

Implications of Political Change on National Park Operations: Doi Moi and Tourism to Vietnam's National Parks

Abstract

This paper explores the issues and defines and assesses the roles taken up by public and private actors in the development and management of national parks in Vietnam within the context of Vietnam's current period of transition brought about in part by the country's "open door" policy of *doi moi*. It focuses specifically on the conflicts caused by political, social, cultural and economic factors during this period. The paper introduces these conflicts through an overview of the background and management of Vietnam's protected natural areas and the development of eco-tourism in Vietnam in recent years. Subsequently, detailed case studies of two particular Vietnamese national parks are presented to illustrate specific manifestations of these conflicts. An analysis and discussion of the findings of the case studies arrives at an articulation of common defining conflicts facing national parks in Vietnam, including recommendations for future policies and division of roles to address these conflicts.

Keywords

Tourism Management, Eco-Tourism, Vietnam Tourism, Open Door Policy, Tourism in National Parks

Introduction

The Vietnamese government has declared nature-based tourism to be one of the country's key tourism products for development and much of the focus of this development will be in national parks. The number of national parks in Vietnam has increased from three to thirty since the beginning of the "renovation" policy of *doi moi* in 1986 and Vietnam has gained an international reputation as a destination for exotic nature-based tourism (Luong (1999)). National and local government bodies, public and private interests, and domestic and foreign organisations are all involved in various ways in tourism development in these areas. The open door policy has had a marked effect on national parks in Vietnam, particularly by encouraging the involvement of foreign NGOs whose conservation and restoration initiatives have brought new criteria, funds, ideas and ways of doing things to the parks. In the context of Vietnam's transition, brought about in part by the country's "open door" policy of *doi moi*, this paper explores the issues and defines and assesses the roles taken by public and private actors in the development and management of national parks.

National Parks

Nations may have various reasons for establishing national parks, including protection, preservation, conservation, economic potential, regional development and provision for recreation (Butler and Boyd, 2000: 9). In the case of the earliest national parks in the United States and Australia, the land set aside was commonly not arable land, and therefore 'useless' in normal economic terms. As the land was already held by the government, parks could be established at low initial cost (Hall, 2000: 33). Because these earliest national parks were usually quite distant from population centres, development of the parks was highly dependent on provision of transport, normally railway access (Butler and Boyd, 2000: 19-20).

While the original impetus for the establishment of many of the first national parks may have been tourism, there are currently other arguments for their establishment and maintenance. National parks form important components in the preservation of natural ecosystems and habitats, and the tourism trade attracted by these parks often becomes an important part of the local economy, especially as the bases for, and appeal of, traditional livelihoods dwindle. Thus, increased demands are being put on national parks to fulfil social, economic and environmental roles in the interest of sustainability (Field, 1997: 420-421). Developing countries have also found that the development of national parks can be a way to attract foreign aid from foundations such as the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature (Marsh, 1987: 31). With the advantages brought by this type of funding come concerns of 'cultural imperialism' imposed by the developed world on developing nations through such global organisations (Marsh, 1987: 35).

Despite their acknowledged importance, the establishment of national parks is more problematic in the current day than it ever has been before. Growing populations and dwindling resources lead to suggestions to put park land to 'productive' use, to be exploited either for its natural resources or developed for more intensive public use (Dennerlein, 1997: 47-48). These demands are countered by appeals for the important role of national parks as precious remnants of shrinking habitats and ecosystems and calls for the exclusion of excessive disturbances to their pristine natural state.

The Relationship Between Tourism and National Parks

Tourism played an important role in the establishment of the first national parks, both in terms of gathering public interest in the project and in supporting their economic viability (Butler and Boyd, 2000: 9). National parks can raise the awareness of environmental issues amongst the

relatively wealthy, educated and influential classes to which most tourists belong, and increased tourism to national parks can also encourage government involvement in preserving the environments and wildlife that attract tourists (Lilieholm and Romney, 2000: 141). In fact, it has been argued that public support for the concept of national parks is to a large degree contingent on allowing public access to these lands, and that the idea of a national park without tourism is therefore untenable (Butler, 2000: 331). In the case of 'representative' landscapes, as opposed to 'spectacular' landscapes, the presence of tourism could even be seen as the most salient distinction between a national park and its surroundings, and thus the most defensible argument for the uniqueness of the park and the best argument for its protection (Butler, 2000: 331).

For countries with a heritage of spectacular landscape, national parks often provide iconic images for the government's international tourism promotion, as in the case of the Australian Tourist Commission and many regional commissions within the country (Hall, 2000: 29). New Zealand's distinctive image as a 'clean green' destination is supported by its national parks, making the maintenance of these parks crucial to the integrity of the country's identity in the tourism destination market (Booth and Simmons, 2000: 37).

