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Pacific News^{#34}

News | Notes | Insights from the Asia-Pacific Region



The Changing Notion of Security in SEA
"ASEANized" Human Security?

Watershed Inventory in Siem Reap
Combining Social & Natural Science

Pacific Workers in NZ's Horticulture
Comments on the RSE



The Changing Notion of Security in Southeast Asia – 4



Watershed Inventory Siem Reap, Cambodia – 9



Pacific Workers in New Zealand's Horticulture – 28

- 4 **The Changing Notion of Security in Southeast Asia: State, Regime and “ASEANized” Human Security**
Alfred Gerstl

- 9 **Watershed Inventory Siem Reap, Cambodia: A Combination of Social and Natural Science Methods**
Harald Kirsch

- 15 **PN Photo Pages:
The Crescent District in Saigon South: A Showcase for Post-Modern Urban Development in Vietnam**
Michael Waibel

- 18 **BrandHK
A Copycat in City Branding?**
Anna Mak

- 22 **Land of Chopsticks, Jeans and Contradictions: German Geography Students Explore the Pearl River Delta, China**
Theresa Münch

- 24 **Culture as a Political Function in the Pacific: Vanuatu and Tonga Compared**
Andreas Holtz

- 28 **Pacific Workers in New Zealand's Horticulture: Comments on the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme**
Jana Prochazkova

- 32 **PN Picture:
Laughing Labour Migrants at a Workshop within Guangzhou's Textile District**
Timon Koch

EDITORIAL

Dear readers

Commencing the editorial by announcing some changes that the Pacific News has undergone has almost become a tradition over the last few issues. Between the release Pacific News 33 and this issue, we have worked on introducing a peer-review system in order to further increase the quality of articles published in the PN. This involved the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Board with members from recognised international universities that have a role in contributing to the review process itself as well as hopefully spreading the good word and helping to make this journal better known in our parts of the scientific community.

We are therefore pleased to introduce to you the members of the Pacific News Scientific Advisory Board: Dr Roger C.K. Chan, Hong Kong University; Dr Tara Duncan, University of Otago; Dr. Rolf Jordan, University of Vienna; Dr Jan Mosedale, University of Sunderland and Dr. Jan-Peter Mund, United Nations University, Bonn.

Please note that we have also updated our website (www.pacific-news.de); the new authors' guidelines can be found there.

Regardless of the ongoing changes, however, we will continue in aspiring to provide you with up-to-date insights into current events in the Pacific rim area and related research projects. We hope you enjoy the PN as much as ever and wish you an engaging read.

The Editors

Pacific News

The Pacific News (PN), ISSN 1435-8360, is the semi-annual publication of the Association for Pacific Studies (Arbeitsgemeinschaft fuer Pazifische Studien e.V., APSA). It is published through the Department of Economic Geography of Hamburg University, Germany. The PN provides an interdisciplinary academic platform for emerging scholars in particular. It discusses social, cultural, environmental, political and economic issues and developments in the Asia-Pacific region.

In order to uphold scientific standards, the PN is in the process of implementing a peer-review process. All articles that include key words as well as an abstract have been quality-assured through peer-review. The PN will continue to publish reports on current issues as well as photo reports; these have not been subjected to peer-review. APSA-Members receive the Pacific News at no cost as a membership benefit.



The Association for Pacific Studies (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Pazifische Studien e.V., APSA) was founded in 1987 at the Department of Geography of the Technical University Aachen/Germany. Activities include workshops, conferences, public lectures and poster exhibitions. The book series Pazifik Forum was initiated in 1990. In 1992, it was complemented by the publication of the semi-annual journal Pacific News. The latter has developed into the major activity of APSA in recent years. The APSA sees itself as one of the largest scientific networks in Germany for academics and practitioners with an interest in the Asia-Pacific region as well as academic exchange.

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COVER PICTURE

White & Black

Traditional Coffee in Vietnam
Photo made in Cao Lãnh City in
Đồng Tháp province,
© 2010 Dana Puckelwaldt, Berlin

The cover image shows the two
most popular kinds of fresh Vietna-
mese coffee: The traditional milk
coffee „cà phê sữa đá“ is pictured in
the front; coffee is filtered through
a stainless steel filter over sweet-
ened condensed milk. Once all
the coffee has dripped down, it is
usually stirred and then poured into
a glass over ice. The cup of black
coffee without milk in the back is
called „cà phê đá đen“. Over the
past decade, Vietnam saw the
mushrooming of mostly locally-
based coffeehouse chains; the two
largest ones probably being High-
lands Coffee and Trung Nguyễn
Coffee. The price for a café latte
sold there can easily exceed that of
traditional milk coffee by ten times.

The Changing Notion of Security in Southeast Asia

State, Regime and “ASEANized” Human Security

Alfred Gerstl



Abstract: This paper discusses the changing notion of security in Southeast Asia. Even though the neorealist state- and regime-centric view of security is still dominant, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/98 and the natural disasters in the last years, notably the 2004 tsunami and cyclone Nargis in 2008, have further pressured the regimes to adopt a more people-oriented notion of security. The new ASEAN Charter, in force since 2008, though, is still based on sovereignty and non-interference, not on human security. ASEAN has even framed its counter-terrorism policies under the “ASEAN Way” values. In addition to this “ASEANization” approach, the Association has also depoliticized its counter-terrorism policies, emphasizing the socioeconomic and educational dimension of the fight against terrorism. This paper therefore concludes that we do currently not witness a fundamental redefinition but a further broadening of security in Southeast Asia.

Key Words: Southeast Asia; ASEAN; Human Security; ASEAN Charter; Counter-Terrorism

The notion of security is gradually changing in Southeast Asia. Even though the neorealist state- and regime-centric view of security is still dominant, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997/98 and the natural disasters in the last years, notably the 2004 tsunami and cyclone Nargis in 2008, have further pressured the regimes to adopt a more people-oriented notion of security. The new ASEAN Charter, in force since 2008, though, is still based on sovereignty and non-interference. It therefore illustrates that we do currently not witness a fundamental redefinition but a further broadening of security in Southeast Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, non-traditional security threats such as people, drug and weapon smuggling, organized crime, the spread of mass diseases, terrorism or environmental degradation have increased around the globe. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was among the first regional institutions to address these new threats conceptually. Already in the late 1980s, ASEAN has subscribed to the notion of comprehensive security, a modern approach that includes both traditional military and non-traditional threats. Politically, however, ASEAN has actively tackled non-conventional menaces only in the mid-1990s, starting with drug and people smuggling and terrorism (Gerstl 2009).

Comprehensive security

The concept of comprehensive security has been endorsed by almost all regional security organizations since 1989/91, as it adequately reflects the challenges our globalized and interconnected societies face today. In Southeast Asia, however, neorealist perceptions of security remain strong. An expression of neorealism is that the

regimes still stress sovereignty, non-interference (enshrined in the “ASEAN Way”) and favor only limited cooperation, steered by the governments rather than independent institutions¹. Accordingly, in Southeast Asia where most regimes are output- rather than democratically legitimized, comprehensive security has a strong state-centric dimension (Caballero-Anthony

2004: 160–163). This concept was according to Amitav Acharya (2006: 249) “developed and propagated by governments and the policy community in Asia (except in Japan, where the concept originated) primarily as an instrument of regime legitimization and survival, by making the governments of day appear to be seriously concerned with challenges other than military

threats, primarily poverty and under-development”.

Human security

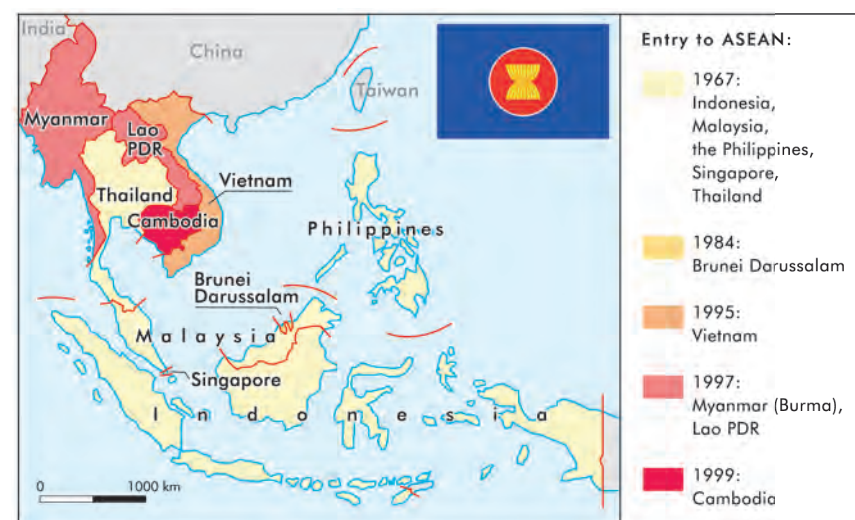
Even human security is in Southeast Asia viewed through a neorealist lens. This broad approach was first promoted by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1994 to further the idea that individuals and communities can also be threatened by insecurity and legitimate referent objects in international politics. According to the UNDP, human security comprises of seven core threats: economic, food, health, environment, personal, community and political security.

Ideally, this multidimensional and multifaceted notion of human security strengthens state, regime and individual security. In practice, however, especially in non-democratic countries, these three dimensions of human security can conflict with each other. As human security is a security, developmental and potential democratic concept alike, it poses a political challenge to the regime security of the non-democratic countries. Empowered people become aware of their needs for – and entitlement to – political participation, free media and other basic human rights. Especially as the case of Myanmar illustrates, it is very often the regime itself that endangers the security of its own citizens. The junta is of course an extreme example, but many other governments in the developing world seem to be also more concerned with their national and regime security rather than that of their citizens.

On global level, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), sponsored by Canada, promotes since 2001 the idea of a global “responsibility to protect” (R2P). In case of severe human rights violations the international community would have the moral duty to intervene directly into domestic affairs. This concept of humanitarian (military) interventions – a logical evolution of the human security concept – poses a direct challenge to traditional notions of sovereignty and non-interference (Helmke 2009).

People-oriented approach

Despite the dominance of neorealist thinking, ASEAN has since the mid-1990s further developed its security concept towards a more people-ori-



ASEAN Member States and their Entry Date

ented approach (Emmerson 2008a). The Asian Financial Crisis (AFC) of 1997/98 acted as a crucial catalyst to put human security on the political agenda. Similar to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic in 2003, the devastating tsunami in 2004 and cyclone Nargis in 2008, the AFC highlighted that the peoples can be more affected by economic, social, environmental or political crises than the state or regime. Furthermore, the popular uprising in Indonesia against the corrupt Suharto government that culminated in a regime change in 1998 demonstrated the Southeast Asian governments that the failure to effectively tackle human insecurity can end their hold on power.

Thus, the legitimacy of the non-democratic Southeast Asian governments is apparently no longer solely based on their ability to provide equitable growth and socioeconomic development – but human security as well. As most human security menaces are transnational in character, the governments have to find at least a minimal form of regional cooperation. Yet while Indonesia has now clearly embraced the principles of democracy, human rights and human security (Sukma 2008), other regimes have nolens volens agreed to a common ASEAN approach. Acknowledging the Association’s political and institutional limits to deal with new non-traditional and human security challenges such as underdevelopment, migration, the spread of mass diseases or climate change, ASEAN announced in October 2003 its far-reaching plans for an Asian Community by the year 2015 (initially by 2020). The official goal is to create a more people-oriented, ca-

ring and inclusive community that shall consist of a political-security, economic and socio-cultural pillar. As the role model is the European Economic Community, not the supranational European Union collaboration in the economic pillar will be much deeper than in the two other sectors.

The ASEAN Charter

The ASEAN Charter of 2007 is instrumental for establishing the East Asian Community. Signed in November 2007, it is, after the ratification through all members, in force since December 2008. Legally binding, the Charter gives ASEAN for the first time a legal personality. By means of the Charter, which consists of 55 articles, ASEAN aimed to codify its existing norms and values. It reflects a political compromise but it is nevertheless a progress into the direction of a more people-oriented understanding of security. Though, it must be the start rather than the end of the journey.

