

Integrating French Architectural Heritage Conservation with Creative Economy and Urban Tourism in Hanoi through Sustainable Policy Frameworks

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the feasibility and mechanisms for integrating the conservation of French colonial architectural heritage with creative economy development and urban tourism in Hanoi. Through policy analysis, international comparisons (Singapore, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur), and field surveys at five representative French architectural zones, the study proposes an integrated policy framework built on three strategic pillars: (1) adaptive heritage conservation, (2) heritage-linked creative economy ecosystems, and (3) culturally enriched urban tourism products. Findings reveal that Hanoi's 1,253+ French architectural structures represent an underutilized cultural resource, while the existing policy framework remains fragmented with insufficient mechanisms for heritage economic activation. The paper recommends establishing a Hanoi Urban Heritage Coordination Board, zoning three Heritage Creative Zones, and creating a multi-source Conservation Fund. Findings contribute to theoretical discourse on sustainable urban heritage governance in developing economies.*

KEYWORDS: *Heritage conservation; French architecture; Creative economy; Urban tourism; Sustainable policy; Hanoi*

I. INTRODUCTION

Hanoi, with a history of over a millennium of civilization, is confronting a dual challenge characteristic of rapidly developing Asian cities: reconciling the pressures of economic growth with the imperative to preserve cultural identity and architectural heritage. Among the multiple layers of heritage interwoven within the capital, the system of French colonial architectural works constructed during the colonial period (1883–1954) stands out as a distinctive cultural resource. These assets not only embody historical, aesthetic, and scientific values, but also contain underexplored economic potential that has yet to be systematically harnessed [1], [2].

According to the Hanoi Architectural Yearbook [3], the city retains approximately 1,253 buildings of French colonial origin, of which more than 400 possess significant architectural and historical value. However, only 126 buildings have been officially listed for preservation, and even these frequently face deterioration, inappropriate use, or demolition to make way for new construction projects [4]. The unprecedented pace of urbanization with the urbanization rate increasing from 45.7% in 2000 to 62.3% in 2023 [5] has resulted in the demolition or inappropriate renovation of many French colonial structures.

In the global context, adaptive reuse models of architectural heritage associated with the development of the creative economy and urban tourism have been demonstrated to be viable and sustainable approaches. Cities such

as Singapore, Shanghai, and Melbourne have successfully transformed heritage into economic assets while simultaneously fostering distinctive urban identities that attract tourists and creative communities [6, 7]. However, in the case of Hanoi, there has been no study that proposes a comprehensive, integrated policy framework linking the three domains of heritage conservation, the creative economy, and tourism.

The central research question of this paper is: How can Hanoi develop and implement a sustainable policy framework to integrate the conservation of French colonial architectural heritage with the development of the creative economy and urban tourism? To address this question, the paper undertakes the following: (1) analyzes the current state of French colonial architectural heritage in Hanoi; (2) evaluates the existing policy and institutional framework; (3) compares international experiences; and (4) proposes an integrated policy framework based on three strategic pillars.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Theory of Adaptive Reuse of Architectural Heritage

The concept of adaptive reuse has developed significantly since the late twentieth century, particularly following the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1979; revised 2013), which recognizes that maintaining cultural heritage through new uses constitutes a rational and effective conservation strategy. Bullen and Love [8] argue that adaptive reuse is not merely a technical solution but a strategic decision integrating economic, social, environmental, and cultural values. Jokilehto distinguishes three levels of intervention: preservation, restoration, and adaptive conversion—the third of which is often more financially feasible in the context of developing countries [9].

In the Southeast Asian context, Marc Askew notes that colonial heritage in cities such as Hanoi embodies a multidimensional historical character: it is simultaneously a symbol of foreign domination, evidence of cultural hybridity, and an inseparable component of urban memory [10]. This complexity requires conservation policies to be politically and culturally sensitive, avoiding two extremes: the outright rejection of colonial heritage or, conversely, its uncritical aestheticization.

2.2. Creative Economy and Urban Cluster Theory

Richard Florida (2002) popularized the theory of the “creative class,” arguing that urban development in the twenty-first century depends on a city’s ability to attract and retain creative individuals through three key factors: talent, technology, and tolerance. Architectural heritage and distinctive cultural spaces play a crucial role in shaping an attractive urban environment for this group. Charles Landry [11] introduced the concept of the “creative city,” in which cultural heritage functions as symbolic capital and as soft infrastructure for innovation.

