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Developing marine tourism to meet the green growth requirements of Hai Phong city

Nguyen Van Dung
Hai Phong College of Tourism, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT:
Hai Phong City is a coastal city with great potential, endowed by nature with all the general conditions and unique characteristics favorable for the development of marine tourism. This activity not only contributes positively to economic growth, creates jobs and promotes many related industries, but also contributes to ensuring security - national defense and protecting the marine environment. However, the exploitation of marine tourism resources in recent times has not been effective; the exploitation level is still backward, marine tourism products are poor, unsystematic, fragmented and dispersed, not commensurate with the inherent potential and advantages. Some indicators of marine tourism development in Hai Phong are still limited. The article focuses on analyzing issues related to marine tourism resources, marine tourism products and facilities serving the development of marine tourism economy, thereby proposing solutions towards the goal of green growth for Hai Phong City.

Keywords: Sea tourism; Hai Phong; Green growth; Community participation.

I. INTRODUCTION

With its strategic location at the gateway to the Northeast of Vietnam, Hai Phong is considered an important economic, industrial and commercial center, and plays a key role in connecting the Red River Delta with the international market (Nguyen, 2020). The city is not only famous for its modern seaport activities but also possesses favorable natural conditions for the strong development of the marine tourism industry (Tran & Le, 2019).

Hai Phong's marine tourism resources include many famous landmarks, including Cat Ba archipelago, which has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Biosphere Reserve, Do Son beach with attractive natural landscapes and historical values, and a unique cultural heritage system such as Du Hang Pagoda, Nghe Temple or Hai Phong Opera House (Vu, 2021). The combination of landscape, ecosystem and traditional culture has helped the city become one of the top destinations for domestic and foreign tourists.

However, the marine tourism industry in Hai Phong is still under pressure from rapid urbanization, environmental pollution and limitations in planning and management. Pollution in coastal and island areas is negatively affecting the quality of natural resources (Pham et al., 2022). At the same time, the failure to fully apply sustainable development principles in tourism management and exploitation has reduced the effectiveness of promoting the city's inherent advantages (Hoang, 2020).

Based on this situation, the study aims to analyze the environmental, economic and social factors affecting the sustainable development of marine tourism in Hai Phong. On that basis, the article proposes directional solutions to reasonably exploit potential, conserve resources, maintain cultural identity and improve community life, aiming at the goal of long-term and stable development for the local marine tourism industry.

II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF MARINE TOURISM

a. Concept of sustainable development of marine tourism

Sustainable development of marine tourism is understood as the process of exploiting and rationally using marine resources including coastal landscapes, marine ecosystems, coral reefs, mangroves and coastal human resources to meet current tourism needs without reducing the ability

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to meet the needs of future generations. According to the classic definition of the Brundtland Commission (1987), sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). In the tourism industry, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes that sustainable development requires a harmonious balance between three pillars: economic, social and environmental (UNWTO, 2005).

In the context of Hai Phong, sustainable development of marine tourism does not stop at exploiting landscapes and ecological resources in a reasonable manner, but is also associated with preserving the cultural identity of the fishing community, improving income and quality of life of coastal residents, while maintaining a clean marine environment to ensure the long-term attractiveness of the destination.

b. Concept of marine tourism development to meet green growth requirements

Developing marine tourism to meet the requirements of sustainable development is the process of exploiting and using marine resources rationally to meet current tourism needs, while ensuring the maintenance and improvement of the ability to supply resources for future generations. This process requires a harmonious balance between tourism economic growth, marine environmental protection and maintaining the cultural and social identity of coastal communities (UNWTO, 2005; WCED, 1987).

Different from the concept of sustainable development of marine tourism in general, this concept emphasizes the factor of "meeting requirements", meaning that development not only follows the principles of sustainability, but is also consistent with the socio -economic development strategy, urban planning orientation, and national defense and security goals of the locality. In the context of Hai Phong, this includes:

Exploiting the potential of marine tourism based on geographical advantages and natural resources without causing environmental degradation.

Linking tourism development with improving community life, creating sustainable jobs and preserving traditional cultural values.

Ensure tourism activities are consistent with the city's overall development plan, contributing to protecting sea and island sovereignty and promoting international cooperation.

Thus, developing marine tourism to meet the requirements of sustainable development is not only an orientation for tourism resource management, but also an overall development strategy, in which marine tourism plays the role of both an economic driving force and a tool for preserving and promoting long-term environmental and social values.

c. Principles of sustainable development of marine tourism

According to UNWTO (2005), sustainable development of marine tourism needs to follow the following principles:

Environmental protection: Limit pollution, control waste and negative impacts from tourism activities on marine ecosystems.

