

LINKAGES BETWEEN HERITAGE POLICY, TOURISM AND BUSINESS ENTERPRISES IN LUANG PRABANG

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Abstract. The 1995 listing of the historic city center of Luang Prabang, Laos as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO is seen as a boon to the town's tourism industry, bringing economic gain through increased tourism and investment. Between 1997 and 2009, the number of tourism-related businesses (tour agents, hotels, guesthouses and restaurants) in Luang Prabang grew from 87 to 363. The tourism industry of Luang Prabang is characterized by small-scale enterprises with a high proportion of local ownership. Many of these businesses are housed within protected "heritage" structures. Heritage has both tangible (buildings, artifacts) and intangible (ways of life and traditions) aspects. The economic and policy measures needed to sustain the preservation of built heritage in poorer countries often conflict with the preservation of a locality's traditional space usage and livelihood, while introducing new usages and livelihoods. This paper reports on the findings of a study on the impacts of heritage preservation policy and practice on businesses in the UNESCO listed town centre of Luang Prabang. The research targets three categories of businesses: 1) tourism businesses owned by Laotians, 2) tourism businesses owned by foreigners and 3) non-tourism businesses owned by Laotians. Based on interviews and surveys conducted with property owners and business owners in this heritage zone, the research investigates the relation between these enterprises and the heritage environment they occupy. Issues include the perceived benefits and constraints brought to businesses by preservation policies and practices, as well as changes in property usage brought about by socio-economic spinoff effects of UNESCO listing, such as booming tourism and increasing regulation of the use and preservation of properties.

1. Introduction

The first heritage legislation for Luang Prabang was passed in 1989, laying the foundation for the 1993 application for Luang Prabang's World Heritage listing. A heritage protection zone was established under the Ministry of Information and Culture in 1994, designating 33 temples and 11 secular sites as heritage structures. These structures and this heritage zone were entered onto the UNESCO World Heritage registry in 1995. The rationale for the UNESCO listing of Luang Prabang rests on its qualities as a well-preserved townscape that is a unique fusion of Laotian and Western colonial architecture and urban structures, rather than any individual piece or pieces of architecture, and indeed the attractiveness of this destination to tourists also relies on this quality (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479>). Seeing the tourism potential brought by the UNESCO listing, the Lao government encouraged the development of a tourism economy, to mitigate poverty in the area and discourage environmentally destructive practices like slash and burn agriculture.

The protected area of Luang Prabang consists of four zones encompassing the different phases of the historic town and its setting, subject to control of different degrees and natures. These are ZPP-Ua (preservation zone), ZPP-Ub (protection zone), ZPP-N (natural and scenery zone) and ZPP-M (monasteries zone) (*Maison du Patrimoine*, 2002). Most of the businesses surveyed in the course of this research are located within the preservation zone, with a few in the protection zone. The most stringent heritage conservation regulations apply to a 1.4-hectare heritage preservation area. There are 29 distinct villages within the UNESCO zone, each characterized by a traditional trade that does not serve the tourism industry.

The Heritage House (*Maison du Patrimoine* (MdP)) was founded in 1996 as the main organization in charge of heritage preservation in Luang Prabang and was upgraded to the Department of World Heritage (*Département du Patrimoine Mondial de Luang Prabang* (DPL)) in 2009. It receives most of the foreign aid earmarked for heritage conservation in Luang Prabang. The Heritage House has no direct enforcing power, but a large budget. Most of the staff of the Heritage House are Lao, though most are

not originally from Luang Prabang (Bushell and Staiff, 2011). The Heritage House is not under the control of UNESCO, but reports to the Provincial Committee for Preservation of Historical, Cultural and Natural Heritage, which advises governmental bodies on the integration of conservation into development initiatives. The Urban Development and Administration Authority (UDAA) is a body of the provincial government, funded by the Asia Development Bank, responsible for urban planning and infrastructure. Construction permits involving heritage properties are vetted by the Heritage House before being reviewed by the Issuing Committee of the UDAA. Normally the authorization process for alterations to any building in the heritage area is three months, involving multiple submissions until the UDAA and DPL are satisfied (Yamaguchi, Takada and Leong, 2009).