Allen J. Scott [7] extends this framework through the concept of the “cultural–cognitive economy,” emphasizing that in the post-industrial era, cultural industries including architecture, design, arts, gastronomy, and tourism become central productive forces in urban economies. Spatial proximity among these industries generates clustering effects that enhance productivity and innovation.

2.3. Urban Heritage Tourism and the Authenticity Framework

Dallen J. Timothy and Stephen W. Boyd [12] define urban heritage tourism as a form of tourism in which the primary motivation is the desire to experience places, artifacts, activities, and narratives representing the past. Bob McKercher and Hilary du Cros [13] argue that successful heritage tourism requires a balance between “authenticity” and the “consumability” of heritage assets. Donovan Rypkema [14], through multiple case studies

in Asia, demonstrates that heritage conservation can generate economic benefits three to five times greater than new construction, through mechanisms such as increased property values, job creation, investment attraction, and enhanced local tax revenues.

2.4. Integrated Analytical Framework

This study adopts an integrated analytical framework based on the intersection of three foundational theories: (1) the adaptive conservation model (Australia ICOMOS, 2013); (2) place-based creative economy theory [7]; and (3) the World Tourism Organization Sustainable Heritage Tourism Framework [15]. The integration of these three frameworks, illustrated in Figure 1 below, provides a multidimensional analytical lens appropriate to the complexity of the research subject.

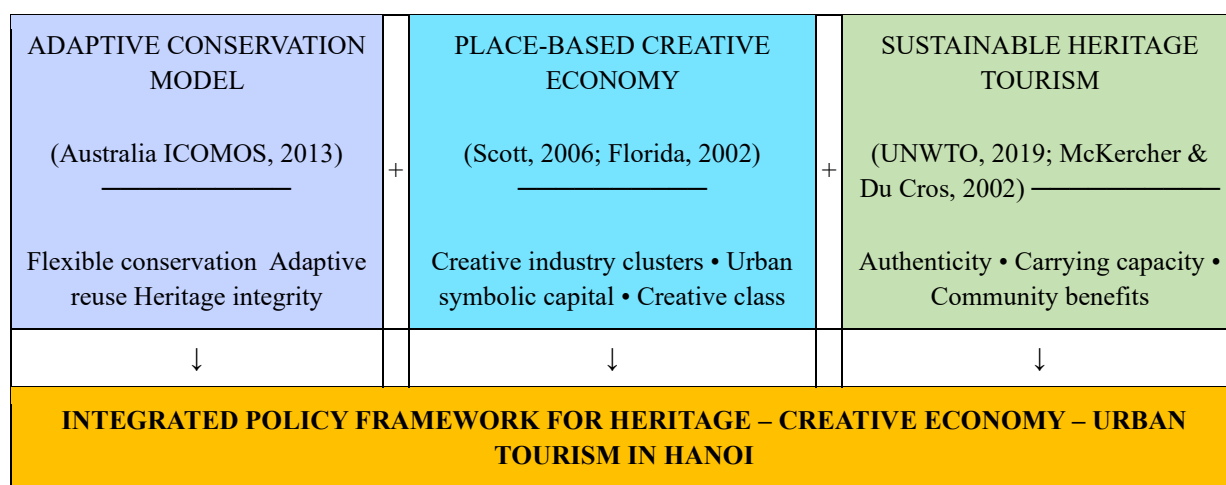


Figure 1. Integrated Analytical Framework of Three Theoretical Pillars

(Source: Author's compilation)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Document Analysis: Legal documents, policies, and planning frameworks from 2000 to 2023 were systematically reviewed, including laws, decrees, and government decisions; urban plans of Hanoi; reports from state management agencies; and materials from UNESCO, ICOMOS, and World Bank.

Field Surveys: Conducted in five areas with a high concentration of French colonial architecture: (i) the area surrounding Hoan Kiem Lake; (ii) Dien Bien Phu Street and adjacent streets; (iii) the Temple of Literature area; (iv) Ba Dinh District with its cluster of French colonial public buildings; and (v) the Hang Bai – Ly Thai To area.

In-depth Interviews: Conducted with 24 participants across four groups: heritage and urban planning officials (n=6); architecture and conservation experts (n=6); creative economy and tourism enterprises (n=8); and local residents and community representatives (n=4).

