

# Mekong Tourism Development: Capital or Social Mobilization?

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The current growth of tourism development in Southeast Asia is not necessarily desirable as a government tool to assist in the economic recovery from the region's recent crisis from late 1997 onwards. The key general questions regardless of location, remain: how can conflicts of interests among various groups of all tourism stakeholders be balanced between global and local levels, and what are the objectives in tourism planning—capital or social mobilization? The first part of this paper describes the application of computer software to determine answers to these questions. In Thailand, a small sample of tourism policy-makers was examined to determine their decision-making styles in tourism planning. A tentative conclusion is that they gave great emphasis to an option's correctness, return for effort, and likelihood of acceptance. Preliminary research findings show that one of the most crucial problems relating to sustainable development centres on the contradiction between the ethics of local involvement in decision-making processes compared with that of capital mobilization. This information helps us understand how the ethical problems arose and suggests how alternative principles such as Buddhist ethics could be developed to increase social mobilization towards local sustainability.

Keywords : capital/social mobilization, globalization, local culture, tourism development, ethics.

## Globalization versus Localization

Global economic arrangements and trends towards international integration are in conflict with growing demands for 'bottom-up' local participation, both to fulfil democratic aspirations and for effectiveness in policy development and implementation (Carley and Christie 2000:81). The process of 'globalization' is now taking capital mobilization—a 'top-down' process—to all corners of the world, and western consumption patterns are being emulated in the developing world. It is evident that indefinite increases in unregulated forms of resource consumption are incompatible with agricultural society in remote areas of the Mekong River Basin, and certainly not the types of mass tourism growth promoted by most of the governments in Southeast Asian countries (Boniface and Cooper 2001: 274-279). An essential question to be asked, therefore, is how could these 'top-down' public policies be translated into implementation processes from the perspective of community interests? Indeed, are different forms of tourism development more, or less, suitable to different countries, society or development needs and objectives? (Sharpley and Telfer 2002: 3). Since there is relentless pressure on the human ecology of host communities, mainly on local culture and environment, tourism development will require some alternative policies in the form of qualitative or non-numeric measures to control the unlimited growth of tourism development.

There is a need to examine the different policy approaches initiated by different bodies so as to anticipate both the problems and benefits of tourism development impacts—particularly their effects on sustainability of local resources.

Countries of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)<sup>1</sup> have experienced varying rates of growth in tourism development. However, most development policies focus on physical infrastructure, business opportunities, and marketing (summarized from NESDB 1999 and TISTR 1999). Until now, investment has focused on transportation networks and commercial development rather than the multi-faceted integration of social, environmental, cultural, and ethical aspects, applying a holistic approach. In addition, social and environmental impact assessments in tourism development are rarely acted upon, even where these matters are acknowledged as important in most documents and in various meetings among the private sector, government officials and international organizations (e.g. ADB 1996, PCI and TEAM 1998, PAT A 2000, Parnwell 2001).

Nevertheless, in practice, most host communities in the GMS are experiencing a period of tourism growth that is heavily reliant on the area's unique cultural and natural heritage resources. While increases in tourism demand are quite often good news economically, if the heritage resources—upon which tourism is based—are not carefully

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protected, regions are seriously at risk of losing them forever. There are by now some indications that unplanned tourism development policies have wrought irreversible damage to some of the most precious and irreplaceable heritage sites (Parnwell 2001: 239—244; Pleumarom 2002: 144—150). This paper will attempt to ascertain the root causes of this common problem in the GMS. Participation in tourism planning policies, using Chiang Rai province, Northern Thailand as a study area, will be discussed to clarify alternative future approaches.