In 2000, the Heritage House issued a Safeguarding and Valorisation Plan (*Plan de Sauvegard et de Mise en Valeur* (PSMV)), documenting the characteristics of the built architectural and urban heritage of the city. Based partially on this plan, the Luang Prabang government identified a number of areas in which advances are necessary if the city is to surmount the challenges of growth. These include weak coordination between different authorities, low local capacity for management, and a lack of effective dissemination channels for information (Yamaguchi and Vaggione, 2008). It has also been remarked that neither the governmental nor the private sector had taken the initiative to start the necessary dialogue to achieve effective heritage management (Aas et al, 2005). Through the mechanism of “village contracts”, for every infrastructure project taken on by the Heritage House, the village in question is held responsible for performing counterpart works to augment the heritage quality of the environment, such as repairs of historical elements or hiding of modern additions like satellite dishes, though enforcement is complicated by a lack of human resources in the villages to carry out the works (Gujadhur and Rogers, 2008). A new national heritage law was enacted in 2005 (Decree of the President of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic on the Promulgation of the Law on National Heritage, 2005), defining and classifying both tangible and intangible heritage, establishing rights and duties for its protection and setting up a National Heritage Fund.

These policies put constraints on the alterations, additions and other physical measures that may be undertaken on heritage listed buildings, in terms of aspects such as architectural style, materials and scale. Unapproved changes continue to be made in defiance of the heritage regulations, leading UNESCO at one point in 2007 to consider placing Luang Prabang on the “World Heritage in Danger” list, citing a lack of appreciation of factors such as the World Heritage ethos, the impact of individual actions, the intent behind the controls and the details of the regulations. Illegal construction and change of land use

from traditional trades to tourism uses were mentioned as two primary threats brought by this attitude “on the part of some stakeholders” (Boccardi and Logan, 2007).

2. Tangible and Intangible Heritage

In 2003, thirty-one years after the original World Heritage charter, UNESCO explicitly incorporated intangible cultural forms into the realm of heritage worthy of protection, with the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, citing a “deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003). Dearborn and Stallmeyer (2009) contend that it is the intangible aspects of heritage that draw tourists to Luang Prabang, and that heritage regulation needs to be concerned with balancing the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage.

Long and Sweet (2006) have remarked, however, that the justification for Luang Prabang’s listing, and thus also heritage policy in Luang Prabang, is concentrated almost entirely on maintaining an architectural ensemble frozen at the time of the colonial period. The intangible social, cultural and economic milieus within which these buildings emerged, and from which their meaning derives, are not accorded protection, and in many ways are threatened by preservation measures, which implicitly encourage change-over of buildings to tourism uses. They contend that such a view is myopic, in that it ignores the mutually formative relation between tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. Gentrification may preserve the physical structures, by providing a motivation for their retention as well as the money for their restoration, but would tend to suppress intangible heritage or encourage it to exist only in “packaged” commodified forms (Boccardi and Logan, 2007).

A particular threat to the intangible aspects of heritage is the loss of “living heritage” as people move out to be replaced by tourists and non-local entrepreneurs (Yamaguchi, Takada and Leong, 2009). Local people move out for a number of reasons, including environmental degradation brought by development, increase in property prices due to foreign investors’ speculation. Conservation regulation also contributes to out-migration from the city, in cases where owners cannot afford to maintain a heritage structure to the standards set by the Heritage House. In some cases where the owner of a wooden building is unable to afford proper restoration, UNESCO will fund the purchase of the expensive traditional construction materials with the provision that UNESCO will be allowed to use the building for its own purposes for fifteen years before returning use rights to the owner (Ackhavong, 2008).

A 2008 study found that fewer than 50 percent of hotels in Luang Prabang were local owned and that, whereas

government records showed 100 percent local ownership of guest houses in the town, in actuality many were de facto owned by non-locals in the name of a local person. Many of the workers in the tourism industry are non-local migrants including students (Ackhavong, 2008) who come from other provinces to study in Luang Prabang. Laotians tend to predominate as owners of guesthouses, restaurants and other more modestly-scaled enterprises, while large hotels outside the preservation zone tended to be developed with foreign capital (Wittayapak, 2010). Rules requiring a minimum contribution of US\$100,000 by a foreign investor in a project but blocking land ownership by foreigners has created a niche for Laotians to partner in tourism enterprises with little capital (Gujadhur and Rogers, 2008).