Comparative Analysis: A systematic comparison was undertaken with four international case studies: Chinatown Singapore and Kampong Glam (Singapore); Tianzifang and Xintiandi (Shanghai); George Town (Kuala Lumpur/Penang); and Hoi An as a domestic model.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis with NVivo 12. Quantitative data were processed using SPSS 26. Triangulation analysis was employed to ensure consistency across data sources.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Current Status of French Colonial Architectural Heritage in Hanoi

4.1.1. Classification and Scale of the System

The system of French colonial architecture in Hanoi was formed through three distinct stylistic phases. The first phase (1883–1902) was characterized by Neoclassical architecture, exemplified by the Presidential Palace Hanoi (formerly the Palace of the Governor-General of Indochina), the Hanoi People's Committee Building (formerly the City Hall), and the Hanoi Opera House. The second phase (1902–1930) was marked by the Indochine architectural style, which synthesized Asian influences with French construction techniques, with representative examples such as the Vietnam National Museum of History and Chu Van An High School. The third phase (1930–1954) witnessed the emergence of Art Deco and modernist architecture [1, 16]. Table 1 provides an overview of the classification of these architectural works by function.

Table 1. Classification of French Colonial Architectural Buildings in Hanoi by Function (2022)

Type of Building	Quantity	Percentage (%)	Listed	Predominant Conservation Status
Villas and residential houses	189	15.1%	42	Deteriorating (privatized)
Townhouses (attached villas)	412	32.9%	18	Arbitrary renovations, subdivision
Public buildings (schools, hospitals, administrative offices)	247	19.7%	51	Relatively good, lack of interpretation
Religious and cultural buildings	68	5,4%	12	Maintained, limited alterations
Infrastructure (bridges, markets, stations, gates)	337	26.9%	3	Many demolished
Total	1.253	100%	126	

Source: [3]; [17]

4.1.2. Current Status of Use and Conservation by Functional Groups

Field surveys and document analysis indicate that the conservation status of French colonial architecture in Hanoi varies significantly across functional groups. Buildings managed by the state for administrative purposes (accounting for approximately 35%) are generally well maintained in physical terms; however, they are often used in ways that do not align with their heritage values and lack adequate cultural interpretation.

Privately owned villas and residential buildings, largely privatized after 1990 (approximately 28%), are in the most critical condition: most have been subdivided, arbitrarily modified, or demolished without proper control [4, 18].

Cultural, educational, and healthcare buildings (22%) tend to be better preserved, although they lack structured heritage interpretation programs. Meanwhile, commercial and mixed-use buildings (15%) exhibit the highest rate of transformation, reflecting pressures from the real estate market and the absence of effective conservation incentives for private owners.

Land prices in central districts with a high concentration of French colonial architecture such as Hoan Kiem District, Ba Dinh District, and Dong Da District have increased by five to eight times during the period 2000–2023 [19], creating substantial economic pressure on both property owners and public authorities. Figure 2 below illustrates the key factors influencing the transformation of French colonial architectural heritage.

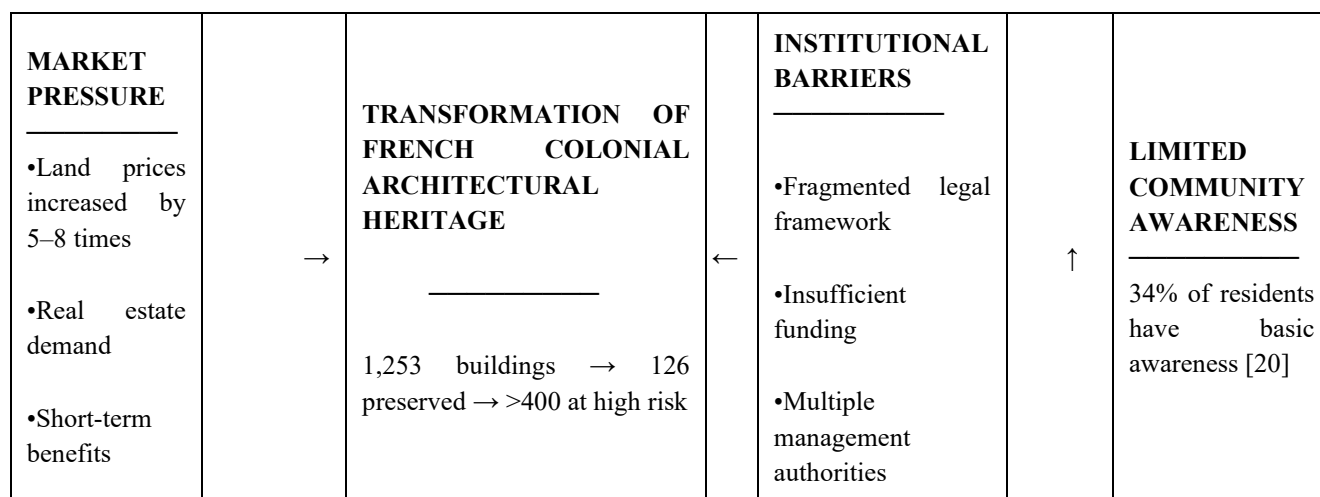


Figure 2. Factors Influencing the Transformation of French Colonial Architectural Heritage in Hanoi
 (Source: Author’s synthesis)

