Improving State Management on Sustainable Tourism Accommodation Development in Vietnam: From a Business Perspective

Ha Giang Chu[1,*], Nam Vu[2]

[1] University of Exeter, United Kingdom
[2] National Economics University, Vietnam

Abstract

This study examines the role of state management in promoting sustainable tourism accommodation development in Vietnam, focusing on balancing economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. The objectives are to assess the current state of sustainable tourism accommodation, identify challenges and opportunities in implementing sustainable practices, evaluate the effectiveness of existing government policies, and propose strategic recommendations for enhancing state management. Using quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with stakeholders, the research reveals a growing commitment to sustainability among high-end accommodations but also highlights challenges such as high certification costs, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and limited stakeholder engagement. The findings underscore the critical role of government policies in fostering sustainable practices and recommend strengthening policy frameworks, providing financial incentives, enhancing stakeholder collaboration, and offering training programs to improve the skills and knowledge of tourism professionals. These steps are essential for Vietnam to achieve its sustainability goals and enhance the competitiveness of its tourism sector.

*Corresponding author. Email: hc933@exeter.ac.uk

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development, which gained prominence in the 1980s, was formally defined at the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) Conference. This foundation was further strengthened by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established in 2015. These goals provide a detailed framework with 17 objectives addressing global challenges, including those pertinent to sustainable tourism. Sustainability in the hospitality industry was emphasized at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, where it was defined as the practice of meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This concept has become increasingly relevant to hoteliers in the 21st century due to rising costs, demand sensitivity, and the imperative for economic, social, and environmental responsibility. As Hsiao (2014) noted, green initiatives not only enhance the image of hotels but also educate consumers about environmental protection, aligning with the market trend favoring sustainable and socially responsible business practices, as indicated by Sneirson et al. (2009).

Management strategies for sustainable tourism, as discussed by Santos et al. (2017) and Bocken et al. (2014), suggest that hotel managers should ethically and transparently improve their performances in economic, environmental,

and social aspects, focusing on maximizing social, cultural, and environmental benefits. Dewhurst and Thomas (2003) and Liu (2003) point out that successful examples of sustainable tourism often start at the micro or corporate level, with the voluntary participation of tourism businesses playing a crucial role. Additionally, the central role of the state in developing sustainable tourism, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam, has been emphasized by researchers such as Nguyen Thi Thanh Ngan (2016).

In Vietnam, there is a growing need for a unified set of standards for sustainable tourism, leading to the adoption of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards. These standards provide a comprehensive framework for sustainability in the hospitality sector, particularly emphasizing "Effective Sustainability Management." Aligning with the GSTC standards also connects with several SDGs, especially those focusing on responsible consumption and production, peace, justice, and partnerships.

The Vietnamese government's potential role in supporting tourism accommodations through policy development, legal frameworks, and encouraging adherence to GSTC standards is crucial. This theoretical framework underlines the importance of collaborative efforts between the hospitality industry, consumers, and the government in Vietnam to achieve sustainable tourism goals. It highlights the intersection of environmental stewardship, economic viability, and social responsibility in the realm of sustainable tourism accommodation development.

This study aims to explore and analyze the current state of sustainable tourism in Vietnam, focusing on the implementation of GSTC standards and the role of various stakeholders in promoting sustainability within the hospitality sector. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of effective strategies and policies that will enhance the sustainability of tourism in Vietnam, ultimately supporting the broader objectives of sustainable development.

2. Literature review

Sustainable tourism
Sustainable tourism, as defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), fully considers its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (UNWTO, 2013). Key principles include minimizing negative impacts, generating economic benefits for local communities, conserving natural and cultural heritage, promoting intercultural understanding, and ensuring that tourism development is informed by a comprehensive and participatory planning process (Bramwell & Lane, 2013). In Vietnam, these principles are crucial given the country's rich cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes.

The economic impact of sustainable tourism accommodation development in Vietnam is substantial, with tourism being a key contributor to the national GDP and an essential driver of inclusive economic growth. The *Strategy for Tourism Development to 2030* highlights this potential, setting ambitious targets of a 15–17% direct contribution to GDP and the creation of 8.5 million jobs, including 3 million direct employment opportunities, by 2030. These goals reflect the significant role of the tourism sector, particularly in rural areas where it supports diversified local economies and improved living standards (WTTC, 2018). However, challenges such as seasonality, income leakage, and inadequate investment in infrastructure and training persist (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). Seasonality disrupts consistent revenue streams for businesses, while income leakage limits the retention of benefits within local economies. Addressing these issues requires effective state management to bridge gaps in investment, particularly by encouraging the adoption of eco-friendly technologies and fostering capacity-building programs for the tourism workforce (Strategy for Tourism Development to 2030, 2020). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which dominate Vietnam's tourism sector, including family-run homestays and local tour operators, play a vital role in ensuring equitable economic benefits. Their ability to foster inclusive growth is critical, yet these businesses face structural challenges such as limited access to capital and resources (Ashley, Goodwin, & Roe, 2001). Recognizing these obstacles, the government has outlined targeted measures in its strategy, such as tax incentives, financial assistance, and training programs, to empower SMEs and enhance their resilience against economic shocks. These interventions, coupled with collaborative partnerships between public and private sectors, are crucial for aligning sustainable tourism accommodation development with Vietnam's broader economic objectives and ensuring the long-term competitiveness of its tourism industry.