3. Continuity and Change

The replacement of old houses with modern buildings, rather than restoring them, is seen as a threat to the perpetuation of traditional building techniques (Boccardi and Logan, 2007), but the retention and restoration of old structures also poses a less obvious threat to traditional livelihoods. Ackhavong (2008) claims that, while the built heritage of Luang Prabang is constructed over time through the “livelihood adaptations” of local people, the 1995 World Heritage listing of the site drastically changed this dynamic. The ability of the urban context to evolve and change with the needs and desires of its inhabitants is effectively blocked by heritage conservation, for reasons that are difficult to fathom for many locals.

Most of the Heritage House’s public-oriented communication has to do with encouraging local people’s adherence to heritage guidelines, without much effort at instilling a holistic understanding and sense of identification with the PSMV. Because of this, authorities have not been successful in raising public awareness or gaining local people’s active participation in heritage measures (Gujadhur and Rogers, 2008). Bushell and Staiff (2012) claim that the cosmopolitan “universal value” stance of World Heritage requires a point of view that is inaccessible to the local people who inhabit heritage sites, threatening the effectiveness of the “community empowerment” and “custodianship” aimed for in many conservation efforts. Gujadhur and Rogers (2008) remark that local people in Luang Prabang tend to perceive heritage conservation as a burden put on them for the benefit of others, and that the only perceived benefits are the employment and capital brought by tourism, rather than the intrinsic value of heritage.

The city is found to have less built diversity than before the UNESCO listing and also to be less attuned to the patterns and needs of the day-to-day lives of its inhabitants (Dearborn and Stallmeyer, 2009: 253). These authors see the post-UNESCO-listing development of Luang Prabang

as characterized by an editing out what cannot be “easily packaged” under the sanctioned brand image of the city. The space of the city is seen as having been commodified, with everyday activities of local people, such as almsgiving to the town’s many monks, becoming appropriated as tourism activities such that local life becomes seen as a performance for tourists (Suntikul, 2009). The freezing of architectural form at an idealized historical state also contributes to a feeling of the town as a staged museum rather than a living city that evolves with the society that it houses.

4. Outline of the Research

The study reported on this paper is based on interviews conducted in July 2011 with proprietors of businesses in the heritage area of Luang Prabang. A total of twenty-nine interviews were conducted: thirteen with Laotian owners of tourism-related businesses, nine with foreign owners of tourism businesses and six with Laotian owners of non-tourism businesses. The interviews were semi-structured, based on a set of 30 common questions divided into four categories: about the business, about the building, about heritage policy, and about relations between foreign-owned and local-owned businesses. The following sections discuss findings of this research relative to the perceptions of these business owners regarding the impact of heritage policy in Luang Prabang on their business and the city.

The foreign-owned tourism-related businesses comprised two bars, three restaurants and four hotels. The Laotian-owned tourism businesses included five guesthouses, three tour companies, two small restaurants, a hotel and a souvenir shop. The Laotian-owned non-tourism businesses were a diverse group, including a stationery store, a repair shop, a bank, a noodle shop, a wholesale/retail shop and a hairdresser. For the purposes of this study, non-tourism businesses are defined as businesses that rely primarily on local people, not tourists, as their clientele.

5. General Information on the Interviewees and their Businesses

Six of the nine foreign-owned tourism businesses were self-owned, one family-owned, one a partnership and one an international hotel chain. As a consequence of restrictions on foreign land ownership, all of these businesses operated out of rented properties, with the chain hotel having agreed a long-term lease of a building owned by the government. All of the Laotian-owned tourism and non-tourism businesses were owned by the business operator or their family. The majority of Laotian non-tourism business owners also owned the building in which the business was located, except for one government-owned bank and one foreign partnership

hotel. Eight of the Laotian tourism business owners also owned their properties, three rented and one held a long-term lease.

Foreign-owned businesses tended to be larger than those owned by Laotians. Besides a bank, which employed 60 people, the Laotian non-tourism businesses had between one and seven employees. The largest Laotian tourism business was a hotel with 17 employees. The rest in this category ranged from 1 to 6 employees. In contrast, even excluding an international chain hotel, which employed 140 staff, the foreign-owned tourism businesses ranged between five and sixty-five employees.

