

JIP Final Report

World Heritage, Regional Integration and Local Livelihoods: Tourism, Development, and Sustainability in Mainland Southeast Asia

By Dr. Coleen Fox; Project Leader
Dr. Nicholas Kohler; Project Leader
Dr. Sekson Yongvanit; Team Member

1. Abstract

World Heritage Site locations occupy an intriguing space where the interactions among, and tensions between, global, national, and local forces are particularly evident. In the area of the “Greater Mekong Subregion” of mainland Southeast Asia, world heritage sites are an important part of regional tourism development efforts and are significant local economic and social drivers. In light of recent emphasis on ‘sustainable’ and ‘pro-poor’ development policies, heritage sites can potentially play a key role in mitigating the ill impacts of development and in responding to political and economic crises.

This research project used case studies at four world heritage sites - in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia - to examine the role of cultural world heritage sites in linking global institutions and industries to localities in developing countries. The research period from 2008 to 2009 occurred during massive political unrest within Thailand, border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia related to the listing of a new world heritage site, and a global economic collapse which threatens many important regional industries, including tourism.

The research indicates that heritage sites occupy an important and somewhat contradictory position, caught between promoting conservation while serving as one of the main drivers, via increased tourism, of increased development and change. At the local-level heritage sites have been effective in preserving physical environments and increasing economic opportunities, but there are serious questions about the distribution of benefits from tourism, the availability of resources for conservation, and the impacts on local cultures. At the regional level, heritage sites serve as an important impetus toward cooperative planning between countries, but their importance as national symbols can give rise to potentially violent conflict.

2. Introduction

This project examined how the establishment and management of World Heritage Sites interacts with local landscapes, regional economic development efforts, and transnational political connections. In particular, it looked at how the development and promotion of tourism -- which is supposed to be both 'sustainable' and 'pro-poor' according to the management goals of heritage sites -- actually proceeds when implemented in developing countries in the fast-growing region of mainland Southeast Asia. Using as case studies four differing types of cultural heritage sites (located in Cambodia, Thailand, and Lao PDR) the research employed a geographic approach to probe the influence of heritage tourism on local landscapes, to examine the establishment of regional economic connections, and to characterize the development of international cooperative programs for heritage management.

Three primary outcomes are expected of the project: first, a detailed analysis of problems and opportunities for the individual world heritage sites used as case studies; second, a review of the regional interaction between heritage site management and economic development in mainland Southeast Asia; and third, discussion of the broader implications of heritage management and promotion in regard to the promotion of sustainability and equitable economic growth in developing countries. These subjects are touched upon in this report and will be dealt with at a greater length in a series of future articles.

3. The heritage and tourism project

Tourism and heritage preservation are closely intertwined phenomenon with unprecedented modern global reach. The World Heritage Convention is one of the most widely agreed-upon international agreements (Kammeier 2003), ratified by 186 nations as of early 2009 with listed World Heritage Sites in 145 countries.¹ Most of the sites (50%) lie in Europe or North America, with the Asia and the Pacific region second with 21% of world heritage listings (Appendix: Figure 1). Tourism is one of the largest global economic sectors, with international tourism receipts representing about 6% of worldwide exports of goods and services (30% of services alone) in 2003 (World Tourism Organization 2007). Aside from Myanmar, the development of tourism plays a key role in the economy of every country in mainland Southeast Asia. A significant proportion of the visitors to those countries, are attracted to World Heritage sites, particularly the Angkor temple complex in Cambodia and the city of Luang Prabang in Laos.

The World Heritage Sites are popular tourist destinations, and heritage preservation is dependent

1 . These consist of 679 cultural, 174 natural, and 25 mixed heritage sites (World Heritage Center 2009).

upon tourism revenue for funding in many countries, particularly developing ones (Drost 1996, Garrod and Fyall 2000; Aas, Ladkin and Fletcher 2005). However, the goals of tourism development and heritage preservation contain contradictory elements that influence economic growth, international integration, local livelihoods, and the physical landscape around World Heritage Sites. These include tensions between the desire for making sites increasingly accessible to tourists and the needs of preventing over-use from detracting from the heritage site, or the economic benefits provided to the immediate area of heritage sites versus the economic and social costs to locals as outside investors and business operators move in.

Winter (2007) writes “While organizations like UNESCO have attempted to advance a language of cultural difference within a shared inheritance of globally 'unique' sites, a framework of 'world heritage' has invariably led to a battleground between nationalistic agendas and the sub-national interests of minority groups (p13). These contradictions are playing out in deeply problematic ways at places such as Angkor, where rapid tourism development now threatens the integrity of the site and surrounding area. Tensions between site conservation and tourism development, in addition to growing concerns about social justice, have made the ideas of “sustainable” and “pro-poor” tourism central in tourism planning and heritage promotion at local, regional, and global scales. There is now a recognized need for tourism to be assessed not just in terms of growth, but also in terms of integration with the broader development goals of the local area, host country, region, and beyond (Brohman 1996).

