

# SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ITS ROLE FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-PANDEMIC COVID-19 CONTEXT: THE CASE OF TRA QUE VEGETABLE VILLAGE, HOI AN CITY

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## Abstract

Research on Tra Que Vegetable Village, Hoi An City, Vietnam, has traditionally focused on agritourism and rural tourism (Van Trung & Mohanty, 2021; Ngo, Hao Do & Chan, 2022; Van Trung & Mohanty, 2023). Less is known about the social capital of Tra Que Vegetable Village to explore its role in sustainable tourism development fully. This empirical analysis, which adopted a sequential mixed-method approach has uncovered significant findings about social capital's role in tourism development in the context of post-pandemic COVID-19. The finding indicated some of the problematic and negative aspects of social capital including formal and informal social interactions and the network boundaries blurred by the evolving technology.

**Keywords:** *Social capital, tourism development, post-pandemic COVID-19.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The more than 400-year-old Tra Que Vegetable Village (TQVV) is located on the outskirts of Hoi An City, a World Heritage Site in Vietnam, and belongs to Cam Ha Commune. TQVV benefits from fertile soil and a plentiful water supply because of its advantageous location between the De Vong River and Tra Que Alga Pond. As a result, it has a long history of cultivating basil, lettuce, houttuynia, flagrant knotweed, and coriander. In addition, TQVV is a popular tourist spot for domestic and international travellers due to its idyllic beauty and green natural landscape. Thus, Hoi An People's Committee officially approved the proposed scheme: development of community-based tourism in TQVV in Decision No. 1766/QD-UBND dated September 19, 2019. Furthermore, the Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism recognized TQVV's folklore and traditional crafts as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage last April 2022. The recognition is the governmental authorities' effort to preserve and promote the legacy of Tra Que horticulture farming and raise locals' awareness of tourism development.

Despite TQVV's inherent potential and governmental authorities' community-based tourism development strategy, community networks' cohesion in TQVV needs to be improved. The massive, spontaneous and uncontrolled development of tourism companies also leads to the risk of disrupting the environmental landscape, ecological space and historical and cultural values. As a result, the primary goal of this study is an organized analysis of complex social interactions within a tourist destination, especially in the post-pandemic COVID -19 context, based on the social capital theory.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Capital

Social capital (SC) is a multifaceted term utilized across various academic domains, its origins trace back to classical capital theory as posited by Marx (1933, 1995). Bourdieu (1980) and Coleman (1988) are widely acknowledged as the foundational theorists in the realm of SC (Häuberer, 2011). Drawing from Häuberer (2011) and Siisiäinen (2003), the author meticulously outlined diverse SC concepts and their respective limitations in Table 1, providing a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter.

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Tab. 1 – Summary of SC concepts

Author	Year	Concept of SC	The Narrowness of the Concept
Bourdieu	1970s and early 1980s	Economic, cultural and social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exclude the idea of genuine consensus and universal values – Trust.</li><li>• Only focus on groups that are institutionalized.</li></ul>
Coleman	1988 1990	Relations of mutual trust, authority relations, information potential, effective norms, appropriable social organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not explore how social capital can be developed to increase equality.</li><li>• Neglect the negative effects of social capital.</li><li>• Consider social capital in a functionalist light.</li></ul>
Robert D. Putnam	1993 1995 2000	Generalized trust, networks of civic engagement, norms of reciprocity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Problematic causal relationships exist between generalized trust, civic engagement networks, and reciprocity norms.</li><li>• Fail to theorize the connection at the individual level.</li><li>• Scope of associations building networks of civic engagement is very limited.</li><li>• Highlight a negative side of social capital, but a ‘misplaced optimism’ or ‘a romantic functionalist and pluralist’.</li><li>• Omit issues with power, opposing interests and conflicts (within associations, between civil society and the political society).</li></ul>
Ronald S. Burt	1992 2005	The structural theory of action, the general concept of networks, the concept of structural holes representing social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not formulate specific theorems.</li><li>• Neglect the public good character of SC.</li><li>• The open networks include drawbacks.</li><li>• Not refer to negative effects of open structures.</li><li>• Not discuss the possibilities of using social capital to de-crease inequality.</li></ul>
Nan Lin	2001	Resources embedded in social relationships that are used in purposive actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative consequences of social capital are ignored and not conceptualized.</li><li>• Not address the possibility of employing social capital to reduce inequality.</li></ul>

Source: authors elaborated from Häuberer (2011) and (Siisiäinen, 2003).

