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**TOURISM EDUCATION FOR CAMBODIA:
A CASE STUDY OF ITS FIRST UNIVERSITY-LEVEL COURSE**

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This paper details the development, delivery and outcomes of a Masters course in Tourism Development that was delivered by the Royal University of Phnom Penh, with the assistance and support of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the University of Bologna, Italy (UNIBO).

The paper will first outline the magnitude of tourism activity in Cambodia. This is then used as the context for developing a model for tourism education in Cambodia. The approach to the development of this particular Masters course is then outlined. This paper concludes by assessing the outcomes of the course in terms of lessons for other countries introducing tourism education and its effectiveness and appropriateness for Cambodia itself.

Tourism in Cambodia

The need for educated tourism management professionals in Cambodia became apparent in the late 1990s. Combined with the introduction of an 'open skies' air transport policy and increasing political stability, Cambodia's attractiveness as an international tourist destination has grown significantly. International visitor arrivals to this country, hitherto ravaged by an extreme form of civil war and authoritarianism, grew steadily from 176,617 in 1994 to 286,524 in 1998, and then virtually doubled to 466,365 in 2000 (MoT, 2000a).

In 2001, it was postulated that 'within five years, if present increases continue, the number of foreign tourists visiting Cambodia could exceed one million visitors per year' (Hach *et al* 2001: 63), not that unrealistic given the declaration of 2003 as 'Visit Cambodia Year' (MoT 2001). This target was achieved within 3 years, notwithstanding the effects of Sept 11 and the SARS outbreak. There has been a 50% increase in tourist arrivals in 2004, to just over 1 million visitors (MoT, 2005).

It had been estimated that:

- Cambodia's gross foreign tourism earnings grew from approximately US\$80 million in 1995 to US\$170 million in 2000 (Hach, Huot and Boreak 2001; MoT/UNDP/WTO 1996a; MoP 1995; Hall and Page 1999);
- total direct, indirect and induced income from tourism represented 5.5% of Cambodia's GDP even as far back as 1995 (MoT/UNDP/WTO 1996b);

- total government revenues from tourism taxes and charges were US\$20 million in 2000 (Ministry of Economy and Finance, op. cit. Hach *et al* 2001); and
- there were approximately 60,000 persons employed in the Cambodian tourism industry in 2000 (Hach *et al* 2001).

The importance of tourism export income to the economic development of Cambodia is widely acknowledged in socioeconomic plans and reviews (e.g. CDRI, 2001; MoC 2001; MoP 1995). Many studies were undertaken to come up with a tourism development plan for Cambodia and most of them highlighted the need for (amongst other imperatives) the need for a partnership between the national and provincial governments, the local communities and industry; the appropriate education and training of Cambodians to occupy, develop and manage the industry in all sectors and at various levels was also stressed.

The Tourist Area Life Cycle as applicable to Cambodia

According to Butler's (1980) Tourist Area Life Cycle, as a destination progresses through stages of tourism development and growth, there is a concomitant increase of non-local (usually Western) enterprise, that tend to use 'proven' formulae, thereby possibly transplanting inappropriate business models to the destination. The type of tourist visiting the country also changes from 'venturers' or allocentrics' to 'dependables' or 'psychocentrics' (Plog, 2001).

The combined effect of such trends on the destination is also well-documented. Weaver and Opperman (2000) highlight

- a shift away from cultural / natural / local attractions to mass-market tourism products,
- increasing dependence on the economic status of tourism,
- a lower economic multiplier, partially owing to economic leakage,
- a commodification of services and products provided,
- apathy and antagonism experienced by local communities (the Irridex model), and
- significant increases in environmental stress in natural areas that are ecologically sensitive or economically critical.

Weaver and Opperman (2000) also caution that this is a fairly deterministic concept, which has been proven to be wrong from time to time; but that the model can be used to warn and to predict the possible types and effects of future tourism development.

It could be said that Cambodia is emerging out of the Involvement stage and into the Development stage in its Life Cycle. At the *involvement* stage, the tourism industry is still, for the most part, locally-owned, but starting to offering tourist-specific products and services. There is some degree of concentration of resources and services in some regions, but, by and large, the community is welcoming of the increasing tourism flows and the resultant economic benefits to the community.

