

The Perception of Locals and Visitors for Development on Internal Transports of Sukhothai Historical Park

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This qualitative research aims to study the perception of locals and inbound visitors to develop the internal transport of Sukhothai Historical Park. The primary data were collected by observation, in-depth interview, and small group discussion from the key informants that include 19 locals and 17 visitors during November 2017 by purposive sampling. The data were analyzed by content analysis, categorizing, and thematising. The findings present the perception and attitudes of locals and visitors towards the internal transport as well as its problems of the Sukhothai Historical Park. By analysis of the collected data, the authors of this paper offer some solutions to develop and improve the park's internal transport in several ways.

Keywords: perception, locals and visitors, internal transports, Sukhothai Historical Park

Introduction

This study was started from a phenomenon of the historical park to tend its policy and campaign to be the non-carbon historical park by the limitation of transport in 2018. This attempt seems to be a good practice while it hides some issues that affect some occupations, such as local taxi service for the visitors, local logistics, as well as the price of transportation in Sukhothai Historical Park. The internal transports in Sukhothai Historical Park include bicycles (20 Thai baht a bike per day), trams (20 Thai baht a round per person), electric tri-cycles, and electric four-wheel cars (400 Thai baht per hour for two to three persons). Otherwise, visitors can walk around.

The current situation of internal transport of the park includes:

(1) Announcement by the historical park that the park becomes the non-carbon historical park in 2018. According to this announcement, the park has prohibited all transports that have carbon emission (motorbike, motor tricycle, and car) to serve the visitors going inside the park which affects the local transportation (motor-tricycle service) that has been operated by local people for a long time. Because motor-tricycle service is the primary career of many locals, they have been affected by such issue considering their economy;

(2) Tourists showed comments in TripAdvisor (<https://www.tripadvisor.com/>), such as "Difficult to walk!" in January 2018, "I did not see any vehicle meant for handicaps" in August 2017, which represents the insufficient transport services. These are issues of transportation services in the Sukhothai Historical Park;

(3) Phirasant, Sirasoonthorn, Viriya, Chanthawarang, and Sattha (2014) in their paper *The Development of Cultural Tourism in the Communities Around Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Province*, found and suggested that tourism information and landmark, private and public transportation information, tourism facility, and service information should be paid attention. These findings show the problem of transportation. Thus, the research aims to study the perception of locals and inbound visitors towards developing the internal transport of Sukhothai Historical Park.

“Sukhothai” means “the dawn of happiness” as a kingdom and the first capital of Thailand 700 years ago and it is one of the most important and well-known cities among tourists (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], n.d.). The historical city is 70 square kilometers in size (Sukhothai Province, n.d.). Most of the attractions in this city relate to historical backgrounds, such as the Sukhothai Historical Park – Wat Mahathat, the biggest complex ruins including the area of the grand palace and the primary temple. The monument of the King Ramkhamhaeng and Wat Sri Chum are also the centers of visitors. This ancient site is accepted to be the World Heritage site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

There are a lot of festivals in Sukhothai but the famous one is the Loy Krathong to float the ornament tray (made from banana trunk and leaves as well as decorated by flowers, incense, and candle) to respect the river which was held in the historical park every year. The number of visitors in Sukhothai in December 2016 is 134,292 visitors (Department of Tourism, 2017). Thus, the average visitor per day is 4,476.

Literature Review

Woraphakorn and Witchayakawin (2017), in their study entitled *A Study of Tourist Experience About Transportation Tourism Models to Lead to Sukhothai Provinces*, found that Thai tourists preferred the bus because of its variety, good service, low price, and safety as they trust the driver. They perceived that the information about transport in this city was little while it was believable. Similarly, international tourists liked to use bus and bicycle. They always trusted the drivers even they drove fast sometimes. The bus and bicycle were the better choices for them because they were cheap. This finding shows that the price of transport may be the main factor for selecting mode of transport by both Thai and inbound tourists.