The environmental impact of tourism in Vietnam, particularly within the accommodation sector, highlights critical challenges such as resource consumption, waste generation, pollution, and biodiversity loss, which threaten the sustainability of the industry and require robust state management interventions. Iconic destinations like Phu Quoc and Hạ Long Bay face escalating pressures due to unregulated activities and increasing visitor numbers, underscoring the need for a regulatory framework that promotes eco-friendly accommodations and responsible business practices. While sustainable tourism practices, such as energy-efficient infrastructure, waste management systems, and green certifications, are gradually being adopted (Gössling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009), their implementation is hindered by high certification costs, inadequate regulatory enforcement, and limited stakeholder engagement (Strategy for Tourism Development to 2030, 2020). Research by Buckley (2012) emphasizes the importance of integrating environmental management systems and renewable energy, but practical application in Vietnam remains inconsistent, reflecting gaps in state oversight. From a business perspective, addressing these challenges requires the government to strengthen policy frameworks, provide financial incentives, and enhance

collaboration between public and private sectors to scale sustainable practices. Becken and Hay (2007) stress the urgency of integrating climate change mitigation strategies into tourism planning, a necessity given Vietnam's vulnerability to rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Strategic state management, including capacity-building initiatives and the alignment of sustainability policies with industry needs, is critical for fostering environmentally sustainable accommodations, preserving natural resources, and enhancing the competitiveness of Vietnam's tourism sector.

Sustainable tourism in Vietnam also considers its social impact, including its effects on local communities and cultures. On the positive side, it contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage, increases community pride, and fosters cultural exchange, as seen in initiatives that promote traditional crafts, festivals, and local customs (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). The *Strategy for Tourism Development to 2030* emphasizes linking tourism development with cultural preservation, advocating for the integration of cultural heritage into tourism products to enhance national identity and local pride. However, negative effects such as cultural commodification, where traditions risk being overly commercialized, and the displacement of local populations due to infrastructure development, raise concerns about equitable outcomes (Smith, 2009). These challenges highlight the need for more inclusive and community-driven approaches. The strategy prioritizes developing community-based tourism (CBT) to empower local populations, particularly in rural and disadvantaged regions. It encourages policies to support local artisans and businesses while promoting cultural experiences that reflect authenticity and respect for local values. Community involvement in tourism planning and decision-making processes is essential to ensure that the benefits of tourism development are equitably distributed. Timothy (2007) underscores the importance of participatory planning, which the strategy reflects by emphasizing stakeholder collaboration and local engagement. To address potential inequalities, the government has also committed to providing resources, training programs, and financial support to enhance local capacities and ensure that tourism development aligns with the socioeconomic goals of Vietnam's communities. These measures aim to create a balance between leveraging cultural assets for tourism and safeguarding the social fabric of local communities.

Sustainable tourism accommodation

Sustainable tourism accommodation refers to lodging establishments that operate in a manner that minimizes negative environmental, social, and economic impacts while maximizing benefits for local communities and natural ecosystems. According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), sustainable accommodation practices include energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, and the use of sustainable materials (GSTC, 2016). In the context of Vietnam, where tourism is a key economic sector, the adoption of sustainable

accommodation practices is critical to preserving the country's natural and cultural heritage.

Sustainable tourism accommodation can provide significant economic benefits, including job creation, revenue generation, and increased competitiveness in the tourism market. A study by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2018) indicates that sustainable practices can lead to cost savings and improved profitability for accommodation providers. In Vietnam, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adopting sustainable practices can enhance their economic resilience and contribute to local economic development (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). However, challenges such as initial investment costs and the need for training and capacity building are prevalent (Ashley, Goodwin, & Roe, 2001).

The environmental impact of tourism accommodation includes energy consumption, water usage, waste generation, and impacts on biodiversity. Sustainable accommodation practices in Vietnam focus on reducing these impacts through measures such as energy-efficient lighting and appliances, water-saving fixtures, waste recycling programs, and the use of locally sourced, eco-friendly materials (Gössling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009). Buckley (2012) highlights the importance of environmental management systems and certifications in promoting sustainable practices. For instance, accommodations in Vietnam are increasingly adopting certifications like EarthCheck and Green Key to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.

The social impacts of sustainable tourism accommodation involve community engagement, cultural preservation, and social equity. Positive social impacts include the promotion of local culture and heritage, fair employment practices, and contributions to community development (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). In Vietnam, sustainable accommodation providers often collaborate with local communities to offer authentic cultural experiences and support local artisans and businesses (Smith, 2009). However, challenges such as cultural commodification and potential displacement of local populations need to be managed carefully (Timothy, 2007).

Effective policy and management strategies are essential for promoting sustainable tourism accommodation in Vietnam. This includes the development of national and local regulations, incentives for sustainable practices, and the establishment of partnerships between government agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Vietnam's tourism authorities have initiated various programs to encourage sustainable accommodation practices, such as providing grants and technical support for green building initiatives (Simpson, 2008). Additionally, multi-level governance and stakeholder collaboration are crucial for the effective implementation and enforcement of sustainable policies (Hall, 2011).

Certification and standards play a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism accommodation in Vietnam. Certifications like Green Key, EarthCheck, and the GSTC standards provide guidelines and benchmarks for sustainable practices (Font & Harris, 2004). The adoption of these

certifications can enhance the reputation of accommodation providers, attract environmentally conscious tourists, and provide a competitive advantage (Honey, 2008). However, challenges such as the proliferation of standards, the cost of certification, and the need for widespread adoption are also relevant (Black & Crabtree, 2007).

Despite progress, several challenges remain in promoting sustainable tourism accommodation in Vietnam. These include the need for greater awareness and education among accommodation providers, the integration of sustainability into mainstream tourism operations, and addressing the impacts of rapid tourism growth (Butler, 2018). Future research directions emphasize the importance of technological innovations, such as smart building technologies and renewable energy solutions, to enhance sustainability in accommodation (Gössling & Peeters, 2015). Additionally, fostering collaboration among stakeholders and developing comprehensive policy frameworks are critical for advancing sustainable accommodation practices in Vietnam.