One could argue that certain parts of Cambodia were well past this, particularly Siem Reap. This town could already be at the *Development* stage, marked by a rapid increase in tourist numbers, and transnational companies stepping in to offer services at a much larger scale of operation and marketing. There are also some commodified services being offered in the form of hotels, tours and 'cultural' performances. The local community was in danger of being sidelined, or worse, trampled, in this tourism rush. The implication was that it was critical at this stage of Cambodia's development to empower the local community to retain control of their tourism future. This empowerment was to take all of these three forms:

1. Community Participation to help shape the future tourism development in *their* region.
2. Local industry involvement: to develop the capacity of local enterprises to deliver services professionally at the same time reflecting the community's values, concerns and local economy. Local industry involvement also considerably reduces economic leakage from the region.
3. Human Resource Development: As a people-intensive industry, tourism can provide significant employment benefits to the local people, thereby increasing both their self-esteem and quality of life. It, in turn, also generates second-order multiplier effects. In addition, such local skills and knowledge can add to the quality of the experience experienced by the tourist.

"At their best, small businesses provide all that is excellent and most sustainable in local tourism. They have personality and individuality and are literally unique. Many reflect the

local sense of place and culture...At their worst, however, and there are millions of them in total, they represent all that is worst in low-quality visitor experiences and collectively destroy an environment by their short-term survival decisions.” (Middleton and Clarke, 2001:463).

Medium-sized and large Cambodian businesses too would benefit by such educational development. Moreover, implicit in the above three points is the underlying co-ordinating role to be fulfilled by a national or provincial government. In the context of both tourism and education, such co-ordination should involve, at the very least,

- a. policy setting and strategic direction
- b. identifying priorities for development
- c. allocating responsibilities between governments, industry and the community,
- d. resourcing (to the extent possible) development efforts
- e. provision of infrastructure
- f. monitoring performance and achievement of goals.

Therefore, such Human Resource Development should not just cover the operational needs of small or large businesses in tourism, but also set such industrial effort in the socio-cultural and ecological context of the destination. This would ensure that the higher qualified echelons of the workforce would work towards minimisation of the negative effects of the transition to Butler's *Involvement* stage, as stated earlier. Once in the work force, they would achieve this by

- themselves participating in the drawing up of their region's tourism development strategies,
- themselves working at influential levels of governments
- themselves committing to the further education of the future workforce.

In most other countries where tourism education has developed and thrived, in what Butler calls their early Exploration and Involvement stages, much of the initial tourist visitation came from domestic tourists. Tourism education institutions were soon set up with the aim of formalising and delivering collective knowledge of the local tourism context for a local market. As the demand for such a destination grew, the demand from international source markets emerged. At this stage, the

local tourism education began to embrace a broader and more global view of tourism. This has broadly been the pattern of development in most Western countries up until the mid-1980s.

Cambodia, however, has followed a different path in terms of tourism development and market evolution. The world-wide recognition of the splendours of Angkor Wat has generated significant increases in international tourism visitation, even as domestic tourism activity was only emerging as a result of the growth of a Cambodian middle-class. This renders ineffective the traditional path of developing tourism expertise in parallel with, or preceding, domestic tourism growth. Therefore, whilst there are many tourism curriculum options available (indeed the existing UTS Masters course could have been simply transplanted), these were seen as simply not answering the needs of Cambodia's tourism development. Further, Angkor Wat's uniqueness and its universal appeal would have needed obviously to be the centrepiece of any Cambodian tourism development strategy – it had to be based on cultural and historical resources.

A new curriculum framework therefore needed to be designed. Academics from the University of Bologna and UTS were asked to help, but more input was needed – input from various tourism-related stakeholders in Cambodia. Accordingly it was decided to conduct a workshop with interested stakeholders to flag these approaches, and obtain some informed input.

A 2-day Workshop was conducted in Phnom Penh in 1999 to which were invited representatives from the Cambodian Government (Ministries of Tourism and Education), Cambodian academics in related fields, and leading figures charged with the preservation and promotion of Khmer art, culture, heritage and the physical environment. Representatives from UNIBO, UTS and Vrije University of Amsterdam were also present. Representatives of the tourism industry were also invited, but, regrettably, none attended.

