COMPLETION REPORT

Exchange Program

June 26- 30, 2023 | Seoul, Republic of Korea

SUSTAINABLE AND SMART TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MEKONG REGION PROJECT

Mekong Institute

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Executive summary

The "Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Region" project, led by the Mekong Institute (MI) and funded by the Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF), aims to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the increasing tourism in the Mekong region. With a focus on UNESCO world heritage sites and various creative industries, the project acknowledges the positive impact of tourism on local economies and job creation. However, it also recognizes the potential risks of over-tourism and over-commercialization to historical and cultural treasures. The Republic of Korea's tourism development strategy, centered on preserving and managing historical heritage sites, while also actively promotes its' cultural tourism contributing to a sustainable and thriving industry.

The exchange program successfully brought together approximately 60 delegates from Ayutthaya (Thailand), Siem Reap (Cambodia), Luang Prabang (Laos), Bagan (Myanmar), Hue (Vietnam), Seoul City, and Jeonju City (South Korea). The participants represented both the public and private sectors of these World Heritage cities. Through the various activities encompassing non-binding MOUs, exchange seminar, a new mobile app launch, synthesis workshop, and site visits, the program successfully facilitated collaboration, knowledge sharing, and relationship-building among the participants. It provided an avenue for stakeholders to collectively work towards the goal of sustainable and smart heritage tourism development, while also addressing challenges and exploring investment opportunities specific to their respective locations. The group discussions and presentations during the exchange program provided a comprehensive understanding of the issues and identified practical strategies and solutions.

Moving forward, it is imperative for these heritage sites to prioritize collaboration among government agencies, heritage management organizations, communities, and private stakeholders. Furthermore, the delegates emphasized the importance of long-term commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and the integration of smart tourism technologies. To achieve sustainable tourism development, the delegates highlighted the significance of securing funding, diversifying revenue beyond tourism, and balancing conservation with economic benefits. Moreover, efforts to manage environmental impact, waste, and transportation challenges are crucial for effective tourist management. The emphasis on improving tourism infrastructure, enhancing tourism soft skills, and implementing targeted publicity campaigns will contribute to the development of urban tourism while preserving heritage sites. Ultimately, the delegates' collective insights and strategic roadmaps reflect a commitment to addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities in the tourism industry. By implementing these measures and fostering ongoing collaboration, these heritage sites can not only preserve their cultural treasures but also attract tourists, engage stakeholders, and ensure sustainable tourism development for future generations.

1. Project Background

The Mekong region is a diverse and vibrant destination that attracts millions of tourists every year. In recent years, the region's UNESCO world heritage sites have also seen a noticeable increase in the number of visitors as more and more travelers seek out cultural experiences and rich historical heritages. In addition to the hospitality and travel industries, these UNESCO heritage sites also encompass a broad range of creative industries such as performing arts and traditional music, traditional and cultural textiles and architecture designs, gastronomy, and local artisans, among others. Furthermore, the global tourism industry is currently making a strong recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a projection of a 30% increase in 2023 exceeding 2019 pre-pandemic levels. These trends offer a positive impact on the local economies, providing a boost to small businesses, creating jobs, and contributing to the overall growth of the tourism industry in the Mekong region.

On the other hand, the rapid growth of the tourism industry also poses a significant challenge to the conservation of historical sites and authentic cultural heritages, as well as the environment in Mekong countries, signaling the significance of responsible and sustainable tourism practices. These heritage sites encompass unique cultural and historical treasures of the region that require careful management to mitigate the risks associated with the negative impacts of over-tourism and over-commercialization. A sustainable and smart tourism approach offers solutions to these challenges while also enhancing both the host communities' and visitors' experiences through technology and innovations. Sharing this aspiration, governments in the region are pursuing a more collaborative and balanced approach that takes into account the social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism in their respective heritage destinations.

The Republic of Korea's tourism development strategy revolves largely around preserving and responsibly managing its historical heritage sites. By actively promoting these assets and offering immersive cultural experiences, RoK's cultural tourism promotes a sustainable and thriving industry that celebrates its rich heritage. The country places significant emphasis on promoting its cultural traditions through support for festivals, events, and performances showcasing traditional Korean arts, crafts, music, and dance.

Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Region Project

Implemented by the Mekong Institute (MI) with the financial support of Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF), the "Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Region" project introduces smart tourism tools, techniques, and technologies with the aim to promote and strengthen the application of sustainable and smart tourism practices. The overall project's expected outcomes include a wide application of sustainable and smart tourism practices within the "shared economy" concept, maximization of human capital potentials in innovation and efficient use of endogenous cultural and natural resources. The project targets tourism stakeholders in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand.

To achieve the achieve the objectives, the project has three main components:

- Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Countries,
- Enhancing Korea-Mekong Hospitality Training and Mentoring, and
- Establishing Historical and Cultural Town Twinning amongst selected heritage sites in Mekong countries and the Republic of Korea.

Year 1

Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Countries
- Online Platform Development
- Regional Workshop
- Regional Training

Year 2

Korea–Mekong Hospitality Training and Mentoring
- Road Shows in CLMTV
- Sustainable Tourism Curriculum Development
- Training in the ROK
- E-Mentoring

Year 3

Twinning of Historical/Cultural towns Between Korea and Mekong Countries
- Exchange Program
- Investment Forum
- Project Monitoring and Evaluation

2. Introduction of the Exchange Program

The exchange program was organized with the objective of promoting collaborations and facilitating knowledge exchange among stakeholders of selected UNESCO World Heritage towns/sites. The program aimed to foster partnerships through town twinning Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), exchange forums, and site visits, focusing on sustainable and smart heritage tourism development.

Participants

The program successfully brought together approximately 60 delegates from Ayutthaya (Thailand), Siem Reap (Cambodia), Luang Prabang (Laos), Bagan (Myanmar), Hue (Vietnam), Seoul City, and Jeonju City (Korea). The participants represented both the public and private sectors of these World Heritage cities.
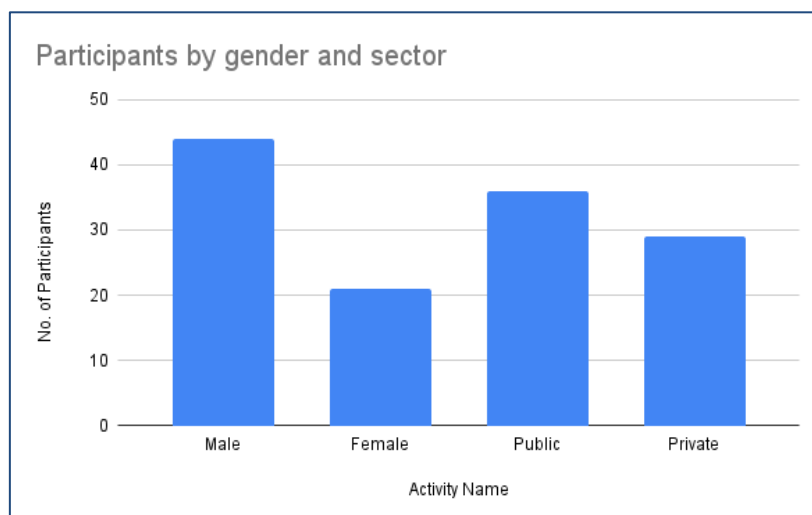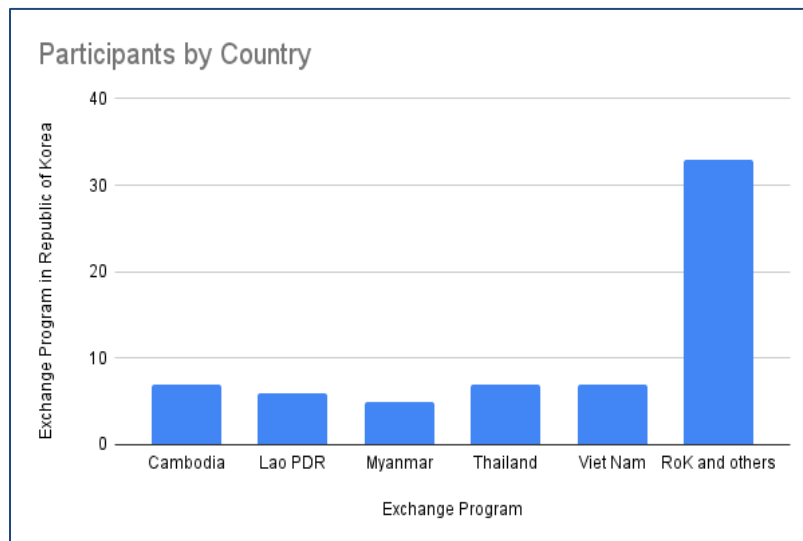
Program Activities

