

MAPPING TRADITIONAL BELIEF SYSTEMS AND ESTABLISHING CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS IN A HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE.

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ABSTRACT:

The simplest and obvious use of Geographical Information Systems in Cultural Heritage Management is in the area of mapping tangible heritage features and predictive modelling of archaeological sites. Recent research using remote sensing in Angkor has established the enormity and complexity of the Archaeological Park. Community-inclusive heritage management approaches are being used widely in the recent years. The research seeks to establish the cultural connections of the local population to the Angkor World Heritage Site. The intangible values of the tangible remains and the cultural practices are spatially mapped in order to understand the contemporary society's connections with the historical landscape. The cultural heritage values of Angkor from the perspective of its local community are mapped using GIS, and this is hoped; will add to the existing knowledge base in the understanding of Angkor. The author seeks methods to map cultural heritage values using Angkor as a case study. It is hoped that this integrated and holistic approach will help in establishing methods to prioritise heritage management information.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 GIS and Cultural Heritage Management (CHM)

'A Geographical Information System (GIS) system is a computer-based technology for producing, organizing and analysing spatial information. GIS has capabilities for database management, mapping, image processing and statistical analysis'.(Box, 1999)

GIS has been adopted world wide in a variety of CHM projects and in a wide range of applications including inventorying and mapping of architectural, cultural and archaeological heritage, predictive modelling of archaeological sites, heritage tourism and urban planning. Mapping methods have been primarily used to map the tangible aspects in the landscape. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate GIS as a valuable tool in mapping cultural heritage values, particularly in linking the intangible values to the tangible features from the perspective of the locals.

1.2 Philosophies governing CHM

'Cultural resource management (CRM) encompasses recognition, description, maintenance, security and the overall management of cultural resources. The objective of CRM is to ensure the protection of the cultural significance, integrity and authenticity of the resource for the present and future generations through conservation and sustainable resource utilisation'.(Box, 1999)

The Athens Charter of 1931 defined these basic principles for the first time; contributing to the development of an extensive international movement. The second international congress of architects and specialists of historic buildings in Venice (1964)

adopted thirteen resolutions on restoration and also created International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). (ICOMOS, 2006)

Development in ideologies and philosophies continued and led the way to a number of charters, resolutions and declarations. The initial focus was on buildings and a great deal of emphasis was placed onto their restoration and maintenance. The concepts were primarily centred on a European context and defined in terms of its culture and cities.

It was not until the late twentieth century that declarations and documents were created to suit non-European contexts. Article 8 of the Nara Document on authenticity (1994) states: 'Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it.' (Byrne et al., 2003) The revised Burra Charter established the notion of a 'place' and laid emphasis to the social value. (Burra Charter, 1999) The Hoi-An Protocol (1999), China Principles (2000) and the draft Indian Charter (2004) emphasise the need for contextualising heritage management approaches in their respective cultural context. (Taylor, 2004)

Nevertheless, despite these developments, the focus of heritage management has been primarily attributed to the tangible remains. The UNESCO conventions on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) and Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) mark the beginning of, an emerging trend which looks at diverse cultures, social values and intangible cultural aspects. This has further paved the way for the need to include the local communities in heritage management, especially in indigenous contexts.

* . The author is currently pursuing doctoral research at the University of Sydney. This paper is part of a larger research titled: 'Re-interpreting the Greater Angkor Cultural Landscape – An integrated approach to Cultural Heritage Management using GIS'. The PhD is an APAI (Australian Postgraduate Award – Industry) scholarship, part of an ARC (Australian Research Council) Linkage grant titled 'Living with Heritage: Integrating time, place and culture for World Heritage Conservation'; a multi-disciplinary project collaborating with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), EFEO (École Française d'Extrême-Orient), APSARA (Autorité pour la Protection du Site et l'Aménagement de la Région d'Angkor) and other partners.

Conservation decisions are usually guided by an assessment of heritage values. Assessment of values is usually difficult, due to the diverse nature of values stemming from cultural, economic, political, aesthetic, scientific and more – and the fact that values change over time and are shaped by contextual factors such as social forces, cultural trends are not to be ignored. (Mason, 2002) Accordingly, it is important to consider the contexts of a heritage conservation project – social, cultural, economic, geographical, administrative as deeply and seriously as the artefact, monument or site itself is considered. (Mason, 2002)

1.3 Methods in mapping Cultural Heritage

‘Mapping has been mankind’s indispensable tool in elucidating natural and cultural landscapes and is used for a myriad of purposes’. (UNESCO, 2006) UNESCO has introduced concepts of cultural mapping since early 21st century. Various projects in various Asian countries use cultural mapping.

