Tourism Development in a New Democracy: Residents' Perceptions of Community-based Tourism in Mawlamyine, Myanmar

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Abstract

The concept of community-based tourism (CBT) is not new, and definitions of CBT have proliferated in the years since Murphy (1985) expounded on the community involvement approach in tourism development. This study examined residents' perceptions of CBT in Mawlamyine as a conduit for sustainable tourism amidst a climate of rapid economic and social change. Using a grounded theory approach, analysis of data collected from 14 semi-structured interviews with local residents and foreign tourists revealed that Mawlamyine's tourism potential lies in its untouched natural resources and cultural heritage, yet is hindered by a lack of essential infrastructure and services. The city's proximity to Mount Kyaitko, a popular tourist site, and Yangon, a major transit hub, has the potential to create strong market access to CBT projects. However, local residents cite the obscure governmental policies for obtaining permission to begin a CBT project as a major barrier.

Keywords: community, tourism, sustainability, development, perceptions

1. Introduction

1.1. Community-based Tourism

Community-based tourism (CBT) development has been widely adopted and refined since Murphy (1985) explored the case for community involvement in tourism in his seminal work, *Tourism: A Community Approach*. The various definitions of CBT that have emerged in the decades since share the principle that CBT is an approach that actively promotes community participation of the host community in tourism development. A community involved in tourism planning and activity is a mechanism for a sustainable tourism plan (Tukamushaba & Okech, 2011) by which the social and unique cultural and natural heritage of that community are protected and enhanced. Because of the democratic, participatory nature of the CBT concept, it has been widely implemented in developing countries where local communities are vulnerable to what Brohman (1996) cites as "…environmental destruction, a declining quality of life, and rising feelings of loss of control and cultural alienation…" (p. 58). It is well documented that many CBT projects in such emerging destinations do not succeed (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008; Salazar, 2012), primarily due to inadequate capacity building in three areas: market access, governance, and financial viability (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008).

In 2010, Myanmar transitioned from military dictatorship to democracy, a shift that has dramatically impacted the economic, social, and natural environment of this developing nation. The reopening of Myanmar's borders after decades of isolation has led to a rapid surge in tourism. The new government made what appears to be a proactive gesture towards mitigating unregulated tourism development by publishing the Community Involvement in Tourism (CIT) policy in May 2013, a national program that advocates sustainable tourism development using the CBT approach. The purpose of this study is to examine the potential for successful CBT development in Myanmar through the perspective of local residents and tourism stakeholders in the southeastern town of Mawlamyine, where CBT is in the conceptual stage. While numerous studies conducted in the post-implementation stage illustrate results and impacts of CBT projects, studies examining CBT and the participating communities before CBT implementation are rare. Ultimately, this research intends to offer pre-CBT development insight to determine how the local community's perceptions of CBT will affect CBT implementation.

There are extensive examples in the literature detailing the pitfalls of CBT projects after their implementation and the factors that contributed to their demise, most notably poor market access, poor governance, and poor financial viability (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). At the opposite end of the spectrum, there appears to be a lack in the research of inquiry into how the community's perceptions of the general concept of CBT impact the potential for a CBT project's favorable outcome. Probing local residents may reveal vital clues towards implementing the critical success factors. The CIT policy being circulated throughout Myanmar by the Tourism Ministry, which includes the three success factors is a good start, yet taken alone does not reflect the condition or attitudes of the local communities in which CBT will be implemented. Therefore, this study intends to bridge the gap between policy and reality by examining the perceptions of local residents in regard to CBT in order to gauge the potential for successful CBT development in Mawlamyine. The aim of this research is to understand the role of the community's preconceived impressions and expectations of CBT using Mitchell & Muckosy's critical factors as a reference for CBT success.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the tourism potential in Mawlamyine?

2. What is the perception of local residents and tourism stakeholders towards community-based tourism (CBT) development in Mawlamyine?