Through the various activities encompassing non-binding MOUs, exchange seminar, a new mobile app launch, synthesis workshop,and site visits, the program successfully facilitated collaboration, knowledge sharing, and relationship-building among the participants. It provided an avenue for stakeholders to collectively work towards the goal of sustainable and smart heritage tourism development, while also addressing challenges and exploring investment opportunities specific to their respective locations

Program Outcomes

During the program, delegates shared their respective best practices for governing and promoting sustainable and smart heritage tourism destinations. They highlighted successful strategies and initiatives implemented in their locations. Simultaneously, challenges and investment opportunities specific to each site were identified and discussed, allowing participants to gain valuable insights and exchange ideas.

Beyond knowledge exchange, the program served as a platform to nurture stronger relationships between the participants. By creating a convivial environment, the program fostered cross-cultural understanding and encouraged networking among stakeholders.

3. Exchange Program Content

Activity 1: Exchange Seminar

The exchange seminar facilitated knowledge sharing, idea exchange, and relationship-building among the delegates from both Mekong region and the Republic of Korea on June 26,2023. The event provided a platform for the participants to strengthen collaboration in sustainable and smart heritage tourism development, fostering cross-cultural understanding and paving the way for future initiatives.

Opening Session

The event commenced with special remarks from Ms. Kyung-hwa Chung, Director of Southeast Asia Division II, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, who graced the occasion as a distinguished guest. The Executive Director of Mekong Institute, Mr. Suriyan Vitchilekarn, also delivered welcoming remarks to all the participants. Afterwards, Mr. Madhurjya K. Dutta introduced the project and provided the overall information of the exchange program to the participants.

Presentations

During the seminar, the delegates from each country shared their best practices, exchanged ideas, and presented their approaches to sustainable and smart heritage destinations in the form of presentations and discussions. The knowledge exchange forum consisted of roundtable discussions and presentations, allowing participants to share experiences and expand their knowledge base.

Presentations by the Representatives of Siem Reap, Cambodia
Siem Reap delegates presented information on enhancing visitor experience and promoting responsible tourism. They focused on improving services, developing a new identity, creating innovative tourism products, practicing sustainability, addressing tourism trends, nurturing talent, and implementing smart city initiatives. These efforts highlight Siem Reap's commitment to providing a memorable experience, showcasing cultural heritage, minimizing negative impacts, adapting to evolving demands, and leveraging technology for efficiency and livability. Additionally, the Angkor Handicraft Association's Seal of Authenticity guarantees the quality and authenticity of handicraft products from the Angkor region, supporting local artisans and preserving cultural heritage. Furthermore, the Siem Reap delegates presented on Community Based Tourism, Cultural and Traditional Tour Activities, and Plastic Use Reduction, aiming to engage communities, preserve heritage, and promote sustainable practices in the region. Together, these initiatives demonstrate Siem Reap's dedication to enhancing tourism while ensuring sustainable development.

Presentations by the Representatives of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

The Luang Prabang Delegates presented an informative report on the conservation efforts in Luang Prabang World Heritage Site involving meticulous restoration and preservation of historic buildings. Despite challenges like material deterioration and limited resources, recommendations such as guidelines, training programs, and public awareness aim to overcome these obstacles and ensure effective preservation. Phousi Mountain Management focuses on best practices and strategies, including visitor management, conservation measures, and community engagement to maintain the integrity of Phousi Hill. However, challenges such as overcrowding and environmental impact require innovative solutions like crowd control measures and sustainable tourism practices. Alongside these efforts, "Discover Laos Through Textiles" offers an immersive experience, combining classes, shops, and culinary delights to showcase Laos' rich textile traditions. Together, these initiatives strive to preserve cultural heritage and provide meaningful experiences for visitors in Luang Prabang.

Presentation by the Representatives of Bagan, Myanmar

The Bagan Delegates presented an informative report on Bagan, an ancient city in Myanmar renowned for its archaeological site boasting thousands of temples and pagodas, which reflect its

cultural and religious heritage. The delegates highlighted various attractions and experiences available to visitors, such as exploring the archaeological zone, witnessing breathtaking sunrise and sunset views from hot air balloons, and immersing themselves in the serene atmosphere. The delegates also emphasized the importance of preservation efforts to maintain the historical integrity of the site. Additionally, a presentation by Boutique Destination focused on Bagan's 1000-year-old legacy, with a particular emphasis on the 3822 remaining temples as remarkable architectural treasures. The concept of Bagan as an open museum was introduced, showcasing its living testament to the past. The "Living Bagan Experience" was also highlighted as an initiative to provide authentic encounters with the local culture. These efforts contribute to sustainable tourism practices and foster a deeper connection between visitors and the local community, making Bagan an enchanting destination that offers a captivating glimpse into Myanmar's glorious past.

Presentation by the Representatives of Hue, Vietnam

The Hue delegates presented an informative report on Hue actively developing its heritage tourism industry by embracing digital technology, showcasing its cultural heritage through smart tourism and digital tools. The presentation emphasized professional skills training for the local tourism sector, highlighting the role of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and the well-equipped Practical Training Center at Villa Hue Hotel. It also focused on the connection between wellness tourism and sustainable gastronomy, discussing challenges such as sourcing local and organic ingredients and minimizing food waste. Efforts taken, including collaboration with local farmers and eco-friendly practices, were showcased. The future directions encompassed smart infrastructure, data analytics, and personalized experiences.

Presentation by the Representatives of Ayutthaya, Thailand

The Ayutthaya delegates presented an information report on a historically significant city in Thailand, which was presented as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with a rich cultural heritage and historical importance. The challenges faced by Ayutthaya in heritage preservation and tourism management were addressed, along with innovative solutions. The city's commitment to sustainable and smart tourism initiatives was showcased, emphasizing the preservation of cultural heritage, environmental protection, and community benefits. Additionally, Ayutthaya's use of technology and digital tools to enhance the visitor experience and improve city management was highlighted. The presentation also explored Ayutthaya's history, architecture, culture, and future development, including its strategic five-year plan. Furthermore, the benefits of accessible tourism were emphasized, promoting inclusivity, economic growth, social integration, destination development, enhanced customer experiences, and adherence to legal and ethical standards. Overall, the presentation provided a comprehensive overview of Ayutthaya's heritage, sustainability, and inclusive tourism initiatives.