Cultural and social conservation: Preserving local cultural identity, respecting the rights of coastal communities.

Sustainable economic development: Ensuring economic benefits from tourism not only for businesses but also supporting local communities, improving the lives of coastal residents.

Proper management and planning: Ensure planned development, avoid over-exploitation of tourism leading to destruction of natural resources.

d. Sustainable development models of marine tourism

Some popular models that have been researched and applied worldwide in sustainable development of marine tourism include:

Carrying Capacity Model: This model emphasizes a destination's ability to accommodate tourists without causing negative impacts on the environment and society (Butler, 1980).

Sustainable Destination Management Model: Developed by UNWTO, this model focuses on overall planning, balancing the interests of stakeholders (tourists, businesses, governments and local communities).

Marine Ecotourism Model: Encourages responsible tourism, conservation of marine ecosystems through activities such as controlled diving, green tourism, coral reef protection... (Orams, 1995).

III. CURRENT STATUS OF MARINE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT TO MEET GREEN GROWTH REQUIREMENTS IN HAI PHONG CITY

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According to the orientation of the Master Plan for Tourism Development of Hai Phong City to 2025, with a vision to 2030, the city sets specific goals to effectively exploit the potential of marine tourism associated with the sustainable development strategy (Hai Phong City People's Committee, 2020). The goal by 2025 is to welcome about 10 million visitors, including 1.5 million international visitors, with total revenue reaching 12,400 billion VND, contributing about 2.80% of the city's GRDP. By 2030, the number of visitors is expected to increase to about 20 million, including 2.8 million international visitors, with tourism revenue reaching about 25,500 billion VND and contributing 4.19% of GRDP. Along with that, the marine tourism industry will create jobs for about 18,700 direct workers by 2025 and about 23,000 workers by 2030, while contributing to preserving cultural values and improving the spiritual life of coastal communities.Hai Phong possesses rich marine tourism potential with a sea area of about 4,000 km², 2.6 times the land area of the city and accounting for 5.4% of the area of Bac Bo Gulf. With a coastline of about 125 km, the city has 6 main river mouths flowing into the sea, creating a diverse coastal ecosystem. Notably, of the city's 15 districts, there are 8 administrative units adjacent to the sea and two important island districts, Cat Hai and Bach Long Vi.

Along with the growth in scale, the development of Hai Phong's marine tourism is required to be closely linked to environmental protection and sustainable exploitation of resources. The city aims to reduce plastic waste, emissions and negative impacts on the marine ecosystem; by 2025, 100% of coastal tourist areas, destinations, accommodation establishments and service establishments will stop using non-degradable plastic bags and disposable plastic products (Hai Phong City People's Committee, 2020). This is not only a commitment to the international community in the goal of green growth, but also a mandatory condition to ensure the long-term attractiveness of coastal destinations.

With its geographical advantages, increasingly complete tourism infrastructure and rich marine resources such as Do Son, Cat Ba and many unique cultural and historical values, Hai Phong has favorable conditions to strongly develop the marine tourism industry (Tran & Le, 2019). However, human resources serving the tourism industry are still limited. Currently, the city has 142 operating travel businesses, including 85 international businesses, 54 domestic businesses and 3 branches of travel companies, but the scale and operating capacity are not uniform.

Following the global development trend and the need for innovation, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has implemented the Sustainable Tourism Development Program, considering it a strategic direction in the tourism sector. In recent years, UNWTO has identified tourism development associated with green growth as an important component of the roadmap towards sustainable development. The organization emphasizes the role of tourism as an economic driver within the framework of a green economy. In 2011, UNWTO published Tourism in the Green Economy, affirming that tourism development towards green growth is not only necessary but also plays a key role in ensuring harmony between economic development, environmental protection and social welfare improvement.

Hai Phong is a strategic port city, a major industrial center and an important transport hub of the North, holding the position of an economic growth pole of the Northern key economic region. In recent years, the city's economy has achieved stable growth, with the orientation of industrialization and modernization being strongly implemented. Economic and social infrastructure, especially transport infrastructure, has been invested synchronously and modernly, thereby creating attraction for domestic and foreign investors, while promoting labor demand and developing related economic sectors, including marine tourism.