### **Roles of Policy-makers**

Because the tourism industry is a primary user of the subregion's heritage resources, deriving a large proportion of its profits from the exploitation of these resources and relying on them for future business, policy-makers and other stakeholders in this industry should commit themselves to conservation initiatives. However, in practice, under the globalization pressures of capital-investment in the free-trade market, government tourism policies in the GMS countries are geared towards, firstly, an increase in the number of tourists and, secondly, economic cooperation between the countries in transportation and commercial investments, such as infrastructure, building construction and marketing promotion (TISTR1999). The main drive is to enhance national income and upgrade physical facilities, which does not necessarily lead to economic benefits to local host communities. This form of short-term economic-oriented development policies focusing on tourist consumer demands rather than upon improving the quality of host communities and the environmental resource base for tourism (encompassing natural, built, and cultural components) could lead to inter-related problems, in terms of social costs and environmental impacts (Chon 2000; Parnwell 2001; Pleumarom 2002; Sharpley and Telfer 2002).

Arising out of the economic boom period, identified by analysts between early 1990s until the 1997, and the Thai Baht devaluation leading to economic crisis (Chon 2000: 55; Phongpaichit and Baker 1998:319), the GMS countries have suffered a challenge to their local identity and cultural diversity. Their governments have developed a fascination with materialism and the outward symbols of modernization in part responding to pressures from the process of globalization. As this process continues to unfold, the communities could lack spiritual and cultural leadership at the local level, while the policy-makers could ignore or reject ethical consciousness in decision-making for transparency and accountability based upon a viable Eastern philosophy (Billington 1997). In addition, most development, either international or domestic, is initiated for political purposes (McCaskill and Kampe 1997: 140).

The development practices in the GMS, for the most part, are mandated by persons with individual and institutional interests and are beneficial for only specific projects or areas (Pleumarom 2002).

### **Contesting Tourism Development and Local Culture**

If globalization fosters the development of a universal culture, characterized by a world of homogeneous consumption, wherein every society holds similar values, there is a high probability of profound impacts on the Mekong River basin, where a significant part of the world's remaining cultural diversity thrives. Cultural diversity is a historical reflection of people's connection along this great river basin in the six GMS countries. The Mekong River flows through these countries from its source in the Tibetan Plateau to the lowlands of the Mekong Delta at the South China Sea. The settlements of various ethnic groups along this geographical link means that there exists a flow of related spiritual beliefs and religious values reflecting similar local cultures and traditions.

While the present global economy seems to spring from a view that enshrines money as the ultimate goal, conflicts of interests in heritage resource utilization have become critical. It has not been questioned whether tourism should be a means of economic development or a means of modernization to improve living standards and whether or not it is possible to modernize lifestyles and living standards without changing the traditions and old customs of the host communities (Sharpley and Telfer 2002:225).

It is easy to see why development practices based upon a western worldview, with its emphasis on secular and material progress, would fail to comprehend and accept such a 'spiritually-based' culture in this subregion. Similarly, it is not difficult to understand why indigenous people would perceive elements of development practices imposed from outside as a threat to their way of life (McCaskill and Kampe 1997: 44-45).

### **Sufficiency Economy: The Case of Thailand**

In the GMS, Buddhist philosophy is certainly one of the principal resources for symbolic ideas, spiritual inspiration, and ethical principles in creating a concept of sustainable development (Silva 1998; Tucker and Williams 1997; Payutto 1995b). However, its significance in this area needs to be thought through.

In Thailand, 'sufficiency' is a Buddhist philosophy commended by His Majesty the King to his subjects through royal remarks on many occasions over the past three decades.<sup>2</sup> The philosophy provides guidance on

appropriate conduct covering numerous aspects of life. After the economic crisis in 1997, His Majesty reiterated and expounded on the 'Sufficiency Economy' in December 1997. The philosophy points the way for a recovery that is expected to lead to a more resilient and sustainable economy, better capable of meeting the challenges arising from globalization and related changes.

The 'Sufficiency Economy' is a philosophy that stresses the middle path as the overriding principle for appropriate conduct by the populace at all levels. This applies to conduct at the level of the individual, families and communities, as well as to the choice of a balanced development strategy for the nation. Thus providing a local framework for modernization in line with the forces of globalization, while providing a buffer against the inevitable shocks and excesses that result (Giddens 2001; Wasi 1994; Schumacher 1973).