Many scholars have described SC in three main dimensions: bonding SC, bridging SC, and linking SC (Claridge, 2018). Bonding SC describes connections within a group or community (Putnam, 2000). Bridging SC refers to relationships that bring individuals together across cleavages that frequently separate society (Putnam, 2000; Claridge, 2018). Linking SC is the interaction between individuals or organisations at various societal power hierarchies (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Nevertheless, Leonard (2004) argued that Putnam’s distinction was flawed and that the transition between bonding and bridging SC is problematic.

## Social Capital’s Role for Tourism Development

Concerning SC concepts applied in the tourism sector, Nunkoo (2017) discussed the concepts of trust, power and SC in the context of good governance and sustainable tourism. His research proposed a typology

of SC in governance and sustainable tourism. Accordingly, he suggested that different key actors were involved in different perspectives ranging from local associations to intra (bonding SC) and inter (bridging SC) community ties, political and legal institutions, community networks and state-society relations. Despite analyzing the contribution of trust, power and SC to tourism governance and sustainable tourism, he mainly focused on the top-down approach and the positive aspects of SC. However, the relationship between SC and tourism development is not linear, complex and not centralized.

Many studies have validated the value of SC to the level of local communities' participation in tourism development (Ha & Dung, 2021; Thammajinda, 2013); the residents' reactions to tourism development (Park et al., 2015); the community residents' perceived resilience in tourism destinations (Guo et al., 2018); the realisation of community resilience in communal natural resources management (Musavengane & Kloppers, 2020); and the destination strategic planning process (Soulard et al., 2018).

In addition, Moscardo et al. (2017) highlighted important elements required for enhancing destination community social capital, such as strong tourism leadership, effective local resident engagement in tourism planning, and a desire to find various models for local and regional tourism organizations. The findings of Zhang et al. (2021) supported a six-factor model that theorizes how community-based tourism development affects social capital, including collective efficacy, community belonging, traditional social regulations, community cohesion, social networking, and community competence. In the context of Southeast Asia, Mutiani et al. (2022) described the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital related to local tourism development. Apart from that, Jones (2005) pointed out that social capital is both an outcome and a factor in causing development.

In particular, a prominent issue is how SC plays the role in tourism development in the context of post-pandemic COVID-19. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research to explore the various nuances of SC.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study is an empirical analysis using a sequential mixed method design of both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis.

As for quantitative data, the study adapted the measures of the community residents' perceived capital items from the research of McGehee et al. (2010) due to the exceptional utility of SC's theory in tourism studies (Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2019). The research collected questionnaires from 130 residents directly and indirectly involved in the tourism industry of Tra Que vegetable village (TQVV), Hoi An city, using a five-point Likert scale and Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Inc., version 20) for analysis. Of the 130 surveys that were disseminated, 120 valid surveys were completed and returned. Sampling was collected by convenience sampling.

Towards the qualitative method, this research used a case-study research method, a data collection method with field observation and in-depth interviews (Creswell John W., 2014). A case study approach was chosen because it was shown to be appropriate when little information is available on a subject, making it impossible to generate testable hypotheses (Ryan, 2012). For this study, the author chose a typical case of TQVV in Hoi An City to analyze the role of SC in tourism development in the post-pandemic COVID -19 context. The study conducted in-depth interviews with one expert who has a master's degree in the tourism field and has carried out exploratory research in agritourism in TQVV since December 2020; one director of a private tourism entrepreneur currently based in Hoi An City and this company's tourism operations cover in both TQVV and Hoi An City.

