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An Analytical Framework for Successful Community-Based Tourism Projects in the Global South

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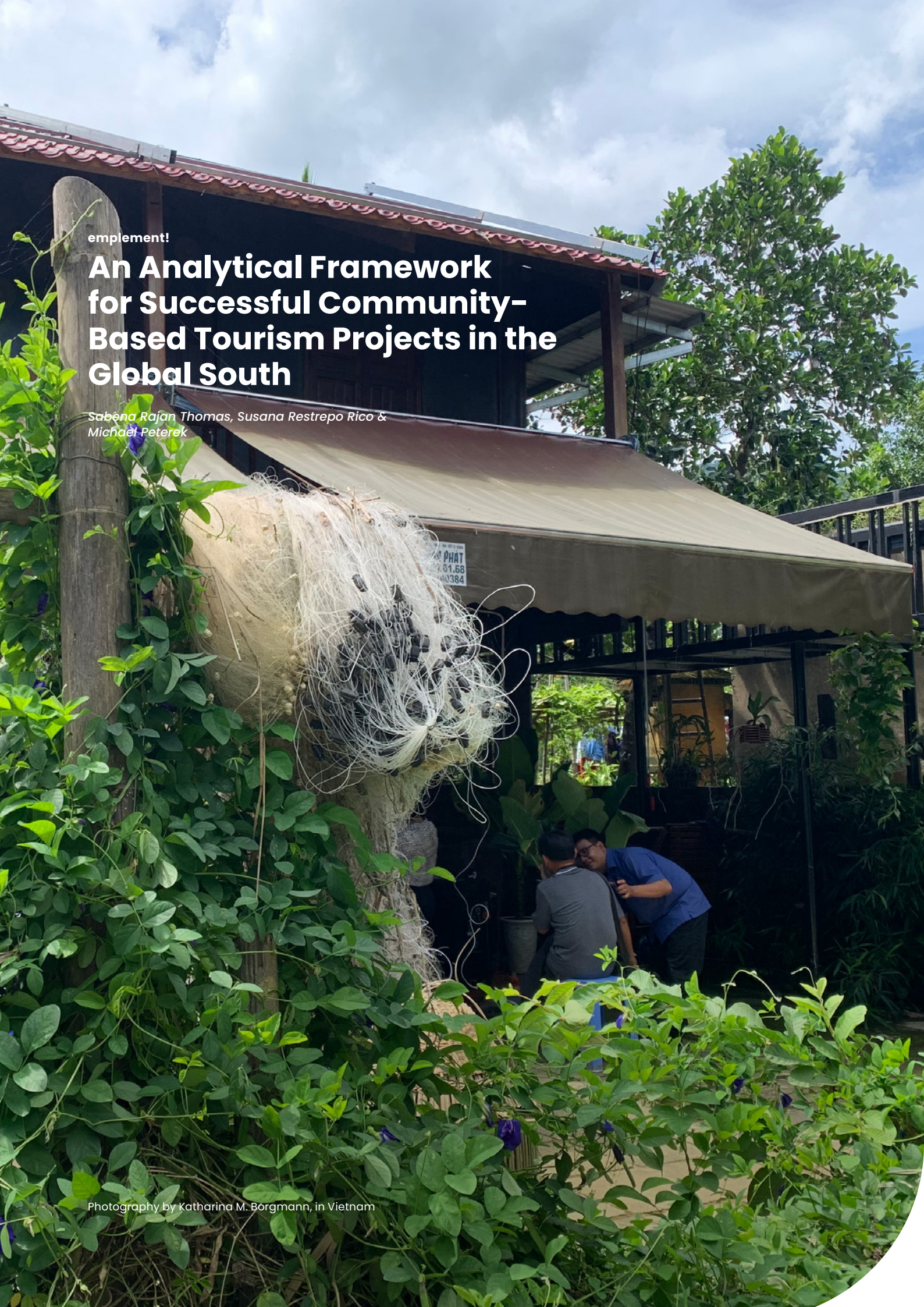

