

The Role of Non-Government Organizations in Environmental Awareness - A Case Study of Osmose Organization

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the nature and effectiveness of the media, messages, and processes of transmitting knowledge regarding the protection of the environment to tourists by Osmose, (non-government organization). Data were gathered by documentary research, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as well as by participation observation. Content analysis and triangulation methods were used to analyze the data. The research analysis revealed that a diversity of media, messages, and processes of transmitting environmental knowledge to tourists. The messages about flora and fauna, natural resources, endangered birds, correct disposal of rubbish, and the work done by Osmose were shown to be appropriate for the tourists. The effective processes of spreading environmental knowledge to tourists were in the pre-trip phase and during the trip. The study showed that in the pre-trip phase, Osmose used indirect processes such as the Internet and some publications, and during the trip direct processes such as tour guides, posters, and guidebooks were used.

KEY WORDS: *Effectiveness, Media, Messages, Processes, Osmose, NGO.*

Introduction

The Tonle Sap Great Lake (TSGL) in Cambodia, where Osmose is working for environmental conservation for many water-birds, fish, and plant life of the region. It has been estimated that there are 1,410 visitors per day to the TSGL (Rith, 2008). This popularity towards the attraction lake has led to problems concerning the ecosystem and biodiversity, waste disposal, water pollution, and threatened resources. In addition, these problems have been compounded by the effects of hydropower constructions in the upper Mekong River on the water quantity and quality, the natural regime, fish, plants, and animals (Bonheur, 2003; Kummu et al., 2005; Ian et al., 2006; Varis et al., 2006; Osmose, 2008; Wang and Tong, 2009). Studies found that several concerns exist in the Prek Toal Core Area¹, including the impact on the ecology of the water-birds due to disturbances caused by the high frequency of visits, inappropriate viewing distances, numbers and locations of viewing towers to watch the birds, modes of transport, and zonings for restricted use. Deforestation and over-exploitation of fishery resources and indigenous wildlife occur, and water pollution results from local people's settlements on the lake, waste disposal, and oil spilt from boat engines involved in tourism and other industries (Bonheur, 2003; Jin et al., 2005; Serrat, 2005; ADB Loan, 2007; Osmose, 2008; Meinander, 2009). These problems have caused deterioration in the state of the TSGL and, as a result, development and conservation projects have been organized by various institutions to maintain the lake as a tourist site

¹ The Prek Toal Core Area is a protected area and one of the tourist destinations in the Tonle Sap Great Lake

beneficial to all stakeholders, especially for local residents (Varis et al., 2006). These institutions include the Mekong River Commission, United Nations (UN) agencies, Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Greater Mekong Sub-region program, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and many donor countries.

One institution involved in this development and conservation of the TSGL is Osmose, and the present study is based on three objectives:

- 1) To identify the types of media and the messages used in each media reporting of Osmose.
- 2) To explore the processes of Osmose in the transmission of knowledge regarding the protection of the environment to tourists
- 3) To investigate tourists' perceptions of the effective media, knowledge types (messages), and processes as means to develop tourists' environmental awareness.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study consisted of three phases of investigation. The first phase involved an unstructured interview with the Manager and Ecotourism Coordinator of Osmose to assess the organization's appropriateness for the study. The second phase consisted of literature research to explore and review the relevant published journals, books, and related laws from the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Cambodia and these were closely analyzed to identify their relevance to the study.

The final phase involved fieldwork to obtain the data. This consisted of four main steps:

- (1) The collection of existing printed material, such as brochures, booklets, guidebooks, newsletters, posters, magazines, reports, and training documents used by Osmose to train new tour guides in 2009.
- (2) Semi-structured interviews with the Osmose Manager and Ecotourism Coordinator.
- (3) Semi-structured interviews with eight American and two New Zealand tourists to discover their perspectives on environmental knowledge and effective media, knowledge types/messages, and processes of transmitting knowledge and their recommendations to implement ecotourism in the TSGL. In addition, tourists' behavior was observed during the visit and notes recorded about their actions in relation to the environment.
- (4) Semi-structured interviews with two tour guides, five park rangers, and three villagers to obtain information from their perspectives to answer the research objectives.