With this contemporary thrust in heritage planning and tourism development, it is important to examine how well the ideas of sustainability and pro-poor tourism articulate between scales – does ‘sustainable’ development at the scale of a region necessarily translate into sustainable and pro-poor development at local scales? Conversely, is local scale sustainability possible in light of regional tourism growth? This research examines these questions by probing the articulation between local, regional, and international aspects of heritage management and tourism development in the countries of Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Home to a wide variety of heritage sites, an important and rapidly growing international tourist industry, and a number of transnational cooperation programs, these mainland Southeast Asian Countries are an ideal region in which to look at the interplay between international heritage conservation, regional tourism development, and the local expression of sustainable and pro-poor tourism.

A key concept behind this research is that the interplay of local, regional, and international scales of action are particularly apparent in World Heritage Sites, due to a variety of factors. These include the close relationship of these sites with the global tourist industry and the necessarily site-specific nature of world heritage conservation. Heritage sites vividly illustrate tensions between conservation/preservation on the

one hand and development/promotion on the other. They exemplify the conundrum of local sustainability and control in the face of internationally-mandated regulation and management action and the pressures of regional economic development and cooperation.

This project examined the role played by World Heritage Sites in regional integration and local development using both quantitative and qualitative methods drawn from several disciplines. The combination of methods was designed to answer questions about the role of specific world heritage sites on their local and regional surroundings, and to develop a standardized protocol which can be used to examine heritage sites and other tourist areas throughout the globe. The four specific sites used in the research provide a range of types of cultural heritage sites; these are Angkor in Cambodia, Luang Prabang and Vat Phou in Laos, and Ban Chiang in Thailand (Figure 1). Angkor and Luang Prabang are two of the most visited sites in the region, while Vat Phou and Ban Chiang are smaller and less well-known sites.

Quantitative methods used include land use change analysis, characterization of local and regional transportation and communication linkages, and the inventory of tourist and community infrastructure in case study areas, drawing upon methods common in geographic, economic, and tourism research. Qualitative methods consist of critical textual interpretation of tourist literature and regional cooperative planning documents, as well as informal surveys of tourists, tour operators, tourism planning officials, and local residents. A portion of this research attempted to evaluate the sustainability of tourism development by probing tourist and local opinions about the heritage sites.

Data sources for the landscape analysis consisted of maps, historical air photos, and high-resolution satellite imagery as well as GPS data collection. Transportation linkages were examined through analysis of airline, bus, and rail schedules and the examination of tour itineraries offered by travel companies. Site visits were conducted during September and December of 2008, and during February and March of 2009. This visits both highlighted both the utility of multiple research trips to a survey site as well as the need for flexibility in conducting international research – the main field visit in December of 2008 was severely disrupted by the shutdown of the Bangkok airport by political protesters. While this event was problematic in that it necessitated the rescheduling of a large portion of the planned field research, it was also fortuitous in that it highlighted some of the immediate and potential benefits of a regional approach to tourism development.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative methods should allow for the evaluation of each world heritage sites' integration with local and regional economies, the perceived sustainability and equity of tourism development at the sites, and a characterization of the role of heritage sites in regional cooperation and planning. Results will be useful for the international and regional organizations concerned

with heritage preservation and tourism development, addressing a need for the increase in knowledge related to sustainable environmental tourism and for basic data collection and analysis techniques (Greater Mekong Subregion Environmental Forum for Sustainable Development, 2001). The site specific results, particularly the results of the mapping undertaken as a part of this research, are being disseminated through printed maps and reports distributed to the relevant agencies and focus on the immediate practical use of data collected for this research. More general findings are being prepared as a pair of articles for publication in the academic literature: one focusing on local-levels concerns and the practical needs of tourism management and conservation at heritage site; another treating the role of regional initiatives in the face of uncertainty such as global economic risks and national level political unrest. Additionally, the project members are developing materials and seeking funding to provide ongoing training in the creation and management of geospatial data for cultural heritage management.

4. Results

Criticisms of third world tourism include the loss of local economic control, the commodification of local culture, lack of integration with other local economic sectors, spatially uneven development, and a tendency to increase inequality and disparities in local areas (Brohman 1996; Drost 1996; Wall 1997; Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher 2005). Despite these criticisms, high tourism growth in the developing world has generated interest in tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy. This has been termed pro-poor tourism (Chok et al. 2007). The key characteristics of pro-poor tourism are participation, a holistic livelihoods approach, equitable distribution of benefits, economic viability, and learning opportunities. Heritage sites in Southeast Asia are assets around which pro-poor tourism could be focused. But to what extent does this seem to be happening? Are heritage sites more or less likely to promote pro-poor tourism than other tourist attractions, such as eco-tourism destinations?

