

## BUILDING HOI AN TOWARDS A CULTURAL CITY



**HERITAGE** ENVIRONMENT **COMMUNITY**  
**CONSERVATION** ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
TRADITION **JOB**S GROWTH **IDENTITY**

### 1. Context

Hoi An is an administrative unit of Quang Nam, a province in Central Vietnam. The City is located 30km South-east of Da Nang City. From 1999 to 2013, the population went from 77, 283 to 90.891 and the city from 5 urban wards to 9 and from 7 communes to and 4. The city is situated at the lower section of Thu Bon River, which flows into the sea at Cua Dai estuary. With such a location, Hoi An has unique natural and cultural landscape with many traditional and craft villages located along the riverside and used to be a famous and bustling international trading port in South East Asia from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, trading activities fell into difficulties and stagnation and the local people lived on farming, fishing and making handicrafts. During the anti-American war, most of the people in Hoi An lived in very difficult conditions. In 1999, the Ancient Town of Hoi An city was inscribed in the World Cultural Heritage List. It opened a new page of the City's history with opportunities for development. Nevertheless, the City has also been facing many

new challenges, particularly the negative impacts of urbanization, the development pressures on cultural – traditional values and ecological environment.

The cultural policy was initiated by the People's Committee of Hoi An. It was determined a long-term development policy which is divided into four phases. The first resolution of the policy was carefully drafted, went through many comments and adjustments—and was finally approved by the City People's Committee. It has also been reviewed after each phase of implementation and adjusted for adaptation in the new context. The policy is now being implemented under phase 3 (2011-2015). It was issued in 1999, 14 years after the Vietnam's Renovation, while the early market economy was bringing economic development opportunities and pressures on local culture and environment. There were loss in cultural traditions, a degradation of cultural heritages and the top priorities were made on economic growth. Many traditional craft villages have been on the verge of decline and a lot of cultural performances have been abandoned. The policy has been a success of both Hoi An authorities and residents in the follows of previous efforts in heritage preservation. This policy set out culture and heritages as a driving force of development. Preservation and promotion of cultural values had to be done with economic development and ecological environment protection for higher level of participation, satisfaction and cherish of the local people.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT HELPS TO IMPROVE LOCAL PEOPLE'S AWARENESS OF CHERISHING, PRESERVING AND PROTECTING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE; DEMOCRACY IS WIDE OPEN FOR THE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN BUILDING THEIR GOVERNMENT, AND ECONOMIC LIFE.

The policy has been implemented in all fields from economic and cultural activities to social security. It was promulgated in a context of both abundant advantages and opportunities and challenges. Hoi An had also been renowned for its history in international trading port. The waterways and traditional, craft villages are rich properties for the City in developing economy, particularly eco-cultural tourism. Almost all build heritages (ancient houses and relics) were protected over hundreds of years. In addition, the City's government received strong support from local residents. Opportunities also included active support and presence of the donators and international organizations. It included both financial and technical expertise. The challenges that Hoi An had to face were not a few. The City had to face heavy pressures, particularly the need of urbanization. Being the unique City with an ancient town at its heart, Hoi An had no similar model or previous experience found in Vietnam. The policy was experimental and the implementation needed prudence.



## 2. Hoi An and culture

Prior to the policy “**Building Hoi An towards a Cultural City**”, there were a lot of efforts in safeguarding the architectural monuments, relics and cultural values:

- In 1985, The Ancient Town of Hoi An was recognized as a National Site of Historic and Cultural Relics. A foundation was created for the protection of built heritages. Hoi An had the responsibility of maintaining, preserving, restoring local cultural values.

- In 1991, when economic development was made a focus nationwide, Hoi An implemented an Economic development and cultural resource preservation and promotion policy.
- In 1993 a Decree was promulgated by Hoi An to emphasize 4 major tasks “Harmonious families – Safe and Peaceful Village – Lawful society – Clean and Beautiful streets”.
- In 1996, the City launched “All the people unite to build the new life in the residential sites.”
- In 1999, the nomination of the ancient town as World Cultural Heritage created many opportunities. The City People’s Committee initiated the policy “**Building Hoi An towards a Cultural City**” in order to deal with the task of heritage preservation, using cultural heritages and values as driving forces for development.