Mapping of cultural values are critical in ascertaining the significance of a place to the local and global communities. Assessment of cultural values needs anthropological techniques because as Low points out “most cultural landscapes are identified solely in terms of their historical, rather than their contemporary importance to the community. To involve the public in a meaningful way, we need to understand the contemporary population’s relationship to the site, their reactions and feelings about it and we need to learn what parts of those responses can be used to capture their interest to learn more, and to help us conserve and preserve those sites” (Low, 2002)

Cultural mapping has been recognized by UNESCO as a crucial tool and technique in preserving the world’s intangible and tangible cultural assets. It encompasses a wide range of techniques and activities from community-based participatory data collection and management to sophisticated mapping using GIS. The different methods of cultural mapping illustrated on the UNESCO-Bangkok’s Cultural Mapping web site are Social Mapping, Cognitive Maps, Concept Map and Mind map. (UNESCO, 2006) The author has focussed on the concepts of Mind map for the preliminary field work conducted.

1.3.1 Mind map: A mind map is a learning and thinking tool which has revolutionized the process of taking down notes and absorbing information. By using the mind map, the ‘shape’ of the central subject/topic and the linkages to related ideas or points are shown in a structure or format that the mind can easily understand and process information. (UNESCO, 2006)

2. ANGKOR WORLD HERITAGE SITE

2.1 Introduction

The Angkor Archaeological Park was inscribed onto the World Heritage list in 1992 on the basis of criterion (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) of the World Heritage Convention which includes the monuments and the archaeological zones. Due to the then political instability (Cambodia was placed under the United Nations in 1991) and in order to address the problems of monument conservation effectively and quickly, Angkor was also inscribed onto the list of World Heritage in Danger. On the basis of the ICOMOS report, an official advisory body to UNESCO set up in 1965; the concerned authorities were required to meet certain conditions in order to deal with the conservation of the archaeological park, ‘which included:

- a) *enact* adequate protective legislation;
- b) *establish* an adequately staffed national protection agency;
- c) *establish* permanent boundaries based on the UNDP project;
- d) *define* meaningful buffer zones;
- e) *establish* monitoring and coordination of the international conservation effort’ (WHC, 1992)

2.2 Recent Research on Angkor

The Angkor Archaeological Park extends over an area of nearly 400 square kilometres and includes some remarkable examples of *Khmer* architecture spanning a period of six centuries. Since the French arrival in the region, a great deal of research has been carried out in epigraphy, architecture, archaeology, geography, art history and anthropology. (Dagens, 1995) Maps of Angkor region since the beginning of the 20th century invariably centred on the Angkor Archaeological Park with emphasis to the monuments. The map (Figure 1) created by French researcher B.P.Groslier showed for the first time some features to the north of Angkor. (Groslier, 1979)

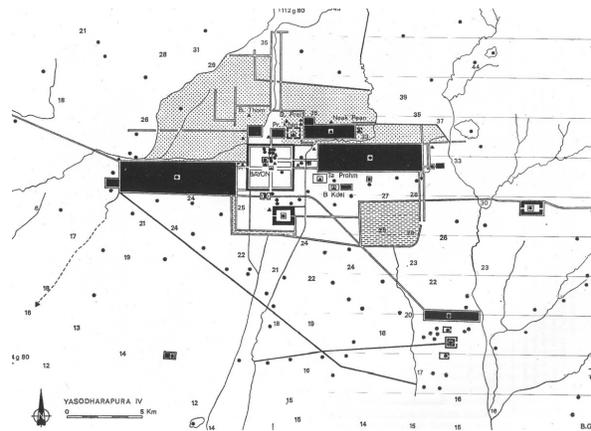


Figure 1. (1979) Angkor and surrounds – B.P.Groslier

Remote Sensing in recent decades has helped in a more comprehensive understanding of the site. The systematic mapping (Figure 2) carried out by Pottier (Pottier, 1999) in the 90s changed the perception of Angkor.