Even though the Charter highlights the requirements of sustainable development and the furthering of human development in Southeast Asia, it falls short of clearly defining the Association’s human security approach. Its security concept is still work in progress – a mixture of state, regime and individual notions of security. In the Charter, the political dimension of human security is again framed under a neorealist, state-centric perspective. An illustration is Article 1, §7 which specifies as one of ASEAN’s purposes: “to strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and re-



CO2 Champion Award to World Leaders on 01/22/2010

A Greenpeace activist standing in front of the United States Embassy in Bangkok holds a banner reading "Carbon Dioxide Champions" as he stands beside impersonators of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd of Australia, US President Barack Obama, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada. Over 75 Greenpeace activists from Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines demonstrated at the US embassy in Bangkok condemning the derailment of the climate negotiations in Copenhagen by a handful of countries led by the US.

sponsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN." The section "principles" (Art. 2) exemplifies the last caveat even better: The emphasis is here on the traditional core principles sovereignty, non-interference into domestic affairs, dialogue and consensual decision-making.

Nowhere does the Charter acknowledge that human rights are the base for human development. It merely reiterates the "respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of justice" (Art. 2i) as one of ASEAN's core principle. At the 15th ASEAN summit in Thailand in October 2009, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), promised since the early 1990s and reiterated in the Charter (Art. 14), has finally been established. Though, dependent bureaucrats rather than civil society representatives have been delegated as watchdogs by the member states (Ashayagachat, 2009).

The main reason for ASEAN's wariness in endorsing democracy and human security both on national and regional level is that the majority of the

ASEAN countries are authoritarian regimes. The Freedom in the World Index 2008 labels Indonesia as the only "free" democracy in Southeast Asia. The Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand are regarded as partly free, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam as not free. It can therefore not be expected that Myanmar or Vietnam advocate democracy and human rights.

In the Charter, both the authoritarian and democratic ASEAN leaders have agreed to a less contested depoliticized, yet fragmented concept of human security under an overall neo-realist and output-oriented conceptual framework. This understanding reconciles state and regime security with individual security, both conceptually and politically. Depoliticization means that rather than emphasizing the human rights and democratic aspects of human security, ASEAN stresses pragmatic long-term policies to eradicate poverty, provide socioeconomic development and implement reforms in the economic, social and education sector. As it emphasizes the economic and social rather than the political di-

mension of human security, the junta in Myanmar is in no danger of facing a humanitarian intervention conducted by ASEAN. To minimize such a threat to their regime security was one of the key reasons for the authoritarian governments to work on an ASEAN-wide position on human security.

Not surprisingly, the new ASEAN Charter falls short of the initially high expectations civil society groups such as the ASEAN People's Assembly (APA) and the Solidarity for Asian People's Advocacy (SAPA). SAPA and other civil society groups as Greenpeace have criticized these conceptual and political shortcomings (Dosch 2008, Emmerson 2008b). The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) has in its draft for the Charter in 2006 recommended more ambitious aims too. Consisting of former senior politicians, the group has even suggested reconsidering the ASEAN Way: "ASEAN may need to calibrate the traditional policy of non-intervention in areas where the common interest dictates closer cooperation" (EPG 2006: 1). However, "retired officials could be creatively liberal; sitting ones could



© Greenpeace 2009/ Buck Pago

Global Day of Action in Quezon City, 12/12/2009

Greenpeace and other organizations under the "tiktoktiktok" ("tckctck" in some countries) movement unfurled a banner saying "Time is Running Out, Climate Action now" in front of Quezon City Hall on Saturday morning during a musical noise barrage as part of Global Day of Action activities worldwide. The group is calling on world leaders for a fair, ambitious and binding deal at the ongoing United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark.

not" (Dosch 2008: 83), and therefore the Charter, written by politicians and diplomats is a realist document. According to Donald Emmerson's (2008b: 39) counting, while the EPG makes 57 references to liberal reforms, the Charter only 20. Strikingly, both mention the ASEAN Way almost as often (23 and 24 times, respectively), though the Charter more often in a positive context.

Strong impulses for the promotion of human security, notably human rights and democratic values, can only be expected from the increasingly active, transnational organized civil society groups – and from Jakarta. Since its successful democratization after the ousting of President Suharto in 1998, Indonesia has pressured ASEAN to adopt a human security agenda (Sukma 2008). It can also be assumed that the new ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan will play a crucial facilitating role, in particular as the Charter has strengthened his institutional position. Pitsuwan, a former Thai foreign minister and International Relations scholar, is a credible advocate of human security.

ASEANization of counter-terrorism

An illustration for ASEAN's human security concept as well as for its depoliticization and ASEANization approach are its counter-terrorism policies. Responding to growing international pressure, notably from Washington after September 11, and increased terrorist activities in Southeast Asia itself, ASEAN has more effectively addressed the non-traditional threat of terrorism.

Political, ethnic or religious violence and terrorism, though, have haunted Southeast Asia for decades. Thus ASEAN has already in the mid-1990s cautiously started to promote collaboration in counter-terrorism policies. After the terror attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Washington viewed Southeast Asia as the "second front in the war on terror". Initially, the United States kept a low profile in its regional counter-terrorism efforts, engaging in capability building and intelligence sharing. The Bush doctrine from 2002 that proclaimed the "right" of the United States to conduct pre-emptive military

strikes against suspected terrorist bases in foreign countries, though, alienated Washington from its Southeast Asian partners. Even though the US returned in Southeast Asia at the end of 2003 to its initial strategy, popular distrust remained and made it politically difficult for the ASEAN countries to collaborate with the US and Australia in counter-terrorism affairs (Gerstl 2009).

Despite strong verbal condemnations of terrorism and the promise to strengthen its counter-terrorism efforts after 9/11, it was only after the Bali bombings in October 2002 that ASEAN started to regard terrorism as a severe transnational security threat both for the state and the people. Yet even after "Bali", its members could not agree on how big the terrorist danger really is in Southeast Asia. While Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is active in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore and has established networks with Islamic terrorist groups in the Philippines where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front or Abu Sayyaf have strongholds too, terrorism poses no threat to Indochina. However, overall, Southeast Asia

seems to be “more of a transit, support, and facilitation point rather than an operation hub or a target in itself in al Qaeda’s strategy” (Acharya & Acharya 2007: 77).

In addition to the different threat perceptions, the capabilities of the national police forces, the military and the law enforcement agencies vary extremely. Furthermore, there remains still considerable distrust even among the ASEAN founding members, e.g. Singapore, to share sensitive intelligence with partners perceived as less reliable. Consequently, it was politically difficult for ASEAN to agree on a robust common counter-terrorism policy.

The compromise ASEAN achieved was, first, to frame terrorism as a transnational organized crime rather than a political offence. This criminalization implies a depoliticization of a politically contested issue. Depoliticization does neither mean desecuritization nor that counter-terrorism measures are not discussed in the parliaments or the media – it claims that the focus rests on the non-political, law enforcing and technical measures to resolve terrorism. In the authoritarian ASEAN countries, however, this strategy has also removed the crucial question from the agenda if political oppression or lack of democracy and human rights in general do legitimate non-violent political opposition. Secondly, terrorism has been securitized under the specific context of ASEAN’s core principles of sovereignty, non-interference, nation-building and socio-economic development. In other words: ASEAN has ASEANized its counter-terrorism policies, aiming to resolve terrorism and political violence with the implementation of a non-political human security approach (Gerstl 2009).

The most important political outcome of this political concept is the ASEAN Counter Terrorism Convention (ACTC) of 2007. Its main aim is to create a regional legalistic and institutional frame to combat terrorism. The first step is the strengthening of the national policing and law enforcement agencies. Subsequently, the member countries shall increase their bi- or multilateral cooperation, e.g. increased multilateral training of police and mi-

litary forces, the exchange of passenger data or even the extradition of terrorism suspects to another ASEAN country. The ACCT is one of the few binding ASEAN conventions, though it has not been ratified yet by all members.

Overall, ASEAN’s counter-terrorism approach also reflects the organization’s classic conflict-resolution method: Economic and social development will eradicate the root causes for conflicts, in this case for political violence and terrorism. In addition, ASEAN and in particular Indonesia and Singapore stress the need for investments into human development. In both countries, the re-education of terrorists has yielded results. Claiming that terrorists are guided by wrong ideologies, the re-education program targets the family members and broader community of terrorists and terrorism suspects, including religious and communal leaders.

So far, the Association’s depoliticized and ASEANized counter-terrorism approach has proven surprisingly successful as it has in fact increased the prospects for a pragmatic, functional cooperation in this field, both among selected ASEAN members and with external powers such as the United States and Australia. Notably Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia have since 2001 deepened their collaboration with Western partners. However, due to domestic criticism, the regimes tend to downplay these partnerships.

Conclusion

ASEAN’s counter-terrorism approach is a comprehensive, but long-term reform project with a strong emphasis on resolving the economic and social rather than political root causes of terrorism and political violence. It does therefore mirror the gradual evolution of ASEAN’s security concept into a more-people oriented direction. Though, it also shows that too many Southeast Asian governments still believe to improve human security is only a means for strengthening their regime security. A fundamental shift in the regional notion of security has therefore not occurred. The human rights groups thus need to remind their lea-

ders that even though human security encompasses both state and individual security, it should foremost be a security and political concept that primarily address the needs of the individual citizens.

End-note:

¹ Excellent analyses of the theoretical and analytical strengths and shortcomings of neorealist approaches can be found in Donnelly (2005) and Mearsheimer (2007). Emmerson (2008a) gives a very good overview over current comprehensive and human security approaches.

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Watershed Inventory Siem Reap, Cambodia: A Combination of Social and Natural Science Methods

Harald Kirsch



Sand mining upstream of Phum Khat

Source: MRC-GTZ WSMP

Abstract: The population in the Stung Siem Reap Watershed in Northern Cambodia is suffering from the declining quality and quantity of their water resources. A Watershed Inventory was undertaken to identify the main causes and to provide local planners with comprehensive information on watershed issues, including land use changes and their consequences. Hereby the combined application of environmental, hydrological, and socio-economic survey methods – supported by GIS application – proved to be successful to detect sand excavations from riverbanks and the continuous depletion of forests as having a major negative impact on water resources. This methodology also helped to explain upstream – downstream relationships and climate-related phenomena like floods and droughts. To ensure a more sustainable development in the future, the main objective of all actions must be to stop the severe destruction of the natural resources, which has foreseeable consequences for the socio-economic system of the watershed.

Keywords: Watershed; Siem Reap; Cambodia; Land Use; Natural Resources; Hydrology

Watersheds are spatial units defined by natural boundaries, the watershed divides. They consist of socio-economic as well as bio-physical elements with a high grade of interdependency. Manipulations of the waterways and their surrounding land have deep impacts on the functionality of watershed elements and can eventually contribute to the breakdown of societies such as the historic Khmer Empire of Angkor (KUMMU 2003, LUSTIG et al. 2008). This paper describes the combination of social and natural science to identify modern days' watershed characteristics and issues in the same area in Cambodia.

Background

The MRC-GTZ Watershed Management Project (WSMP)¹ conducted a first baseline survey in the Stung Siem Reap Watershed in September 2004 to compile data and information on socio-economy, land use, and natural resources management for impact monitoring and identification of interventions (SCHINDELE et al. 2004). To provide local planners and the Cambodian National Working Group on Watershed Management with a comprehensive database for the identification of actual watershed issues, and to gain more insight in environmental, hydrological, and socioeconomic settings and their changes during the past years, the 2004 watershed baseline survey had to be reviewed and updated. A multidisciplinary team of MRC-GTZ

WSMP conducted this update in April and May 2008. The core team consisted of four Cambodian subject matter specialists and one international expert. The focus was laid on water-related issues – including local knowledge and wisdom – concerning the Stung Siem Reap River itself as well as other waters and streams in the watershed (KIRSCH et al. 2008).

Methodology and Approach

Data were gathered on two levels: primary data collected in the field (local knowledge survey, rapid stream assessment, geology and soils) and secondary data collected from various organizations, institutions and project reports (commune and village statistics, community managed and protected areas, hydrological and climatolo-

gical data, information on land mines, and Agro Ecosystem Analyses). Furthermore, several relevant studies, e.g. on climate change (WSMP 2008), environmental impacts of stream diversions (KUMMU 2003; LUSTIG et al. 2008), integrated planning (JICA 2006), and groundwater (JICA 2006; GARAMI & KERTAI 1993; JSA 1996) were analysed.