Photography by Katharina M. Borgmann, in Vietnam

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a key aspect of the sustainable development of rural communities and, thus an important element of the urban-rural nexus in rapidly developing urban regions, specifically in the Global South. Within the emplement! research project as part of the SURE Funding Priority, a CBT pilot project in the Cu De River Valley, close to the city of Da Nang in central Vietnam, is being followed and investigated by the German and the Vietnamese project partners. For this purpose, it is important to understand the factors that have led to the success of other CBT initiatives in similar circumstances and to develop a framework for their assessment. The presented paper examines three communities in Thailand, Cambodia and Ecuador that implemented CBT initiatives in the past and have sustained their projects and benefits in the long term. The paper proposes an analytical framework for examining CBT approaches based on the existing literature. It utilises said framework to identify the main factors of success and information relating to the process of planning, managing and implementing CBT in rural communities. The lessons learned from the analysis of the case studies could inform the formulation of future CBT initiatives not only in the Cu De River Valley, but also in other regions of the Global South, transferring the strengths of these best practices and overcoming some of the challenges that the communities have been confronted with.

Tóm tắt tiếng Việt
Du lịch cộng đồng (Community-based tourism – CBT) là khía cạnh then chốt cho sự phát triển bền vững của các cộng đồng nông thôn và vì vậy là yếu tố quan trọng trong mối liên kết giữa thành thị và nông thôn ở các khu vực đô thị đang phát triển nhanh chóng, đặc biệt là các khu vực đô thị ở phía Nam bán cầu. Trong khuôn khổ dự án nghiên cứu emplement! – thuộc Quỹ Phát triển Bền vững Khu vực Đô thị SURE, một dự án thí điểm về du lịch cộng đồng đang được nghiên cứu thực hiện tại lưu vực sông Cu Đê – Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam với sự tham gia của các đối tác dự án đến từ CHLB Đức và Việt Nam. Để đạt được mục tiêu dự án, việc hiểu biết các yếu tố dẫn đến sự thành công của các sáng kiến du lịch cộng đồng trong bối cảnh tương tự cũng như việc đề xuất một khung đánh giá cho những yếu tố đó là rất quan trọng. Bài viết sau đây xem xét ba cộng đồng ở Thái Lan, Campuchia và Ecuador đã triển khai thành công, duy trì hoạt động du lịch cộng đồng và đảm bảo lợi ích dài hạn cho cộng đồng. Bài viết đề xuất một khung phân tích để nghiên cứu các phương pháp tiếp cận du lịch cộng đồng dựa trên lý thuyết sẵn có và sử dụng khung phân tích này để xác định các yếu tố chính dẫn đến thành công cũng như quá trình lập kế hoạch, quản lý và triển khai du lịch cộng đồng ở các cộng đồng nông thôn. Những bài học rút ra từ việc phân tích các trường hợp nghiên cứu điển hình giúp định hình các sáng kiến du lịch cộng đồng ở lưu vực sông Cu Đê và các khu vực khác của Nam bán cầu, giúp phát huy các điểm mạnh và hạn chế những rủi ro mà các cộng đồng đã và đang phải đối mặt.

Introduction

With regards to the processes of global urbanisation, cities and their surrounding regions cannot be seen separately anymore, but only in adequate consideration of the systemic urban-rural nexus. Therefore, the objective of the research project “emplement! Empowering Urban Regions for Implementation and Resilience Strategies Considering the Urban-Rural Nexus”, which is part of the SURE Funding Priority and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) from 2019 to 2025, is to develop transferable tools and the needed capacities that enable administrations and relevant stakeholders in the city of Da Nang and the adjacent Quang Nam Province in Vietnam to implement relevant strategies and plans into practical, efficient and sustainable measures that interact synergistically on a city-regional scale. Both at the planning and the practical level, the emplement! project thereby focuses on four fields of action: tourism, agriculture, industry, and the built environment.