The two-day workshop was attended by 26 participants, and engendered a good deal of active discussion. Interpreters provided translations in Khmer and English. The structure of the workshop was as follows:

- **Setting the context:** by the Rector of RUPP,

- **Academic perspectives:** Khmer culture as a tourism resource, the management and marketing of contemporary tourism, and pedagogical approaches to tourism
- Each of these perspectives was followed by **discussions in small groups**, which were then fed back to the plenary sessions. The outcomes were to highlight the priorities that needed to be addressed in a proposed curriculum. This came very close to the final course structure.
- A seminar and group discussion on **implementation** – length, entry qualifications, fee structure, and resource requirements.

There was a consensus at the end of this workshop; indeed to the extent of clearly delineating the content to be covered in this course. In the course curriculum particular emphasis was laid on

- An understanding of Khmer language and culture and their centrality in any tourism program that is to be offered in Cambodia.
- A mix of theoretical and applied content and delivery,
- The need for practical work experience and tourism industry contact to be an integral part of the course, and
- The need to build up a resource base of well-researched cases in the Cambodian context.
- That it should be a post-graduate course, and
- That it should be subject to payment of fees.

Tribe (2002) citing Schön's (1983) 'curriculum space' might describe this curriculum content and approach as '*reflective liberal*' and '*reflective vocational*', rather than leading to vocational or liberal *actions*. In other words, instead of providing normative or prescribed, readymade solutions, there was the need to identify the broader context of contemporary Cambodia before attempting to recommend solutions. At the same time, tools to study and analyse a range of problems needed to be provided. At the workshop, it was proposed that the course be a Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Tourism. It was felt that the course should include issues affecting the natural environment; as well, it would focus on government and industry-based strategies to ensure the ecological sustainability of tourism effort in Cambodia.

Initial feedback to RUPP after the workshop indicated, that, on reflection, there were two problems with the Sustainable Tourism title. Sustainable Tourism, whilst a worthy name and instantly recognisable in overseas academic and industry circles, did not resonate with Cambodian government, industry or potential applicants at that time (perhaps due to a lack of awareness of sustainability as an issue, or unfamiliarity with the term itself). *Tourism Development* was chosen in its place. Further, A Graduate Diploma course had limited appeal. A Master's qualification, however, generated a lot more interest; particularly if it included a full thesis. It was also necessary to ensure sufficient academic rigour up to international standard. At this early stage, RUPP committed itself to maintain the rigour and integrity of the course. It was decided to use the Quality Assurance (QA) principles developed at UTS. These were put into place.

Course Delivery

The course was delivered over two years (five semesters). 27 students were initially selected for the course. 24 were awarded a Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Tourism (an exit point at the end of the first-year). Those with credit averages (17 of these students) or higher were invited to prepare for a thesis, and 14 students were finally accepted to undertake a thesis. The course was taught mostly by tourism academics from UTS and UNIBO in 2-week intensive blocks, with a few subjects being taught by Cambodian academics. The 1st year fieldwork projects and Masters theses were supervised by UTS and UNIBO academics. Course curriculum is available on request from the author.

Local academic support was provided by Australian tourism graduates who were stationed in Phnom Penh, sponsored by Ausaid – the Australian government's foreign aid arm. These graduates also had access to electronic resources housed in the UTS Library.

The Outcomes

Arguably, the students in this course have had a chance to obtain the broader view of tourism espoused in this paper. There were also numerous instances (particularly in the Fieldwork Research Project subject and Master's theses) where students have gone beyond examining only the immediate context of the case or region they were studying. If they were studying a marketing-

related issue or problem, they recognised the effects of the cultural environment within which a particular tourist site was presented. Conversely, if the issue was one of maintaining the cultural or ecological integrity and sustainability of a site, then the commercially relevant imperatives were not ignored either. There is perhaps not enough space to provide individual instances of such outcomes. Instead, this paper indicates students' choice of research topics and placements as an indication of their learning and interest. Appendix 1 lists the variety of topics undertaken by students in their Fieldwork Research Projects in semester 3. All these projects were deemed pass-worthy, and many even getting the top 'A' grade. Appendix 3 looks at the list of research topics undertaken for their Masters' theses. Appendix 2 lists the industry placements undertaken by the students.

