



Urban environmental assessment and social impact assessment of tourism development policy: Thailand's Ayutthaya Historical Park



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ABSTRACT

This research reports the results of research using an urban environmental assessment (UEA) and a social impact assessment (SIA) of tourism policies in Thailand's Ayutthaya Historical Park. The data were collected from a sample of 193 households from a total of 529 households dwelling inside a 1-km radius of the ancient city. While creating revenues for the State, the top-down approach is failing to contribute to the economic well-being of local residents. One reason is the lack of local festive activities and the prohibition of locals from active commercial participation. These deficiencies arise from a lack of leadership and cohesion in the community. To tackle these issues, policy recommendations are made at the individual, community, provincial and national levels.

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1. Introduction

Incomes from the tourism and tourism-related industries account for approximately a quarter of Thailand's annual gross domestic product (GDP) in recent decades. Despite a 2014 report by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports which documented a decline in tourism revenues by 11.66%, the World Tourism Organization has forecast a significant rise in the number of tourist arrivals to Southeast Asia, including the Kingdom of Thailand. Thus, it is essential for Thailand to implement measures to increase the variety and improve the quality of the country's tourism industry to become a globally renowned tourist destination. In addition, it is necessary that the provincial-level tourism strategies be consistent with the national-level tourism policy.

Specifically, this empirical research focuses on Thailand's Central Province of Ayutthaya as it has a variety of tourist attractions, particularly the UNESCO-listed Ayutthaya Historical Park. Interestingly, it has long been held, despite disproved by this research findings, that the world-renowned stature of the ancient city of Ayutthaya would bring in considerable tourism incomes and thereby the sustainable economic well-being and happiness of the locals. This conviction is rooted in the province's 2010 Gross Provincial Product (GPP) figure of the Ayutthaya Provincial Treasury Office that ranked Ayutthaya the third highest in the country with a total annual revenue 479,601 million baht (1 USD = THB 35).

In addition, despite the alignment between the national- and provincial-level (i.e. Ayutthaya) tourism policies and strategies, the implementation has brought about both desirable (positive) and

undesirable (negative) outcomes. According to Unalan (2013), the effective tourism development requires taking into consideration both the positive and negative impacts on the locals and the environment (e.g. tourism-related pollution). In other words, the tourism development plan must be holistically formulated such that the affected local community is a major beneficiary with regard to the economic contributions and infrastructural development.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology consists of the following steps:

1. Make visits to the historical site for primary data and conduct investigation into existing theories and related research on tourism and conservation of heritage sites (i.e. secondary data).
2. Interview community leaders and representatives of relevant government agencies to obtain preliminary data for development of a questionnaire.
3. Gather data from the sampled households (i.e. 193 households) using the questionnaire and analyze the questionnaire results for the urban environmental and social impacts from the implementation of the tourism development policy and plan.
4. Propose the policy recommendations on various levels to mitigate the undesirable impacts attributable to the tourism policy implementation.

2.1. Population and sample

The research population was 529 households who resided inside a 1-km radius of the Ayutthaya Historical Park, who were subsequently

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randomly sampled (Langston & Ding, 2001) for a sample size of 193 households. On the demographics of the sampled households, the ages of the questionnaire respondents were between 26 and 40 years with 36.8% holding a Bachelor's degree. The majority of the participants (56.8%) were unmarried.

The occupations of the respondents were civil servants (12%) government employees (20.7%), employees/factory workers (26.9%), informal laborers including small shop owners (23.3%), students (6.7%), agriculturists (1.6%) and other (8.8%). On the monthly household income, 13% of the respondents earned less than 10,000 Thai baht (THB35 = 1 USD), 34.2% between THB10,001–20,000; 29.5% between THB20001–30000; 17.6% between THB30001–40000; 3.1% between THB40001–50,000; and 5.7% more than THB50,001.

2.2. Research tools

The collection of data was carried out through direct observation and the questionnaire. The reliability of questionnaire as measured by Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient is 0.725.

2.3. Data analysis methods

The analysis of the questionnaire data was performed in both quantitative and qualitative fashion.

3. Research findings

According to the field survey (Fig. 1), the Ayutthaya Historical Park is limited in area and thus a high population density with temples, ancient remains and old communities competing for space. The high concentration was attributable to the city being the commercial hub for hundreds of years in the ancient times where merchants from the West, e.g. Britain, France, The Netherlands and Portugal, converged and traded goods with local merchants.

3.1. Urban environmental assessment (UEA)

The condition and adequacy of infrastructure remains a challenge in certain locations of the area under investigation (i.e. within 1-km radius of the ancient city) with electricity the most acute. The state of the environment in the community is also a cause of concern. In general, a community with good environment is a boon to the local tourism and its dwellers' well-being, and, in particular, a good state of environment in and around the Ayutthaya Historical Park would create a positive impression on visitors of the historical site and surrounding areas, an undertaking that requires constant education from relevant state agencies and active participation and full cooperation from local residents. Fig. 2 is an amalgamation of images depicting the condition of infrastructure and the state of the environment of the area under study, while Table 1 summarizes the pluses and minuses of the infrastructure and transportation in the study area.

The findings showed that the infrastructure and utilities services of the area within a 1-km radius of the historical park adequately meet the local residents' basic demands. In addition, it was found that the respondents possess a certain degree of knowledge on good sanitation and natural resources and environmental conservation. The community nonetheless has been afflicted by the problems of uncollected garbage and post-downpour overflowing sewage.

3.2. Social impact assessment

The field survey of the province in March 2012 revealed that Ayutthaya has been transformed from an agricultural town of several past hundred years into an industrial city with new infrastructure and constructions to cater to the needs of the industrial sector. The province of Ayutthaya nevertheless has made great efforts to conserve its ancient civilizations and centuries-old cultural heritages.

The qualitative analysis revealed that prior to the implementation of tourism development policy (i.e. the pre-implementation period), nearly all respondents indicated that their monthly incomes were sufficient and thus no moonlighting was necessary. In the post-implementation



Fig. 1. Utilization around Ayutthaya Historical Park. Source: Thanvisitthpon, 2015.

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