The case study sites looked at in research conducted under this project show that heritage sites are indeed a key asset for pro-poor and sustainable tourism. Programs such as the “Stay Another Day” initiative gain exposure by including heritage sites in their geographic reach. Operating within Laos and Cambodia, the Stay Another Day² seeks “to promote "destination friendly" tourism, by connecting travellers with organisations that are in some way helping to conserve local culture and heritage, support community projects benefitting local people or initiatives to lessen negative environmental impacts of

2 “[Stay-another-day.org](http://stay-another-day.org) is an initiative by the Mekong Private Sector Development Facility (IFC-MPDF), a multi-donor funded initiative set up by the International Finance Corporation in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, to reduce poverty through sustainable private sector development. “ (SADI 2009).

tourism” (SADI 2009). Although gaining a certain prominence, the increasing visibility of pro-poor and sustainable tourism project do not lead to the elimination of tourism that is not pro-poor or sustainable.

A key critique of tourism as pro-poor is the extent to which the industry is bound up with the health of the global economy and highly dependent on a stable political climate. These processes are beyond the control of local communities, which undermines the goals of participation and a holistic livelihoods approach. This was demonstrated forcefully during the course of our research in Southeast Asia, when regional, national, and global events (a global economic crisis originating in the United States, political unrest in Thailand, and conflict between Thailand and Cambodia over Preah Viharn, a newly listed World Heritage site) strongly impacted local livelihoods linked to heritage tourism. While doing fieldwork in December, 2008 - during and immediately after the Bangkok airport was closed by political protests - local merchants and tourist operators in the town of Siem Reap near Angkor reported business down by 10 to 40 percent in informal discussions. A similar decline in tourist numbers was reported in Luang Prabang, Laos on the same trip.

The characteristics of heritage tourism create specific opportunities and obstacles to poverty alleviation. Although the role of global (UN), regional (Greater Mekong Sub-Region), and state authorities can sometimes undermine local control and participation, they also create a variety of economic benefits and opportunities for locals. The involvement of outside authorities can facilitate economic development through hotel and road construction, funds for preservation, and regional and international promotion of sites. The question whether all this activity, which seeks to integrate areas around heritage sites into the global tourism industry, is ultimately beneficial to locals and the underprivileged will be seriously looked at as the impacts of the present global economic crisis are realized over 2009 and 2010.

While the case studies and supporting research examined in this project provide some insights into the above-mentioned theoretical debates, they also point to some immediate practical considerations. During the research period three newsworthy events influenced the study: the dramatic global downturn in economic activity, the political unrest within Thailand, and the border dispute between Thailand and Cambodia related to the designation of a new world heritage site (Preah Viharn) in Cambodia. As of the final writing of this report, an emerging Swine Flu outbreak based in Mexico City also threatens international travel and tourism. Global projects of heritage preservation, regional efforts at integration, and the livelihoods dependent upon tourism are particularly responsive to international events. The funding of heritage conservation operations and the planning of tourism development needs to take the prospects of occasional drops in tourist numbers and revenue very seriously, in the past decade the 2001 terrorist attacks, the 2003 SARS disease outbreaks, and the 2008 economic crash and unrest in Thailand

have all seriously impacted the pace of tourism in mainland Southeast Asia.

An additional and related practical need for heritage sites and the areas around them is the continued lack of data, equipment, and training available to government workers, business operators, and others involved in the planning and management of the surroundings. While there are a number of training opportunities provided by international aid organizations, there is also a tendency for those who acquire skills to be promoted or moved to other projects, or to lack the resources to continue the work after the period of outside funding ends. This data acquired for this research is designed to help provide information about current site conditions to the planners and managers of the case study sites, particularly in the form of maps based on the high-resolution satellite imagery used in this project. These maps, in addition to the information on site conditions captured with combined photography and GPS locations ('geotagging'), should aid both in the long-term understanding of change occurring at the sites and in the immediate planning needs (Figure 2). Heritage managers in Luang Prabang and Vat Phou, Laos, in particular, have a use for this information due to the large amount of privately managed properties within and around the heritage site boundaries.

5. Case Study Results

During the course of the research, each case study site brought to the fore a number of the theoretical and practical issues discussed above. These are discussed on a site-by-site basis below.

Ban Chiang Archaeological Site. Udon Thani Province, Thailand

Ban Chiang became a World Heritage site in 1992 on the basis of the important archaeological discoveries made in the area relating to the early use of metals in mainland Southeast Asia. It is the smallest World Heritage site of the case studies, and much of the 'heritage' which the site seeks to protect is underground. In the past, much of this heritage has been looted and sold due to fame and quality of the pottery produced by the prehistoric inhabitants. The main sites now open to tourism are a newly renovated museum and a preserved archaeological dig a short distance (around 700 meters) to the East at a Wat complex (Figure 3).

