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Tourism Project Screening Approach in Environmental Impact Assessment in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the strong development of the tourism industry in Vietnam, tourism projects are increasingly expanding in scale and location, especially in environmentally sensitive areas such as special-use forests, coastal areas and nature reserves. Although they contribute greatly to economic growth and employment, these projects also pose many risks of causing negative impacts on the environment and society. Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is an important management tool to identify and control such impacts. Screening is the first and very important step to help determine whether a project requires an EIA or not, bringing many benefits in terms of efficiency and environmental management. However, current project screening is still done in a formal and ineffective manner, leading to impractical EIA reports that do not focus on core issues. This study focuses on analyzing the role, current status and limitations of the screening step in EIA of tourism projects in Vietnam, and proposes a new, flexible approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to improve the quality and effectiveness of this step. The proposed 6-step screening process helps to identify major impacts early, save resources and increase transparency in decision-making. The study also recommends improving the legal framework, enhancing staff training, applying technology and promoting the role of the community in monitoring and feedback. This is an important basis for improving the quality of EIA and moving towards sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Tourism; EIA; Tourism Project; Tourism Project Screening

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1. Introduction

In the context of current socio-economic development, tourism is considered one of the key economic sectors [1], tourism makes a very important contribution to GDP growth and creates jobs for many Vietnamese people [2, 3]. However, the rapid and sometimes uncontrolled development of tourism projects, especially in areas with sensitive ecosystems such as special-use forests, coastal areas, islands and nature reserves, has caused many negative consequences for the natural and social environment [4, 5]. EIA is the main environmental management tool [6] on a global scale and EIA is recognized as a global standard in international environmental law. EIA is a process of identifying, assessing and managing potential impacts of development, in order to predict [7] the impacts (including both positive and negative) that may occur when implementing a project, thereby proposing effective mitigation and prevention measures. EIA is a legally mandatory provision in almost every country in the world, in some form, as a process to obtain environmental approval for development and promote sustainable development [8]. In most countries, most types of projects are required to undergo some form of EIA prior to approval [9]. In EIA for tourism projects in Vietnam, the steps usually include: (1) Project screening; (2) Scoping; (3) Impact assessment and mitigation; (4) Impact management; (5) EIA reporting; (6) Assessment and licensing; (7) Monitoring [10]. In which, the first step is screening, which plays a particularly important role, determining the scope, content and overall effectiveness of the EIA. Screening is the basis for determining the scope of the tourism project, this is the stage to identify the main issues and impacts that need to be addressed in the EIA for the tourism project. However, in reality, this step is often overlooked or performed as a formality, leading to EIA reports that are not close to reality, omitting serious impacts, or spreading out assessments and lacking focus. For tourism projects, the right approach right from the screening step will help clearly identify which projects really need an EIA, avoiding wasting resources on small-scale projects with insignificant impacts.

2. Research Method

The research is conducted based on a qualitative and quantitative approach combining theoretical research and practical analysis to clarify the scientific basis and the current status of screening in EIA for tourism projects. The specific methods used include:

— Document research method (qualitative): This method is used to systematically collect and analyze sources of documents related to screening in EIA. Documents exploited include: Current legal documents in Vietnam such as the Law on Environmental Protection, decrees, guiding circulars and technical documents related to EIA; Scientific research works, domestic and foreign academic documents on theories, processes and approaches in screening and determining the scope of environmental impact assessment... The results from this method provide a theoretical and legal basis to shape the analytical framework for the study.

— Quantitative research method: In order to supplement the objective perspective from stakeholders, the study used a quantitative survey method through a semi-structured questionnaire. This method allows for systematic data collection on perceptions, assessments and practical experience in implementing screening activities in EIA for tourism projects:

Determining the scale and structure of the survey sample: A total of 36 valid survey forms were collected, distributed into three main groups of subjects: 16 experts and environmental management officers from the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, Departments of Natural Resources and Environment (now the Department of Agriculture and Environment) in provinces with many tourism projects; 11 representatives of consulting units with experience in preparing EIA reports for tourism projects; 9 representatives of investors of tourism projects that have conducted EIA. The subjects were selected by purposive sampling to ensure that they have professional knowledge and practical experience related to EIA and project screening.

Questionnaire design and content: The questionnaire was designed semi-structured, including quantitative questions (on a 5-level Likert scale: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree) and some open-ended questions to further explore the opinions of the respondents. The main contents include: Awareness and level of understanding of screening in EIA; Evaluation of the effectiveness of the current screening process; Level

of participation and role of stakeholders (investors, consultants, communities, etc.); Common barriers and difficulties in the screening process. In particular, the main survey objective is to assess the level of agreement of these groups of subjects with the application of screening approaches in the EIA process. The survey results provide a multi-dimensional view of the assessment and acceptance of different screening methods by stakeholders in the EIA field, thereby serving as a basis for improving and developing assessment processes and tools suitable for sustainable management and development practices. Questionnaire development and validation process: The questionnaire was developed based on a synthesis of specialized documents and reference to similar studies at home and abroad. Before the official implementation, the questionnaire was pre-tested with 5 experts to assess the clarity and appropriateness of the content and to correct the language and structure of the questions. Feedback from the pilot was integrated to complete the final version of the questionnaire.

— Case study method: To analyze the practice of screening in EIA in Vietnam, the study selected a number of EIA reports of approved tourism projects as the subjects of analysis. The selection of case studies is based on the following criteria: representativeness of project types (ecotourism, resorts, entertainment, etc.), project scale, geographical area and level of environmental impact. The analysis focuses on the screening process and criteria applied; Consultation with stakeholders during the screening process; Compliance with legal and technical requirements. Data collected includes EIA reports, accompanying reference documents and, in some cases, information from semi-structured interviews with experts or environmental managers.
— Analysis and synthesis method: The analysis and synthesis method is used to process information from document sources and case studies. From there, the study identifies the appropriate points, inadequacies and gaps between theory and practice in EIA screening for tourism projects.

Based on the results of theoretical and practical research, the study proposes screening approaches in EIA for tourism projects.

3. Research Content and Results

3.1. Concept of Screening

Screening is the first stage [11–14] of the EIA process that leads to the important EIA decision, namely whether to proceed with the assessment (based on the likely significant impacts) or not to proceed (in case no such impacts are expected). Screening can be done by one of the following measures: Comparing the project with the list of projects that do not require EIA as prescribed by the environmental agency; measuring simple parameters such as project scale or location; estimating key impacts; analyzing complex issues using available documents [15]. Screening aims to help authorities, investors and the community identify tourism projects with high risks of affecting the environment and must comply with environmental protection regulations.

Every year, in Vietnam, many projects are implemented. To save time and money, EIA should only be conducted for projects that will actually cause environmental impacts. Therefore, first of all, there needs to be a mechanism to determine the level of necessity, to determine the main purpose of EIA of all projects [16]. Distinguishing projects according to the level of necessity of EIA is called project screening [17]. Project screening for EIA for tourism development projects is a very important step in the environmental management process and ensures that tourism activities are implemented sustainably, without causing serious harm to the natural environment, economic environment and society. Screening helps determine whether a tourism project needs to conduct a full EIA or not and what the level of its impact on the environment is. Therefore, screening needs to follow specific procedures that are often described in legislation so that all tourism projects follow the same process.

The main contributions of screening to achieving a good EIA are:

— Facilitating informed decision-making by providing a clearly structured, factual analysis of the impacts and consequences of proposed actions.
— Influencing both project selection and policy design by screening out proposals that are not environmentally and socially beneficial, as well as modifying feasible actions.