The tourism businesses, both foreign-owned and Laotian-owned, counted only a small number of Laotians among their patrons. Eight out of nine of the foreign-owned businesses reported that between 90 and 100 per cent of their customers were tourists. The remaining business – a bar – reported that 70 per cent of customers were expatriates with the rest evenly divided between tourists and Laotians. Most of the Laotian-owned tourism businesses served 80 to 100 per cent tourists. Two of the guesthouses hosted higher percentages of domestic tourists – 35 and 50 per cent. Laotian-owned non-tourism businesses declared between 80 and 98 per cent local or Laotian customers, though all of them did attract a small number of tourists or expats as well.

Among foreign owners of tourism businesses, the primary motivation for opening their business had to do with romantic and exotic associations with the qualities of the place, its history, culture, environment and lifestyle. Laotians' motivations tended to be more pragmatic in nature, inspired by their training in a certain field or their perception of a business opportunity. Financial gain was downplayed as a motive by foreign owners but was the most prevalently mentioned reason among Laotian tourism-business operators for opening their business.

6. Experiences with Building Renovations

The interviewed owners had undertaken different types of renovation to their buildings, depending on the condition of the building, its heritage status and the functional constraints that the structure put on their ambitions for their business. Two owners whose buildings in the preservation zone were not heritage protected (one foreign and one Laotian non-tourism) because they were not historical structures, tore those buildings down to replace them with Laotian style buildings to Heritage House specifications. Laotian non-tourism businesses whose buildings were heritage protected tended to make little if any repair work to the exterior of the building. Interior work or changing of the internal subdivision of space, was sometimes undertaken without informing the Heritage House, for fear of the work being delayed, complicated or even forbidden. Tourism businesses, both

foreign-owned and Laotian-owned, were more likely to undertake exterior repair work than non-tourism businesses (though some did very little to the existing building), mainly for the purposes of fixing structural flaws ranging from foundation replacement to a new roof to a near-complete rebuilding. All acknowledged that the outward appearance of a heritage building was considered sacrosanct and that any ambitions to make changes were futile.

7. Constraints and Advantages of Heritage Regulation on Businesses

Laotians and foreigners, tourism and non-tourism businesses alike reported strong inflexible resistance from the Heritage House against what seemed to them to be quite minor alteration requests, such as slightly extending a roof to protect from rain, planting grass on the riverbank, raising the height of fences to secure privacy for guests, or filling in a stagnant pond (183 ponds in Luang Prabang are also under heritage protection). The interviewee from the bank stated, for example. "we wanted a 50-centimeter longer roof (to cover ATM machine patrons from rain) but the Heritage House only wanted 30 centimeters... We had to follow their design". A foreign hotel owner said "we were extending the balcony to two meters... but the Heritage House only wanted to allow 80 centimeters, which was too small for customers to sit. After negotiation, they allowed only one meter". Laotian non-tourism business owners reported on damages to their buildings whose condition worsened while waiting for extended periods for Heritage House approval to undertake repairs. One foreign owner of a thirteen-room hotel which developed a leaky roof had to close the affected guest room for two months while seeking Heritage House approval for repair work, stating that she wanted to avoid potential trouble by following regulations but ended up losing substantial revenue.

The majority of all three groups felt that their business was in some way constrained by heritage regulations. Laotian non-tourism business owners who felt constrained by heritage regulations tended to cite the prohibitive costs of undertaking repairs to their building using Heritage House approved materials, as well as prohibitions on extending their structures to accommodate growing space needs. Laotian-owned tourism businesses also felt the constraints on expansion of their properties but did not mention expense as a prohibiting factor. Rather, they were more concerned with the perceived lack of clarity in preservation regulations and lack of efficiency and professionalism in administration of these regulations. Foreign-owned tourism businesses, on the other hand, met with resistance when trying to incorporate the trappings of modern tourism facilities – such as a swimming pool, larger windows, modern light fixtures or

English or Thai-language signage (regulations require that Laotian be the most prominent language on any signage)—into heritage buildings. One foreign business owner stated that she was forbidden from having the signage *inside* of her shop (not visible from outside the building) in Thai language, even though most of the customers were Thai and most cannot read Laotian or English.

