



Alan A. Lew &lt;alanalew@gmail.com&gt;

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## Da Nang (with photos) - Spontaneous development and significant impacts - Feel free to use in lectures

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McKercher, Bob [SHTM] <bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk>  
To: TRINET <trinet-l@lists.hawaii.edu>  
Cc: "McKercher, Bob [SHTM]" <bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk>

Tue, Jan 2, 2018 at 6:03 PM

# Da Nang, Vietnam – A classic case of spontaneous development with many impacts

Bob McKercher

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

[bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk)

January, 2018.

The case reported below is based on observations of a recent trip made to the Da Nang and Hoi An areas of Vietnam, plus the An Bang Beach village enclave situated between the two cities.

It is a classic example of unplanned and spontaneous development as a destination moves rapidly from Butler's the Involvement to the Development stage of its lifecycle.

**Please feel free to use these materials and photos in lectures if you wish.**

The information provided is based on observations as well as discussions with a number of, mostly, expatriate long-term residents who are involved in the tourism sector.

Note: All photos are taken by me unless otherwise noted.

## Context

Let's put Da Nang and the enclave of An Bang Beach in context.

Da Nang is Vietnam's third largest city located on the coast about midway between Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi. It has an almost unbroken beachfront that extends at least 30 km south of the city. According to its tourist website (<https://tourism.danang.vn/en/about-danang/about-da-nang-city.html>) its smooth and sandy beaches were voted one of the six most beautiful beaches in the world.



Source: <http://asiaforvisitors.com/vietnam/central/>

The city was home to a major airbase built by the Americans during the Vietnam War. It is now converted primarily for civilian use, although there is still a military presence. New domestic and international terminals were opened in 2011 that have led to the transformation of the place. Airport passenger numbers have grown from 1.7 million in 2008 to more than 8.8 million in 2016.

In the first 9 months of 2017, foreign arrivals to Da Nang reached 1.8 million, a 49% increase from the same period in 2016. Total arrivals reached 5.2 million, up 22.7% against the same period last year, while 45 international cruise ships with 52,403 passengers on board docked at Tien Sa deep seaport (<http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/12228>).

An Bang is a village enclave situated on the coast about 5 km from Hoi An and 25 km from Da Nang. It has managed to retain much of its original character. It is a popular backpackers' destination and also has a number of long term expats married to local women have started businesses.

## Butler's first 3 lifecycle stages in evidence

The development process here is a classic case reflecting Butler's lifecycle stages and Pearce's concept of spontaneous development.

I first visited in 2007. At that time, there was one international resort. The beaches were clean and undeveloped. The civilian terminal at the airport was small and could only process a few visitors at a time. Tourism was just in its initial stages.

The **Exploration** stage was typified by small numbers of backpackers staying in very basic accommodations.

**Involvement** and the first steps toward development was initiated with the establishment of better quality backpackers' hostels and small restaurants. This stage was driven primarily by expatriate residents married to local partners. A small number of individuals put the place (especially An Bang) onto the tourist map.

As visitor numbers grew, local residents also became involved, opening homestays, retail outlets and more restaurants. After that, some more upscale boutique type hotels like the one shown below started to be developed, again developed primarily by long term expats, followed by small to medium sized hotels built by Vietnamese developers.



Rising land prices led to a building boom, either of second homes or of homestay properties.



The opening of the international terminal in 2011, changed everything and propelled Da Nang into a chaotic period of rapid **Development**. It is still in that phase. New resort and condominium development is occurring along virtually the entire coastline between Da Nang and An Bang, with further development along another 5 km of coast to the south of this enclave.

There appear to be few or no development controls, evidence of demand forecasting or planning. Instead, it is a race to develop as much, as quickly as possible. A classic case of spontaneous development.

Undeveloped rural land and farmland have been bought up, taken out of production and built on. Up market resorts owned by Vietnamese companies as well as multi-national hotel companies are now the norm. At least 5 luxury golf courses have been built, with plans to develop another 36 holes already approved.

(The An Bang enclave seems to have survived because the village retained its integrity and also because a number of very influential people have properties there and are resisting being bought out).

According to some people, corruption is also rife. While Vietnam has strong legislation, it seems that with the proper payments to the proper individuals, authorities can turn a blind eye to a range of development proposals that would otherwise not be approved.

As the pictures below show, almost 25 km of coastline from Da Nang is being developed.

Large scale resort development on the outskirts of Da Nang



Beach front property currently fenced off and about to be developed.



New construction.



Entire villages have been bulldozed and residents displaced.



## Impacts

A range of positive and negative economic, social and environmental impacts have been observed.

### Economic impacts

Economic impacts have been mixed, but are felt by residents to be mostly positive at this stage.

Jobs, jobs and more jobs are being created in the construction sector, the service sector and in small businesses.

Tourism creates an attractive alternative to low paid factory work. The hours are better and the wages higher.

It also creates opportunities for youth, which is vital in a place like Vietnam where 41% of the population is under 25 years of age.

In emerging economies, people have to create their own jobs. Many opportunities exist for local residents to go into business for themselves by opening small shops, restaurants, spas, motorcycle rental services and also home stays.



It is typical for shops and restaurants like the ones shown below to open across the street from large resorts. In this way, local residents can also benefit from the tourism boom.



Land prices have sky rocketed. A plot of land like the one shown below (about 125 sq. m) in An Bang could be bought for US\$15,000 ten (10) years ago. A similar plot was sold two years ago for US\$150,000 and was flipped last year for US\$300,000+.

Villagers can sell their land and move 300 to 500 m across the highway to the river front (which is less prone to flooding) and have enough money to buy 3 plots of land and build new, modern houses on each plot. In doing so, they can build a house for themselves and their children. Or they can build one house and have enough money not to work again.