When screening a tourism development project to de-

cide whether an EIA is required, the following factors should be considered:

— Scale of the tourism project: Large-scale tourism development projects (e.g. resorts, amusement parks, national parks, etc.) typically have larger environmental impacts and require detailed assessment. Smaller-scale tourism development projects (e.g. hotels, single-family homes) may not require an EIA if the environmental impacts are insignificant, but still need to be considered.
— Location and geographical features: Is the tourism project located in a nature reserve, historical site, area with high biodiversity, or vulnerable area? The presence of special natural elements such as mangroves, coral reefs, freshwater ecosystems, etc. can greatly influence the decision to conduct an EIA.
— Impact on biodiversity and ecosystems: Can tourism projects change natural ecosystems? For example, exploiting resources and developing infrastructure (roads, electricity, water, etc.), changing the flow of rivers and streams, or causing soil, water, and air pollution.
— Impact on communities and society: Does the tourism project impact the lives of local communities? This may include changes in population structure, cultural changes, population growth, pressure on social services, transportation, health, education, etc. It is necessary to assess social impacts to ensure that the tourism project does not reduce the quality of life of local communities.
— Pollution levels and environmental risks: Can tourism projects create waste, emissions, or cause noise and light pollution? Activities such as construction, exploitation, and infrastructure development can create negative impacts. Natural disaster risks, such as flooding, soil erosion, or landslides, should be assessed when developing tourism projects in vulnerable areas.
— Resources and infrastructure: Does the tourism project require large amounts of resources, such as clean water, electricity, or construction materials? The use of natural resources can affect resources and the environment. Tourism infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, parking lots, and roads can increase pressure on local infrastructure and lead to a decline in the quality of the living environment.

3.2. Benefits of Screening

An important element in the EIA process is to determine the extent of the impact of a proposed project, development program or initiative. For large-scale projects, especially those involving the exploitation of natural resources such as mineral mines, hydroelectric projects or oil and gas exploitation, it can be affirmed that conducting an EIA and social impact assessment is indispensable. Conversely, although tourism projects may initially be considered low-risk, upon closer examination, it can be seen that they require large amounts of clean water, consume a lot of energy, have the potential to affect rare plant and animal species, and increase the amount of wastewater that needs to be treated. In addition, increased road and air traffic to transport supplies, welcome visitors and deploy human resources is also inevitable. Furthermore, the impacts of tourism projects are not always fixed, but can change over time. For this reason, in the first step—the screening stage, most proposals can be quickly assessed and excluded from the EIA process due to their low impact. Only a small group of projects, usually large-scale tourism projects, need to undergo a full assessment because they are likely to have significant impacts on the natural environment, public health, livelihoods or cultural values. However, many projects with moderate impacts will require the development of an environmental management plan—an essential part of a full EIA dossier.

Conducting project screening for EIA for tourism development projects is an extremely important step to ensure that tourism development is both sustainable and does not cause negative impacts on the economy, society, environment and local communities. Therefore, screening tourism projects brings many great benefits such as:

— Screening for effective resource management and environmental protection of tourism projects: Tourism development is associated with the exploitation of natural resources (water, land, forest, sea). If not well managed, this exploitation can lead to resource depletion, affecting the livelihoods of the community and having long-term impacts on the environment. Therefore, screening helps to assess the level of resource use and propose effective measures to protect resources; protect the natural environment, minimize negative impacts on environmental resources and preserve ecosystems.

— Screening to ensure sustainable development of tourism projects: Tourism development can bring great economic benefits, but if not properly managed, tourism development activities can also cause many adverse impacts on the environment and the community. Screening helps identify tourism projects that pose significant risks to the environment, thereby providing mitigation measures and protecting the natural environment, protecting biodiversity and maintaining the stability of ecosystems. This helps develop tourism in a sustainable manner, ensuring that tourism development not only brings economic benefits but also preserves the local environment and culture, not only serves short-term interests but also protects resources and the environment for future generations.

— Screening to prevent environmental pollution risks [18], minimize the risk of serious environmental impacts of tourism projects: Some tourism projects, especially in large-scale resorts and amusement parks, can cause many negative impacts on the environment such as water and air pollution, land degradation, erosion, deforestation or loss of biodiversity. The screening process helps to identify tourism projects that are likely to cause major impacts early, thereby proposing mitigation measures or changing the design of the tourism project to minimize these impacts.

— Screening to ensure that tourism projects fully comply with legal regulations on environmental protection: In many countries, implementing EIA is a legal requirement for tourism projects that can cause major impacts on the environment. Screening tourism projects helps to identify which projects are subject to EIA, thereby ensuring that tourism projects fully comply with legal regulations on environmental protection. This not only helps protect the environment but also avoids legal risks and unnecessary fines for investors, as well as minimizing risks for investors and helping investors identify risks and take preventive measures from the beginning.

— Screening to enhance consensus and support from the community for tourism projects: Screening tourism projects and EIA helps to publicize information about the project and invite participation and comments from the community. This not only helps to create consensus from the local community but also minimizes the risk of social conflicts, making tourism projects easier to implement and more acceptable to the community. Community consultation also helps to protect the rights of people, ensuring that they are not negatively affected by tourism projects.

— Screening to enhance transparency and risk management of tourism projects: Screening tourism projects helps to enhance transparency in the decision-making and risk management process. EIA not only helps to identify potential impacts but also helps investors and project management agencies to develop plans to respond to environmental risks. This helps to minimize the possibility of incidents and environmental crisis situations during the implementation and deployment of tourism projects.

— Screening to protect public health and people's lives: Tourism projects can directly affect public health, especially in densely populated areas or environmentally vulnerable areas. Improper discharge, noise and air pollution or unreasonable use of water resources can harm people's health. Screening helps identify and prevent these impacts right from the beginning of a tourism project.

— Screening to increase awareness and responsibility for environmental protection of tourism projects: Screening of tourism projects helps raise awareness of stakeholders (investors, local authorities and communities...) about the importance of environmental protection in tourism development. By assessing environmental impacts right from the beginning, parties can make more reasonable decisions and take responsibility for minimizing negative impacts from the project.

— Screening to create opportunities for responsible tourism development: Screening helps ensure that tourism projects are developed in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. Tourism projects not only aim for economic benefits but also ensure sustainability, protecting cultural and natural values. This helps the tourism industry develop in a long-term manner without causing negative consequences in the future.

— Screening to support improving the image and reputation of the tourism industry: A tourism industry that implements environmental protection and sustainable development measures will be highly appreciated by the

community and tourists, contributing to improving the reputation and image of the industry. Tourism projects that do not control environmental impacts will be easily criticized and can affect the long-term development of the industry.

Project screening for EIA for tourism projects not only helps protect the environment, but also ensures sustainable development of the tourism industry, protects the community, minimizes risks, and fully complies with legal regulations. This is an important tool to help maintain the balance between economic development and management, protect natural resources, and also create a safe and attractive tourism environment for visitors.

3.3. Current Status of Screening Tourism Projects in EIA in Vietnam

In the context of rapid tourism development, especially in sensitive ecological areas such as coastal, mountainous, island and ethnic minority areas, EIA is considered an important legal and scientific tool to ensure sustainable development.

EIA is a powerful tool for decision-making in sustainable development [19], contributing to environmental protection in tourism development [3], because EIA in tourism forms the basis for identifying ecological risks and possible preventive measures [20]. However, in reality, the screening process and determination of the scope of assessment in EIA of current tourism projects still have many shortcomings, both in terms of technique and substance [21, 22]:

— The screening method is mainly based on a hard list: Projects are screened based on the list issued with regulations, determining whether the group is required to prepare an EIA or not. The screening is mainly based on the list and qualitative threshold, lacking a tool for preliminary assessment of environmental risks. This leads to an uncontrolled situation of potential impacts specific to the tourism industry such as: changes in community livelihoods, encroachment on natural spaces, overloading of environmental infrastructure (water, waste, traffic, etc.). Classification is often based on scale (land area, number of rooms, exploitation capacity) without paying attention to geographical location, ecological sensitivity or potential risks.
— Omission of projects with significant impacts: Many projects smaller than the prescribed threshold but implemented in sensitive areas… may not be required to conduct EIA, or there are no detailed guidelines for screening according to regional ecological characteristics, leading to omissions that pose great risks to the ecosystem, environment and local communities.
— Lack of a quantitative index system for accurate screening: There is currently no integrated environmental-social risk or sensitivity screening toolkit. Screening is mainly administrative, leading to inaccurate assessments of the impact of some projects.