'Sufficiency' means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct, as well as the need for sufficient protection from internal and external shocks. To achieve this, the application of knowledge with prudence, especially from various sources of local wisdom, is essential. In particular, great care is needed in the utilization of untested theories and methodologies for planning and implementation. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the moral fibre of the nation, so that everyone, particularly, political and public officials, technocrats, businessmen and financiers, adhere to the principles of honesty and integrity. In addition, a balanced approach, combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence is indispensable so as to cope appropriately with the critical challenges arising from the extensive and rapid socio-economic, environmental, and cultural changes occurring as a result of globalization.

How can key government agencies concerned with tourism development change their current attitude of achieving only income or numeric values? To create a strong base with a bottom-up policy, tourism proposals should be initiated from a grassroots level through community participation, based upon the concept of tourism collaboration and partnerships (Bramwell and Lane 2000: 333-340).

#### Tourism Development: Choices of Policy Approach

The challenge for tourism development is to assist social and cultural growth that exist in the aspirations and objectives of the host communities. The desired economic outcome is one of sustainable tourism for those tourism destinations that are able to develop their own particular

cultural environments, and maintain their unique sense of place and social ambience, especially at the community scale (Hall and Lew 1998). Therefore, each community should have an individual tourism policy option, appropriate to that particular locality. This will not be an easy task, because the interactions of resource, visitor, and host community are often complex, markedly different from one area and country to another, and often rapidly changing.

In the uplands of Northern Thailand, for example, there has been an over development of approaches for home-stay, village-based and trekking tourism in the sensitive areas of tribal villages. The most urgent tasks are the study of destination management focusing on socio-cultural impacts and the site's carrying capacity. If 'development' is to take place, we need to know in which area, at what scale, to what degree and in what time frame. What activities should be controlled or promoted? Which facilities should be invested in or renovated? How would an increasing number of tourists be controlled? And what should be the development threshold in each area? If these questions cannot be analysed efficiently and monitored consistently by key decision-makers and inter-disciplinary policy-makers, it will be difficult to achieve sustainable outcomes of tourism development (Hall and Lew 1998, Bramwell and Lane 2000).

#### Towards Capital or Social Mobilization?

It is doubtful that some remote areas in the GMS countries can continue to be agricultural societies without tourism in the near future. The point is that decisions about which activities they would like to start need to be made by each local society, not by capital economic forces, especially as exemplified by the rapid increase of marketing promotion packages from international tour operators.

In the GMS countries, each government, institution, organization, private company and community has its own development plans. In practice, these do not work well together. Stakeholder-based approaches to tourism development seem to be a key step towards greater transparency in the management of the common interests in planning applications. Heritage resources, visitors, and host communities should be the major concerns, rather than individuals or institutions.

The way ahead in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—in the era of globalisation—would seem to be to go beyond the same forms of tourism policy options for all places. Furthermore, it is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the present realities of the dynamic world around us. For example, if the tourism phenomenon is defined as a

'process' that can change from time to time, would tourism policies with local participation in decision-making processes provide a more sustainable alternative outcomes than traditional mass tourism directed from a 'top-down' approach?

Attitudes of Policy-makers

In the first quarter of 2000, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with various top-level policy-makers in Thailand, both in the public and private sectors, so as to identify their goals and preferred policy options. The key leaders/informants in potential tourism attractions, NGO representatives and planners were included. To give a macro assessment of policy options used for the CMS and particularly those that have been applied for tourism development, the four major groups of senior multi-level policy-makers in relevant fields of tourism planning and development (13 persons) were carefully selected so as to identify their various views of tourism development goals and preferred policy options. They were:

- (i) central government officials (four persons);
- (ii) local government officials (five persons);
- (iii) local private entrepreneurs (two persons); and
- (iv) local NGO officials (two persons).

In order to review their perceptions about tourism planning policies, they were asked to use the computer-aided policy-making software known as *Strategizer* (Wyatt 1999). This programme asks each user to input their ultimate

goal along with suggested options for achieving it. Later, all the types of goals and options were counted up, to arrive at definite results (Table 1). The numbers in the brackets indicate frequency of goals and policy options. The sequences of asking questions in the programme are simplified and adapted to this study from Wyatt (1999: 165—191):

- (i) What is your *ultimate goal* in tourism development planning and for whom?;
- (ii) What are your *top three* preferred tourism policy options?;
- (iii) Please score a value of -10 to +10 for each option according to your preference evaluation of these 10 criteria (listed below). It is important that every user has a very accurate understanding of the meaning for each evaluation criterion before they proceed further; and
- (iv) The computer software will record automatically the overall score in each option afterwards. Then, please give the reasons of your favourite one.