Tuk-Tuk and motorcycles are available all over Sukhothai. Tourists are expected to pay around 50 baht for a short ride and 150 baht from New Sukhothai to the historical park. They can also be arranged for tours of the ruins and many of the drivers can speak some English. Single-gear pushbikes can be rented at practically every guesthouse for 50 baht and the eastern gate to the historical park’s central zone. A motorcycle can be lent at all guesthouses and resorts for 200 to 300 baht. A motorcycle and car rent shop has also positioned a pair of hundred meters west of the bus station on the access street from Highway 101. Otherwise, New Sukhothai and Old Sukhothai are conducive to walking (Luekens, 2016).

There are three basic transportation modes to Sukhothai: air, road, and railroad (Rattanakitrungreang, 2007):

(1) By car: The distances from Sukhothai to neighboring provinces are to Phitsanulok (59 kilometers), to Kamphaeng Phet (77 kilometers), to Tak (79 kilometers), to Uttaradit (100 kilometers), to Phrae (165 kilometers), and to Lampang (207 kilometers);

(2) By bus: Air-conditioned buses depart from Bangkok’s Mochit 2 Bus Terminal to Sukhothai daily between 9:45 a.m. and 10:20 p.m., frequently during the morning. The journey takes seven hours;

(3) By train: There are no trains going directly to Sukhothai. One may travel by train to Phitsanulok and then take a local bus to Sukhothai (about 59 kilometers away);

(4) By plane: Bangkok Airways flies from Bangkok to Sukhothai daily for the one-hour journey. Sukhothai Airport is about 40 kilometers north of the city.

Providing an attractive public transport system should be the main focus of government policy and the following options could be considered. For rail-based transport, the mass rapid rail system could be expanded and better linked with the bus system, as well as other public transport modes running along the rail track. This would improve the attractiveness of the system by minimizing forced passenger transfers and this is integrated transport. The bus system needs to be reformed. A clear governance structure with a lead agency for strategic direction, monitoring, and coordinating with relevant agencies is needed to improve the quality and efficiency of public bus services. The attractiveness of buses could be raised through the upgrading of the service with investment in a new bus fleet equipped with information technology (IT) systems, such as automated fare collection system, real-time information on the bus movements, locations, and expected arrival times. This would all help bus users to plan their journey better and cut down waiting time (Tulyasuwan, 2013).

Weisbrod (2007), in the study entitled *Models to Predict the Economic Development Impact of Transportation Projects: Historical Experience and New Applications*, indicated the eight guidelines that should be considered by both researchers and policy analysts seeking to select among predictive models and impact measurement methods:

(1) Consider economic impact factors beyond just the value of daily average travel time and travel cost savings, including the potential value of highway system connectivity and peak period reliability improvements for both commuting and goods movement;

(2) Consider the importance of multimodal implications, such as how a highway project can affect access to jobs, recreation, airports, intermodal rail terminals, and border crossings;

(3) Consider the potential for changes in transportation conditions to hit certain industries that are particularly dependent on schedule reliability for time-sensitive deliveries;

(4) Consider the need for analysis methods that can identify when transportation impacts are magnified or constrained by other local economic growth factors, such as utility infrastructure, financing, labor skills, and capacity for growth;

(5) Avoid confusion by using analysis methods that can separate economic (flow of dollar) impacts from the value of benefits that do not directly affect the flow of dollars;

(6) Distinguish areas of impact: (a) local; (b) state; (c) national; and (d) global impacts show results for the level of the study area that is most appropriate for those who will be using the analysis results;

(7) Distinguish benefit and cost perspectives: (a) savings for travelers; (b) savings for all users including freight shippers and recipients; (c) generation of income in the economy; and (d) the value of all benefits to society report results as appropriate for those who will be using the analysis results;

(8) Select modeling approaches that stress the particular types of causal factors and access elements of most relevance to the type of transportation project being considered and its location context, recognizing that various economic responses and market mechanisms can be of differing relevance depending on the size of the project and scale of the study area.

Methodology

This qualitative research is a case study research that aims to study the perception of locals and visitors in Sukhothai Historical Park area. This study collected the primary data by observation, in-depth interview, and small group discussion from the key informants that include 19 locals and 17 visitors during November 2017 by purposive sampling and used the structured interview form as the research instrument as well as used the material to record data which included researcher, pencil, note paper (different colors and different groups), i-pad 2 was used for sound record and Cannon camera (EOS M6) was used to record photos. The data collection procedure included that the first researcher was the questioner, the second researcher took note on paper, and an assistant took photos as well as served the beverage.

