COMMUNITY TOURISM: SAP CHAMPA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE, LOP BURI, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the community perspectives on heritage conservation and tourism development at Sap Champa Archaeological Site (SCAS) in Lop Buri Province, Thailand. The study focuses on the concerns of the respondents (n=217) about the importance of the site in relation to their way of life as well as the threats and benefits if the site were to be fully developed as a major cultural heritage tourist destination. Using a 5-point Likert scale, the respondents believed that SCAS should be (a) conserved for the future generations (average Likert scale of 4.91, S.D ± 0.35), (b) promoted as a new tourist attraction in the Province (average Likert scale of 4.85, S.D ± 0.42), and (c) simultaneously managed for conservation and tourism (average Likert scale of 4.82, S.D ± 0.38). The perceived values of SCAS as a heritage and tourism asset are as follows: economic (49.38%); conservation/cultural (26.85%), educational (12.67%), and social (11.1%). The respondents believed that the adverse impact of anthropogenic activities including tourism and land-use conflicts should be addressed. The data collected from the questionnaire survey and interviews provide valuable insights into sound and sustainable tourism management. Taking into account the concerns of the local community without compromising the archaeological integrity of the cultural site and the quality of tourist experience is crucial in sustainable tourism management.

Key words: archaeological heritage, community participation, tourism benefits, tourism impact, tourism management, sustainable tourism
INTRODUCTION

Archaeological sites are popular tourist attractions. Some of them are famous worldwide and are even listed in UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2012), while others are less obscured but nevertheless important. These sites and the artefacts found therein provide symbolic meanings and physical evidence of past civilizations (Cronyn, 1992; Johansen, 2004), ancient culture and arts (Cui et al., 2010), and natural events (Atik, Danaci, & Erdogan, 2010; Behbahan et al., 2010). They have significant aesthetic, spiritual, educational, historical, research, and economic values. These values promote appreciation of heritage as well as enhance cultural pride and identity (Medina, 2003; Smith, 2009).

The number of tourists visiting archaeological sites and ruins in Thailand has increased since the 1970s when the government started to promote culture as one of its tourist attractions (Promsaramatee, Somtrakool, & Thidpad, 2010). The ruins as well as the invaluable archaeological knowledge and numerous artefacts are considered not only as symbols of Thai identity and patrimony but also as means of promoting economic development. Unfortunately, many archaeological heritage sites in many parts of the world have, over time, been degraded due to natural disasters (Salman et al., 2010) and adverse human activities. Disruptive human activities include theft, illegal export, ignorance, lack of maintenance, modernisation and industrialisation, rural land modifications as well as pollution, social unrest, inappropriate management interventions, and lack of legal framework for conservation and monitoring (e.g. Cronyn, 1992, Franco, 1996; Jordan, 2001; Lowenthal, 2008; Zhang et al., 2011). In some cases, well-intentioned restoration projects have also caused damage to or alteration of the structural integrity and distribution of artefacts even before they are thoroughly investigated (Miksic, 2001).

Sustainable heritage tourism can contribute to the advancement of archaeological research and public education (Miksic, 2001); it is also seen as a catalyst for economic growth in many developing countries. However, if not properly managed, tourism can be a major threat to the integrity of archaeological sites. Furthermore, tourist destinations including archaeological sites that are developed without the benefits of consultative and holistic planning often suffer from the short- and long-term impacts of tourism (Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999; Weaver & Oppermann, 2000). The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 2011) reiterates that planning should incorporate the maintenance and enhancement of both the tangible and intangible values of archaeological sites and should aim to promote local pride and identity, enhance local economy, and increase public awareness about their conservation. Through sustainable tourism development, archaeological sites can also help generate local, national, and international employments and revenues.

The perspectives of the local community especially those who are directly affected by tourism at archaeological sites are valuable in promoting sustainable tourism development (Ardren, 2002; Hearne & Santos, 2005). Silverman (2002, p. 899) explains that “archaeological tourism is being locally promoted, constructed and produced by its own heterogeneous sets of players for reasons that also encompass the deeply historic, social, personal, and political problems and aspirations of each particular locale.” In addition, Varcarcel (cited in Silverman, 2002, p. 884) states that “historical monuments contain the collective spirituality of a people and that
people perceive a relationship among themselves, buildings, and events or personages that have intervened in their historical process.” For example, the interpretations of the ancestral places in San Pedro Valley (Arizona, USA) by contemporary American Indian tribes are vital in understanding how indigenous perspectives imbue these places with profound cultural and individual meanings (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson, 2006). Winter (2004) underscores that local meanings associated with cultural heritage, such as those with the Angkor Archaeological Park, should be explored in order to provide useful insights into the inter-connectivity of landscape, memory and identity. Thus, the integration of archaeological tourism with community-based tourism should prove beneficial for conservation of ancient culture and promotion of authentic cultural experience.