*Strategizer* is also able to deduce users' decision-making styles. It does so by recording the relationship between policy options' desirability levels and their scores on the following 10 policy-evaluation criteria (adapted from Wyatt 1999:177):

- *Correct?* means how much it makes one feel good;
- *Responsive?* means amount of payoff per unit of effort

Table 1. Results of Policy Preferences: Goals and Options

Aspects	Goals	Policy options
• Economic	Local income improvement (6) Overall economic benefits (1) Self-reliant economy (1)	Tourism product development (6) Marketing promotion (2) Funding for tourism activities (2) Agritourism (1)
• Environmental	Sustainable local resources (2) Environmental Conservation (1)	Resource management (4) Conservation programmes (3) Ecotourism (1)
• Social	Local participation (1)	Public relations through all media (4) Education and training (4) Raising local awareness (3) Local participation/empowerment (2) Public safety, well-being (2)
• Political	Consensus of all stakeholders (1)	Civil society, decentralization (2) Legal administrative improvement (1)
• Cultural/Spiritual	—	Cultural identity enhancement (2)

in trying to achieve this option;

- *Likely?* means likely to be implemented;
- *Fast?* means able to be achieved quickly;
- *Improvable?* means possible room still left for improvement of this option;
- *Effective?* means influence on attainment of the overall goal;
- *Permissive?* means not standing in the way of other things being achieved as well;
- *Safe?* means unlikely to cause future problems;
- *Independent?* means not dependent, for its attainment, on the attainment of other options;
- *Easy?* means not difficult.

From these findings, we can identify that the most popular goal and policy option in tourism planning, for the top-level policy-makers, is to increase the local income by developing tourism products and commercial facilities. Therefore, in practice, the highest priority and percentage of the investment budget allocation in the public sector is likely to be devoted to physical infrastructure development rather than to long-term political/socio-cultural/spiritual development.

Table 2. Policy-makers' Planning Style

Criterion	Importance (Correlation value)
Correctness	0.89
Responsiveness	0.82
Likelihood	0.81
Speed	0.73
Improvability	0.66
Effectiveness	0.64
Permissiveness	0.62
Safety	Not significant
Independence	Not significant
Ease	Not significant

Source: Analysed from data input of the 10 criteria in *Strategizer* computer software-

The planning style of all respondents taken together is shown in Table 2. This is a more consensual approach to policy-making. It favours 'correct' plans that are likely to generate a self-evident return for all the efforts that people will eventually be asked to contribute. Also, it suggests the importance for the respondents of choosing options that others in the community will favour —the likely, more

feasible alternatives. In short, these policy-makers seem much more focused on the social acceptance of any plan rather than on its objective economic and environmental effectiveness.

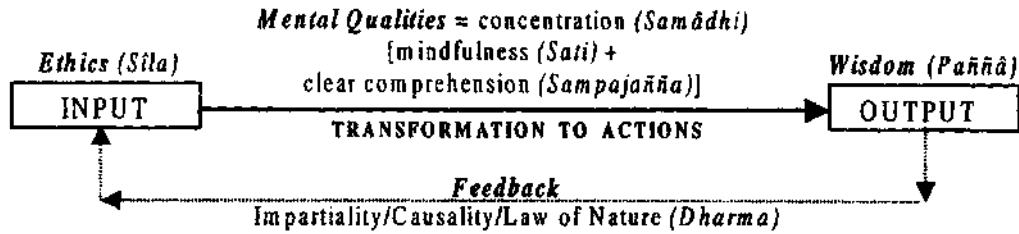
For those seeking to enhance social mobilization and grassroots involvement, the findings suggest that the introduction of ethical principles in policy-makers' planning goals will be necessary before those people can broaden their awareness of the multi-faceted impacts of tourism development on communities.