Additional up-to-date information on stakeholders and water resources-related issues and problems were gathered during a workshop-style 2½ days WSM training course for district and commune representatives in April 2008. The results of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and environmental surveys conducted in 3 villages during the WSM Planning Training in February 2008 were also considered.

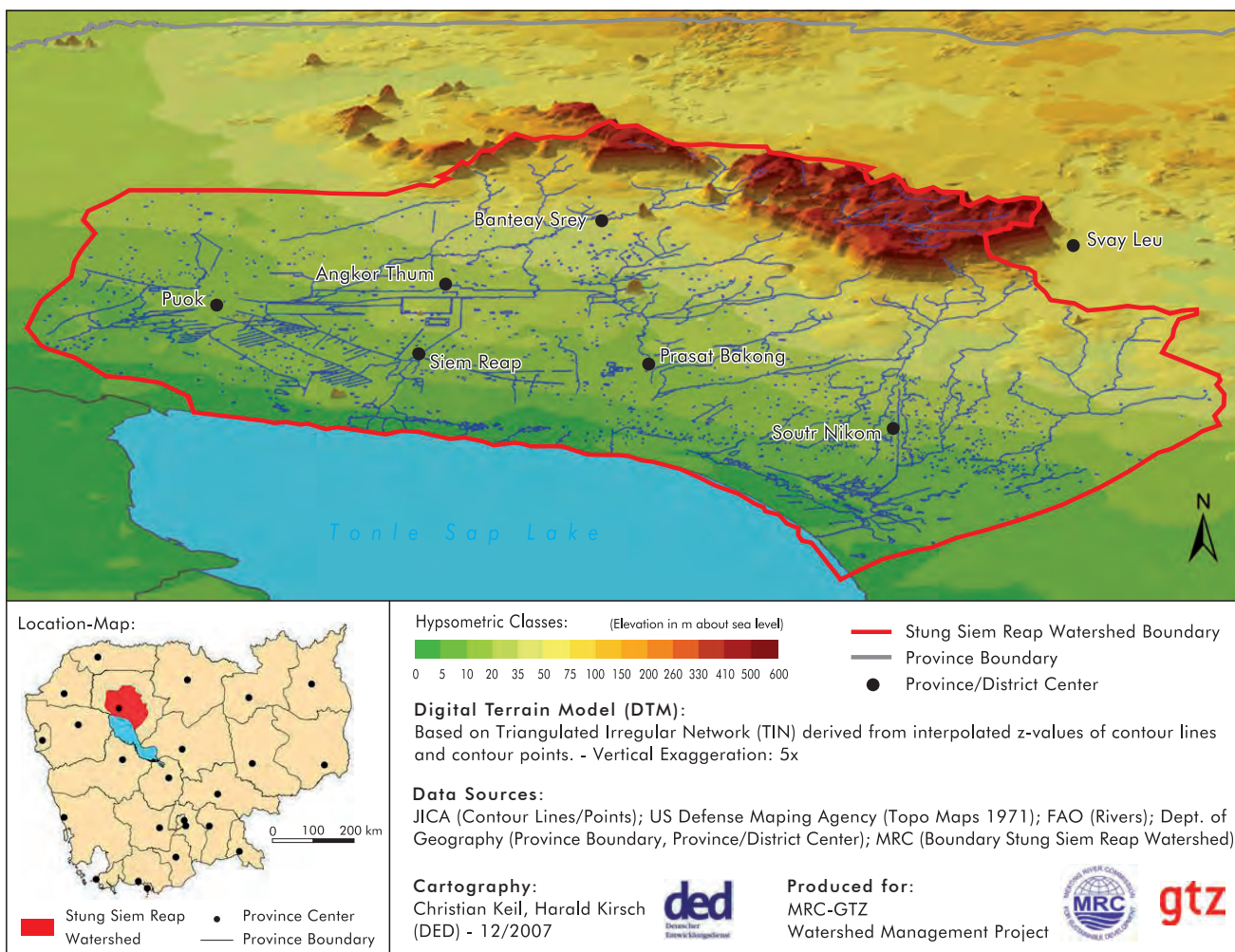


Fig. 1: Digital Terrain Model of the Stung Siem Reap Watershed

Already existing digital data on topography, geology, soils, and land use were analysed to evaluate their usability and then further processed. An interpretation of a 2005 SPOT² satellite image, combined with GPS coordinates of ground surveys, produced a detailed land use map.

All data with a spatial reference were added into a GIS-based database³. This enables the WSMP staff to provide needs-tailored information

by combining various GIS layers and data sets on any desired scale to support decision-making, planning and implementation by local government authorities and the Siem Reap Watershed Committee⁴.

Identification and location of the Siem Reap study area

The watershed investigated is located in north-western Cambodia in the province of Siem Reap, home to the

world-famous historic temple of Angkor Wat. It comprises an area of 3,619 sqkm and extends from the mountain range of Phnum Kulen to the Tonle Sap Lake (Fig. 1). The elevations in the upstream area of Phnum Kulen reach up to 500 m asl, whereas the town of Siem Reap in the downstream area is located only at 15 m asl.

The watershed overlaps with 10 districts having totally 66 communes completely or partly in the watershed



Forest depletion at the northern slope of Phnum Kulen between Oct. 2003 (l) and Apr. 2008 (r)

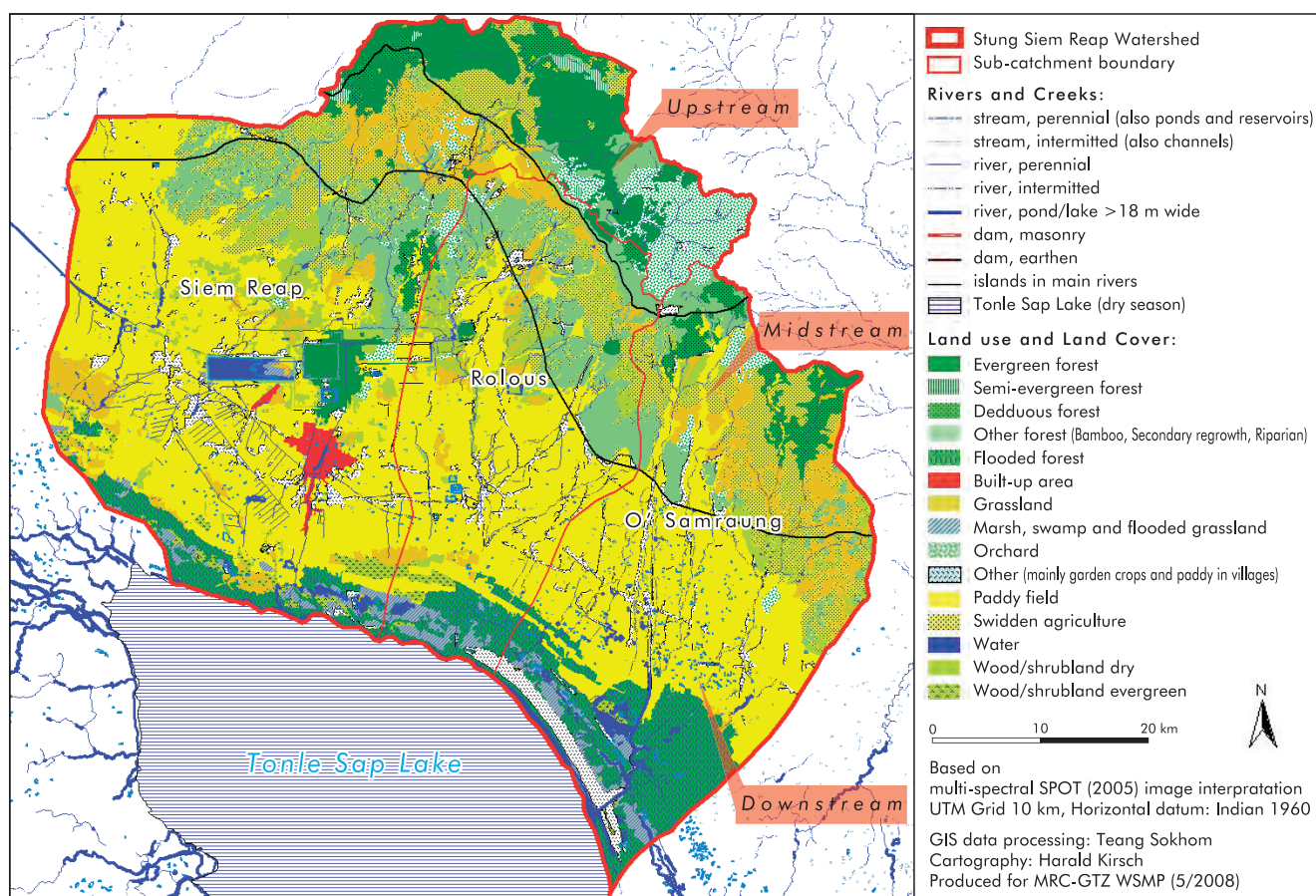


Fig. 2: Land Use Map of Stung Siem Reap Watershed

area. There are around 470 villages within the watershed with a total population of ca. 500,000. The annual growth rate is about 2.2%. The majority of the people live in a ca. 30 km wide strip between the foot slope of the Phnum Kulen and shoreline of the Tonle Sap Lake (Commune Statistics 2002-2003, 2007). Siem Reap is one of Cambodia's poorest provinces with limited access to basic education and health services. Malnutrition is still widespread.

Based on hydrology and topography, the watershed has been subdivided into the 3 sub-catchments: Stung Siem Reap, Stung Roluos, and O' Samraung (Fig. 2). Furthermore, the whole watershed (incl. the sub-catchments) was subdivided into 3 major landscape units (KIRSCH et al. 2008): 1) The Phnum Kulen sandstone plateau is defining almost the entire upstream area of the watershed; 2) The undulating midstream area with a complex geology (volcanic rocks, sandstone, and sandy sediments with laterite) extends 10-20 km from the foot slope of Phnum Kulen towards SW; 3) The flat downstream area is located on alluvial fans which stretch with 0-2% inclination towards SW until the Tonle Sap

Lake.

Sandy sediments are functioning as groundwater aquifer. The soils in the watershed reflect the geological setup, the topography and the influence of surface water and ground water. Most soils have been classified as varieties of Arenosols (FAO 2006). These are sandy soils with low clay content and low water-holding capacity. All Arenosols in the watershed are weakly consolidated and thus prone to erosion.

Vegetation & Land Use

The spatial distribution of vegetation types (evergreen vs. deciduous forest) in Siem Reap reflects the available water either through precipitation or soil and groundwater. Satellite image analysis revealed that between 1993 and 2005 almost 50% of the forest (30,000 ha) was converted into non-forest, predominantly into slash and burn areas. This occurred mainly in the upstream and upper midstream areas. Most changes of forest cover were from evergreen forest into non-forest. On the whole, forest cover decreased from 14% to 6% during the specified period.

Illegal logging at a big scale is organised by powerful and influential per-

sons. The survey indicated the likely involvement of the military, police and politicians. On the other hand there are poor farmers who are engaged in illegal logging for subsistence. Large evergreen forest areas within the Kulen National Park have been cleared since the end of 2003. Some of the depleted area has been converted into orchards, on others slash and burn is practiced; others just remain fallow and will change into shrub or grassland.

The proven huge extent of forest degradation in the watershed confirms statements made by local villagers that river flow changes in the area are caused by forest loss in the upper part of the watershed. Illegal commercial logging is still going on in Siem Reap, despite enhanced law enforcement by the Forestry Administration. As figure 2 shows, the largest proportion of the land use is still paddy fields (38.8%), followed by swidden agriculture / slash and burn (9.8%) and other forests like gallery and riparian forest, regrowth, and bamboo (10.0%).

As described by SCHINDELE et al. (2004) already, land conflicts between local people and outsiders seeking areas for commercial purposes



Stream Morphology Survey at Stung Roluos, Phum Stung

Source: Harald Kirsch

are increasing. The poor, illiterate and less educated lose in this process because they do not have the access to money and power needed to defend their rights. As a result, land is becoming progressively more concentrated in the hands of people or entities who are politically well connected or can afford informal payments, especially in regions with potential for tourism, logging, industrial or urban development. During the fieldwork the team could observe a shift from small area encroachment for subsistence farming towards larger areas being encroached and fenced.