The literature on sustainable tourism accommodation provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of this field. In Vietnam, integrating economic, environmental, and social considerations into accommodation practices is essential for achieving sustainable tourism development. Improving state management on sustainable tourism accommodation development from a business perspective involves addressing these challenges, promoting best practices through certifications and standards, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

GSTC

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is an international body established to develop and manage global standards for sustainable travel and tourism, known as the GSTC Criteria. These criteria are designed to provide a framework for sustainability practices across the tourism industry, including hotels, tour operators, and destinations. In Vietnam, the adoption of GSTC standards is increasingly seen as a way to enhance the sustainability of the tourism sector, which is a key economic driver.

The GSTC Criteria are divided into four main pillars: sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts. These criteria provide comprehensive guidelines for tourism businesses and destinations to operate sustainably, addressing critical issues such as resource efficiency, community engagement, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation (GSTC, 2016).

In terms of sustainable management, the GSTC emphasizes the need for tourism businesses to adopt policies and practices that ensure long-term sustainability. This includes the implementation of a sustainability management system, regular monitoring and reporting, and stakeholder engagement. In Vietnam, several tourism businesses have begun to integrate these practices, although the level of adoption varies widely. Hanh (2018) indicates that while larger hotels and resorts are more likely to implement comprehensive sustainability management systems, smaller establishments often lack the resources and knowledge to do so.

The socio-economic impacts of tourism are another critical focus of the GSTC Criteria. These criteria aim to maximize the benefits of tourism for local communities while minimizing negative impacts. In Vietnam, the tourism industry plays a significant role in job creation and poverty alleviation, particularly in rural areas. However, challenges such as income inequality and labor exploitation persist. Truong (2017) highlights the importance of community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives, which align with GSTC principles by empowering local communities and ensuring that tourism revenues contribute to local development.

Cultural impacts are also a major consideration under the GSTC Criteria. These standards promote the preservation of cultural heritage and respect for local traditions and customs. Vietnam, with its rich cultural history and diverse ethnic communities, faces both opportunities and challenges in this area. Nguyen and Cheung (2014) suggested that while tourism can help preserve cultural heritage, it can also lead to cultural commodification and loss of authenticity. The GSTC Criteria encourage tourism operators to engage with local communities and support cultural preservation initiatives, which can help mitigate these risks.

Environmental impacts are a crucial aspect of the GSTC Criteria, focusing on minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism operations. This includes energy and water efficiency, waste management, and biodiversity conservation. In Vietnam, the rapid growth of tourism has put pressure on natural resources and ecosystems. Thuy et al. (2016) demonstrate that the implementation of environmental management practices, such as those outlined in the GSTC Criteria, can significantly reduce the negative environmental impacts of tourism. Examples include the adoption of renewable energy sources, water-saving technologies, and waste recycling programs in hotels and resorts.

The GSTC certification process is an important tool for promoting sustainability in tourism. Certified businesses and destinations must demonstrate compliance with the GSTC Criteria through a rigorous assessment process. In Vietnam, the number of GSTC-certified entities is growing, although awareness and uptake remain limited compared to global trends. Pham (2019) indicates that GSTC certification can provide competitive advantages for tourism businesses, including enhanced reputation, access to new markets, and increased customer loyalty.

Despite the benefits, there are challenges to the widespread adoption of GSTC standards in Vietnam. These include the costs of certification, the need for capacity building, and the varying levels of commitment among tourism businesses. Le and Hens (2018) suggest that government support, including financial incentives and technical assistance, is crucial for overcoming these barriers and promoting the adoption of sustainable practices across the tourism sector.

In conclusion, the GSTC provides a valuable framework for promoting sustainable tourism in Vietnam. By adopting GSTC Criteria, tourism businesses, and destinations can enhance their sustainability performance, contributing to the

long-term viability of the tourism industry and the preservation of Vietnam's natural and cultural heritage. Continued research and collaboration among stakeholders are essential to support the widespread implementation of GSTC standards and to address the challenges faced by the tourism sector in Vietnam.

Figure 1. GSTC Industry Criteria for Hotels
Source: GSTC

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of sustainable tourism accommodation development in Vietnam, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative in-depth interviews to capture diverse perspectives.

Quantitative Methods

The quantitative component involved a structured survey administered to 100 participants representing various types of accommodation establishments, including 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotels, resorts, and homestays. Respondents held diverse roles, such as trainees, employees, managers, and directors, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on sustainability practices. The survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale to assess key aspects of sustainability, including compliance with environmental standards, adoption of sustainability management systems, and engagement with local communities. This method provided measurable insights into the current state of sustainability practices and their perceived effectiveness across Vietnam's hospitality sector.

Qualitative Methods

To complement the survey findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with five key stakeholders, including hotel directors, managers, and the founder of an eco-homestay. These interviews, lasting 30 to 45 minutes, were designed to explore the challenges and opportunities in implementing sustainable practices, as well as innovative strategies such as integrating traditional Vietnamese aquaculture into operations and applying farm-to-table concepts to enhance community engagement. The qualitative data was transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights, offering a richer contextual understanding of sustainability practices.

Rationale

The mixed-methods approach was selected to balance quantitative data's broad applicability with the depth and nuance provided by qualitative insights. This dual approach ensures a holistic understanding of sustainable practices in Vietnam's tourism accommodation sector, reflecting both general trends and localized challenges.

