

Planning and Management of Sustainable Tourism Spaces

Assignment 5

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Student Name: Deepak Chand Ramola

ID Number: DE240295



Case Study: Stakeholder Participation in the Management of Angkor Archaeological Park, Cambodia

The Stakeholder Participation requirement

The presence of multi-layered interplay between heritage conservation, alleviation of poverty, development of tourism, and entitlement of a community made it vital to Angkor Archaeological Park. At the time of the inscription of Angkor as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1992, the site was under threat of extinction due to decades of civil strife, looting, building and urban decay, and uncontrolled human vegetation overgrowth. Nevertheless, initial conservation initiatives embraced a top down policy that locked out around 120,000 individuals residing in the conservation area, which brought conflict between conservation requirements and local livelihoods.

The necessity of inclusive participation was based on a number of crucial aspects. To begin with, local communities had exceptional traditional knowledge regarding the temples and landscape, since they have been having spiritual attachments to the Buddhist and Hindu religious places of Angkor over time. Second, conservation had to be locally supported- limitation of agricultural activities, settlement translocation and control of tourism activities could not be effective without community buy-in. Third, the international tourists (more than 2.6 million every year as of 2019) posed an economic opportunity through which locals would be at risk of being left out of planning altogether. Fourth, Cambodian government understood that sustainable management meant developing a balance between needs of heritage protection and development in one of the poorest countries of the country. Lastly more international donors and conservation organizations began to realize that culturally competent and participatory strategies produced more lasting results than expert interventions which lacked sensitivity to social environments.

The Stakeholders Involved

Angkor management model entails several stakeholders who work at various levels. The management of the park is mainly done through the APSARA National Authority (Authority on the protection and management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap) which was established in 1995 and has extensive jurisdiction on the park. Policies that influence visitor development and the conservation of the ecological environment are organized by the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Environment respectively.

The international organizations also have significant contributions: UNESCO gives technical advice and supervision; the International Coordinating Committee on the Safeguarding and Development of Angkor (ICC-Angkor) coordinates global aid; the World Monuments Fund, Japanese Government Team on Safeguarding Angkor (JSA), and Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient are responsible in carrying out restoration projects. The Global Heritage Fund particularly targeted the community-based tourism projects.

The most important stakeholders are local communities, such as village residents around the park boundaries, Buddhist monks keeping active pagodas in the temple complex, farmers with their traditional rice paddies, and artisans engaged in handicraft. As local stakeholder groups, the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) cooperatives developed. The other economic stakeholders with strong economic power include the international hotel chains, local guesthouses, tour operators, and transport services, which comprise the private sector. Scholastic personnel of academic institutions all over the world make contributions to archaeological information and preservation experience. There is also increased involvement by the tourists themselves in responsible tourism programs and volunteer conservation services.

The Results of Stakeholder Involvement

The involvement of the stakeholders yielded a number of radical results at Angkor. In the early 2000s, the Community-Based Tourism program was developed through collaboration and has developed village-based tourism enterprises that have homestays, traditional craft displays, oxcart rides, cultural performances. This directly transferred tourism income to the local homes and in some villages, it has been reported that the income had increased by 30-50% without any changes in the traditional lifestyle.

The consequence of massive consultations between APSARA, communities, and conservation experts led to participatory zoning. The management plan assigned five different zones having different protection and allowed activities to accommodate conservation goals and the current activities of the community. Cultivation of rice was also practiced in special farmlands as part of the heritage culture, and it helped preserve the historic landscape features and the importance of the sacred sites as religious ceremonies could still be held despite the limitations on the visiting tourists.

The Revenue sharing model became better with the stakeholder advocacy. Though at first unpopular, some of the entrance fees is used today to finance community development projects-schools, health clinics, water systems and road upkeep, which are chosen at participatory village meetings. The Community Liaison Office in APSARA which came as a pressure by the community gives avenues of grievances and participation in decisions making.

Capacity building program- Community members were trained to work as licensed tour guides, conservation technicians, and as workers in the hospitality industry, which generated jobs that

lessened the strain on damaging activities (looting, or illegal mining of resources). Through cultural revitalization, communities felt more confident to display traditional practices such as the Apsara dance, shadow puppetry, silk weaving among others and they might have otherwise died out, enhancing intangible heritage transmission.

Benefits to the Site

The involvement of the stakeholders produced immense conservation, economic, social, and experiential gains. Community stewardship led to conservation improvements, through reporting of illegal activity, and preventing vandalism by the local residents, as well as cleaning the temples and minor repairs. Conservation was actually facilitated by traditional farming methods which included the practices of preserving the traditional culture landscape through the preservation of the traditional water management systems and continuation of the rice farming instead of letting them deteriorate through the incursion of destructive vegetation. Sustainable tourism development was balanced in the growth and protection. The diversification of community-based services improved the visitor experience (not only temple viewing) and extended the average length of stay and spending as well as redistributed economic benefits more equally. Tourists had their own cultural experiences; they could have dinner with a family, learn some Russian crafts, and learn how rice is grown, and this experience could contribute to the whole experience directly benefiting the local livelihoods. This minimized hatred towards tourism and created a sense of community pride in the heritage. There was a decrease in illegal activity due to economic substitutes and community ownership. The cases of looting reduced because locals enjoyed preservation instead of exploitation. Forest protection was also enhanced because the communities were granted sustainable use rights and monitoring. The level of social cohesion was enhanced because participatory processes formed forums where the various groups in the society, the government agencies and even external actors would communicate.