There are three protected areas in the watershed: the above mentioned Kulen National Park, the Angkor Wat Protected Landscape with the surrounding protection zones under APSARA⁵, and the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. In 2008 there were 37 community forestry areas and 6 community-protected (forest) areas in the province; most of them are located within the watershed boundary.

Climate

The climate of the area investigated is determined by the Asian monsoons. The rainy season lasts from May to October (Fig. 3). The natural climatic variability is quite high; the beginning

of the rainy seasons can be as much as one month too early or too late. The amount of monthly and yearly rainfall and the number of rain days can naturally vary from year to year (Siem Reap station: 1179 – 1765 mm/year, average 1420 mm; 58 – 177 days/year, average 136 days). This is causing problems for the widely practiced rain-fed agriculture. There is also a pronounced spatial variation of precipitation in the study area, caused by wind directions and orographic influence. The mean annual rainfall ranges from 1093 mm in Bantaey Srei to 1828 mm on Phum Kulen. The temperatures range between 10.7 °C (min.) in the cold season in December to 40.8 °C (max.) in April. The annual mean temperature in measured at Siem Reap station is 27.6 °C.

Villagers who were long-time residents identified in interviews certain years with droughts, prolonged intra-seasonal dry spells, and floods (YU 2008, WSMP 2008). Nowadays both phenomena seem to occur more frequent than in the past. Climate data⁶ show that the reported drought years coincide with a much below average rainfall in July/August. The mentioned floods can be clearly attributed to above average rainfall at the beginning or end of the rainy season

Hydrology & Water Resources

Drainage patterns in the lower Stung Siem Reap sub-catchment are indicating that the river network has been modified. This has happened through stream diversions since the Angkor period in the 13th century (KUMMU 2003, LUSTIG et al. 2008), with consequent erosion and sedimentation changing the whole river system. Stung Roluos and O' Samraung sub-catchments are – except for some man-made interconnecting channels – still in the original stage. Their drainage patterns are common for alluvial fans or deltas. The most typical characteristic is the river dynamic caused by the power of stream flow, a low gradient long profile of streams, and the geology (weakly aggregated sandy sediments). River course changes through erosion and deposition, flooding and meandering are natural processes in this kind of landscape. More recent human interventions such as depleting the stream bank vegetation, sand mining, stream diversion, and logging have only accelerated these processes.

As a result of hundreds or even thousands of years of river course changes many ox-bows and backswamps have developed. Today these are the hundreds of ponds and small lakes in the downstream area of the

watershed, which are an important water reserve in the dry season and source for small-scale irrigation in wet season. It is assumed that these ponds receive water through floods, rainfall and groundwater inflow. In interviews the villagers complained about decreasing dry season water levels in some ponds since several years.

The width and depth of the rivers and creeks vary within a short distance according to the riverbed characteristics, relief and geology. They are between 1.50 m to > 20 m ca. wide, and between 10 cm to almost 2 m deep (dry season). In the rainy seasons all streams in the pilot watershed flow into the Tonle Sap Lake, but since 10 years O' Samraung is completely seared in the dry seasons.

Except for two stations, no stream flow and water level data were available. Thus the team had to rely on interviews with local communities (YU 2008) and outputs of WSM trainings and workshops. In almost all surveyed communities the people stated that the dry season stream water level has decreased significantly in the last 10 years, the rainy season stream flow is increasing yearly and floods come faster and are higher than before, and the flow rate of natural springs has significantly decreased during the dry seasons in areas where forests have been degraded.

The problem of extreme seasonal changes in stream water flow seems to be most severe in the downstream area, but occur as well mid- and upstream. All interview partners said that logging upstream of their community is the reason for the described problems. The local people clearly attribute that negative changes in water resources to the loss of forest (e.g. YU 2008).

The analysis of the 2005 SPOT satellite image, ground checks, and a comparison with previous spatial land cover data (1993, 1997, 2003) from MRC-GTZ, FAO, JICA and the Cambodian Forestry Administration revealed that the most extensive forest depletion took place in the upstream and upper midstream areas.

Villagers living in fishery villages along the Tonle Sap Lake shoreline complained that the annual rise of the lake water level declined from 6 m before to 2 – 4 m nowadays. This has changed fish migration pattern and negatively influences the amount of fish they can catch. For their own con-

sumption villagers also catch fish and other aquatic animals in the canals, rivers, streams and in paddy fields in their neighbourhood. People reported that because of increasing water shortage in the dry season, fish resources have become very scarce. Migrating fish species from the Tonle Sap are declining in the rivers, they almost disappeared from up-stream but new species are spreading.

Only about 7% of the population in the pilot watershed has access to safe drinking water⁷. It comes mostly from dug wells (76%), but also from rainfall, rivers, and from natural springs.

Water quality problems are serious in Stung Siem Reap and Stung Roluos catchments. Stung Siem Reap, which leaves Phnum Kulen as a clear, clean and unpolluted river enters the Tonle Sap Lake as sewer. The reasons are the entry of wastewater, solid waste, human excrements, and agro-chemicals (JICA 2006). A lot of people suffer from skin diseases after bathing in rivers in the mid- and downstream areas and mention declining water quality over the last years (YU 2008).

Sand excavation, soil erosion from cleared land and river bank erosion lead to an increase of suspended and sediment load. GIS mapping that included information from field surveys, analysis of SPOT satellite images, and turbidity data of water samples (turbidity tube) finally proofed what previously has been stated by interviewed villagers and workshop participants: the excavation of sand for construc-

tion purposes was identified as a major reason for water pollution in the whole watershed. The mining operators showed total disregard for any law. If these practices would continue, the resulting high sediment and suspended load in the rivers will certainly have a negative impact on all kinds of water utilization. It can even lead to a breakdown of the function of water take-off channels. Reservoirs and rivers already have increasingly been silted, which caused frequent floods in the town and droughts in agricultural areas (JICA 2006).

The impact of the 2009 economic crisis on the construction business reduced the demand for sand. Aware of the results of the watershed inventory, the provincial governor issued a ban on sand mining in waterways that so far has been widely obeyed⁸.

Hydromorphic soil properties and field observations in dug wells by the WSMP team led to the conclusion, that groundwater tables in the dry season are relatively shallow (up to 1.7 m below ground level) in most flat landscape units. According to JICA (2006), groundwater is easily accessible as the water table during the wet season and dry season lies between depths of 0 and 5 m below the ground level. However, groundwater is increasingly and uncontrolled pumped up in Siem Reap town by hotels, private enterprises and households. An unchecked continuation of this practice may cause groundwater declination and land subsidence in the future.

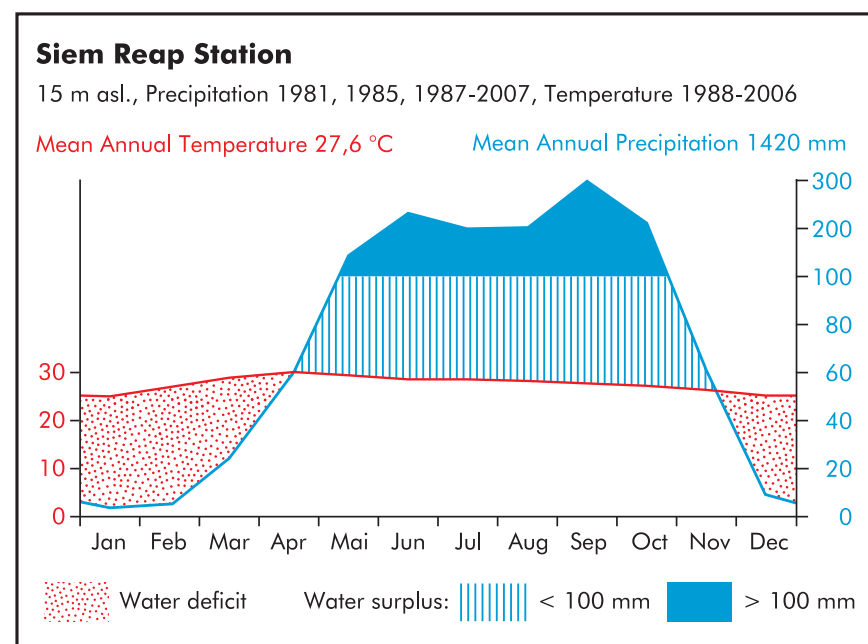


Fig. 3: Climate Diagram of Siem Reap Station

Data Source: Prov. Dept. of Water Resources & Meteorology, Siem Reap
 Pacific News Design: © Claus Carstens 2010



Local Knowledge Survey in Phum Stung Village

Conclusion

The land and natural resources related problems that were stated in the first baseline survey (SCHINDELE et al. 2004) still persist. A discouraging fact is that the survey team did rarely find any improvements in 2008. The situation regarding the health of the natural resources seems to be even worse than before.

The most burning issues identified are the sand excavations from riverbanks, and the proven continuous depletion of forests up- and midstream. The offenders in the first issue were private companies, whereas all levels of the society participate in illegal logging, but to a different extent. The impacts on water resources are particularly severe in mid- and downstream areas, but occur as well upstream.

From a methodological perspective of the watershed inventory, it turned out that the combined application of social science and natural science has been very complementary and fruitful. Many climate phenomena - such as floods and droughts - which were described by the villagers during the local knowledge survey can be explained with measured climate data. However, many phenomena do perfectly match with the natural variability of the climate. But there is a recent tendency that the July/August dry spells became more severe.

An encouraging outlook is the fact, that the local rural population is very much aware about the degradation of the natural resources in their area and the consequences for their livelihood.

The main objective of all actions regarding sustainable development must be to stop the severe destruction of the natural resources, and waterways in particular, that may lead to a partly collapse of the watershed services provided by the natural system with foreseeable consequences for socio-economic system of the watershed.

Endnotes

1) For more information about the MRC (Mekong River Commission)-GTZ (German Technical Cooperation) WSMP please refer to:

http://www.mrcmekong.org/annual_report/2008/Mekong-livelihood-AIFP.htm

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/programmes/AIFP/watershed-management-project.htm>

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/download/Papers/Siligato-et-al-MRC-GTZ-WSMP.pdf#search=%22GTZ%22>

2) Multi-spectral image, 2.5 m resolution, manual interpretation (on-screen digitizing) of true color bands (1,2,3), scale 1:20000

3) ARC GIS 9.3

4) All data and documents are kept at the WSM Learning & Information Center, Siem Reap Provincial Hall

5) Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap

6) Provincial Dept. of Water Resources and Meteorology

7) National Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, 1998

8) MRC-GTZ: personal communication April 2010

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The Crescent District in Saigon South

A showcase for post-modern urban development in Vietnam

Michael Waibel

„The Crescent – an iconic waterside project located in the heart of Phu My Hung’s international commercial and financial district, is a fitting symbol of some of the finest architectural works in Ho Chi Minh City.“
taken from the web-site of the project: www.the-crescent.com

Vietnam’s metropolises have witnessed two major inter-linked developments during the past decade: First, the widespread erection of comprehensively planned new urban areas in the urban periphery; second, the gradual emergence of an urban middle-class population. The latter soon became the most important driver for advancing suburbanization processes into new urban areas. Meanwhile, residential suburbanization is followed by large-scale retail development driven by global players. The Crescent commercial and cultural district located within the largest new urban area of Vietnam, Saigon South, is a perfect showcase for these phenomena.



All photos by Michael Waibel 2009/2010



The Crescent project is part of the commercial centre of Saigon South, a mixed-use urban development area covering 3,300 hectares of former wetlands about 4 km south of the city centre of Ho Chi Minh City. The projected population of Saigon South for the year 2020 ranges between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people. So far, around 200,000 inhabitants have moved into the most internationalized urban landscape of Vietnam. Typically for new urban area development in Vietnam, it is being implemented through a public-private partnership model: The Phu My Hung Corporation (PMH) is a company founded as a joint venture between the Taiwanese corporation Central Trading & Development Group (CT&D) and the Vietnamese Tan Thuan Industrial Promotion Corporation (IPC), the latter being under control of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City. PMH had already been awarded the contract for the development of Saigon South in 1993.