A few points come to attention:

1. The majority of the Fieldwork research projects and theses were at the local community level and were concerned with community impacts and/or community participation in tourism development. There were not many studies related to industry functioning. Whilst this mix is less than ideal, the studies were nevertheless conducted at the level of small communities (with populations of a few thousand people or less). If indeed tourism is to benefit Cambodia, then the benefit should flow through to the smaller rural communities rather than urban elites. To this extent, the study topics were seen to be meeting a desirable objective.
2. Related to the previous point, visitation to these smaller communities is undertaken not by international visitors, but by local Khmer people. They opt to visit on quick day trips not using the tourism-specific forms of transport, accommodation outlets or tour companies. Therefore the study of the tourism-specific firms is not as integral to the development of these 'local tourism products and resources.'
3. The projects are spread over a variety of provinces in Cambodia, providing a resource base of case studies to be built upon. Siem Reap and its neighbourhood is the focus of three Masters theses topics..

4. The question must then be asked: has the student learnt enough about the industrial side of tourism? One could argue that they did, especially through their Practicum experiences of 4 weeks. As Appendix 4 illustrates, all, except 3 worked with a community-based organisation or an NGO. They have also worked in a variety of firms in the tourism industry. Having assessed their Practicum reports, this writer can say that the students did display an understanding of the industrial / commercial aspect of tourism.

5. Co-operation from the tourism Industry was, however, an issue. Industry members did not respond to the invitation to attend the curriculum development workshop. Students reported that their attempts to research their operations or seek practicum placements were often refused. This is in spite of RUPP sending out letters seeking industry support for student research, countersigned by the Ministry of Tourism (Jackson, 2002).

Lessons for Other Countries

Cambodia is by no means unique as compared to other developing countries and emerging tourism destinations. So, a few key points are being made with respect to similar efforts undertaken in other countries. I am assuming that such emerging destinations would also seek the assistance of established universities or institutions in developing course curriculum, and perhaps also delivery and assessment.

The host University / Institution needs to be a credible provider, especially if it is the first to offer academic courses in tourism in that destination. This not only helps in attracting high-quality students, especially for post-graduate degree offerings, but also to seek input and co-operation from the governments and the local tourism industry. In Cambodia, RUPP received input into the course structure from various government departments, and ongoing support in the form of lectures by their officials, letters of support to students, and, ultimately, positions of responsibility for the graduating students.

Academic standards need to be maintained and students need to be educated in this regard. Even though the incoming students in this course were graduates, there was a pre-existing culture of rote-learning and a lax attitude to assessment integrity. The senior academics of the University

were very supportive of efforts to bring student standards up to international level. The students did adapt and accept the 'revised' standards.

Application of content to industry and real-life contexts: Students benefited immensely from field trips, internships, field research, guest lectures, and discussions of current issues from the press. As indicated in the previous section, involvement and co-operation by industry members were wanting, but it was nevertheless achieved through persistent efforts and the backing of the University and the Ministry of Tourism.

Communication with academics overseas is now much easier through email. Yet the Cambodian experience reveals that it was invaluable to have an up-and-coming academic or recent graduate permanently *on the ground* as the first point of contact. Such person could also help identify electronic resources (research papers, journal articles and the like) in the initial stages.

Educational resources were the biggest problem that was encountered. Apart from texts being prohibitively expensive in Cambodian terms, the host University could not afford to subscribe to electronic journals. This was overcome by (a) donations, (b) international staff handing over older editions of texts, (c) UTS allowing the junior academic on-site access to its database of electronic resources through the Internet.

Domestic tourism markets should not be ignored in the rush to provide tourism acceptable to international markets. This may not hold true for smaller (e.g. island) countries, but emerging middle-classes in larger countries would travel domestically and hopefully visit locally-renowned sites, thereby increasing dispersal of tourism activity and benefits. The implications for tourism education are spelt out in the last paragraph of this paper.

Overall, it was a good decision to start first with a graduate program to develop a research and academic climate within the emerging destination. Private operators will step in to provide vocational training, but may not see higher-degree and macro-level research as one of their priorities. Finally, community consultation was essential to the recognition of the course; input was sought at the course design stage to highlight key areas in educational development, and key

industry and government personnel were invited to the presentations of the masters theses as part of a 'graduation ceremony'.

Conclusion

The question posed at the beginning of this paper is whether our attempt to deliver a holistic course in Tourism Development in Cambodia has been effective and/or appropriate. As the first specialist tourism course offered in Cambodia, it could be seen to be effective in that it educated a selection of neophyte tourism academics and introduced them to current perspectives, models and best practice in tourism development and took them all the way to submitting a thesis which was assessed by a panel of international academics and local experts. Along the way, there was a conscious attempt to overcome the learning styles embedded in Confucian Heritage Culture students (Barron and Arcodia, 2002). Further, all except one of the 14 Masters graduates secured employment within academic institutions or with the Ministry of Tourism. In addition, the research undertaken by the students has created a database of home-grown research.