The reliability of this research triangulation of:

- (1) Different data collection methods (observation, in-depth interview, and small group discussion);
- (2) Different time that researchers went to the primary site during November 20-29, 2017 for 10 days and interview in morning, afternoon, and evening time;
- (3) Different persons of locals and visitors by three methods of data collection gathered from different key informants.

After data collection, researchers typed all information from key informants in notepaper and sound recorder to the word processor (preparing for analyzing) and grouped the data by keyword and same definition. Data were categorized by the frequency of data or word and were finally thematized by selecting many keywords.

Results and Discussions

The locals 19 subjects included four (21%) males and 15 (79%) females. Age included group of 21-30 is five (26%), 31-40 is six (31%), 41-50 is two (11%), 51-60 is four (21%), and 61⁺ is two (11%) subjects. Career involved the group of own business 11 (58%) and park's staff eight (42%) subjects. The tourists 17 subjects included 10 males (59%) and seven females (41%). Age included group of 21-30 is six (35%), 31-40 is four (24%), 41-50 is one (6%), 51-60 is one (6%), and 61⁺ is five (29%) subjects. Career included business job seven (42%), government job five (29%), and retire and other are five (29%) subjects. The tourists from Asia were three (18%), from America were three (18%), from Europe were 10 (58%), and other one (6%) subject.

The perception of the stakeholders shows that there is insufficient transport and the bike is the best choice for them because of many reasons, such as no air pollution, affordable price, easy to use and access, good touch scenery and atmosphere, fun, flexible, and convenient. The good transport system affects the number of tourists which will provide benefits for the locals. The transport problems include transport and parking areas are not enough, some accidents with children, incomplete equipment on the bike, getting confused in their bike and limit transport in the incoming new year (only non-carbon transport is allowed) and accident on the shared road. Moreover, fit transports are still considered for the elderly and the disabled. Also, there are pick up and drop off services for tourists, the price of transport is high, delay time, and noisy. The park policy has changed many times so as to follow the change of the government team. The park needs to improve insufficient transport, incomplete instrument, non-standard price, and safety problem. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 below demonstrate the perception of locals and inbound visitors.

Table 1

Record of Interview: How Do You Feel About Transport in the Sukhothai Historical Park?

Locals (staffs and communities)	Inbound visitors (Indonesian, French, German, and American)
1. It is joyful in the festival season because there were many visitors in the park, but the bicycle service was not enough. 2. Sometimes, the bicycles were not enough for rent in this place. 3. The transport is not enough to serve the visitors. 4. I feel that bicycle using is good because it reduces the air pollution, but it is not suitable for the disabled sometimes. 5. The transport is convenient because it can have access to everything including electricity tricycle, tram, and airplane that bring visitors coming and the vendors get benefits from the accessibility of transport. 6. It is good. It makes the transport system orderly. When the transport parks outside, the outsiders would buy products and eat outside making the inside of the park clean. 7. It is good, but it is not the best (it was at the moderate level). 8. It is good, but the weather is hot. 9. We have all transports as motor-tricycle, electricity tricycle, tram, and bicycle with good service. 10. The transport and the parking area are enough with good security system.	1. It is not good because the tourists must park their car in the town and go to the historical park by taking the bus. The bus does not come on the right time then the tourists have to wait for a long time. 2. It is non-carbon and it is very convenient, but there is less transportation. 3. Bicycle and tram are good. The tricycle is noisy—sound and pollution. 4. Travelling by bike is an excellent idea. Also, the trams are very good for elderly people or to sum it up, I think it is pretty good (smile!). 5. Great. 6. It is funny to use a bike, easier than taking a car. 7. It is really easy because you can ride a bike to the park.