Data Analysis

This study analyzed the data by the content analysis method and validated the accuracy of the findings by triangulation method. Data from the interviews with the Osmose Manager, Coordinator, tourists, tour guides, park rangers, and villagers and from the observations of tourists' behaviour were recorded in writing and coded according to references to media, messages in the media, and processes of transmitting environmental knowledge, and the effectiveness of each of these. This was done immediately after the interviews and observations and the coding was collated in groups to indicate the frequencies of these references. Two kinds of data were identified, that relating to media, messages in the media, and processes of transmitting environmental knowledge, and that relating to the effectiveness of the media, messages, and processes. In addition, data from respondents were cross-checked with references from other respondents for validity. For example, responses by Osmose personnel about the effectiveness of tour guides were cross-checked with responses from tourists. Information received from the Manager and Coordinator showed the work of Osmose in the area of environmental conservation. The data obtained from tourists, tour guides, park rangers, and villagers illustrated their perspectives of the

work of Osmose in the transmission of environmental awareness to tourists. Recommendations from these groups represented their views on the most effective media, knowledge types, and processes of transmitting knowledge, views that Osmose could use in the design of future effective action for environmental sustainability in the TSGL.

Results

Media

The results of this research demonstrated that Osmose used personnel, printed media, and painted media to distribute information about the environment. The personnel were tour guides, park rangers, and villagers. The printed media was of two types, that which was sold and that which was free. The media for sale consisted of posters, magazines, books, and booklets. The free media included the Internet, leaflets, newsletters, big banners, and paintings. Some media were distributed during the visit and some at other locations or on other occasions. The content of the media was mainly about flora and fauna of the lake, different kinds of endangered birds and other species in the lake, Dos and Don'ts, the richness of the TSGL natural resources, and the work of Osmose.

Processes of Transmitting Knowledge

The processes of transmitting environmental knowledge to tourists occurred in the pre-trip phase and during the trip. To reach tourists in the pre-trip phase, Osmose used the Internet to state about the kinds of tourists the organization focused on and some activities about ecotourism. Osmose also distributed some publications such as magazines, books, booklets, and leaflets to tour companies, especially the companies from inside and outside of Cambodia that had contracts with Osmose to bring tourists to visit the TSGL. During the trip, Osmose brought tourists to many different places including the floating villages and the bird sanctuary in the Prek Toal Core Area, and tourists listened to presentations by the tour guides. All these activities and materials for tourists allowed them to learn about the environmental conservation work of Osmose.

Effective Media and Messages

It was found that the effective media were tour guides, posters, the Internet, some publications such as leaflets and guidebooks, Lonely Planet, and UNESCO. The tour guides, posters, and the Internet were the most effective media according to the ten tourists, two Osmose management officers, and two tour guides. Tourists, villagers, and park rangers expressed similar opinions about the effective messages of the media. These included messages about flora and fauna of the lake, the TSGL natural resources, endangered birds, correct disposal of rubbish, and the work of Osmose, and all were considered appropriate for this group of tourists.

Effective Processes

Tourists and tour guides indicated that the distribution of information by Osmose in the pre-trip phase by the use of the Internet and printed materials were effective processes. These two groups also, along with the Osmose management team, villagers and park rangers, believed that the activities in the pre-trip phase and during the trip were effective processes of spreading environmental knowledge to tourists. During the trip, the distribution of information by the use of tour guides, posters and guidebooks was important because it could be done clearly and directly to tourists, and receive instant feedback. Other direct ways of spreading information during the trip involved tour guides making presentations to the tourists and by making explanations at the sites related to birds and/or trees being viewed. Tour guides, park rangers, and villagers believed that the process of reacting to problems during the trip was also effective. When they saw tourists behaving inappropriately, such as throwing rubbish into the lake or making too much noise at the bird

sanctuary, the guides, rangers, and villagers avoided verbal contact with the tourists but instead acted as role models and behaved appropriately.

Discussion

Media

The findings indicated that media used by Osmose were personnel and printed media. The personnel were tour guides, park rangers, and villagers. The printed media consisted of posters, leaflets, booklets, newsletters, big banners, paintings, pictures, drawings, guidebooks. These findings are similar to those of Seaton and Bennett (1996), Kotler et al. (2006), and Oelkers (2007) who highlighted the use of written publications, broadcast, electronic and outdoor media:

- 1) Written publications - guidebooks, magazines, booklets, brochures, leaflets, pictures and posters. Swarbrooke (1999) nominated guidebooks as the media relevant for sustainable tourism.
- 2) Broadcast media - tour guides' presentations.
- 3) Electronic media - environmental conservation information and information about the work of Osmose on the organization's website.
- 4) Outdoor media - wall pictures, paintings and posters display at the attractions and on the boat.