Activity 2: MOUs Signing Ceremony

At the end of the exchange seminar day, non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) ceremony took place where multiple MOUs were signed between selected heritage towns and cities to establish potential collaboration and cooperation in sustainable and smart tourism development. These agreements aim to promote the exchange of expertise, human resources development, cross-cultural understanding, and the celebration of unique cultural aspects. This following is the overview of the MOUs signed between the City of Seoul and three Mekong heritage cities, the City of Jeonju and the same three Mekong heritage cities, as well as between Jeonju University and Ayutthaya Tourism College and RPITS Siem Reap.

MOU between Seoul City and Three Mekong Heritage Cities

The MOU between the City of Seoul, Luang Prabang, Siem Reap, and Ayutthaya seeks to establish a robust framework for collaboration in sustainable and smart tourism development. Seoul city was represented by the Seoul Tourism Association. The MOUs aim to achieve their objectives through activities such as exchange programs, cultural exhibitions, sustainability initiatives, joint marketing campaigns, digital collaborations, and youth programs. These activities promote expertise exchange, cross-cultural understanding, sustainable practices, increased awareness, digital enhancements, and engagement of young people in tourism-related activities.

MOU between Jeonju City and Mekong Heritage Cities

The MOU between the City of Jeonju, Luang Prabang, Siem Reap, and Ayutthaya aims to activate mutual exchanges focusing on culture and tourism, enhance friendship, contribute to sustainable development, and promote exchange and cooperation. The activities outlined in this MOU encompass mutual exchanges of cultural programs, festivals, exhibitions, and study tours between the cities. It aims to promote sustainable development and economic growth in the Mekong River

Basin countries, while fostering collaboration, partnership, and joint activities for the development of heritage cities.

MOU between Jeonju University and Ayutthaya Tourism College and RPITS Siem Reap
This MOU establishes a partnership between Jeonju University, Ayutthaya Tourism College, and RPITS Siem Reap to collaborate on cultural and historical tourism, human resources development, and research in World Heritage cities. The potential scope of collaboration outlined in the MOU includes facilitating internships and apprenticeships, curriculum development and exchange, industry certification and licensing support, industry expert guest lectures, site visits and job shadowing opportunities, research partnerships, and professional development for faculty members. These activities aim to provide practical experience, enhance education, foster industry-standard training, share insights, promote firsthand knowledge, contribute to research, and enhance teaching and research capabilities in the field of cultural and historical tourism.

Activity 3: Launch of Mekong Heritage App

The exchange seminar brought together stakeholders and experts in the field of cultural heritage to unveil the Mekong Heritage Mobile app. This app represents a significant milestone in the efforts to celebrate and safeguard the rich cultural heritage of the Mekong region. Developed by a dedicated team led by Prof. Dr. Sangwon Park from Kyunghee University's College of Tourism and Hotel Management, in collaboration with local communities and cultural institutions, the app aims to educate, engage, and inspire individuals worldwide about the unique traditions and historical significance of the Mekong's vibrant communities.

The Mekong Heritage Mobile app has been designed to provide comprehensive information on the key attractions, tourism services, and products of the five project locations within the Mekong region. It serves as a valuable resource for both local residents and tourists, offering a user-friendly interface that allows easy access to a wealth of cultural information and travel resources. By utilizing the app, users can gain insights into the diverse heritage sites, explore their historical significance, and discover the fascinating stories behind them.

During the launch event, attendees were treated to a live demonstration of the app's features and capabilities. Prof. Dr. Sangwon Park led the demonstration, walking through the app's user interface, highlighting its unique features, and explaining how it can be utilized to enhance the travel experience in the Mekong region. The demo showcased the app's intuitive navigation, interactive maps, multimedia content, and personalized recommendations, which help users tailor their cultural exploration based on their interests and preferences.

Furthermore, a Q&A session provided an opportunity for attendees to engage with the project team and gain further insights into the app's development, future plans, and sustainability. The team discussed various aspects, including the promotion plan to attract users, the system and content maintenance strategy, and the partnerships and ownership arrangements. This session demonstrated the commitment of the project team to continuous improvement and collaboration to ensure the long-term success and effectiveness of the app.

The launch of the Mekong Heritage Mobile app marks an important step in promoting sustainable tourism and preserving the cultural heritage of the Mekong region. By providing a digital platform that showcases the diverse range of cultural offerings and facilitating information exchange between travelers and local authorities, the app supports the development of tourism products and services that are in line with travelers' preferences and expectations. Moreover, the app's interactive features, such as virtual tours, cultural exhibitions, and storytelling elements, offer a dynamic and engaging way for users to connect with the cultural heritage of the Mekong region.

In conclusion, the Mekong Heritage Mobile app launch event successfully introduced a powerful tool for cultural exploration and sustainable tourism development. With its comprehensive

information, user-friendly interface, and commitment to preserving and celebrating the Mekong's cultural heritage, the app has the potential to become an invaluable resource for travelers and local communities alike. The collaborative efforts of the project team and the involvement of various stakeholders ensure the app's future growth and impact in promoting cross-cultural understanding and sustainable tourism practices in the Mekong region.

Activity 4: Structured Learning Visit

On June 28, 2023, the Mekong delegates embarked on a one-day guided tour of heritage sites in the Seoul district. The objective of this tour was to provide participants with a deep exploration of the historical and cultural immersion while learning about the management and preservation practices implemented in these twinned towns. The tour focused on visiting UNESCO heritage sites within Seoul city, showcasing the best practices employed in preserving and conserving the cultural and historical heritages of Korea. The delegates had the opportunity to engage with the rich history, architecture, and traditions of these sites, fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage preservation.

The day began with a visit to Changdeokgung Palace, where the Mekong delegates immersed themselves in the grandeur of one of the Five Grand Palaces of the Joseon Dynasty. They marveled at the palace's unique architecture and explored its stunning gardens, including the renowned "Secret Garden." The tour then proceeded to Jongmyo Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage site dedicated to the royal ancestors of the Joseon Dynasty. Participants gained insights into the historical significance and cultural practices associated with this sacred site, appreciating its well-preserved examples of Confucian architecture.

During a group lunch at a local restaurant, delegates had the opportunity to engage in discussions and reflect on the morning's enriching experiences. The afternoon continued with a visit to Bukchon Hanok Village, a charming village that offered a glimpse into Korea's cultural heritage with its narrow streets lined with restored traditional homes dating back to the 14th century. Delegates further deepened their understanding of Korea's royal history as they explored Deoksugung, a walled compound of palaces that were once inhabited by members of Korea's Royal Family during the Joseon monarchy.

The tour concluded with a visit to the Seoul Fortress Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage site encircling the old city of Seoul. Participants witnessed the historical significance of the fortress,

appreciating its role in protecting the city throughout the centuries. After a full day of exploration, the delegates returned to Seoul, where they had dinner and enjoyed some well-deserved rest.

