The Role of Regional Trading Blocs in the Development and Management of Tourism: an Analysis of the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of regional trading blocs is considered an important aspect of the process of economic and political globalisation. Focusing on the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, this paper considers whether the involvement of regional trading blocs in tourism is desirable and if so, what form future participation might take. Based on the findings from two qualitative studies, examples of best practice are identified and recommendations are made. Greater co-operation over facilitating tourist movement and crisis management are suggested, but it is concluded that ultimately, the relevance of regional trading blocs in tourism needs further endorsement by the member states.

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of regional trading blocs is considered an important aspect of the process of economic and political globalisation. Membership of a trading bloc may bring benefits such as increased intraregional trade, greater economic and political stability, and closer co-operation with neighbouring countries (Goldstein, 2003). Regionalism refers to the appearance and consolidation of various arrangements among groups of geographically proximate countries (Heywood, 2003). Regional integration ranges from the simplest free trade area to full economic union; concomitant are costs and benefits, as individual countries must sacrifice a proportion of their autonomy in economic policy-making in exchange for further growth (McCormick, 1999).

Since the middle of the twentieth century, there has been an upsurge in the number of regional trading blocs and the areas of their involvement. This same period has seen a spectacular growth in international tourism, with arrivals increasing at an average rate of 6.4%, from 25.3 million in 1950 to an estimated 763.2 million in 2004 (World Tourism Organisation (WTO), 2005a). Nevertheless, although there is an extensive tourism literature focusing on specific nation states, there have been relatively few studies of tourism within the context of regional trading blocs (Hall, 1994;
Dieke, 1998; Smith and Pizam, 1998; Ghimire, 2001; Timothy, 2001).

Because of its potential to generate foreign exchange and employment, tourism has been deemed a preferred economic activity for nation states and regional trading blocs alike (Commission of the European Communities (CEC), 2001a). However, terrorist actions and disasters such as the Bali bombings and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak have highlighted the vulnerability and volatility of the sector (Mason et al., 2005). Although such crises may occur in a single country or region, their impact may be widespread and may require a collective, international response and multi-level co-operation, as demonstrated by the Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004. This would suggest that supranational organisations could now be much more relevant to tourism than they have been in the past by providing a platform from which to manage such challenges.

This study focuses on the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), both well-established blocs with a high volume of tourism, but with limited direct involvement. Although tourism in Southeast Asian countries has been researched from different perspectives (Hitchcock et al., 1993; Chon, 2000; Teo et al., 2001; Citrinot, 2003), little is published on the role and influence of ASEAN itself. In the case of the EU, aspects of tourism have been explored but not comprehensively. Early studies dealt with the potential for tourism involvement at EU level (Akerhielm et al., 1990; Lickorish, 1991; Akehurst et al., 1993), whereas more recent research by means of case studies has had a more specific focus (Hannigan, 1994; Deegan and Dineen, 1997; Wanhill, 1997; Giannias, 1999). The purpose of this paper is to compare the current involvement of both regional trading blocs in three key areas for tourism and to consider whether and how this participation could or should change in the future.

BACKGROUND TO REGIONALISM

Different explanations are proffered for the rise of regionalism in the post-war era. Some authors view regionalism as an extension of globalisation or as an alternative to global competition (Switky, 2000). Whereas globalisation can strain domestic markets, regionalism can provide new opportunities through tariff reductions and increased intraregional trade. Small domestic markets are characteristic of many countries and act as a major constraint to economic development and industrialisation. Joining a regional trading bloc can ensure national economic survival and minimise global competitive pressures (Jessop, 1995).

In addition, regionalisation may occur for political reasons. First, a state may join a trading bloc for fear of being blocked out of regional arrangements that may have serious implications for its economy. Second, bordering non-member countries must adopt trading bloc regulations in order to trade; joining the bloc allows them to influence regulations or receive compensation if they are adversely affected by them. Third, an increasing number of countries have opted to negotiate jointly during World Trade discussions in order to strengthen their bargaining position, either through regional trading blocs or through coalitions of interest, such as the Cairns Group of agricultural exporting nations (Cairns Group, 2006).

The number and scope of regional trading blocs has increased rapidly and almost every country in the world is now a member of some form of alliance, each with its own priorities and objectives and at varying degrees of regional integration (Switky, 2000). The majority of regional trading blocs acknowledge tourism as an area of involvement, because their barrier-removal effects act as stimulants to further tourism development co-operation and increase mobility. The level of involvement in tourism in each bloc depends on tourism’s contribution to the economies of member states and its relative levels of development. For these reasons, the treatment of tourism is more perfunctory in blocs such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and more pronounced in others, e.g. the Caribbean Community and Common Market. The literature on the relationship between regional trading blocs and tourism (Dieke, 1998; Smith and Pizam, 1998; Teye, 2000; Ghimire, 2001; Timothy, 2001, 2003) has indicated that for many trading blocs, collective efforts tend to focus on facilitating cross-border mobility and
attracting long-haul tourists. In contrast, little attention is paid to the intraregional tourist. Furthermore, the involvement of regional blocs in tourism is often limited to a statement of goodwill rather than concrete action because of the unwillingness to submit national control to that at the supranational level (Anastasiadou, 2006).