Despite the constraints imposed, heritage structures are valued by both Laotian and foreign tourism business owners. Several see the heritage building as an important asset of their business as it attracts more customers. Others see the location in the historic center as beneficial. Among these groups of interviewees were those who perceived the heritage rules as restrictive, as well as those who welcomed these rules for their protection of the qualities of the environment. A foreign business owner mentioned that “UNESCO gives Luang Prabang more value, identity and character”. Another declared that the “UNESCO brand” brought a good image to the town. Two of the Laotian tourism business owners mentioned lack of vehicular access as a disadvantage. All of the six Laotian non-tourism business interviewees mentioned location in the city center as the primary benefit of doing business in a heritage building, and none mentioned the qualities of the building itself.

A majority of all three sets of interviewees knew of buildings that were allowed to deteriorate. Some mentioned reasons were because the owners lacked access to funds for restoration but were forbidden from tearing the building down, because of sentimental attachment to ancestors, because the owning family could not agree amongst themselves to sell, or because the buildings in question were off the beaten track and not viable as tourism businesses that could provide payback on the restoration costs.

8. Impressions of Heritage Policy

Most interviewed foreign business owners felt that the primary benefit of preservation policy for their business was in keeping the town tidy, well-preserved and orderly, and maintaining the town’s atmosphere. Laotian tourism business owners echo this sentiment, and also that the UNESCO listing is responsible for the influx of tourists on which their businesses rely. Laotian non-tourism business owners also remarked that the UNESCO listing had brought tourists, and four of these six acknowledged that, even though they were not directly involved in tourism, this brought more business to them by offering goods and services to hotel, restaurant and transport companies or, in the case of the bank, by offering credit for purchase or rental of properties for tourism uses. One air conditioner repairman said that he benefited from the growth of tourism amenities that often required his services for repairs and maintenance of their air conditioning systems.

Most of the respondents indicated that they had never given input or tried to influence heritage policy. One of the Laotian non-tourism owner and two foreigners said that they had tried to give input but without any success. Although two Laotian non-tourism business owners out of six had contact with the Heritage House to seek permission for some works, the majority of this group of interviewees never had any communication with the Heritage House. Foreign owners were more likely to have dealt with Heritage House to seek permits for work, but mostly had no contact beyond that. Responses of Laotian tourism business owners were more mixed. Five of the thirteen only dealt with the Heritage House when seeking permits, one had approached the Heritage House for advice on various issues beyond renovation, and one expressed outright apprehension of having any dealings with the government. The majority of all interviewed Laotian tourism and non-tourism business owners (but not foreigners) felt that the Heritage House should be more active in disseminating information on conservation and preservation of buildings. One example is “Heritage House never creates awareness or tells local people who live in the preservation zone about regulations on preservation and restoration... There is no proper coordination or communication with local people”.

In general, the interviewed foreign owners declared that they were satisfied with the level of constraints applied to alterations on buildings in the heritage area, or that they would prefer stricter enforcement of the constraints. Some felt that the regulations were unevenly enforced, with stricter standards being applied to them than to others, but most admitted that they did not have a full understanding of the regulations. Most Laotian non-tourist business owners also felt that the level of constraints was “middle”, in some cases declaring no particular knowledge or involvement with heritage policy. Two such owners, both of whom had had measures denied by the Heritage House, though, saw the controls as too strict. There was no dominant trend among Laotian tourism business owners, though. Of the thirteen interviewed, two felt that regulations were too strict, five felt they were appropriate (or “middle”) and three felt they were not strict enough. One declared that the regulations were “useless” because they could be circumvented by anyone with enough money.

When asked about government assistance available for heritage restoration or building improvement, the only business that had received government assistance for restoration work was the government-owned bank. Laotian non-tourism business owners tend to perceive that government funding goes towards hotels and other tourism structures. One such interviewee stated that there was no government support for businesses like his because the government would “rather concentrate on temples, and hotels and restaurants to serve tourists”.

However, foreign tourism business owners stated that they neither receive nor expect any government financial assistance.

Regarding their vision for how they would like to see Luang Prabang develop during the next ten years, foreign business owners unanimously stated that they would not want it to change at all, with the exception of banning cars from the historic area. A similar sentiment characterized Laotian non-tourism business owners, though some of these interviewees also expressed desires for better infrastructure and environmental initiatives such as a carbon free zone.