4.1.3. Quantitative Assessment of Conservation Pressure

Table 2 summarizes quantitative indicators reflecting the conservation pressures and the untapped economic potential of the French architectural heritage system in Hanoi, thereby providing a basis for policy recommendations.

Table 2. Quantitative Indicators of the Current Status and Economic Potential of French Architectural Heritage in Hanoi

Indicator	Value	Source
Total number of remaining French architectural buildings	1,253 structures	[3]
Number of officially designated heritage buildings	126 (10,1%)	[17]

Number of buildings at high risk of demolition/deterioration	More 400 (31,9%)	[4] ; Field survey, 2023
Urbanization rate of Hanoi (2023)	62.3% (increased from 45.7% in 2000)	[5]
Increase in land prices in the central area (2000–2023)	5–8 times	[19]
Heritage conservation budget / Total municipal budget expenditure	~0,3% (Singapore: 3,2%; Seoul: 4,1%)	[21]
Number of international visitors to Hanoi (2023)	3.6 million arrivals	[22]
Proportion of residents with basic knowledge of French architecture	34%	[20]
Growth rate of Hanoi’s creative industries sector	Among the top 5 fastest-growing in the Asia–Pacific region	[23]

(Source: Author’s compilation)

4.2. Analysis of the Current Policy and Institutional Framework

The legal framework for architectural heritage conservation in Vietnam has been developed over several decades; however, it still exhibits significant limitations in terms of coherence and enforcement effectiveness. The Law on Cultural Heritage [24] serves as the foundational legal document, yet it primarily focuses on officially designated monuments. Meanwhile, a large proportion of French architectural works that have not been formally listed remain without effective protection mechanisms [25].

Decision No. 73/2014/QĐ-UBND issued by the Hanoi People’s Committee on the management of villas represents the first specialized regulatory instrument; nevertheless, it still has several shortcomings: the absence of financial incentive mechanisms for conservation, the lack of provisions for adaptive reuse, and insufficient integration with broader economic and tourism development strategies.

Table 3. Evaluation of the Legal Framework for Architectural Heritage Conservation in Hanoi

Legal document	Year of issuance	Strengths	Limitations
Law on Cultural Heritage (amended)	2001, 2009	Comprehensive legal framework, positively evaluated internationally	Focuses on officially designated monuments; lacks provisions for adaptive reuse
Law on Urban Planning	2009	Identifies heritage conservation as a planning objective	Lacks specific indicators and enforcement mechanisms
Law on Construction (amended)	2014, 2020	Provides regulations on the renovation of existing buildings	Conflicts with heritage conservation regulations

Decision No. 73/2014 (Hanoi People's Committee) – Old Villas	2014	Classifies 970 villas into three value-based categories	Lacks financial incentives; no mechanism for adaptive reuse
Decision No. 1259/QĐ-TTg – Hanoi Master Plan to 2030	2011	Identifies heritage conservation as a development objective	Lacks enforcement mechanisms; significant “implementation gap”
Decision No. 1755/QĐ-TTg – Cultural Industries Strategy to 2030	2016	Sets a target of cultural industries contributing 7% of GDP	Not linked to heritage conservation policies

(Source: Author's compilation)

The analysis of the current policy framework reveals four critical policy gaps that need to be addressed, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Policy Gaps in the Management of French Architectural Heritage in Hanoi

No	Sector	Gap	Impact
1	Institutional framework	Fragmented authority across ≥6 agencies; lack of a coordinating body	Delayed decision-making; inconsistency in implementation
2	Finance	Conservation budget accounts for only 0.3% of total expenditure; lack of mechanisms to mobilize private investment	Heritage deterioration; insufficient resources for conservation
3	Economic	Lack of regulations on adaptive reuse; absence of incentives for creative industries	The economic potential of heritage remains underutilized
4	Awareness	Lack of systematic heritage education and communication programs	Only 34% of the population has basic knowledge; low level of public support

(Source: Author's compilation)

4.3. International Experiences

Integrated Models of Heritage and Urban Economy: Singapore is widely regarded as one of the most successful models in Asia for integrating heritage conservation with urban economic development. Since the 1980s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) has implemented a comprehensive conservation strategy for historic heritage districts such as Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, and Tanjong Pagar [6]. A key highlight is the mechanism for encouraging private investment through tax incentives, flexible adaptive reuse policies, and low-interest credit support. As a result, most heritage buildings have been preserved and reused by the private sector, reducing the burden on public budgets while generating substantial economic returns from tourism [26].