Within the larger consortium of the emplement! research partners, both from Germany and Vietnam, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences has taken the lead, together with Da Nang Architecture University (DAU), in the action field of sustainable, community-based tourism (CBT) as a relevant element of sustainable city-regional development, scientifically accompanying a CBT pilot project in different villages along the Cu De River Valley, in close proximity to the city of Da Nang.

Community-based tourism (CBT) is hereby considered an integral part of sustainable tourism due to the affinity of its principles with the pillars

of sustainability (Asker et al., 2010). CBT initiatives are focused on community and economic empowerment, preservation of heritage and protection of the environment and biodiversity. Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2019) state that the participation of communities and the local perspectives in the definition of tourism development is essential for the effectiveness of projects. Moreover, Yanes et al. (2019) and Asker et al. (2010) provide a theoretical basis for the definition of a CBT approach that could improve rural populations' livelihoods.

As background research for the above-mentioned pilot project in the Cu De River Valley, the purpose of the here presented paper is to identify the main components of a successful CBT initiative and highlight the main challenges and lessons learned from the implementation of the CBT approach in three reference communities of the Global South. The key success factors and instruments of CBT projects in these communities could then be transferred to the villages in the Cu De River Valley as well as to other projects. Examination of successful CBT initiatives could help identify the main factors to consider in formulating a CBT approach and determine the various instruments and lessons that can inform the development and implementation of future CBT projects in the Global South.

Methodology

The case studies investigated here were chosen based on the following criteria to define a CBT initiative in the Global South which was developed by Spenceley (2008) and adapted to the purpose of the analysis:

- the case study must be located within a developing region,
- the CBT project must be managed by one or more members of the community and must involve tourism-based activities,
- the project has been sustained for over ten years and has produced tangible benefits for the community involved.

The background of each project is explored together with the factors that contribute to its success as well as the challenges that each project may experience. To do this, an analytical framework (see below) was developed based on the work of Yanes et al. (2019) and Asker et al. (2010).

Community-Based Tourism Reference Examples

The cases studied in this paper are the Banteay Chhmar community in Cambodia, the Agua Blanca community in Ecuador, and the Mae Kampong in Thailand. These are located in tropical and rural areas in Global South countries and the implementation of CBT initiatives is based on community participation, long-term sustainability and self-organisation for management (Spenceley, 2008; Yanes et al., 2019).

Banteay Chhmar, Cambodia

Located 20 km from the Thai border and with the nearest tourism locality approximately 170 km away, the traditional Khmer community in Banteay Chhmar was centred on farming rice and cassava. The major tourist attraction in the area is a protected Angkorian temple. The community contends with socio-economic concerns such as poverty and unemployment (Pawson et al., 2017).

The CBT project was developed in 2007 to protect the local culture and the natural landscape while improving the residents' quality of life. The project has developed numerous tourism products since, and the benefits have allowed the creation of a community CBT fund that has financed various community development projects such as water filters, solid waste management projects and a library. The profits are distributed to members of the CBT project only; however, contributions are made towards the aforementioned, which benefit the entire community. The CBT initiatives are based on attracting cultural tourism to the area and include:

- a homestay program,
- cooking groups and picnics for tourists,
- traditional music and dance,
- guided tours,
- ox cart tours,
- taxi services and
- participation in rice flattening activities.

The governance structure consists of one leadership committee where only the CBT project coordinator receives a salary (Pawson et al., 2017).

Figure 1: Agricultural festival as part of the community-based tourism initiative in Nam Yen village in the Cu De River Valley in Vietnam. Photography by Susana Restrepo Rico

Agua Blanca, Ecuador

The community of Agua Blanca is located in the Machalilla National Park with 260 inhabitants. The 8.000 ha territory is owned by the community, and tourist activity is regulated by the community with the park administration's approval (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011). CBT in Agua Blanca developed in the 1980s and is centred on the showcase and protection of archaeological remains. Initially, there was a conflict between the government and the community's visions for tourism, but this was resolved once the government understood that the CBT complements park tourism through environmental awareness and protection (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011). The main CBT activities in Agua Blanca are:

- guided tours
- sales of artisanal crafts and goods

Many community members also engage in other activities to sustain their livelihood by participating in livestock farming, creating vegetable gardens, or working in construction or as a tour guide in the greater park area. This range of activities ensures that many community members do not have to migrate out of the community to make a living. The introduction of tourist activities also ensures that there is less pressure placed on the environment, and it can continue to be protected sustainably (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011).