9. Discussion

This study has sought to understand the relationship between heritage buildings and the businesses that occupy them, in the UNESCO protected old city of Luang Prabang, through interviews with the owners of these businesses. Nationality was the most apparent determining factor in interviewees' motivation for starting their business. Foreign business owners had made an intentional decision to come to Luang Prabang, drawn by the qualities of the place (culture, exoticism, romantic and peaceful lifestyle) and were less concerned with money than with maintaining a certain way of life in a place to which they had chosen to come, in some cases from across the world. Local owners of both tourism and non-tourism businesses are living through a period of unprecedented transformation in their town, and many are motivated by the money-making opportunities that they perceive in this metamorphosing context.

Most of the local residents tend to be poor, without appreciable skills or experience in business, and therefore ill-equipped to enter as entrepreneurs into Luang Prabang's burgeoning tourism industry. The inflation and speculation brought by development and tourism push up living costs, and the profits to be made by renting one's property to a tourism business provide an added economic incentive for locals to leave. Because rent contracts are often done on an all-up-front or half-up-front basis (for instance, for a ten-year contract, either 5 years or ten years' worth of rent would be payable at the beginning of the contract period), locals leave with adequate funds to build a new house outside the city center.

The value given to heritage buildings in some sense puts them at an advantage over owners of buildings that are not heritage listed. However, this advantage is counteracted by the disadvantages brought by restrictions on the developments that may be undertaken. Some owners of heritage buildings are in effect marginalized as well. Those who do not have the initial capital or skills to start a tourism business and/or renovate the building and were thus compelled to rent or sell their building to others who then converted them to tourism uses.

While strict directives are given regarding the tangible aspects of heritage – the architectural character of the buildings – the UNESCO stipulations put no corresponding restrictions on retaining the original use of the buildings, and a change of usage from traditional livelihoods to tourism uses seems almost a prerequisite to meeting the heritage conservation requirements of the Heritage House. Businesses that rely on tourist traffic are seen as gaining the largest benefit from occupying a heritage structure, and also with a high degree of economic motivation to maintain the architectural character of the structure, since more “authentic” historical structures are seen as more attractive to tourists seeking to immerse themselves within a specific romanticized nostalgic image of the city. The expenses of repairing and preserving these buildings are not prohibitive for owners of these buildings, who reap the dividends of occupying a heritage structure. Heritage buildings not appropriated by the tourism industry often fall into increasing disrepair.

This economic dynamic brings perceived disruptions for some the interviewees. The owners of these buildings have little say in determining the nature of the developments to be undertaken. The expensive materials and specific architectural stipulations make repairing or altering a heritage building prohibitively expensive for some. Even those who can afford to develop these buildings “appropriately” are restricted in the types of development that may be undertaken, and the types of uses that can provide financial justification for the alterations.

Local business owners tend to perceive the permit process for works on protected buildings as being quite complicated and unclear as to what is allowed or not allowed, inspiring them to undertake work illegally or, if it would require obvious work on the building exterior, avoiding repairs and restoration altogether. Foreigners tend to be less intimidated by the permit process. They tend to undertake even quite extensive conservation and restoration work on their buildings, but have only modest ambitions at doing anything beyond an obedient carrying-out of the Heritage House stipulations. Modest requests by these owners for variations to the guidelines are invariably denied.

The interviews reveal ways in which heritage conservation comes into conflict with practical issues in running a business in Luang Prabang. The normal processes by which the physical fabric of a town co-evolves with the lives and livelihoods of its people are constrained. The designation of a fixed architectural style, the prescription of limited and expensive building materials and the prohibition of more modern and accessible ones, the institution of a daunting array of rules, permissions and procedures for building all discourage building owners and business owners from undertaking building work. Even very practical or hygienic measures such as extending a roof to keep rain out of a building, enlarging a balcony to make it usable, or filling-in

a stagnant mosquito-breeding pond are prohibited on stylistic grounds.

Interviews with tourism business owners reveal an ambivalent relation with heritage regulations, with many interviewees on the one hand expressing appreciation for the role of such regulation in maintaining the atmosphere and character of the old city, but on the other hand expressing frustration at the inflexibility of these rule to accommodate the nature of the tourism businesses housed in these buildings. Signage in a language comprehensible to a business' customers or a fence high enough to provide visual privacy to a pool, are forbidden for not fitting into the heritage vocabulary of the town. Such experiences reported by the interviewees indicate a degree of detachment of the form of the buildings of Luang Prabang from their content. The interviewed business owners each had to negotiate a balance between the advantages of doing business in a heritage building and the disadvantages of the narrow restrictions to which they had to adhere.

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