Shanghai: The Creative Districts of Tianzifang and Xintiandi: Tianzifang and Xintiandi are two prominent creative districts in Shanghai, developed on the foundation of Shikumen architecture (a Franco-Chinese townhouse style) from the early twentieth century. Xintiandi follows a government-led, top-down development model with a strong orientation toward high-end commercial activities, whereas Tianzifang has evolved through a bottom-up approach driven by artists, designers, and small entrepreneurs [27]. Zheng [28] argues that Tianzifang is more successful in terms of heritage conservation and fostering a diverse creative community, while Xintiandi performs better in purely economic terms. This contrast suggests that Hanoi should adopt a hybrid approach, combining both models depending on the characteristics of each heritage area.

Hoi An: Lessons from a Domestic World Heritage Site: Hoi An recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site in 1999 offers one of the most relevant domestic examples of integrating heritage conservation with tourism development. The city has established a community-based heritage management model, in which local residents act both as custodians of heritage and as direct beneficiaries[29]. However, the Hoi An experience also highlights the risks associated with success: over-tourism, excessive commercialization, and the erosion of community authenticity important warnings that Hanoi should consider when formulating its strategy [30].

4.4. Proposed Integrated Policy Framework

Based on the analysis of the current situation, policy evaluation, and international lessons, this paper proposes the Integrated Framework for Heritage – Creative Economy – Urban Tourism (hereinafter referred to as the “HCD Framework”). This framework consists of three strategic pillars supported by two foundational conditions—namely institutional and financial mechanisms—as summarized in Figure 3.