Overall, the guided tour provided the Mekong delegates with a valuable opportunity to witness firsthand the best practices employed in preserving and conserving cultural and historical heritages in Korea. By visiting renowned UNESCO sites, they gained deeper insights into Korea's rich history, architecture, and cultural traditions, fostering cross-cultural understanding and a greater appreciation for cultural heritage preservation.

DAY 2   JUNE 28, 2023
UNESCO SITES VISIT
Participants : Mekong Delegates

9 AM - 5 PM
A one-day guided tour to UNESCO heritage sites within Seoul city to learn about the best practices in preserving and conserving the cultural and historical heritages in Korea.

1 HOTEL — DEPART
2 CHANGDEOKGUNG PALACE
3 JONGMYO SHRINE
4 KOREAN LUNCH
5 BUKCHON HANOK VILLAGE
6 DEOKSUGUNG
7 SEOUL FORTRESS WALL
8 HOTEL — RETURN

Activity 5: Synthesis Workshop

The final day of the exchange program was a synthesis workshop that served as a platform for group discussions and presentations where country representatives reflected on key takeaways and formulated strategic roadmaps for sustainable and smart tourism development.

Objectives

The workshop involved reflecting on and analyzing the information that had been exchanged, identifying common themes and ideas, and synthesizing them into a cohesive set of recommendations or action items. The purpose was to achieve a shared understanding of what had been learned and exchanged throughout the program and to identify concrete next steps that could be taken to advance the goals and objectives of the program. The participants from Mekong region worked together to formulate strategies and plans to move forward and make progress in the implementation of sustainable and smart tourism practices. The workshop provided a valuable opportunity to consolidate the knowledge gained and ensure a unified approach to driving positive change in the tourism industry.

The Workshop Topics

Exploring New Learnings and Practical Adoption: Delegates shared their experiences and learned from the sustainable and smart tourism practices implemented in other countries. They identified innovative approaches and strategies that could be adapted to their respective locations, fostering knowledge transfer and cross-country learning.

Identifying Challenges and Potential Solutions: Participants engaged in in-depth discussions to identify the key challenges they face in their tourism industry. They collectively brainstormed potential solutions, considering factors such as environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community involvement. The aim was to find feasible approaches that address these challenges effectively.

Examining Investment Needs and Opportunities: The delegates assessed the investment needs for sustainable and smart tourism development in their respective countries. They explored potential funding opportunities and discussed strategies to attract investments. By considering financial resources, public-private partnerships, and innovative financing models, the participants formulated plans to secure the necessary resources for their initiatives.

Allocation of Responsibilities and Industry Regulation: The exchange program emphasized the importance of stakeholder collaboration and the allocation of responsibilities for successful implementation. Participants discussed the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including governments, private sector entities, local communities, and NGOs. Additionally, they

explored the importance of effective regulation and the potential benefits of public-private partnerships (PPP) to drive sustainable and smart tourism development.

Group Discussion Results

Discussions on Siem Reap, Cambodia

Siem Reap faces challenges in implementing sustainable and smart tourism development while preserving its heritage site. These challenges include overcrowding, limited infrastructure, environmental sustainability, community engagement, balancing conservation and economic benefits, and technological readiness. To overcome these obstacles and generate sustainable revenue, solutions like investing in digital infrastructure, sustainable development practices, education and training programs, cultural heritage preservation, and improved marketing and promotion are crucial. Two specific technologies, the Smart Phone Based Audio Guide and Ticket Vending Machine, can enhance visitor experiences and streamline processes. However, the feasibility depends on available resources, stakeholder engagement, government support, community involvement, and long-term commitment to sustainability. By embracing these solutions and technologies, Siem Reap can preserve its cultural heritage, enhance the visitor experience, and achieve sustainable economic benefits.

Discussions on Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

The sustainable and smart tourism development in Luang Prabang faces key obstacles and infrastructure limitations. Challenges include coordinating Culture Day events, maintaining the heritage site's infrastructure, managing tourist numbers, and addressing the specific challenges of empty spaces and lacking components within buildings. Redevelopment costs, attracting investors, limited infrastructure, market demand assessment, and regulatory compliance pose economic challenges. To address these, solutions such as additional parking facilities, multilingual brochures, accessible facilities, and multilingual maps can be implemented. Feasibility depends on resources, collaboration, and community engagement. Initiatives like smart parking systems, mobile applications, virtual reality, sustainable tourism certifications, big data analytics, and IoT solutions can effectively address business key issues on smart tourism in Luang Prabang. These efforts can enhance operational efficiency, visitor experiences, and sustainability in the heritage city.

Discussions on Hue, Vietnam

Hue city faces challenges in sustainable tourism development and heritage preservation due to limited infrastructure, preservation issues, environmental impact, community engagement, and technological readiness. Inadequate transportation and waste management hinder tourist management, while balancing preservation and tourism requires careful restoration. Mitigating the environmental impact and involving the local community are crucial. Technological readiness hinders smart tourism implementation. Maintaining the heritage site and generating sustainable revenue require funding. Balancing tourism development with heritage preservation preserves cultural value and economic benefits. Diversifying revenue beyond tourism ensures long-term sustainability. Collaboration among government agencies, heritage management organizations, communities, and private stakeholders is vital for addressing these challenges and ensuring Hue's heritage site's lasting sustainability.

Discussions on Ayutthaya, Thailand

Ayutthaya faces significant challenges in conserving its heritage site, managing environmental impact, and balancing tourism with the well-being of local communities. Ongoing conservation efforts are essential to protect historical structures, but the influx of tourists can strain resources and generate waste. Achieving a balance between heritage preservation and economic benefits requires careful management. Solutions for sustainable tourism in Ayutthaya involve managing environmental impact, securing funding, balancing conservation with economic benefits, and enhancing technological readiness. These solutions aim to promote sustainability, collaboration, and the integration of smart tourism technologies. Effective conservation, visitor management, sustainable infrastructure, and community engagement are key strategies to achieve sustainable tourism development in Ayutthaya.

Discussions on Bagan, Myanmar

The obstacles to developing urban tourism in Bagan, Myanmar while preserving heritage sites include the lack of tourism infrastructure and limited tourism soft skills. To address these challenges, it is crucial to improve tourism infrastructure, including transportation networks and accommodations, to accommodate the growing number of tourists and enhance their overall experience. Additionally, investing in training programs and capacity building initiatives can enhance tourism soft skills among local stakeholders, ensuring effective communication, customer service, and knowledge about Bagan's history and cultural heritage. A comprehensive and targeted publicity campaign should be implemented to promote Bagan's unique cultural heritage and

emphasize responsible tourism practices. Collaborative partnerships between the public, private, and local community sectors are essential for coordinated decision-making and sustainable tourism development. Technical support in the form of training programs and expertise from tourism professionals will further enhance the capacity of local stakeholders. By implementing these measures, Bagan can overcome these obstacles and successfully develop urban tourism while preserving its heritage sites, attracting tourists, engaging stakeholders, and ensuring the long-term preservation of its cultural treasures.

By engaging in these group discussions and presentations, the delegates gained valuable insights and perspectives. They identified practical strategies and formulated strategic roadmaps to guide their future actions in sustainable and smart tourism development. The collaborative nature of the program fostered cross-country learning, promoting effective solutions and initiatives that address challenges and capitalize on opportunities in the tourism industry.