Figure 2. (1999) Map of region south of Angkor – C.Pottier

This information has been considerably supplemented in recent years with the work of the Greater Angkor Project* (Figure 3) using AIRSAR and aerial photographs. (GAP, 2003)

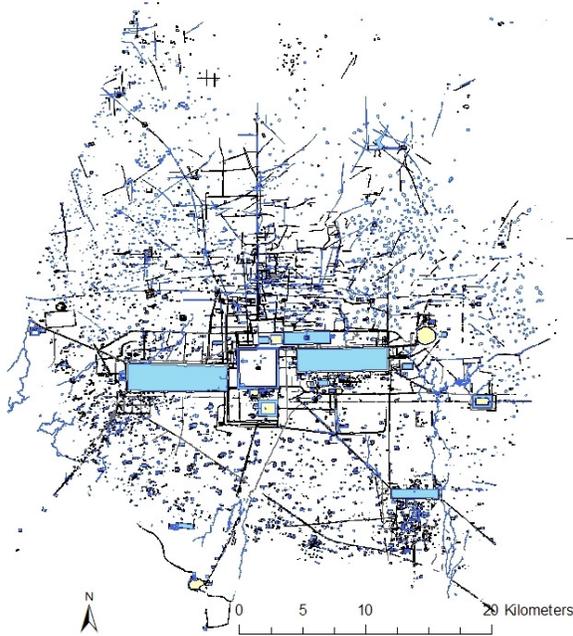


Figure 3. (2002) Map of Angkor region (Angkor Park and the region south – C.Pottier; North of Angkor – D.Evans)

The Angkor archaeological site is now recognised as a complex cultural landscape which includes temples, ruins, canals, embankments, occupation mounds, dykes, *baray* (reservoir), *trapeang* (pond), historical roads and bridges along with the monumental features which have been extensively researched since the early 20th century. (Dagens, 1995) The cultural region is much larger than the designated Angkor Archaeological Park. The countryside surrounding the historical capitals of Hariharalaya (Roluos), Yashodharapura (Angkor Thom) is dotted with local shrines and occupation mounds. The landscape and its rich cultural context need to be understood for its continuity in occupation. The author's research endeavours to document 21st century society's connections with the rich archaeological landscape and seeks to help protect and manage the cultural material above and below ground.

2.3 Local Community

The Angkor Park has approximately 100 villages housing a population close to 100,000. The villagers live, cultivate the landscape and practise their cultural beliefs in this historical

* The Greater Angkor Project is a collaborative research project of Sydney University and other Australian, Cambodian and French researchers. Angkor, the medieval Khmer capital, was the most extensive pre-industrial city on Earth. The city's massive, delicately balanced infrastructure of canals and embankments covered more than 1000 sq km. New integrated analyses of this networks development, operation and failure, and the dynamics of the landscape, will identify the inter-connected role of infra-structural inertia and environmental impact in the demise of Angkor.

Angkorian landscape. 'A fragile thread of continuity connects life around the ancient capital of the kingdom of Cambodia to the distant past' (Luco, 2000) Today, the cultural connections of the society to the Angkorian landscape are not obvious to the outsider. The author is seeking to explore methods to map this cultural connection and establish its significance.

'The political trauma which the nation went through during the *Khmer* rouge regime (in the 1970s) has caused a great deal of havoc in disrupting cultural life and social order. Cambodia's past and recent history - a long succession of battles, internal conflicts, rebellions, insurrections, territorial partitions and supervision by foreign countries - provides a partial explanation for the partitioning of the population and the prevailing feeling of insecurity. Still today, Cambodia is barely recovering from 30 years of war and intense violence'. (Luco, 2002)

Today, the phenomenon of globalisation is also impacting on the community's cultural values and life style. It is critical to document the intangible values and practices of the people at this point of change for the benefit of the future generation.

The World Heritage site management needs to integrate the recent research on Angkor with the values and perceptions of the local community living amongst the historical remains and a contextualised approach in the Cambodian context. An Integrated, multi-disciplinary and holistic approach is critical.