### **4. RESEARCH FINDING**

International visitor arrivals to TQVV account for the majority, with a high percentage. On the other hand, domestic visitor arrivals to TQVV make up a negligible proportion of the total. Based on the secondary data, Table 2 provides a breakdown of visitor arrivals to TQVV between 2012 and 2018. However, both the in-depth interview's key informants and the secondary data report stated that the actual number of visitor arrivals to TQVV is substantially higher. This is due to the loose and passive manner in which the TQVV management board sells tickets. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the ticket price to TQVV was lowered from 35,000 VND per ticket to just 10,000 VND per domestic tourist ticket and 20,000 VND per foreign

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tourist ticket in 2021. The revenue from TQVV ticket sales is remitted to the Culture-Sports & Radio-Television Center of Hoi An City, the Cam Ha commune People's Committee and a few local households (vegetable garden owners or horticulture performers) who engaged in tourism activities of the TQVV management board.

Tab. 2 – Visitor arrivals to TQVV (2012-2018)

Year	Number of Domestic visitors	Percent	Number of International visitors	Percent	Total number of visitors
2012	235	1.82	12713	98.18	12948
2013	137	1.02	13272	98.98	13409
2014	997	4.11	23239	95.89	24236
2015	1354	4.36	29729	95.64	31083
2016	618	2.19	27608	97.81	28226
2017	120	0.46	26050	99.54	26170
2018	850	3.81	21440	96.19	22290

Source: The Culture-Sports & Radio-Television Center of Hoi An City, 2019.

Table 3 illustrates the demographic profile of residents, including the owner of the farmland, external and internal tourism entrepreneurs/businesses of TQVV and even expatriates. There were 65 male residents (54.2%) and 55 female residents (45.8%), hence making a total of 120 residents. In terms of age, a majority of the residents were middle-aged, from 35 to 44 years of age (39.2%) and 45 to 55 years old (36.7%), while the younger age group (18-24 years of age and 25-34 years of age) respectively made up only 5.8% and 18.3% of the total residents. Most of the residents receive education from primary school (30%) to higher education (18.3%), upper secondary school (17.5%) and lower secondary school (16.7%). Meanwhile, only 17.5% of the residents do not have any schooling.

Tab. 3 – Respondent profile (n=120)

Items	Description	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	65	<b>54.2</b>
	Female	55	45.8
Age group	18 – 24 years old	7	5.8
	25 – 34 years old	22	18.3
	35 – 44 years old	47	<b>39.2</b>
	45 – 55 years old	44	36.7
	55 years old or more	0	0
Highest level of education	No schooling	21	17.5
	Primary school	36	<b>30.0</b>
	Lower secondary school	20	16.7
	Upper secondary school	21	17.5
	Higher education	22	18.3
Residential tenure	0 – 10 years	33	27.5
	11 – 20 years	62	<b>51.7</b>

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	21 – 30 years	6	5.0
	31 – 40 years	19	15.8
	41 years or more	0	0
Types of residents	Permanent residents	106	<b>88.3</b>
	Temporary residents from other places	14	11.7
Tourism industry involvement years	0 – 5 years	59	<b>49.2</b>
	6 – 10 years	35	29.2
	11 – 15 years	16	13.3
	16 – 20 years	10	8.3
	21 years or more	0	0

Source: authors' own survey, 2022.

With respect to the residential tenure, the highest percentage was 51.7% for those who have lived and worked in TQVV for 11-20 years, whereas those with a period in TQVV of 0-10 years, 31-40 years and 21-30 years account for 27.5%, 15.8% and 5% respectively. None of the residents has spent 41 years or more living and working in TQVV (0%). A majority of residents are permanent residents (88.3%), and the rest are temporary residents from other places (11.7%). Regarding the residents' involvement years in the tourism industry in TQVV, 49% of residents have engaged in the tourism industry in the past five years. 29% of residents have participated in the tourism industry for six to ten years. Still, some residents have engaged in the tourism industry for a very long time, specifically for 11 to 15 years (13%) and 16 to 20 years (8.3%). The data on residential tenure, type of residents, and years of involvement in the tourism industry show that most response residents have a long time to observe and reflect on their understanding of the tourism industry in TQVV. At the same time, they also have an excellent grasp of the local situation due to their presence at the place of residence for a long time.

