcement of the law on sustainable tourism.

Monitoring and law enforcement play a key role in ensuring that the principles of sustainable tourism development are implemented effectively and sustainably. To achieve this, it is necessary to establish a strict monitoring mechanism for all tourism activities, including periodic inspection teams to monitor compliance with regulations on environmental protection, heritage conservation, and resource management. It is also important to empower local communities to participate in the monitoring process, thereby increasing transparency and accountability among stakeholders. The government needs to encourage the participation of people and non-governmental organizations to detect and prevent violations in a timely manner.

Additionally, the application of digital technology in management, such as building an online monitoring system for resource consumption, environmental quality, and tourism impacts on the ecosystem, will help the authorities make decisions quickly and accurately. These solutions not only improve the effectiveness of the law but also contribute to building a friendly tourism industry that is responsible for the environment and the community.

Fifth, raising awareness and responsibility of enterprises and tourists

The awareness and responsibility of enterprises and tourists are indispensable to promoting sustainable tourism, contributing to environmental protection, preserving cultural heritage, and developing the local economy. First, it is necessary to promote awareness and education through communication campaigns on responsible tourism, including limiting plastic waste, protecting the landscape, and respecting indigenous culture. Forms of communication can include print materials, online content, or on-site engagement.

On the business side, it is necessary to enhance social responsibility through a commitment to implementing sustainable development policies, including reducing emissions, using renewable energy, treating waste rationally, and supporting local communities. At the same time, the authorities need to develop incentive mechanisms,

such as green tourism certification, financial support, or tax incentives for enterprises that successfully adopt the environmentally friendly tourism model.

Additionally, it is necessary to promote the community tourism model, creating conditions for local people to participate deeply in the tourism value chain, from accommodation and cuisine to cultural experiences. The combination of tourists' awareness, enterprises' responsibility, and supportive policies from the State will be a solid foundation for the sustainable development of the tourism industry, balancing economic benefits and preserving natural and cultural resources.

6 CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism development is not only an inevitable trend but also an urgent requirement to ensure harmony among economic growth, environmental protection, and the preservation of national cultural identity. Given Vietnam's diverse and rich tourism potential, the tourism industry faces many opportunities but also faces many challenges, including a lack of coordination in the policy system, the overexploitation of resources, and the negative consequences of mass tourism. Overcoming these barriers requires a comprehensive and coordinated development strategy, with a focus on improving the legal system, strengthening oversight, raising awareness and responsibility among enterprises and tourists, and promoting sustainable tourism models that are aligned with community interests and environmental protection. If these solutions are implemented effectively, Vietnam's tourism will not only develop in the direction of professionalism and high quality but also contribute positively to the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage and to sustainable socio-economic development in the long term.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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