In the case of the Crescent Project, which started in 2008, PMH has taken the leader as the main developer, too. The project basically consists of several elements from the toolbox of post-modern urban development. High-end residential and office spaces can be found as well as spectacular urban design gadgets, such as the so-called "starlight" pedestrian bridge that sports an illuminated artificial waterfall. The starlight bridge ends at the most exquisitely designed restaurant of Ho Chi Minh City, the "Cham Charm", owned by self-made millionaire Khai (owner of the Khai-silk empire). It can be seen as a typical example of historical eclecticism and of the re-invention of tradition by imi-

tating older forms – in this case, Cham architecture.

The 700-metre long promenade along the waterfront, the so-called Crescent Walk, is supposed to serve as stage for events such as fashion or cultural shows. This can be interpreted as a sign of the orchestration and increased commercialization of the built environment. Further, PMH is regulated by omnipresent billboard signs, indicating an increasing transition from public to private space. The Crescent Walk leads to what the developer expects to become the first international-standard shopping mall in Vietnam, the so-called Crescent Mall. This project alone has a total investment volume of more than US\$100 million. The Crescent Mall is intended to develop into Vietnam's largest shopping complex after its scheduled completion in the end of 2011. It will comprise more than 200 shops, a huge supermarket, an international cuisine food court, a multiplex cinema, and further entertainment spaces. The U.S.-based company Savills Vietnam made a successful bid as its manager and exclusive leasing agent.

The production of such post-modern urban spaces is usually contested. Critics point out that standardized global products created by global companies serve globally homogenized tastes there. In this way, the Crescent Mall development would contribute to the erosion of local difference. Not surprisingly, the self-perception of the developer is different, as following quotation from their web-site shows:

"Crescent Mall is a further step of the direct fulfilment of the promise made by Phu My Hung to the Ho Chi Minh City citizens to improve

the quality of living."

Also, not much criticism is expected from the side of the targeted customers. Quite the contrary: It is safe to assume that the Crescent project is highly welcomed by the members of the new middle classes of Ho Chi Minh City. They most likely regard it primarily as a symbol of their city's world-class status ("it looks just like in Singapore") and, probably most importantly, as a spatial reflection of their own economic rise within a society that was predominantly poor only two decades ago. At least, this should be the case if their societal prestige and class identity-creation really is solely built upon consumption. Indeed, post-materialistic or alternative lifestyles are currently difficult to find among them. The experience of other Asian countries shows that new middle classes often do not want to endanger their newly gained status by being different from the mainstream. Civil society development in Vietnam is still at the beginning, in general. Following this line of argumentation, the new middle classes neither care if the development of the Crescent will contribute to a fragmented city form, nor does it matter to them if their consumption behaviour leads to a sharply increased ecological footprint. All these issues have been highlighted in a very hypothetical way, of course. It just shows that the lifestyles of the new urban middle class population in Vietnam, their consumption patterns, and their aspirations towards a more pro-environmental behaviour are still largely a black hole from the perspective of social research.

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BrandHK: A Copycat In City Branding?

Anna Mak

Abstract: Brand Hong Kong is a systematic place branding programme launched by the Hong Kong government in 2001 to revive the local economy and enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong. This branding programme has been considered successful and continues. This study, through literature review and a desk-based study of the relevant government documents, is undertaken to examine how BrandHK visualize a set of strategies to revive the local economy and the influence of popular academic theories of city competitiveness. It concludes that the similarities between BrandHK and the strategies of other cities pursuing place branding programmes demonstrate the strong influence of academic theories such as the creative class theory by Richard Florida. However, BrandHK has its own uniqueness and has contributed to the success of Hong Kong in becoming Asia's World City.

Key Words: Brand Hong Kong; City Branding; Creative City; World City; City-Region Competitiveness

The idea of branding Hong Kong was first explored in 1996 arising from the concerns that Hong Kong might 'vanish from the international stage' after the reunification of Hong Kong with China in 1997 (Fig. 1). With a view to reinventing Hong Kong, the Hong Kong government launched a systematic branding programme - Brand Hong Kong - in 2001 through which Hong Kong is positioned as 'Asia's World City'. A closer look at Brand Hong Kong (hereunder referred as BrandHK) shows that the notion to compete in a globalised economy is accepted unquestioned by Hong Kong government in pursuing this place marketing programme. The emphasis on building a strong regional economy and the familiar city branding strategies reveals the prominent influence of academic theories on city competitiveness. Whilst it looks like BrandHK is another copycat in place marketing, it actually responds to the unique characteristics of Hong Kong as an economy and as a city. Ten years after the handover, Hong Kong is coined by Time as Nylonkong (Fig. 2) – one of the three cities driving the global financial market. The set of economic policies symbolised by BrandHK seems to have contributed to the strong economic performance of Hong Kong economy. However, there remain questions as to what should be the ultimate goal of a city branding programme: strong economic performance alone or the quality of life for all.

The road map to a world city

While Michael Porter (1990 and 1998) advocates that the competitiveness of a nation depends on the ability of firms to enhance the productivity through innovation and clusters of industries, Richard Florida (2005, p. 22) believes that 'human creativity is the ultimate source of economic growth'. According to Florida, the competitiveness of a city depends on its ability to

provide a 'broadly supportive community context' (ibid, p. 19) with diversity and open culture to attract and retain talents, particularly the creative workers – the highly educated and mobile professionals such as engineers, lawyers, artists and scientists. These creative professionals tend to cluster which will in turn influence the location decision of firms and hence the formation of industry clusters. The

presence of the creative class and thus the industry clusters will enhance the innovation ability of a city to create new business ideas and commercial products – i.e. the key to the economic growth (Florida 2003 and 2005). On the other hand, Saskia Sassen (1996 and 2002) defines a 'world city' by how well a particular city is connected to other international cities and the number of corporate headquarters.

These academic theories have far reaching impact on city competition. In fact, an ever-increasing number of cities including Cardiff, Liverpool, Singapore, Hamburg or Bilbao adopt similar strategies (e.g. building flagship schemes or cultural icons) and pursue systematic place branding in order to sustain the economic growth and compete with other world cities for talents and inward investment (Boland 2007; Evans 2003; Kong 2007). BrandHK is no exception.

The background

Prior to the launch of BrandHK in 2001, Hong Kong has already been regarded as a world city: an international business and finance centre (En-





Figure 1. Hong Kong 1995 - Fortune's cover story predicting that HK would lose its international status upon the handover of HK to China in 1997.

right 1999), a leading international port and airport (Hall 1966) and a well-networked world city (Sassen 2002). The development of Hong Kong into a world city followed a path as described by Sassen. Almost the entire manufacturing sector of Hong Kong has been relocated to Mainland China. The service sector accounted for over 80% of Hong Kong GDP (Estes 2005). Structural unemployment has been persistent (CSD 2006). Apart from the threat of losing its competitiveness upon reunification with China in 1997 (BrandHK website), there has been constant competition for foreign direct investment from neighbouring countries such as Singapore (Lo and Yeung 1998) and the fast growing China cities such as Shengzhen and Shanghai (Enright 1999). The notion for Hong Kong to compete in a globalised market through place marketing is explicitly stated in the report of the Commission on Strategic Development (CSD):

'...Hong Kong needs to promote its unique position as one of the most cosmopolitan and vibrant cities in Asia... A successful external promotion programme can have a significant positive impact on Hong Kong's ability to achieve a number of key economic, social and cultural objectives.' (CSD 2000, p.33)

The CSD report highlighted the imminent need to enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong in a highly competitive globalised economy, and develop Hong Kong and other cities

A Tale of Three Cities

By MICHAEL ELLIOTT Thursday, Jan. 17, 2008



Figure 2. Hong Kong 2008 – coined as 'Nylonkong' – one of the three cities, New York, London and Hong Kong, driving the global economy in the age of finance.

in the Pearl River Delta Region into a powerful 'city-region'. The fast growing economy of China and the admission of China to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 were perceived as opportunities for Hong Kong to strengthen its role as a service hub in the South China region (CSD 2000).

This led to the aspiration to develop Hong Kong as a centre city of a region 'enjoying a status similar to that of New York in America and London in Europe' (Policy speech by the then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa in October 1998, cited in Flowerdew 2008, p.586).

BrandHK in a nutshell

The following statement presents how Hong Kong is positioned as Asia's World City:

'Hong Kong is a free and dynamic society where creativity and entrepreneurship converge. Strategically located in the heart of Asia, it is a cosmopolitan city offering global connectivity, security and rich diversity, and is home to a unique network of people who celebrate excellence and quality living' (BrandHK website)

Hong Kong is presented as the key to a powerful 'city-regional' economy offering the best location and opportunities for multinational corporations in Asia. There are also promises of strategic industry clusters including regional transportation hub, regional communication and broadcasting hub, as well as numerous flagship schemes such as West Kowloon Culture

District, Cyberport, Science Park and Hong Kong Disneyland (BrandHK website). The emphasis is building a powerful 'city-regional' economy.

BrandHK also carries the message that Hong Kong will be a culture hub and a city of events. The competitive identity of Hong Kong are communicated via the core values of BrandHK: free, innovative, enterprising, excellence and quality living, and the attributes of Hong Kong are expressed as cosmopolitan, connected, secure, dynamic and diverse (BrandHK website). In essence, Hong Kong is a vibrant, diversified, free, open, clean and safe place for the hyper mobile creative talents to live.

The language used and the strategies adopted are commonly presented by other cities which pursue systematic place branding (Boland 2007; Evans 2003; Kong 2007). In the case of BrandHK, there is a clear motive to developing Hong Kong into what Florida described as a 'creative city'. Therefore, projecting an image of Hong Kong as an open, vibrant and diversified city is deemed essential in attracting the 'creative class' and hence the innovation industries to Hong Kong. Such similarities in the branding strategies adopted across cities are probably due to the active consultancy business by academics (Boland 2007). Documents show that the formulation of BrandHK has taken reference of good practices of other cities worldwide (CSD Report, 2001; BrandHK website) and two private-funded academic reports released in 1997 on the

competitiveness of Hong Kong as a city¹. The recommendations from both studies echoed the mainstream academic thinking on city competition and advocated development of 'hub' functions, entrepreneurial culture and a knowledge-based economy (Jessop and Sum 2000).

Although words of competitiveness are seldom mentioned in BrandHK documents, the concept of city competition and the whole idea of strengthening the competitiveness of Hong Kong are explicit in the CSD report. Throughout the CSD report, the competitiveness of Hong Kong firms almost equates to the competitiveness of Hong Kong, which echoes with the idea of Michael Porter that productivity of firms is the key to the competitiveness of a city.

To strengthen the role of Hong Kong as a service hub in the region, BrandHK emphasizes on cooperation between cities within the Pearl River Delta Region. There are repeated emphases on strengthening the collaboration with Mainland China through the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) to facilitate Hong Kong companies to tap the opportunities of a larger market and to grow in size (CSD 2000, p. viii, p.11). It is also stated that a 'marriage of Hong Kong's traditional entrepreneurial spirit and the potential of the rapidly expanding technology sector could produce outstanding commercial success for Hong Kong companies' (ibid, p. 14). It is never stated in any BrandHK documents that Hong Kong will be the leading city in the region even though various analysis of the competitiveness of Hong Kong have commonly commented on the ability of Hong Kong to do so (CSD 2000; Enright 1999; Rohlen 2000). The building of a strong city-region economy by advocating cooperation between cities in a region and its role as a regional hub providing producer services and an ideal place for regional headquarters align with the arguments of Sassen (2002) on how city can successfully compete in a globalised economy.

Notwithstanding the similarities in BrandHK and the branding strategies adopted by other cities, BrandHK is like a mosaic taking pieces from different successful stories and is carefully crafted in Hong Kong style. BrandHK obviously has modelled on some common city branding strate-

gies but there are tailor-made details in Hong Kong context by capturing the existing strengths and the characteristic of Hong Kong economy - well-established financial market, rule of law and the strategic location in South China. The benefit of 'One Country, Two Systems' are fully captured in BrandHK. The strategic position of Hong Kong as part of China after the reunification is emphasised alongside with the common law system and the East-meet-West culture which are inherited from the colonial time.