According to the report of Hai Phong Department of Tourism, in the first 8 months of the year, the city is estimated to welcome about 6.5 million visitors, of which Cat Ba archipelago welcomed about 2.8 million visitors and Do Son tourist area about 2.6 million visitors. Representative of the Department of Tourism, Mr. Vu Huy Thuong - Deputy Director of the Department - said that the authorities have synchronously deployed many solutions to effectively exploit the available potential, while investing and upgrading infrastructure to serve tourism. Specifically, the city has put into operation two new ferries connecting to Cat Ba island, bringing the total number of ferries to 10; reduced cable car fares by 50% to stimulate tourism; and expanded the road system to meet the increasing demand of tourists.

Currently, Hai Phong has 554 accommodation establishments with a total of 16,284 rooms, including 6 5-star hotels, 9 4-star hotels and 4 3-star hotels. The city also owns 4

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international standard golf courses, attracting tourists all year round. In Cat Ba alone, the number of accommodation rooms is about 15,000; Lan Ha Bay has 1,400 rooms; and Do Son has a similar scale.

However, according to Mr. Mai Xuan Thang - Chairman of Hai Phong Tourism Association - although the accommodation and transportation infrastructure has been improved unprecedentedly, the source of visitors is still seasonal and not stable all year round. Meanwhile, domestic tourists currently have higher spending levels than before, opening up great opportunities to develop new products and services. Therefore, in the future, management agencies and tourism businesses need to focus on developing four-season tourism products, extending the length of stay of tourists, and maximizing the value of supporting services such as cuisine, entertainment and accommodation, thereby improving the economic efficiency of Hai Phong's sea tourism industry.

Although the number of workers in the marine tourism industry increases every year, the proportion of workers who are properly trained in expertise, foreign languages, and customer service skills still does not meet the industry's standards (Pham et al., 2022). High-quality human resources are still mainly concentrated in large establishments, while small units, especially in coastal and rural areas, still lack human resources trained according to national and regional standards. To achieve the goal of sustainable marine tourism development, Hai Phong needs to implement focused human resource training and development policies, ensuring both quantity and quality, in line with the orientation of green growth and international integration.

In recent years, Hai Phong sea tourism has achieved many encouraging results, actively exploiting available advantages to attract tourists and contributing to the socio-economic development of the city. However, besides the achievements, Hai Phong sea tourism still has many limitations, hindering sustainable development and has not demonstrated its role as a key economic sector. These limitations are reflected in the following aspects:

Firstly, the effectiveness of tourism development is not commensurate with its potential.

Although the number of sea tourists tends to increase over the years, the average spending of tourists is still low, leading to revenue from sea tourism not being commensurate with the inherent potential. The length of stay of tourists in Hai Phong is also short, mainly day visitors or short-term visitors, not creating high economic value.

In particular, the proportion of international tourists in the total number of tourists is still small and tends to decrease. This reflects the limitation in the ability to attract and serve foreign tourists, showing that Hai Phong has not really become an attractive destination on the international tourism map.

Second, there has been no breakthrough development, lagging behind neighboring localities.

Despite its geographical advantages, diverse marine ecosystems and famous landscapes such as Cat Ba and Do Son, Hai Phong has yet to make a breakthrough to affirm that marine tourism is a key economic sector. Compared to neighboring localities such as Quang Ninh (with Ha Long) or Thanh Hoa (with Sam Son), Hai Phong's marine tourism is lagging behind due to the lack of a long-term development strategy and the lack of highly competitive tourism products.

Third, tourism promotion and advertising work is not effective.

Hai Phong’s tourism promotion and advertising activities are still small-scale, not regularly implemented, and do not apply high technology. The image of Hai Phong’s sea tourism has not been widely promoted to international markets, leading to many limitations in attracting foreign visitors.

Tourism promotion campaigns have not been properly invested in, and have not made good use of digital media platforms, social networks, and online promotion channels. Compared to localities with strong promotion strategies such as Da Nang, Nha Trang, or Phu Quoc, Hai Phong beach tourism has yet to create a distinct brand and identity.

Fourth, marine tourism infrastructure is still fragmented and lacking in uniformity.

Despite the great potential for developing sea tourism, the infrastructure serving tourism in Hai Phong has not really met the development needs. Investment projects are still scattered, unfocused and slow to implement. The transportation system connecting to sea tourism destinations has improved but is still not synchronous, not creating the most favorable conditions for tourists.

In addition, although the number of accommodation facilities in Hai Phong has increased, the quality of services is not consistent and does not meet the standards of high-end tourism. The accompanying entertainment services

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are still poor, and there are not many unique products to attract tourists to stay longer.