2.4 Religion in Angkor

The precise nature of state religions and their history in the Angkorian period has not been established definitively. The monumental remains are some indicators of prevalent religious affiliations of the time. There is evidence of Hinduism and Buddhism (Vajrayana) through the earlier temples. Religious Syncretism existed; one example of evidence is Preah Khan (Coe, 2003). It is possible that Buddhism and Hinduism were treated equally at this point. Later Theravadan Buddhism was adopted as the state religion and by 14th and 15th centuries, Cambodia was a Buddhist nation. Angkor Wat initially dedicated to Vishnu was later re-consecrated to Buddha. (Coe, 2003)

2.4.1 Ancestral Deity worship: The practice of ancestral deity worship has been and remains the centre of the Cambodian farmers throughout history. (Forest, 1992) Though very little is known about the origin of these deities and associated cultural practices, they are still very much a conscious part of the *Khmer* society. This has become evident through the preliminary field research conducted by the author.

Ch. Ang's research on the material representation of ancestral deities (*anak tā*) reveals that representations of *anak tā* vary from an amorphous form in an idol-less shelter to anthropomorphic representation of a brute stone spirit. The earth is the social territory into which the local community's ancestors are condensed. His research further reveals the perception of Śivaism in ancient Cambodia and the adoption of the *linga* as an ideal material and ritual extension of the brute stone. (Ang, 1995)

The *Khmer* population in villages exhibit strong belief in ancestral deity worship. Each village has its set of *anak tā*, where rituals are conducted. *Anak tā* is sometimes an idol-less shelter, or an idol or at times a tree or a location or a feature on

the landscape. A *Prah Khum* (navel of the village) is a place close to the geographical centre of the village, where rituals related to the welfare of the village are conducted. (Ang, 2006)

3. ESTABLISHING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

This research seeks to establish the cultural connections of the contemporary society living in the Angkor archaeological park. An understanding of the local community's perceptions of heritage and the values that are most significant to them is critical in order to manage the Angkor World Heritage site in a more systematic and inclusive manner.

3.1 Cultural Heritage Values

The term 'Cultural Heritage' includes and integrates the tangible and intangible aspects of a heritage site. In the past conservation ideology was primarily driven by architectural, archaeological and artistic values defined by the Venice charter. (ICOMOS, 2006) As has been discussed, the emerging CHM philosophies are beginning to pay attention to social values and the local community living amongst heritage sites.

'For a complete understanding of heritage values however, a combination of methods from various disciplines needs to be included for a comprehensive assessment of the values of a heritage site. The ultimate aim of conservation is not to conserve material for its own sake but, rather, to maintain (and shape) the values embodied by the heritage—with physical intervention or treatment being one of many means toward that end. To achieve that end, such that the heritage is meaningful to those whom it is intended to benefit (i.e., future generations), it is necessary to examine *why* and *how* heritage is valued, and by whom'. (Low, 2002)

3.2 Mapping of Cultural Values

The preliminary field survey was focussed on case studies of selected villages. The researcher chose three villages in the Roluos group of monuments which represent the first capital of the Angkorian kings. The capital Hariharalaya came into being around the 8th century (Coe, 2003). Some of the key monuments include the Bakong temple, the Preah Ko temple, the Prei Monti complex, the Lolei *Baray* and the Lolei temple in the centre of the *baray*. (Figure 4)

The villages were chosen on the basis of their proximity to a large heritage feature in the landscape. The villages chosen were Lolei, which is situated on the embankment around the Lolei *Baray*, Ovloak and Thnal Trang villages (Figure 4) which are around the Bakong temple. Interviews were conducted amongst various sections of the villagers including the village chief, monks, shop keepers and other locals. The intent was to comprehend and identify the connections of the people with the landscape and their perceptions related to the heritage, their values and belief systems and their cultural practices.

The base map for the field survey as shown in figure 4 includes EFEO inventory and the details identified by Pottier: channels, moats, mounds, reservoirs and water-courses. (Pottier, 1999)

The most obvious features are the temples, ruins, large water bodies. Water bodies are referred to in the local language as *baray*, *trapeang* or *beng* depending on its context and size.