Barriers that affect the organisation of regional trading groups include geographical and political fragmentation, varying levels of development between member states (Timothy, 2004), political and economic variety, and diversity of strategic views among member states (Henderson, 1999). Such limitations have impeded the establishment of common policies or strategies for tourism in most trading blocs, especially those whose members are culturally and politically diverse. However, where member states share similar institutional frameworks, it is easier to coordinate economic policies and, by extension, tourism policies.

Each trading bloc, shaped by different geopolitical and historical factors, has distinctive characteristics, and a closer inspection of each will help create a clearer picture of its role and influence in tourism development. Timothy (2003) argues that trading blocs can affect or even guide tourism development through their involvement in the areas of marketing and promotion, infrastructure development, the flow of people and environmental conservation. This paper therefore focuses on three areas of prime importance to tourism development, marketing and promotion, freedom of movement and cross-border cooperation, where there is evidence of best practice or the potential for further cooperation.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE EU AND ASEAN

The EU currently has a membership of 25, and it is at the most advanced stage of regional integration (Sbragia, 2001). The introduction of a single currency as legal tender in 2002 for 12 of its members brought full economic union even closer, but major challenges to further economic and political integration remain. These include reaching an agreement on the future direction of the EU, the accession of Central and Eastern European countries that are less developed than other member states, and the scepticism concerning the devolution of further authority and decision-making power to the EU institutions.

In contrast, ASEAN comprises only 10 countries, and it has not reached the same level of integration and political co-operation. A free trade area only since 1992 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004a), its ultimate goal is the ASEAN Economic Community, a single market and production base (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003a). However, the accession to ASEAN of four less developed countries has slowed progress and should Timor Leste join the association, the single market may be delayed further. Its unique form of regionalism, dubbed the ‘ASEAN way’, is based on loose co-operation and the principles of consultation, consensus and non-interference in the internal affairs of its member states (Henderson, 1999). Since 1999, ASEAN has sought greater political, economic and social co-operation with China, Japan and Korea (ASEAN Secretariat, 1999), which will give it a stronger global role.

Each bloc approaches tourism differently, possibly owing to the difference in the level of development and degree of integration of each. Table 1 shows the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and World Bank classification for member countries of each area.

Although in the EU there is a greater range of GDP per capita (US$52,028 as compared with US$23,454 in ASEAN), the countries are all classified as upper middle or high income countries. In contrast, ASEAN includes countries classified at all levels of development, from low to high income. The considerable disparity in development levels of the Southeast Asian countries has slowed ASEAN’s progress; in contrast, greater homogeneity in the EU has led to further integration and increased socio-economic benefits for its members. In an attempt to accelerate this process in ASEAN, Thailand and Singapore have forged bilateral links in the hope that the other members will follow suit, a practice that has been used by EU member states in the past with some success (Vatikiotis and McBeth, 2003).

Currently, the EU has a population of 453.7 million and covers an area of considerable
historical, cultural and geographical diversity. Statistics show that approximately 9 million people are directly employed in tourism, which contributes close to 5.5% of the total GDP for the EU (CEC, 2002). According to the WTO (2002), the high level of economic development and integration in Europe has made international travel an integral part of the European lifestyle. In 2004, 414 million visitors were attracted to the area, a 54% share of world tourist arrivals (WTO, 2005b). Almost 85% of international arrivals to the region are intraregional travellers (CEC, 2003), which demonstrates the stability of the region and the significance of intraregional travel to the EU economy.

The European tourism market, however, is mature and its world market share of international arrivals has been declining (European Travel Commission (ETC), 2004; WTO, 2005b). It is difficult to assess the extent to which this can be attributed to a decline in popularity or to the emergence of new and competing destinations such as China and Southeast Asia.

Table 1. Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (PPPS) 2003 and World Bank (WB) classification for member countries.