Mae Kampong, Thailand

Mae Kampong, 50 km from the city of Chiang Mai, accommodates around 500 inhabitants and is located between forests and mountains (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). The main income-generation activities are the agriculture of herbs, coffee, tea, and a tea-based snack known as *miang*. The concept of generating tourism in the region developed in the 1990s with the decline in the demand for *miang* and the aim to diversify economic activities in the community. Given the long-term impacts of tourism on the country, the villagers were concerned about the possible effects of tourism on their area. Community collaboration was therefore central to the emergence of CBT in Mae Kampong as the means to develop a CBT strategy that ensured that ownership, benefits, and the control of tourism activities remained with the community and was promoted through meetings, workshops, and focus group sessions (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). The CBT strategy focused on:

- a homestay program,
- traditional music and dance performances,
- guided tours and
- sales of artisanal crafts and goods.

There are two key points regarding the village's geographical location that favour Mae Kampong's CBT initiative. Firstly, the village is accessible compared to other remote villages due to its

proximity to Chiang Mai, a city with major transport connections and tourism opportunities. However, access to the area and the number of visitors are regulated by the precarious road infrastructure, which does not permit large tourist buses to enter the area. Secondly, Mae Kampong is situated at a higher elevation along a natural stream, creating an attractive environment with a pleasant climate (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

The CBT Framework

A community-based tourism approach allows for integrated and inclusive community development; however, it is important to understand that CBT must be localised, contextualised, and adjusted to the social and legal structures of the communities. The literature provides a strong theoretical basis for the identification of the main components for a successful CBT project (Yanes et al., 2019; Asker et al., 2010), namely:

- preparation of CBT
- management and operation of CBT
- benefits and impact of CBT

These components must be adjusted to the specific contexts, but all of these have been found in all three of the best practices studied in this paper. The categorisation of these components provides an analytical framework that highlights a range of factors, influences and structures used to implement CBT in these communities. Subsequently, the analysis of the three case studies explores the similarities, differences and lessons learned from implementing and maintaining the CBT projects. Preparation of CBT Projects.

Preparation of CBT Projects

Studies on CBT indicate the importance of avoiding top-down approaches and integrating the community into planning approaches (Asker et al., 2010; López-Guzmán et al., 2011; Mtapuri and Giampiccoli, 2019), thus participatory planning is essential for the development of CBT projects. Community participation empowers the residents, and creates a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Furthermore, the community should be able to define the form of participation according to their capacities, interests, and traditions (Asker et al., 2010).

Collaborative action and consistent communication with public and external stakeholders such as government institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and educational and non-profit organisations are also important

CBT Analytical Framework	Banteay Chhmar, Cambodia	Agua Blanca, Ecuador	Mae Kampong, Thailand
Community participation	Adequate levels of community participation	Self-organised planning with active participation	High community participation
Type and level of participation	Not defined by community	Defined by community	Defined by community
Collaboration between stakeholders	Collaborative relationships initiated but not maintained	Public stakeholder engagement, no private stakeholders involved	Collaborative relationships fostered
Existing plans and policy	Seeks to support community development	Independent of development plans	Supported by government agencies
Political support	Level of support unclear	Strong political commitment	Strong leadership
Capacity building	Yes, with multiple NGOs	Self-organised	Yes, with NGOs

Table 1: Analysis of the preparation stage for the CBT approach

parts of successful CBT initiatives (Yanes et al., 2010), along with political commitment and government action. A multi-stakeholder apwproach can facilitate the implementation through knowledge sharing, capacity building and formulation of supportive policy, adjusting projects to existing development plans.

Management and Operation of CBT Projects

As with the preparation of CBT, consistent public participation and continuous capacity building should also be extended to both management and operations.