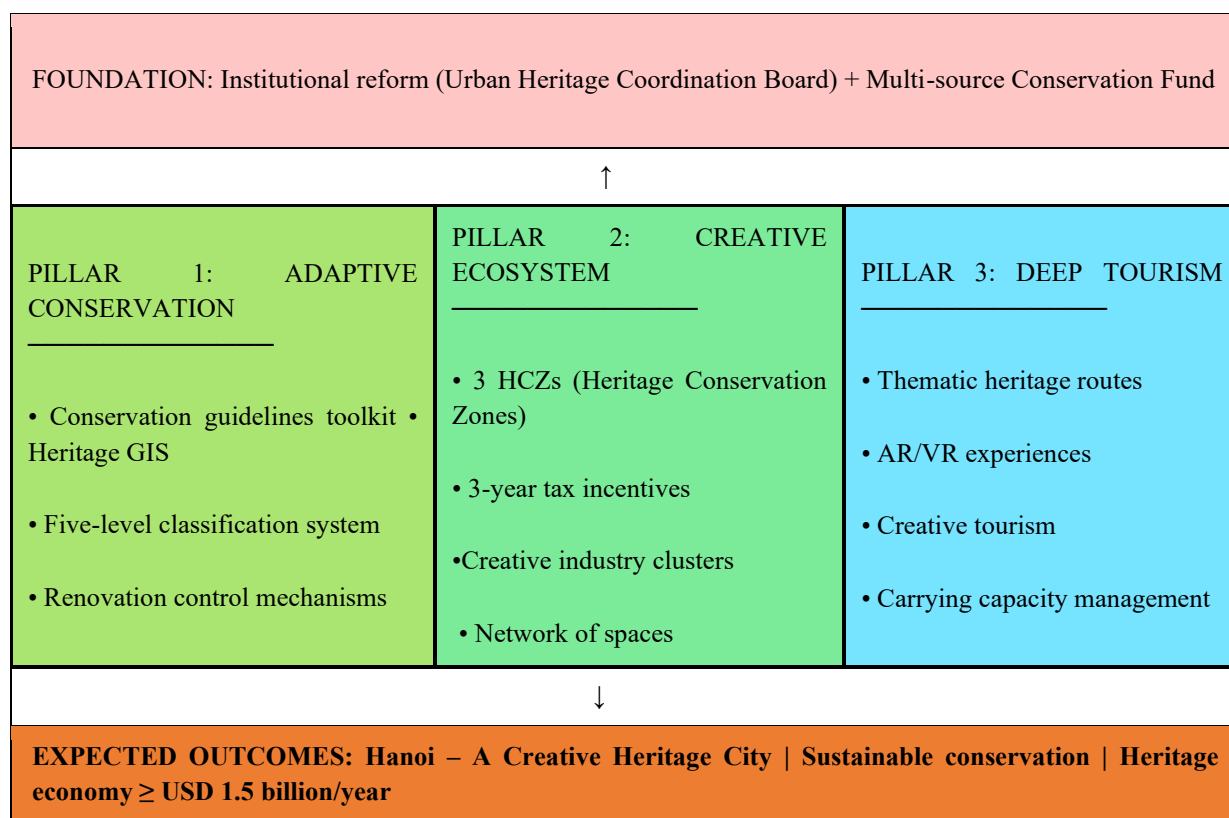


Figure 3. Integrated Policy Framework for Heritage – Creative Economy – Urban Tourism (HCD Framework)

(Source: Proposed by the author)

Pillar 1: Adaptive Conservation of Architectural Heritage: Modernizing the Legal Framework and Heritage Classification. The first pillar focuses on modernizing the conservation management system toward a more adaptive and flexible approach. It is necessary to develop a Guideline for the Conservation of French Architectural Heritage in Hanoi a technical document that specifies conservation standards, permissible scopes of adaptive reuse, and approval procedures for each category of buildings, based on consultations with ICOMOS Vietnam and international experts. Table 6 presents the proposed classification system and the corresponding levels of permitted intervention.

Table 6. Classification System of French Architectural Heritage and Permitted Levels of Intervention (Proposed)

Group	Group name	Identification criteria	Estimated number	Permitted level of intervention	Budget priority
A	Exceptional heritage	Outstanding architectural value, associated with major historical events	~50 buildings	Strict preservation in original condition	100% state funding
B	Representative heritage	High value, representative of a style or historical period	~200 buildings	Preservation combined with controlled interior renovation	60–70% state funding
C	Notable heritage	Retains fundamental architectural characteristics	~500 buildings	Flexible adaptive reuse	30–40% private sector support
D	Heritage with remaining elements	Already modified but still retains identifiable features	~350 buildings	Selective restoration	Voluntary encouragement
E	Potential heritage	Recognized but requires further research	~153 buildings	Monitoring and research	Not a short-term priority

(Source: Author’s proposal)

Establishing the Hanoi Urban Heritage Coordination Board: It is proposed to establish the Hanoi Urban Heritage Coordination Board (HUHCB), operating under the Hanoi People’s Committee, to integrate the functions of currently fragmented agencies, including the Heritage Management Board, the Department of Planning and Architecture, the Department of Culture and Sports, and the Department of Tourism. This model is comparable to Singapore’s URA and has proven effective in addressing institutional fragmentation [26]. The HUHCB would have authority to approve conservation and adaptive reuse projects, manage the Conservation Fund, and coordinate with relevant departments and agencies. **Development of a Heritage GIS System:** A Heritage Geographic Information System (Heritage GIS) for the entire French architectural heritage system in Hanoi should be developed and continuously updated in real time. The system would integrate data on physical conditions,

ownership, legal status, usage history, and risk assessments, thereby providing a foundation for management and decision-making. Experiences from Singapore and Seoul indicate that Heritage GIS can reduce heritage project approval time from 18 months to 3–4 months[21].

Pillar 2: Development of a Heritage-Linked Creative Ecosystem. Planning Three Heritage Creative Zones (HCZs)

It is proposed to establish three Heritage Creative Zones (HCZs) in Hanoi, each focusing on a specific cluster of creative industries.