Community tourism is a highly participatory form of tourism. The development of tourism ensures that the local community is involved in planning and management. Tourism ventures owned and/or managed by the local community reflects community’s self-sufficiency and self-determination (Blackstock, 2005; Catibog-Sinha & Wechtunyagu (2011). Many authors argue that community involvement should move away from the tokenistic form of public participation to a more collaborative form of partnerships aimed at empowering the members of the community (e.g. Brohman, 1996; Lane 2005). If empowered, individuals or groups can acquire confidence and capability to implement and manage their own affairs, find solutions to their problems, and become active agents of change (Catibog-Sinha, 2011; Cole, 2006; Suravanichakit & Catibog-Sinha, 2011).

This paper focuses on what the local community living around and adjacent to an archaeological site feel about the importance of the site in relation to their way of life as well as the threats and benefits that they foresee if the site were to be fully developed as a major cultural heritage tourist destination. Given that the views of the local communities are paramount in sustaining tourism development whilst preserving the archaeological site, the management measures proposed by the respondents are presented in this paper.

STUDY AREA

Sap Champa Archaeological Site (henceforth, SCAS) is located within the village of Ban Khu Mueang at Sap Champa sub-district in Lop Buri Province about 197 kilometres from Bangkok. Except for a few small and scattered patches of remnant forests, a large portion (80-90%) of the surrounding areas had been converted to agriculture and human settlements. With the enactment of the Royal Forest Department’s National Forest Act in 1964, SCAS and the adjacent forested areas were declared part of the Chai Ba Dan National Forest. The enactment of this law has triggered land use conflicts and ownership, such as the alleged human settlement and farming on some portions of the protected area even before the Second World War (Office of Environment Policy and Planning & Natural and Cultural Environment Conservation of Lop Buri Province, 2009).

The study area has interesting cultural history. Archaeological evidence indicates that the site was part of an ancient settlement (Mueang Pra Temi), which was occupied for a long period of time during the Dvaravati period (6th to 13th century) until it was totally abandoned probably because of epidemic diseases and war.
The ancient village is believed to be an important trade post as it was strategically located between the highland of the central region and the Korat Plateau at the north-eastern region of Thailand (Lertrit, 2003; Lertcharnlit, 2005). To protect the ancient village from invaders, two parallel moats 20 meters apart and each about 16 meters wide and 10 meters deep were constructed; these prominent structures constitute some of the major tourist attractions of the study area. Within the remains of this ancient village are three significant grave sites, which also offer interesting tourist attractions but are considered sacred by the local communities.

**METHODS**

The study was conducted using a combination of research methods. The perspectives of the members of the local residents and relevant stakeholders about the importance of and the expected tourism benefits from the study area were determined through one-on-one assisted structured questionnaires survey (in Thai and later translated to English). Using a 5-point Likert scale, the respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance attached to the following variables: (a) preservation of SCAS as a cultural heritage site, (b) promotion of SCAS as a tourist attraction, and (c) co-existence of conservation and tourism development of SCAS. The Likert scores were averaged and presented as mean values with corresponding standard deviations. Face-to-face interviews with selected local residents, relevant officials from the local and provincial government units, and experts from national museums and forest agencies were conducted to determine their opinion about the conservation and tourism management at SCAS. Both field observation and interviews were used to assess tourism issues on the site. An intensive field study was conducted from December 2007 to March 2008. In-depth literature review was also conducted. The notion of cultural authenticity was not covered in this study.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Socio-demographic profile**

A total of 217 participants, between 18 and 60 years of age and residing in the seven villages (Moo) that comprised the sub district of Sap Champa, took part in the survey. About 55% of the participants had lived in Sap Champa sub-district for 10-30 years; about 60% were females. While all the respondents were literate, none had achieved tertiary education, but all were familiar with the situation at SCAS. The main occupation of the respondents was farming; the majority (91%) had no adjunct or supplementary income. Those with supplementary income were mostly women engaged in preparing food and crafting souvenir products. The annual household income of the majority of the respondents (89%) was between THB 10,000 and 100,000, which is significantly below the national average of THB 223,920 per household per year (National Statistics Office of Thailand, 2009).

**Site analysis**

Several archaeological diggings for research and scientific purposes at SCAS have produced a collection of valuable artefacts and relics such as grinding stones, relatively large images of Buddha, sculpture of a crouching deer, and hundreds of
terracotta potteries, beads and ornaments. Many of these collections are on display at the local and national museums.