Ban Chiang has likely benefited from being a part of the heritage tour routes developing regionally, as well as the growing importance of Udon Thani as a tourist base. Like Vat Phou, much of the 'heritage' at Ban Chiang lies underground and is relatively inaccessible to tourism and degradation. In addition to being included as a short stop in a number of 'heritage' related itineraries designed for international travelers, tourism from the local region is also important. In addition to tourists on an international

itinerary, for example, schoolchildren from Vientiane, a three hour drive away in neighboring Laos, visit the museum on field trips.

Much of the tourist-related economy in the local area comes from demonstrating traditional skills such as weaving or from selling handicrafts. Facing the Ban Chiang Museum is a line of shops selling handicrafts, with each shop selling a similar array of merchandise. Recent budgeting issues forced the museum to cut back hours and impaired the local merchants, most visibly in the shops directly across from the museum entrance (Figure 4).

An intriguing question for the future of Ban Chiang relates to the possible repatriation to Thailand of a number of Ban Chiang artifacts from museums in the United States thought to have been illegally brought out of Thailand over the past 30 years. Given the fame of the site and the amount of notoriety gained with the recent criminal cases, interest in Ban Chiang may well increase and the quality of the pieces in the Heritage museum (Figure 5) grow. This may well increase the value of local reproduction of ancient pottery, and it will hopefully reduce the danger of the illegal removal of Ban Chiang artifacts in the future.

Angkor. Siem Reap Province, Cambodia.

In the early 1990s, Angkor was still an undeveloped tourist location, with few hotels, no urban sprawl, and little tourist infrastructure. Many saw it as a unique opportunity “to set an example, to create a unique tourist site, to innovate and actually make heritage serve the purposes of a cultural project, the economic development of a country and the enjoyment of generations of tourists to come” (Durand 2002: 131). While there have been successes in terms of protecting the site, uncontrolled development to serve tourists is a growing problem for sustainability and equity. The tension between maximizing tourism revenues and safeguarding monuments presents an ongoing challenge, and it is one that characterizes world heritage sites around the world, from Petra to Venice to the Inca Trail.

The situation in Angkor also sheds lights on our research questions around regional integration and sustainability. Growth in hotels and other businesses now concentrates along the roads connecting the airport with the archaeological sites around Angkor, briefly passing through the town of Siem Reap (Figure 6).

Angkor is now a must see for tourists on regional tours. Direct flights from Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, Ho Chi Minh City, Phuket, and Vientiane, have facilitated easy access, making a stopover in Phnom Penh unnecessary. Direct flights benefit Siem Reap, making it possible for tourists to incorporate a short trip to Cambodia into their itinerary, so that they can have a truly regional travel

experience during their Southeast Asia vacation. But, this local development coupled with regional integration has meant that an increasing proportion of visitors to Cambodia bypass Phnom Penh. When political unrest disrupted air travel in and out of Bangkok in December 2008, Angkor was adversely affected, since Bangkok is the regional hub for Southeast Asian travel (for example, Bangkok Air has seven flights daily to Siem Reap). During the project research trip to Siem Reap, during and immediately after the closure of the Bangkok Airport by political protesters, locals reported a drop in visitors of around 30%. Ongoing political unrest in Thailand might adversely affect Cambodia to the extent that the region is seen as a less desirable destination. The SARS scare similarly led to a decline in tourist arrivals in 2003, even though there were no reported cases in Cambodia. Conversely, increased regional connection with cities outside of Bangkok might make it easier for travelers to visit Angkor while bypassing problematic parts of Thailand. Regional integration thus creates both opportunities and vulnerabilities, but the example of 2008 indicates that international tourism in Cambodia certainly stands to benefit from increased integration with countries in addition to Thailand.

A more serious question for the development of tourism in Cambodia may be how to integrate tourism in Angkor with tourism in other parts of the country. Winter (2007: 18) "...with Cambodia's airports unable to accept long haul aircraft, the expansion of the country's tourism industry has, in part, been determined by decisions made in the regional hubs of Bangkok, Singapore, or Hong Kong. Moreover, for tour operators looking to integrate Angkor within their existing regional networks of hospitality, promoting Cambodia beyond temples remains a risky and unprofitable exercise." Interviews with officials at the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA) indicated a concern for practical projects to benefit locals (particularly related to tourism development) and also a concern for increasing large numbers of tourist arrivals. At the same time, the immediate vicinity of Angkor is attracting increasing settlement from Cambodians, with the population in 'strongly protected zones' around the Angkor monuments growing from over 20,000 in 1992 to over 100,000 in 2002, with noted increase since this time (APSARA 2009).

An additional concern for the development of tourism at Angkor (and there are similar questions for Luang Prabang) is the sustainability of the recent investment and rapid growth in tourism and related infrastructure. This rapid growth presents both social and economic concerns. Present estimates from the World Tourism Organization suggest a halt during 2009 in the global growth of tourism, and many of the investments in new construction around Siem Reap are predicated on increased tourist numbers. At the same time, with revenues from tourism declining and an increasing number of people dependent upon tourism, the potential for social dislocation will increase.