From Table 1, communities perceived that the number of bicycles and other transports is not enough for the visitors, especially in festival season. The bike is good and can reduce air pollution, but it is not suitable for elderly people. All transports are convenient with good service and specious parking space with the security system in the park. The locals gain benefits from good transport system service. The foreign tourists perceived that the entire transport is not good, the type is less, as well as it is not convenient to take a bus that does not come at the right time. The bicycles and trams are useful for the visitors and local people because they are non-carbon, comfortable, fun, and easy to use. In contrast, the sound of tri-cycle is loud and has pollution.

Table 2

Record of Interview: What Is the Best Transport to the Park and Why?

Locals (staffs and communities)	Inbound visitors (Indonesian, French, German, and American)
1. The best transport is bike and walking because you will feel comfort for seeing the ancient town. 2. It depends on the tourists' need and comfort, but most foreigners like to walk and use the bicycle. 3. The best vehicle in the park is bicycle because the visitors can admire the atmosphere in the park and the tricycle is appropriate for family and handicap person. 4. Bike and Tuk-Tuk, because there is costly and reasonable price for visitors and Thais. 5. The bus because it is convenient and suits for the number of visitors. 6. All are good because of good service. 7. Tricycle, bike, and tram are the best. 8. The tram is the best because it can transport the huge number of people while the tricycle is suitable for ageing because of easy access. 9. Using the bike because it is convenient to admire the park and does not have pollution as well as reduces the accident that is a cause of injury for visitors. It is relaxing to use a bike. 10. The bike because it can be parked anywhere you want while the tram is suitable for the elderly.	1. The bike because it is convenient to take around the park. 2. Bike. 3. Bike, because you can take time and it is a little bit funny. 4. Bike is suitable to use in the park because the price is low which is appropriate for tourists. By taking a bike we can touch the authentic atmosphere of the park and it is a good access to all environments. 5. Walking is the best, I like sightseeing. I enjoy walking around. 6. The bicycle is funny and interesting to ride and see the scenery. 7. By bike, you see the most of you can stop whenever you want and take your time.

From the study of Weisbrod (2007), the 7th guideline (d) mentions the value of all benefits to society and report results as appropriate for those who will be using the analysis results that if considering the finding in the current study to mention “vendors get benefits from the accessibility of transport” that the locals perceived their benefits also rely on good transport system.

From Table 2, the bike and walking (able to admire full atmosphere, costly, convenient, no pollution, reduce accident, can park anywhere, and feel relax) seem to be the best choice in locals’ perception. Others are mentioned but they are used for specific purposes, such as tricycle for family or the disabled, bus and tram for the mass number or elderly tourists, and many Thais like Tuk-Tuk. Similarly, the travelers also choose bike and walking as the best choice with the same reasons, but there is the addition as they can take more time, touch authentic atmosphere, have easy access to all environments, and have fun.

Table 3

Record of Interview: What Is the Problem of Transport in the Park and Why?

Locals (staffs and communities)	Inbound visitors (Indonesian, French, German, and American)
1. The number of the bikes is not enough for the number of tourists. 2. In the morning time, there are many tourists coming to the park and the number of bikes is not enough to rent as well as tram and tri-wheel motorcycle. 3. The children have the problem when they put their feet on the wheel of the bike and sometimes, the tourists exchange the bikes by accident because the bikes are the same. 4. The parking area and transport are not enough. 5. It is not the big problem, but the personal car is prohibited to enter the park, we must use the park’s transports. 6. It has no problem, but in the coming new year, we can use only electric transport. The fuel transport is prohibited. 7. The motorbike, drinking water, and food are prohibited to take inside. The only bike is allowed while elderly visitors who can walk long way cannot go inside. 8. The truck and automobile are prohibited to take inside the park. Every time to change the exclusive park team, the policy is always changed. 9. No separate lane between the tourists’ transport and motorbike, and it makes the transfer slow when they come at the inter-road. 10. No problem, depending on the person because now we have the convenient road.	1. No problem. 2. Transportation to get to the park from the bus station. 3. I do not know, but I can take the only bike in the park. 4. There is no free of charge shuttle transfer service for the tourist in the park while the price of private transport (electric car) in the park is high. Also, the transportation service from the new town to the historical park does not come at the right time. These cause the number of tourists to reduce. 5. It may have the bus or public bus to transfer the tourists to each temple. 6. The tricycle is quite noisy and disturbing. 7. I am not aware of the problem right now.

