

CHAPTER 3

The Communication of Farmers' Double Identity

In this chapter, I will argue that farmers at different levels (international, national, and local) were encouraged to identify as capable actors, which opened a space for the engagement of farmers in the agritourism business. In the process of diversifying agricultural livelihoods as a motivation for local economic development, farmers were seeking sources of capital investment, and to enter the markets of outsiders beyond their capacity and availability in the hope of reducing their own dependence on agriculture under the unstable market. Beginning with the Dutch Farmers' Association (Agriterro) recommended agritourism project as a solution to farmers' demands, with the ultimate aim of generating more incomes and jobs. Far beyond Agriterro's formal rationality is a desire to empower farmers' ability to bypass the market in business as entrepreneurs. I will present the process of constructing identity as a way to communicate by analyzing farmers' needs and motivations embedded in agritourism. Consequently, local farmers had both formal and substantial reasons to promote agricultural products and farmers' activities in rural areas. The authentication of farmers' identities was shown in their perspectives on agritourism.

3.1 Communicating the Diverse Farmers' Identity

In this section, I present how Agriterro initially started the agritourism project to recruit farmers as capable agents in the agritourism business. Beginning with communication with national farming leaders, the project proved to promote a democratic and people-centric society, which agreed with the advocated-for practices of sustainable development. Furthermore, the project promoted farmers' abilities to accumulate their capital, investment, and agency from outsiders to empower themselves. Through this communication, Agriterro presented themselves as capable actors in the market; as an

example of how to engage farmers in the agritourism business as entrepreneurs. What I mean by communication is how the stakeholders presented their ideas to others and convinced them, and how those others responded to those ideas. I analyzed one-sided communication to emphasize the farmers' voices at different levels. Agriterra helps rural farmers access capital, investments, and markets, in order to make them more self-reliant, which represents a people-centric society and democracy. Agriterra holds that farmers should organize themselves to benefit from higher advantages during tense politico-economic negotiations (Agriterra n.d). In 1997, a group of Dutch rural people's organizations (including the Dutch Federation of Agriculture and Horticulture, the Dutch Foundation of Cooperating Women's Organizations, the National Cooperative Council for Agriculture and Horticulture, and the Dutch Agricultural Youth Organization) founded the Dutch Farmers' Association (Agriterra) to support and finance rural people in The Netherlands and other developing countries (Agriterra n.d). Agriterra maintains a broad network of approximately 80 rural people's organizations in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Netherlands. The group's underlying mission is to promote democracy by raising rural people's voices and empowering them. Agriterra posits that:

“In developing countries many people live and work in rural areas. They play a crucial role in solving the problems of hunger and poverty. If they do not manage to organize themselves, they will remain powerless on a political level and will be economically disadvantaged. Agriterra's work is based on the conviction that if they organize themselves, they will be able to take the responsibility of their development into their own hands. Strong and representative agricultural organisations are indispensable for the promotion of democracy, for a better distribution of income and for the economic development of a country” (Agriterra n.d).

The Dutch organization was founded as civil society group in rural areas, focusing mainly on the private agricultural sector. The agritourism project was implemented under the state's authorization in such a way that Kerkvliet (1995) called Agriterra a form of pluralism creeping out under the Vietnamese government's authorization. Agriterra postures itself as an agri-agency and works in a wide range of fields, such as activities in rural tourism, agricultural production, banking, and marketing. All to ensure an equal income distribution in developing countries. Agriterra believe that only people that can truly help the farmers are themselves — the farmers. They can do so by organizing

themselves into one unified, impactful political actor, which could possibly negotiate with other actors in the market. In order to achieve this level of self-organization, farmers must transform themselves into entrepreneurs to actively seek out and engage with their markets, capital, and investments.

Despite their ideology, they conformed to the state's agenda, and fulfilled the requirements of the Viet Nam Sustainable Development Strategy for 2011-2020, which clearly stated,

“Human beings are the center of sustainable development. Promote the role of people as the key subject, resources and targets of sustainable development; increasingly meet the material and spiritual demand of people of all strata; build a wealthy and strong country, democratic, equal and civilized society; develop an independent and self-reliant economy with active international integration for sustainable development” (Vietnam Government 2012).

The viewpoints also emphasized a people-centric sense of sustainable development towards an “independent and self-reliant economy,” and a “democratic, equal, and civilized society.” Therefore, Agriterra provided the project's opportunity by opening a space of communication — one with the same goals as those of the state, but beyond Agriterra's underlying ideology to strengthen farmers' voices at political level. However, they strategically adapted their democratically minded policies to the state's socio-economic development-orientated language, and met the farmers' demand of diversifying income sources.

After initially communicating with the government, Agriterra turned towards practices that would transform the management mechanism of the Farmers' Union in Agritourism. They had to work with the central leader of these farmers unions first, instead of working directly with local farmers. The agritourism project complied with the Vietnamese state policy of promoting a “democratic, equal and civilized society; develop an independent and self-reliant economy” (Vietnam Government 2012). Moreover, it provided capital, investments, and consultancies to farmers, encouraging them to participate in agritourism on a very local level. Agriterra continually worked with various provincial and regional leaders of local farming communities. They also managed to foster direct contact with countless local farmers through training workshops. Consequently, Agriterra helped

change provincial farming leadership into major marketing managers of a vibrant tourist center. Farmers engaged in the agritourism project were able to work separately as fully fledged actors in the larger market.