Based on the above observation, the agenda of BrandHK to develop Hong Kong into a cultural hub and a city of events do display a tendency of a copycat but the tailor-made details demonstrate the entrepreneur quality of Hong Kong.

Measuring the performance of BrandHK

There are criticisms that some of the flagship programmes did not deliver the expected benefits. For example, Hong Kong Disneyland has not yielded the expected benefits in terms of revenue as well as the number of visitors (Yeung et al 2008). Also, just having a designated site and a label for industrial sites without a Hong Kong context will never be enough for developing high-tech industries (Baark and So 2006). This proves the arguments that copying flagship programmes or pouring resources into some hot emerging industries will not guarantee success in regenerating local economy (Florida 2005).

Notwithstanding these criticisms, figures presented on BrandHK website showing that Hong Kong economy is thriving. The set of economic policies together with the branding strategies seem to have successfully transformed Hong Kong into Asia's World City and a regional hub. The number of regional headquarters reached a record high of 1228 in 2007 and 3580 by June 2009 (BrandHK website). The heavy investment in infrastructure and flagship schemes appears in general to have paid-off (Estes 2005). By January 2007, Hong Kong has become the second largest share market for IPO listing and has received the second largest inward FDI in Asia (BrandHK website). Unemployment rate has continued to fall and average income level increased since the economy was badly hit by SARS in 2003 (CSD 2007).

However, all these performance indicators presented by the government: GDP growth, inward FDI and world rankings of Hong Kong, are output-related measurements in economic terms. Apart from the higher employment rate and higher average income level, what do the competitiveness and these economic outcomes mean to Hong Kong people in daily life?

Something is missing from the mosaic. In terms of quality of life, BrandHK is only limited to the commitment of improved air quality and equal opportunities for women in their publications by 2007. Although there are more coverage on public policies addressing social issues in their current publication such as the provision of free education and public housing (BrandHK website), other issues that are considered imminent such as rising income disparities (CSD 2000) are neglected in BrandHK documents or the local economic development policies. Social issues include the social exclusion and family violence in the most deprived communities, for example Tin Shui Wai – a community labeled as 'migrant slum', are out of the beautiful scenes presented in BrandHK (Estes 2005; Lee 2005; Wong, S., 2008). The ranking of Hong Kong on the United Nation Gini Index on income/wealth disparity has got higher in recent years (UN 2010). The problem of poverty, particularly the working poor, has aggregated despite of the economic growth and the improvement in unemployment rate, or the prevailing policies on public housing and education which have been in place for decades (Wong, H, 2009; Tsang 2010). The widening social inequalities and the expensive housing for the professional 'elites' seems to show that the socio-economic development of Hong Kong resonates with the world city phenomenon described by Sassen (1996 and 2002).

So BrandHK, like other branding of city, may still run the risk of marketing Hong Kong as a commodity and put too much emphasis on building a positive image of Hong Kong and the return in economic terms. The narrow economic focus and the underlying global ambition are so obvious that there are now public voices for social goals and community empowerment (Estes 2005; Lee 2005). A good example of this is the slowdown of West Kowloon Cultural District develop-

ment when the general public clearly did not feel that the original government plan was responding to the genuine needs of Hong Kong community. The public feared that the original proposal would just be another luxury property development with iconic architectures in the backdrop and lack of local culture flavour (Kong 2007; Wong, A., 2008; Yau 2008).

Conclusion

BrandHK is not merely an image-building programme but indeed is visualising a series of place-based policies and strategies to strengthen the position of Hong Kong in the global economy and boosting the local economy. The similarities between BrandHK and the place branding strategies of other metropolis embody the dominant discourses of globalisation and city competitiveness. It also reflects the mainstream notion of how city compete for inward foreign investment, talents and market share by building a city's competitive advantages within a city-regional economy.

BrandHK embraces two main characters of Hong Kong: adaptability and entrepreneurship. It is these characters that prevent BrandHK from becoming a total copycat. Although BrandHK could not be said to be the sole driving force to the strong economic performance of Hong Kong, the series of place-based policies do contribute to the local economy particularly in its development into a world leading financial centre.

However, the prevailing city branding strategies like BrandHK are too often narrowly focused on the firm competitiveness and growth in economic terms. The ultimate goal of city branding policies should go beyond an improved local economy and aim to achieving a higher quality of life for people living in a place. In this respect, BrandHK, which emphasis on building Hong Kong as a city of events, flagship schemes and iconic architectures, still falls short in meeting the social goals when resources and focus are put on adopting common

city branding strategies and promoting the city as a commodity. There are also doubts whether the existing branding policy can sustain the strong economic performance of Hong Kong in the long run and whether it will ultimately bring real benefit to the quality of life of Hong Kong people. All these questions will be contested both in face of the current global economic crisis and over a longer time span.

End-note

1) The two private-funded reports are *The Hong Kong Advantage* conducted by Harvard Business School (Enright 1999; also cited in Jessop and Sum 2000), and *Made by Hong Kong* by MIT (Berger and Lester 1997, cited in Jessop and Sum 2000).

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Land of Chopsticks, Jeans and Contradictions

German geography students explore the Pearl River Delta, China

Theresa Münch



Urban fabric within the City Centre of Guangzhou

„Made in China“ - that's what it says on jeans and shirts, on mobiles and watches. Made in China mostly means made in the Pearl River Delta. But the former factory of the world is in transition. Students from four German universities went on a two-week-field trip to explore this mega-urban region and its structural changes and challenges.

Chopsticks, Beijing, Shanghai, the Great Wall and Mao Zedong first come to mind when thinking about China. Next are highly populated metropolises and under-developed rural areas. This large country is associated with contradictions like no other state in the world. Just last year, it displaced Germany as the world's leading export-nation of industrial goods. China sold commodities amounting to more than 1.07 trillion dollar - a large percentage of which came from the Pearl River Delta (PRD).

The PRD, including the cities of Shenzhen, Dongguan, Guangzhou, Foshan, Jiangmen, Zhongshan and Zhuhai as well as the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao, is a highly dynamic and still growing mega-urban region. It used to have a longstanding reputation as the factory of the world but now faces fierce competition with ambitious metropolitan areas such as the Yangtze

Delta (Shanghai) or the Beijing-Tianjin metropolitan region.

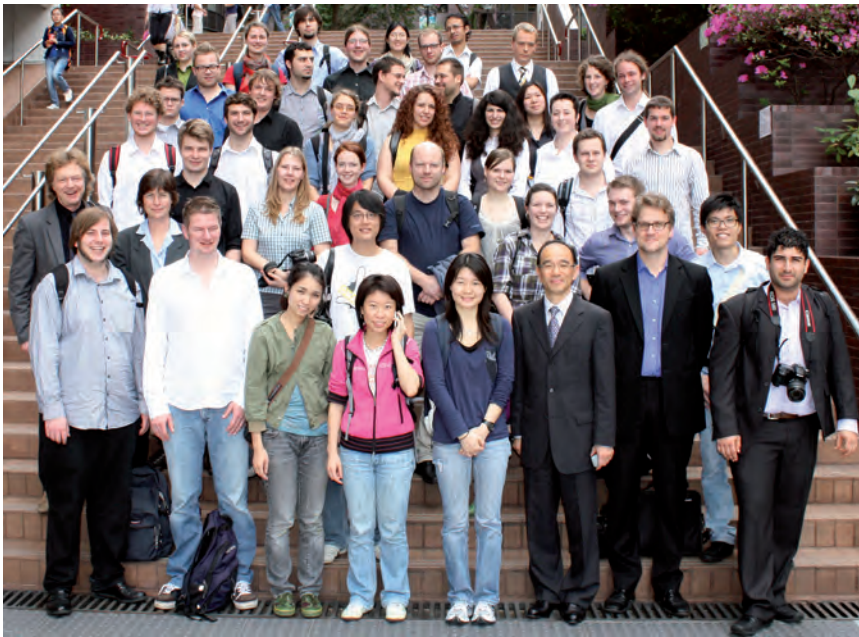
Between 1 and 15 March 2010, 33 students from the four German universities of Hamburg, Osnabrück, Kassel and Leipzig travelled to the PRD to observe urban development and economic restructuring processes within this mega-urban region. They were accompanied and instructed by Prof. Dr. Jürgen Oßenbrügge & Dr. Michael Waibel from Hamburg, Prof. Dr. Britta Klagge & Christian Wuttke from Osnabrück as well as by Urban Planning Prof. Dr. Uwe Altrock from the University of Kassel. Longstanding contacts between the German scientists and their Chinese colleagues, resulting from participation in the DFG-funded Priority Program 1233 “Megacities – Megachallenge: Informal Dynamics of Global Change”, allowed for joint fieldwork and bi-national workshops in Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. The

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) financially supported the technical tour.

Bi-national workshops

In Hong Kong, the students experienced a high-rise dominated mega-city with its large CBD on Hong Kong Island and shopping districts in Kowloon. In cooperation with the Department of Urban Planning and Design at the Hong Kong University (Prof. Anthony G.O. Yeh and Assoc. Prof. Roger Chan) and the Department of Building and Real Estate at the Polytechnic University (Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bo-sin Tang), student working groups went into the field and explored social housing policies, redevelopment strategies, retailing structures and the local tourism-related infrastructure.

Urban restructuring was at the centre of interest of both lectures and fieldwork. Particularly, the shared experiences with the Chinese students



Guests and hosts at a joint workshop at Hong Kong University, 2 March 2010

highlighted the fascinating impression of the thrilling metropolis of Hong Kong. As one of the participants summarized, "the Chinese students gave us a very warm welcome".

Green City – Chinese style

A visit to Shenzhen, China's first and most successful Special Economic Zone and a pioneering metropolis in many respects provided insights into transitions in urban development strategies. Here, a comparably sophisticated change process from an industrial to a (in a Chinese understanding) sustainable city was observed. Urban Planner Michael Gallagher (Shenzhen Planning Bureau) introduced the modern Futian New City Center.

During a workshop with Assoc. Prof. Liu Xiao of the College of Management of Shenzhen University, Chinese and German students comparatively discussed specific aspects of planning and urban governance in both countries. It became apparent that China as a huge, centrally governed nation faces many challenges. The friendly conversations between Chinese and German students helped to get a better understanding of both similarities and differences in culture, education, sciences and peoples' ways of thinking. Many of the German students are likely to stay in contact with their Chinese friends and have invited them to spend their vacation and even study-years in Germany.

Textiles & Creativity

Gentrification and industrial restructuring have been the main topic at a workshop at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. After an introduction on „Old Warehouse-Redevelopment“ by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Shenjing He, students engaged in fieldwork in an economic cluster of an established industry, Guangzhou's textile district. They qualitatively observed labor conditions in factories as well as small-scale manufacturing in little shops and in the streets. Despite the photo showing laughing labor migrants of a small textile workshop, many interviewees mentioned about their long working hours and poor salaries.

Given the overall increasing standards of living in the PRD, it is becoming difficult for companies to attract laborers that are willing to work under these conditions. Although PRD's industry structure is still mainly characterized by labor-intensive manufacturing, it became evident that economic restructuring towards more knowledge-intensive and service-oriented industries is underway. This was also emphasized during a field trip to Guangzhou's Science City and a visit at Business Incubators a day later.

The student group was also invited to visit the Guangdong Planning Bureau and the German Consulate General where they learned about the current planning and economic challenges of the thriving mega-urban re-

gion. They further explored one of the biggest gated communities in Guangzhou (Phoenix) as well as Xintang town, an industrial town that specializes on the production of jeans. About 40 percent of the world market's jeans are manufactured there. Another fascinating economic cluster was paid attention to at Dafen village in Shenzhen which is China's most important oil painting production centre. The students have been able to enjoy hundreds of Van Gogh and Picasso paintings at that site.

In Macao, the last stop of the round trip, the focus lay on the emergence of a creative class. The establishment of creative industry districts in the former Portuguese colony was compared to similar developments in the German cities of Hamburg or Berlin. Natalie Hon from the Macau Urban Planning Institute (MUPI) warmly welcomed the students; she had organized a visit to the San Lazaro Creative Industry District where local artists showed their work.

Remembered will also be nights of karaoke and Tsingtao-beer, tea-ceremonies, casino-gambling or chicken heads on chopsticks. And what about Chinas Great Wall, Tibet or Beijings Forbidden City? - Well, this country is huge – and it gives the students reason to come back.