Adverse impacts include:

- Higher prices for consumer goods than would normally be charged in non-tourism areas,
- People who do not own land are largely excluded from living in their villages or from benefiting from the economic boom.

## Social Impacts

Social impacts have been mixed as well and are likely more balanced.

One a positive note:

- Increased affluence has enhanced the local residents' quality of life, allowing them to build newer houses, purchase motorcycles and/or create their own jobs
- Younger people can remain in their local villages

On the neutral side

- Villagers realize that they need to learn second languages. People who can speak English and increasingly Chinese are very employable. Parents are reportedly encouraging their children to learn another language.

On a negative note:

- Bulldozing of villages has led to a degree of displacement. Farmers are especially vulnerable to have their land bought for below market prices
- Shop owners keep extremely long hours. Many shops open before 7 am and remain open until 10 pm or later, seven days a week. To date most shop keepers do not want to employ outside workers, so their job becomes their life.
- Local residents have complained that because they are working such long hours, traditional festivals have had to be cancelled for no one is available or has the time to organise them.
- Sales of land have resulted in the privatization of much of the coastline, denying local residents their traditional rights of access to the beach



## Environmental Impacts

From what I could see, the environmental costs were high and mostly negative.

Paddy fields have gone out of production to create golf courses. The literature writes extensively about the environmental impact of golf courses, from heavy water consumption, to pesticide and herbicide use, to the run-off of fertilizers polluting local waterways.



Resort development has encroached upon beaches as is typical of the resort shown below.



While the impact on one resort may be limited, the collective impact on destabilizing beach ecosystems has proven disastrous further down the coast.

Sand dunes and beaches are 'living' ecosystems as the sand is constantly moving, being eroded and replenished by other sand. Dunes play a vital role in coastal management for they act as a buffer against wave damage during storms, protecting the land behind from salt water intrusion. As well, dunes act as a reservoir of sand to replenish and maintain the beach at time of erosions ([https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/coastal/ecology/beaches-dunes/coastal\\_dunes.html](https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/coastal/ecology/beaches-dunes/coastal_dunes.html)).

The need to maintain the integrity of dunes and beach ecologies is especially vital in areas like Da Nang that is subjected to typhoons, that can wreak havoc on damaged coastlines.

This basic knowledge seems to have been lost by developers, or more likely ignored by them.

The set of pictures below shows what happens when false assumptions are made that maintaining the integrity of beaches is ignored at the peril of the developer.

This large scale development was built over the beach by constructing a large sea wall.



However, as you can see, the seawall was not able to withstand the pounding of the surf and the erosion of the sand beneath it and collapsed.



The net result was the collapse of large parts of the sea wall and erosion of an unstable, exposed waterfront that led to the collapse of a number of buildings. The resort has now been abandoned for more than seven years as the sea slowly reclaims its original position.



The set of photos below shows a second scenario.

Again, another large resort was being built that encroached onto the beach. Like the above example, a sea wall was built that was thought to be stable. But when the resort above encountered its problems, the integrity of the seas wall of this resort was also breached.

Construction ceased on this project for the better part of seven years and the buildings were left abandoned. The ocean reclaimed its original position and flooded the pool.

These photos were taken in Spring 2017.



Photo: Charly Feldman



Photo: Charly Feldman

However, new owners took over and built a new, massive and very expensive sea wall (no one would tell me how much it cost) in 2017. The resort was completed and opened as a 5 star property in late 2017.

While the resort itself is very impressive, the sea wall is an eyesore and one wonders how long it will withstand the surf?



A third example of beach erosion is shown in this photo of the (non) beach at the Hoi An Beach Resort. Again, you can see how the development in the background damaged the beach's integrity, resulting in widespread erosion. Remedial sandbagging and concreting has slowed but not stopped the pace of destruction.



A last example is of seafront erosion and subsidence at My Khe Beach, Da Nang's most famous beach



Photo: Sandra Navarro-Ruiz

Construction of small houses is exacerbating the problem as shown in this photo below. Even though not permitted, builders of this house have destroyed almost half of the sand dune behind the building.



Other environmental impacts that are likely to be felt relate to infrastructure development and whether sufficient water and sewage facilities are provided.

## Hoi An

I have tried to be as objective as possible in documenting the positive and negative impacts of tourism development. The views expressed about Hoi An, though, are more personal and subjective in nature.

The old town of Hoi An was declared a World Heritage site in 1998. It has been a Chinese and Japanese trading site for centuries. According to UNESCO (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/948>) Hoi An Ancient Town is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a South-east Asian trading port dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its buildings and its street plan reflect the influences, both indigenous and foreign, that have contributed to produce the unique heritage site. Its most famous site is the 'Japanese' bridge (pictured), which was constructed around 1596.



Photo: Sandra Navarro-Ruiz



However, there is very little evidence that the heritage is being valued in this site. Instead, it serves only as a backdrop for a shopping, dining and souvenir district selling everything from cheap trinkets to designer clothes.

You can buy an 'entrance' ticket that gives you access to up to five or six of the most significant sites. It is unclear who operates this business and how much of the revenue goes to maintaining the site. A vague 'some of the revenue generated goes to maintaining the site' comment is made.



Photo: Sandra Navarro-Ruiz



Enjoy.

Prof Bob McKercher

School of Hotel and Tourism Management

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Hung Hom, Kowloon,

Hong Kong SAR, China

(852) 3400 2161

fax (852) 2362 9362

[bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:bob.mckercher@polyu.edu.hk)

President of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism ([www.tourismscholars.org](http://www.tourismscholars.org))

Fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism

Fellow of the Council for Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Education

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1/3/2018

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