Subsequently, farmers were encouraged to be members of a farmers' agritourism cooperative to build their managerial capacities and skill sets. Farmers engaging in the project would get to decide whether to join member the cooperative as members themselves. Currently, there are only 28 out of 82 households engaged in agritourism projects who have decided to be the cooperatives' members. The following project is to build the rural farmers' tourism center, which is managed and controlled by farmers' forces after getting the success of the project since 2007 (Interview Agriterra 2015). The Farmers' agritourism cooperative plays two main roles as an agency. The first is consulting farmers on topics and issues such as access to capital, investments, entering into and navigating various markets, and general skills and capacity building. The second role the cooperative takes on is in its operation as a tourism business. In light of its new role as a business, control of the project was transferred to the provincial leader of the An Giang Farmers Union, Mr. Nguyễn Thanh Tùng. Mr. Tùng became the manager of the cooperative's tourism center. The center worked separately from the Farmers' Union, but always in cooperation. In 2007, Agriterra's specialists found An Giang as a promising site for new agritourism development programs (Interview Agriterra 2015). Mr. Tùng chose about 3-5 households in each commune to participate in this new project. The participating households' costs of initial investment were funded by Agriterra, including operations, marketing, trainings, and investment in communities and households. The maximum investment is 25% of the total cost. Other support includes training workshops in communicating, hosting tourists, cooking, and adapting local food to tourists. The project also designed tours for farmers to travel to other provinces to learn about other tourism models. Therefore, agritourism project simultaneously supported partially farmers engaged in the project and strengthen their capacity to work by themselves.

The project's goals highlighted income generation, production of agro-tourists services and opportunities for poorer farmers beyond empowering their economic capacity (Interview Agriterra 2015). The indicators were identified as number of households

involved, jobs created, rise in income household, number of tourists visiting, financial coverage of the expenses of the tourist center to monitor economic efficiency (Interview Agritererra 2015). Thus Agritererra defined “Agricultural tourism is based on farm households, uses their opportunities, and generates products, which aim at satisfying the growing need of clients for community tourism, back to nature, experiencing local culture and showing responsibility to community through sustainable tourism” (Interview Agritererra 2015). It can be deduced that production of agro-tourists services are commoditized based on utilizing farm households’ opportunities to meet tourists’ demand of rural tourism and show farmers’ responsibility to community through agritourism as a form of sustainable tourism. In this sense, the sustainability was interpreted to comply with “the PPP principles: respect for People, planet, profit and “do no harm”. It is based on the existing community and farm live and utilization of the environment” (Interview Agritererra 2015). Therefore, the concept of sustainability was hidden to emphasize on sustainable alternative livelihoods utilizing the available agricultural environment, which proved farmers’ active roles as managers.

Agritererra continually encouraged farmers’ roles in tourism management by establishing the project membership to develop their full engagement and collaboration with outsiders. The project aimed to increase membership, local collaboration with other actors, access to finance and business initiatives (Agritererra n.d). Practically, agritourism activities included tourists’ participation in farming, local culture, and dinner with farm households, homestay, and sightseeing to promote farmers’ roles in possible management. Farmers additionally joined training workshops to develop their business skills in agritourism, which helped them actively meet tourists’ demand in agritourism activities. Agritourism project opened a space for farmers as producers to meet tourists as consumers as well as other intermediates. This motivated farmers to connect production and consumption for economic benefits. The project facilitated the farmers’ collaboration with travel and insurance companies and broadens their boundaries to outsiders. Conclusively, Agritererra proved the project as an option to solve farmers’ difficulties in capital, market, and investment, found by Dang Phong’s study (1995) and strengthen their roles in management.

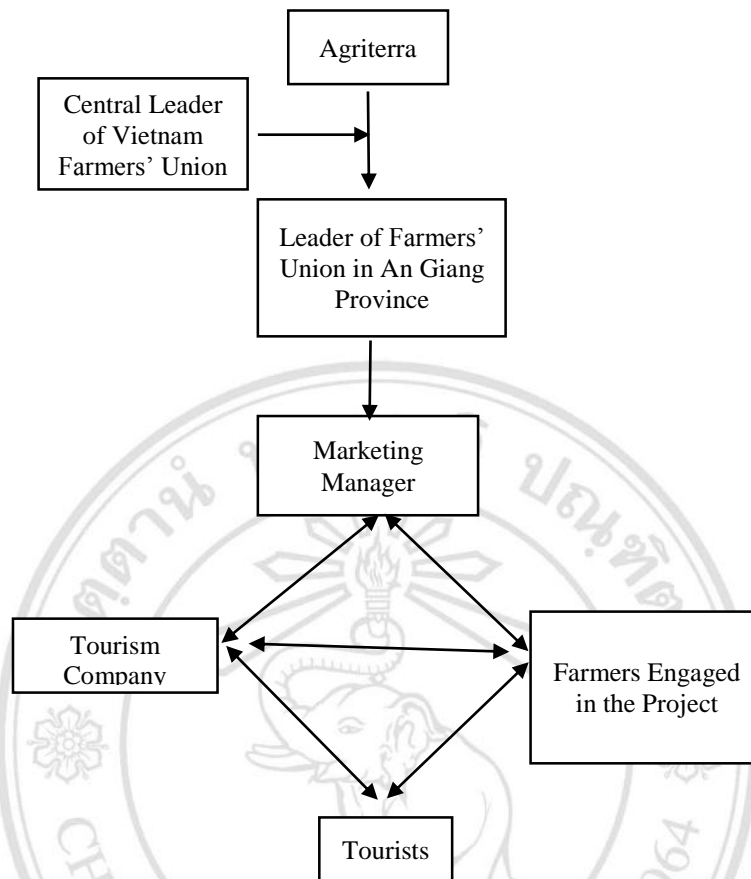


Figure 3.1 Agritourism Model in An Giang Province

At the second stage since 2010, the project established Farmers' Rural Tourism Centre to mobilize the potential of households to host tourists. The principle is to utilize farmers' availability, including agricultural activities, environment, and labor to produce agritourism products. There are 15 communes involved in the project with 87 households (Interview Provincial Leader of Farmers Union 2015). Over 20 farmers households already provided services such as food, drinks, channel drainage for fish, catching fish by nets, husbandry, caring fruit tree, vegetables and so on (Interview Agriterra 2015). The project tried to follow and support farmers' practices in tourism, including skills, knowledge, capital, investment, and network to ensure The Center playing their consultant roles and sustaining farmers' networking.