Following the well-publicised visit of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to SCAS on 29 August 1986, several conservation and archaeological research projects funded by the national government had been initiated. With the assistance of the local government and several non-government organisations, the Information Centre of Sub Champa Historical Site was set up within the compound of a secondary public school – the Tha Luang Wittayakom School. The Centre, although restricted in space and collections, is a learning venue for several local schools and universities interested in archaeology and ancient history. No official records on tourist volume and trends are available, but it was noted that the majority of the visitors are from nearby towns and districts.

The Royal Forest Department has been undertaking reforestation activities near the archaeological site to protect it from soil erosion. However, only minimal efforts are exerted to protect the site from illegal excavations, vandalism, and souveniring. In accordance with the Thailand’s Ancient Remain Act (1961; amended in 1992), all activities within national monument areas including the excavation of artefacts from registered and non-registered sites must be approved by the Director of Fine Arts Department. The Head of the Academic Section of the Fourth Regional Office of Fine Arts in Lop Buri (M.Yukongdee, personal communication, September 9, 2009) recognised the management difficulties involved in the enforcement of the law. The collaboration with other government agencies (e.g. Forest Department) as well as the local government and communities is, thus, essential to ensure that SCAS is adequately protected not only as a priceless cultural heritage but also as a valuable tourist destination.

The local government (Sap Champa Local Government Authority) in cooperation with some organisations such as the Sap Champa and Cham Pi Sirindhorn Conservation Club has initiated small-scale initiatives to promote SCAS as a tourist destination, highlighting the ancient artefacts remaining on the site. The members of the Club assist in tour guiding, food catering, and other related activities. The tour also includes sightseeing of the rural landscape surrounding SCAS.

Community concerns

While the site has great tourism potential, it has not been fully managed as a culturally significant destination. The local community expressed concerns regarding the current condition of SCAS not only because of the increasing disintegration of its heritage value but also of the potential loss of the economic benefits accruing from archaeological tourism. Table 1 summarises these concerns. The respondents believed that SCAS should be (a) conserved for the future generations (average Likert scale of 4.91, S.D ± 0.35), (b) promoted as a new tourist attraction in the Province (average Likert scale of 4.85, S.D ± 0.42), and (c) simultaneously managed for conservation and tourism (average Likert scale of 4.82, S.D ± 0.38).

The study shows that the local community has positive attitude towards the conservation of SCAS because of its cultural and economic values. They expressed the need to develop tourism opportunities so as to attract more tourists despite the
relatively inaccessibility of the site. To attract a wide tourist market, it was suggested that the development of the archaeological site as a tourist destination should complement that of the nearby Cham Pi Sirindhorn Forest, which has already some basic tourist facilities and attractions. Hence, tourist marketing and tour package should include visits to these two sites.

Table 1. Local community’s perspectives about conservation and tourism in SCAS)\(^1\)

| Items                                      | n  | Mean | S.D.  
|-------------------------------------------|----|------|-------
| 1. Conservation                           | 215| 4.91 | 0.35  |
| 2. New tourist attraction in the Province  | 214| 4.85 | 0.42  |
| 3. Simultaneous conservation and tourism  | 217| 4.82 | 0.38  |

\(^1\) Total number of respondents = 217; Likert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = Strongly agree

Although understanding the tourism markets as well as visitors preference and motivations is necessary in promoting tourism, the basic aspirations and preferences of the host community are not to be compromised (Hearne & Santos, 2005). Most importantly, tourism should be able to support the developmental needs and livelihoods of the local community. The former director of Somdet Pranarai National Museum (Kuenkhun Manita, personal communication, October 9, 2009) said that income from tourism at SCAS can be used to preserve and/or restore the site and help in augmenting the household income of community members. However, she was disheartened by the absence of suitable infrastructure facilities such as boardwalk and physical barriers which are needed to minimise the physical impacts of tourism. Another respondent (Natupintu Surapol, personal communication, October 15, 2009) agreed that management including tourist promotion and interpretation are insufficient to make SCAS a new and emerging tourist attraction. According to him, if tourist facilities such as toilets, access roads, and interpretative signs are made available and/or improved, then it is very likely that SCAS would be a popular destination in the Province of Lop Buri. Field observation confirms the above-mentioned criticisms. The local government has been harnessing the support and cooperation from other stakeholders, especially those from the private sector; however, this effort should be strengthened and sustained. According to Choi and Sirakaya (2005), the engagement of relevant stakeholders in planning and management is critical in pursuing sustainable community tourism.