In developing countries, the establishment of national parks in conjunction with well-planned wildlife tourism can provide a region with tourism income that proves more lucrative than other uses to which the land would otherwise be put (Lilieholm and Romney, 2000: 137). Though tourism in national parks may provide an economic boon for surrounding communities, one should be wary of allowing a situation in which the local economy is overly dependent on tourism as an economic sector (Field, 1997: 421).

Conflicts of Tourism in National Parks

Butler (2000: 333) has argued that the effects of human use on the ecologies within national parks is perhaps the most important, and the most neglected, aspect of ecological research in these parks. Dearden has identified the internal contradiction between the conservation and recreation functions of national parks as one of three classes of 'resource conflicts' that occur in these areas. The second type of conflict is caused by illegal appropriation of the park's resources by outside factors, such as poaching, illegal logging and agricultural uses. Although these uses are sometimes tolerated in the interest of conciliation with the local inhabitants, the illegal activities are often not a case of subsistence behaviour by indigenous people but are motivated and orchestrated by the greed of influential figures at the local or even national level in business or government. The third type of resource conflict arises from activities that take place outside the park but affect the park. An example of this is the overdevelopment of areas at a park perimeter that leads to air pollution or interference with waterways that flow into or out of the park (Dearden, 2000).

Relations with Local People

National parks are often used by governments as reserves for indigenous populations. Hall has used examples in Australia and New Zealand to demonstrate how the contact between native people and tourism that occurs in national parks can lead to better accommodation of aboriginal issues in tourism planning, a more positive tourism image of aboriginal culture and better dissemination of knowledge and involvement in tourism amongst indigenous people (cited in Booth and Simmons, 2000: 53).

Although far from universally successful, programmes for the involvement of local communities in the management of national parks, and provision of opportunities for them to profit economically from tourism are becoming widespread. At the price of acceding some power and control to the local community, such initiatives reinforce the efficacy of the park authority, while affecting locals' view of conservation by making them aware of the concrete advantages to be gained by sustainable practices.

Processes of Interaction in National Parks

As already noted above, tourism can play a mediating role between the interests of the park management and locals. Butler and Boyd have examined how the modes of interaction between these three factors of tourism, parks and local communities affect different aspects of the park environment. In their analysis, human-initiated changes to the landscape are largely determined by the interaction between tourism and parks, the relationship between tourism and local communities deal with local involvement and economic benefits and multipliers, parks and local communities interact in the realm of conservation and other policy and decision-making issues. All three interests interact on questions of development and issues of stakes and interests. The outcomes of these interactions can take one of three general directions:

- a 'win-win-win' condition in which the park management supports tourism initiatives which in turn bolster the park management's effectiveness and locals learn that the practice of conservation encourages tourism trade from which they directly benefit
- a 'win-win-lose' scenario in which two of the three sectors benefit at the expense of the other one, as is the case when increased development benefits tourism and local businesses to the detriment of the park or when conservation measures benefit tourism and the park without furthering local economic interests
- a 'lose-lose-lose' situation from which none of the three interests benefit, as when environmental degradation of the park discourages tourism, thus removing economic benefits to the local community.

Obviously, any long-term viable future for national parks must provide sufficient benefits for all three types of stakeholders. This can help guarantee a sustainable form of development that is in the interest of the area as a whole, understood as a composite of human and natural systems. These processes of interaction in the specific scenario of present-day Vietnam will be discussed in the next section.

Vietnam's Protected Areas

History of Vietnam's Protected Natural Areas Through Doi Moi

In 1943, during the French colonial era, about 43 per cent of Vietnam was still covered by forests (Vu Quy, 1995: 169). On December 1st 1945, President Ho Chi Minh signed Ordinance No. 49, transferring the management of the Forest Service and the Forest Protection Department to the Ministry of Agriculture. In 1962, Cuc Phuong was designated as Vietnam's first 'Prohibited Forest' to protect it from exploitation. It was re-designated as Vietnam's first national park in 1966.

During the US/Vietnam war, the extensive use of herbicides by American forces affected 16 per cent of South Vietnam's area, including more than one-third of its mangrove forests (Cresswell and Maclaren, 2000: 290). Even since the end of the war, human activity has continued to decimate Vietnam's natural habitats. It is estimated that, between 1943 and 1994, forested land in Vietnam decreased from 14,325,000 hectares to 8,631,000, representing a reduction in coverage from 43.7 per cent to 26.1 per cent of the total country (Luong, 1997: 105).