Despite some similarities in the use of media for sustainable tourism and for advertising, there are also a number of differences. Media such as local and international press, radio, television, telephones, and journals used to promote sustainable tourism in the case study of Direct Holiday, UK and Thomas Cook cited in Seaton and Bennet (1996) and Swarbrooke (1999) were not found in this study of Osmose. This is probably due to the fact that Osmose is a small, non-profit organization with limited resources targeting foreign tourists. Another issue to be considered is the target group. The Osmose Manager said most of the environmental problems in the TSGL happen because of the local Cambodian people. The researcher observed that Cambodian tourists also visit the TSGL, but these tourists did not buy the package tours of Osmose. However, the organization does not have appropriate media with which to target Cambodian tourists. Mareth (2003) identified radio, television, videos, and cultural events as the most effective methods of media to reach a wider audience, including this group of local tourists.

Messages

Osmose informed tourists with messages about flora and fauna of the lake, endangered birds, the work of the organization, the need for responsible tourists to visit the sites, history of the floating villages, and Dos and Don'ts through a variety of media used by tour guides. These messages provided basic knowledge for tourists about the natural resources of the lake, how tourists should behave at the sites, and the conservation work of Osmose. The messages were similar to previous research. Luo and Deng (2008) found that information to the public should be about the attractions of the site, and education should be emphasized by tour guides as a means of reinforcing visitors' environmental knowledge. UNWTO (2004) and Swarbrooke (1999) pointed out that messages about sustainable tourism should raise tourists' awareness about sustainability issues and promote its practice amongst tourists. The laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia also mentioned about taking care of natural resources.

Processes of Transmitting Environmental Knowledge

The activities of Osmose in the pre-trip phase were part of an indirect process. In this phase, the organization informed tourists of the type of tourists Osmose wanted and the ecotourism activities of the organization. Osmose also distributed publications to tour companies. The purpose of these pre-trip initiatives was to inform tourists about the sites and the work of the organization. This is similar to the work of Kotler et al. (2006) and

Middle and Hawkins (1998) that showed that the distribution channels have key functions for transmitting information. During the trip, Osmose brought tourists to see the many sites and the materials of the organization. The tour guides made presentations to the tourists. These direct process approaches meant that tourists learnt about the TSGL on different occasions and in different ways. These findings support those of Seaton and Bennett (1996) and Kotler et al. (2006) regarding companies' direct and indirect contact with customers.

Effective Media

The key informants of the study expressed their views that the effective media of Osmose were tour guides, posters, the Internet, and publications such as leaflets and guidebooks, Lonely Planet, and UNESCO. These media can be used according to the times, places, and situation of the receivers. The findings of Seaton and Bennett (1996) about the effectiveness of using media were similar to Morgan (1996) and Oelkers (2007). These were based on five factors related to: 1) who are the target tourists? 2) cost of media 3) total number of tourists who see the advertisement 4) total number of times that the target tourists see or hear the advertisement 5) time needed to prepare the advertisement (Morgan, 1996; Oelkers, 2007; Seaton and Bennett, 1996). Osmose used a variety of media, such as personnel and printed media, to transmit environmental knowledge to tourists. This approach is in accord with the findings of Ralph and Richard (1995); Peter and Donnelly (2001); Kaser and Freeman (2002); Walker and Lundberg (2005); and Reid and Bojanic (2010) who demonstrated that business must have a varied promotional mix and should choose the right one to use to make customers aware of their product or service. The use of tour guides as a form of personnel media in Osmose is similar to that of Ralph and Richard (1995) and Peter and Donnelly (2001) who illustrated the advantages of personal selling in the establishment of effective relationships, ease in persuading customers, fast provision of information to customers, supply of information about complex products, and quick receipt of responses. Tour guides were the effective media because of their good English and sense of humor. The studies of Luo and Deng (2008) and Aphirom and Jean (n.d.) mentioned that education in ecotourism should be a mixture of education and entertainment to suit the clientele and the curriculum should be innovative. The posters were also an effective media as they made it possible to reach the right group. They were less expensive and less time-consuming to produce because Osmose prepared them once and could use them many times. Seaton and Bennett (1996) had a similar idea, stating that the media must reach the tourists and time spent must be kept to a minimum. The Internet was also an effective medium. Osmose used this form of media because it reached many tourists world-wide. Seaton and Bennett (1996) and Kotler et al. (2006) recognized that the Internet or IT had become a fact of life for the travel industry.