**Perceived values and benefits**

The benefits perceived by the local communities are summarized in Table 2. The economic value of SCAS is on top of the list of the expected tourism benefits from this archeologically site. The respondents (49.38%) believed that tourism can create job opportunities, increase family income, and improve their quality of life. The economic benefits from tourism are essential for national and regional development in many developing countries including Thailand. Additionally, tourism can be a tool to augment household income and improve standard of living and quality of life at the community level.
Table 2: Perceived benefits of SCAS to the community (n=multiple responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Values</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More job opportunities</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>12.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional government support for local community</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>12.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased family income</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>12.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More infrastructure development</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>11.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>721</td>
<td>49.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural and Conservation Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased public appreciation of cultural heritage</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>13.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation of the cultural heritage site at the national level</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>13.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>392</td>
<td>26.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased educational or learning opportunities</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>12.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>185</td>
<td>12.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More cooperation among stakeholders</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>10.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: increased motivation towards conservation would strengthen the relationships within the community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>162</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on multiple responses from 217 respondents

The value that a community places on an archaeological site depends not only on economic investments but also on social capital. According to Timothy and Boyd (2003), it makes good economic sense to market cultural heritage in sustainable tourism as a means to conserve it. Some studies also pointed out that tourism can be used as an economic justification for heritage preservation (Leslie & Sigala, 2005). The willingness of tourists to pay when visiting archaeological sites, such as those in Mexico, indicates the value of ancient sites (Beltran & Rojas, 1996). In the case of SCAS, reasonable entrance fees can be charged to defray expenses incurred for site management and support for the conservation of the archaeological site. Some of the funds can also be used to augment household income and thereby serve as financial incentive for local residents to support conservation goals. Beltran and Rojas (1996) also proposed organising national and international donation campaign to raise additional funds. The management of user fee (e.g. entrance fees, conservation fees) and donations should, however, be democratic and transparent.
The conservation/cultural value of SCAS as a tourist destination was considered important by 26.85% of the respondents; this reflects the great potential of the site in enhancing public awareness of its cultural value and in generating broader support for conservation. Because of its cultural importance, SCAS can play a major role in promoting Thai history and cultural landscape, thus offering support to sustainable tourism initiatives at the local and national levels.

The perceived educational and social benefits of SCAS were ranked relatively low (12.67% and 11.1%, respectively) by the respondents even though several organisations and academic institutions have a few educational and research activities initiated at SCAS. It seems that the educational benefits of SCAS are not yet fully recognised by the majority of the respondents who have had no active involvement in these academic-driven initiatives. Providing incentives to the local community to appreciate the value of SCAS should therefore be enhanced. The majority of the respondents, even those who are not proximally residing in SCAS, expressed the view that tourism can give them opportunity to participate in various aspects of planning and decision-making albeit the absence of common goals for the long-term conservation and tourism development of the study area. For the local communities to be effectively involved in the management process, they have to be empowered through technical and financial assistance from policy-making bodies, funding institutions, and experts in the fields.

Respondents expressed the need for them to be trained in the intricacies of archaeological tourism-related services, public relations, marketing-planning, tourist facilities development, and financing. Through formal and informal education, the notion of connecting “the dead past and the living present” (Ardren, 2002, p. 2) should be incorporated and contextualised. A broader perspective of cultural heritage is necessary in archaeological tourism because as Silverman (2002, p. 898) states “the recovery or re-creation of the past is not an objective enterprise and the past is multiply mediated.” Several authors agree that since the value associated with heritage is socially, culturally, and historically constructed, its interpretation should be broadly recognised in heritage management (Gibson & Pendlebury, 2009) as well as in cultural heritage tourism.

**Perceived threats**

There are several man-made threats that the majority of the respondents believed should be immediately addressed so as not to compromise the archaeological integrity of the site and the quality of tourist experience. These threats, which were also observed during several field visits, are as follows: (a) deterioration of archeologically site (e.g. soil erosion, vandalism, littering), (b) illegal collection and trade of artefacts (e.g. vandalism, theft), (c) management issues (e.g. unsupervised public access to the site, lack of basic tourism facilities and services, absence of physical barriers to protect fragile/sensitive artefacts), and (d) social issues (e.g. absence of strong collaboration among local organizations, lack of institutional and personal accountabilities).

In addition, there were some apprehensions regarding the over-commercialization of SCAS as a tourist destination because of the reported adverse impacts of over-crowding, such as the situation in several UNESCO cultural heritage sites where
crowding, among many others, has been identified as a major concern (Salman et al., 2010; Sanaye & Makhdoum, 2009). The misrepresentation of ancient history to promote archaeological tourism is also an issue that has to be explored, but yet to be realised by the local community and the tourism industry (Maurer, 2009; Smith & Waterton, 2009; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Watzman, 2007).