4. Evaluation and Feedback

The post-event evaluation[1] of the Exchange Program in Seoul, South Korea, has yielded several key findings that shed light on the overall success and areas for improvement. Here are the key findings:

Knowledge and Awareness Improvement: Participants overwhelmingly reported a positive impact on their knowledge and awareness of other countries' best practices on heritage site management, with a majority indicating moderate to highly improved levels.

Relevance to Work: The knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program were highly relevant to participants' work, with a majority expressing a high level of relevance.

Confidence in Utilizing Knowledge: Participants exhibited a strong confidence in utilizing the knowledge and skills acquired during the program for promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange in sustainable and smart heritage tourism development.

Willingness to Utilize New Knowledge and Skills: A significant majority expressed a high level of willingness to utilize the new knowledge and skills gained from the program, indicating a proactive approach to applying the insights in their professional contexts.

Action Plan Development: All participants affirmed that they have developed or planned to develop an action plan to apply the newly acquired knowledge and skills, highlighting a commitment to translating insights into practical actions.

Program Component Satisfaction: Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction with various program components, including presentations, app launch, MOU signing, guided tour, and synthesis workshop. The guided tour received exceptionally high satisfaction ratings.

Overall Program Experience: The majority of participants reported satisfaction or high satisfaction with the overall Exchange Program experience, emphasizing its positive impact and effectiveness in meeting participant expectations.

Exchange Program Administrations: Various aspects of program administration, such as accommodations, information sharing, food/meals, reimbursement, and staff support, received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Some areas, like visa facilitations, sound/video quality, and transportation arrangements, present opportunities for refinement.

Overall, the program has been well-received, with participants expressing high satisfaction and a strong commitment to applying their newfound knowledge and skills in their respective professional domains.

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[1] https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11y_9cmY69tvH3Ovcv7skafH6tPxzpkv_/edit#gid=254672850

Q1. To what extent has the Exchange Program improved or increased your knowledge or awareness on information related to other country's best practices on sustainable and smart tourism development?

Respondents generally perceive improvement in their knowledge and awareness of sustainable and smart tourism practices. None of the respondents indicated that the program had "not improved" their understanding.

Gradation in Improvement Levels:
- A majority of participants (55.56%) rated the program as "Mostly Improved," emphasizing a significant positive impact on their understanding.
- Another substantial group (33.33%) perceived a "Highly Improved" level, indicating a deepened awareness and knowledge.
- Moderate levels of improvement were reported by some participants, with ratings of "Moderately Improved" and "Slightly Improved."

Consistency in Responses:
- Responses across the survey are consistent, with similar patterns in the distribution of improvement levels.
- No respondents skipped the question, indicating a high level of engagement with the topic.

Weighted Average Analysis:
- The Weighted Average across all responses is 4.22, suggesting an overall positive impact on participants' understanding of sustainable and smart tourism practices.
- The average falls within the "Mostly Improved" category, indicating a substantial positive shift in awareness and knowledge.

Q2. To what extent has the Exchange Program improved or increased your knowledge and awareness on information related to other country's best practices on heritage site management?

A significant majority of participants experienced a positive impact on their knowledge and awareness of information related to other countries' best practices on heritage site management. Specifically, 16.67% reported a moderate improvement, 33.33% reported mostly improved, and 50.00% reported highly improved awareness. Notably, no participants indicated that the program had not improved their understanding in this regard. Out of the respondents, all provided answers to the question. The overall trend suggests a successful and impactful exchange program with a substantial positive effect on participants' knowledge of heritage site management practices in other countries.
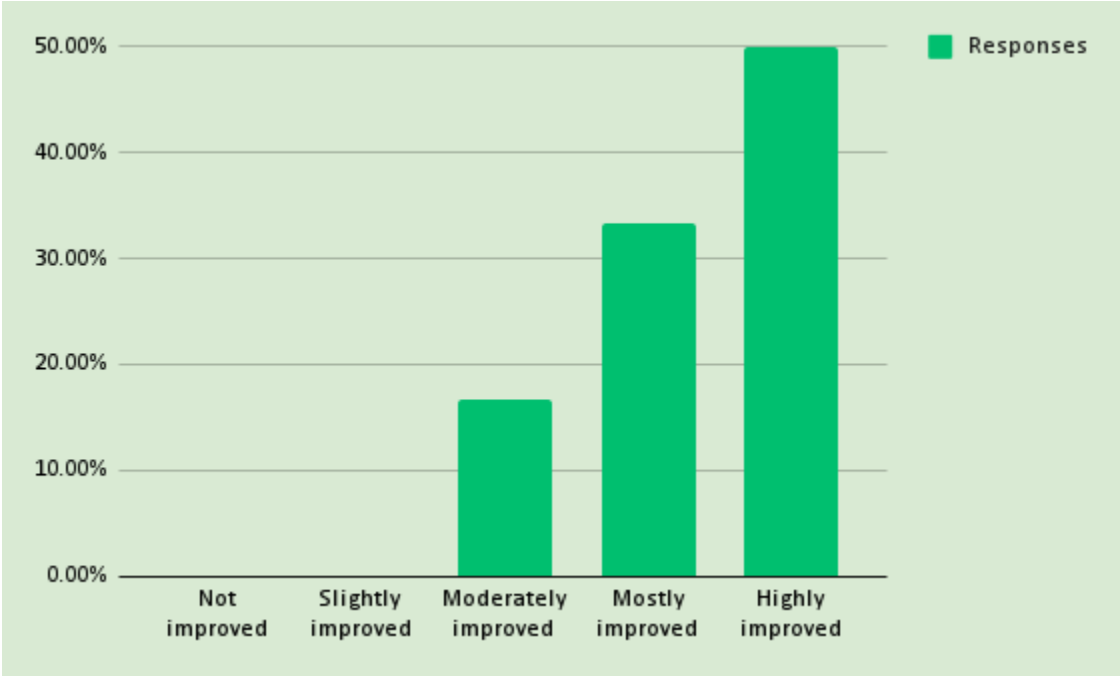
Q3. Were the knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program relevant to your work?