Some of the main causes of the above shortcomings are: The legal framework is not detailed and flexible enough to apply to diverse types of tourism; Pressure on local socio-economic development: Many localities prioritize attracting tourism investment, which can easily lead to loosening the screening work and scope of assessment to "facilitate" investors; Lack of tools to support quantitative and spatial integration such as GIS, environmental and social risk maps; Limited capacity for consulting and reporting appraisal, leading to mechanical or formal application; Limitations in monitoring and criticism: The mechanism for social monitoring and independent criticism in the initial stages of EIA is still weak, lacking intermediary organizations with a technical support role.

The current screening status in EIA for tourism projects is still lacking in practicality, has not kept up with the characteristics of the industry, and has not fully promoted its role as a tool to support sustainable development. Improving the approach and enhancing the quality of screening is an urgent requirement in the context of tourism development increasing in both scale and speed.

3.4. Expecting a New Approach with Many Values and Advantages for Screening Tourism Projects in EIA

In the context of tourism projects increasingly developing in diversity in type, scale and implementation space, the requirement is to build a new screening approach in EIA that is capable of synthesizing and promoting all the values and advantages of existing approaches, specifically as follows:

— The new approach needs to ensure consistency with the

current system of regulations, standards and guidelines, facilitating implementation, inspection and monitoring. The value from the regulatory approach helps increase transparency, while establishing a mandatory minimum threshold for the screening process.

— The new approach needs to allow for appropriate adjustments to each type of tourism, each investment stage and development goal, in order to increase assessment effectiveness and minimize unnecessary administrative pressure.

— Integrating geographical, ecological and spatially sensitive environmental factors will help accurately screen high-risk projects, ensuring that the assessment process does not miss areas of conservation value or vulnerability.

— The new method should inherit the ability to decentralize and classify based on the scale, capacity and nature of tourism project activities, helping to clearly identify assessment thresholds and priority levels in screening, in line with the principle of ”assessment by impact level”.

— Based on the impact classification method, screening should aim to identify key environmental factors affected, thereby limiting the scope of assessment to components that are highly sensitive or have long-term significance.

— Requires the integration of qualitative and quantitative analysis of potential risks, including environmental incidents, climate risks or resource use conflicts. This helps increase the ability to proactively respond and minimize negative consequences early.

— A modern approach needs to be able to quantify environmental and social indicators (ESI), which can serve as a basis for objective comparison between projects, as well as support the decision-making process in conditions of multiple investment options.

— The new approach needs to integrate information from local realities through surveys, on-site inspections and two-way consultations with the community. This not only increases democracy, but also helps detect potential impacts that are difficult to identify through technical documents.

The desire is to develop an integrated, flexible, evidence-based and participatory screening approach that is both compliant with regulations and responsive to local realities, while improving the quality and effectiveness of the EIA process for tourism projects. This approach not only helps to accurately screen high-risk projects, but also supports strategic orientation for sustainable and environmentally friendly development.

3.5. Proposed Approaches, Processes and Test Models

3.5.1. Screening Approaches

Project screening approaches for EIA for tourism projects play a crucial role in identifying projects that may have significant environmental and social impacts, and in deciding whether a detailed EIA is required. There are different approaches to conducting project screening, depending on the characteristics of each project, the region and the legal requirements, which may include:

(1) Prescriptive or standardized approach: The types of development proposals are clearly defined in existing regulations and legislation. Typically, the proponent can determine for itself whether its project requires an EIA, based on standardized approaches. These may include: a list of projects (with or without thresholds) that are subject to an EIA; or an exclusion list—which includes activities that are exempted from EIA because their impacts are insignificant or are otherwise legally permitted[23].

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on regulations or standardization are shown in **Table 1**.

The majority (93.7%) of experts and managers showed high consensus with the prescriptive/standardized approach (levels 4 and 5). Only 6.3% remained neutral, with no objections, indicating confidence in the standardization and legality of this approach in the EIA screening process. This reflects an appreciation of the role of regulations and standards as a solid, clear and transparent basis for EIA implementation.

The consulting group also had a relatively high level of consensus with 72.7% agreeing and strongly agreeing. However, 9.1% disagreed and 18.2% were neutral, indicating that some opinions may believe that the rigid prescriptive approach may lack flexibility, causing difficulties in some specific cases. This may reflect the need to balance standardization and customization in practice.

Table 1. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on regulations or standardization.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.8
2. Disagree	0	0.0	1	9.1	1	11.1	2	5.6
3. Neutral	1	6.3	2	18.2	2	22.2	5	13.9
4. Agree	8	50.0	5	45.5	3	33.3	16	44.4
5. Strongly agree	7	43.7	3	27.2	2	22.3	12	33.3
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

Investors have more diverse views with only 55.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing, the rate of disagreeing and strongly disagreeing is 22.2%. The neutral rate is also relatively high (22.2%), showing that some investors are still hesitant or do not fully trust the effectiveness or suitability of the prescribed/standardized method in each specific case. It may be because investors want more flexible methods, less rigidity to adapt to different project conditions. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on regulations or standards is shown in **Figure 1**.

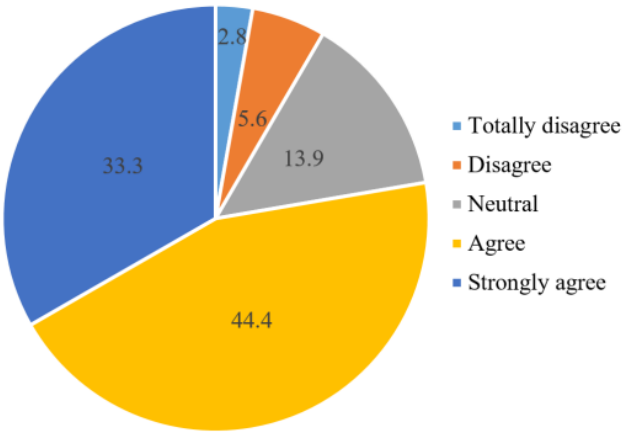

Figure 1. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on regulations or standardization.

The prescriptive/standardized approach is highly valued and trusted by the expert group and management staff, and is fairly accepted by the consulting unit. However, the investor group shows more caution and diversity of opinions, reflecting the need to consider between compliance with regulations and flexibility in application. To increase feasibility, it is necessary to continue to develop and adjust standards to suit reality, while creating conditions for flexibility in application to meet the diverse needs of projects.

(2) Tailored approaches: Screening of proposals is done individually or on a case-by-case basis, based on category-based guidelines. Different countries and international agencies combine these types of screening procedures. Typically, a simple classification (such as A, B, C or 1, 2, 3) is used. These categories help the proponent and the permitting authority decide when a full, detailed EIA is required [23].

— For high impact projects: A full EIA is required for projects that have a risk of causing serious environmental impacts, such as causing irreversible damage, impacting ethnic minority communities living in remote and vulnerable areas, involving forced or involuntary displacement, or potentially affecting cultural heritage values.

— For medium impact projects: Projects in this category have a lower level of negative environmental impact than those previously mentioned. Typically, a limited environmental assessment will be conducted to identify appropriate management and mitigation measures, which will then be incorporated into the project implementation process.