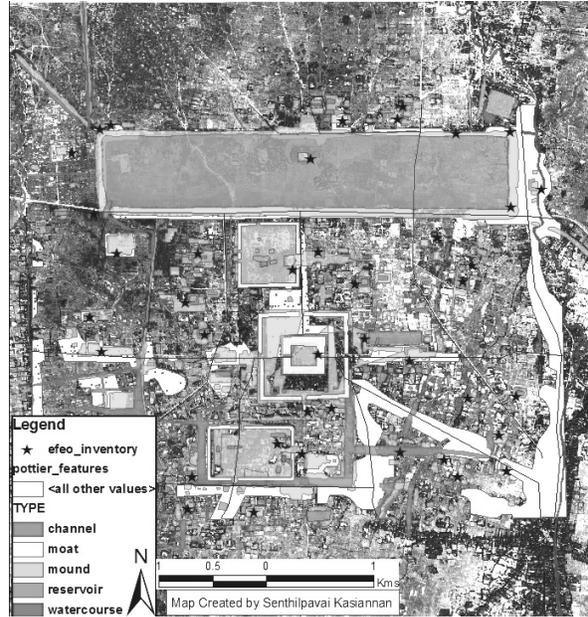


Figure 4. (2002) Base map of case study region; tangible attributes mapped by Pottier/EFEO overlaid on SPOT image

The less prominent features, which maybe of high cultural heritage value, are the culverts (a few of them are intact), embankments and roads. The lesser obvious features in the landscape are archaeological mounds, mostly obvious from air, spatial maps and the like. In case of ancient *prasat* sites, due to intangible association of *anak tā* spirits there are remnants of cultural activity in the form of ritual offering. The obvious signs are incense and offering to laterite or sandstone blocks which have been appropriated as the *anak tā form*.

The information obtained so far, has been mapped using GIS onto the base map which includes the tangible heritage features.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The methods used for data collection in the field include key informant interviews, expert interviews and impromptu group sessions. Some techniques of Mind Mapping, Observational and Ethnographic methods were used to comprehend the complexity of the cultural connections of Angkor's present society.

The data included basic demographic information of name, age, primary occupation and basic details of the interviewee along with the name /names of village, its extent and details. Further questions sought to identify cultural features in the landscape. Hard copy maps were used subject to the comfort of the interviewee. Some villagers drew their maps on the ground and sometimes on paper. The local *Khmer* terms like *kok* (mound), *trapeang* (pond), *beng* (large pond/reservoir), *prasat* (Hindu temple), *thnal* (road) were used with the help of a local interpreter to identify the tangible features.

This was followed by questions related to the *anak tā* (Ancestral deity). Their names, locations, significance, rituals performed and any associated story if known. The cultural and religious practices and where in the village they took place, and how the historical monuments were viewed by the community. The interviews were audio-recorded and detailed notes were written

down. The interviews took an hour to an hour and a half depending on the time of the day and the interviewee.

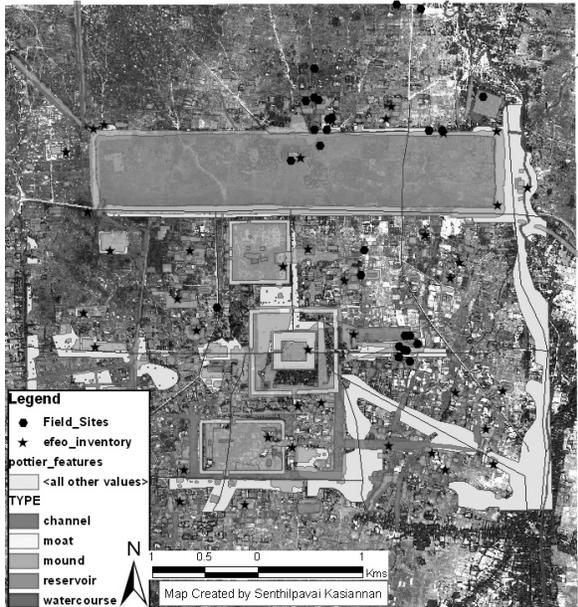


Figure 5. Cultural features mapped as black dots

The location of the *anak tā* shrines were mapped using a GPS. The cultural heritage features mapped by Pottier (Pottier, 1999) served as a guide to locate some of the older temple sites, which were also associated with *anak tā* spirits. In some cases, identification of the cultural features was easier with the help of the local villagers' guidance to the site. The features mapped have been identified as black dots in Figure 5.

4. CONCLUSION

The preliminary investigations in the field along with the interviews conducted amongst the villagers have helped establish an understanding of the Angkor archaeological park. The local community living in the park are well aware of the landscape and connected to it through their life and practices. The cultural connections to the Angkorian landscape however, are very subtly evident and rather fragile.