Management recommendations

The data collected from the questionnaire survey and interviews provide valuable insights for tourism planning and management. Continuous dialogues and conversations between/among stakeholders are essential in planning and management, as was demonstrated in the management of an archaeological site in Yucatan, Mexico (Ardren, 2002). The results of archaeological research as well as the perceived values and concerns of the local community should help frame the management of SCAS as an irreplaceable local heritage and an archaeological tourist attraction.

A comprehensive management plan has yet to be developed for SCAS. The plan should incorporate the provision of tourist opportunities that meet not only the demands of the tourists but also the needs and capacities of the local communities as well as the physical threshold of the tourist destination. Furthermore, the existing legislation need to be strengthened by clarifying within the law the jurisdictional boundaries, paying due respect to the owners of indigenous knowledge, and increasing punitive measures for violators. The strict implementation of the law requires public awareness and better surveillance efforts.

The management recommendations aimed at addressing the major threats at SCAS are outlined below. These recommendations were suggested by concerned local residents and officials at the local and national levels. Because the local community should be at the heart of all aspects of tourism planning and management, these concerns should be seriously considered for sustainable tourism management.

1. Degradation of cultural sites/archaeological sites due to trampling and the theft
   - Strengthen and strictly implement relevant legislative measures. Amend the existing Law by imposing much stricter punishment and higher penalties to violators.
   - Provide adequate warning sign and surveillance with the assistance of the local people
   - Develop educational programs to increase public awareness on the cultural, scientific, and economic significance of the archaeological site
   - Employ local residents in the maintenance and protection of the site

2. Absence of a community-driven management plan for the conservation and rehabilitation of SCAS
   - Conduct regular public hearings involving the local people, government and non-government organisations, and researchers/experts (i.e. Fine Arts Department, academic institutions at the national, regional, and local levels)
   - Establish a multi-disciplinary planning committee to look into the short- and long-term conservation and development goals for the site
• Improve the technical capacity of relevant government personnel (i.e. museums, forestry and agriculture agencies)
• Strengthen research collaboration at the local, national, and international levels (i.e. museums can form a network of collaboration)
• Improve public awareness by establishing local museums or open-air museum on the site; this will also increase local employment opportunities
• Continue government and private support to local initiatives (e.g. local schools and museums)
• Monitor and evaluate the outcome of the management plan and visitor impacts

3. Conflicts among stakeholders and community members
• Resolve conflicts on land ownership and administrative jurisdiction over the heritage site and surrounding public land
• Provide clear mandates on how to manage the site in order to prevent overlapping functions and responsibilities of relevant government agencies (i.e. Forestry Department, Fine Arts Department)
• Encourage collaboration between researchers and local people in the interpretation of the archaeological site taking into account both past and present uses and traditions
• Find ways and means to provide benefits to local people who may claim for some ownership of heritage objects found on their land (i.e. tourism benefits)
• Provide clear government guidelines on ownership and benefit sharing.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that there is a need to conserve and enhance the tangible and intangible values of archaeological sites such as the Sap Champa Archaeological Site. Community-based tourism that is built on the needs and concerns of the local community and in accordance with the principles of sustainable development has an important role in achieving this goal.

Local communities are generally enthusiastic but at the same time worried about the adverse impacts of tourism. The lack of understanding of the value of archaeological site and community issues can lead to mismanagement and social conflicts. A bottom-up approach to sustainable archeologically tourism is crucial in community-based tourism. The local community should also be given both economic and non-economic incentives to conserve archaeological site both as a cultural heritage and tourist attraction.

Tourism development of small communities needs to be actively planned, developed, and managed with a strong emphasis on community involvement. The collaboration of relevant stakeholders in planning and management is a paramount ingredient in sustainable tourism. Community involvement in tourism planning provides local residents and stakeholder opportunities to participate in various conservation and tourism initiatives. This process can be instrumental in enhancing public awareness about heritage conservation and sustainable tourism management.
The lack of cooperation among some stakeholders on matters pertaining to the preservation and sustainable utilisation of a cultural heritage destination could compromise the integrity of the site. Land ownership conflicts (farmers vs. Government), which trigger animosity and uncertainties among stakeholders, could lead to social conflict and lack of long-term commitment for conservation and sustainability. The underlying mistrusts between/among stakeholders should be addressed to reconcile community indifference. Developing trust and cohesiveness among individuals within a community would enable people to become more cooperative and closer together as a community. There is also a need for regular, democratic, and transparent dialogues among the members of the community and various stakeholders.

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