From Table 3, the communities perceived the insufficient number of bikes, other transports, and parking area. Tourists having children may be concerned with the accident that may be caused by using the bike and/or some travelers may get confused in their bike because they are similar. The park policy prohibits all carbon transports, drink, and food to go into the park at the coming year that the park will allow electric transport and bike only. Some of them concern about elderly visitors who cannot use bike and complain many times about change of policy by changing the government. Another problem is the accident from the shared road in the park. Some tourists are aware that there is no pick up and drop off transport for tourists, the price of transport is high, delay time, and noisy transport. Some of them need bus service or public bus to each temple.

Table 4

Record of Interview: What Should Be Improved About Transport in the Park and Why?

Locals (staffs and communities)	Inbound visitors (Indonesian, French, German, and American)
1. The trams and bikes should be improved because some bikes are damaged and non-complete, as well as the trams, whose security system should be checked, such as the braking system. 2. The government sector should prepare the bike service for tourists that it should be enough for all. 3. I would like to change all transport system to be the electric system because it can reduce air pollution and for the future policy. 4. The parking area and capacity to accept the buses should be improved because they are not enough. 5. No need to, because we prepare everything ready for the visitors. 6. Have no problem. 7. The park should allow all transports to go inside even though they buy the entry ticket because the service transport is very expensive for bidders. 8. They should have the vehicle to pick up the elderly people. 9. Personal vehicle and tour coaches parking area should be improved because they have limited space then it is hard for them to park in that area and not convenient to access the park. 10. The tram should also serve the ageing tourists catering their needs when they want to visit the King monument, but the tram does not serve them.	1. No variety of transportation. 2. Increase the touchable vehicle from the bus station to the park. 3. Maybe a small shuttle car, small car, it could be better than the bike. 4. The park should have pick up and drop off services for convenience and can increase the number of visitors. 5. The public transportation because it should have more types of tourists. 6. Price is different from the bicycle (inside is too expensive and outside is cheap). 7. I think it is really good already.

From Table 4, the villagers thought that tram and bike should be improved for sufficiency, fixing some incomplete instrument, the reasonable price, and security checking before following the campaign for all transports are the electricity system. The parking area and space for travelling bus still need improvement as well as transport service for ageing. The inbound visitors are recommended to have more variety of transport, increase touchable vehicles, pick up and drop off service, public transport service, and standard of price. Some offered the small shuttle car or small car which may be better than the bike.

From the study of Weisbrod (2007), the 7th guideline (a: savings for travelers if to compare with the current findings) represents the perception towards the need of “fixing some incomplete instrument”.

Conclusions and Implications

The transportation inside the Sukhothai Historical Park is insufficient and the bike is the best choice because of many advantages such as cheap and non-carbon. The further development and improvement include:

(1) The related authorities (Sukhothai Historical Park, Sukhothai Provincial Administration Organization, and Ministry of Tourism & Sports Thailand) and business sector (rental bicycle shop managers) need to improve the bike standard and transportation for tourism (e.g., big bike size for European). The excellent transport system affects the benefits of locals (e.g., if the price of transport is reasonable, it can increase the demand of tourism), the policy of the historical park is always changed that the unstable system (administration and park management) may affect the permanent occupation of locals. The park and transportation service providers need to set the standard price as the visitors may get confused and be dissatisfied with the non-standard price;

(2) Local people need to cooperate with the park by following the regulation and selling products with the standard price;

(3) Visitors need to lock the bikes during parking, do not take transport on the ruins, command the vehicles on the left-hand side (riding in Thailand) and use non-carbon carriers.

The limitations of the research involved:

(1) The weather in Sukhothai is hot making it difficult to take time for interviewing the ageing and tourists with small children;

(2) The park operated the event during the data collection period that disturbed the discussion by noise from the event.

Future researchers should enlarge the key informants in qualitative study or survey by the quantitative method with more extensive sampling size or study by the mixed approach to ensure that the qualitative data get support by quantitative data. Future researchers need to consider transportation and infrastructure in the entire area of Sukhothai province instead of studying only the internal Sukhothai Historical Park.

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