Fifth, the quality of tourism human resources is still limited.

One of the major barriers to Hai Phong sea tourism is the problem of human resources. The workforce in the tourism industry, especially in the service sector, tour guides, restaurants, and hotels, is still limited in professional skills and foreign language proficiency. This affects the quality of service, making it difficult for Hai Phong to meet the increasing demands of tourists, especially international tourists.

Training and fostering tourism human resources have not received due attention, and there are not many cooperation programs between schools and businesses to improve practical skills for workers in the industry.

Sixth, Regional linkages in tourism development have not been well promoted.

Hai Phong tourism has not yet had close links with neighboring localities such as Quang Ninh, Hai Duong, Nam Dinh to create a synchronous chain of sea tourism products. The lack of links causes tourists to often choose Hai Phong as a single destination instead of combining it with long-term itineraries, leading to short stays and low spending.

If compared with the tourism linkage model between Da Nang - Hoi An - Hue, it can be seen that Hai Phong has not taken advantage of its central location in the Northern coastal region to create highly connected tourism products, attracting domestic and foreign tourists.

Seventh, Sea tourism products are not diverse and lack distinction.

Sea tourism products in Hai Phong still mainly focus on swimming and relaxation, without many new and attractive activities such as sea sports tourism, scuba diving, luxury yachts or unique ecological experiences. The lack of diversity in tourism products makes Hai Phong unable to compete with other destinations such as Phu Quoc, Nha Trang or Ha Long.

Furthermore, the application of technology in tourism product development is still very limited. Smart tourism services, virtual reality applications, online ticket booking or digital tourism maps have not been widely deployed, making the tourist experience not really convenient and modern.

Eighth, Limitations in management and tourism business environment

Tourism management in Hai Phong still overlaps between many agencies, lacking effective coordination, leading to loose and unsystematic management. Violations in tourism business activities such as price gouging and food safety violations are still common, reducing the city's tourism image in the eyes of visitors.

Environmental protection in coastal tourist areas has not received due attention. Some coastal areas still have waste and seawater pollution due to unsustainable tourism exploitation. This affects the quality of visitors' experiences and in the long term can reduce the tourism value of Hai Phong.

IV. SOME SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE MARINE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN HAI PHONG CITY

To develop Hai Phong's sea tourism in line with the green growth orientation, it is necessary to synchronously deploy groups of solutions on management, investment, conservation and promotion, ensuring harmony between economic development, environmental protection and maintaining cultural and social identity.

(i). Raising public awareness and promoting the image of green tourism

Public education and propaganda work should be focused on to form a sense of civilized behavior, respect for cultural heritage, and protection of marine resources and environment. The city needs to promote multimedia communication, combining domestic and international political, economic, cultural, sports and tourism events to promote Hai Phong's marine tourism products and brands. The introduction of tourism products associated with local cultural values should be associated with the message of sustainable development and green growth.

(ii). Mobilizing and effectively using investment resources

Investment capital needs to be secured through local budgets, combined with support from the central budget and social mobilization. The state budget needs to prioritize the preservation and promotion of heritage values, the development of key tourism infrastructure, and the training of high-quality human resources. At the same time, private enterprises and international investors should be encouraged to participate in building facilities, upgrading technical infrastructure and services at sea and island tourist areas and destinations.

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(iii). Developing unique marine tourism products and diversifying business types.

It is necessary to encourage the development of marine sports and adventure tourism, tourism products with high economic value, and at the same time conduct market research to design products suitable for each key customer group. The development of sea and island tourism routes and eco-tourism needs to combine the rational exploitation of natural resources with the conservation of marine ecosystems, mangrove forests and coastal landscapes.

(iv). Ensuring safety, security and management of the tourism environment

Hai Phong needs to strengthen measures to ensure health security, prevent epidemics, prevent crimes and violations of national sovereignty. The Tourism Association needs to promote the role of coordination between businesses and management agencies in controlling service quality, preventing solicitation and price gouging, and maintaining a safe and friendly tourism environment. At the same time, the city must closely monitor mineral exploitation activities to avoid negative impacts on relics and landscapes.

(v). Completing technical infrastructure and zoning for marine management

The overall planning of the sea area needs to go hand in hand with functional zoning including: strictly protected areas, restricted exploitation areas and common use areas. This helps control exploitation activities and conserve marine life. It is necessary to invest in wastewater treatment systems, waste collection and clean water supply in coastal tourist areas. Develop synchronous infrastructure, including tourist seaports, traffic routes connecting Do Son - Cat Ba - Ha Long - Mong Cai and international connections with Bac Hai, Phong Thanh (China).