Conclusively, agritourism project created a negotiated space with the government and local farmers to engage farmers in agritourism business. Agriterra tried to convince farmers' capacity to recognize their roles as entrepreneurs, who can actively be a part of market. Initially, the organization started the communication of farmers' identification as a capable actor. In line with the state's viewpoints of "democratic, equal and civilized society" and "self-reliant economy with active international integration" (Vietnam Government 2012), agritourism projects was implemented to fulfill farmers' demand of diversifying livelihoods in sustainable development. Their ultimate economic efficiency were the incentive of their ideology of promoting farmers' democracy by empower their capacities. Therefore, they assist farmers in accessing capital, investment, and market. Then, The Rural Farmers' Tourism Center should be established and controlled to sustain farmers' practices and management in agritourism. At local level, they reinforce and strengthen farmer's capacities by providing training workshops of new knowledge of tourism business, engaging farmers' activities in tourism through membership, and promoting collaboration with other chain actors.

Consequently, farmers' identification was presented in how they interpreted their rationality through agritourism. Agriterra proved to be a capable and active actor in the market, whose roles are not limited to agricultural producers. Economic efficiency is Agriterra's ultimate aims beyond raising farmers' voices to negotiate with other actors in the market. In order to empower, self-reliance in managing and organizing as substantial rationality became the platform for economic efficiency. In this sense, formal and substantial rationality are not separate, but hierarchically built in priority in order to fulfil their underlying ideology of empower farmers' roles in the market economy. Evidently, farmers' identity can be transformed into entrepreneurs for better income distribution in tourism market.

3.2 The Making of Farmer Leader as a Marketing Manager

This section shows that how the farmer leader's roles were transformed into marketing manager as convincing farmers to engage in the project and maintaining agritourism business' success. The discourse of farmer leader's morality encouraged the leader to

balance his ideals of taking cares of farmers and economic efficiency, meanwhile the probability of agriculture in tourism were evident assuring farmers' investment. Similarly, Popkin (1979: 261) in the study of the rational peasant in the political economy of rural society in Vietnam argued that the leader' credibility built in self-abnegation of the leadership in Communist and religious movements prevailed bourgeois organization. In this section, I will going to show how Mr. Tùng, a provincial leader of farmer union and then a marketing manager, built his credibility and presented his rationality beyond his self-interest to engage farmers in agritourism especially in the areas of Hoa Hao Buddhism and under the context of Vietnam. Moreover, I will present when Mr. Tùng was transformed himself to the marketing manager of The Farmers' Rural Tourist Center, he completely shifted his roles to sustain tourism business by managing farmers and collaborating with other actors such as travel companies, tourists, managers of hotels, resorts and restaurants.

Initially, Mr. Tùng showed me in his passion how difficult his job was to engage farmers in agritourism project in terms of his personalities and responsibilities. At the beginning, he had to work with Mr. Định, the central leader of farmer union, consultants from Agriterro to choose farmer households that met the requirements of participating in the project. The most important criterion was the willingness of farmers. Mr. Tùng explained to me "If they volunteer to join the project, they will be more responsible for their activities. Vice versa, it will be annoyed" (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). He also told me in a disappointed way when sharing with me about difficulties in agritourism business "some farmers refused to welcome tourists when there were a lot of tourist" (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). By the reasons of disturbing farmers' life and ease, for example staying up late, (it was just about over 8pm) or the large influx of tourists, farmers complained to Mr. Tùng. He was angry to say that it was not also easy to find tourists, but he had to persuade farmers to continue providing their services. Those illustrated that even farmers committed to join agritourism; they could give up anytime if they were not happy at something. Some cases showed that Mr. Tùng also had some mistakes to engage farmers in agritourism because farmers just wanted to receive financial support instead of upgrading their houses as a compulsory requirement.

Subsequently, Mr. Tùng had to question himself the reasons to include farmers in agritourism to promote their full participation in business. Farmers have their own motivations and needs in the Vietnamese villages generated by a combination of Confucian and Vietnamese virtues (Popkin 1979:3). Mr. Tùng had to argue similarly to Popkin (1979: 260) how he possibly convinced farmers his credible goals could better farmers' life. His first reason was the discourse of "moral leader", a form of self-abnegation, who has responsibility to take care of farmers as a need. Moreover, the ties of leaders and farmers became undeniable relationships in addressing any affairs that Popkin (1979: 243) called in fraternal terms of "young brother" to "older brother".

Respectively, Mr. Tùng built his credibility to establish farmers' commitment in agritourism project and communicated strategically with farmers by his own rationality. According the tours designed by Mr. Tùng, travel agencies or tourists' demands, he works with local farmers to organize activities. Whenever farmers have difficulties to prepare for the tours, they inform Mr. Tùng to ask for consultant and supports, including capital and human resources. Local farmers also contribute to design the tours when Mr. Tùng presents his general ideas of tourists' demand because they know clearly what activities are available in the season. Being the manager of The Center, he also plays a role as consultant. Accordingly, he sets his aims to understand farmers' family situation, livelihoods, business and other related issues, also meaning that he should build closed relationships with members. He shared with me an unsuccessful case from Mr. Tùng-acerola cherry, a farmer engaged in the project, who has 4 hectares of acerola cherry and mango gardens. He used to sell fruits and acerola cherry alcohol before joining in the project. Mr. Tùng-acerola-cherry participated in the project as a local restaurant. His business successfully grew within two years. His brother and sister working as laborers in Binh Duong had to return in order to help him with his business. After married, a conflict of his mother and wife happened when his mother kept the money. Due to weak financial management and lack of caring for his gardens, his business failed shortly thereafter. Mr. Tùng failed to consult and encourage him as well as remind him to take care of his gardens because he thought the gardens were the platform for his business.

His credibility was both presented in his closed relationships and contact with farmers and motivations. Mr. Tùng confided since the beginning his motivations included (1) his passion to work in agritourism, (2) experience with farmers and (3) his ideology to be a good leader of farmer union (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). Those reflect how he interpreted his own farmer leader' identity. He presents himself as a farmer, who is willing to work with other farmers in rural areas as his passion. As a farmer leader, taking care of members, advocating and developing them in term of agricultural production and the legal are his responsibilities. He was active in helping farmers prepare legal documents for farmers' membership, including certificate of food safety, fire safety, or boating license, business license, and taxes in business operation.