4. Development of Vietnam's Tourism Accommodation Establishments

Vietnam, a rapidly developing country with tourism as a key economic pillar, has increasingly recognized the importance of sustainable development, particularly in the field of tourism accommodation. The system of tourism accommodation establishments in Vietnam has grown significantly in both quantity and quality, diversifying in types and serving tens of millions of visitors each year at varying spending levels.

From 2015 to 2019, the number of tourism facilities increased from 19,000 to 30,000. The growth rate in the number of rooms also showed a substantial rise, from 370,000 rooms in 2015 to 650,000 rooms in 2019, reflecting a significant investment in facilities to meet the increasing demands of tourists. However, the average room occupancy rate slightly decreased from 55% to 52% during the same period, which could be attributed to increased competition and higher service quality expectations from customers. This development indicates continuous efforts by Vietnam's tourism industry to improve quality and diversify its offerings, contributing significantly to the country's economic growth.

The table below illustrates the growth in the number of tourism accommodation establishments and their rankings from 2011 to 2022. It shows a marked increase in the total number of establishments and a significant rise in the number of 4- and 5-star accommodations, reflecting the sector's emphasis on quality and luxury.
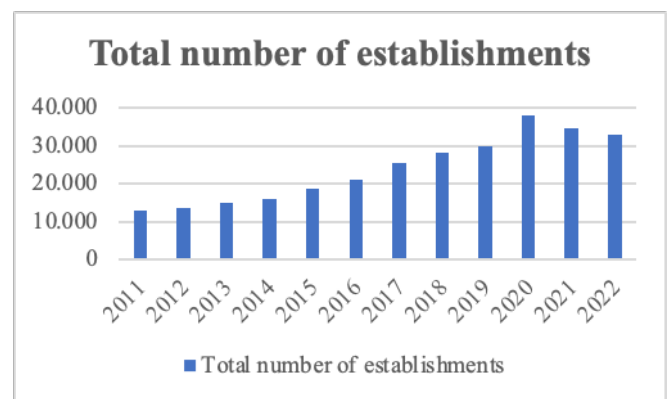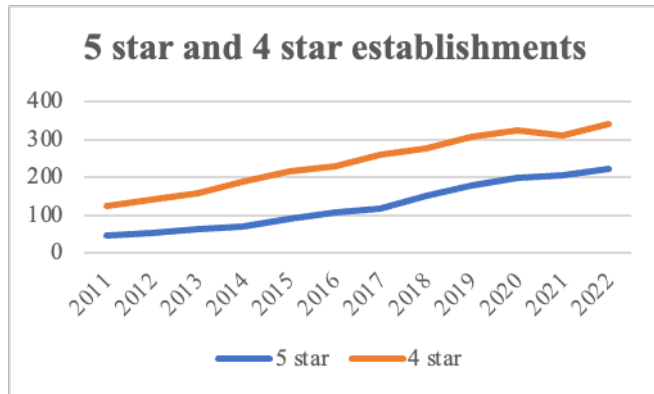
Figure 2. Number of Tourism Accommodation Establishments and Ranking Establishments
Source: VNAT

The rapid growth of both domestic and international visitors has triggered substantial investment in the tourist accommodation sector, particularly in tourist hubs. Leading domestic groups such as Sun Group and Vingroup have been instrumental in this growth. For instance, in 2019, Khanh Hoa alone launched 6,000 new rooms, followed by Da Nang with 4,500 new rooms, and Phu Quoc with 3,000 new rooms. The number of 4-5-star tourist accommodations reached 484, with over 100,000 rooms, representing an increase of 13.0% and 12.2% over 2018, respectively.
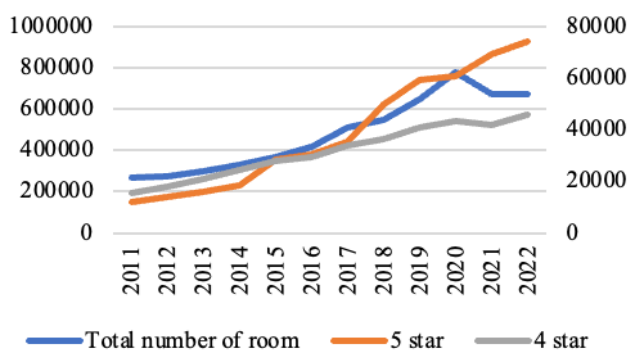

Figure 3. Capacity of Tourism Accommodation Establishments and Ranked Establishments (2011-2022)
Source: VNAT

By the end of 2022, Vietnam had over 33,000 tourism accommodation facilities with more than 670,000 rooms, a decrease of more than 10% compared to 2020, which had 38,000 establishments with 780,000 rooms. The increase in 4-5-star accommodations contrasted with a decline in 1-2-3-star accommodations compared to previous periods. In 2023, the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism appraised,

ranked, and issued 164 class recognition decisions, indicating a growth in higher-ranked establishments.

In recent times, especially during the post-COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam's tourism accommodation system has been developing in a green and sustainable direction. This shift provides favorable conditions for management agencies to implement and practice policies on sustainable development within the tourism industry.

