

Islands in the (revenue) stream

By David F. Morrill
May 3, 2010

Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam may be exotic locations to many, but to Don Rahtz they're also laboratories for research and teaching. His interest: Quality of Life (QOL) studies.

The J. S. Mack Professor in the Mason School, Rahtz regularly travels to Southeast Asia to measure quality of life issues, especially as agricultural and aquacultural economies make the transition to tourism-centered economies. The island of Koh Yao Noi off southern Thailand, for instance, provides a controlled environment for studying what needs to be done to improve the local standard of living and, hence, quality of life.

Rahtz has also recommended strategies for economic development around Cambodia's famous Angkor temples. Over the years there has been an influx of tourists that provides a much-needed revenue stream for the community. The trick, however, is to keep the area environmentally sustainable in the face of increased traffic.

In some cases, entire regions must be built from scratch. "After the Khmer Rouge, everything was stripped out so badly, there wasn't even an education system," Rahtz says. "My research tries to focus on the local community and interview the community members about what has improved and what is not working. We then examine what needs to be addressed in contributing to an increased Quality of Life for the community."

"My research tries to focus on the local community and interview the community members about what has improved and what is not working. We then examine what needs to be addressed in contributing to an increased Quality of Life for the community."

member of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS), which advocates for quality of life throughout the world. He also writes and reviews for a number of scholarly journals, including Social Indicators Research, Journal of Macromarketing, Journal of Happiness Studies, and the recently launched Journal of Applied QOL Research.

At William and Mary for more than 25 years, Rahtz measures his own quality of life in terms of his work and those around him. He credits his ability to stay abreast of the mindset of the nation – absolutely vital for marketing -- as the result of working with young people and witnessing, as he puts it, the "marketing progression from Madonna to Lady Gaga."

"I have friends in the business world thinking about their retirement portfolios," he adds. "I find that they don't think about a lot of the things that the college students are thinking about. I feel I am really in a great position to span the two worlds and try to stay abreast of the things that matter for everyone. Everyone has their own idea of what is important and what constitutes quality of life. Sometimes my older friends don't think like I do any more."

Hanging about with students will do that to a scholar.



Students gifted in Asian languages regularly assist Rahtz in his research, interviewing locals and tourists and compiling data. The results are more tangible than mere academic exercises. "The work we've done in Cambodia and the south of Thailand is really energizing," Rahtz says. "You plant your boots firmly on the ground and hope that the research is applied in a way that really matters."

Rahtz's wide-ranging interests -- including marketing communications and marketing research -- stem from a bachelor's degree in Southeast Asian Studies, an MBA, a stint at Quaker Oats, and a Ph.D. in marketing. He has also done a lot of healthcare consulting over the years, even before it made the daily news. "When I started, it was a marketing sidelight that no one wanted to pay attention to," he says. "Now it's mainstream."

Rahtz is a founding member of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS), which advocates for quality of life throughout the world. He also writes and reviews for a number of scholarly journals, including Social Indicators Research, Journal of Macromarketing, Journal of Happiness Studies, and the recently launched Journal of Applied QOL Research.

Don Rahtz
J.S. Mack Professor of Marketing
757.221.2866
don.rahtz@mason.wm.edu
<http://mason.wm.edu/rahtz>