— For low impact projects: Projects that are likely to cause minimal or no adverse environmental impacts do not require an EIA.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on customized approaches are shown in **Table 2**.

The majority of experts and environmental managers (nearly 70%) expressed a positive attitude towards the customisation method (68.7% at levels 4 and 5), indicating that they appreciate the flexibility and case-by-case adjustment in EIA screening. However, a small proportion of about 12.6%

expressed doubts or disagreement (levels 1 and 2), possibly due to concerns about standardisation and wide applicability. 18.7% were neutral, reflecting some ambiguity or unclear views.

Table 2. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on customized approaches.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	1	6.3	0	0.0	1	11.1	2	5.6
2. Disagree	1	6.3	1	9.1	1	11.1	3	8.3
3. Neutral	3	18.7	2	18.2	2	22.2	7	19.4
4. Agree	7	43.7	5	45.5	3	33.3	15	41.7
5. Strongly agree	4	25.0	3	27.2	2	22.3	9	25
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

For the group of consulting units with a high rate of agreement and strong agreement (72.7%), similar to experts, it shows that they also positively assess the customisation of the screening method, possibly due to the need to adjust it to suit the actual project. A small proportion (9.1%) disagreed, indicating that there are still some opinions that are not completely confident or have difficulty applying this method. The neutral level is 18.2%, quite similar to the expert group.

Investors expressed more diverse views with a lower agreement rate than the two groups above (55.6% at levels 4 and 5), possibly because they prioritize clearer, more standardized screening methods. The rate of disagreement and strong disagreement is about 22.2%, higher than the other two groups, indicating that investors may still be hesitant about the feasibility or risks of applying the customized method. The relatively high neutral rate (22.2%) reflects a lack of certainty or a need for more specific information and guidance. Summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on customized approaches is shown in **Figure 2**.

The customized approach received a high level of consensus from experts and consultants, while investors were more cautious. This suggests that more detailed, transparent guidelines and technical support are needed to increase confidence and applicability of the customized approach in practice. At the same time, consider incorporating common standards and regulations to ensure transparency and efficiency of the EIA screening process.

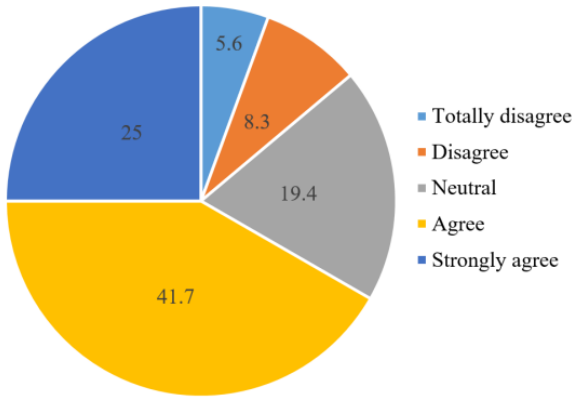

Figure 2. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on customized approaches.

(3) Location and geographic area approach: This approach focuses on the geographic characteristics of the tourism project area, as the environments of different areas have different levels of sensitivity and resilience.

— Vulnerable areas: Areas such as national parks, nature reserves and world cultural heritage sites, coral reef ecosystems, mangrove forests, etc. require careful screening and may require detailed EIA. Tourism projects in these areas can have major impacts on natural ecosystems and local communities.
— Less sensitive areas: Areas with few natural resources or not located in protected areas may not require EIA if the environmental impact is insignificant.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on location and geographical area characteristics are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on location and geographical area characteristics.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2. Disagree	0	0.0	1	9.1	1	11.1	2	5.6
3. Neutral	2	12.4	2	18.2	2	22.2	6	16.7
4. Agree	7	43.8	5	45.5	4	44.4	16	44.4
5. Strongly agree	7	43.8	3	27.2	2	22.3	12	33.3
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

Experts and managers: Showed high consensus with this method when nearly 88% (levels 4 and 5) expressed agreement or completely agreed. The neutral rate was 12.4%, with no objections, showing that this method is positively evaluated as a suitable and flexible approach based on the specific conditions of each region. This result reflects a good awareness of the importance of considering geographical location characteristics in EIA screening.

For EIA consulting units: Most opinions were also positive with about 73% agreeing and completely agreeing, showing appreciation for the practical application of the method. However, there were still 9.1% disagreeing and 18.2% holding neutral views, showing that some consultants may still have concerns about the feasibility or specific implementation methods in practice. This suggests that more detailed guidance is needed to create consistency and ease of application.

Investors have a more diverse view with 66.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing, but 11.1% disagreeing, along with 22.2% being neutral. This shows that the geographically based approach is considered quite suitable but there are still some investors who are concerned or unclear about the benefits and how to apply it. It may be necessary to increase information and make the process transparent to increase the level of consensus from investors. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on location and geographical area characteristics is shown in **Figure 3**.

The location-based and geographical approach has received strong consensus from experts and managers, as well as the majority of consultants and investors, demonstrating its high suitability and practicality. However, to increase acceptance and effectiveness, it is necessary to focus on developing detailed, transparent guidelines and enhancing communication with stakeholders, especially investors.

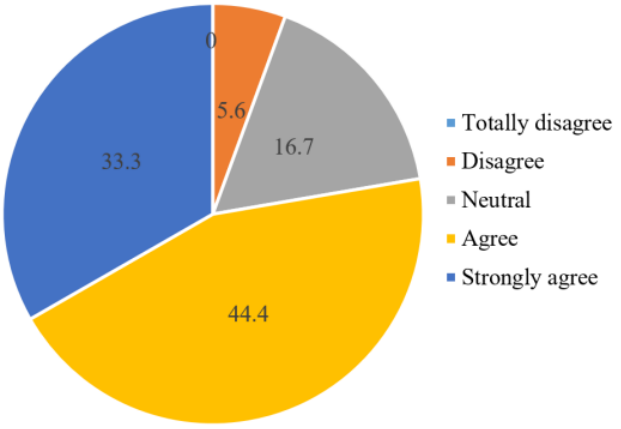

Figure 3. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on location and geographical area characteristics.

(4) Scale and type of project approach: This approach classifies tourism projects based on their scale and type to determine the potential level of environmental impact.

— Project scale: Large-scale tourism development projects (such as resorts, golf courses, amusement parks, etc.) often have greater environmental impacts and require detailed EIAs. Small-scale projects (such as hotels, motels, small tourist attractions, etc.) may not require EIAs if their environmental impacts are insignificant.

— Type of activity: Projects that involve the exploitation of natural resources (forests, seas, mountains, etc.) or activities with a high risk of causing pollution (such as the construction of infrastructure, parking lots, roads, etc.) will require more careful screening.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach

to screening tourism projects in EIA based on the scale and type of project are shown in **Table 4**.

The survey results show that the group of experts and environmental managers have a fairly positive assessment of the project scale and type approach, with 68.7% (7 agree, 4 strongly agree) expressing consensus. However, this group also has 12.6% disagreeing and 18.7% remaining neutral, showing some concerns or not yet completely confident in the effectiveness of this method. In the group representing EIA consulting units, the consensus rate is higher at 72.7% (5 agree, 3 strongly agree), while the rate of disagreement is 9.1% and neutral is 18.2%. This shows that consulting units have a more positive view of the flexible application of this method to specific projects. For the group representing tourism project investors, the level of consensus dropped to 55.6% (3 agree, 2 strongly agree), with 22.2% neutral and 22.2% disagreeing, reflecting caution in applying this approach, possibly due to investors lacking information or experience about the specific benefits of the scale and type of project approach. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA according to project scale and type is shown in **Figure 4**.