5. Research Results

5.1. Demographic characteristics of research participants

Table 1. Statistics on demographic characteristics of the research

No.	Feature		Percentage
1	Age	19-24	32%
		25-34	26%
		35- 44	23%
		45-54	9%
		55-64	4%
2	Gender	Female	49%
		Male	50%
		Others	1%
3	Job position	Trainee	21%
		Official employee	46%
		Manager	23%
		Director	10%
4	Classification of tourism accommodation establishments	5-star	32%
		4-star	47%
		3-star	21%

(Source: Summary results of the author's investigation and survey)

The research was conducted with a sample size of 100 individuals to illustrate the current status of sustainable development within tourism accommodation establishments in Vietnam. The demographic characteristics of the sample revealed a significant representation across a spectrum of age groups, job positions, gender, and classification of the establishments.
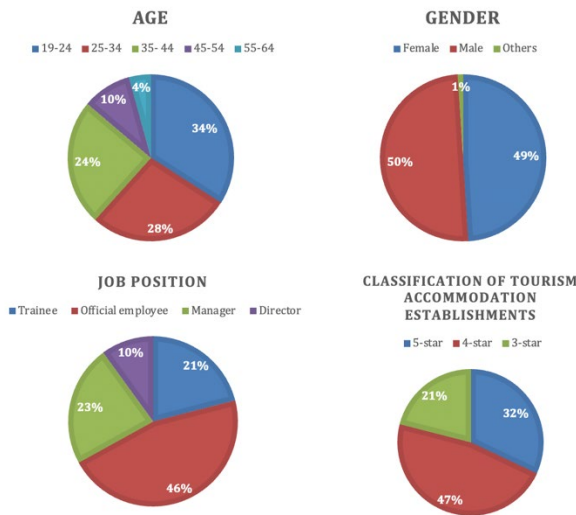
Figure 4. Statistics on demographic characteristics of the research

(Source: Summary results of the author's investigation and survey)

Age distribution: Predominantly, the sample was composed of younger individuals, with 32% falling within the 19-24 age bracket, tapering down to just 4% for ages 55-64. This age structure is indicative of a youthful workforce in the tourism sector, which may be more receptive to innovative sustainable practices.

Gender representation: The gender distribution was nearly equitable with females constituting 49% and males 50%, with an additional 1% representing other genders. This parity offers a balanced perspective in the evaluation of sustainability practices, although it also brings to light the marginal representation of non-binary individuals within the sector.

Job positions: Insights from various hierarchical levels were captured with 46% official employees and a combined managerial presence of 33% (including managers and directors). This suggests that the research has a comprehensive view from both operational and strategic levels, allowing for an inclusive analysis of sustainable development policies and practices.

Classification of establishments: The sample favored higher-end establishments with 32% of participants from 5-star accommodations, 47% of participants from 4-star establishments and the remaining 21% from 3-star establishments. The implications of such a distribution suggest a possibly greater exposure to and implementation of sustainable practices among premium establishments, which may possess more resources and incentives to pursue such initiatives

5.2. Tourism Accommodation and Sustainable Practices

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis Results on Sustainable Tourism Accommodation in Vietnam

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
My accommodation establishment facility has a long-term sustainable management system appropriate to its scale.	3.92	0.91762
My accommodation establishment has a sustainable management system that covers environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health, and safety issues.	3.8	0.9101
My accommodation establishment updates and complies with legal requirements related to health, safety, labor, and the environment.	3.98	0.85257
My accommodation establishment has received a certificate regarding compliance with legal requirements.	3.87	0.97084
My accommodation establishment effectively produces an annual report on its sustainable practices.	3.79	1.06643
My accommodation establishment has sustainability information that is effectively communicated to customers and shareholders.	3.79	0.89098
My accommodation establishment has implemented programs/initiatives to increase customer and shareholder engagement in sustainable activities.	3.69	0.92872
My accommodation establishment effectively collects and evaluates feedback from customers and shareholders on sustainability information.	3.75	0.94575
My accommodation establishment uses feedback from customers and shareholders to improve its sustainability performance.	3.8	0.9211
Green Lotus Label	3.36	1.12385
ASEAN Green Hotel	3.27	1.10878
Homestay ASEAN	3.22	1.14221
GSTC hotel criteria	3.24	1.16446
Travel life	3.15	1.21751
Other standards on environmental protection in general in Vietnam	3.56	1.21751

(Source: Summary results of the author's investigation and survey)

- Sustainable Management Systems: The majority of accommodation establishments have implemented long-term sustainable management systems appropriate to their scale (Mean = 3.92, SD = 0.91762). These systems cover environmental, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, and health and safety issues (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.9101).
- Legal Compliance: Establishments show high compliance with legal requirements related to health, safety, labor, and the environment (Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.85257). However, formal certification for legal compliance is less uniformly pursued (Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.97084).
- Sustainability Reporting and Communication: The production of annual sustainability reports and effective communication of sustainability information to customers and shareholders are noted, though the mean scores indicate room for improvement (Mean = 3.79, SD = 1.06643 and Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.89098, respectively).
- Customer and Shareholder Engagement: Programs to engage customers and shareholders in sustainable activities are in place (Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.92872), and feedback is collected and used to improve sustainability performance (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.9211).

- Adoption of Sustainability Standards: Adopting various sustainability standards such as the Green Lotus Label, ASEAN Green Hotel Standard,
- Homestay ASEAN, and GSTC hotel criteria varies, with mean scores indicating moderate adoption levels (Mean scores ranging from 3.15 to 3.56).

5.3. Challenges and Opportunities of Sustainable Practices in Vietnam's Tourism Accommodation: Insights from Industry Experts

This section presents insights from interviews with five hotel industry experts in Vietnam, including Director, a Manager, and a Founder. The interviews, each lasting between 30 to 45 minutes, focused on the challenges and opportunities of sustainable practices in tourism accommodation. Everything said in these interviews was carefully transcribed and analyzed for common themes. This part of the study shares the valuable perspectives and experiences of these professionals, shedding light on sustainability in Vietnam's tourism accommodation industry.