Laughing labour migrants at a workshop within Guangzhou's Textile District.

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Culture as a Political Function in the Pacific: Vanuatu and Tonga Compared

Andreas Holtz

Abstract: This article shows how culture is used politically in Tonga and Vanuatu, which are compared exemplarily for the Pacific. Thereby, the aim is to outline culture as political function to preserve or to create power relations in this region. The article's main hypothesis consists of the assumption that a missing definition of culture is the pre-condition of its flexible use especially in terms of identity politics. This raises the question how culture is being politically exploited in the Pacific. In Melanesian Vanuatu, the state has practically been imposed on the adjacent parallel societies of the Big Men. Culture is used there to create and legitimate a new political unit. By contrast, the state in Polynesian Tonga was – due to its social order – only confronted with a new type of organization that had to be brought in line with the traditional regulatory instruments. The article concludes that indigenous culture is ideologized and constructed as traditionalism in order to meet its target: the maintenance of power in the case of Tonga respectively the establishment of power in the case of Vanuatu.

Key Words: Vanuatu; Tonga; Pacific Island States; Culture; Nation-Building; Traditionalism; Political Power

The Pacific Island States (PIS) are not only counted among the smallest, but also the most recent post-colonial states. The decolonization process commenced in 1962 with the independence of Samoa and has tentatively been concluded with Vanuatu's sovereignty as recently as 1980. In 2018, New Caledonia will hold a referendum on independence from France, the outcome of which - in view of the opulent transfers from Paris - is yet uncertain. Due to their remoteness, these relatively young states have only been colonized late, so that the European influence is still comparatively small while indigenous traditions and customs could be retained.

Having achieved independence, especially the Melanesian PIS faced forms of social organization previously unknown to them. In this context, differences between the sub-regions Melanesia and Polynesia need to be emphasised. While small, egalitarian groups directed by changing leaders (Big Men) emerged in Melanesia, Polynesia had already in pre-European times developed differentiated, hierarchical and different groups of comprehensive social systems.

With the establishment of state-

hood, both approaches were reflected in a western modernity. In Melanesia, the state has practically been imposed on the adjacent parallel societies of the Big Men. National identities and awareness often only exist among the western-trained elites, who had also fought for independence. By contrast, the new states in Polynesia were - due to their social order - confronted with a new type of organization that had to be brought in line with the traditional power relations and regulatory instruments. On a more abstract level it can

be said that in Melanesia the state is to create a national identity while in Polynesia the national identity was followed by a state (see Larmour 2003:24).

The political problem within such a framework given the social structures in Polynesia was to maintain the status quo in terms of a conservative approach, while in Melanesia something completely new had to be implemented. Both approaches reflect the German discussion of a nation of culture and civilisation ("Kulturnation") in Polynesia versus a nation of will

Official residence of the King of Tonga



(“Staatsnation”) in Melanesia. Consequently, the standards in the new PIS were different in the respective sub-regions. To implement these different standards of identity politics, the states used and still use various already existing social cultural functions such as customs and traditions, which will be presented in the following using the examples of Tonga and Vanuatu.

The scientific aim of this paper is to outline culture as political function to preserve or create power relations in the Pacific. This raises the question how exactly culture is being politically exploited in the PIS. For this purpose, the ambivalence with regards to contents of the Tongan democracy movement and the ideology of constructed traditions and customs in Vanuatu will be compared.

Culture and Politics in the PIS

Both approaches highlight differences in the collective identity. In order to use these politically, (not only) the PIS and their political elites avail themselves of cultural functions. It can be hypothesized that culture serves as a function in terms of a support (service) in order to legitimate power. Whether culture is used politically for the preservation of existing regulatory and government patterns or as a legitimization of new mechanisms needs to be ascertained. In doing so, a cybernetic model becomes evident, in which culture creates power and vice versa (see Hauck 2006:188). As a result, culture does not only contribute to the social acceptance and legitimization of the modern PIS, but is even essential for it. In this context, it should not be overlooked that the PIS consists of small states that are above all characterised by a strong social intimacy and personalization (see Holtz 2007:29 f). The de-personalization and streamlining of power as the most important features of a modern state with a differentiated mode of operation is therefore difficult to realize. A necessary rational and definable institutionalization of relations is virtually impossible, so that tensile cultural features provide an explosive political significance.

Cultural functions operate as an instrument of power in the PIS. Customs and traditions are incorporated in the respective constitutions, even though the indigenous *Kastom*¹ is nowhere bindingly defined. These instruments



Tonga, Vava'u Island: Women weaving baskets for direct sales.

Source: © Ingrid Schilsky/German Pacific Network.

consequently serve as omnipotent principles for decision-making and justification. The political elites are by their origin familiar with the customs and traditions and at the same time well acquainted with the modern western governance. They are capable of utilizing the dualism of traditional and modern times for themselves. The simple formula of indefiniteness is applied here: the less culture is defined, the better it is deployable because of its imprecision.

Preservation of the Status Quo in Tonga

The intended use of cultural functions to maintain power in the Pacific is particularly evident in Polynesia, as the example of Tonga illustrates. Tonga -despite various attempts at modernization- still maintains its feudal system, which in particular secures the power of family rule. Tonga's monarchy is based on a self-conception by divine right. The King is responsible for the state and religious leadership. The origin of the tradition determining the political system is intentionally kept vague to nip any possible doubt as to the royal legitimacy in the bud (see Lawson 1996:81): „Truth is what the chief says, and history is what the highest chief says“ (Wood-Ellem 1981:9).

According to the Tongan constitution the king is sacred because of divine legitimacy. He is immensely powerful and restricts the authority of the local leaders. The king provides the aristocracy with power, which is returned with the noble loyalty. The commoners are given land by the aristo-

cracy, which in turn sustains the close relationship between ruler and ruled (see James 1997:57ff).

The appointment of a divinely legitimized ruler politically and socially required a hierarchical order and a centralized political system. Tonga is regarded as highly centralized, consequently local institutions have only a marginal say (see Duncan 2004:6). This centralization is supported by the linguistic unit. The socio-political system is based on three hierarchical classes. Below the king and his family there are the 33 nobles, including their immediate families (“hou'eiki”), and as a supporting base the group of ordinary people (“commoner”). This division has been kept up to now and is also reflected in the political system of the state, which allows for little political change. Tonga's twelve Cabinet members are also members of Parliament, which comprises 30 seats that are allocated by a particular system. The remaining 18 seats are held equally by representatives of the nobility and the people. Hence twelve members of Parliament are legitimized by royal command, nine are elected by the 33 nobles, and only nine members of Parliament are established by general election. The government is not accountable to Parliament, so that the function of Parliament is reduced to the petition of laws. Laws must be countersigned by the king, ensuring the crown as the ultimate arbitration. The election by the people for the people is only possible in the local elections held every three years, since the government has refrained from also

appointing municipal officials centrally (see James 2004:2). In no other political system of the Pacific does the traditional power of the Chiefs emerge as strongly as it does in Tonga (see Fraenkel 2004:4).

Despite an increase in resistance, the existing power structure seems secure. This resistance has been insignificant to date; so far only the relatively few well-educated have raised their voice to protest, while the majority of the "average" people are still too trapped in their traditions to propagate a change (see James 2003:309 ff). The Tongan government is based on two pillars, the first of which is tradition. This ensures that a different political system appears impossible for the majority of Tongans. The second pillar is religion and therefore equally determined by culture. Reforms would question the existing system into, which would imply to doubt God and his order. For many deeply religious Tongans, this is unthinkable. For this reason, even bourgeois reformist parliamentarians are against a complete political transformation. The structures of this royal system are prone to abuse.

In Tonga today there is an obvious increase of corruption in the ruling classes, probably due to the assumption that customs and traditions precede any institutional political affairs (see James/Tufui 2004:5). In the country, there is a Polynesian-style history of misuse of power which is culturally justified but the only purpose of which is personal gain. Although the Tongan public is aware of this and aspires to change, which was demonstrated in the violent protests of autumn 2006, the king as the foundation of the system remains unaffected (see Mückler 2006:188). There is an apparent desire

to change the system, but at the same time to retain the king as pillar of the Tongan identity. The modernization of the state and the ruling system is indeed longed for, ironically though without having to deviate from the Faka Tonga, the „Tongan Way“.

Implementation of the New in Vanuatu

Contrary to the use of culture to maintain power, in Melanesia cultural functions are used to legitimize the relatively new organizational state. In order to establish a new centralism of the state in the traditionally decentralized co-existence of the clans, cultural constructions have been created. The goal was to create a national identity beyond the clan borders, which did not exist in this form before the founding of the state. Vanuatu's problem is typical of the Melanesian PIS, illustrated by an example of the Solomon Islands: „Allegiance of Solomon Islanders to the central state was, and remains, less strong than self-identification with separate provinces, islands, regions or wantoks“ (Fraenkel 2004b:182). Vanuatu provides a striking paradigm of this problem of Melanesian identity.

Besides the classic juxtaposition of the egalitarian systems of the Big Man, the modern Vanuatu has up to 1980 been administered as a condominium of Britain and France, which enhanced the social fragmentation and heterogeneity even further. This colonial inconsistency has constrained Vanuatu to this day, yet another difficulty being its linguistic diversity. Besides the three official languages English, French and Bislama around 110 different languages are spoken. Vanuatu combines a cultural with a colonial mortgage so that nation-building plays an impor-

tant role.

This is determined particularly by the mostly western-trained elite of the country. This elite connects with indigenous customs and traditions as far as they can be politically utilized. Here, state Kastom takes over the function of producing a collective sense of identity. The initiators of Vanuatu's independence among the first Prime Minister Walter Lini, transformed the concept of Kastom into a national ideology to unite the country. Besides its unifying character, Kastom is also deployed for establishing an elite of power and dependency ratios. Kastom in this sense means nothing more than the constructed self as opposed to the western lifestyle (see Ellis/Parsons 1983:112). Interestingly, the criticism on the western way inherent in Kastom, is especially passed by the western educated elite. They constructed Kastom also for reasons of power politics justifying the ideology of their new state and by that orchestrated a constructed national culture.

The construction of Kastom includes two important features: It finds its greatest advocates among an urban, educated, Christian and acculturated group of people. Consequently the highest authorized officers are the least acquainted with the traditional, rural and pre-Christian customs (see Philibert 1986:3). In addition, reference is repeatedly made to a supposedly positive past before colonization, which is not further defined. Vague information e.g. concerning an alleged former unity are part of the concept, which initially involves the implementation of the cultural tool Kastom as a multi-purpose and elastic term. Moreover, it is attempted by means of Kastom to address and win over the Big Men in

Source: © Ingrid Schilsky/German Pacific Network.



Vanuatu, Efate Island: Typical Settlement Structures of the Indigenous Population (Ni-Vanuatu as they call themselves)



Vanuatu, Tanna Island: Women sell their agricultural products on a small market

their role as traditional opinion leaders of a fragmented society. The socio-cultural identities of the Big Man-Systems are therewith enabled to develop a political identity (see Linnekin 1997:414). This type of Kastom can consequently be described as a state Kastom, "to reduce the various ethnic identities to one national identity by appealing to some hypothetical common tradition" (Babadzan 1988:211).

The artificiality of the Kastom construction is evident at various points. The Christian trained creators of the State Kastom in Vanuatu aimed at a supposedly harmonious pre-Christian past of the unity. The connection between Christianity and pre-Christian traditions is a paradox, but no less effective. The contrast Kastom vs. western culture does not apply to the opposition Kastom vs. Christianity (see Douglas 2000:5). Another example for the artificiality of it is the fact that the actual Kastom was originally used to dissociate oneself from others and not to overcome the boundaries towards becoming a nation (see Tonkinson 1982:302). The elite often meets such criticism with pointing out the unspecified difference between good and bad Kastom. Again the maxim of flexibility is applied here to expand the Kastom and its meaning in any direction.

The quoted pre-European past is before the written word, orally passed-down and often unexplored, which contributes to this elastic imprecision causing problems. Although Kastom is enshrined in the Constitution, it is not further explained. Disputes over land ownership or acquisition of traditional power positions are not centrally controlled, so that the instrumentalization of culture virtually lends itself to purposes of power politics. The state elite suppresses any protests against clientelism and corruption arising from this instrumentalization with a reference to the naturally not further differentiated Melanesian ideals (see Howard 1983:198).