In 1985 the Vietnamese 'National Conservation Strategy' (NCS) was issued (Tran Lien Phong, 1995: 183). By 1986, there were eighty-seven 'Prohibited Forests' in Vietnam (Nguyen Mau Tai, 1995: 164). A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was enacted by the Vietnamese government in 1995 in reaction to the issuing of the Convention on Biological Diversity by the United Nations Environment Programme (Rambaldi et al, 2001: 44). This appears to have had positive effects for conservation as forested areas in Vietnam currently cover 11,784,589 hectares, equivalent to 35.8 per cent of the country (Management Strategy for a Protected Areas System to 2010, 2003: 19). Despite this, the natural environment is still under severe pressure in places and twenty per cent of the world's endangered primate species can be found in Vietnam (Rogers, 2002).

This paper focuses on Vietnam's national parks. According to the "Management Strategy for a Protected Area System in Vietnam to 2010", a national park is defined as "a natural area of land and/or sea, of sufficient area for the protection of one or more specific, unmodified or slightly modified ecosystem and its endemic or threatened plant and animal species for present and future generations. A national park provides a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and low impact ecotourism opportunities" (2003: 95). In 2007 there were thirty national parks in Vietnam.

Management Structure and Responsibilities

Several ministries and agencies are involved with National Parks in Vietnam. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is responsible for the overall direction of the system of Special-use Forests (SUFs) including national parks. The Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) is in charge of annual budgeting and funding. The Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) is in charge of developing Vietnam's tourism strategy and promoting the country's national parks as tourist destinations among other tourist sites. The Forest Protection Department (FPD) under the MARD assists its ministry by playing a monitoring and professional management role.

The Prime Minister's Decision No. 08/2001/QĐ-TTĐ, dated January 11, 2001 decentralised administration of SUFs to put control of most of the individual parks at the provincial level, with the MARD playing a master planning role. Eight national parks that are of special importance or that overlap provinces are administered directly by the MARD (Management Strategy for a Protected Area System in Vietnam to 2010, 2003: 26-27).

Funding

Funding for SUFs comes from various governmental sources and is not consolidated into a single budget (ICEM, 2003: 26). Most protected areas receive a small budget from the province in which they are located. The management budget for protected areas comes from the MARD (Rambaldi et al, 2001: 50), but infrastructure development tends to take priority over conservation measures in funding allocation (ICEM, 2003: 26). Because of a relative lack of government funding, many of the funds for conservation management in Vietnam since *doi moi* have been provided by international conservation organisations such as WWF, IUCN and Birdlife International (Nguyen Nhu Phuong and Vu Van Dung, 2001). McElwee (2001) has cynically identified such funding as a new and lucrative source of income for the government. As an illustration, the money obtained from international donors over a few years up to 2001 for the Vu Quang Nature Reserve alone was ten times the government budget for all protected areas in Vietnam in 1991 (McElwee, 2001: 10).

Land Use Conflicts

Vietnam's forested land is divided into the categories of Protection Forest, Special-use Forest and Production Forest. Most production forest was managed by State-Forest Enterprises until 1997, when the Vietnamese government eliminated logging activities in 300 of the 400 State-forest enterprises because degradation of forest resources and the inaccessibility of commercially valuable forest stands had compromised their viability. Most State-Forest Enterprises moved from production to protection forestry (ICEM, 2003:19). For example, the Vu Quang Nature Reserve, famous as the home of a number of recently-discovered previously unknown mammal species, was formed from economically defunct State-Forest Enterprise land (McElwee, 2001: 10). Conservation continues to come into conflict with other aspects of Vietnam's development, as was the case in the 2001 approval to run a section of the planned north-south national highway

through Cuc Phuong Park (New Vietnam Highway May Cut Through National Park, 2001) and the granting of approval to raze part of the protected forest of Thu Duc near Ho Chi Minh City to build a golf course (Rakthammachat, 1993).

Eco-tourism in Vietnam

The Vietnamese government has declared nature-based tourism to be one of the country's key tourism products for development. The open door policy has encouraged the participation of foreign NGOs in Vietnam's natural areas and allowed the growth of eco-tourism to the country by allowing foreign investment in the country and actively promoting tourist visitation. National parks are the sites of many of Vietnam's natural attractions and ecosystems and an important focus when studying these developments.

A national workshop on 'Eco-tourism Development in Vietnam' in September 1999, organised by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Economic and Social Commission Asia Pacific (ESCAP) and the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT), was an important step in introducing the concepts and practices of eco-tourism to Vietnam (Wurm, 2000: 14).