### Buddhist Ethics: Towards Local Participation

Many apparent attempts to encourage local participation amount to varying degrees of tokenism, where people are consulted or informed about a decision, but where they really have little or no power to affect it (Amstein 1969). Based on participants observations during the field study discussed in the preceding section and a subsequent fieldwork in three selected community-based tourism destinations in Chiang Rai province, ethical principles are the crucial 'input' factors affecting people's attitudes. The problems of insignificant levels of local participation in tourism planning policies and conflicts of interests are both ethical problems in practice. It seems that the willingness of local people to participate in the planning process is strongly related to what they have learned and experienced in their lives, and the degree of ethical inputs that they see in policy settings affecting them, and the resulting outputs of action plans and implementation processes.

A conceptual diagram of the basic Buddhist ethical concept of human mindset development is proposed in Figure 1.

The following proposed ethical principles<sup>3</sup> are the ideologies of the 'trade-off' system, using Theravada Buddhist philosophy as a tool to indicate the balance between problems and benefits. If these principles are to be applied to tourism development, there are three levels of the participatory learning process for policy-makers and various groups of tourism stakeholders at which they can be applied in the introduction of village-based tourism planning practices seeking to achieve local sustainability. This learning process (Smith 2001) could apply at the individual level (self-development/control), community level (influential part of the social system) and inter-organizational level (appreciation of the whole environment system). The series of Buddhist ethical transformations from the problems to the benefits in these three levels are explained as follows:



**Figure 1. Self-development in Buddhist ethics**

(Note: Sanskrit words in brackets)

1. Self-Development (individual learning)
  - 1.1 Morality (Sila + Samadhi): balancing *altruism* (sense of giving/sharing, honesty/ dignity and philanthropism towards accountability and transparency) and *greed* (individualism/egoism towards own benefits and corruption).
  - 1.2 Wisdom (Pannd): balancing *impartiality (dhamma)* in Buddhism means the laws of nature—understanding the truth with impartial consciousness leading to enlightenment) and *bias* (inequity, ignorance, carelessness, making someone unjustly suffer).
2. Interactive Learning (social organizations learning)
  - 2.1 Holism and Dynamism (Anicca-Idappaccayata): balancing *interdependence* (understanding of multi-dimensional phenomena through life cycle, integrity values, uncertainty/interrelation of multi-faceted social networks) and *disconnection* (objective-oriented value, singular concern/attraction/interest).
  - 2.2 Sufficiency (Attahi attdno natho): balancing *self-reliance* (sufficiency economy with a civil society concept—trust in local action/production) and *unlimited growth* (productive economic efficiency, belief in concept of profit-driven operations).
3. External Influences (macro social environments learning)
  - 3.1 Non-violence (Ahimsd + Khanti): balancing *cooperation* (compromising with forbearance/concord, having democratic public consensus without oppression) and *competition* (command/control/fighting for victory).
  - 3-2 Causality (Paticca-samuppada + Yonisomanasik & ra): balancing an *adaptive system* (causes and conditions towards alternative options/integrated solutions with systematic/critical attention to both the pros and cons arguments through the processes) and a *rigid system*

(fixed output/timeframe, extreme ultimate/closed solution focusing on 'end-product' rather than 'process').

This proposed model in Figure 2 reflects the three suggested learning levels of ethics for facilitating participatory development policies; i.e. self-development (inward), interactive learning (mediator) and external influences (outward). These draft guidelines should not be considered as formulae but rather contributing to awareness that could bring about appropriate outcomes from balanced development, particularly for the concerned agencies of the GMS governments. In this era of 'moral crisis', these ethical principles could also be applied to other types of planning applications concerned with the concept of sustainable development, not just to the tourism industry.

**Applications of the Ethical Principles to Development Practices**

Tourism planners and practitioners may have to explore a new development paradigm for alternative tourism development solutions. Wasi (1994:9-16) described the strong link between the concept of sustainable development and Buddhist ethics as intrinsic harmony between humankind and the Laws of Nature (*Dharma* in Buddhist discourse). His holistic model of integrated development between physical, social and mental freedom is shown in Figure 3.