| EU                  | Country     | Date joined | GDP     | WB classification |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Austria             | 1995        | 30094       | High income |
| Belgium             | 1952        | 28335       | High income |
| Cyprus              | 2004        | 18776       | High income |
| Czech Republic      | 2004        | 16357       | Upper middle income |
| Denmark             | 1973        | 31465       | High income |
| Estonia             | 2004        | 13539       | Upper middle income |
| Finland             | 1995        | 27619       | High income |
| France              | 1952        | 27677       | High income |
| Germany             | 1952        | 27756       | High income |
| Greece              | 1981        | 19954       | High income |
| Hungary             | 2004        | 14584       | Upper middle income |
| Ireland             | 1973        | 37738       | High income |
| Italy               | 1952        | 27119       | High income |
| Latvia              | 2004        | 10270       | Upper middle income |
| Lithuania           | 2004        | 11702       | Upper middle income |
| Luxembourg          | 1952        | 62298       | High income |
| Malta               | 2004        | 17633       | High income |
| Netherlands         | 1952        | 29371       | High income |
| Poland              | 2004        | 11379       | Upper middle income |
| Portugal            | 1986        | 18126       | High income |
| Slovakia            | 2004        | 13494       | Upper middle income |
| Slovenia            | 2004        | 19150       | High income |
| Spain               | 1986        | 22391       | High income |
| Sweden              | 1995        | 26750       | High income |
| UK                  | 1973        | 27147       | High income |

| ASEAN               | Country     | Date joined | GDP     | WB classification |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| Brunei              | 1981        | 19210       | High income |
| Cambodia            | 1999        | 2078        | Low income |
| Indonesia           | 1967        | 3361        | Lower middle income |
| Lao PDR             | 1997        | 1759        | Low income |
| Malaysia            | 1967        | 9512        | Upper middle income |
| Myanmar             | 1997        | 1027*       | Low income |
| Philippines         | 1967        | 4321        | Lower middle income |
| Singapore           | 1967        | 24481       | High income |
| Thailand            | 1967        | 7595        | Lower middle income |
| Vietnam             | 1995        | 2490        | Low income |

*Data from 2002.
Sources: World Bank (2006); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2005).
EU, European Union; ASEAN, Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

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Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in May 2004 have invigorated European tourism and helped Europe achieve its best growth rate for 20 years in 2004 (WTO, 2005b). Prior to 1989, travel between these countries and the rest of Europe was restricted, and their tourism infrastructures were consequently relatively underdeveloped for international tourism (Hall, 1998). In preparation for their accession, they received significant EU funding to improve their infrastructure (Directorate General Regional Policy (DG Regio), 2004a) and are now more accessible in psychological and pragmatic terms.

The countries in ASEAN are spread over an area of 4.5 million km$^2$, much of it sea, and have a combined population estimated at 558.2 million (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005a). All have excellent natural assets and tourism in the region has traditionally focused on beach and cultural tourism. Although the founding member countries now have established tourism sectors, the low-income countries are looking to tourism as a means of economic diversification. In 2002, tourism receipts reached US$27.68 billion, equivalent to 4.29% of the region’s GDP, and there were an estimated 49.964 million international tourist arrivals in 2004, of which 46.10% were intraregional (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005a, pp. 227, 229).

Since the mid-1990s, tourism in ASEAN has experienced some turbulence. In 1997, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand were affected to differing degrees by a severe outbreak of environmental haze, which received considerable negative media coverage internationally (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003b). The collapse of the Thai baht the same year precipitated the Asian financial crisis, which had far-reaching impacts in the East Asia Pacific region and seriously affected intraregional tourism demand and yields (WTO, 1999). Recovery was driven by efforts to diversify into new products, such as heritage tourism and ecotourism, to widen the region’s appeal in existing markets and to capitalise on emerging markets such as India, China and the Middle East. This was remarkably successful; by 2002 tourism arrivals to ASEAN countries had reached 43.763 million (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005a, p. 229). Despite a subsequent contraction of 12.3% in the growth rate of arrivals in 2003, largely attributed to the Bali bombings in 2002 and the SARS epidemic in 2003, the tourism sector proved resilient and arrivals in 2004 grew at 30.2% (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005a, p. 235).

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

An insight into the current and potential involvement of the two blocs was obtained by means of empirical data collected between July 2001 and May 2002 during two qualitative studies: an exploration of EU involvement in tourism and the Malaysian tourism sector’s response to the Asian financial crisis. Thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were held in London, Brussels and in three locations in Malaysia with elite individuals representing organisations and institutions in both the public and private sectors, many of whom were involved in policy formulation. The interviewees were viewed as elite because of their high-level status and their specialist knowledge.

Efforts were made to consult a wide range of individuals who were selected by using non-probability purposive sampling, snowball sampling and key informants to improve the response rate (Goldstein, 2002). Where permitted, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed; QSR NUD*IST NVivo was used as a sophisticated search engine to facilitate management of the data obtained.

In the EU study, both face-to-face and telephone interviews were necessary because interviewees were scattered throughout Europe and meetings in person were not always possible. The majority of face-to-face interviews were conducted in March 2002 in Brussels, the administrative capital of the EU. The interviewees included Members of the European Parliament active in tourism, European Commission civil servants, and tourism industry representatives from Euro associations and umbrella groups such as the ETC, the European Tour Operators’ Association (ETOA) and the European Tourism Action Group (ETAG). Attempts were made to include representatives from consumer and environmental groups in order to obtain a wider range of views but these were unsuccessful.
In the ASEAN study, the interviews were conducted face-to-face and in English and each lasted approximately one hour. Snowball sampling is particularly productive in Southeast Asia, where contact by means of personal introduction is customary. The organisations represented included the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, Tourism Malaysia, the National Economic Action Council (NEAC) Secretariat, the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority, the Johor State Executive Council, the Langkawi Development Authority, the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, the Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents, the Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners and the leisure complex Sunway City Berhad. All the interviewees held very senior positions in their organisations such as chairman, director or assistant director, general manager or senior analyst.