Town of Luang Prabang. Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR.

Luang Prabang was chosen as a World Heritage Site in 1995 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO. As a 'living city' – a heritage site which is also a functioning urban area -- Luang Prabang provides stark examples of issues related to the commodification of culture by tourism. This trend is most clearly apparent in the increasing tourist appeal of the morning alms round of Buddhist Monks living in the many temples within the heritage site (Figure 7). The participation by non-locals in a daily ritual originally supported by local inhabitants, particularly the frenzy of photography which accompanies this event, might be viewed as detrimental to the local culture. At the same time, tourist-oriented businesses have displaced many of the locals. Some residents of the core heritage area in Luang Prabang, who once supported the monks through the donation of food or materials, have moved away to take advantage of - or escape - the rising prices of land and rents within the core heritage area. Thus tourism has become an important source of financial support for the local monasteries, but in some ways this may have eroded the social integration of the monks, many of whom come from rural areas outside the city, with the local inhabitants.

However, the world heritage status arguably also prevents a certain amount of overexploitation of resources – for example, there is a ban on large tour buses coming into the old town of Luang Prabang during the day time, preventing the development of 'drive-by' tourism and limiting some of the appeal of the city to large tour groups. The growing importance of tourism originating out of Asian countries in the city and Laos as a whole³ will test this commitment. For the present, local spaces still coexist within the growing tourist matrix in Luang Prabang. The current economic turmoil will provide a test of the resilience of the development path within and around the heritage area.

As locals move out of the core preservation area of Luang Prabang in the center of the city, development is moving into surrounding areas. Former agricultural area on the fringes of the city are quickly developing with both residential and commercial construction (Figure 8). This movement of locals both reduces the cultural integrity and vibrancy of old Luang Prabang but also can potentially threaten the environment – particularly wetland areas – around the town. The future movement of locals and non-tourist related businesses from the center of the city is a serious concern for the future.

Vat Phou and Associated Ancient Settlements within the Champasak Cultural Landscape. Champasak Province, Lao PDR.

3 Over the period 2000-2006, tourist arrivals to Laos from Asia and Pacific nations grew by 12%, while arrivals from European countries grew by 6%. Tourists from China are increasingly common, by 2006, Chinese were the third most common arriving nationality in the country (2006 Statistical Report on Tourism in Laos)

Vat Phou, inscribed in 2001 and the most recent of the World Heritage listings used as a case study in this project, occupies a somewhat unusual space in the typology of world heritage cultural sites. A 'cultural landscape,' it includes aboveground and buried archaeological sites which are closely associated with the natural landscape. Like Angkor, the site also has local religious significance, with functioning Buddhist shrines occupying centuries-old buildings and an annual festival, long popular with the Lao and Khmer inhabitants of the region, that centers around the site.

International tourism is just beginning to become an important part of the economy around the site, but the heritage listing has already attracted investment in the area and is an important component of tourism promotion in southern Laos. Like other case study sites, there are tensions between the goals of tourism development from provincial tourism officials and the goals of heritage site management. For example a proposed gondola ascending the mountain around which the Vat Phou site is structured (Figure 9), was discouraged by heritage officials. Also like other heritage sites, there is a question whether the increased strain on local resources which a growth in tourism entails will be accompanied by an increase in the resources available for the mitigation of negative effects.

An interesting case from a variety of research perspectives, one aspect of the Vat Phou sites bears mentioning in regards to the distribution of benefits of tourism. In contrast to the operations of small-scale merchants in the three other case study sites of the project, where many neighboring vendors offered essentially the same range of goods, in the main temple area of the heritage site there was only one area in which to buy refreshments. Seemingly cooperatively managed, this points to the variety of paths by which the benefits of tourism can be distributed to locals. Understanding better the limitations and benefits of different styles of business operations in the context of heritage sites could have immediate practical benefits in some areas. Research should also pay attention to the role of gender and local cultures in the development of differing styles of small-scale business operations.

6. Analysis

The findings of the project suggest several conclusions in regard to world heritage site management, tourism development, and regional integration. Despite the tensions that exist between the stated goals of conservation and equitable development of heritage sites and despite the tendency of heritage sites to help cause a rapid increase in tourism impacts, the sites themselves serve as potential venues to mitigate some of the negative effects. At the regional scale, while there is a tendency to promote sites within individual countries which can discourage multilateral cooperation, the existence of the global model of

heritage sites serves as an important vehicle to develop mutual interests.