Effective Messages

The messages about flora and fauna of the lake, the TSGL natural resources, endangered birds, correct waste disposal, and the work of Osmose were appropriate for the group of tourists. The findings of this study indicated that the tourists were satisfied with these messages because they gave basic and new knowledge about the TSGL and actions that allowed them to take part in environmental conservation. The findings about the messages relate to those of Oelkers (2007) who stated, "Three of the most effective words in media are **new**, **easy** and **results**." Oelkers (2007) also said, "Messages should communicate with the target tourists." Osmose followed the regulations in bringing tourists to the bird sanctuary. The regulations related to bird viewing distances and speeds of boats. The distances were set at 200 metres and speeds of boats were controlled at 25 to 30 kilometres per hour in the core area, and 10 to 25 kilometres per hour in the bird zones near the nests. These regulations are in accord with the study of Bonheur (2003) and the laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The content of posters, banners, and magazines in Osmose were mainly about

flora and fauna of the lake, endangered species, Dos and Don'ts, and activities related to environmental conservation. The laws of the MoT, the MoE, and the MoAFF related to the development of long-term protection, conservation of natural resources and the ecosystem, preservation of wildlife, fish, and aquatic resources, minimization of water pollution, good management and conservation of natural resources, and improvement of biological diversity and the ecological system of the TSGL. This showed Osmose operating as an ecotourism organization in agreement with the messages given by the laws of the government agencies. Messages on the Internet included "the tours are ideal for people with an interest in nature and responsible tourism," and "Osmose proposes you a relaxing but educative visit which will enable you to understand the ecological and human aspects of the TSGL". This illustrated that Osmose was keen on the selection of appropriate tourists to visit the sites. Such an approach supports the findings of Luo and Deng (2008) that showed one of the activities for ecotourism in the longer term is the identification and segmentation of eco-tourists to visit the sites. Messages about tourists' participation in environmental conservation, including "Rubbish bin, Help to Clean Our Lake" on the boat and "Dos and Don'ts" in the Core Area Management Centre, reinforced the results of the study of Luo and Deng (2008) who found that sites functioned better if properly protected through the efforts of all people, including visitors.

Effective Processes

The effective processes of spreading environmental knowledge to tourists were activities in the pre-trip phase and during the trip. In the pre-trip phase, Osmose used the Internet and distributed publications such as magazines and leaflets to tour companies. During the trip, Osmose used its own tour guides, posters, and guidebooks to spread information to the tourists. The pretrip process involved indirect contact with the tourists. During the trip, the contact was directly with the tourists. The two processes in Osmose are in accord with the views of Kotler et al. (2006) and Seaton and Bennett (1996) who stated that contact can be made either directly to tourists or indirectly through intermediaries. During the trip, tourists were involved in the process of knowledge acquisition. For example, tourists were invited to listen to the presentations of the tour guides and ask questions. This process is similar to the marketing of services of Kaser and Freeman (2002), Walker and Lundberg (2005), and Reid and Bojanic (2010) who described that the marketing of services needs involvement from customers in a production process. Another process during the trip that tour guides, park rangers and villagers used was reacting to a problem. When they saw tourists behave inappropriately to the environment, such as throwing rubbish into the lake or making noises at the bird sanctuary, they acted as role models and behaved correctly for tourists. These were re-active solutions to the problems. However, Osmose was pro-active in its attitude to problems as it made efforts before and during the visits of tourists to encourage responsible behaviour to the environment. This is in accord with the views of Swarbrooke (1999) who believed that environmental conservation should be pro-active.

Conclusion

The study found that Osmose implemented ecotourism activities appropriately in the TSGL in relation to the theory of ecotourism and the environmental laws of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The organization used a variety of media with enough information to spread environmental conservation to tourists. The processes to spread information were effective for tourists to learn about the TSGL. The researcher believes that Osmose needs to focus and raise the awareness of local tourists regarding the development of sustainable tourism in the region. This study informs Osmose about the most effective media, messages, and processes of transmitting environmental knowledge to tourists so that the organization can use them effectively and get fruitful results with tourists and tour companies in the implementation of ecotourism in the TSGL.

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