The method was chosen because it allowed close interaction between the researchers and the interviewees. In addition, greater control could be exercised over the progress of the interviews which, given both the high status of many of the interviewees and the cross-cultural element, is recommended by Odendahl and Shaw (2002). It also reduced misunderstandings due to language differences. In addition, member validation was encouraged, where interviewees were given the opportunity to discuss the findings of the study with the researcher, considered by Maxwell (1996, p. 94) to be ‘the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what [interviewees] say and the perspectives they have of what is going on’. The interviewees were not stratified with regard to their nationality, ethnic origin or gender as although it was recognised that these would inevitably influence their perceptions and opinions, it was felt that the variety would enrich the data rather than detract from it.

In both studies, the number of suitable candidates was inevitably limited by virtue of their senior position and was restricted to those who spoke English. As English was not usually the interviewees’ first language, some of the nuances of meaning were lost despite great care being taken to clarify any ambiguities. Only EU institutions, Euro trade associations and tourism groups at the EU level were included because very little is known of their role and their views in relation to tourism. The Southeast Asian interviewees were mostly Malaysian (two were Singaporean), which is by no means representative of the range of views of ASEAN citizens but does still offer some perspective on issues of relevance to this paper.

CURRENT AND POTENTIAL AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM

Although both the EU and ASEAN are involved in tourism in a number of spheres, there are three areas where they have, or could have, considerable influence over tourism and which merit particular attention: cross-border development, marketing and promotion, and the facilitation of intraregional movement.

Cross-border development

The establishment of trading agreements may increase the disparities between member countries and favour the more developed countries or regions at the expense of the less developed (Armstrong and Taylor, 2000). To counter this, both ASEAN and the EU have made efforts to address economic and social inequalities between their member countries through regional development initiatives. In the EU, the regional development funds, known as Structural Funds, constitute the second largest budget provision (DG Regio, 2004b). In ASEAN, development objectives tend towards the facilitation of investment and the free movement of labour (Timothy, 2001). Support is much more limited than in the case of the EU and focuses on three regional growth triangles and initiatives such as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) programme, a joint scheme with China to realise the economic potential of the countries bordering the Mekong (Asian Development Bank, 2006a).

Tourism’s capacity to address regional challenges has been recognised and as formal relationships between member countries already exist, there have been some moves in both blocs to develop cross-border tourism projects. Within the EU, tourism is a significant tool for regional development. During the period
1994–1999, 7.3 billion economic currency units (the precursor of the Euro) were used from the Structural Funds to fund tourism projects (Hall, 2000), but little is known of the overall impact of regional development policies on tourism development.

Cross-border development, considered vital for greater cohesion and integration, is a major priority of EU regional development policy and is funded accordingly (DG Regio, 2004c). Cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation are promoted through INTERREG, an initiative introduced in 1990 to prepare border areas for a community without internal frontiers (DG Regio, 2005a); in addition, financial assistance is offered to candidate and third countries that wish to collaborate. ARCHI-MED, for instance, is a programme aimed at developing transnational co-operation between Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Italy and participation has been extended to Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Libya; key priorities include the sustainable management of tourism and cultural heritage in the participating states (DG Regio, 2005b). Euro regions too have been established to promote co-operation between local and regional authorities in member states and their non-EU bordering countries in for instance environmental protection, heritage and tourism, although there is a lack of empirical data on their involvement in the latter (Sinclair and Page, 1993).

It would appear that cross-border co-operation is well established within the EU, but it has often been driven by the availability of EU funding; an interviewee commented that it often makes more sense for German regions to co-operate with Austrian regions rather than with other German regions because there is more funding available for cross-border developments. Yet cross-border tourism development is still limited, given the degree of European integration, largely because of competition between and within member countries.

Growth triangles in ASEAN are equivalent to the EU’s Euro regions. They aim to foster trade and investment between participating countries without major institutional or legislative changes. As national boundaries are preserved, the potential for political friction is minimised. They are generally private sector initiatives, established in economically depressed or peripheral areas that stand to benefit substantially from focused actions to boost economic growth. There may be considerable difference between the development levels of the participating countries; infrastructure and knowledge skills in one or more partners may complement available land and cheaper labour of the others. Foreign direct investment focuses mainly on manufacturing and media and telecommunications equipment (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005b), but there may also be involvement in transport, shipping, agriculture and forestry, industrial infrastructure development and tourism (Tongzon, 2002).