However, in the context of developing countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, the problems related to a lack of funding, equipment, and trained human resources to manage tourism growth threatens to negate many of the potential benefits from regional cooperation in tourism and the local boost to the tourism industry provided by heritage sites. Additionally, in order to promote the goals of equitable development there is a need for these skills and resources to be developed outside of the traditional urban centers of political and economic power (ADB 2008). There is a serious question whether the increasing economic benefits from tourism will be outweighed by the impacts on the social and natural environment around heritage sites. Future research, particularly in light of the present collapse of the tourist industry, should help shed some light on this issue.

An additional outcome of the research points to the benefits of the model of regional cooperation being promoted within the Greater Mekong Subregion, and these results help reconcile the tension, long-noted (Ashworth and Turnbridge 1990, Drost 1996) between national self-promotion and the celebration of international cultural heritage. The recent political instability in Thailand, which has severely impacted the country's important tourist industry for the past several years, has made the links with the neighboring countries all the more important in maintaining the growing industry. It seems to be in the interest of national governments simultaneously, not exclusively, promote national tourism and international cooperation, and this is indicated by the findings of the 2008 evaluation of the tourism sector in the Mekong region by the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2008). Laos and Cambodia benefit from the increased abilities of tourists to enter via other countries other than Thailand (most notably via Vietnam, Singapore, or China). While Thailand has lost tourism revenue due to its internal political instability, in addition to the overall global drop in tourism numbers, the increased visibility of the region as a whole for the tourism market should help the long-term potential of the industry. The growth in tourism originating from within Asia has also contributed to the benefit of the regional approach.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Advocates for 'sustainable tourism' have stressed the need for local priorities to take precedence in tourism planning (Brohman 1996), but admit that the revenue from tourism, particularly in developing countries, can lead to a reluctance to control tourist numbers or activities around heritage sites. Other criticisms of third world tourism have been voiced, among these the loss of local economic control, the commodification of local culture, lack of integration with other local economic sectors, spatially uneven development, and a tendency to increase inequality and disparities in local areas (Brohman 1996; Drost

1996; Wall 1997; Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher 2005). Despite these criticisms, tourism remains an important development strategy for many regions and countries, and is seen as a crucial source of funding for heritage preservation programs (Brohman 1996, Drost 1996, Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher 2005, Candelaria 2005, Morimoto 2005). Researchers, writing in the context of Europe, see a necessary link between sustainable tourism and cultural heritage preservation (Cope 1995; Johnson and Thomas 1995; Drost 1996; Van der Borg, Costa and Gotti 1996). In Southeast Asia and other parts of the developing world there is a similar push for sustainable tourism, promoted by international organizations such as the United Nations as well as regional organization such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Mekong Tourism Office. Recent evaluations of 'pro-poor' tourism in the region have found some progress toward that goal (ADB 2008).

Heritage sites are an important component of this push, and there are indications from the research project, particularly regarding the cases in Laos, that heritage site management can mitigate some of the possible problems resulting from rapid tourism growth. For example, while Luang Prabang has been rapidly developing and changing with an increase in tourism, there is even more rapid growth and perceived environmental and cultural damage occurring due to tourism in the nearby town of Vang Viang. With its laid-back party atmosphere, Vang Viang has grown into one of the most visited towns in Laos over the past decade. In the case of Vat Phou, the island of Don Det, located in the Mekong River near the border with Cambodia, serves as a similar example of much more rapid and unconstrained tourism growth. In both cases, local tourism managers have expressed a desire to prevent the growth in the heritage sites from replicating what has occurred in these nearby areas.

Theories of post-development (Estava and Prakash 1998; Simon 2007; Watts 2003) indicate a way to move beyond critiques of the status quo and towards alternative strategies for more sustainable World Heritage Site tourism. Tourism research can benefit significantly from an engagement with post-development theoretical frameworks, because, unlike most critiques of the mainstream development model (Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994), which lean towards some degree of de-linking with global capital and global markets, post-development allows for more interaction and integration, but with a focus on livelihoods and social justice (Sen 2002). The efforts at regional integration and heritage preservation examined in this project are concrete examples showing that there are ways to mitigate the detrimental impacts of tourism, and other assessments have found these efforts somewhat successful (ADB 2008). These ideas are being explored further in articles that we are submitting to peer-reviewed journals which include a deeper investigation of this theoretical framework.

The results of the JREX project indicate that heritage sites in developing regions are important

venues which help to integrate global processes and economies with very defined local areas. As such, they are ideal venues both for the development of regional linkages at the international scale and for the promotion of ideas such as sustainable and equitable development. Although there are valid criticisms to be made about the influence of heritage sites on local areas, there are also a variety of benefits to local areas that arise. World heritage sites simultaneously promote and mitigate tourism, and these issues are being explored in future articles.