4.1 Key Inferences

The exercise in mapping the cultural heritage features in the landscape has been an easy task. Establishing the significance of these features and attributing values based on the perception of the local villagers is proving to be a challenge.

The local villagers have a very good understanding of the terrain. The entire region is predominantly flat, but subtle elevations are understood very well. During the wet season, they are very evident when the annual monsoons cause the low-lying parts in the landscape to be flooded.

Raised ground is always significant. It coincides with occupation mounds, so raised land is continually occupied. Houses are invariably built on the (*kok*) raised ground, for its obvious suitability. Occupation mounds and *prasat* mounds are used for growing vegetables during the wet season and water from the moats surrounding is used for the farming.

Based on the interviews, it is evident that members of the local community are aware of the fact that Lolei *baray* and Bakong temple were constructed before Angkor Wat. However, they do not seem to know any further details about the temples.

Most of the historical *prasat* (temple) sites around the case study villages were found to be revered for the belief that they house ancestral deities / spirits (*anak tā*).

Location of significant *anak tā* sites are common knowledge. Older people know some of the obscure ones as well. Worship of ancestral deities take place depending on personal needs and context.

A number of *prasat* sites to the north of Loley *baray* are being forgotten and the sites are covered with dense vegetation. These sites are associated with *anak tā*, but they are not used for any ritual purpose. These are incredibly difficult to locate without the help of a GPS.

Heritage bringing tourism is seen as welcome by locals, because most people benefit from tourism directly or indirectly.

4.1.1 Emerging Issues

Attributing historical and heritage significance to the smaller, lesser known and significant features in the landscape like archaeological mound, *trapeang*, bunds, roads and laterite culverts are not viewed as critical by Cambodians. As a result, development pressures are causing a great deal of damage to the cultural landscape. Increasing tourism is indirectly escalating the rate of development in the region. One of the significant *prasat* sites has been flattened by bulldozing for development to the north of Lolei *baray*. This issue raises serious concerns for the archaeological material in the park.

A lot of development is taking place in the region due to the additional pressure of the villages located along route 6, the national highway to Phnom Penh.

Owing to the political trauma, and the physical displacement during *Khmer Rouge*, the locals are not yet comfortable to share their views and opinions easily. The villagers need convincing to share information about their values and cultural practices. Modernization and concepts of development in some instances is diminishing the significance of *anak tā* worship.

4.2 Conclusions and Future directions

Angkor World Heritage site plays a big role in the economy of Cambodia due to the amount of revenue it brings through tourism. The management of the archaeological park has been primarily focussed on providing the best experience for the international tourist. The focus of the government and the authority may need to focus less on economy and tourism and prioritise the interests of the community living in the park.

The author's investigation is so far inadequate to be conclusive of the community's cultural connections. However, it has become evident in this initial field research that there are connections between the local *Khmer* people and the historical landscape. The political disturbances in the recent past had moved entire villages around the country and the trauma of genocide is just beginning to fade ever so slightly in the *Khmer* memory. On the other hand, APSARA in its role as a managing body is required to carry out the obligations of the World

Heritage Convention and this poses difficulty to community in practising their daily life.

Linking the intangible values to the tangible practices and remains is important in understanding the contemporary society's cultural connections to the World Heritage site. The mapping of the cultural heritage values and their significance would help in establishing the value of the landscape to the primary owners who inhabit the land. It is hoped that the knowledge of cultural connection, would help in empowering the locals and help them take pride in their heritage. The understanding would further help the managing authority to establish strategies which accommodate the needs of the population living in the World Heritage site.

In order to establish the initial understanding, the researcher is going to carry out further field research in some more villages in the Roluos group. *Trapeang Totung-Thngai*, Roluos, Stung are some of the villages identified. Group discussions and interviews will help in mapping the cultural values. It is hoped that new information may arise from these villages owing to the fact that some of them are outside the normal tourist circuit.

Finally, the mapping of cultural values is difficult due to the fact that values are constantly evolving and changing with the community's needs. However, the intangible values linked to the tangible heritage will help in an integrated approach to World Heritage Site Management. This will ensure long term management of the Heritage fabric and help in empowering locals and in the process help in 'nation building'.

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