Despite growth triangles having been in existence since the late 1980s, they do not yet have a significant tourism dimension, and research relevant to this paper is consequently limited (Timothy, 2000; Grundy-Warr and Perry, 2001; Henderson, 2001). Apart from projects such as the building of a casino hotel resort in the Philippines and the establishment of a national park in Sarawak with tourist access and accommodation, initiatives appear mostly to be aimed at encouraging and facilitating visitation by improving access and reducing or abolishing tourist taxes and aircraft landing fees (East ASEAN Growth Area (EAGA), 2004). Nevertheless, interviewees voiced support for growth triangles, although there was some scepticism as to their overall impact and future direction.

The comparatively small number of cross-border tourism projects may be due to unforeseen barriers to their successful operation. First, the private sector appears reluctant to enter into joint commercial ventures where they must not only surrender an element of control over the project but also be subject to the laws of the other participating countries. Second, substantial cultural differences arising from diverse ethnic and religious origins result in very different approaches to business and incompatible work ethic that may cause friction between participants. Third, owing to the disparity in development levels of the participating countries, there may be significant operational and administrative differences that are hard to reconcile.
The GMS programme incorporates the newer ASEAN member countries, Myanmar, Cambodia, Viet Nam and Lao PDR, with Thailand and the Yunnan province of China and focuses on transportation, energy, trade, investment, tourism, human resource development, and the environment. With six distinct cultures and assets that include 12 World Heritage sites within reach of the river, there is considerable potential for tourism development. The objectives of the GMS strategy for tourism include the promotion of pro-poor, community-based tourism especially in rural areas, the increase of private sector participation and the facilitation of movement of tourists to and within the sub-region (Asian Development Bank, 2006b).

ASEAN appears to ascribe greater importance to the GMS project than to the growth triangles, possibly because it has a much higher profile internationally. This may be due to the involvement of international organisations such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and because there are much greater gains. Not only are China, Japan and Korea involved but there are also immense infrastructure schemes being undertaken, such as the construction of a gas pipeline across the region, the building of the Trans-Asia Rail Link connecting Kunming in southern China with Singapore, and the development through the region of a road network that includes the North-South and East-West Corridors. The tourism potential of the GMS is undeniable, although Sofield (2006) identifies a number of political, economic and administrative barriers that need to be overcome before this can be fully realised.

Overall, cross-border co-operation remains minimal in the case of the EU because of competition. The availability of funding tends to skew co-operation in favour of cross-border initiatives, but as these may be unsustainable without additional funding, they will consequently alter in accordance with funding objectives. In ASEAN, there has been little formal evaluation of the performance of growth triangles, and more time is necessary before their effectiveness in practice and their success as a tool for regional development can be assessed. It has been claimed that in the EAGA, there has been an increase in regional GDP and some reduction of poverty incidence, and the hosting of festivals and sporting events has renewed socio-cultural ties and increased productivity (Mindanao Economic Development Council, 2004). However, the disparity in development levels and substantial cultural differences in ASEAN create more obstacles to the success of cross-border initiatives than in the EU. As tourism development is still at a relatively early stage in many of the ASEAN countries and access to tourist destinations is infrequent and even difficult, the development of tourism products other than adventure tourism or ecotourism will require assistance from governments in the form of financial or tax incentives and possibly even special status for the sub-region.

Marketing and promotion

Although a primary purpose of EU involvement in tourism has been regional development, to date the role of ASEAN in tourism has focused principally on marketing and promotion. One of its most important achievements was the Visit ASEAN Year (VAY) 1992, organised to mark ASEAN’s twenty-fifth anniversary, which helped reinforce the identity of ASEAN as a tourist destination on a global scale while establishing a platform for cooperation between the public and private sectors. The subsequent Visit ASEAN Millennium Year 2002 was originally identified as the focus for the promotion of ASEAN tourism in the Hanoi Plan of Action at the sixth ASEAN Summit (ASEAN Secretariat, 1998) but was abandoned because its cost was considered too high for the new member countries. Despite the comparative success of VAY, there was some doubt as to whether the ASEAN brand was recognised outside Asia, so the less ambitious Visit ASEAN Campaign (VAC) was run instead, with funding invested in global and intraregional marketing campaigns to build awareness of the ASEAN brand and its identity (Muqbil, 2002).

At the tenth ASEAN Summit in November 2004, tourism was identified as one of the priority sectors for integration by member states in the move towards establishing the ASEAN Economic Community (ASEAN Secretariat,
The marketing and promotion strategies include raising awareness of ASEAN tourism heritage and encouraging the private sector to develop packages to attract visitors from the main markets of India, China, Japan and Korea and to participate in joint initiatives, such as the Visit ASEAN Pass. This offers special rates to tourists for flights on participating regional carriers, hotels and transfers, provided they stop over in at least three different ASEAN countries during the visit (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005c).