Table 4. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on the scale and type of project.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
	Number of people selected	Rate (%)	Number of people selected	Rate (%)	Number of people selected	Rate (%)	Number of people selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	1	6.3	0	0.0	1	11.1	2	5.6
2. Disagree	1	6.3	1	9.1	1	11.1	3	8.3
3. Neutral	3	18.7	2	18.2	2	22.2	7	19.4
4. Agree	7	43.7	5	45.5	3	33.3	15	41.7
5. strongly agree	4	25.0	3	27.2	2	22.3	9	25
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

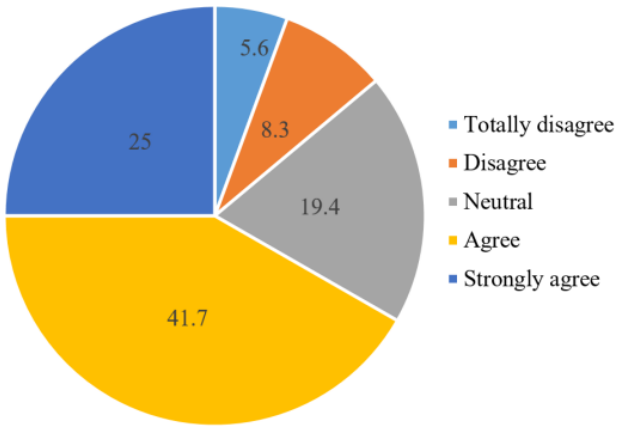

Figure 4. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on the scale and type of project.

Overall, the scale and type of project approach was positively evaluated, but the level of consensus was not really high in all groups, especially the investor group, indicating the need for more guidance, training and practical demonstration to increase trust and apply more effectively in the future.

(5) Environmental impact classification approach: This method uses criteria on the type and level of environmental impact to classify tourism projects.

— Impact on biodiversity: Tourism projects that may cause biodiversity loss or loss of endemic flora and fauna will be screened more carefully. Tourism projects that may disturb the natural habitat of species, leading to a decline in flora and fauna populations, especially when resource exploitation is involved.

— Impact on land and water: Tourism projects that may cause soil and water pollution or change natural flows will also need to be carefully assessed.

— Impact on climate and air: Large tourism projects such as the construction of transport infrastructure, resorts, etc. can create emissions, increase air pollution or change the climate balance in the area.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental impact classification are shown in **Table 5**.

The survey results show that the group of experts and environmental managers have a positive assessment of the approach based on environmental impact classification, with 81.2% (7 agree, 6 strongly agree) showing high consensus. The rate of disagreement is low (6.3%) and 12.5% are neutral, showing that the majority of experts believe that this method is effective and appropriate in the EIA screening process. For the group of representatives of EIA consulting units, the level of consensus is also quite high with 72.7% (5 agree, 3 strongly agree). However, there is still a small rate of 9.1% disagree and 18.2% are neutral, showing some concerns or need for more practical experience to apply it more effectively. In the group of representatives of tourism project investors, the level of support decreased slightly, with 55.6% agreeing and strongly agreeing, while 22.2% were neutral and 22.2% disagreed, reflecting caution and possibly not really understanding or experiencing deeply the benefits of this method in their projects. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental impact classification is shown in **Figure 5**.

Table 5. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental impact classification.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.8
2. Disagree	1	6.3	1	9.1	1	11.1	3	8.3
3. Neutral	2	12.5	2	18.2	2	22.2	6	16.7
4. Agree	7	43.7	5	45.5	3	33.3	15	41.7
5. Strongly agree	6	37.5	3	27.2	2	22.3	11	30.5
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

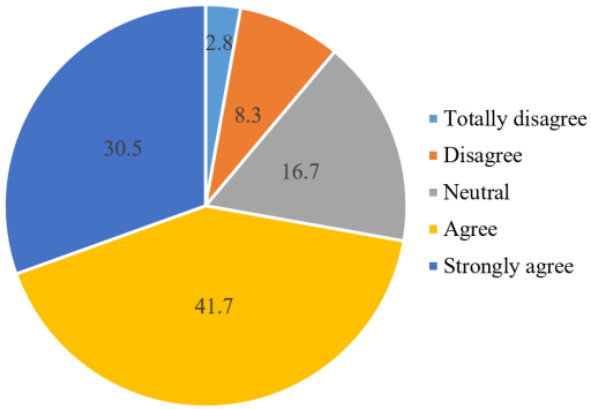

Figure 5. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental impact classification.

Overall, the approach based on environmental impact classification was assessed quite positively, especially in the group of experts and managers, but there is still a need to strengthen communication and guidance for the consulting group and investors to improve the effectiveness of application in practice.

(6) Hazard and risk analysis approach: This approach focuses on assessing the potential risks of tourism projects to the environment and society. Project screening will find potential hazards that, if left untreated, could cause serious impacts. This is an important approach when tourism projects can create unexpected or unpredictable risks.

— Pollution risk: Activities such as waste, wastewater, or garbage treatment can create serious pollution if not properly managed.
— Natural disaster risk: Tourism development projects in areas susceptible to natural disasters (floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.) may need to carefully assess these risks.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on risk and hazard analysis are shown in **Table 6**.

The survey results show that the group of experts and environmental managers have a fairly positive view of the approach based on hazard and risk analysis, with 81.2% (6 agree, 7 strongly agree) showing clear support. Only 6.3% disagree and 12.5% remain neutral, reflecting a fairly high level of consensus on the effectiveness and necessity of this approach in the screening process. In the group of representatives of EIA consulting units, the consensus dropped to 63.6% (4 agree, 3 strongly agree), while the rate of dis-

agreement and neutrality accounted for 36.4%, showing a difference in views on the applicability and practicality of hazard and risk analysis. Among tourism project owners, this approach received lower support, with 44.5% agreeing and strongly agreeing, while the majority remained neutral or disagreed (55.5%). This reflects caution or uncertainty about the practical benefits of applying hazard and risk analysis in their projects. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on risk and hazard analysis is shown in **Figure 6**.

Table 6. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on risk and hazard analysis.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.8
2. Disagree	1	6.3	2	18.2	1	11.1	4	11.1
3. Neutral	2	12.5	2	18.2	3	33.3	7	19.5
4. Agree	6	37.5	4	36.4	2	22.2	12	33.3
5. strongly agree	7	43.7	3	27.2	2	22.3	12	33.3
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

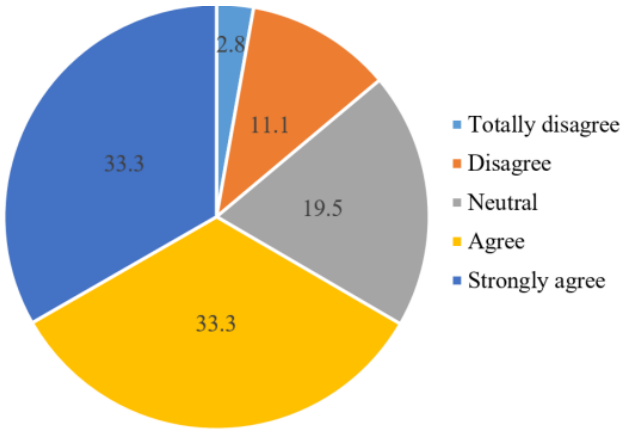

Figure 6. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on risk and hazard analysis.

Overall, the hazard and risk analysis-based approach was highly appreciated by experts and managers, while the consulting group and owners had diverse views, suggesting the need for more specific guidance and practical evidence to improve consensus and implementation effectiveness.