3. What do local residents and tourism stakeholders want to achieve through community-based (CBT) development?

4. What potential challenges or barriers to community-based tourism (CBT) implementation do local residents and tourism stakeholders foresee?

1.3. Review of the Literature

Mass Tourism

The economic effects of travel and tourism have a greater impact globally than other important sectors including automotive, mining, and chemical manufacturing (WTTC, 2012a, b). Tourism's total contribution to global GDP in 2012 was $6.6 trillion (WTTC, 2013), up from $6.3 trillion in 2011 (WTTC, 2012a, b). Regionally, Asia and the Pacific boast strong tourism growth, outpacing Europe and the Americas in 2011 and 2012 (UNWTO, 2013a, b; UNWTO, 2013a, b). Around 232.9 million international tourist arrivals were reported in 2012 and increased 6% in the first four months of 2013 (UNWTO, 2013a, b). Tourism's direct contribution to Southeast Asia's GDP is expected to increase from over $94 billion in 2011 to $173 billion in 2022 (WTTC, 2012a, b).

But despite such a positive contribution to global economies from a robust and flourishing tourism sector, impacts from mass tourism have the potential to be destructive to a destination, particularly those in developing nations (Brohman, 1996). Brohman cites a dependency on foreign control, "socioeconomic and spatial polarization, environmental destruction, cultural alienation, and the loss of social control and identity" (p.48) as negative impacts from mass tourism. The UN Environmental Programme also cautions against some of the negative impacts of mass tourism, specifically in the form of leakages, and uses Thailand, the Caribbean, and India as examples where 40%-80% of tourist expenditure is never re-circulated into the local economy (UNEP). Kuvan (2010) focuses on the environmental impacts from tourism and believes that harm to the physical environment is inevitable, as tourism development is dependent on the availability of land to build accommodations and services for tourists; in fact, "0.5 percent of the alternation of biologically productive lands worldwide" has been caused by tourism itself (Kuvan, 2010, p. 158).

Sustainable Tourism

Conversely, sustainable tourism is accepted as being a form of tourism that considers long-term effects on the cultural and natural environment of a destination, and is officially defined by the WTO as "tourism which meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future." (WTO, 1993:7).

It would seem that the resulting effects that characterize mass tourism (e.g. large-scale private sector development, overcrowding, environmental destruction, etc.) preclude it from being sustainable, thereby pitting, in a sense, mass tourism against sustainable tourism. However, as Brohman (1996) and Butler (1999) suggest, both types of tourism are not necessarily independent of each other. Sustainable tourism is not an alternative to mass tourism; rather, the solution to mitigating negative effects of mass tourism lies in making mass tourism itself sustainable (Brohman, 1996).

Community-based Tourism (CBT)

The concept of CBT in developing countries is not new. Murphy (1985) wrote of the idea of local community involvement in tourism development, but Pearce (1992) proposed that new types of tourism, alternative and soft tourism, which sought to bridge the gap between tourist and host, were promoted in the forms of tourism development projects in developing countries beginning in the 1970s. Such projects sprung from concern of tourism's impacts from mass tourism development on local communities, and many mirrored what is known as ecotourism, as they focused on promoting the conservation of protected areas and national parks with the involvement of the destination community; the tourist revenue generated by these conservation projects was intended to be invested back into the community (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). These early CBT initiatives were rooted in the belief that the best approach to collective community effort was through environmental conservation of the community's own natural environment (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). The subsequent CBT projects, and the academic research that followed, spawned various ideas among the leaders and donors of CBT initiatives of what exactly CBT means (Pearce, 1992).