The course may also be seen to be appropriate as the *starting point* for tourism education in Cambodia. But it is by no means the appropriate model for *all* tourism education in that country. Given the growing demand for domestic tourism in Cambodia, the lack of touristic infrastructure at the 'domestic' attractions in smaller towns, and the lack of education and training to support small-scale enterprises in such areas, there is a pressing need to develop rigorous, detailed, and context-specific education and training at the operational level. As in many other countries, much of this could be delivered outside the government education system, but there have to be some centrally determined resource inputs (core curricula at the very least) and quality assurance mechanisms. Importantly, the content has to be determined locally (within Cambodia), and delivered, of course, by local trained staff. Courses such as the Masters in Tourism Development (and their staff and students) can contribute to this development by virtue of their broader perspective, as well as their ability to analyse other (international) approaches to tourism education and suggest adaptations to the Cambodian context.

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Appendix 1

Examples of Student Fieldwork Research Topics

M.A. (Tourism Development), Royal University of Phnom Penh

Marketing / Industry – related projects

- Angkor Compound: - Tourist Satisfaction
- Phnom Penh: - Tourist Attractions – Visitor Expectations and Choice Processes
- Phnom Penh: - Attractions: Industry linkages
- Kampot: - Effectiveness of hotel marketing activities
- Phnom Penh: - Accommodation Environmental Practices

Socio-economic Impact Studies

- Oudong Mountain Resort: - Social Impacts
- Tamao Mountain: - Social Impacts
- Occheteual Beach, Sihanoukville - Economic Impacts

Development Strategies & Community Involvement Projects

- Lvear Em District: - Tourism Development Potential
- Koh Tonsay: – Should Tourism Development take place?
- Phnom Tamao: - Tourism Development Constraints
- Teuk Chhou: - Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy
- Bokor National Park: - Community Attitudes and Visitor Profiles
- Tonle Bati Resort: - Tourism Development and Community Involvement
- Phnom Chiso: - Local Participation in Tourism Planning
- Kep Village: - Visitor and Community attitudes toward tourism development

Appendix 2

Examples of Student Practicum Placements

M.A. (Tourism Development), Royal University of Phnom Penh

Regional and Community-based Development NGOS

DRIVE , Ratnakiri -3 students

Tour operators and Travel Agencies

11 operators – 14 students

Accommodation Units.

2 operators – 5 students

Tourist Souvenir Shop

1 operator – 1 student.

Appendix 3

List of Student topics for their Masters theses

M.A. (Tourism Development), Royal University of Phnom Penh

Ecotourism: preserving the natural environment:

- Potential & Challenges of Community-based Ecotourism in Ratanakiri
- Visitor Management Issues & Challenges: A case study of Phnom Preah Reach Trop Mountain

Tourism and Community Development (Poverty Reduction):

- The Contribution of Tourism development to Poverty Alleviation: Preah Sihanouk National Park
- Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism Focusing on Change in Local People's jobs and Social Values: Trapeng Sesh Village, Siem Reap.
- Tourism Development: Poverty Reduction or Society Destruction: A Focus on Socio-Economic Impacts: Pradak Village, Siem Reap

Community Participation in Tourism Planning and Development

- Host Community Perceptions of Tourism Impacts: Oucheuteal Beach, Sihanoukville.

Cultural Tourism

- Cultural Tourism & Heritage Management in Tonle Bati Resort
- Assessment of a Heritage Site for Tourism Development: Sambo Prei Kuk
- Potential and Challenges for Cultural Tourism Development at Preah Reach Trop Mountain: Approaches Towards Sustainability

Tourism Impacts (Social, Cultural, Economic)

- Socio-cultural Impacts & Sustainable Tourism Development in Oudong
- Collaboration between NGOs, the government and the tourism industry in combating child sex tourism (CST)

Tourism Marketing and Promotion

- Market Segmentation of International Tourists in Cambodia.
- Tourist Visitation Patterns in Siem Reap–Angkor and Repeat Visitation Intention

Tourism Education

- Demand for Tourism Higher Education Research

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