The importance of extending community participation during the operational stage of the project is imperative to ensure better communication amongst stakeholders, create defined responsibilities for all and facilitate project flexibility. It also prevents corruption and miscommunication, as well as promotes the transferability of knowledge through capacity-building activities initiated by community members.

A strong organisational structure within the community linked to public and external stakeholders could create a management culture of efficiency, effectiveness, and inclusivity.

CBT Analytical Framework	Banteay Chhmar, Cambodia	Agua Blanca, Ecuador	Mae Kampong, Thailand
Community management structure	Yes, but with a top-down approach	Yes	Yes
Community participation	Not involved in management	Consensus-based participatory strategy	High participation
Community Capacity building	Not clear	Continuous mentoring and learning for tour guides	Not clear
Democratic team selection	Democratic elections every 2 years	Committee are trained	Not clear
Communication between stakeholders	Limited due to lack of transparency	Daily to monthly meetings	Meetings and workshops
Capacity building	Yes, with multiple NGOs	Self-organised	Yes, with NGOs
Dissemination of information	Democratic elections every 2 years	Committee are trained	Not clear
Clear roles for community	Not enough dissemination	Yes, clear dissemination	Yes, with some discrepancies
Operation within legal framework	Not defined	Yes	Yes
Adaptable and flexible	Challenges for financial sustainability	Yes, a diverse range of activities to reduce reliance on CBT	Dependent on current leadership
Monitoring and evaluation	Unclear	Continuous monitoring and evaluation process	Effective monitoring and evaluation

Table 2: Analysis of the management and operation stage of the CBT approach

The community's organisational structure should include clearly defined roles where members use their expertise to advance the project. Establishing a community structure generates cohesion and a unified vision for management and operation, increasing accountability and fostering multi-stakeholder communication.

On the governmental side, a flexible structure could promote collaboration with the community and create an effective communication channel for disseminating information between all stakeholders (Yanes et al., 2010). CBT projects implemented within the current legal frameworks can prevent legal conflicts that could halt them altogether (Asker et al., 2010). The legal framework also provides a basis for monitoring and evaluation, a process required to adjust the projects to the emergent needs, placing growth at the forefront.

Due to the fluctuating nature of tourism, resilience, project adjustment, and flexibility become crucial components for the sustainability of CBT projects. Flexibility in income generation activities in tourism-oriented areas is essential to survive during pandemics, product shortages or changing community expectations. Managing visitor expectations appropriately with realistic offers that avoid overpromising and under-delivery of goods as well as managing the behaviour of tourists by creating awareness and understanding of beliefs, customs, and other relevant behaviours, generate resilient communities and CBT projects (Asker et al., 2010).

Benefits and Impact of CBT Projects

The benefits of the proper functioning of a CBT project include social cohesion and empowerment of the community (Yanes et al., 2019). These are linked to the economic benefits with an equitable distribution of profits among all community members. Economic benefits are not limited to profit sharing but include employment, further stabilising socio-economic conditions. For the long-term benefit of CBT, it is important that the impact on the environment is minimised. A greater value in conservancy allows communities to thrive even without tourism.

CBT Analytical Framework	Banteay Chhmar, Cambodia	Agua Blanca, Ecuador	Mae Kampong, Thailand
Distribution of profits	Profits distributed amongst tourism committee members	Equitable distribution in the community	Equitable distribution in the community
Sense of ownership	Yes	Yes	Yes
Value in conservancy	Great value	Great value	Great value
Consumption of resources	Not clear	Depends on tourism demand	Not clear
Employment generation	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3: Analysis of the benefits and impact stage of the CBT approach