(7) Approach based on environmental and social indicators: This method uses environmental and social indicators to quickly assess the impact level of tourism projects. These indicators can be determined through factors such as: Level of air, water, soil pollution; changes in community structure; increase in population density; ability to maintain ecological services. Based on these indicators, projects can be classified and a decision can be made whether a detailed EIA is required.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental and social indicators are shown in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental and social indicators.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.8
2. Disagree	1	6.3	2	18.2	1	11.1	4	11.1
3. Neutral	3	18.7	1	9.1	3	33.3	7	19.4
4. Agree	6	37.5	5	45.5	3	33.3	14	38.9
5. strongly agree	6	37.5	3	27.2	1	11.2	10	27.8
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

The survey results show that the group of experts and environmental managers positively assessed the approach based on environmental and social indicators, with 75% (6 agree, 6 strongly agree) showing clear support. However, there were still 18.7% neutral and 6.3% disagreed, showing that some opinions were not completely sure about the effectiveness of this method. The group of representatives of the EIA consulting unit had a more divided assessment, with 72.7% (5 agree, 3 strongly agree) agreeing, but there were also 18.2% disagreeing, reflecting doubts or difficulties in effectively applying environmental and social indicators to the screening process. On the side of representatives of tourism project investors, the level of consensus was lower than the two groups above, with only 44.5% (3 agree, 1 strongly agree) agreeing with this method. At the same time, the neutral and disagreement rate reached 55.5%, showing some hesitation, possibly due to not really seeing the benefits or having difficulties in applying it in practice. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental and social indicators is shown in **Figure 7**.

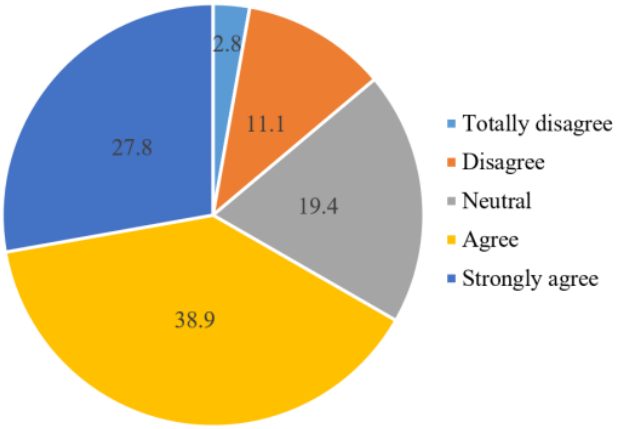

Figure 7. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of the subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on environmental and social indicators.

In general, the approach based on environmental and social indicators was evaluated quite positively by the group of experts and consultants, but received more caution from the investor. This suggests the need for improvements, specific guidance and practical support to improve the effectiveness of applying this method in EIA screening.

(8) Approach based on community screening and consultation: This method involves consulting with communities and stakeholders during the screening process of tourism projects. Local communities, environmental protection organizations and other stakeholders can provide valuable information on potential impacts from tourism projects and mitigation solutions. Community consultation also helps identify potential social issues, such as land, migration and indigenous culture.

The results of the survey of 36 subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in the EIA based on the method of checking and consulting the community are shown in **Table 8**.

Table 8. Level of agreement of subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in the EIA based on the method of checking and consulting the community.

Level	Experts and Managers (n = 16)		EIA Consulting Unit (n = 11)		Investor (n = 9)		Total Number of People Choosing and Percentage of 3 Subjects	
	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)	Number of People Selected	Rate (%)
1. Totally disagree	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.8
2. Disagree	1	6.3	2	18.2	1	11.1	4	11.1
3. Neutral	2	12.5	2	18.2	2	22.2	6	16.7
4. Agree	6	37.5	4	36.4	3	33.3	13	36.1
5. strongly agree	7	43.7	3	27.2	2	22.3	12	33.3
Total	16	100	11	100	9	100	36	100

The survey results show that the majority of experts and environmental managers highly appreciate the approach based on community inspection and consultation, with 81.2% (6 people agree and 7 people strongly agree) expressing strong support. The rate of neutrality and disagreement is very low, no one completely disagrees. In the group of representatives of EIA consulting units, the consensus is also quite clear, with 63.6% (4 agree, 3 completely agree) positively evaluating this method. However, there is a large portion (36.4%) consisting of neutral and disagreement lev-

els, showing that there are still cautious or skeptical opinions about the effectiveness of community inspection and consultation in the screening process. For representatives of tourism project investors, the level of agreement is slightly lower, with 55.6% (3 agree, 2 completely agree). At the same time, the rate of disagreement and neutrality also accounted for about 44.4%, reflecting the diversity of views, possibly due to practical experience or difficulties in applying this method. The summary of the consensus rate of the subjects on the method of screening tourism projects in EIA based on the method of checking and community consultation is shown in **Figure 8**.

In general, the method of checking and consulting the community was positively evaluated by all three groups, especially the group of experts and environmental management officers. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the cautious views from consultants and investors, which suggests that the effective implementation of this method depends on practical conditions and the substantial participation of stakeholders.

Project screening approaches for EIA for tourism development projects play a very important role in identifying and minimizing negative environmental and social impacts (**Figure 9**). Combining multiple approaches will help to assess environmental and social risks more comprehensively and accurately, while ensuring that tourism projects are developed sustainably, protecting natural resources and improving the quality of life of the community.

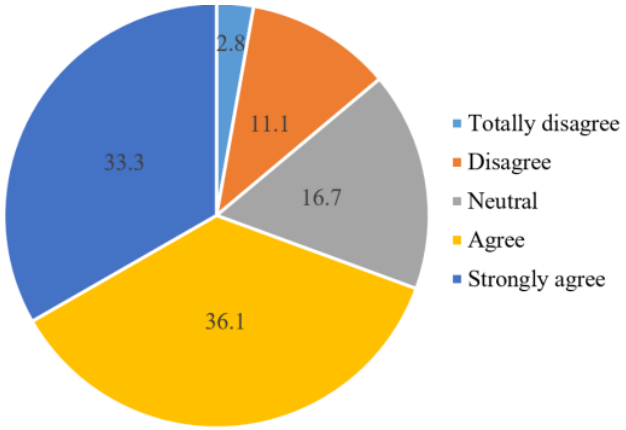

Figure 8. Chart showing the percentage of agreement of the subjects on the approach to screening tourism projects in EIA based on the method of checking and consulting the community.

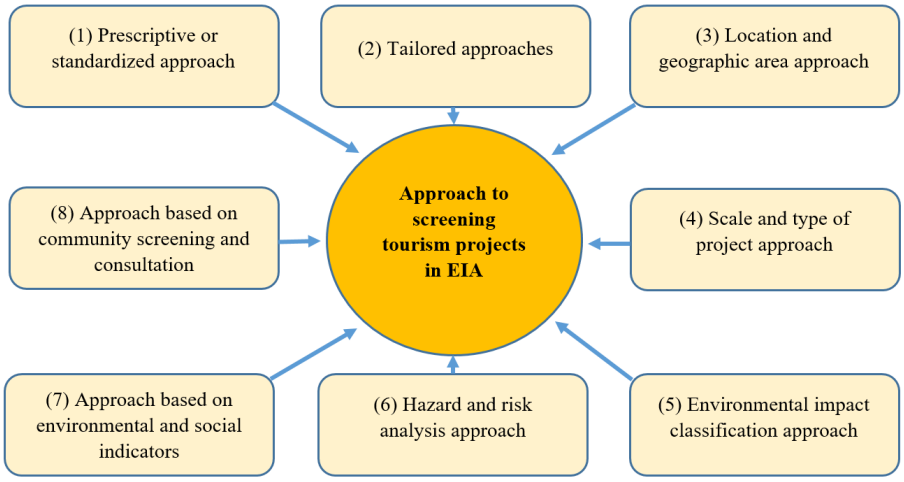

Figure 9. Approach to screening tourism projects in EIA.