The responses to Q3 regarding the relevance of knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program are overwhelmingly positive. A substantial majority of participants, 61.11%, indicated that the acquired knowledge and skills were highly relevant to their work. Additionally, 27.78% found them mostly relevant, while 11.11% reported moderate relevance. Notably, none of the participants considered the gained knowledge and skills as not relevant or only slightly relevant. All respondents answered the question, suggesting a unanimous acknowledgment of the program's relevance to their professional responsibilities. These findings underscore the program's success in providing valuable and pertinent insights that directly contribute to the participants' work.
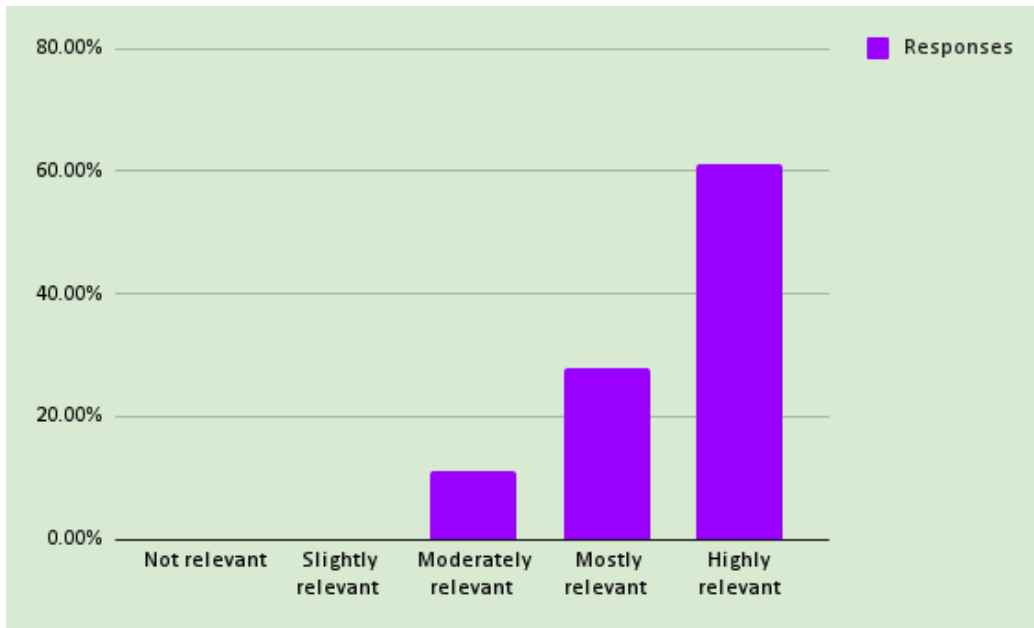
Q4. What would you rate your level of confidence in utilizing related knowledge and skills to promote collaboration and knowledge exchange for sustainable and smart heritage tourism development after the event?

The evaluation of participants' confidence in utilizing knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program for promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange in sustainable and smart heritage tourism development reveals positive outcomes. Notably, no participants indicated low or no confidence in utilizing the acquired knowledge and skills.

Overall, the responses indicate a strong positive impact of the Exchange Program on participants' confidence levels, suggesting that the event has equipped them well for promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange in the context of sustainable and smart heritage tourism development. All respondents provided answers to this question, highlighting a unanimous engagement in assessing their confidence levels post-event.
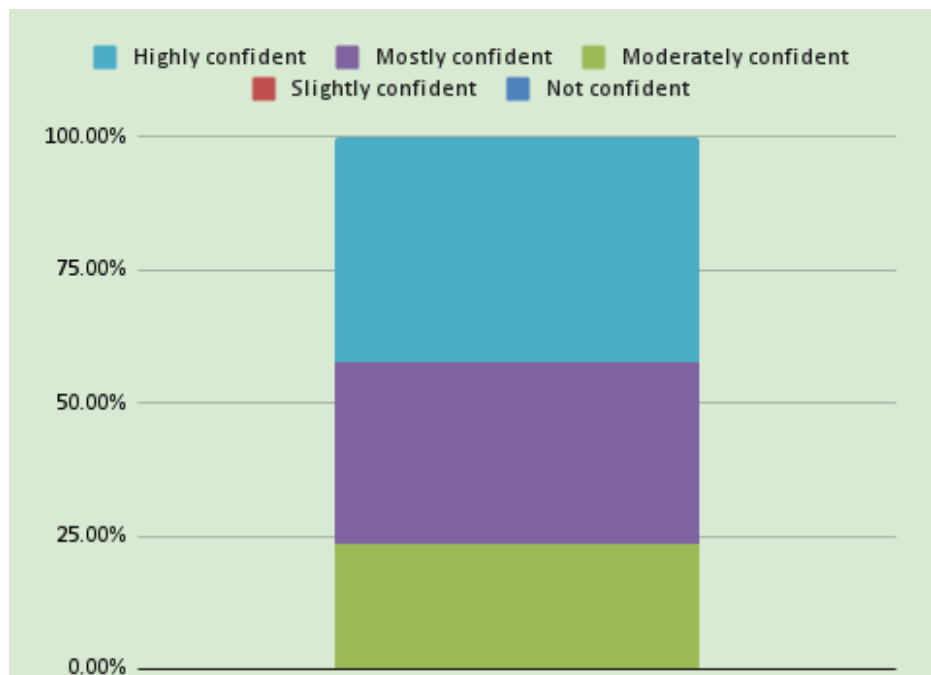
Q5. Rate the level of your willingness to utilize new knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program?

Participants' willingness to utilize new knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program is generally positive. A majority of respondents, 50.00%, expressed a high level of willingness to apply the acquired knowledge and skills, while an additional 38.89% indicated being mostly willing. A smaller proportion, 11.11%, reported a moderate level of willingness. Importantly, none of the participants expressed a lack of willingness, with no responses falling under the categories of "not willing" or "slightly willing." These findings highlight a strong commitment among participants to actively incorporate the newly acquired insights into their work. All respondents provided answers to this question, indicating a unanimous and positive attitude towards the practical application of knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program.
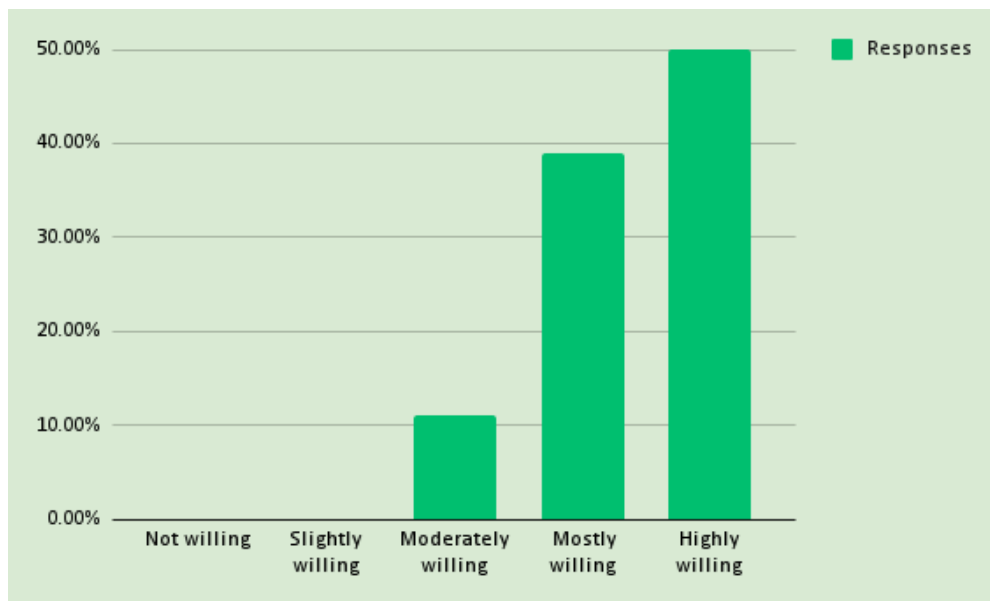

Q6. Have you developed (or planned to develop) an action plan to utilize new knowledge and skills gained from the event?