Market saturation and competition:

> *"The tourism boom has led to a surge in accommodations, but not without its challenges. We are seeing a tighter market, especially in urban centers, with room occupancy dipping slightly. This competition, while challenging, pushes us towards higher service standards and innovative sustainability practices."*
>
> ***Director, 5-star Hotel***

The integration of traditional Vietnamese aquaculture methods into contemporary hotel operations, as highlighted by the eco-resort founder, is reflective of a broader trend within Vietnam's tourism accommodation sector. This trend is both a response to and a catalyst for the current state of sustainable practices in the industry. The endeavor to meld traditional methods with modern sustainability standards underlines the industry's commitment to preserving Vietnam's rich cultural heritage while meeting contemporary environmental expectations. However, this combination presents operational challenges, notably in maintaining the authenticity and ecological integrity of these traditional practices amidst the demands of modern tourism. This complex balancing act is representative of the broader challenge facing the tourism sector in Vietnam: adapting and evolving to incorporate sustainable practices that resonate with both local traditions and global sustainability trends. This transition, while challenging, is involved in shaping the current landscape of sustainable tourism in Vietnam,

The growing competition in Vietnam's hotel market, as shown by the falling average room capacity, is not just a challenge but also a key reason behind the current focus on improving service quality. This market saturation pushes hotels to find new ways to stand out. One effective approach is adopting unique sustainable practices. As more hotels enter the market, they need to attract travelers who are looking for something special. This need for differentiation is driving hotels to innovate in sustainability, turning market challenges into chances for growth. It is clear that the crowded market is a major factor leading to the rise of sustainable practices in Vietnam's tourism accommodations, as hotels strive to offer unique, eco-friendly experiences to discerning travelers.

Integrating traditional practices:

> *our operations has been both a challenge and a revelation. It's a balance of preserving these practices while adapting them to modern sustainability standards."*
>
> ***Founder, Eco-Homestay***

demonstrating a deepening engagement with responsible tourism practices that honor the country's cultural and ecological legacy.

Sustainable culinary practices:

> *"Implementing our 'Farm-to-Table' concept was challenging, particularly in sourcing consistently high-quality, local ingredients. Yet, it is an invaluable opportunity to support local communities and provide guests with an authentic Vietnamese culinary experience."*
>
> ***Director, Culinary Boutique Hotel***

The adoption of the 'Farm-to-Table' concept in the Vietnamese hotel industry signifies a response to several driving factors. Firstly, there is a growing demand from

guests for authentic and sustainable dining experiences, which the 'Farm-to-Table' approach directly caters to. Additionally, the challenges faced in securing a consistent supply of high-quality local ingredients highlight broader issues within the supply chain and local agriculture that hotels are now addressing. By engaging in 'Farm-to-Table' practices, hotels are not only enhancing their service offerings but also actively participating in supporting local economies and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. This strategy, therefore, emerges not just as a trend in hotel dining but as a multifaceted response to evolving guest preferences, local economic needs, and sustainability objectives, making it an integral part of the movement towards more sustainable operations in Vietnam's tourism accommodations.

Remote area development:

> *"Our focus at this hotel has always been on the "people factor", particularly the well-being of our staff. Given our high mountain location, most of our staff members have limited qualifications. We believe that the government should consider tax incentives or discounts for hotels like ours, which prioritize staff welfare and training. Furthermore, sustainability criteria and regulations must be established and disseminated before the construction of hotels. This proactive approach will enable hotels to comply from the outset and align their operations with sustainable practices more effectively."*
>
> ***Director, Culinary Boutique Hotel***

The adoption of the 'Farm-to-Table' concept in the Vietnamese hotel industry signifies a response to several driving factors. Firstly, there is a growing demand from guests for authentic and sustainable dining experiences, which the 'Farm-to-Table' approach directly caters to. Additionally, the challenges faced in securing a consistent supply of high-quality local ingredients highlight broader issues within the supply chain and local agriculture that hotels are now addressing. By engaging in 'Farm-to-Table' practices, hotels are not only enhancing their service offerings but also actively participating in supporting local economies and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. This strategy, therefore, emerges not just as a trend in hotel dining but as a multifaceted response to evolving guest preferences, local economic needs, and sustainability objectives, making it an integral part of the movement towards more sustainable operations in Vietnam's tourism accommodations.

Remote area development:

> *"Our focus at this hotel has always been on the "people factor", particularly the well-being of our staff. Given our high mountain location, most of our staff members have limited qualifications. We believe that the government should consider tax incentives or discounts for hotels like ours, which prioritize staff welfare and training. Furthermore, sustainability criteria and regulations must be established and disseminated before the construction of hotels. This proactive approach will enable hotels to comply from the outset and align their operations with sustainable practices more effectively."*
>
> ***Director, Mountainous Hotel***

The development of hotels in Vietnam's remote and mountainous areas is reflective of a strategic response to a set of unique challenges and opportunities that have shaped the current state of sustainable practices in these regions. The difficulties in infrastructure and staff training are not just operational hurdles; they represent a broader context in which these remote hotels operate. These challenges have been important in steering these establishments towards sustainable practices as a means of not just overcoming these difficulties but also leveraging them. In areas with limited accessibility and resources, sustainable practices such as local sourcing, community engagement, and eco-friendly operations become crucial. They help in reducing the environmental footprint and fostering local economies. Furthermore, in addressing the challenges of staff training, these hotels often turn to local communities, thereby nurturing a workforce that is deeply connected to the local culture and environment. This approach not only enhances the sustainability of the hotel's operations but also contributes to the socio-economic development of these remote areas. In summary, the distinctive challenges faced by hotels in Vietnam's remote regions have been significant drivers in the adoption and evolution of sustainable practices, contributing to a more responsible and inclusive tourism sector.