Mr. Tùng showed his strength as a moral leader through personal conversations, and following through with his word, even when it came to me. When I asked him about interviewing a group of driving boats in Châu Đốc, he said it was not safe enough for to do so, and that it would be difficult to contact them because they are wanderers. Interviews would not go smoothly (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). He added that the people who have difficulties in life typically move around seeking work, and live with a certain amount of chaos disorganization built into their lives. For instance, in trying to involve such people in the tourism industry, Mr. Tùng has had to prepare their boating licenses for them, as a number of them are illiterate. But having a boating license not only facilitates for them a smooth transition into the tourism industry, but stabilizes their basic livelihood, ensuring they always have a reliable source of transportation. However, much of his efforts in this area have been hindered by complicated administrative procedures. So much so that he feels indebted to these people, for making promises to them that have been a long time in filling. Consequently, credibility is not a matter of keeping a promise, but a clear and obvious attempt to positively intervene in the farmers' affairs in a caring and gentle way. In this way, it is the moral leader's methodology in fulfilling his responsibilities, and his skills in managing his duties, in which these farmers can find good examples, and confidently follow "their brother."

After justifying himself, he was confident enough to convince farmers to follow him, and to help them understand the basics in agritourism, and the benefits of active engagement

in the business. The benefits of participating in agritourism projects shall be proved first. According to Agriterra's aims, transferred to Mr. Tùng, farmers engaged in the agritourism project should be organized into one cohesive agency (Agriterra's Mission 2015). Mr. Tùng had to convince farmers of the efficiency and sustainability of this new business structure in comparison to agriculture. This is similar to Popkin's argument in his study that an entrepreneur's credibility and capability are estimated in the way he can put his potential resources to use for the common good (Popkin 1979:261). Though originally just a provincial leader of a local farming union, Mr. Tùng proved to be a capable marketing manager, able to sustain the business with only partial institutional support on the part of Agriterra. Mr. Tùng showed his prowess in finding appropriate markets to launch his tours by expanding his relationships with existing external institutions, including functional departments, travel and accommodation companies, and other entities within the greater tourism industry.

Before being assigned to be in charge of this project, Mr. Tùng used to work for the Movement of Youth Group after graduating with a degree in agriculture. Control of the agritourism project was transferred to him by the central leader of Vietnam Farmers Union, Mr. Nguyễn Xuân Định, in the first phase of assessing agritourism sites and households, together with the help and suggestion of Agriterra's Dutch expert consultancy group. At the time of the project's implementation, Mr. Tùng had worked as the marketing manager since 2007; his main responsibility being the location and analysis of various applicable models of agricultural practices that create locally unique products (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). Tourism-related products are created with a highly volatile and seasonal demand in mind, and are designed to appeal to tourists in a safe, and novel, while still detailing the unique traditions of local farmers, particular to that region. Mr. Tùng looked like a real farmer, far beyond my own conceptions of a leader, which can be described as "toiling and moiling in the fields," a Vietnamese idiom depicting the traditional farmer's appearance. I first met him when he also had appointments with other guests in a well-known coffee shop adjacent to Đông Xuyên Hotel. Later on, I found out that this is one of the places he usually comes to meet other partners, including the managers of hotel and travel companies, not to mention other local and provincial leaders of all types of governmental departments.

Since the beginning, Mr. Tùng was very concerned with the principles of agritourism and economic sustainability. He had long desired to engage tourists in the activities of local farmers, activities which had not been considered as offerings by most other traditional tour companies. In the first place, he asked me to define several kinds of tourism, including agritourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism, and community tourism. I was surprised by those questions, while trying to explain my understanding of those concepts in a clear and concise way, and also demonstrating the purpose of my study. Mr. Tùng is incredibly focused on the possibilities of agritourism as a creative and powerful way to differentiate his own brand of tourism, one that builds sustainable community impacts, which are vital for beneficial tourism production. According to him, agritourism is an opportunity for tourists to participate in agricultural practices in rural areas, as organized by farmers, who are defined as being farmers and people having knowledge of farmers' lives, meaning that they don't need to work as farmers (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). He also mentioned about the concept of sustainability in economic terms — that farmers can sustain themselves even after ending the project. Mr. Tùng proudly claimed that his agritourism is not a form of *sân khấu hóa*, a *show*, but rather a window into farmers' authentic activities, through tourists can contact and participate with farmers. He tried to make agritourism activities that can meet tourists' demands.

Furthermore, tourists' demands are also of concern to him — they help inform his the launch of his products. In order to combine agriculture and tourism, he identified what aspects available to agriculture could be adequately coupled with tourism. In the first phase of the project, Mr. Tùng worked with Agriterra's consultancy group to identify qualified households and chose farmers who were willing to participate in the project. During this time, building infrastructure and training farmers' awareness of new business and necessary skills were his main aims. In the second phase, when *The Rural Farmers' Tourism Center* was established, Mr. Tùng officially became the Marketing Manager. Through participating in conferences, seminars, and exhibitions, and learning about partners' opinions and tourist demands, he locked onto tourists' desires to visit rural areas as a way to regenerate the labor pools of those same areas. In this way, agritourism can, as a long-term trend, tend to questions of labor in these areas. The relationships of

governmental agencies and potential travel companies are the two main sources for him to gather clients and tourists.