3.5.2. Project Screening Process

In determining whether a tourism project requires an EIA, the proponent will review its project against criteria established by the competent authority. Screening should be carried out as early as possible in the proposal development process to help investors and other stakeholders understand the potential EIA requirements. At the same time, the process should be applied in a consistent and systematic manner to ensure that similar decisions are made in different screening scenarios. The steps involved in conducting project screening for EIA for tourism development projects are an important process for identifying projects that may have significant environmental and social impacts, and for deciding whether a detailed EIA is required.

(1) Collecting tourism project information: The first step in the screening process is to collect complete information about the project, helping to make a preliminary assessment of the characteristics of the tourism project. The information to be collected includes:

— Description of the tourism project: Main activities of the project, scale (land area, number of works, expected number of visitors), implementation time.
— Geographical location of tourism: Specific location of the project and geographical features around the area (urban, rural, near nature reserves, cultural heritages and historical sites...).
— Scope and scale of the tourism project: Construction scale, infrastructure system, land use area, changes in the natural environment.
— Expected tourism activities: Main tourism activities such as building resorts, amusement parks, tourist attractions.

(2) Determine the scale, type and location of the tourism project: After collecting information, the next step is to determine the level of impact of the project based on the scale and location.

— Scale, type of project: Make a list of tourism projects and classify them by scale (large or small scale projects), type of activity. Large projects such as resorts, amusement parks, golf courses, etc. often have greater environmental impacts and require detailed EIAs. Small tourism projects may not require EIAs or only require simple EIAs.
— Project location: Where is the tourism project located? Projects near conservation areas, world heritage sites, or sensitive ecological areas need to be carefully screened. Projects in urban areas may have less severe impacts on the natural environment.

(3) Assessment of environmental impact factors: Based on the above factors, analyze the potential impacts of the tourism project on the natural and social environment.

— Impact on natural resources: Does the tourism project exploit natural resources (land, water, biological resources, forests, etc.)?
— Impact on the ecosystem: Can the tourism project cause loss of biodiversity, disrupt the ecosystem? Pay special attention to sensitive areas such as nature reserves, mangrove forests, coral reefs, etc.
— Impact on the community and culture: Can the tourism project cause changes in social structure, affect the livelihoods and cultural life of the local community?
— Impact on the living environment and community health: Can the tourism project cause air, water, soil or noise pollution, affecting community health?

(4) Classification of tourism projects: Based on the above factors, tourism projects will be classified into the following two groups:

— Group requiring detailed EIA: These are tourism projects that are likely to cause major environmental impacts, have negative impacts on natural resources and biodiversity, public health or sensitive areas. These projects require detailed EIA to thoroughly analyze impacts, forecast future impacts and propose mitigation measures.
— Group not requiring EIA or only requiring simple EIA: These are tourism projects that have little or insignificant environmental impacts, do not affect important ecosystems or local communities. These tourism projects may not require detailed EIA, or only require preliminary EIA or simple mitigation measures.

(5) Community and stakeholder consultation: An important step in screening is to consult stakeholders, including local communities, environmental protection organizations, and experts.

— Local community consultation: Local communities can provide information on social and environmental issues that investors may not be aware of. This helps ensure that the tourism project does not have negative impacts on the community, culture, or livelihoods of local people.
— Environmental protection organization and ex-

pert consultation: Environmental experts will help accurately assess the potential impacts of the tourism project and propose mitigation measures.

(6) Decision to require EIA: Based on the above analysis, the competent authority will make a decision on whether the tourism project requires a detailed EIA.

— Approval of tourism projects without detailed EIA: If the environmental impact is assessed as insignificant, the tourism project can be approved without requiring a detailed EIA.

— Requirement of detailed EIA: If the tourism project has a significant environmental impact, a detailed EIA should be required. The detailed EIA will analyze the specific environmental impacts, mitigation measures and monitoring programs throughout the project implementation and execution.

Develop a tourism project screening method and process that is capable of: Combining multiple factors: legal, geographical, social-environmental; Quantifying screening criteria; Classifying risks to make early decisions on whether and to what extent an EIA is required (**Table 9**).

Table 9. Approach and process for screening tourism projects.

No.	Approach	Application	Data/Method of Use
1	As prescribed or standardized	As the first step of preliminary screening according to legal categories	Decree No. 08/2022/ND-CP dated January 10, 2022 detailing a number of articles of the Law on Environmental Protection, Vietnam [24], Law on Environmental Protection (Law No. 72/2020/QH14, Hanoi, November 17, 2020), Vietnam [25]
2	Customized to project	Add separate criteria system suitable for each type of tourism	Soft criteria table by type: ecological, resort, spiritual...
3	Location and geographic features	Environmental sensitivity assessment of project area	GIS, ecological maps, conservation areas, geological risk areas
4	According to project size and type	Risk scoring based on size (area, capacity, traffic...)	Scoring according to the scale-impact matrix
5	Environmental impact classification	Group projects according to the risk of causing pollution, degradation, and social conflict.	Building a sectoral impact classification diagram
6	Hazard and risk analysis	Identify environmental risks, natural disasters, conflicts	SWOT analysis and risk map (flood, landslide, fire...)
7	Environmental and social index	Scoring based on ecological and social sensitivity	Integrated index set (Urbanization level, biodiversity, community…)
8	Community and stakeholder consultation	Check social consensus, reflect community concerns	Questionnaires, workshops, qualitative surveys (can be digitized)

Implementation process (6-step format):

* Step 1: Preliminary legal screening: Is the project on the list of mandatory EIA?

— Objective: Determine legal requirements based on legal documents. If it is on the list of projects requiring EIA, there is no need to continue screening and move on to the full EIA step.

— Method: Compare the project with the list according to legal regulations. Consider criteria such as: scale, type of construction, location in sensitive ecological areas.

— Output: If it is on the list of projects requiring EIA, stop screening and move on to EIA. If it is unclear or not on the list, continue to step 2.

* Step 2: Determine the composite index of risk and sensitivity: Calculate scores for 4 groups of factors: Ecological location (forest, sea, watershed area...); Scale and type of tourism; Potential risks (natural disasters, society); Social sensitivity (community, livelihood, culture).

— Objective: To generate a composite score that reflects the environmental risk level of the project, based on four main groups of factors.
— Four groups of assessment factors (**Table 10**):

Table 10. Assessment factor groups.

No.	Factor Group	Specific Assessment Content
1	Ecological Location	Is the project located near/adjacent to: natural forests, seas, lakes, watersheds, conservation areas, etc.?
2	Scale and Type	Land use area, expected number of visitors, types of tourism with strong influence (adventure, sea, spiritual...)
3	Social-Disaster Risk	Areas at risk of landslides, flash floods, forest fires, or conflicts of local interests
4	Social-Cultural Sensitivity	Impact on livelihoods, ethnic communities, religious spaces, cultural traditions

— Output: Score each factor group (on a scale of 1–5). Prepare data for steps 3 and 4

* Step 3: Analyze local characteristics and tourism type: Assign weights to factors according to tourism type (e.g. spiritual tourism has a high weight on culture)

— Objective: Adjust the importance of each risk factor based on the local context and type of tourism.
— How to do: Identify the main type of tourism of the project (spiritual, ecological, community, resort...); Analyze local characteristics: Is there an ethnic minority community? Are there forests, seas, heritage? What resources do people's livelihoods depend on? Assign weights (coefficients) to each group of factors: For example: Spiritual tourism has a high weight for ”culture-society”, Ecotourism has a high weight for ”ecological location”.
— Output: Weighting table for 4 groups of factors. Use to calculate the weighted composite score in step 4.

* Step 4: Classify potential impacts: Use the level of intervention vs environmental sensitivity matrix to group risks

— Objective: Is the project low – medium – high risk? Strong or weak impact?
— Tool: Potential impact matrix according to environmental sensitivity levels (**Table 11**):

Table 11. Potential impacts according to environmental sensitivity levels.

