

## RhôneAlpes

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## In Việt-Nam, Triangle G H's catering school in Saigon takes off.

By Xavier Bourgois

With 87 million inhabitants, a good half of which is under 30 years old, and with 7, 1 % of average growth between 1990 and 2009, Việt-Nam is a young and dynamic country, in spite of persistent economic troubles, a trade deficit of 12.4 billion dollars, an inflation close to 14 % last March and a currency - the Dong - devaluated four times since 2009.

The country, which was perhaps a little quickly called « the new Asian dragon » twenty years ago, has probably grown too fast since its opening-up to market economy in the early 1990's. Institutions and human resources were quickly overwhelmed in growing sectors such as tourism, severely lacking of skilled labor.

The city of Saigon, also known as Ho-Chi-Minh City, must also manage a massive rural migration phenomenon. More and more young people, pressed by their parents to find a job in order to support financially their family living in the provinces, come to the economic capital of Việt-Nam to find work. But the unqualified majority is in a precarious situation.

### A catering training center anchored in the economic reality of the country.

It is in this context that a relationship developed between Triangle G H and Việt-Nam a little over a decade ago, when the association strived to give the tools to participate in the touristic development of the country to a part of the disadvantaged youth of Saigon.

Bakery, catering, table service, chocolate shop: so many businesses that find their place in today's Việt-Nam, and that the less advantaged youth of the region can now access through the creation in 2001 of a catering training center by Triangle G H.

For Marie Brillet, Head of Mission for Triangle G H in Saigon, « Việt-Nam was liberalized in the late 80s, early 90s. As a consequence, tourism developed, touristic infrastructures, hotels, restaurants were created, but there was no qualified staff. Hotel-keepers and restaurant-owners looked for personnel in neighboring countries, especially in Thailand. There was a niche to find, and the idea was to give disadvantaged youth the opportunity to have a job and to be able to cope ».



### A recognized sandwich course

During one year, the apprentices are provided alternate training in the school restaurant, catering service or bakery, which are both places of training and a source of additional income for the institution.

« Soon - explains Marie - the catering school will start a new training on room service through the construction of a test-hostel within the school that will allow students to do more practice ».

With about 80 students per class and two classes per year, the school runs well, and to date, more than 500 students graduated, possessing the skills necessary for independent living. This success allows the project manager to say that « the training provided by the school is really recognized at city level, a certain number of students finding jobs in luxurious or upmarket hotels ». Access to employment is facilitated by a placement service within the school.

### After ten years of support, Triangle G H hands over the center's keys to Vietnamese authorities.

According to Marie «The school has been given the means to function correctly», and fortified by this certitude, Triangle G H has started these past months to transfer the management of the center to Vietnamese authorities.

« Triangle G H has heavily invested in this project. But the time has come for people to handle things on their own. In recent years, a lot of work has been done to support resources such as training sessions on management and human resources, teachers training in cooking and in the making of chocolate, etc... but also training on project management for managers... a lot of work has been done on school empowerment, so I believe that at some point we must move forward ».

In fact, since the beginning of the project, Triangle G H has worked in partnership with the DELISA (Department of Labor, War invalids and Social Affairs of Ho-Chi-Minh Ville), but also with institutions such as the Committee for Poverty Reduction, which helped identify and refer young apprentices through their good knowledge of the field.

Thus, from the beginning, Triangle G H and the Vietnamese school managers led activities in the form of a joint management committee. Triangle G H withdrew several years ago from this joint management in order to give more autonomy to school managers while remaining in support until the end of 2010. A notable success was reached in 2007, when the school became a public institution granted official recognition of its vocational training since then validated by a State diploma.

The future of the school is now in the hands of Vietnamese managers and of its ministry of supervision (DELISA) in order to continue the efforts initiated by Triangle G H.

In order not to stop on such a good momentum, the school continues to grow. At the program, the opening of a hostel by the end of 2011, but also the opening of an annex of the training center, offering the complete theoretical training in an area off-center of Saigon, in order to optimize access to training: «Many young people would like to enter the school, but they cannot because they live too far away», says Marie, to whom the prospect of this sub-branch is very promising.



• **The fruit of a long process**

At the time of taking stock, Patrick Verbruggen, co-director of Triangle G H, looks back on this Vietnamese experience: « *This school is an example today (...) we wanted to create a tool and give it to Vietnamese authorities, it is done now (...) but it is the fruit of a long process* ».

In fact, while the first stone of the school was laid in 2001, it is during his first trip in 1998 that the process really started: « *It is when I set foot in Saigon that the project started* ».

For him, the success of the operation relies on the direct partnership with the authorities, who - despite difficult relationships at times - ensure today the sustainability of the training center which has become state property.

This is the story of a long and fruitful collaboration that ends and starts at the same time: « *Now I will have to go back to Vietnam, just to say goodbye to this project, which, I have to admit, really has been our baby over the past years* ».