In trying to bring about balance of whole system of local resources, there must always be communication with local people to ensure awareness in both physical and mental dimensions, so that the future development changes in host societies become more equitable, fair and participatory. Moreover, evaluation of the impacts needs to be assessed without political pressure or biases. Lastly, strategic action plans of tourism resource management and monitoring programmes must be efficiently examined from time to time to reduce undesirable and/or unintentional impacts.

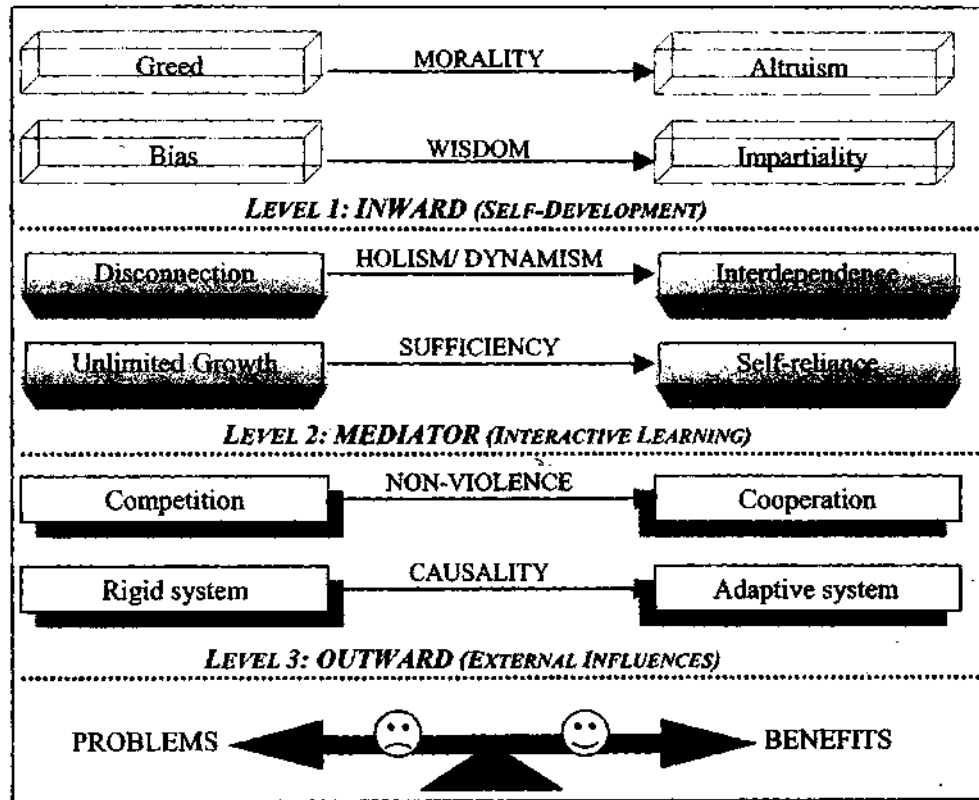
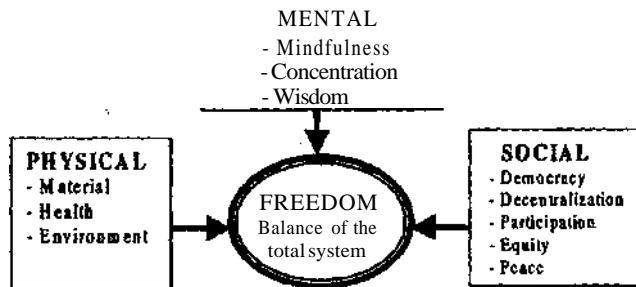


