

## **Public perception and public willingness-to-pay for conserving urban heritage trees in Vietnam**

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### **Abstract**

Objective: Heritage trees in cities are globally identified as special natural-cum-cultural assets of cities. Not only do they contribute to the urban environmental sustainability, they also play a vital role in upgrading the quality of urban life through the provision of aesthetical benefits and reflecting the social value. Over the last decade, the rapid urbanization and economic growth of Vietnam has exerted intense pressure on urban trees. In fact, hundreds of urban heritage trees have to yield their space for modern buildings and other public facilities. Conserving urban heritage trees are attracting increasing interest worldwide. Many countries have taken initiatives to lift awareness of community in preserving urban trees and enacted the law or declared policy to authorize the conservation of heritage trees as a part of urban cultural value. From the position of Vietnam, neither law nor public community has paid much attention on urban heritage tree protection. Still the issue of heritage trees was overlooked or underestimated. There is an urgent need to stimulate community perceptions toward heritage tree conservation. This current study investigated, firstly, the local community perception, attitudes, and behaviors towards urban heritage tree protection, and secondly, examined public willingness-to-pay (WTP) for the conservation of trees.

Methods: Research was implemented in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Data was collected through a questionnaire (face-to-face interview) and group discussions. Logistic regression and the contingent valuation method (CVM) were employed to identify the factors influencing local people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of heritage tree protection and public willingness to pay for tree conservation.

The findings: The findings showed that 'knowledge', 'gender' and 'income' were the significant factors stimulating local people to take proactive actions in urban heritage tree protection. Specifically, local people with profound knowledge would pay more attention to the status of urban tree. Female were highly motivated to behave positively to conservation than male did, and individuals with stable income were more likely to be involved in heritage urban tree conservation. The results also revealed that in Hanoi, individual's mean WTP were 50.000 VND (around US\$2) and 100.000 VND (US\$4) for common heritage tree protection and for rare

heritage tree protection respectively. In Ho Chi Minh City, local community's mean WTP were a little bit higher with 60.000 VND (around US\$3) and 140.000 VND (around US\$7) for common and rare heritage tree protection respectively. Equally importantly, local community expressed their strong sensitive to WTP as they said that they would spend money to support tree protection providing that not only did local government design adequate protection programs, they also allowed local community to be involved in every stage from design to implementation of heritage tree conservation program. Thus, it is indispensable to foster public awareness toward urban heritage tree protection and government's responsibility simultaneously in order to achieve the success of urban heritage tree conservation.