In the modern history of Cambodia, the temples of Angkor were constantly (ab)used for identity constructions by the actual ruling powers. In this game, the years between 1979 and 1989 represent a unique case study: While the Cambodian territory itself was occupied by the Vietnamese Heng Samrin-regime, the resistance movement around the Khmer Rouge were recognized by the United Nations as the legal Khmer government under the name of Democratic Kampuchea. As a clever political strategy and in coalition with the former King Norodom Sihanouk, its political leaders around Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary appropriated the western discourse on national cultural heritage: with its Permanent UNESCO-Delegation in Paris, the “safeguarding of Angkor” was promoted as inseparable part of the diplomatic struggle towards national independence.

This presentation tries to analyse the ways and means of the “Angkor-as-heritage discourse” of the Khmer Rouge/Democratic Kampuchea in the 1980s, including the reactions of UNESCO and the international community.
Biographical information

Michael Falser studied architecture at the Vienna University of Technology and at the École d'Architecture Paris La-Villette and art history at the Vienna University. He wrote his dissertation on the political history of historic preservation in Germany as DFG-fellow at the Graduate Program “Building Research - Art History - Historic Preservation” at the Berlin University of Technology. After practical experience as preservation architect in San Francisco and consultant at the Austrian UNESCO-Commission, he worked as scientific assistant at the Institute of Building Research and Conservation at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich and at the art history department at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich. Since 2009, he is research fellow of the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” at Heidelberg University. His research focuses on the discussion of “heritage” as a transcultural concept with the case study of Angkor Vat in Cambodia. He is the organizer of this workshop.

Selected publications

- From a French exhibit back to the real thing: Re-enacting the Khmer temple of Angkor Wat in a transcultural perspective. In: International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden (ed.): Asian Countries as Exhibited at World Expositions (forthcoming 2011)

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