He also used websites to advertise his agritourism company. This allowed him to broadly market to large and diverse groups of tourists. The tour programs were publicized on mass media such as Vietnam-specific tourism websites (<http://dulich.hoinongdanag.org.vn/> and <http://homestayangiang.com/>), are linked to on the website of the Farmers' Union (<http://hoinongdanag.org.vn/>), and even are linked to on the website of the An Giang Department of Culture Sport and Tourism (<http://angiangtourism.vn/site/tin-tuc-sukien/tin-du-lich-c65691.html#.VfVAzBGeDGc>). He also advertised in newspapers. The Center organizes tours for trial and invites travel companies to broaden their reach and networks. According to Mr. Tùng, there are two main types of tourists: (1) foreigners with specific demands (contributing to 5% of the number of tourists), and (2) domestic tourists, including governmental officials with high salaries, and workers and students (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). He said that different tourist groups have various types of requirements, and value locality differently. In this sense, the publicized content includes descriptions and the documentation of activities wherein tourists share authentic experiences with farmers, and participate in culture exchange; for example, Đờn Ca Tài Tử (an art-form recognized as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO) and ethnic performances, while enjoying local culinary specialties. To Mr. Tùng, farmers should be patient while working with tourists in to agritourism, which is led differently by travel agencies (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015).

In conclusion, being an official of the local farmers' union, Mr. Tùng sees his role as taking care of farmers, and his job as helping them developing their skills sets to become responsible leaders in their own right. Additionally, working with farmers and sharing in their activities are his passions, though he had many difficulties in encouraging them to engage in agritourism. Presenting himself as a farmer, he is trying to advertise his agritourism as an appealing invitation to tourists, which is different from travel agencies. In this sense, his tours are designed for tourists to enjoy not only the rural landscape but also farmers' activities in cooking and agricultural practices. Mr. Tùng has gradually transformed himself into a marketing manager, who plays a key role in connecting

farmers directly to consumers, without bearing in mind that he is a representative of farmers. Different from being a leader of a farmers' union, who cannot help farmers connect with wider markets, Mr. Tùng takes advantage of his networking with governmental departments and travel agencies to find tourists, and works with farmers to conduct agritourism programs. Economic efficiency became an implication in tourism business as an inevitability once The Center has to live on their profit. In this case, tours' prices are still calculated on production and consumption when Mr. Tùng negotiates with tourists or travel agencies as well as discusses with farmers.

3.3 Double Identification of Local Farmers as both Agricultural Producers and Entrepreneurs

Farmers engaged in the agritourism project as their private investment. Since the beginning, they had to consider the possible benefits as outlined or otherwise promised by the farmers' leader. This communication initially encouraged their roles as entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the training helped build skill sets crucial to the agritourism business (a business that also served as a communication space for Agriterra, convincing local farmers of the necessity and opportunity to be self-reliant in business).

Farmers became the main decision-makers in their agricultural production methods since the appearance of the land market (Dao The Tuan 1995). It became possible to diversify their livelihoods according to their own self-interests, and the market demand. Tracing Vietnamese history, Popkin (1979:ix) claimed that farmers as behaved "rational problem-solver[s], who can communicate with others to gain mutual benefits." In this sense, in order to deal with the unstable market of agriculture, farmers tried to find alternative livelihoods to reduce the risks that the government failed to support them in. Being "rational problem-solver[s]," farmers themselves should be able to find appropriate and attainable solutions to their own problems. But it depends on their access to information and opportunities, if they can calculate a proposed solution that can be their choice, which Popkin (1979:31) explained similarly that farmers' rationality is the evaluation of possible outcomes and their choices with their preferences and values. In my study, I employed Weberian perspectives to find out how farmers are pulled into markets through

the weighing of formal and substantial rationalities debated and communicated among themselves. Moreover, I want to understand the implication beyond farmers' definition of the concept of agritourism. This study explores how different levels of farmers as agritourism providers communicate their rationality and reasoning in the tourism business and how farmers integrate their practices into agritourism.

Farmers in An Giang have similar substantial rationalities, emphasizing on farmers' self-reliance on managing agritourism business, the economic hope of agritourism, and the learning opportunity. Firstly, agritourism in An Giang is defined as "farmers' tourism" or "*Du lịch nông dân*." This type of tourism is organized by farmers to engage tourists in farmers' activities in order to generate incomes for community. *Du lịch nông dân* in effect means that farmers are the main force to organize and manage the tourism business. This awareness amongst farmers and the ability to empower themselves roundly echoed Agriterra's aims to promote self-reliance among farmers and their activities, and helped Mr. Tùg bolster farmers' memberships in his agritourism projects. According to Mr. Trần Trung Nghĩa, a farmers engaged in the project in the Mỹ Hòa Hưng commune, "agritourism engages tourists in agriculture with farmers, including cultivating vegetables" (Interview Mr. Trần Trung Nghĩa 2015). Showing the same view, Mr. Tùg-Táo also emphasized the experience with farmers and farmers' lives. Farmers' lives and practices are demonstrated in the activities that facilitate tourists' contact and experience with both agriculture and farmers. Farmers' lives are also dependent on and informed by the living environment. For example Mr. Võ Thành Trang, a farmer in Vàm Nao hamlet, said that "agritourism relates to farmers' familiarities of land and rivers" (Interview Mr. Võ Thành Trang 2015). According the head of Vàm Nao, Mr. Nguyễn Tấn Nhu, "agritourism revolves [around] agriculture-related activities such as picking lotus and *trapa bicornis*" (Interview Mr. Nguyễn Tấn Nhu 2015).

Similarly, other farmers showed how tourism can relate to agriculture and farmers in specific activities in each commune. For example, "channel drainage for fish, catching fish by nets, husbandry, caring [for] fruit tree[s], vegetables." Farmers' roles are additionally reinforced by claiming that agritourism should be done by farmers in managing, organizing and connecting to the market. Mr. Trình Thanh Nhơn and Mr.

Nguyên, two farmers engaged in the project in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, shared the same opinions that farmers are self-reliant in agritourism because “they were given fishing rod, then they have to fish by themselves” (Interview farmers in Mỹ Hòa Hưng 2015), meaning that farmers were initially supported by Agriterra, then had to survive by themselves. Consequently, farmers’ perspectives of agritourism mainly focus on agriculture, in which farmers present themselves as entrepreneurs in tourism within in the rural environment. In this sense, farmers’ sense of belonging to both environment and agricultural practices are directly central to their tourism business. This again proved that Agriterra’s aims to promote self-reliance in farmers’ activities are both attainable and achievable.