### 3. Aim, goals and implementation of the project

#### 3.1. Aim and specific goal

“**Building Hoi An towards a Cultural City**” aims at the Goal: develop Hoi An into Cultural, Ecological and Tourism city where eco-socio development well harmonizes with heritage preservation and promotion, making the City into a unique cultural city of Vietnam.

The Policy “Building Hoi An towards a cultural City” reflected **Agenda 21 for culture**:

#### 1. Culture & Human Rights

- Respect cultural diversity of ethnic groups (Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans).
- Create favourable conditions to include everybody in heritage preservation and promotion; encourage participation, improve grass root democracy and citizen’s responsibilities.

#### 2. Culture & management

- Give the chance to citizens to give their opinions about building an effective government.
- Build public service oriented culture in government agencies.
- Build a “Green government” based on promotion of rights-based approach, preserving and fostering cultural values, improving the people’s living standards.

BEING THE UNIQUE CITY WITH THE ANCIENT TOWN AT ITS HEART, HOI AN HAD NO SIMILAR MODEL OR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE FOUND IN VIETNAM. ]

#### 3. Culture & society

- Consider Hoi An culture a force and resource for economic, cultural and social development.
- Develop the indicators for the implementation of models of cultural families, clans, public offices, schools, business bases.

#### 4. Culture & economy

- Use culture as resources for tourism and service development; Economic development in turn needs to nurture and enrich culture and ecological environment.

- Invest in public spaces and grass root cultural institutions using government funding.
- Reserve a proportion of heritage entrance ticket revenue for reinvestment in culture.
- Promote cultural tourism services to generate job opportunities for vulnerable groups.

### 3.2. Project and indicators

This policy set a detailed framework comprising of 4 categories with specific indicators: **Culture and society** (14 indicators) - **Economic development** (3 indicators) - **Environment, landscape and ecology** (5 indicators) - **Life quality** (5 indicators).

The policy implementation was divided into 4 phases from 1999 to 2015. By the end of each phase, an assessment is conducted to draw lessons and propose recommendations and adjustments for the following phase. With the active participation of many stakeholders, including government agencies, domestic and international organizations, individuals and local residents, many programs and activities have been conducted. Among those, 12 significant projects and activities which have been fulfilled deserve a mention:

1. Issue the regulation on managing the Ancient Town and related regulations and Code of conducts which clarify the benefits and responsibilities of local residents.
2. Implement the monthly event Legendary Night of Old Hoi An on the 14th of the lunar month, the daily non-motorised vehicle ancient town and a walking street.
3. Reserve 70% out of the ticket revenues for heritage preservation and promotion. A cost-share mechanism was also developed and applied for the restoration of private old houses. The property owners are eligible for financial support of 40-70% of the restoration cost.
4. Build and promote cultural practices and standards with concrete models for individuals, families, clans and communities.
5. Rehabilitate traditional craft villages, occupations and traditional festivities and festivals.
6. Activities to raise the awareness of heritage preservation and environment protection in the young generation.
7. International cooperations improvement, via cultural events, with UNESCO, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Universities in the world...
8. tourism and service economy development to make Hoi An a safe and friendly destination
9. Environmental protection activities such as the Non-motorised Vehicle ancient Town, the Community Based Eco-tourism, the One Hour for a Cleaner, Greener and More Beautiful Hoi An, the Earth Hour, the movement of Saying No to Plastic Bags, Cycling for a better Environment...
10. The landscapes of eco-villages preservation; ~~planning-promotion~~.
11. Bio-diversity and conditions preservation.
12. Reforming the public administrative system via the One Door Office system.

THIS POLICY SET A DETAILED FRAMEWORK COMPRISING OF 4 CATEGORIES WITH SPECIFIC INDICATORS: CULTURE AND SOCIETY (14) - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (3) - ENVIRONMENT, LANDSCAPE AND ECOLOGY (5) - LIFE QUALITY (5).

