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REVIEW OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

M.A. Toai Anh Le

**Dissertation Entitled: A Study on the Status of Ecotourism Development
in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region, Vietnam**

Prepared at

University of the National Education Commission, Krakow; Doctoral School

Discipline: Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management

Supervisor: Prof. Leszek Butowski, PhD

Associate supervisor: Łukasz Quirini-Popławski, PhD

In accordance with Article 187 and Article 190(3) of the Act of 20 July 2018 – Law on Higher Education and Science, and following my appointment as reviewer in the doctoral procedure in the discipline of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, I hereby present my review of the doctoral dissertation of M.A. Toai Anh Le entitled “A Study on the Status of Ecotourism Development in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region, Vietnam”, prepared at the Doctoral School of the University of the National Education Commission, Krakow.

In line with the Act and the guidelines of the Council for Scientific Excellence (2022), the subject of my evaluation covers the following elements:

- the doctoral candidate's general theoretical knowledge in the discipline (socio-economic geography and spatial management);
- the ability to conduct independent scientific research;
- the originality of the scientific problem and its solution.

The review has been prepared in accordance with the detailed guidelines of the University of the National Education Commission in Krakow.



The review consists of:

Part A – presentation of the candidate’s background information;

Part B – presentation and evaluation of the doctoral dissertation.

The review concludes with a final assessment.

PART A – PRESENTATION OF THE CANDIDATE’S BACKGROUND

Education / academic career:

Toai Anh Le obtained the Bachelor’s degree in Geography at the University of Education, Hue University in 2014.

At the same institution, he also obtained the Master’s degree in Geography in 2018.

Since July 2018, he has been employed as Lecturer at the Faculty of Geography, University of Education, Hue University.

Toai Anh Le is the author or co-author of 8 scientific publications and 15 conference presentations.

To the best of my knowledge, based on the available documentation, Toai Anh Le has not previously applied for the doctoral degree.

PART B – PRESENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Title of the Dissertation

The title “A Study on the Status of Ecotourism Development in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region, Vietnam” has been properly formulated and reflects the content of the dissertation.

2. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of 9 chapters, references, and appendices. It also includes a List of Abbreviations, List of Tables, and List of Figures.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the necessary theoretical foundation for subsequent analyses. Their scientific quality is high, supported by in-depth literature research.

The author carried out a broad review and justified the choice of concepts for his own research.

Chapter 1. Philosophical Foundation and Methodological Approach – includes philosophical foundations, research problems, questions, hypotheses, goals and objectives, research design, case study approach, and data collection.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Foundations of Ecotourism Research – includes the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, review of definitions, and bibliometric analysis.

Chapter 3. Tourism in Vietnam – provides comprehensive information such as historical background, contemporary factors, statistical outlook, tourist arrivals, infrastructure, and workforce.

Chapter 4. Tourism in the Binh-Tri-Thien Region – focuses on the study area with analysis of

factors, tourist statistics, and infrastructure.

Chapter 5. Ecotourism in the Region – addresses regulations, organizational framework, and forms of ecotourism activities.

Chapter 6. Mapping Ecotourism Potential, Case Study Selection, and Field Research – presents methodology, GIS analysis, mapping results, and selection of case studies.

Chapter 7. Field Study Results and Discussion – presents quantitative and qualitative research results, including surveys, interviews, and observations.

Chapter 8. Strategies for Ecotourism Development – includes SWOT/TOWS analysis, prioritization, and strategy formulation.

Chapter 9. Final Conclusions, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research.

I consider the structure and sequence of the chapters to be logical, coherent, and well-adapted to the objectives of the dissertation, demonstrating the candidate's scientific maturity.

3. Literature Review

The bibliography includes as many as 641 items, covering relevant literature on tourism and ecotourism, as well as strategic documents by international organizations and Vietnamese institutions.

The selection of literature is competent and mature. The list could only be enhanced by the reference: Duffy, R. (2002). *A Trip Too Far: Ecotourism, Politics and Exploitation*. Routledge.

4. Aim of the Dissertation

The dissertation aims to assess the current state and potential of ecotourism in the Binh-Tri-Thien region, identify priority issues, and propose sustainable development strategies, while also providing practical recommendations for policymakers and tourism stakeholders. The aim has been formulated ambitiously but appropriately, and the topic is highly relevant.

5. Methodology

The dissertation applies content and bibliometric analysis, secondary data analysis, GIS analysis, primary data collection, and SWOT/TOWS methods.

Case studies were selected based on GIS suitability mapping, focusing on Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park and Bach Ma National Park.

The author used triangulation (questionnaires, interviews, direct observation) ensuring a comprehensive understanding.

Questionnaires (491 valid responses) were conducted with tourists and local communities in both English and Vietnamese.

In-depth interviews were conducted with government officials, park managers, entrepreneurs, and households.

Direct observations were targeted at assessing both ecotourism potential and problems.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and PLS-SEM modelling; qualitative data through content analysis.

This combination of methods is well-justified and demonstrates the candidate's methodological

competence.

One minor remark: the justification of fieldwork timing partly referred to the candidate's availability during the Polish holiday period, which is not a valid scientific argument and should not have been listed first. Nonetheless, the methodological section remains strong.

6. Results and Discussion

Results are presented systematically with statistical analysis, tables, and descriptions.

In most of cases the commentary is accurate, but in some cases inconsistencies appear between text and tables (e.g. tourist motivations and activities tab. 7.4 and 7.5).

Interviews revealed valuable insights, including issues of social dysfunction, inequality in benefit distribution, insufficient involvement of local communities, and over tourism-related risks.

This part is of high scientific and practical value.

7. Critical Remarks

- The section "Goals and Objectives" should precede "Hypotheses" in Chapter 1.
- In Chapter 2, ecotourism is not sufficiently contrasted with mass tourism; their conceptual relationship could be more critically addressed, including over tourism risks.
- Chapter 3 would benefit from addressing the threats of mass tourism and infrastructural overdevelopment, e.g., the case of Halong Bay.
- The SWOT analysis should have included threats from corporate-driven mass tourism infrastructure.

8. Original Contribution

The dissertation's novelty lies in its holistic methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research, GIS analysis, and SWOT/TOWS strategic frameworks.

It contributes both theoretically and practically to the study of ecotourism.

9. Theoretical Knowledge

The candidate demonstrates extensive theoretical knowledge in socio-economic geography and spatial management, with competent use of literature and data sources.

10. Independent Research Skills

The dissertation proves the candidate's ability to independently design and conduct research, select appropriate methods, and interpret results.

Both quantitative and qualitative tools are applied competently.

The inclusion of research instruments in appendices demonstrates transparency and correctness.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The dissertation by M.A. Toai Anh Le is a mature scientific work that:

- demonstrates knowledge and skills in socio-economic geography and spatial management;
- defines research problems and hypotheses clearly and consistently;

- applies appropriate methods competently;
- presents results synthetically and draws practical conclusions.

The dissertation fully meets the statutory requirements for a doctoral thesis under the Act of 14 March 2003 on Academic Degrees and Titles.

I evaluate it as very good and worthy of publication, and I recommend that it be admitted to the subsequent stages of the doctoral procedure.

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