Lessons Learned

The Banteay Chhmar project evidences the need for the community to define their level and type of participation in order to maintain collaboration between stakeholders and have clear roles and responsibilities amongst the stakeholders. The impact of this gap in the project is a lack of communication and transparency within the community (Pawson et al., 2017). In contrast, with the project in Agua Blanca, there is consistent community participation and strong

communication between residents. This is achieved through daily and monthly meetings, which are also used to plan and collaborate on the project and resolve any internal conflict (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011). A closer glance at the Mae Kampong example also indicates the strength of active community participation from the planning to the operation of the CBT project. The project in Mae Kampong also benefited from funding from the Thailand Research Fund (TRF), which enabled local residents to conduct focus groups, and workshops, which were very successful. This created an awareness and understanding of the benefits, costs, and impact of CBT tourism, providing a greater sense of ownership over the project, which subsequently activated meaningful participation within the community in the operational stage of the project. Additionally, the TRF invested in a marketing campaign (television and radio) that helped promote Mae Kampong leading to more visitors to the area (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). This indicates that regardless of the level and type of community participation, the support of external stakeholders is crucial for the sustainability of CBT projects. The involvement of NGOs and government agencies can help with funding for research, marketing, and training, along with the transferability of the CBT to similar communities.

The initiative from Mae Kampong in Thailand has also benefitted from strong leadership which has been a key facilitator in connecting the community to the management, operation, and benefits of CBT. Strong and flexible leadership was instrumental in bringing the community together to participate in and understand the CBT process. However, this leadership was so influential that it also posed a challenge because respondents in interviews identified that the project may not be robust enough to survive changing leadership due to an overreliance on one particular leader (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). The sustainability of the project will require similar leadership qualities from future leaders. In Banteay Chhmar, leadership is democratically elected every two years, preventing an over-dependence on a singular leader (Pawson et al., 2017). In Agua Blanca, the management structure is different to the other two case studies in that Agua Blanca consists of more than one tourism committee, each of which has different responsibilities. These committees are in charge of regulating resource use and creating a rotational schedule that ensures that all tour guides participate and benefit from tourism. This, therefore, requires income-generating activities not related to tourism, which allows residents to sustain themselves throughout the year. A key factor of success is, therefore their inclusive approach to tourism. The benefits of capacity building can also be seen in this community with their mentorship and training programme for tour guides, allowing for continuous knowledge sharing and development. (Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011).

In terms of profit distribution, a key factor for success in both Banteay Chhmar and Mae Kampong is the existence of a social welfare and community development fund. Portions of the profits from CBT are added to the funds, which are then used to develop infrastructure projects within the community. In Banteay Chhmar, this has boosted morale and pride because residents can see tangible benefits within the community (Pawson et al., 2017).

The Mae Kampong and Agua Blanca Projects only have a few discrepancies in their respective projects with respect to the framework. In contrast, the project in Banteay Chhmar has a few more challenges relating to a lack of trust between the community and the leadership as well as the long-term financial sustainability of the project. Conversely, a higher volume of tourists in the future could pose a challenge for these relatively small communities to meet rising demands that may put pressure on their surrounding environments.

Conclusions

The foundation of a successful CBT project is active community participation, and all three cases do have either complete control of the planning and implementation process by the community or high levels of community participation in the planning and implementation phases. There is no one-size-fits-all definition of CBT projects; each initiative must be planned, designed, executed, and maintained by the community based on their existing financial, natural, and social resources.

Photography by Katharina M. Borgmann, Vietnam

The CBT framework indicates the importance of participation and project ownership in each of the distinct stages, i.e., preparation, management and operation, as well as impact and benefits distribution. The different project components require an integrated approach as these are interrelated. For example, sufficient and community-centred planning allows for the management component to function efficiently. The benefits and impact result from considering both the planning and management thoughtfully and carefully.

The higher the participation and control of the different project stages by the community, the higher the potential for community capacity-building activities and equitable distribution of CBT project profits among the entire community. Additionally, the participation of external stakeholders facilitates the promotion of CBT initiatives outside the villages and can attract other forms of funding for community development projects.

The analysis of the three case studies has cemented the importance of providing the community with a sense of ownership through active participation, equitable distribution of profits and capacity building and development as some of the key elements for successful growth. Each case study has indicated one or more of these elements and provided a deeper understanding of how communities can successfully develop CBT projects. These lessons learned should now also be transferred to the emplement! pilot project in the Cu De River Valley.