### 3.3. Achievements

All the aims of the project have been achieved so far. The material and spiritual life of the people have been improved considerably. The cultural heritage of Hoi An city becomes a great motive for the local economic, cultural and social developments. GDP from tourism, tourist and cultural services occupy 65 – 68% of the yearly GDP of the city. Poor families go down to 0.2%, primary and secondary education popularization has been completed, the average living age goes up to 72 – 74, the Ancient Town of Hoi An was recognized as a World Cultural Heritage, in 1999 and a World biosphere Reserve in 2009. Recently, Hoi An has been recognized to be an eco-environmental and rural balanced city. Villages in the vicinity are preserved, urbanization has been controlled. The movements “Say No to plastic bags, “Say No to Smoking”, “Cycling for Environment Protection”, “Earth Hour” launched in 2011, 2012 have been being kept. The city gets 70% from the total income

of sightseeing ticket sales to restore relics and invest for cultural development of the city. -Intangible cultural properties have been effectively invested and promoted such as the Hoi An Legendary Night, the monthly festivities, the traditional craft villages of the Thanh Ha (pottery), Tra Que (organic vegetables), and traditional occupations of making Cao Lau Noodle, collecting Bird Nests.

The implementation of the project helps to improve local people's awareness of cherishing, preserving and protecting the cultural heritage; democracy is wide open for the people to participate in building their government, and economic life. Administrative formalities reform has been improved, more convenient and more responsible. Between 2005 and 2014, Hoi An have received 14 different recognitions awards.

The project benefitted to local people living both in the rural and urban parts of the city. The local cultural values are preserved and promoted more and more effectively. These cultural values become the motive for tourism economy, bringing higher incomes for many people in the heritage site. Together with the preservation of the cultural heritage, the cultural values of traditional craft villages and those of the rural parts are also protected, preserved and promoted, paving the way for the cultural and ecological tourist activities development, bringing new jobs for people from Tra Que, Thanh Ha, and Cam Thanh villages, and for the Cham islands.



Hoi An ecological environment has been well protected and taken care of, being able to cope with urbanization and enable a good life and good health for the people of the whole city. Carrying out this project, step by step, brings about the reform of administrative formalities in the orientation of widening democracy, offering conveniences for the people to get quick accesses and effects of their righteous needs and to positively participate in building the city government.

## 4. Impacts

### 4.1. Impact on the local government

The project has made positive changes to the management and monitoring of the local government. Tourism and Services development became the key economy of the city and Culture and Ecology play as the base of the economic development. New policies are given for building a green government, increasing investment for tangible and intangible heritage preservation and promotion, making conditions for the local people to create and enjoy culture.

### 4.2. Impact on culture and its local workers

Carrying out the project has made clear and positive changes in the local cultural life. Traditional, cultural values are enhanced and cherished. Cultural models are built and multiplied, making the city a harmonious cultural environment. New cultural values are created and popularized. The staff working in the cultural field have better improvement in standards, conception, creative and perceptive ability that help much in building policies and implementing the project contents.

### 4.3. Impact on the territory and on population

The project mobilizes many groups of people, many units, agencies, occupational, religious organizations to participate. Hoi An is the good and typical example of a cultural, safe and friendly destination of the country.

“BUILDING HOI AN TOWARDS A CULTURAL CITY” AIMS AT THE GOAL: DEVELOP HOI AN INTO CULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL AND TOURISM CITY WHERE ECO-SOCIO DEVELOPMENT WELL HARMONIZES WITH HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION, MAKING THE CITY INTO A UNIQUE CULTURAL CITY OF VIETNAM.

#### 4.4. Cross-sectorial Impacts

Its phases succeed one after another and were never interrupted. The government continually focuses on giving policies, making financial investments for the continuity of the project implementation.

The project has its spreading elements in different fields, from culture to economy, society, and environment. It has a positive effect not only within the city but also in the neighbouring areas, even in the province and the country as well. The city develops tourism and services effectively, creating jobs, increasing income, improving living standards for the people. The localities around Hoi An also take part in the chain of tourist services. The ecological environment paves the way for protecting landscapes and ecological environment. The project also brings jobs to women, disables, easy injured ones, making equality between men and women.



## 5. Other Information

The City of Hoi An was a candidate to the first edition of the “International Award UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21” (January-May 2014). The Jury of the Award elaborated its final report in June 2014 and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promotes this project as a good practice of the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture.

Text approved in September 2014.

Good practice published in October 2014.

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Video: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxDGCe3jYab1TXkyMG41OF9oeDQ/edit>