Fig. 2. Buddhist ethics: balancing problems and benefits



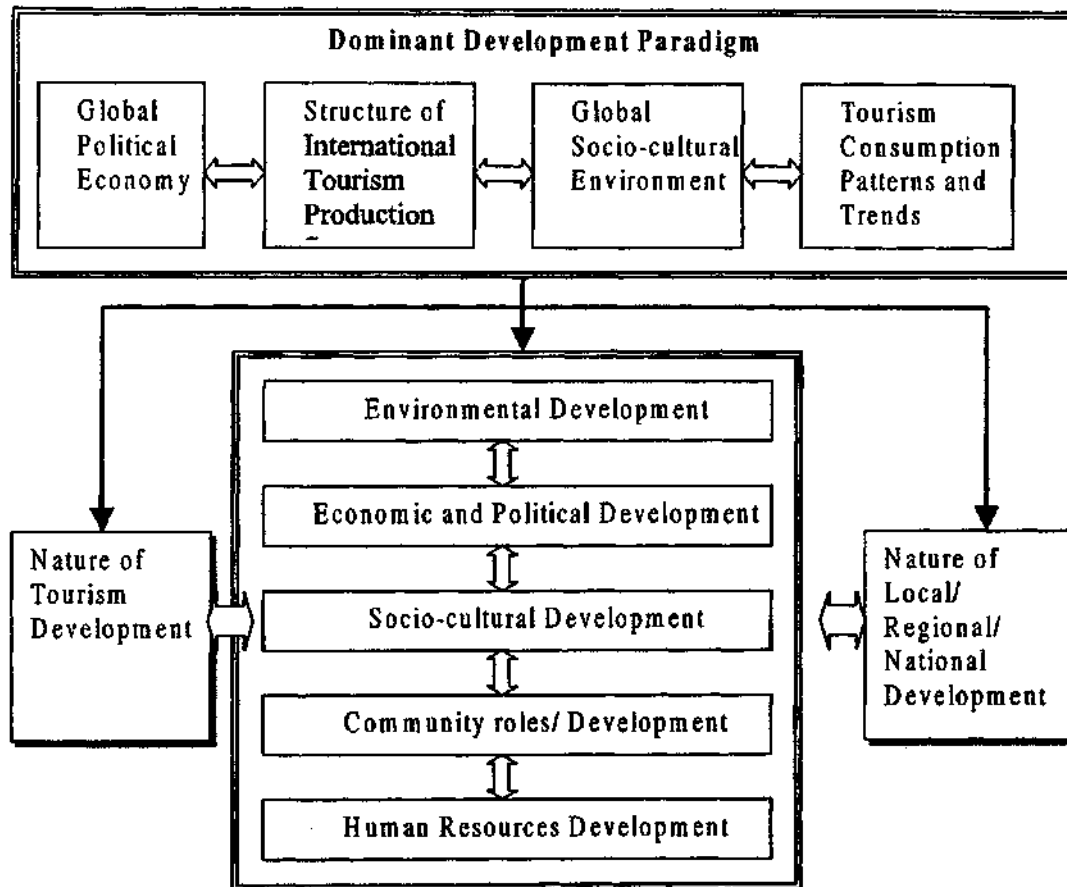
Source: Adapted from Wasi, P. (1994:14)

Fig. 3. An Integrated Buddhist Development Model

The development studies in tourism practices could be conceptualized as a relationship diagram (Figure 4). This comprehensive structure introduces and emphasises, the centrality of an ethical dimension into deliberation about planning and development processes. The Buddhist ethical principle of "holism and dynamism" implies the existence of, and seeks to define the interface between alternative

development paradigms and the economic, environmental, socio-cultural and human dimensions. Their relationships are interconnected to deal with the nature of future development changes in multi-layers of spatial and temporal structures.

The last Buddhist ethical principle of 'causality' focusing on an "adaptive system" requires the characteristics in planning processes and organizations as described on the left in Table 3. Rather than attempting to control or stabilize the tourism systems, policies and practices should focus on establishing opportunities to learn and adapt from changing situations (Bramwell and Lane 2000: 251). That means the planning and development practices should provide a range of objectives, alternative policies, adaptive indicators and appropriate communication networks among relevant parties to overcome the unexpected future changes (Dearden and Mitchell 1998). The requirements listed in Table 3 also reflect a connection for other proposed Buddhist ethical principles such as interdependence and cooperation.