Secondly, farmers are also concerned with the economic hope of agritourism, which is their future hope and motivations to participate in the project. They expected that as the number of tourists increases, agritourism can be a good choice for their livelihood. According to Mr. Chao Thu Hà, a farmer in Ô Lâm, “nowadays, tourism has been developed. People usually travel in cities. So, they want to enjoy rural areas” (Interview farmer in Ô Lâm 2015). Farmers’ calculations of the relative costs and benefits of the project refer to several factors that influenced their decision. Those factors included their current and future benefits, which were not only about economic efficiency. They were also about the future prospect. Agritourism also offered farmers opportunities to exchange their culture and knowledge. The project provided trainings in tourism, which was new to farmers. Since they had previous contacts and experiences with tourists as outsiders, especially city dwellers, they began to compare their culture with that of the outsiders. According to farmers, they learned from tourists by their selected choices (Interview farmers in Ô Lâm). For example, using separate bowls and spoons is cleaner, but make members more individualistic.

Thirdly, the formal rationality of income generation and promoting local products are also concerns beyond simply promoting farmers’ roles in agricultural production and the rural environment. Most of the farmers interviewed mentioned the concept of agritourism with respect to its benefits. Especially those related to economic efficiency in the way Popkin (1979: 26) explained that membership in the village is a license to participate in the economy of the village. In the Ô Lâm commune, tours are designed to engage tourists in

farmers' activities. Therefore, farmers also conceive of agritourism as a channel to promote agricultural products and practices. They emphasized on the relationship of farmers and agriculture in tourism as the main features. Specifically, Mr. Chao Châu San and Mr. Chao Thu Hà, farmers in an agritourism project in Ô Lôm, said that agritourism is the relation of tourism and agriculture, in which farmers' activities are engaged in, to promote local specialties inside and outside country (Interview farmers in Ô Lôm 2015).

In terms of income generation, according to Ms. Hồ Thanh Vân, a farmer in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, "agritourism is very good to generate more income" (Interview Ms. Ho Thanh Van 2015). Mỹ Hòa Hưng is more developed compared to other communes in An Giang. In seeking models with high economic value in agriculture, a diversified local economy including small business or craft villages and even historical tourism is important. Farmers in this commune mainly emphasized agritourism as an "idle tourism," or "*Du lịch nhàn rỗi*" — to generate high income with low risk, as compared to traditional agriculture. Idle tourism means that farmers can utilize their idle time to participate in agritourism. Mr. Trần Anh Châu, the chairman of farmer's union, and Mr. Ba Đính, the leader of the homestay group in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, showed the same ideas; that agritourism is "idle tourism, which can generate high come and jobs for farmers" (Interview Mr. Ba Đính 2015). Being one of the households that received a high income from agritourism, Mr. Ba Đính also added that the earning can assure that farmers live comfortably.

Mỹ Hòa Hưng proved to be the most successful case in economic achievement. Agritourism in Mỹ Hòa Hưng could make two gardeners in the cases of Mr. Ba Đính and Mr. Tùng-Táo gradually shift their professionals if income from tourism is stable and higher. Homestay is a form of activity done by individual households, which are famous in Mỹ Hòa Hưng. Farmers turned to their own self-interests of achieving higher incomes while doing less labor, and avoiding production risks in comparison to traditional agricultural practices. The regulation of homestay groups allows farmers to find their own tourists and pay tax to the group. Until now, there have not been any official regulations for homestay groups, which facilitate farmers' household economies. In the context of travel companies' intervention, homestay groups seemed not to control all individual

activities (Interview Mr. Trần Anh Châu 2015). Mỹ Hòa Hưng is the case that illustrates farmers' roles are absolutely turned into entrepreneurs due to their formal rationality.

Meanwhile Vàm Nao hamlet is chosen for agricultural activities with farmers and local food. Farmers in the hamlet said that agritourism is to promote local products as well as farmers' practices. Tourists actually experience in agricultural activities and contact both directly and indirectly with agriculture through local foods and activities with host family. According to Mr. Võ Thành Trang, "agritourism helps consume local agricultural products with high price, create a channel to promote local specialties" (Interview Mr. Võ Thành Trang 2015). Similarly, Mr. Ngô Tấn Nhu, the head of Vàm Nao hamlet, "agritourism just revolves around agriculture to consume products" besides its' benefits to create jobs and income for farmers (Interview Mr. Ngô Tấn Nhu 2015).

In conclusion, the simple fact that the farmers discussed and made considerations of economic efficiency, including the generation of more income and jobs, and the promotion of agricultural products, can prove that agritourism can be an alternative livelihood in which farmers can find countless advantages. Farmers are rationale to calculate economic and non-economic benefits. Those farmers' ability to organize and make such substantial considerations proved that the farmers had been able to transition into their roles as entrepreneurs, who are capable of investing in new business and access to the market. Farmers can no longer be thought of as agricultural producers, but entrepreneurs.

After weighing the substantial and formal rationality, farmers begin to justify the leader's credibility. Popkin (1979: 259) in the study of the political entrepreneur found out that "when a peasant makes his personal cost-benefit calculations about the expected returns on his own inputs, he is making subjective estimates of the credibility and capability of the organizer." This explained that why farmers in An Giang also relied on Mr. Tùng's credibility as a moral leader, a representative official, who was considered in good brothers and sisters' relationships with farmers. Moreover, this sensation refers to the feeling of security in farmers' investment when they are supported by the government and the project.

The credibility is evaluated in conversations and direct contact with the leader in specific practices. The figure 3.2 illustrates the contacts of farmers and leaders in agritourism. Agritourism in An Giang is organized by group activities. Each group has a leader, who works directly with Mr. Tùng to manage the activities. Mr. Tùng has frequent contacts with farmers when he became tourist guide. Sometimes, they ate and drank together to discuss about the activities and difficulties. Mr. Tùng introduced agritourism to farmers. He has to prove the benefits of agritourism and sustain it to assure his credibility because at the beginning he was a representative of the government. Therefore, his duties are to convince farmers that agritourism is beneficial and alternative for income generation. Even though, Agriterra supported partly finance, Mr. Tùng and farmers have to sustain agritourism by themselves. Farmers, who believed in Mr. Tùng's promise, participated first, meanwhile others were watching their neighbors to see its economic efficiency. Then, they decided to participate in agritourism for more income. Some farmers failed in fishing or gardening also wanted to join the project. At the second phase of the project, Mr. Tùng also motivate farmers to be members in tourism center under their consideration of its membership's benefits. Accordingly, farmers have their choices in making decisions.