In this paper, the study investigates the residents' perceived SC and other forms of the capital of TQVV (details in Table 4). Overall, the results showed that residents' agreement with cultural capital, natural capital, political capital, bridging social capital, bonding social capital, human capital, private built capital, public built capital and financial capital of TQVV are high. Noteworthy, the residents strongly agreed with the capital items related to the natural capital of TQVV, specifically, a varied and diverse range of plants and animals of TQVV (Mean=4.36) and the attractiveness of the TQVV landscape (Mean=4.22). The privately built capital items related to a strong mix of lodging accommodations for tourists were likewise highly rated by the residents (Mean=4.36). Although the residents' perceived SC and other forms of the capital of TQVV are quite high, the field observation and in-depth interviews indicated the loose connection between the residents and the local governmental authorities in the tourism development of TQVV.

Tab. 4 – Measures of capital items and means

Items	Percent of respondents' rank*					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>Cultural Capital in TQVV</b>						
There is strong preservation of local stories and history	0	1.7	18.3	50.8	29.2	4.08
There is strong preservation of traditional foods and ways of preparation	0	0.8	13.3	62.5	23.3	4.08
There is strong preservation of traditional music	0.8	0	15.8	51.7	31.7	4.13
There is strong preservation of traditional art and craft forms	0.8	0	18.3	55.8	25.0	4.04
Overall, there is strong preservation of cultural resources	0	1.7	12.5	57.5	28.3	4.13
<b>Natural Capital in TQVV</b>						
There are a varied and diverse range of plants and animals	0	0	9.2	45.8	45.0	<b>4.36</b>
There are a number of opportunities to interact with fish and wildlife	0	0	18.3	43.3	38.3	4.20

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Air and water quality is excellent	0	0.8	14.2	61.7	23.3	4.08
The landscape is attractive	0.8	0	14.2	46.7	38.3	<b>4.22</b>
Overall, the natural environment is strong	0	0	21.7	46.7	31.7	4.10
<b>Political Capital in TQVV</b>						
There is a strong voice for sometimes excluded people and groups that exist within the tourism industry (small business, independent owners, entrepreneurs)	1.7	3.3	17.5	60.8	16.7	3.87
There is easy access to power in traditional channels (TQVV Management Board, the Hoi An city People's Committee) that can influence decisions made regarding tourism in TQVV	1.7	4.2	17.5	57.5	19.2	3.88
Overall, political resources are strong for the tourism industry	2.5	1.7	24.2	50.8	20.8	3.86
<b>Bridging Social Capital in TQVV</b>						
There is strong communication between and among the local organization(s) and organizations at other levels that focus on tourism	0.8	0.8	19.2	55.8	23.3	4.00
<b>Bonding Social Capital</b>						
Mutual trust currently exists between and among tourism suppliers	0.8	1.7	15.8	56.7	25.0	4.03
Reciprocity exists between individuals and groups within the tourism industry	0	0.8	15.8	54.2	29.2	4.12
Informal social groups currently exist within the tourism industry	2.5	0.8	20.0	51.7	25.0	3.96
The tourism 'community' is cohesive; each actor is just as important as the other for tourism	3.3	2.5	16.7	50.8	26.7	3.95
There is sense of a shared future as part of a tourism product	0	5.8	12.5	60.8	20.8	3.97
Tourism suppliers are working together	2.5	0	15.8	60.8	20.8	3.98
Overall, the social networks are strong for the tourism industry	1.7	1.7	15.8	60.0	20.8	3.97
<b>Human Capital in TQVV</b>						
Professional education opportunities exist for tourism industry employees	0.8	1.7	29.2	49.2	19.2	3.84
Professional education opportunities exist for tourism industry managers	2.5	4.2	20.0	57.5	15.8	3.80
Front-line hospitality skill development and training is readily available	2.5	5.0	10.8	58.3	23.3	3.95
Leadership development opportunities exist for tourism industry employees	2.5	2.5	17.5	55.0	22.5	3.93
Leadership development opportunities exist for tourism industry managers	2.5	4.2	18.3	55.0	20.0	3.86
Overall, human resources development opportunities exist that strengthen the tourism industry	0.8	4.2	21.7	56.7	16.7	3.84
<b>Private Built Capital in TQVV</b>						
There is a strong mix of lodging accommodations for tourists	0	0	9.2	45.8	45.0	<b>4.36</b>
There is a strong mix of restaurant options for tourists	0	0	18.3	43.3	38.3	4.20
There is a strong mix of tourist attractions	0	0.8	14.2	61.7	23.3	4.08
<b>Public Built Capital in TQVV</b>						
There is a well-developed road and highway system	0	1.7	18.3	20.8	29.2	4.08
TQVV is easily accessible by air transportation	0	0.8	13.3	62.5	23.3	4.08