According to Luong (1999: 15) 420,000 of the 1.52 million of foreign visitors to Vietnam in 1998 visited natural sites in the country (Vietnam Investment Review, quoted in Wurm, 1999: 14). The Revised National Tourism Development Plan for Vietnam 2001-2010 proposes concentrating on the development of ecotourism and village-based tourism in remote areas as an important part of the country's diversified tourism product (2001: 15). However, what currently passes for eco-tourism in Vietnam could more accurately be called "nature-based" tourism (Phan, Quan and Le, 2002), often in the form of organised mass-tourism that does not satisfy the criteria of ecologically-minded tourism. Ceballos-Lascurain defined eco-tourism as "Tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these area" (1991:25). Honey added that eco-tourism not only educate travellers, but also provides funds for conservation and brings economic and political power to local communities (199:25).

Despite the above developments, however, Vietnam cannot yet be said to have a national strategy for eco-tourism (Phan, Quan and Le, 2002). Environmental awareness and ecologically-minded practice are still uncommon, within the government as well as amongst the populace. The ubiquitous litter at tourist sites and the common practice of eating wild meat in natural areas evince a low level of ecological awareness amongst Vietnamese tourists. Government indifference and corruption, lack of involvement of locals in planning and the fact that most promoters of tourism tend to be large non-local concerns still serve as barriers to eco-tourism development (Wurm, 2000: 5, 20; Cresswell and Maclaren, 2000: 294). At the governmental level, responsibilities, interdependencies and interests are often indistinct or redundant, complicating the administrative process and the efforts of conservation organisations (Phan, Quan and Le, 2002; Wurm, 1999:17). Guides, administrators and other staff have no indigenous knowledge or knowledge of conservation, nor training in educating visitors in environmental issues. Some 90 per cent of eco-tourist guides were found to lack sufficient environmental knowledge in a 2000 survey (Luong, cited in Phan, Quan and Le, 2002). Fees or punishment for environmental neglect are non-existent or not enforced and local communities still exist in a state of poverty, receiving very few benefits from tourism in their area. Conservation issues may be seen as luxury items and less urgent than other facets of development and modernisation in a developing country such as Vietnam.

To elaborate on and illustrate some of these issues, the paper will now discuss recent changes and developments in two specific national parks, focusing on the effects of the *doi moi* policy on park management and use.

Methodology

Research in Vietnam faces certain problems relating to the restrictive policies of the current regime, and there is still relatively little published research on national parks and eco-tourism in Vietnam. Many researchers and scholars have referred to the lack of reliable and accurate basic statistical data on the development of tourism for Vietnam. (Lloyd, 2004; Lloyd et al, 2004; Mok and Lam, 1996; EIU, 1993; Henderson, 2000; Theuns, 1997). The open door policy has seemingly brought Vietnam's communist government to realise the need to improve the reliability and availability of data in order to attract potential foreign investors who need trustworthy and consistent statistics as a basis for their development strategies (EIU, 1993; Mok and Lam, 1996).

In October 2003, the lead author made the first field trip to Cat Tien National Park where she conducted a pilot study and undertook interviews with high ranking officers. A second field trip was carried out in early July 2004 in Cat Tien National Park, Hanoi and Cuc Phuong National Park. During this trip, the lead author interviewed two administrative officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), a representative of the Vietnam National Park and Protected Area Association, three representatives of Cat Tien National Park and two senior top officers of Cuc Phuong National Park. The interview with the representatives of MARD focused on obtaining an overview of the role of national parks within Vietnam as a whole and understanding how different governmental bodies work together at the national level to affect the operating environment of the parks. It was considered best to interview officials at individual national parks to gain insight into how national and local policy combine with private and international interests in the actual day-to-day experience of running specific parks.

A semi-structured interview was undertaken, involving the implementation of a number of pre-determined questions and/or special topics, asked of each interviewee in a consistent and systematic order, but allowing the interviewer sufficient freedom to digress in order to probe beyond the immediate answers to the predetermined questions. Multiple lines of questioning of different interviewees at different levels were used to validate and cross-check interview results, including the interviewing of national park administrators as well as administrative figures of MARD regarding the development of the national parks and tourism development in national parks. Representatives of government bodies were often in a position to verify the results of interviews with representatives of the two national parks and data from other primary sources.

Information gathered from primary sources through on-site research and interviews was combined with background information from secondary sources to create a consolidated depiction of the subject being investigated. Desk research from secondary sources, including government documents, newspapers and periodicals, supplemented the information gathered from the interviews.