Table 7. Proposed Heritage Creative Zones in Hanoi

HCZ Name	Geographic Area	Focus Creative Industries	Key Existing Heritage Buildings	Reference Model
HCZ Hoan Kiem – Hang Bai	Hoan Kiem District: from Hoan Kiem Lake to Hang Bai and Ly Thai To streets	Fashion design, high-end handicrafts, contemporary art	Hanoi Opera House, Hanoi Post Office, Trang Tien street heritage buildings	Xintiandi (Shanghai)
HCZ Ba Dinh – Dien Bien Phu	Ba Dinh District: along Dien Bien Phu, Tran Phu, Hoang Dieu streets	Architecture, urban planning, urban design, heritage research	Presidential Palace area, Ho Chi Minh Museum, Vietnam Military History Museum, multiple villas	URA Conservation Areas (Singapore)
HCZ Kham Thien – Van Mieu	Dong Da District: from Temple of Literature to Kham Thien area	Traditional music, performing arts, heritage cuisine, handicrafts	Temple of Literature – Imperial Academy, traditional houses in Kham Thien	Tianzifang (Shanghai)

(Source: Author’s proposal)

Financial incentive system to activate the private sector. To enable the creative economy ecosystem within HCZs to develop, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive financial incentive system, including: (i) 70–100% exemption or reduction of rental fees for creative enterprises leasing heritage buildings during the first three years; (ii) a corporate income tax incentive of 10% for the first five years of operation; (iii) subsidized loans through the Conservation Fund with preferential interest rates; and (iv) incentives for private owners who proactively conserve and lease heritage buildings as creative spaces. This model draws on Singapore’s experience, where the return on heritage investment reached 4.2 times over a 10-year period [21].

Pillar 3: Development of Deep Urban Cultural Tourism Products. Development of three groups of tourism products

The third pillar aims to transform French architectural heritage into high-value, culturally immersive tourism products, responding to the global growth of experiential tourism[15]. Three product groups are proposed: (1) thematic architectural tour routes structured around stylistic periods, supported by expert guides and multimedia interpretation tools; (2) AR/VR immersive experiences reconstructing urban life in colonial-era Hanoi at key heritage sites; and (3) creative tourism experiences connecting visitors with artists, artisans, and entrepreneurs

operating within heritage spaces. Managing carrying capacity and developing responsible tourism. Tourism growth must be actively managed to avoid excessive commercialization and negative impacts on physical heritage assets key lessons from Hoi An [30] and Venice [15]. Specific measures include an online ticketing and controlled visitor flow system; zoning and protection mechanisms for visitor circulation; off-peak tourism policies to reduce seasonality; and a code of conduct at heritage sites with clearly defined enforcement measures and penalties.

4.5. Implementation Roadmap and Evaluation Indicators

4.5.1. Phased implementation roadmap

The HCD Framework is proposed to be implemented in three phases, corresponding to Hanoi’s evolving institutional and financial capacity development. Table 9 summarizes the detailed roadmap.

Table 9. Implementation roadmap of the HCD Policy Framework by phase (2025–2035)

Phase	Timeline	Key Focus	Target Outcomes
Phase 1	2025–2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish HUHCB and issue the legal framework; complete the Heritage GIS; classify all 1,253 buildings into five categories; establish the HUHCF and mobilize initial funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HUHCB becomes operational; Heritage GIS covers 100% of buildings; USD 50 million in initial funding secured
Phase 2	2027–2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pilot implementation of 1 HCZ (priority: Hoan Kiem Lake area) - Development of 3 tourism product groups - Training of 200 heritage tour guides - Establishment of the branding “Hanoi – Creative Heritage City” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50 creative enterprises operating within HCZs -500,000 visitors/year participating in cultural tourism route - USD 300 million in heritage tourism revenue
Phase 3	2030–2035	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion of the model to the remaining 2 HCZs - Application for UNESCO Creative Cities Network (Design) - Integration of AR/VR technologies at all Group A and B heritage sites - Comprehensive evaluation and policy adjustment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full operation of 3 HCZs - Hanoi recognized as a creative heritage hub in ASEAN - Contribution of ≥ USD 1.5 billion/year to the city’s economy

(Source: Author’s proposal)

4.5.2. Integrated Evaluation Indicators

To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the HCD Framework implementation, this paper proposes a set of integrated KPIs that simultaneously measure three dimensions: conservation, economic, and social outcomes—aligned with the UNESCO World Heritage Monitoring Framework [31].