The advantage of promoting ASEAN as a single destination was recognised by the interviewees, but doubts were expressed as to whether the ASEAN brand is recognised in the non-Asian source markets. During the VAC, a new logo was designed and a website (www.asean-tourism.com) with links to those of the individual member countries was established. Subsequently, in the ASEAN Summit in 2004, the importance of promoting ASEAN as a single tourism destination at exhibitions and international tourism fairs and by ASEAN leaders in the media was stressed. However, it is still not clear how effective these measures have been. There can be no doubt that for the marketing of the area to become meaningful in the interregional markets, ASEAN needs to raise its international profile as a single destination.

The EU does not have a clearly defined promotional role in tourism as this is largely considered a role for the individual national tourism organisations (NTOs), which they jealously protect (Lickorish, 1994). Advocates of common promotion claim that because the EU is increasingly perceived as a single country and some overseas tourists tend to visit multiple destinations during a visit to Europe, it would be sensible to develop promotional strategies for the whole EU. This is strongly resisted by the NTOs, which remain in direct competition described by one interviewee as ‘extreme, at times senseless’ (ETOA). Conversely, critics of common promotion argue that Europe, with its numerous tourism products and well-established destinations, is too diverse an area for a common promotion campaign to add value.

The debate over marketing Europe as a single destination is perhaps naïve but still relevant. The ETC, a body independent of the EU and financed by European NTOs, has been promoting Europe to overseas markets since 1948 but is now having difficulty undertaking even limited promotional campaigns because of reduced funding (ETAG, 2003). The inability of individual NTOs to fund campaigns on a global scale themselves, combined with the ETC’s financial hardships, makes the involvement of the EU as a supportive mechanism an attractive option.

EU tourism ministers suggested examining further the possibility of promoting Europe as a destination (European Council, 2002) and the European Commission funded the development of a new portal website (www.visiteurope.com), which was launched in March 2006. This markets Europe as a single tourist destination and it has replaced the previous ETC website that was aimed squarely at the American market (ETOA, 2005). The site is now focusing on four major international markets, the USA, Australia, Canada and Brazil, all of which view Europe as a single destination area.

The relevance of common promotion remains an issue of debate within the EU. However, the realities of public sector spending cuts and increasing competition from other regions may lead member states to consider the matter more seriously. Part of the problem perhaps lies in the fact that 85% of the international arrivals to the region are intraregional tourists, which makes the promotion of Europe to non-European countries an issue of less importance. In contrast, only 46.1% of ASEAN arrivals in 2004 were intraregional (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005a, p. 240), and international tourism from the major long-haul markets in particular is of considerable importance to the economies of all the member countries.

The nature of marketing and promotion is changing and perhaps so should common promotion. With the increasing access to the Internet, it may be more relevant to promote each bloc on the Web rather than by running annual campaigns. A sophisticated website would permit tourists to obtain full information about each country prior to a visit and to make their hotel and travel reservations throughout the region using a single point of reference.
The facilitation of intraregional movement

The sphere of involvement where blocs arguably have the greatest impact on tourism is the facilitation of intraregional movement. The abolition of all travel restrictions and visas for EU citizens in 1993 boosted intraregional tourism flows more than any other political change (CEC, 1993). With the implementation of the Schengen agreement in 1995, similar benefits were conferred on overseas visitors to most EU member states (Justice and Home Affairs, 2002). The internal borders of the signatory states have been replaced by a single external border, where immigration checks for the Schengen area are carried out and additional security measures have been introduced to protect against terrorism and crime. Issues such as asylum policy, immigration and drug trafficking have made some EU member states, such as the UK and Ireland, apprehensive about joining in and accepting the Schengen agreement as a European policy (Downes, 2000). Nevertheless, the benefits for non-EU visitors to the Schengen area are substantial because travelling to several destinations becomes much more straightforward.

Through an agreement between the EU and China in 2003, EU members who are part of the Schengen agreement were granted Approved Destination Status (ADS), which facilitates the issuance of visas for Chinese group tours. Such agreements can be of considerable benefit to tourism and are expected to stimulate EU inbound tourism significantly. Germany, for instance, which was the first EU member to be approved, saw an increase of 12% to 560,000 overnight stays by Chinese tourists in 2003 (Dickie, 2003), as it became a point of entry to the Schengen area. Since then, non-Schengen EU members UK and Ireland have also been given ADS through bilateral agreements with China.

The facilitation of intraregional travel has been an issue of prime importance to ASEAN and it has been recommended that formalities at borders should be streamlined for intraregional tourists, and customs and immigration procedures standardised (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003c). These plans were reinforced at the tenth ASEAN Summit in November 2004, when it was agreed that the procedures for issuing visas to international travellers should be harmonised and there should be visa exemption for intraregional travel by ASEAN nationals as from 2005. In addition, a feasibility study into visa facilitation for non-ASEAN travellers within the ASEAN started in 2005 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004b). There can be no doubt that a Schengen-type visa agreement and minimal bureaucratic procedures at borders would simplify intraregional flows, but there are concerns about the movement of terrorists and illegal immigrants. In addition, there are obstacles, such as immigration policies, that would need to be overcome for such an agreement to take shape within ASEAN.

**RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR INVOLVEMENT**

In both regional trading blocs, member states retain prime responsibility for tourism policy; in ASEAN, because of the low degree of integration, action at bloc level has not been feasible, whereas in the EU, because of the high degree of integration, it has not been desirable. This contradiction demonstrates the complexity of establishing a supranational tourism policy. In both blocs, the established mechanisms and institutions have been designed to achieve consensus rather than to respond rapidly to changes, which makes them inflexible, highly regimented and slow. This is particularly relevant to tourism, where the dynamics of demand and the danger of destination substitution may require a faster response than is possible from a supranational organisation if the appropriate structures are not in place.

There needs to be full consideration given to tourism in all policy-making in order to create an environment that is conducive to effective tourism development. Despite the fact that both the EU and ASEAN recognise the importance of tourism, the extent to which the benefit for the tourism sector is considered when any initiatives are being formulated is questionable. In ASEAN, the Regional Haze Action Plan (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003d) that was introduced to address the severe haze in 1997 was in fact of considerable importance to tourism, which had suffered losses of US$9 billion as a result of tourist cancellations and disruptions to...
flights (ASEAN Secretariat, 2001). Actions at supranational level may actually be detrimental; the abolition of duty free sales for intra-European travellers, for instance, had a negative impact on tourism in the EU (Fitzpatrick Associates, 1993). However, the situation is improving. The European Commission’s tourism unit is taking greater steps to ensure that tourism interests are considered in the preparatory stages of legislation and in the operation of programmes and policies that are not directly related to tourism (CEC, 2002).

The driving force of regional trading blocs is consensus, which means that at the supranational level, involvement will inevitably be limited to that which is complementary to the actions taken at both the national and the local levels. It follows therefore that supranational tourism involvement is more likely to be developed where co-ordination and cooperation between member countries are both feasible and desirable, and it is suggested that there are two areas suitable for common action for tourism.

First, there is clearly a role for regional trading blocs in the facilitation of interregional movement. It is evident that in the EU, gains have been made vis a vis tourism from China and there is the potential to develop similar agreements elsewhere, although security concerns are limiting progress in this area. In ASEAN too, efforts are directed towards the development of new and expanding markets. ASEAN leaders are discussing visa-free arrangements with Russia (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005d) and tourism has been endorsed as one of the five new priority areas of cooperation between member countries are both feasible and desirable, and it is suggested that there are two areas suitable for common action for tourism.

The facilitation of tourist movement at intraregional level, whether through marketing and promotion, streamlining of visa provision or the use of a common currency, could benefit all member countries. The introduction of the euro in January 2002 has simplified travel across most of the EU area and reduced commission charges from currency exchange significantly. The Southeast Asians view this with envy; there are plans to link the ASEAN currencies but political and economic obstacles mean that they are unlikely to be realised in the foreseeable future (NEAC). Critics of the single currency have condemned the unexpected increase in prices across the Euro zone since 2002 and the consequent loss of competitiveness, which has deflected demand from the price-sensitive market segments to non-Euro destinations in Europe and to Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt (WTO, 2005b). The adoption of the euro, however, has removed exchange rate volatility, reinforced the image of Europe as a single destination for outside visitors (Leu, 1998) and made price transparency and the comparison of similar tourism products across the zone possible (WTO, 1998).

Second, in view of the economic losses resulting from natural disasters and crises arising from human activity and terrorism, crisis management is an area where there is a role for regional organisations (de Sausmarez, 2004). It is in the interest of countries in a region to participate in the formulation of a crisis management strategy for tourism, as contagion means that no single country can be isolated from its neighbours. This was clearly illustrated by the decline in tourism to much of Southeast Asia following the Bali bombings in October 2002 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004c). There had been opportunities in 1997 for crucial regional cooperation, but the part played by the ASEAN during the Asian financial crisis was disappointing. Nevertheless, interviewees suggested that the ASEAN had handled the haze outbreak the same year in a more satisfactory manner.

The response of the EU institutions to the terrorist attack on the USA on 11 September 2001 included a comprehensive set of measures on the economic, financial, political and security fronts (CEC, 2001b). However, despite calls from the tourism industry for Europe to be promoted as a safe destination and for passenger taxes to be reduced, no specific measures were taken to assist tourism operators, as the impact on European tourism was expected to be limited (CEC, 2001c). This response demonstrated the EU’s inability to grasp the long-term implications for tourism, and it was considered unsatisfactory by several interviewees.