Case Study 1: Cuc Phuong National Park

Cuc Phuong National Park is the oldest and most developed of Vietnam's national parks. It is located about 130 kilometres southwest of Hanoi. The Park's total area is 22,200 hectares. In 1989, a very rare endemic monkey, the Delacour's Langur, was rediscovered in Cuc Phuong and became the 'flagship-species' of the Park (Tilo, 1995: 192-193). The Park is home to diverse fauna including 71 types of mammal, 319 birds, 33 reptiles, 16 amphibians and almost 2,000 plant types, or 68.9 per cent of all Vietnamese flora species (National Parks of Vietnam, 2001: 112-113). The Park has three principal functions: nature conservation, scientific research and tourism (Management Plan Draft Outline: Cuc Phuong National Park 1998-2008, 1998: 7). In contrast to the original staff of only 20 soldiers and local people employed as rangers (The Saigon Times Daily, 1998), by 2004 the tourism-related staff alone numbered 40 (Interview A, 2004).

Although the local population provides a large pool of unskilled labour for the Park, most skilled workers must be brought in from outside the area, lessening the potential economic benefit to residents of the region (Management Plan Draft Outline: Cuc Phuong National Park 1998-2008,

1998: 41). Since *doi moi*, fewer staff members are officials and more are employed from the local population and other non-governmental sectors. The contact system is no longer exclusively through government channels but often through local or staff contacts (Interview A, 2004).

The borders of the Park are presently unmarked, causing confusion among local communities as to which areas are under the jurisdiction of the Park management. Cooperation and communication between the Park and regional authorities is poor. Lack of support by regional authorities has blocked the effectiveness of the ranger force to protect Cuc Phuong. The provincial Forest Protection Department also sometimes turns a blind eye to illegal activities (Management Plan Draft Outline: Cuc Phuong National Park 1998-2008, 1998: 10-38).

Tourism in Cuc Phuong National Park

Attractions in the Park include a community based adventure tourist trail, the tourism village Khan hamlet, an Endangered Primate Rescue Centre and several temples.

Before *doi moi*, Cuc Phuong National Park received only a small number of visitors who were mostly from the government or official organisations. There were no admission fees and no charge for accommodation or the basic services that existed at that time. In 1990, however, the Park was unable to provide free services to the increasing number of tourists and began to charge fees, which went into paying taxes and developing tourism and conservation in the Park (Interview A, 2004).

In the 1980s, Cuc Phuong National Park received an annual average of 2,045 visitors, 25 per cent of whom were students and pupils (Szaniawski, 1987: 15). In 1994, there were 21,795 domestic visitors and 1,472 foreign visitors, which rose to 52,009 domestic and 4,227 foreign tourists in 2003 (Interview B, 2004), an overall increase of over 140 per cent. On a busy day, the Park can receive up to 3,500 visitors. However, according to a local newspaper, the Head of the Management Board of the Park, Mr. Dao Van Khuong, admitted that the actual carrying capacity of the Park is about 300 visitors per day (Vietnam News Briefs, 2002a).

Ecological Issues of Tourism in the Park

The increase in numbers of visitors has also created problems for the Park's management through the large amount of waste they produce, their collecting of plants, and the noise created by large groups (Management Plan Draft Outline: Cuc Phuong National Park 1998-2008, 1998: 33). Some of the Park management's own policies and initiatives in the name of tourism development have also been realised at the expense of the preservation of biodiversity. For instance, in order to improve the roads inside the Park, trees were cut down. Similarly, the creation of artificial lakes inside the Park required forest clearance and resulted in alterations to the local hydrology. The Park staff have also paved tourist trails and added concrete steps, which are eyesores in the opinion of conservationists (Interview H, 2005). The Park management directly supports and encourages noisy activities by offering entertainment facilities such as karaoke (Vietnam News Briefs, 2002a). According to a survey on the impact of tourists on the Park, 87% of 100 visitors remarked on the degradation caused by litter left by tourists (Rugendyke and Nguyen Thi Son, 2005: 197).

Ministry of Forestry Official Letter No. 551 LN/KL dated 21 March 1994, was distributed to provincial and municipal committees to provide directives for "strictly implementing" wildlife protection laws. Among the tasks delegated to the People's Committees was to "(i)nstruct the forestry institutions, Forest Protection Department, Customs office, tax services, and market management of the province (to) prohibit in (sic) hotels, restaurants to advertise and serve the

food cooked from wildlife or their products”. Regardless of these prohibitions, various restaurants in one of the villages near Cuc Phuong National Park advertise their wildlife dishes freely. Some restaurants openly display baby wild animals with herbs and alcohol in jars.