Table 3. Expectations from Tourism Accommodation Establishments to State Management Agencies

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
The government needs to have a policy to develop, promulgate and force tourism accommodation establishments to apply these certifications.	3.96	0.86363
The government only needs to encourage the application of international standards in Vietnam.	3.59	0.9959
The government should let hotel and accommodation businesses proactively choose and apply standards appropriate to their businesses.	3.88	0.90207
The government does not need to have any impact, businesses adjust according to market needs.	3.18	1.31333
Initial investment costs increase, loss of competitive advantage	3.69	0.97125
Difficulty in choosing appropriate standards to apply	3.8	0.8040
The standards have too many criteria and are difficult to apply	3.86	0.92135
The standards are not flexible and suitable to Vietnam's reality	3.81	0.8955
Insufficient trained human resources to operate and maintain standards at the enterprise	3.78	0.8942

(Source: Summary results of the author's investigation and survey)

The data presented in the combined table reflects varied perspectives on the role of the Vietnamese government in mandating sustainable tourism standards in accommodation establishments and the difficulties businesses may encounter when applying these standards.

Government Role:

The highest mean score (3.96) with a standard deviation of 0.86363 indicates a significant inclination towards a more regulatory approach, where the government would not only develop and promulgate sustainability certifications but also enforce their application. Lower mean scores for government encouragement of international standards (3.59), allowing businesses to choose appropriate standards (3.88), and the position that the government should not influence business adjustments to market needs (3.18), imply a less prescriptive approach, reflecting a desire for more autonomy within the industry. The relatively high standard deviation for the latter (1.31333) indicates a wide range of opinions, suggesting uncertainty or debate about the degree of government involvement needed.

Challenges in Applying Standards:

The mean scores for challenges businesses face in implementing sustainability standards range from 3.69 to 3.86, indicating moderate to high levels of difficulty. The initial investment costs and potential loss of competitive advantage (Mean = 3.69, SD = 0.97125), difficulty in selecting appropriate standards (Mean = 3.8, SD = 0.8040), complexity and inflexibility of the standards (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.92135 and Mean = 3.81, SD = 0.89550), and insufficient trained human resources (Mean = 3.78, SD = 0.89420) underscore significant barriers to adopting sustainable practices.

6. Policy implications for the Vietnamese government to strengthen sustainable development in tourism accommodation establishments

In the context of sustainable development within Vietnam's tourism accommodation sector, the government's role is important in steering the industry towards practices that are environmentally sound, economically viable, and socially responsible. This challenge becomes increasingly critical as the country strives to balance its rapid tourism growth with sustainable management. The following policy implications are proposed to aid in this endeavor.

Firstly, the establishment of certification programs aligned with international standards is crucial. The global tourism market is evolving, with a growing emphasis on sustainability. By adopting internationally recognized certifications, Vietnam can ensure its tourism accommodations meet global benchmarks for sustainability. These certifications serve several purposes. They provide a framework for Vietnamese businesses to adopt best practices in sustainable tourism. Additionally, they instill confidence among international travelers, who are increasingly inclined to choose accommodations that demonstrate a commitment to environmental responsibility. These certifications also facilitate compliance with international environmental regulations, a necessity in a world where such standards are becoming stricter. Furthermore, by holding these certifications, Vietnamese establishments can gain access to new markets where sustainable practices are a prerequisite for business dealings.

Secondly, integrating into international sustainability frameworks is paramount. This involves more than merely adopting global standards; it requires active participation in international sustainability dialogues and networks. Through this integration, Vietnam can remain abreast of evolving sustainability trends and practices. This participation allows for the exchange of knowledge and experiences, facilitating the implementation of cutting-edge sustainable practices within its tourism sector. Moreover, such integration can enhance Vietnam's reputation on the global stage as a country committed to sustainable tourism, attracting environmentally conscious travelers and partners.

Thirdly, creating a conducive environment for businesses to engage in sustainable practices is essential. The government can play a significant role in this by introducing incentives for businesses that adhere to sustainability standards. These incentives could range from tax reductions to financial support for implementing sustainable technologies and practices. Additionally, the government can invest in education and training initiatives to ensure that the workforce in the tourism sector is well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable operations. Collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and non-

governmental organizations are also vital. Such collaborations can lead to innovative solutions in areas like waste management, energy efficiency, and community-based tourism. Furthermore, a robust regulatory framework is necessary to ensure compliance with sustainability standards. This framework should not only enforce regulations but also provide clear guidelines and support for businesses to achieve these standards.

Fourthly, supporting development in remote and mountainous regions is essential, as these areas often face inherent developmental challenges. The Vietnamese government can play a transformative role by implementing targeted policies that cater to the unique needs of these locales. Tax incentives or reductions for hotels prioritizing staff welfare and training can incentivize development where it is most challenging. Such measures not only alleviate the economic hurdles of operating in less accessible areas but also uphold a commitment to sustainable and equitable growth across all regions. Additionally, embedding sustainability criteria into the initial development plans can set a benchmark for responsible and environmentally sensitive growth. This proactive approach ensures that development in these regions aligns with broader sustainability goals, promoting tourism that respects both the ecological integrity and cultural richness of these areas.

Finally, promoting sustainable practices and technology integration is equally vital. The government should advocate for the harmonization of traditional Vietnamese practices with contemporary sustainable technologies. One way to achieve this is to encourage the adoption of 'Farm-to-Table' concepts. By incentivizing hotels and restaurants to source their ingredients locally, these initiatives support local agriculture and preserve and celebrate Vietnam's culinary heritage. Concurrently, the government should champion the adoption of smart sustainability technologies. Providing funding or subsidies for energy-efficient appliances, water-saving devices, and innovative waste management systems can greatly reduce the environmental footprint of tourism accommodations. This dual approach of preserving traditional practices while embracing modern technology underscores a comprehensive strategy, positioning Vietnam as a leader in sustainable tourism practices. Through these concerted efforts, the Vietnamese government can ensure the tourism sector's growth is both forward-looking and respectful of the country's rich natural and cultural landscapes.