Source: Adapted from Sharpley and Telfer 2002: 4

**Fig. 4. Relationship between Tourism and Development Studies**

Conclusion: Conflict Resolution towards Social Mobilization

While temporary material benefits and basic services may have been achieved through government agencies' offer to local communities, in their pursuit of an 'unlimited growth' tourism development model, the western materialistic and individualistic values that slowly sink into the region's once communitarian indigenous culture cannot be ignored or discounted. Because of the *conflicts of interests* in tourism planning and development policies, it is necessary to encourage policy-makers and local communities to think, plan and work together. Efforts to avoid or obstruct this at the planning stage could result in detrimental effects on the host communities. Therefore, a continuous exchange of information between all parties is eminent (Watt *et al.* 2000:130).

The research findings in Table 1 and 2 reinforce the suggestion that problems of not giving due weight to non-economic policy issues and efficiency in tourism planning still exist and it will take time to shift the attitudes of those policy-makers to rethink in terms of long-term holistic outcomes. This may be an indication of emerging ethical problems that similar potential areas for the development of tourism will need to face in the CMS countries. The proposed six Buddhist ethical principles represented in the centre of Figure 2 serve as a developmental code of conduct to bring disparate groups together with less conflict. They are morality, wisdom, holism and dynamism, sufficiency, non-violence, and causality.

Socio-cultural mobilization at the local level with the objective of balancing various problems and benefits for the 'common interest' should be an obligation for all relevant stakeholders. More importantly, it must be consistent



**Table 3. Characteristics of Adaptive System**

Adaptive Planning Processes	Requirements
Collaboration of interests	- Identification of stakeholders - Recognizes that participants are in the best position to identify issues and resolutions
Identification of values	- Participants must have genuine desire to build consensus and reach mutually acceptable solutions
Progress through structured improvements	- Participants of a well designed process - Establishment of checkpoints and feedback mechanisms
Continuous learning and modification	- Mechanism for on-going monitoring - Willingness to implement required changes
Adaptive Organizations	Requirements
Well defined mandates, flexible processes	- Minimum critical specification - Some autonomy or authority granted to planning organization
Innovative membership	- Dedicated to continuous learning and self-evaluation - Members explore new approaches
Multi-participant systems	- Anticipatory scanning - Allow public scrutiny
Integration and coordination of related processes	- Establish link to diverse interests and functions - Implementation capacity

Source: Adapted from Reed, M.G. in Bramwell and Lane 2000: 252

throughout future planning and development policies. Tourism policy-makers have to determine their ethical positions to prevent emergence of issues that cause conflicts. An example of issues to be addressed is the design of quality alternative education/ training/entrepreneurship development programmes for the benefit of host communities. However, this in turn essentially requires the right blend of local wisdom, skills, attitudes, aptitudes, commitments, and political ethics to mitigate what could become a more serious 'moral crisis' of the Mekong region in the near future.

*'...Buddhism endorses a spirit of toleration and cooperation with the natural world. It does so because this traditional mode of behaviour is given a specific sense by the tradition, and in the final analysis does not come into conflict with the ultimate goal, which is transcendence of the conditioned world. From the perspective of enlightenment, nothing may have aortal purpose or essential value, but at least in the early stages of the spiritual path, Buddhism acts as though it does. Here then is one of the many paradoxes encountered in the study of this unique religious system of thought.'* (Harris in Harvey 2001: 254)

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### Endnotes

- 1 The subregion is defined by contiguous areas that share the Mekong River : Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China.

An unofficial paper of the Bangkok office of National Economic and Social Development Board, compiled in November 1999 from remarks made by His Majesty the King on various occasions.

These proposed ethical principles are collectively synthesized from many sources (such as Schumacher 1973; Senge 1990; Payutto 1994,1995a, b; Tucker and

Williams 1997 and Silva 1998) and relate to the core teachings of Buddha and the author own experiences when he was a Buddhist monk in 1995. They were also inspiringly suggested during the three-hour interview in April 2000 with venerable Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A.Payutto), who is widely acknowledged as Thailand's foremost Buddhist scholar (Payutto 1995b).

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