According to Brohman (1996), CBT "should seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social and cultural well-being of the popular majority" (p.60). Rozemeijer (2001) notes that CBT provides three main benefits: improved community development spurred by increased income; natural resource management and sustainability; and increased value in the tourism product. In even more simplistic terms, CBT is a grass-roots process whereby tourism is planned, implemented, managed by and benefits the local community in which tourism occurs (Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, & Luloff, 2010). At its core, CBT is a paradigm shift away from the top-down approach of large-scale tourism where policies and decision-making occur at the top of the stakeholder pyramid, and instead allows the local community to direct itself (Razzaq *et al.*, 2012). A destination community that is involved in tourism planning and activity is a

mechanism for sustainable tourism (Tukamushaba & Okech, 2011), a viable long-term tourism plan that is owned by the local community and benefits it economically, environmentally, and socially. In the panoply of research on CBT initiatives, the potential socio-economic benefits to the local communities are heralded (Lucchetti & Font, 2013). It would seem, then, that CBT is panacea for the negative impacts on a local destination caused by mainstream tourism.

But as the critics of CBT projects assert, the dearth of evidence that CBT is successful calls into question the notion that CBT does, in fact, promote positive socio-economic outcomes at the local level (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). The conclusion by Goodwin and others who have taken a critical perspective of the efficacy of CBT is that more often than not, CBT initiatives tend to come up short. They lend that measuring success is "difficult due to the lack of consistent and verifiable impact data" (Lucchetti & Font, 2013), but factors attributed to CBT's failure described by Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) suggest that success or failure should be measured by the implementation process of the CBT plan and not solely on its impacts. Poor market access, poor governance, and lack of financial viability are obstacles to success that occur in the implementation stage of CBT (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). In the case of Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda, researchers attributed a lack of tourism training and education by the CBT leaders of the local community to a lack in active community participation and equal dispersion of economic benefits (Tukamushaba & Okech, 2011). Salazar (2012) observed that a CBT initiative in Tanzania fell apart when the Dutch international development agency SNV who funded it pulled out of the program. And it was found by the Rainforest Alliance/Conservation International that among 200 CBT initiatives surveyed in the Americas, many local tourism operators reached a dismal occupancy rate of 5%, a CBT failure due to poor governance (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). Other researchers have also questioned how CBT projects are governed, focusing on the term "community" itself to suggest that it is an oversight by the development agency (usually of Western origin) of the consideration of the inherent dynamic and hierarchy of the local community itself that stymies positive results (Tosun, 2000; Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). CBTs are developed on the assumption that the community is cohesive and homogenous, failing to account for cultural, political, and religious differences among members of the same community (Belsky, 1999). As Taylor (1995) points out, it is vital to consider the responsiveness of the local community to tourism when introducing CBT programs because "non-western societies residents of different communities will respond in different ways, will have different views of hospitality and view the boundaries of their community through different eyes." In CBT projects where Western management and leadership styles are transferred to local and indigenous communities (men and women of all classes and religions working together as equals), issues of power and control become a threat to success (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008).

Such challenges towards achieving the goal of CBT notwithstanding, researchers have observed successful, sustainable CBT projects, notably Fisherman Village on Samui Island, Thailand, (Pongponrat, 2011), Nam Ha Ecotourism in Luang Namtha, Lao PDR (UNESCO, 2008), and Miso Walai Homestay in Malaysia (Razzaq *et al*., 2012), their success stemming from a congruent implementation process to CBT as defined by Mitchell and Muckosy (2008). In the case of Nam Ha Ecotourism in Lao PDR, initiated in 1999 that has won multiple awards for its achievements in poverty alleviation and heritage preservation, the ecotourism project was organized in four separate stages: extensive pre-planning to establish donors and supervisory committees, feasibility studies and market research of the area, training of staff and community members, and quality assessment of the CBT initiative. Much of the continued success of Nam Ha Ecotourism is owed to the partnerships between the CBT and the private sector.

This study will focus on the perceptions of local residents in Mawlamyine towards CBT, where the concept has been introduced to the community but, at the time of this research, no plans for developing a CBT project had been formed. The purpose of the study is to gauge the potential for

successful CBT by examining local residents' perceptions of CBT together with the criteria stated by Mitchell & Muckosy (2008) necessary for favorable CBT outcomes.