Kastom also serves party political goals. Lini's formerly dominant Vanaaku Pati called the so-called Me-

lanesian socialism into being, which was used as an election platform. This ideology was derived from traditional values such as communalism and egalitarianism, although the approaches were far from being socialistic. Economic policy was very liberal, the tax level barely perceptible and the level of wages very low. Workers' concerns were ignored by the government with regard to the classlessness in Melanesian socialism. Riots and protests could be settled by reference to the incompatibility between protest and Kastom. This is all the more true as it is considered to be a christianized Kastom: "God never went on strike" (Lini quoted by Howard 1983:198).

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be said that the two examples mentioned, Tonga and Vanuatu, stand representatively for the PIS regarding their power-political instrumentalization of cultural functions such as customs, traditions or religions. Observers allude to the term „traditionalism“ in view of this instrumentalization: „Traditionalism as an ideology emerges at the point where the preservation of a particular social or political practice becomes a matter of political concern, often for an instrumental reason“ (Lawson 1997:6). Thus traditionalisms become an apparent ruling element. Indeed, indigenous culture is ideologized and constructed in order to meet its target – the maintenance or establishment of power. Against this background, the Melanesian socialism, which is based on Kastom, is no longer a concept of the culture-bearing people, but rather a concept of the "interests of the national bourgeoisie" (Howard 1983:201).

End-note

1) Melanesian Pidgin, derived from the English term custom.

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Pacific Workers in New Zealand's Horticulture: Comments on the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme

Jana Prochazkova

Abstract: This article contributes to the current discussion about the outcomes of the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE), a special government initiative targeting unskilled and less educated Pacific workers. Since its introduction in April 2007, many different voices have commented on this scheme. Based on qualitative research among the foreign workers in New Zealand, this paper aims to compare the non-Pacific workers' notions of "exploitation" and "cheap labour import" with other opinions. The RSE scheme is found to be not necessarily exploitative, although its outcomes depend on many determinants. Among these, the approach of the employers and the profile of the workers are among the most important factors determining the success or failure of this initiative.

Key words: Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE); labour migration; labour import; New Zealand

The Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE) is aimed especially at the horticulture and viticulture industries in order to help to solve the seasonal labour shortfall (more than 7,000 positions; Schwass 2007). The workers must be offered a job in these areas: planting, maintaining, harvesting and packing. As illustrated by the pictures, typical tasks are the thinning of vines or apple picking.

About RSE

Three agencies were involved in the implementation of the scheme: the Ministry of Social Development, the Department of Labour and NZAID (New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency); the latter of which is monitoring the outcomes of the scheme. The RSE scheme has

become a significant opportunity for economically deprived and unskilled Pacific workers who would be unlikely to be eligible to work in New Zealand under previous policies.

Citizens of several Pacific countries have preferential access because the RSE policy was introduced in order to encourage economic develop-

ment in the Pacific. Employers were expected to recruit from all Pacific Islands Forum states. Yet, Fiji was finally excluded and the majority of workers were hired from so called "Pacific kick – start states:" Tonga, Vanuatu, Samoa, Kiribati and Tuvalu. In the 2007/08 season, 83 per cent came from these five countries (Department

Photos: R. L. Bailey

The Ni-Vanuatu are thinning vines in a Central Otago vineyard



of Labour 2009). For the 2009/2010 season, 3,554 applications were approved (Bedford et al. 2009).

The applicants can obtain their visa for a maximum of seven months (nine months for the workers from Kiribati and Tuvalu), but are allowed to return under the same scheme. New Zealand's recognised employers must have the so called "Recognised Seasonal Employer status", which means they must comply with the laws and specific requirements concerning minimum pay, airfares (employers pay half of the workers' airfare) and pastoral care. The pastoral care includes, for example, arranging suitable accommodation, transportation, provision of necessary equipment, access to banking services and opportunities for recreation as well as for religious observance.

Aid or Problem?

In the discussion about the RSE scheme, there are many voices commenting on its implementation, outcomes and possible consequences. This section will examine the advantages, but it will also follow the critical line highlighting possible disadvantages of RSE.

Temporary work arrangements are seen as important for economic development (Cunliffe 2006) and the RSE scheme was expected to become a triple win for migrants, their countries of origin and the destination countries (Ramasamy et al. 2008). Opinions on the long-term success of the temporary schemes were contradictory but in general, the advantages were emphasized. For example, Plimmer (2006: 8) argued that a well-managed temporary scheme means fewer social risks than permanent schemes or unmanaged temporary work.

Supporting development in the Pacific Islands and targeting poor Pacific Islanders was considered favourable (New Zealand Herald 2008) and RSE was prevailingly described as successful by journalists (e.g. Otago Daily Times 8/2008.; Riley 2008) as well as by the Department of Labour (2009). The RSE scheme is constantly evaluated by a research group at University of Waikato, which presented similar positive conclusions (Gibson et al. 2008, McKenzie et al 2008). Numerous benefits of the scheme were expected, such as improving the living standard of the community as well as of individual households. The work

remittances sent to the home villages were supposed to provide direct benefits like improved education, better income distribution, reducing poverty and stimulation of business activities. Other possible benefits included improving working skills, gaining language competence and the experience of living in another country.

Yet, not all authors were so optimistic and some highlighted different issues such as alleged exploitation or even slavery, high costs connected with the scheme and possible work and social problems (Otago Daily Times 7/2008). Research on the "Pacific Labour and Australian Horticulture Project" identified problems arising from a lack of engagement with unions, community sector and with Pacific communities (Maclellan 2008). The Council of Trade Unions expressed concern about importing a cheap labour force and their secretary highlighted the importance of getting New Zealand's own unemployed to fill labour shortages by offering more flexible hours, better pay and conditions (New Zealand Herald 2006).





Photos: M. Tomasova

The crops in Vanuatu and in New Zealand are different. Some of these men have never eaten an apple before; now they have to fill several 500 kg bins a day to make the minimum wage

Methodology

This paper compares the results of research on “The Foreign Workers in New Zealand’s Horticulture” with the findings published in relevant literature. The research utilized two qualitative methods – participant observation and interviews, followed by data transcription and analysis.

Conducting research among the guest workers meant entering a transient field constituted mostly by mobile backpackers and seasonal workers who follow the harvest times. In April 2009, there were almost 188,000 foreign workers in New Zealand dispersed all over the country. This research used so called “purposive,” “judgement” or “strategic” sampling, where the informants are chosen for a specific reason or purpose. The sample was created according to Angrosino’s (2007) suggestion that it should reflect the heterogeneity of the group being studied. The participants were connected through one employer, but they had previous work experience in other areas. Twenty-eight formal and about thirty informal and unstructured interviews were conducted, which included foreign workers of different nationalities and their managers.

Self-Assessment

Despite the prevailing opinion about mutual advantages of the scheme expressed by many authors, the interviewed non-Pacific workers were sceptical of these perceptions and they articulated the possible negative aspects. The main concern was the possibility that the RSE might damage the traditio-

nal culture of their Ni-Vanuatu co-workers, coming from remote villages. This assumption is difficult to prove and, at present, it is possible only to estimate the extent of possible changes. Further, Pacific workers were viewed as cheap labour, imported to New Zealand because of easy exploitability. Pacific Islanders were depicted as easy to control and misuse because they were perceived as reluctant to complain. This was considered as being due to fear of losing their jobs; they receive significantly higher earnings than on their islands. This concern was partly confirmed by the interviewed Ni-Vanuatu men, who indicated they did not want to complain and risk possible dismissal or other problems.

There was a dichotomy in the description of Pacific workers. One picture drawn by some journalists, by the Department of Labour and by the employers participating in the research tends to depict a satisfied Pacific worker, who was given a possibility to earn money, with which he or she could invest into improving his or her family’s living standard and education. In the view of some non-Pacific workers, there is a seemingly happy Islander, who is in reality taken advantage of and who unknowingly loses a part of his or her culture and identity.

Voices against the notion of “exploited labour”

The picture of Pacific Islanders as exploited victims, maintained by some non-Pacific workers and journalists, is not acceptable as a whole. The RSE scheme is not a cheap alternative to

employing New Zealanders – the employers must pay market rates, half of the airfare and meet other requirements. The RSE places a great amount of responsibility and accountability on employers and is not about making the work easier or cheaper. The viticulturists, initially complaining about the high costs and “mothering” of the workers, changed their opinion in 2009. The workers’ developing skills were appreciated, as well as the elimination of the chronic labour shortages. The orchardists noticed a significant difference in the quality of the produce, which could be harvested at the right times. In brief, the RSE scheme has proved to be a win-win strategy, although the industry’s “win” has dominated during the first year of the policy (Department of Labour 2009).

There are many reasons why the RSE scheme should continue. Managed temporary labour schemes can have many benefits, such as reduction of unemployment, diminishing irregular movement and the “brain drain,” upgrade of skills and possibilities for the families to invest in education and training. Until 2007 and prior to the RSE, the permanent skilled labour movement from the islands predominated, which was the worst-case scenario for Pacific Island countries (Voigt-Graf 2006). Labour migration is often selective of the more talented and ambitious whose loss might have a negative impact. In contrast, the RSE focused on unskilled workers with low income. Unlike the existing scheme, the Pacific Access Category, which attracts more educated applicants, the

RSE opened the ways for poorer workers with less education.

Research results

The results of this research correspond to the findings of the above mentioned authors and indicate that Pacific workers coming under the RSE scheme should not be viewed as a cheap and necessarily exploited labour force. There are many possible benefits for the Pacific countries involved in the program, but possible disadvantages and weak points should be taken into account.

During the first season, there were limited opportunities for women and also limited possibilities to change the employers. The interviews were conducted at a time when the RSE workers could be transferred to another employer when the first one had no more work available or under other specific conditions. Imposing this rule led to a significant dependence of the workers on their first employers. This could create a suitable environment for controversial treatment. Although the interviewed Ni-Vanuatu could not be considered disadvantaged in respect of working hours or the system of payment, the notion of mistreated workers might be partially true. This concerned predominantly the personal approach of some employers, whose behaviour could sometimes be described as controversial. Some of these employers seem to hold stereotypical views of the Pacific workers as naïve, unintelligent and dependent labourers, who need to be approached and managed in a paternalistic way.

The non-Pacific workers' assumption about the possibly spoiled traditional culture of the Ni-Vanuatu is problematic because it does not take into account that this culture has been altered and modernized. The understanding of the "traditional" life in Vanuatu was slightly romantic, simplistic and idealistic. This view resembled the early ethnographic writings describing the alleged timeless, closed and unchanging world of the islanders, but not taking into account the dramatic transformations caused by trading, missionary activities and co-

lonial influences. This opinion seemed to connect the missing showers and electricity with unchanged way of life untouched by the outer world; however the non-Pacific workers did not realize that the "traditional" life has been transformed.

Even if the comments about the spoiled traditional culture are debatable, the informants' scepticism concerning the transferability of Pacific workers' skills might be correct. The Ni-Vanuatu interviewees admitted that most of the skills which they gained in New Zealand will be hardly transferable into their villages because of different crops and other limitations. These skills might provide benefits only if the workers can find employment in their islands.

Conclusion

Work under the RSE scheme limits the freedom of the workers, but it cannot be viewed primarily as exploitation. The workers are controlled by regulations and legal employment conditions. Yet, several issues concerning regulation, labour rights and social impacts need to be addressed, if the seasonal work schemes for Pacific Islanders are to be successful.

Making a viable guest worker program work is not only a challenge for the governments, but also for many other actors who need to cooperate on solving the problematic issues connected with these policies. For example, the governments' main role includes responding to the needs of the labour market, determining the rules of the program in cooperation with the employers and acting as the inspection body (especially in controlling the delivery of pastoral care and its improvement if applicable). The employers' role is crucial and primarily focuses on delivering pastoral care, advocating for the workers within the community, helping them to adjust to a different environment, encouraging workers' involvement into the community and creating constructive recreational activities. The success of the scheme also depends on community willingness to accept Pacific workers and on the islanders themselves, for instance on

their work ethic, on their readiness to learn and on their ability to adapt to different conditions.

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