The greatest current threat to biodiversity conservation in the Park comes from an initiative of the Vietnamese government itself. The new Ho Chi Minh National Highway links the south and north of the country and runs along the Buoi River valley bisecting Cuc Phuong National Park. The manager of conservation programmes at the Park has said that the new highway will make the Park more accessible for loggers and hunting (Cox, 2001). The new highway also greatly increases the accessibility of the Park to tourists and can be expected to encourage further acceleration of growth of visitor numbers in coming years.

Tourism Planning, Development and Investment

The former Director of Cuc Phuong National Park has clearly stated his belief that accessibility, including good road access and availability of communications technology, determines the attractiveness of the Park to tourists above all other factors (Hoang Van Than, 1997: 120). Others (Pham Trung Luong and Nguyen Tai Cung, 1997: 104), have indicated an assumption that a higher degree of development attracts more tourism and thus more revenue. This bias is evident in the aforementioned arguably ill-advised developments in the Park, such as a swimming pool and a karaoke facility. In a continuation of this trend, Ninh Binh province is seeking private investment of over US\$ 3 million for the construction of a bathing lake within Cuc Phuong National Park (Vietnam News Briefs, 2002b).

Lack of coordination between entities involved in the Park is a major barrier to appropriate development. Cooperation between the Park and the local community is lacking (Management Plan Draft Outline: Cuc Phuong National Park 1998-2008, 1998: 40). Previously, an antagonistic relationship seems to have existed between the Park management and the Muong people resident in the Park, who removed notice boards from tourist areas and destroyed articles in the Park out of resentment for being prohibited from pursuing their slash-and-burn forestry practices (Szaniawski, 1987: 22). Perceived imposition of foreign values on the Muong people by NGOs in the course of the resettlement programme may also have fuelled this protest. Relations between the Park management and indigenous populations can be seen to have improved in some aspects since then. Improved water supply and road access, electricity generators and agricultural initiatives, funded by more than VND 300 million of government funds, have benefited the entire community (Le Van Lanh, 1997: 123-126).

Private involvement in Cuc Phuong began after the introduction of *doi moi* and has been increasing. Since *doi moi*, government funding for the Park has fluctuated and has been primarily confined to infrastructure improvements forcing the Park management to find new sources of funds for conservation and tourism development (Interview F, 2004). For this reason, many of the Park's service operations that have sprung up since *doi moi*, such as restaurants and a souvenir shop, are privately run. The current Head of the Park's Tourism Department sees private enterprises as more dynamic than government-provided services and would welcome the incremental introduction of more private involvement in Cuc Phuong. International private tourism companies are also offering tours to the Park. The Dutch tour operators Savadi Tourism and Amtour tourism and the Asia Tourism Company of Spain have been bringing tourists to Cuc Phuong since 1990 (Hoang Van Than, 1997: 122).

Another form of outside involvement in the Park comes from NGOs. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations was among the first to be involved in an extended (3 year) project, beginning just after the introduction of *doi moi*. Previous to *doi moi*, foreign organisations had been involved only in small-scale activities. The language barrier and differing ways of doing things were barriers to cooperation at the beginning of this process, but are gradually being overcome (Szaniawski, 1987).

Case Study 2: Cat Tien National Park

Cat Tien National Park (CTNP) is situated in southern Vietnam, approximately 150 kilometres north of Ho Chi Minh City and about 150 kilometres south of Dalat. The Park has a total area of 73,878 hectares (Conservation Management and Operational Plan Cat Tien National Park, 2003-2008). Cat Tien is the largest lowland tropical forest of southern Vietnam. The Park contains 1,610 identified plant species, some of them rare or endangered, as well as 76 mammal, 320 bird, 74 reptile, 35 amphibian and 99 fish species. The Park is known to accommodate 40 species which are listed 'red' by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), for example the Vietnamese sub-species of the Javan Rhinoceros, the rarest large mammal on earth, with a population of less than 7 found in Cat Loc; the Orange-necked Partridge and the Siamese crocodile (Conservation Management and Operational Plan Cat Tien National Park, 2003-2008: 2003:12).

Cat Tien National Park is one of the last remaining largely intact lowland forest ecosystems in Southeast Asia. It could also become the only protected habitat of the Siamese crocodile, if attempts to reintroduce the species are successful (Conservation Management Plan 2000: 12). Cat Tien National Park was named by UNESCO as the world's 411th Man and Biosphere Reserve (Eco-Tourism Development Plan Period 2003-2008, 2003: 2).

CTNP is directly administered by the national government in Hanoi. The Park Director reports to the national government and has jurisdiction over minor activities within the Park. A representative of the government visits the Park on a yearly basis to monitor progress and to meet with the Park management team. The national Forest Protection Department (FPD) in Hanoi visits and coordinates with the Park FPD (Interview C, 2003).