Technical Intervention	Environmental Sensitivity		
	Low	Medium	High
Low technical intervention	Low risk	Medium	High
High technical intervention	Medium	High	Very high

— Output: Risk classification includes: Low risk: EIA may be exempted; Medium risk: Consider abbreviated EIA; High and very high risk: Require full EIA or consider not implementing

* Step 5: Consult the community (early): Conduct a quick survey: level of consensus, main concerns, early feedback

— Objective: Get initial opinions from affected communities to identify key concerns and increase consensus.
— Implementation method: Conduct quick interviews with local leaders, community representatives, and residents. Key questions include: Do people support or oppose? What are they concerned about? (pollution, deforestation, destruction of monuments, etc.), do they have any suggestions?
— Output: Consensus rate (estimated); Record prominent social issues; Important input data for step 6

* Step 6: Make a final screening decision: Synthesize all data to classify the project: No EIA required; Shortened EIA; Full EIA; Not recommended (too risky).

— Objective: Synthesize all data to make a final decision: Does the project need an EIA, if so, at what level?
— Method: Synthesize: Risk score (steps 2 + 3); Risk classification (step 4); Community consultation results (step 5); Legal context (step 1).
— Output results – 4 final classifications (**Table 12**):

This 6-step process is a preliminary environmental decision-making tool prior to EIA, helping to: Avoid wasting time on unfeasible projects; Increase transparency, reduce conflicts with the community and focus resources appropriately on high-risk projects (**Figure 10**).

Table 12. Final classification for decision making.

No.	Classification	Meaning
1	No need to prepare EIA	Low impact, not required by law
2	Need to prepare abbreviated EIA	Possible risk but moderate, controllable
3	Need to prepare full EIA	High risk, complex impact, need in-depth analysis
4	Should not implement the project	Too risky for the environment or not supported by the community

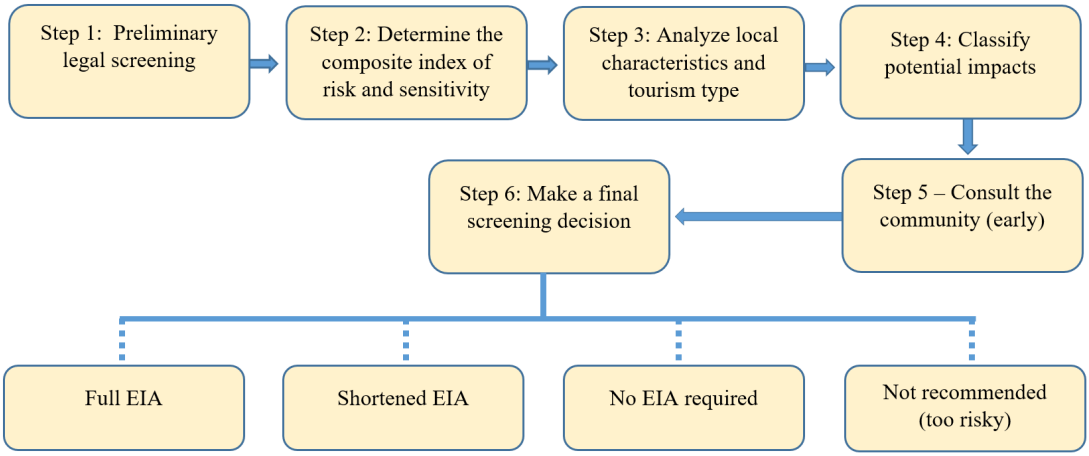

Figure 10. Project screening process.

The project screening process for EIA for tourism development projects is an important step to ensure that these projects do not have negative impacts on the environment and local communities. The screening steps from information collection, impact assessment and community consultation to final decision help to effectively manage the environment and protect natural resources throughout the tourism development process.

Developing a new screening method and process for tourism projects brings: Higher accuracy in identifying potential risks; Flexibility for each region and type of tourism; Practical application with community participation; Contributing to improving the effectiveness of environmental policies and sustainable tourism development.

4. Conclusions

Screening in EIA plays an important role in determining the necessity and scope of EIA implementation for projects, especially in the tourism sector—where there are often major impacts on the natural and social environment. Screening is a fundamental step in the EIA process, playing a decisive role in ensuring the quality and practicality of the EIA report. For tourism projects—especially projects implemented in ecologically sensitive areas or with cultural and social characteristics—the correct and complete approach to these two steps becomes even more urgent. However, currently, screening in EIA for tourism projects often has some important gaps and limitations such as:

(1) Screening criteria are not specific, not updated or not suitable for current development practices. Many small tourism projects are not required to conduct EIA because they do not exceed the prescribed threshold, but in reality they still cause large impacts (for example: in sensitive ecological areas, coastal areas, protective forests, mangrove forests that need protection, etc.);

(2) Lack of overall assessment in phased and subdivided projects. Many investors divide projects into small parts to avoid having to conduct a full EIA or to circumvent screening regulations. Screening only evaluates small parts, not reflecting the cumulative impact of the entire project;

(3) Lack of consideration of the sensitivity of geographical areas. Screening is often based only on technical scale, without fully assessing ecological characteristics, natural environment, location in coastal areas,

special-use forests, conservation areas, heritages, etc., leading to ignoring projects that are small but have a large impact on the environment;

(4) Lack of transparency and independent monitoring. Screening decisions are sometimes subjective or influenced and pressured by stakeholders. There is no independent or third-party verification mechanism to verify the correctness of the screening decision;

(5) Lack of community consultation in the screening step. Local communities are often only consulted at a later stage, after the project has been screened. This leads to the situation where people are not allowed to contribute their opinions early on possible environmental impacts. These shortcomings stem from an incomplete legal system, uneven staff capacity, lack of decision-making support tools, lack of specific criteria, rigid application, and failure to reflect the specificity of tourism projects.

The study has proposed a new, flexible approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative criteria to improve screening efficiency and support a more scientific and transparent decision-making process. Through theoretical analysis, assessment of the current situation and proposed solutions, the study emphasizes the need to innovate the approach towards quantification, application of technology, increased consultation and technical standardization to improve the quality of the screening step in EIA for tourism projects.

Based on the research results and practical analysis, the author proposes recommendations to improve the effectiveness of screening in EIA, especially for projects in the tourism sector—a field with high sensitivity to the environment, culture and society. The recommendations are grouped according to specific subjects to ensure feasibility and suitability for the functions and roles of each stakeholder. At the same time, the content of the recommendations also aims to improve the technical and legal framework and enhance the capacity to implement EIA in the context of increasing requirements for sustainable development.

— For state management agencies: Study and issue separate technical guidelines on screening in EIA, especially for projects in sensitive areas such as tourism; Deploy the development of a sensitive environmental spatial map system and integrate data into the screening assessment system; Strengthen training and in-depth training for staff working on EIA at the local level.

— For investors and consultants: Proactively approach and comply with screening regulations right from the project dossier preparation stage; Cooperate with independent experts, research institutes and local communities in the process of collecting information, preliminary assessment and determining key content of EIA; Improve the quality of reports by focusing on key impacts, avoiding formal listing and copying templates.

— For the scientific community and social organizations: Promote applied research and pilot models for preliminary environmental risk assessment, cumulative impact assessment and rapid assessment tool development; Strengthen the role of social criticism, monitoring the process of determining the scope and implementing EIA to ensure transparency and objectivity.

The study expects that the presented proposals will not only contribute to perfecting the technical and legal framework for EIA work in the tourism sector, but also serve as a reference for application to other sectors with similar characteristics. Improving the quality of screening is the first and important step towards a substantive, effective EIA system that serves the goal of sustainable development.

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Conflicts of Interest

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