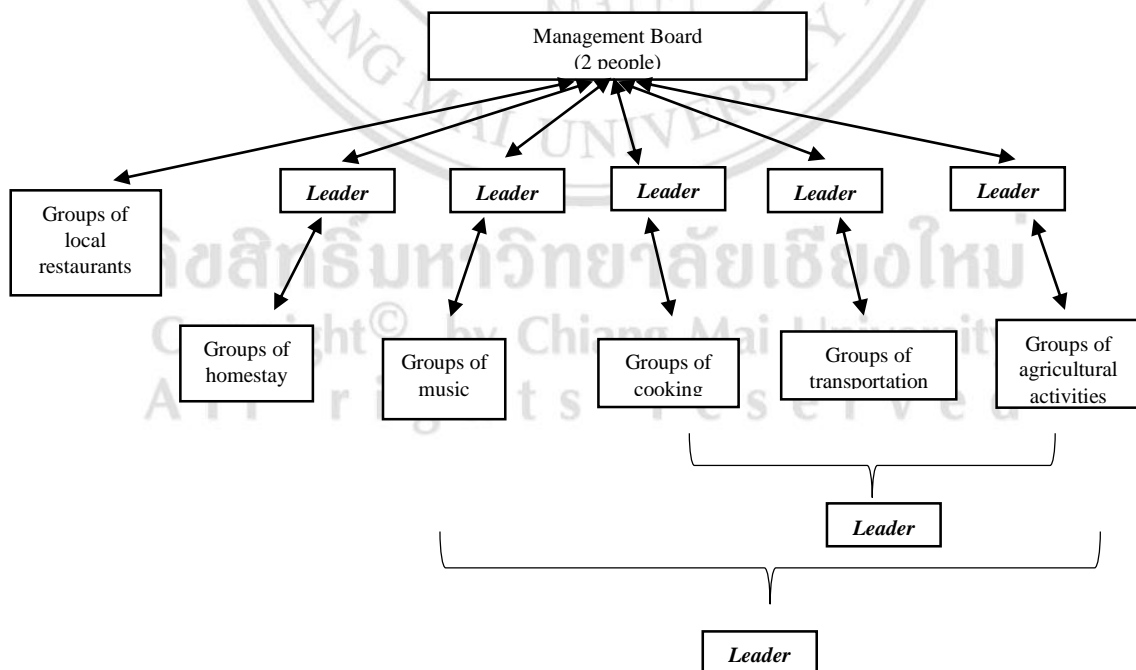


Figure 3.2 Agritourism Management in An Giang

Additionally, farmers considered about the government's future investment in tourism as a preference to engage in agritourism business and justify the leader's promise. Farmers believed that agritourism happened as a new consumption of city dwellers, when they are seeking for more contact and experience with countryside. Additionally, government also has projects to develop ecotourism as their plans. According to Mr. Trần Anh Châu, the chairman of farmer union in Mỹ Hòa Hưng, said that the government also planned to build ecotourism in 2020-2030 and the commune was chosen to engage in the plan (Interview Mr. Trần Anh Châu 2015). Some of the interviewees recognized that tourism is a trend in the future, that is possible developed and invested more. This definition focuses on tourism consumption or demand. Accordingly, farmers' roles in meeting those demand are also concerned in production process to make better products. Mr. Chao Châu San suggested that farmers should try hard to supply their good products (Interview Mr. Chao Châu San 2015), also not to spoil local image, concerned by The chairman of farmer union in Ô Lâm.

Moreover, the project also has to prove some probability and benefits, that Mr. Tùng already showed to prove his morality. Also a representative of farmers, Mr. Tùng said that "the support of Agriterra helped reduce the risks. But, when the project ended, we are still going on" (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015). Similar to other farmers when they tried to avoid risks of unstable market, and crop cultivating, "subsistence and security" seem to be their insurance especially when they are lack of capital, investment, and access to the market. They are finding for support from the government and external institutions. After the project ended, Mr. Nguyễn in Mỹ Hòa Hưng and Mr. Chao Châu San in Ô Lâm also expressed that they had difficulties in access to capital. For example, local government facilitated companies to cooperate with farmers to contract the production, which can help farmers both in input and output of agricultural practices. Farmers contracted companies for Vietnamese Good Agricultural Practices in Mỹ Hòa Hưng or consumption of soy vegetable in Vàm Nao. Agritourism had to fulfill farmers' demand in "subsistence and security" in addition to meet individual interests.

Simultaneously, Agriterra provided investment and capital as well as consultants to assure farmers' benefits and help farmers gradually engaged in agritourism. This is related with

subsistence and security that Popkin (1979: 8) called the farmers' principle of "safety-first" to avoid risks and drops, rather than maximizing expected profits. Mr. Tùng assured the future prospect and facilitated legal framework that farmers can follow. It was not easy to convince farmers to engage in the project, which should be proved as not a risky environment. At the beginning, some gardeners refused to participate because they were afraid that tourists would destroy their gardens. After observing their neighbors' participation, they volunteered to join despite that the project ended. Some farmers failed in their crops also wanted to be a member of the tourists center (Interview Mr. Tùng 2015).