Tourism in Cat Tien National Park

Few tourists came to the Cat Tien in 1992, the year of its establishment as a national park. At that time, however, there were neither professional tourism-related staff nor appropriate facilities for tourists (Interview D, 2004). The number of tourists who visit the Park increased steadily from 2,200 (2,000 Vietnamese and 200 foreigners) in 1995 to 13,790 (12,844 Vietnamese and 946 foreigners) in 2002 (Eco-Tourism Development Plan, Period 2003-2008, 2003: 7). To protect the fragile ecosystem, tourist activities and facilities are restricted to zones located in the southeast of the Park. The Park has great difficulty dealing with large groups of visitors. Despite official claims that all visitors must book in advance, and that tourists above the quota are refused entry (Interview E, 2003), there are also complaints that even large organised groups come unannounced, and the visitors and their leaders tend to ignore almost all park rules, especially the rules regarding littering and the use of megaphones (Tourism Management Plan, 1999: 4).

Conservation has become an important issue in the running of the Park in recent years and international cooperation projects have been achieving noticeable progress in the organisation and success of conservation projects (Interview C, 2003). One such project was the Cat Tien National Park Conservation Project (CTNP-CP) - a joint initiative of the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) and the Royal Netherlands Government - which took place from 1998 to 2004. The second project was the Forest Protection and Rural Development Project (FPRDP) supported by a loan from the World Bank (Conservation Management and Operational Plan Cat Tien National Park, 2003-2008: 10).

Tourism Planning, Development and Investment

A proposed plan for the Cat Tien National Park Conservation Project was formulated to respond to the granting of Biosphere Reserve status to the Park by UNESCO on November 10, 2001. Reiterating and building upon the themes outlined in previous documents, the plan

proposed the development of specific eco-tourism opportunities and the creation of two major wildlife sanctuaries (Lebre, 2002). The document also proposed the extension of tours into the highly sensitive Cat Loc area: a controversial decision due to the presence there of the endangered Java rhinoceros (Murphy, 2001).

Although ecotourism is prioritised by the Vietnamese government, there is very little funding available for its development. Ecological tourism activities are regarded as businesses and are thus expected to turn a profit and pay taxes (Interview, D, 2004). The tax collected however, can be deducted from the annual state budget allotted to the Park (Interview G, 2004).

Two canteens in the Park were originally managed by the Park administration but failed to make a profit. They are now both run by a private individual, who pays a part of the profit as rent. The Park continues to control the price and service. Boatmen on the river used to work for the Park, working office hours with very inefficient service, which caused problems for those wishing to cross the river late in the evening. Since they were granted the right to work for themselves, they have been working longer hours much more efficiently, and paying part of their profit back to the Park (Interview C, 2003).

The involvement of foreign NGOs in development and investment in the Park has made an important contribution to awareness of ecotourism within the Park administration. The Head of the Park's Tourism Department has acknowledged that the management learns much about ecotourism from contact with foreign conservation organisations. For instance, Western organisations recommended the reduction of tour group sizes in order to improve the quality of the contact with nature.

Conclusions

The number of national parks in Vietnam has increased greatly during the period of political transition since the beginning of *doi moi*. As has been noted, the initiative and funding behind the establishment of protected areas and national parks in Vietnam has often come from international conservation organisations. Tourism seems to play at best a secondary role as a driving inspiration for the founding of parks, although the potential value of international tourism to the parks (and Vietnam in general) is becoming more appreciated.

The growing involvement of international NGOs in Vietnam's national parks has brought an influx of conservation and eco-tourism expertise. Although eco-tourism is a component of many of the conservation plans drawn up for parks by NGOs, a lack of understanding or care about the issues involved on the part of those actually charged with carrying out the plans means that there are as yet no true examples of serious eco-tourism practices in Vietnamese parks or serious studies as to whether eco-tourism is in fact the only or most appropriate form of tourism.

Before *doi moi*, tourism to national parks was uncommon, practiced primarily by government officials or their guests and fully subsidised by the state. The increase in tourism since *doi moi* necessitated the formulation of a comprehensive tourism policy for protected areas for the first time. With the rise of tourist interest in natural areas since *doi moi*, the central government did not develop a centralised policy for this but rather opted to delegate responsibility to the individual parks. With the continuing withdrawal of the central government from many aspects of formulating and facilitating plans for national parks, international NGOs, with their large budgets, focused agendas, on-site engagement and planning proficiency, have come to exercise an increasing influence over the policy of parks.