Table 10. Integrated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the HCD Policy Framework

No.	Indicator group	Specific indicator	Baseline (2023)	Target 2030	Data source
1	Physical conservation	Number of properly conserved buildings	126	450	Heritage GIS
2	Physical conservation	Percentage of Group A and B buildings preserved in original condition	60%	95%	HUHCB
3	Creative economy	Number of creative enterprises operating within heritage sites	~30	250+	(Department of Planning and Investment – Hanoi)
4	Creative economy	Heritage economy revenue (USD billion/year)	~0,2	≥1,5	Hanoi Department of Tourism
5	Tourism	Number of international visitors to Hanoi (million arrivals)	3,6	7,0	Hanoi Department of Tourism
6	Tourism	Average expenditure of heritage tourists (USD/person/day)	~85	≥200	Survey of visitors
7	Social	Percentage of residents with knowledge of Hanoi French architectural heritage	34%	70%	Community survey
8	Social	Jobs created by the heritage economy (thousand people)	~5	50+	Hanoi Department of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs

(Source: Author's proposal)

V. DISCUSSION

Potential and competitive advantages of Hanoi: The integrated analysis indicates that Hanoi possesses four key competitive advantages for implementing the HCD Framework. First, the scale and quality of the French architectural heritage system: with more than 1,253 buildings, including several outstanding architectural masterpieces in Southeast Asia, Hanoi has a richer heritage asset base than most cities in the region. Second, its status as the national capital, with well-developed tourism infrastructure and strong international air connectivity. Third, the dynamism of the young creative community: Hanoi is among the five fastest-growing creative industry cities in the Asia–Pacific region [23]. Fourth, strong international interest and support, particularly from France and Francophone organizations.

Barriers to be overcome: However, the HCD Framework also faces significant barriers. The institutional barrier is the most critical: fragmented authority and the lack of effective inter-agency coordination have long been the “Achilles’ heel” of Hanoi’s urban governance [32]. Establishing the HUHCB with real decision-making authority requires strong political commitment and a profound shift in governance thinking. The financial barrier is also substantial: the initial investment required to conserve and renovate more than 400 priority buildings is estimated at approximately USD 500 million during the 2025–2030 period (based on average costs from comparable projects, ADB, 2020), far exceeding the city’s current budget capacity. The social barrier relates to the interests of numerous households currently residing in French villas: experiences from Singapore and Shanghai indicate that this is a potential source of social conflict if not carefully managed.

Theoretical implications: Theoretically, this study contributes to academic debates on the relationship between heritage conservation and economic development in developing cities. While Harvey (2012) warns against the risks of “heritage commodification” and “cultural gentrification,” this study argues that in the context of developing countries such as Vietnam, the controlled economic exploitation of heritage is a necessary condition for generating resources for long-term conservation. The proposed HCD Framework offers a third pathway between two extremes pure conservation and uncontrolled commercialization representing a “middle path” that may be suitable for the specific context of rapidly developing Asian cities.

VI. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has provided a comprehensive analysis of the integration of French architectural heritage conservation with creative economic development and urban tourism in Hanoi, ranging from the current situation and policy framework to international experiences and the proposed HCD Integrated Policy Framework. The findings confirm three main conclusions: (1) Hanoi’s French architectural heritage system is a unique cultural and economic asset that remains underutilized; (2) the current policy and institutional framework contain too many gaps to ensure effective conservation and utilization of this heritage; and (3) the integrated three-pillar model is a feasible approach, consistent with both international experience and Vietnam’s institutional context.

Based on the analysis, the paper proposes six prioritized policy recommendations:

Recommendation 1 (2025–2026) – Institutional reform: Establish the HUHCB with integrated inter-sectoral authority; issue a decree on urban architectural heritage management; complete the Heritage GIS and classify all 1,253 buildings into the proposed five categories.

Recommendation 2 (2025–2027) – Financial instruments development: Establish the HUHCF with a multi-source structure (35% state budget + 25% ODA + 25% tourism fees + 10% CSR + 5% PPP); introduce tax incentives and credit mechanisms for private conservation.

Recommendation 3 (2026–2028) – Pilot Heritage Creative Zone: Implement the Hoan Kiem – Hang Bai HCZ as a pilot model; evaluate and adjust before scaling up.

Recommendation 4 (continuous) – Community capacity building: Integrate French architectural heritage content into local education programs; train professional heritage tour guides.

Recommendation 5 (continuous) – International cooperation: Strengthen cooperation with France (EFEO, AFD), UNESCO, ICOMOS, and ADB in technical support, financing, and knowledge transfer; pursue membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Recommendation 6 (every 3 years) – Monitoring and evaluation: Apply the proposed integrated KPIs system consisting of eight indicators; conduct periodic independent evaluations with international experts.

Successful implementation of the HCD Framework will not only preserve Hanoi’s unique and valuable architectural heritage but also create a sustainable cultural-economic development model, contributing to the city’s position as a leading creative hub and tourism destination in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the findings of this study may be adapted and applied to other heritage cities in Vietnam and Southeast Asia facing similar challenges.

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