All respondents affirmed that they have either developed or planned to develop an action plan to utilize the new knowledge and skills gained from the Exchange Program. This indicates a unanimous commitment among the participants to translate the insights and learnings from the event into practical actions, emphasizing a proactive approach towards implementing the acquired knowledge in their professional contexts.
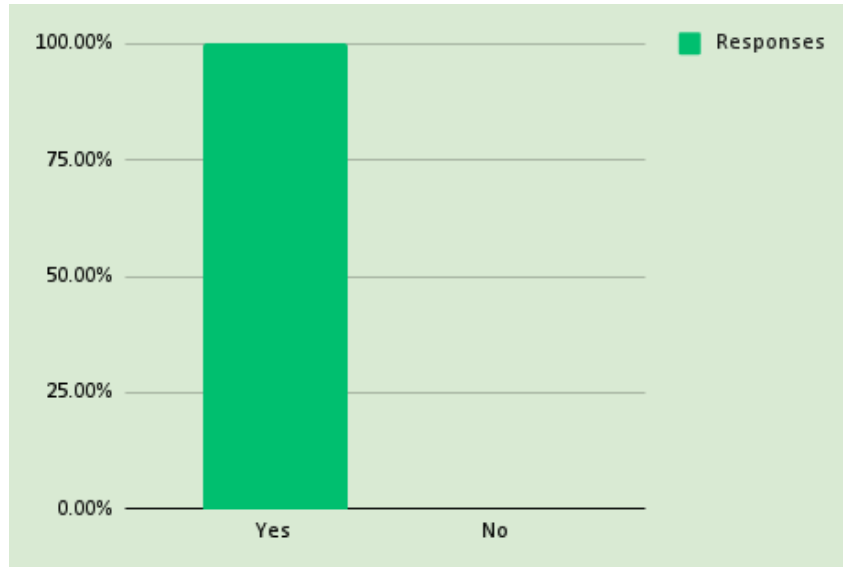
Q7. To what extend are you satisfied with the Exchange Program activities?

The participants' feedback on the program activities reveals a predominantly positive response from participants. Notably, the Day 2 Guided Tour received exceptionally high satisfaction, with 66.67% expressing highly satisfied responses. Overall, participants were satisfied or highly satisfied with the program components, indicating that the Exchange Program effectively met their expectations and delivered valuable experiences. The consistently high satisfaction levels across different activities underscore the success of the event in engaging and meeting the needs of the participants. The findings suggest that the program, encompassing diverse elements, contributed positively to the overall success and impact of the Exchange Program in Seoul, South Korea.
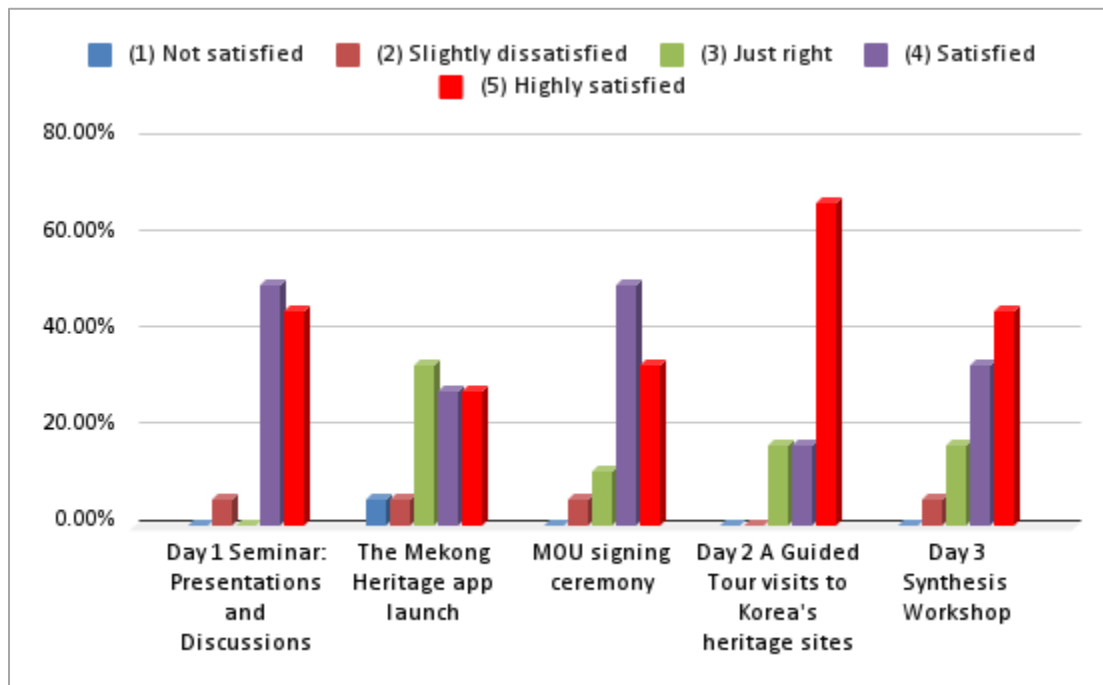
**Q8. Rate your satisfaction level of the following.**

Overall, participants reported high levels of satisfaction in areas such as the exchange of information, the working atmosphere during breakout sessions, friendships made, and professional contacts established. The responses reflect a positive and well-rounded experience, with the majority expressing satisfaction or high satisfaction across these key aspects of the Exchange Program. All 18 respondents provided answers to this question, indicating a unanimous engagement in evaluating their satisfaction levels.
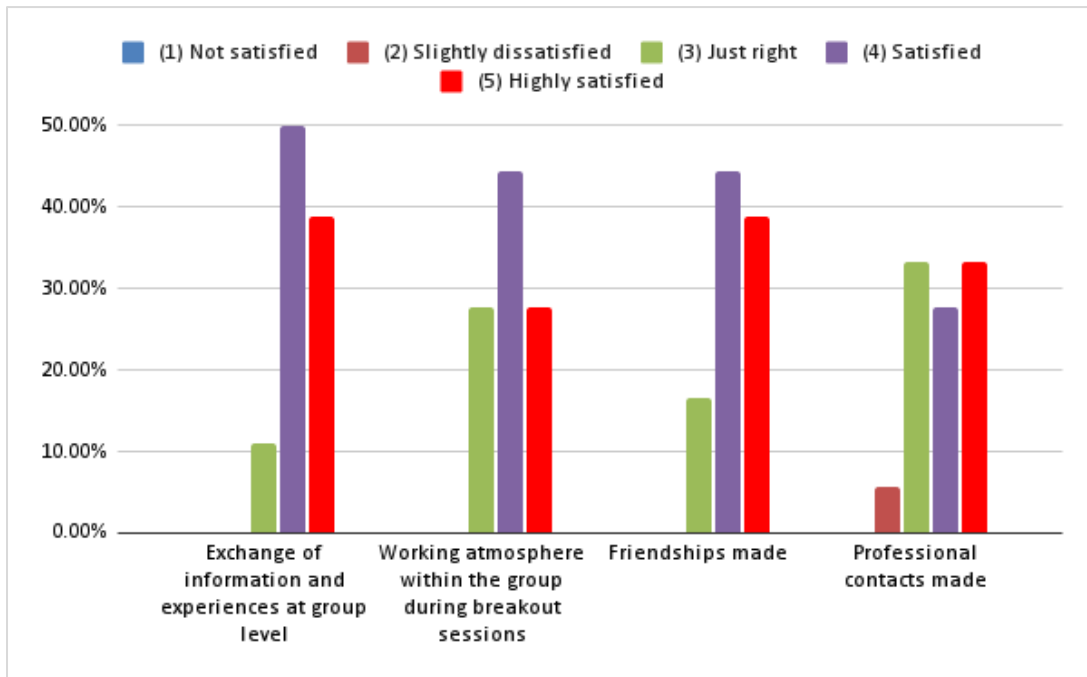
Q9. What was your overall experience of the exchange program?