Private enterprise has taken root in Vietnam's national parks as the result of relaxation of restrictions brought about by *doi moi*. With the withdrawal of government subsidies resulting from the reforms, park facilities had to be re-invented as self-sustaining enterprises (a situation not uncommon in other jurisdictions such as Canada (Boyd and Butler, 2009)). However, the development of private enterprise around tourism in national parks is still at an undeveloped stage and small scale and does not display the diversity or competition that would normally characterise a service economy. There are some cases in which private tourism development interests have been able to use their

financial leverage to influence decision-making and planning in parks, such as the private enterprise that convinced Ba Vi National Park to transport animals to a part of the park it had leased to develop this area as an eco-tourism zone (Interview G, 2004).

The development of tourism in national parks in Vietnam has been related to other aspects of development in the country. Vietnam's national parks are places where issues of tourism, conservation and indigenous people confront one another in both conflict and cooperation. Of the three, tourism is the most obvious sector for continued commercial development and is thus well-positioned to serve as a catalyst for change that could benefit all interests in the parks.

The interest in Vietnam evinced and encouraged by the involvement of organisations such as WWF has raised global awareness of Vietnam's natural wildlife and landscape, propagating an image of the country as an untouched wilderness that appeals to many types of tourists. Although there is very little understanding or interest on the part of the government in developing "pure" eco-tourism in Vietnam, the 'eco' image and language have been widely adopted by public and private operators for anything 'nature based'.

In terms of Butler and Boyd's (2000) three possible outcomes of interactions between parks, tourism and local communities, the current state of the two parks investigated in the case studies in this paper seem to correspond at best to a 'win-win-lose' scenario in which tourism and local communities benefit at the expense of the natural environment. A more pessimistic assessment could define the current situation as a 'win-lose-lose' scenario, since not all local people benefit equally from tourism development. Some may feel completely by-passed or even disadvantaged by development, such as those who are displaced from their homes or livelihoods by the rules relating to tourism development in these parks. Government programmes seem to be based on encouraging exploitation of the natural attractions of the areas to induce economic gain, while doing little to guarantee the protection of that environment or the long-term sustainability of the economic or tourism practices that are being developed. A continuation of this practice could in the long term lead to a 'lose-lose-lose' situation in which degradation of the environment devalues the basis of the local economy and tourism trade, in much the same way as conventional mass tourism destinations eventually suffer decline from overuse and misuse (Butler 1980).

All three of Dearden's (2000) 'resource conflicts' can be observed in one or both of the parks discussed in this paper. An internal contradiction between the conservation and recreation functions is present in both parks, as can be seen in the disparity between the ecological goals of NGOs involved in the parks and the non-ecological expectations and recreational practices of domestic tourists to natural areas. Both parks also suffer from poaching of wildlife and illegal cutting of plants, corresponding to Dearden's second type of conflict. The most obvious example of the third type of conflict, that of external forces having negative effects on the park, can be seen in the Ho Chi Minh Highway bisecting Cuc Phuong National Park and disturbing natural ecosystems. Only the national Vietnamese government has the power and jurisdiction to rectify such conflicts. The causes and mechanisms behind these conflicts are embedded in political and touristic practices that extend beyond the boundaries of the parks, and to effectively address these problems would require a change in government culture as well as changes in the behaviour of tourists to these areas. Achieving such a transformation in attitudes and practices would inevitably involve multiple measures enacted over time. Defining which measures would be most effective would require further research based on detailed surveys and observations of current tourists' attitudes and behaviour, as well as interviews and collaborative studies with governmental figures.

In order to maintain a clear delimitation of scope, this research has dealt primarily with issues of development and management, which has implied a concentration on certain stakeholder groups, such as park management and governmental bureaus. An effort has been made to acknowledge implications for other stakeholder groups, such as the local population, in broad terms, while leaving a detailed enquiry into the point of view of

these stakeholders for subsequent research. It is clear that future policy considerations would have to be informed by focused participatory studies into the potential consequences of any decisions for the indigenous people.

In general, it is not through exertion of influence but rather through withdrawal of control that the Vietnamese central government has enabled and encouraged change in tourism patterns in national parks. International organisations and private enterprises have taken advantage of unprecedented possibilities opened up by the removal of government restrictions and monopolies. International NGOs generally are interested in only some aspects of park development. The decentralisation of control has also given individual parks new powers of self-determination, but there is little evidence of vision or innovation from any specific park management authority. Currently, no single entity or interest can be said to have a complete vision for, or complete control of, the development of Vietnam's national parks. *Doi moi* has certainly brought a more diverse set of actors to the development of tourism within national parks, but an effective division of roles that will lead to a consolidated tourism development policy that reflects the varying needs of the different elements has yet to emerge.

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