.

Appendix. OFFICIAL QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TTPL1	100	1.00	5.00	3.9800	.85257
TTPL2	100	1.00	5.00	3.8700	.97084
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
TTBC1	100	1.00	5.00	3.7900	1.06643
TTBC2	100	1.00	5.00	3.7900	.89098
TTBC3	100	1.00	5.00	3.6900	.92872
TTBC4	100	1.00	5.00	3.7500	.95742
TTBC5	100	1.0	5.0	3.800	.9211
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GOV1	100	1.00	5.00	3.9600	.86363
GOV2	100	1.00	5.00	3.5900	.99590
GOV3	100	1.00	5.00	3.8800	.90207
GOV4	100	1.00	5.00	3.1800	1.31333
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
KK1	100	1.00	5.00	3.6900	.97125
KK2	100	1.0	5.0	3.800	.8040
KK3	100	1.00	5.00	3.8600	.92135
KK4	100	1.00	5.00	3.8100	.89550
KK5	100	1.00	5.00	3.7800	.89420
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
POLICY	100	1.00	5.00	3.8700	.84871
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
LICNBV1	100	1.00	5.00	3.8500	.84537
LICNBV2	100	1.00	5.00	3.8500	.94682
LICNBV3	100	1.00	5.00	4.0600	.82658
LICNBV4	100	1.0	5.0	4.100	.8348
LICNBV5	100	1.00	5.00	3.8900	.95235
LICNBV6	100	1.00	5.00	4.1100	.96290
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BSX	100	1.00	5.00	3.3600	1.12385
KSX Asean	100	1.00	5.00	3.2700	1.10878
Homestay Asean	100	1.00	5.00	3.2200	1.14221
Travel Life	100	1.00	5.00	3.1500	1.21751
TCK	100	1.00	5.00	3.5600	1.05715
GSTC	100	1.00	5.00	3.2400	1.16446
Valid N (listwise)	100				

References

[1] Ashley, C., Goodwin, H., & Roe, D. (2001). Pro-Poor Tourism Strategies: Expanding Opportunities for the Poor. ODI.

[2] Becken, S., & Hay, J. E. (2007). Tourism and Climate Change: Risks and Opportunities. Channel View Publications.

[3] Black, R., & Crabtree, A. (2007). Quality Assurance and Certification in Ecotourism. CABI.

[4] Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2013). Sustainable Tourism: An Evolving Global Approach. Routledge.

[5] Buckley, R. (2012). Sustainable Tourism: Research and Reality. Annals of Tourism Research, 39(2), 528-546.

[6] Butler, R. W. (2018). Overtourism: Issues, Realities, and Solutions. De Gruyter.

[7] Dredge, D., & Jenkins, J. (2007). Tourism Planning and Policy. John Wiley & Sons.

[8] Font, X., & Harris, C. (2004). Rethinking Standards from Green to Sustainable. Annals of Tourism Research, 56, 102-105.

[9] Gössling, S., & Peeters, P. (2015). Assessing Tourism's Global Environmental Impact 1900-2050. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 23(5), 639-659.

[10] Gössling, S., Hall, C. M., & Weaver, D. (2009). Sustainable Tourism Futures: Perspectives on Systems, Restructuring, and Innovations. Routledge.

[11] Hall, C. M. (2011). Policy Learning and Policy Failure in Sustainable Tourism Governance: From First- and Second-Order to Third-Order Change? Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 19(4-5), 649-671.

[12] Honey, M. (2008). Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise? Island Press.

[13] McKercher, B., & du Cros, H. (2002). Cultural Tourism: The Partnership between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management. Haworth Press.

[14] Mitchell, J., & Ashley, C. (2010). Tourism and Poverty Reduction: Pathways to Prosperity. Earthscan.

[15] Simpson, M. C. (2008). Community Benefit Tourism Initiatives: A Conceptual Oxymoron? Tourism Management, 29(1), 1-18.

[16] Smith, M. K. (2009). Issues in Cultural Tourism Studies. Routledge.

[17] Timothy, D. J. (2007). Empowerment and Stakeholder Participation in Tourism Destination Communities. CAB International.

[18] UNWTO. (2013). Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook. World Tourism Organization.

[19] World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). (2018). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2018. WTTC.

[20] GSTC. (2016). Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

[21] Hanh, T. T. (2018). Sustainable Tourism Practices in Vietnam: An Evaluation of the Current Situation and Recommendations for Improvement. Tourism Management Perspectives, 28, 20-29.

[22] Le, T. A., & Hens, L. (2018). Toward Sustainable Tourism Development in Vietnam: A Critical Analysis of Opportunities and Challenges. Environment, Development and Sustainability, 20(6), 2613-2631.

[23] Nguyen, T. H., & Cheung, C. (2014). The Impact of Tourism on Local Cultural Identity: The Case of Vietnam. Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, 12(2), 121-143.

[24] Pham, D. T. (2019). The Role of GSTC Certification in Enhancing the Competitiveness of Vietnam's Tourism Sector. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 27(4), 513-529.

[25] Thuy, N. T., et al. (2016). Environmental Management Practices in Vietnam's Hotel Industry: A Study of Energy, Water, and Waste Management. Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 21(7), 759-776.

[26] Truong, V. D. (2017). Community-Based Tourism in Vietnam: Opportunities and Challenges. Tourism Planning & Development, 14(2), 199-218.