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There are strong public facilities such as parks and other public spaces	0.8	0	15.8	51.7	31.7	4.13
There is a strong mix of museums and other cultural venues	0.8	0	18.3	55.8	25.0	4.04
Overall, the built resources are an asset to tourism development	0	1.7	12.5	57.5	28.3	4.13
<b>Financial Capital in TQVV</b>						
Loans and credit are available to support tourism development	1.7	2.5	20.0	55.0	20.8	3.91
Investment opportunities are available to support tourism development	2.5	0.8	15.8	64.2	16.7	3.92
The tax structure supports tourism development	0.8	2.5	20.0	53.3	23.3	3.96
Governments provide tax incentives to support tourism development	0.8	4.2	19.2	57.5	18.3	3.88
Grants to support tourism marketing are available	0.8	0.8	20.0	50.0	23.3	3.99
Overall, financial resources are available to support local tourism development	0.8	1.7	24.2	48.3	25	4.04

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\*Respondents were asked to rank each item using a five-point Likert scale. (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree)

Source: authors' own survey, 2022.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Overall, local residents agreed and strongly agreed with all the perceived SC and other forms of the capital of TQVV. On the other hand, the field observation and in-depth interviews of key informants showed that the land ownership transferred from permanent residents to outsiders is one of the negative effects of tourism on TQVV due to the benefits of tourism development. Moreover, the tourism interactions and relationships within and between the residents, tour operators and travel agencies in TQVV have been shaped before the approval of the Scheme: Development of Community-Based Tourism in TQVV.

One of the key informants mentioned that tourists' behaviour and demand after the post-pandemic COVID - 19 have changed dramatically. There is a transition from lengthy tours to brief ones, even those lasting just a few hours. Meanwhile, the practice conditions for tour guides include a tour guide card; a labor contract with a travel agency/service provider or a member of a socio-professional association of tour guides; a documented assignment of guides in accordance with the tour itinerary, as per the terms of Vietnam's tourism law. However, travellers these days tend to even book a tour online just a few hours before it takes place, so it is really challenging to make a list of attendees and a tour itinerary to meet the current regulations of Vietnam's tourism law. Therefore, besides organizing regular formal tours, tourism entrepreneurs explore the niche market of informal tours to gain a competitive advantage. Mutual trust underpins the relationship between tourists or travellers and tourism hosts or providers in the informal tour. The informal tour does not have a fixed price. Tourists or travellers will determine their tour price by themselves and pay it forward based on their actual experience. Furthermore, the evolving technology allows local tourism entrepreneurs to access different online communities for other resources. In the case of TQVV, one local tourism entrepreneur based on this resource connects with platforms, allowing them to connect with online communities of tour guides all over the world to share ideas and create creative tours. Thus, this study has identified a few intriguing connections that merit more investigation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The significance of this exploratory study calls for a better understanding of how SC is applied in tourism development, especially in the post-pandemic COVID -19 context. Some of the problematic and negative aspects of SC were revealed including formal and informal social interactions and the network boundaries blurred by the evolving technology. This study adds value to the entry timing literature by focusing on negative aspects of SC in the tourism development.

The limited scope of this research in TQVV is limited and further studies are needed to examine the relationship between social capital and tourism development in different contexts.

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