Ironically, it was the imposition by Western nations of a travel advisory warning against

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visiting Southeast Asia after the Bali bombings in October 2002 that brought a concerted response from ASEAN (ASEAN Secretariat, 2002). Even more impressive was the proactive response when tourism to the region was severely threatened by the outbreak of SARS in March 2003. The summit of ASEAN leaders in Bangkok in April 2003 for a briefing on preventative action against the SARS virus demonstrates that it is possible to orchestrate a regional response to the threat of a specific crisis (ASEAN Secretariat, 2003e). It is perhaps here, too, that trading blocs can take a lead in developing some kind of crisis management provision with joint public–private sector marketing initiatives to reinvigorate travel and tourism to the region after a disaster, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami.

There is clearly a need for a more general crisis management programme to be developed in anticipation of future crises well before they appear. In ASEAN, there are already committees established that deal with issues such as marketing and communication in general, or the haze in particular, which would facilitate the establishment of a generic team and a plan. However, it is not certain whether there would be co-operation at such a high level if no disaster were imminent, especially with regard to tourism, given that countries in a region will most likely be in direct competition with each other for international visitors.

It has been argued (Dieke, 1998; Ghimire, 2001) that regional trading blocs in Africa and South America, such as the Southern African Development Community and Southern Common Market (Mercosur), tend to focus their attention on interregional rather than intraregional tourists. From this analysis, it is apparent that this is true of both ASEAN and the EU, where efforts focus mostly on attracting interregional tourists to the area, and intraregional travel is underrated because of competition between member countries.

The experience of the crises affecting ASEAN has demonstrated that intraregional and domestic tourists are more loyal to a destination because they have better access to local knowledge and information regarding the status quo and so can avoid the trouble spots. For example, the year following the Bali bombings in 2002 interregional visitor arrivals to Indonesia fell by 21.36%, whereas intraregional visitor arrivals increased by 6.6% (ASEAN Secretariat, 2004d, p. 243). As integration increases and regional blocs become more established, intraregional tourists should increasingly be viewed as domestic tourists (except for statistical purposes) and treated likewise.

CONCLUSION

The formation of regional trading blocs has helped to establish socio-economic stability in both Europe and Southeast Asia. Stability within member states and the foundation of solid relationships between them have been primary factors in extending interregional and intraregional co-operation. However, for effective collaboration at the supranational level, common priorities and challenges need to be identified and specific procedures concerning decision making need to be in place, especially where there is economic, political and cultural disparity between the member countries. Not only may countries fear losing control over their future direction because their priorities and expectations differ from those of other member countries, but competition may be a major constraint to greater co-operation.

It is clear that direct involvement in tourism by both the EU and ASEAN has been limited. In the EU, the freedom of movement has facilitated greater intraregional tourism and the establishment of the Schengen visa has created similar benefits for non-EU visitors. Common promotion, however, remains a statement of goodwill. Most of the member states are well-established destinations and see little benefit in collective measures. Although there is evidence that this may be changing, marketing efforts at the supranational level have yet to prove of greater value than those taken at the national level. In contrast, the majority of ASEAN countries are emerging markets and the advantages of co-operation in tourism outweigh other considerations. Member countries have been willing to run common promotion campaigns but because of the slow pace of integration and security concerns, there has been less impetus to interregional and intraregional movement as a common visa has not yet been introduced.
All the activities instigated by a regional trading bloc should add value for all its members rather than favour some at the expense of others. For this reason, it is suggested that at the intraregional level there should be co-operation where possible in areas such as the provision of visas, marketing and promotion, and crisis management. The crises and disasters that have occurred in Southeast Asia during the last decade would indicate that a collective response may constitute the most efficient way of tackling such challenges. It must be stressed that any action agreed at the supranational level should recognise national priorities and ensure that no conflict arises from decisions made at this level. The supply aspects of the tourism product should be handled at the national level by both the private and public sectors, although as interests in tourism are very diverse it may be difficult to strike a balance, given the complex institutional setting that regional blocs create.

This analysis has demonstrated that in the case of the EU, tourism is used primarily as an instrument to achieve other socio-economic goals thus constituting the means, whereas in ASEAN tourism development is a goal in its own right: the end. The existence of a wide range of economic opportunities and well-developed destinations within the EU has maintained tourism as one of the several options, whereas in ASEAN the absence of alternatives has deemed tourism the primary economic opportunity.

It can be concluded that trading blocs have the potential to provide new possibilities for tourism growth, but it is more likely that the benefits to tourism will be primarily an outcome of the process of integration and its attributes rather than as a result of deliberate attempts to support tourism. Supranational tourism policy remains at an infancy stage, as intraregional competition dampens down any efforts for meaningful collaboration at this level. In both blocs, tourism development and promotion remain largely a national, regional or local concern. Despite their prominence and growth, the relevance of regional trading blocs to tourism needs to be endorsed by their member states before they are able to acquire a more meaningful role.

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