(vi). Planning and development of key tourist areas
Do Son tourist area needs to be developed into a comprehensive tourist area with three functional sub-areas:
Area I: Beach tourism, resorts, cuisine, conferences - seminars, commercial centers.
Zone II: Marine sports and entertainment such as jet skiing, windsurfing, parasailing, yachting, tourism events.
Zone III: Ecological and cultural tourism, including resort villas, mountain climbing, picnics, fishing, visiting historical and cultural relics, and spiritual activities.

In addition, it is necessary to speed up the progress of key projects such as Hon Dau Resort, Hoa Phuong Daso Island, Van Son Resort, Cat Ba Amatina and Nam Cuong 5-star hotel.

(vii). Regional connectivity and expansion of international cooperation

Hai Phong needs to promote cooperation with provinces and cities in the key economic regions of the North, the Red River Delta and the Northern midlands and mountains to form an inter-regional chain of sea-island-ecological tourism products. Expand international cooperation through sea tourism routes connecting with Thailand, China, and key international markets.

(viii). Promoting Hai Phong sea tourism to the world

Strengthening promotion on international media platforms, participating in tourism fairs, organizing famtrip and presstrip programs for travel agencies and the press to introduce cultural values, historical relics and traditional festivals. Developing diverse foreign cultural activities, while improving the quality of tourism vocational training according to ASEAN standards to meet integration needs.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Hai Phong sea tourism has outstanding advantages in terms of geographical location, natural resources and cultural and historical values, creating an important premise for development into a key economic sector. In recent years, the city has achieved many achievements in exploiting and promoting the strengths of sea tourism, contributing to promoting socio-economic growth and enhancing its position on the Vietnamese tourism map. However, the development practice still reveals some limitations, including uneven service quality, infrastructure and facilities that do not meet international requirements, undiversified tourism products, and challenges in protecting the marine environment and training human resources.

In the context of global green growth, the development of Hai Phong sea tourism needs to be associated with the principles of sustainable development, ensuring harmony between economic goals, environmental conservation and preservation of local cultural identity. This not only helps to enhance the competitiveness of the destination, but also ensures the ability to exploit long-term,

creating benefits for both current and future generations.

5.2. Recommendations

To develop Hai Phong's marine tourism to meet green growth requirements, the city must first complete its strategy and master plan with clear functional zoning, including strictly protected areas, restricted exploitation areas and reasonable exploitation areas. This plan must incorporate criteria on environmental protection, carbon emission reduction, biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation. This will create a legal basis and long-term orientation for sustainable management, investment and exploitation of marine tourism.

At the same time, it is necessary to focus on synchronous investment in tourism infrastructure and facilities. Upgrading the transportation system connecting coastal tourist areas and destinations with the city center and surrounding areas will help reduce travel time and enhance the tourist experience. At the same time, the city needs to invest in environmental protection projects such as wastewater treatment systems, waste collection and clean water supply systems that meet standards in coastal tourist areas, thereby minimizing negative impacts on the marine ecosystem.

Developing high-quality tourism human resources is a key factor to enhance competitiveness. Hai Phong needs to promote professional training, foreign languages and tourist service skills according to ASEAN and international standards, while enhancing coordination between training facilities, tourism businesses and management agencies. This connection will ensure human resources with both deep expertise and understanding of local culture and society.

Regarding tourism products, the city needs to diversify types and enhance uniqueness to attract tourists. Products such as marine ecotourism, adventure sports tourism, luxury cruises and coastal community cultural experience tourism should be developed in parallel with complementary services, applying digital technology to enhance experiences and extend length of stay. This will contribute to increasing the value of tourists' spending and promoting local economic development.

Promotion and regional cooperation also need to be strengthened. Hai Phong should take advantage of international media platforms, participate in tourism fairs and large-scale cultural and sports events to introduce the image of sea tourism. At the same time, establishing a sustainable cooperation mechanism with other provinces and cities in and outside the region will help form linked tourism product chains, increase attraction and expand the market.

Finally, the preservation and promotion of cultural and historical values should be considered an inseparable part of marine tourism development. Tourism exploitation activities must be associated with the preservation of cultural heritage, traditional festivals and typical customs of coastal communities. The city needs to encourage community participation in tourism activities, ensure fair distribution of benefits and raise awareness of resource protection. This will be the core factor for Hai Phong to develop marine tourism that is both economically sustainable and in harmony with the environment and society.

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