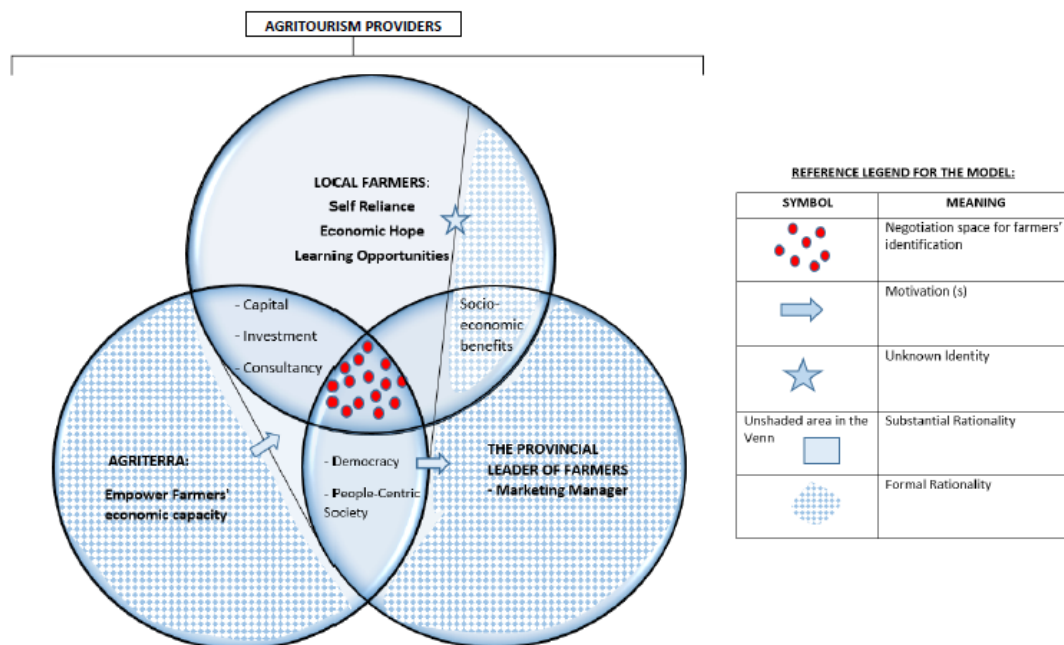


Figure 3.3 Communication of Farmers' Rationality in Agritourism and Beyond

In conclusion, the findings proved Popkin's argument that credibility, moral codes, and visions of the future affect farmers' estimation of their investment (1979: 262). In this sense, farmers were not marginalized forces since the appearance of liberalized market. They have more incentives to be the main decision-makers in their agriculture. In Vàm Nao hamlet, farmers will decide what to cultivate by referencing other farmers around. Despite of that, some of them failed in 2-3 continuous crops (Interview Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Hải 2015). Therefore, farmers are managers in their own agricultural business with many potential risks in unstable market, capital, and investment that they tried to seek for help

from external and internal institutions. Moreover, farmers have various approaches in the definition of agritourism. Depending on each situation and condition of each commune's practices, farmers perceived the concept in different ways. Agritourism in An Giang can be presented according to the issues non-economic benefits including farmers' roles, economic hope, and education opportunity. Economic achievement is also their concerns to generate more incomes and jobs for local community and promote locally agricultural products, which can assure farmers' better life. Lastly, the trust in leader motivated and encouraged farmers in agritourism project for economic hope generated by their calculation of formal and substantial rationalities.

After all, the way farmer interpreted agritourism to balance formal and substantial rationality presented them roles of entrepreneurs, which mostly depended on how much they benefited from agritourism. The figure 3.3 shows how the negotiated space is constructed due to different presentation of farmers' identifications. Farmers at different level strategically communicate their rationality to engage in agritourism. The calculation of formal and substantial rationality proved their viable roles as entrepreneurs, who have capacity to bypass the market. This finding is similar to Barbieri's study about the motivations behind agritourism and other farm enterprise developments in Canada (2010), which originated from farmers' calculation in agritourism business. According to Barbier (2010: 15), entrepreneurial farmers in Canada paid more attention on the creation of jobs for family members for future generations, though the generation of additional income was highly accomplished by non-agritourism farmers. Non-economic benefits or substantial including enhancing personal/family quality of life, increasing or diversifying the market, and responding to a market need or opportunity were also farmers' concerns.

3.4 Conclusion

This section showed how different levels of farmers (international, national, and local) communicated strategically to engage themselves in the agritourism business through their different means of identification. By using the Weberian perspective, I characterized their motivations according to both their economic and non-economic benefits, which directly constructed their negotiated space. The way that farmers interpret their rationality

in agritourism presented their identification differently, which engaged them in mutual communication. Starting from Agriterra, they employed agritourism project to prove them as a capable actor in the market. Promoting democracy and people-centric society became a negotiated space for agritourism project beyond Agriterra's aims of empowering farmers in market economy. Mr. Tùng, a representative of Farmer Union, changed his roles to be marketing manager and work in tourism business. Farmers have their own calculation of economic and non-economic benefits of agritourism project, which opened a space for negotiation of agritourism project. Accordingly, agritourism make farmers' roles as entrepreneurs viable in agritourism business.

Agritourism, which is passive with direct and indirect contact of farmers of agriculture, was a tool for different level of farmers employ to present their identification. Firstly, beginning with Agriterra, they claims themselves as an agri-agency, who is capable of bypassing the market. In their point of views, farmers should improve themselves and raise their voices to negotiate with other actors in the market in order to gain more economic benefits. At local level, they make farmers' roles as entrepreneurs viable by providing them with capital, investment, and consultancy. Agriterra's formal rationality was hidden behind a viable and substantial rationality designed to empower farmers. On a national level, they communicated strategically to promote a democratic and people-centric society in accordance with the government's policies. Secondly, Mr. Tùng transformed himself from Farmers' Leader to Marketing manager to prove farmers' capacity of entrepreneurs. The discourse of the moral leader is his substantial rationality to motivate him to engage in the project beyond the economic goal of coaxing business. Thirdly, local farmers in their attempt to weigh economic and non-economic benefits presented themselves as both identification of agricultural producers and entrepreneurs. Agritourism later facilitated their calculations to make their roles as entrepreneurs viable. In conclusion, economic efficiency ended to be the ultimate motivation and need of what makes a farmer's concern beyond their trust in the leader, learning opportunities and future prospect, and identification of agricultural producers.