The overall experience of the Exchange Program, was positive, with a majority of participants expressing satisfaction. Specifically, 55.56% of respondents reported being satisfied, and an additional 33.33% indicated being highly satisfied.

No participants expressed dissatisfaction or slight dissatisfaction, suggesting that the program was well-received by the participants. The unanimous engagement of all respondents in providing feedback on their overall experience underscores the program's success in delivering a positive and impactful learning and networking opportunity.
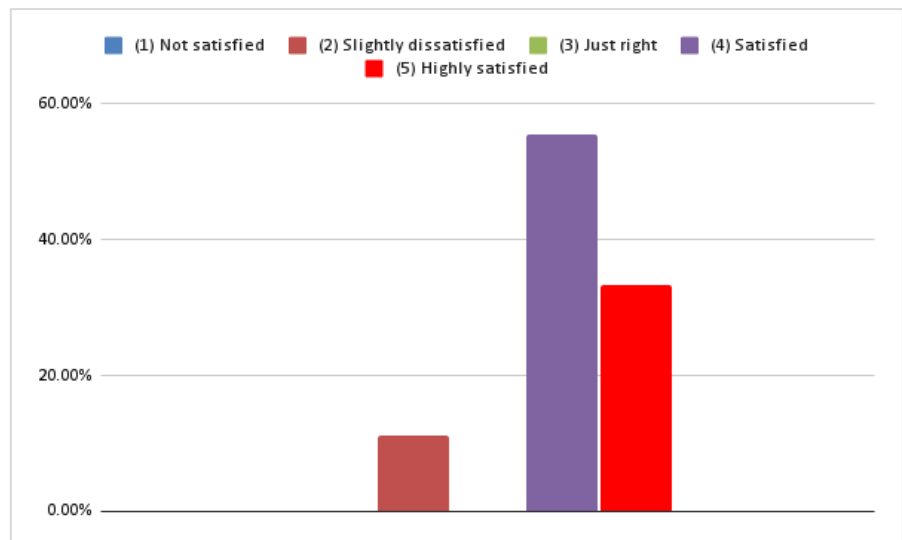
Q10. How do you assess the exchange program administrations?

The assessment of the Exchange Program administrations, as provided by the participants, indicates a generally positive response with a few areas that may benefit from further consideration.

Here is a summary of the findings:

- The majority of participants expressed satisfaction, and a notable proportion found the visa facilitations highly satisfactory.
- Accommodations received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with the majority highly satisfied with their stay.
- Participants generally found the information sharing to be effective, with a significant portion expressing high satisfaction.
- The majority found the sound and video quality during the seminar and workshop to be just right, although there is room for improvement as a significant portion did not express high satisfaction.
- Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the quality of food and meals, with a substantial majority highly satisfied.
- The reimbursement and financial aspects received positive feedback, with a balanced distribution of satisfaction levels.
- While there is a notable satisfaction level, some participants expressed a need for improvement in transportation arrangements.
- The support provided by MI staff received high praise, with a significant majority expressing high satisfaction.
- Event venues were well-received, with a large majority highly satisfied with the chosen locations.
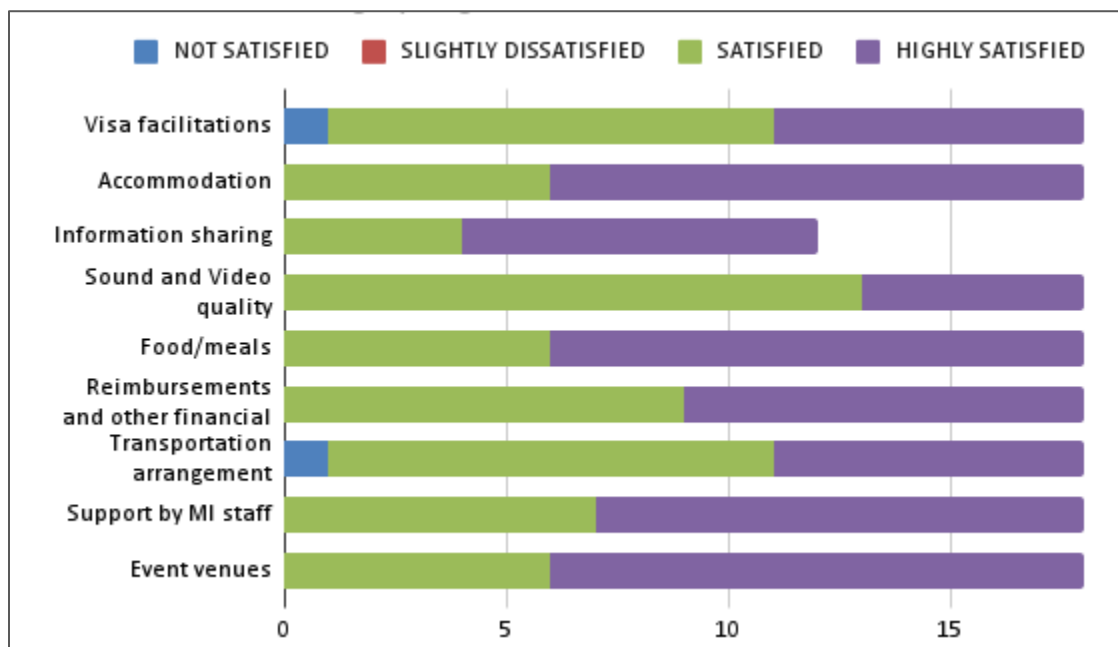
5. Conclusion

The challenges faced by Siem Reap, Cambodia; Luang Prabang, Lao PDR; Hue, Vietnam; Ayutthaya, Thailand; and Bagan, Myanmar in implementing sustainable and smart tourism development are complex and diverse. However, the group discussions and presentations during the exchange program provided a comprehensive understanding of the issues and identified practical strategies and solutions.

Moving forward, it is imperative for these heritage sites to prioritize collaboration among government agencies, heritage management organizations, communities, and private stakeholders. This collaborative approach will ensure a holistic and inclusive decision-making process. Furthermore, the delegates emphasized the importance of long-term commitment to sustainability, community engagement, and the integration of smart tourism technologies.

The proposed solutions, including investing in digital infrastructure, sustainable development practices, education and training programs, cultural heritage preservation, and improved marketing, provide a roadmap for overcoming challenges. Additionally, the implementation of specific technologies like Smart Phone Based Audio Guides, Ticket Vending Machines, smart parking systems, mobile applications, virtual reality, and IoT solutions can enhance operational efficiency and visitor experiences.

To achieve sustainable tourism development, the delegates highlighted the significance of securing funding, diversifying revenue beyond tourism, and balancing conservation with economic benefits. Moreover, efforts to manage environmental impact, waste, and transportation challenges are crucial for effective tourist management.

Moreover, the emphasis on improving tourism infrastructure, enhancing tourism soft skills, and implementing targeted publicity campaigns will contribute to the development of urban tourism while preserving heritage sites. Collaborative partnerships between the public, private, and local community sectors are essential for coordinated decision-making.

Ultimately, the delegates' collective insights and strategic roadmaps reflect a commitment to addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities in the tourism industry. By implementing these measures and fostering ongoing collaboration, these heritage sites can not only preserve their cultural treasures but also attract tourists, engage stakeholders, and ensure sustainable tourism development for future generations.

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