The project also points to the need for careful attention to the differences among sites and to avoid lumping either 'tourists' or 'locals' into monolithic categories. Some argue that the landscapes of individual world heritage sites become conceptually intertwined with other locations as travelers encounter other sites. This tendency toward the blending together of experiences is also a tendency of tourism in general, according to Di Giovane (2009)

as a distinct web of meaning... tourism can be undertaken by locals and foreigners alike, irrespective of constraints such as social status, economic mobility, cultural outlook or education level. Understood in this manner, tourism thus satisfies UNESCO's universalizing appeal, as well as its objective to peacefully bond disparate peoples under a unified conception of place that knows no territorial bounds.

Despite this conceptual loss of territorial bounds, research in this project indicates that in practice territorial bounds are crucially important when they become blocked or censored. The influence of the Thai political unrest on the region's development, not just from the standpoint of tourism, creates an intriguing test case for the regional linkages, such as the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office. Future critical work on this subject might do well to focus on the role of resource and communication networks in the ability to respond to the present economic turmoil, and their ability to withstand shocks to the systems in which they are involved. Recent events indicate that it is important to understand how resilient regional cooperation efforts are in the face of political unrest within one of the countries, political dispute between neighboring countries, and economic collapse internationally.

At the level of the individual, tourists are differentiated by preferences, countries of origin, and a variety of other factors. In light of the likely shift in mainland Southeast Asia towards a tourist makeup dominated by tourists of Asian origin, the impacts on the style or mode of tourism preferred is a key area of research for the future management of these sites. In terms of evaluating the sustainability of tourism, the differentiation among tourists is crucial to understanding their perception of the future condition of the site and the desirability of the change in infrastructure around the site which accompanies tourism growth. This area of research promises to be particularly fruitful given the easy availability of a number of travel

blogs and photo sharing sites, as well as printed travel guides⁴ which provide a rich data source for qualitative analysis of both the package and non-package tour tourist experience. The interview data acquired as part of this research project should complement this type of analysis.

Given the importance of tourism in the global economy and its close alignment with the project of world heritage preservation, there is little surprise that local world heritage sites are areas where the tensions as well as the synergies between global, regional, and local forces are apparent (Winter 2007). There is much to learn from the differentiation of sites as well, for example the somewhat communal style of selling services by the locals at Vat Phou contrasts with the outwardly more competitive model seen at Ban Chiang and even more directly at Angkor. Which style is more economically beneficial, or the social implications of the contrasting styles are promising future areas of inquiry which promise to deliver tangible management results.

Another important finding of the research is that heritage sites, while certainly an magnet which attract tourism, also serve as a means to mitigate the potential harmful impacts. While Vat Phou and Luang Prabang in Laos are both growing quickly, with accompanying environmental and social ill effects, the examples of Vang Viang (near Luang Prabang) and Don Det (near Vat Phou) serve to demonstrate the arguably more pronounced dislocations produced by tourism growth unhindered by the demands of heritage preservation.

Ultimately, “...Southeast Asian tourism operates as a complex web of interconnected national tourism industries” (Winter 2007: 82). Our research has shown this to be both a strength and a potential weakness. This is because “the ability of these countries to reap the rewards of an increasingly 'multipolar global economy' (Forbes 1999: 2), via tourism is predicated on sustained political and economic stability (Winter 2007: 83). Overall, the promotion of regional tourism seems to result in a more resilient industry, at least at the regional scale. Certain locales may suffer adverse impacts from this success, as seems to be happening with the over-development of Luang Prabang. Or, better regional travel connections might make it easier for tourists to alter their travel plans, deciding not to visit one heritage site in, for example, Laos, while choosing other sites in Thailand. This points to a central paradox of heritage tourism, whether cultural or natural – the very success that makes a site pro-poor or economically beneficial might lead the perception that it has been ‘ruined’, with tourists bypassing that site in search of a more ‘authentic’ cultural experience. There are certainly bigger questions about tourism as a source of sustainable development, given its dependence on increasingly scarce fossil fuels to bring people from halfway around

4 . Winter (2007:85) writes “...although seemingly more organic and chaotic, the routes of the non-package tour market have also been dependent upon particular networks of technologies, information, capital, and knowledge: all elements which have been systematically captured and organized within countless volumes of *Lonely Planet* guides.”

the world for a few weeks of vacation. This concern extends to many sectors of the modern global economy, but tourism is particularly vulnerable to high fuel costs, given that long haul vacations are generally considered luxury expenses. In the long term, it is unlikely that any type of tourism that neglects to consider environmental, cultural, and economic concerns will be sustainable.

8. Bibliography

- APSARA. 2009. Population in Angkor Park. Department of Demography and Development, Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap [http://www.auriteapsara.org/en/apsara/demography.html, accessed on April 15, 2009].
- Asian Development Bank. 2008. Tourism Sector in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Sector Assistance Program Evaluation, Reference Number: SAP: REG 2008-58. Operations Evaluation Department, SE-13.
- Aas, Christina, Adele Ladkin and John Fletcher. 2005. Stakeholder collaboration and heritage management. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(1), January 2005, pp.28-48.
- Ashworth, G. E. and J. E. Turnbridge. 1990. *The Tourist - Historic City*. London: Belhaven.
- Brohman, John. 1996. New Directions in Tourism for Third World Development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23(1), pp. 48-70, 1996.
- Candelaria, Maria. 2005. The Angkor Sites of Cambodia: The Conflicting Values of Sustainable Tourism and State Sovereignty. *Brooklyn Journal of International Law* 31(1), pp.253-288.
- Chok, Stephanie, Jim Macbeth and Carol Warren. 2007. Tourism as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation: A Critical Analysis of 'Pro-Poor Tourism' and Implications for Sustainability. *Current Issues in Tourism* 10 (2&3): 144-165.
- Cope, D. 1995 Sustainable Development and the Trust. In *The National Trust: The Next Hundred Years*, H. Newby, ed., pp. 53-69. London: The National Trust.
- Di Giovine, Michael. 2009. *The Heritage-Scape: UNESCO, World Heritage, and Tourism*. Lexington Books. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Durand, Stephane. 2002. Angkor: a decade of tourist development after a decade of heritage rescue? *Museum* 54(1&2): 131-137.
- Englemann, F. 1999. Luang Prabang: A Ghost Town Returns to Life. *UNESCO Courier* (July-August):44-46.
- Escobar, A. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Estava, G. and M.S. Prakash, eds. 1998. *Grassroots Postmodernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*. Zed: London.
- Ferguson, J. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Greater Mekong Subregion Environmental Forum for Sustainable Development. 2001. Proceedings of the GMS Environmental Forum for Sustainable Development, 22-23 November 2001, Asian Institute of Technology, Pathumthani, Thailand [http://www.ait.ac.th/gmsarn/forum/proceedings/Issue4.htm,

accessed on September 12, 2007]

Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Working Group. 2006. "Minutes of the 18th GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting" Phnom Penh, Cambodia. September 10, 2006.

Hall, C. M., and S. Page. 2000. *Tourism in South and South-East Asia*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Harrison, David and Steven Schipani. 2007. Lao Tourism and Poverty Alleviation: Community-Based Tourism and the Private Sector. *Current Issues in Tourism* 10(2-3), pp194-230.

Johnson, P., and B. Thomas. 1995. Heritage as Business. In *Heritage, Tourism and Society*, D. Herbert, ed., pp. 170–190. London: Mansell.

Mekong Tourism Office (MTO), 2007. Official web site accessed on August 26, 2007 [www.mekongtourism.org/site/]

Morimoto, S. (2005), A Stated Preference Study to Evaluate the Potential for Tourism in Luang Prabang, Laos, in Lanza A., Markandya A. and Pigliaru F. (eds.), *The Economics of Tourism and Sustainable Development*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK.

Mydans, Seth. 2008. Tourism Saves a Laotian City but Saps Its Buddhist Spirit. *The New York Time*. 15 April.

Nordic World Heritage Office. 1999. *Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Heritage. A Review of Development Assistance and its Potential to Promote Sustainability*. Oslo: NWHO.

Nuryanti W. 1996. Heritage and postmodern tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 1996, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 249-260(12).

Rodenberg, E. 1980. The Effects of Scale in Economic Development: Tourism in Bali. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 7: 177-196.

SADI 2009. Stay-another-day.org [http://www.stayanotherday.org/ , accessed on 4-28-2009].

Sen. A. 2002. Globalization, inequality and global protest. *Development* 45(2) 11-16.

Simon, D. 2007. Beyond antidevelopment: Discourses, convergences, practices. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 28:205-218

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP). 2006. "17th Meeting of the Working Group on the Greater Mekong Subregion Tourism Sector". Luang Prabang, Laos March 28-30, 2006.

UN-ESCAP. 2007. Japan-ESCAP Cooperation Fund. [http://www.unescap.org/jecf/p08tourism.htm, accessed on August 26, 2007].

Van der Borg, J., P. Costa, and G. Gotti. 1996. Tourism in European Heritage Cities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23:306–321.

- Wall, G. 1997. Linking Heritage and Tourism in an Asian City: The Case of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In *Quality Management in Urban Tourism*, E. Murphy, ed., pp.137–148. Chichester: Wiley.
- Watts, M. 2003. Alternative modern – development as cultural geography. In K. Anderson, M. Domosh, S. Pile, and N. Thrift, eds. *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, pp. 433-53. London: Sage.
- Weaver, D. 1991. Alternatives to Mass Tourism in Dominica. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18:414-432.
- Winter, T. 2007. Post-Conflict Heritage, Postcolonial Tourism: Culture, politics and development at Angkor.
- World Heritage Centre. 2009. World Heritage List [<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>, accessed on April 20, 2009].
- World Tourism Organization. 2007. Tourism and the world economy [<http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>, accessed on Sep. 27, 2007].
- World Tourism Organization. 2009. UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. 7:1, January 2009.