2. Method

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative research method was used to investigate the perceptions of the residents. As Phillimore and Goodson (2004) stated, qualitative research allows for "studying things in their natural settings, interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them, humanizing problems and gaining an 'emic', or insider's perspective." (p. 4).

2.1. Participants and Sampling

The researchers stayed in Mawlamyine for an extended period of time to allow for persistent observation. Snowball sampling was used as an effective sampling method where one participant referred other interviewees to the researcher. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and coded. Maximum variation sampling was further used to get a wide variety of viewpoints from residents. Interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved.

Through the 14 semi-structured interviews with local community members and foreign tourists in Mawlamyine, the researchers took a grounded theory approach to analyze the data collected. Nine participants were male and the remaining four were female. Participants were asked questions such as "Why do you think tourists visit Mawlamyine," "What does CBT mean to you," and "What are some community needs that tourism and CBT could fill?" A grounded theory approach was used to analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through open, axial, and selective coding, several themes emerged that describe the phenomenon of community-based tourism in Mawlamyine. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researchers used prolonged engagement by staying in the area and conducting interviews until saturation was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews were transcribed, given pseudonyms, and two researchers coded the interviews to ensure the reliability of themes. Member checks and triangulation through experts and literature furthermore were used to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.   Table 1 illustrates these themes and subthemes.

2.2. Study Area

Myanmar is a Southeast Asian country bordered by Bangladesh, India, China, Lao PDR, and Thailand. Despite being rich in natural resources, Myanmar is classified by the United Nations as a Least Developed Country (UNCTAD, 2012), and is arguably the most underdeveloped of Southeast Asia (Sovacool, 2012). The military dictatorship whose rule officially began in 1962 (Henderson, 2003) and stymied economic growth for the past 40 years (The Economist, 2013), still wields power today, albeit under a loosely defined democracy. The 17 states and divisions composing the geography of the country are comprised of eight ethnic groups: Bamar, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. Buddhism is the main religion, followed by Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.

Historically, Myanmar has experienced a stream of domestic tourists and a small number of Western visitors, but the progressive governmental reforms and loosening of international sanctions have now opened Myanmar's borders to the outside world. The effect of these changes can be seen in the explosion of international tourism. From 2008 to 2012, international tourist arrivals increased by over 300,000. The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism reported that over one million tourists visited Myanmar in 2012 (MoH) and international tourist arrivals are forecasted to reach 7.5 million by 2020 (ADB). Reports by the media that in 2012, the number of tourists outnumbered the number of beds are evidence of how unprepared the country is to handle increased tourism. To help manage tourism growth, the government recruited industry experts to develop several tourism management plans,

including the Responsible Tourism policy published in 2012, the Master Tourism plan released in June 2013, and the CIT policy published in May 2013.

Mawlamyine

The fourth largest city in Myanmar, Mawlamyine lies 180 miles southeast of Yangon and is a major access point to the southeastern region of the country. Once the capital of Myanmar while under British rule in the 19th century, Mawlamyine is now the capital of Mon State with a population of roughly 400,000 people who are a diverse mix of Bamar, Karen, and Mon, and who subscribe to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Its natural environment is marked by the confluence of the Thanlwin, Gyaing, and Attayan rivers and the green hills that surround Mawlamyine in neighboring Mottama, just over the Thanlwin Bridge for which the city is most known.

Figure 1. Map of Myanmar and Mawlamyine, the study area

Rudyard Kipling may have introduced Mawlamyine to the public when he wrote about his brief visit there in the 19th century in his poem "Mandalay," but the city is still largely unknown and tourism to Mawlamyine is low compared to other major sites such as Inle Lake or Bagan. An unofficial number of tourist arrivals to Mon State in 2012 was roughly 74,000, and 55 hotels and guesthouses in Mon State are currently registered with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, totaling 2,083 rooms.

At the time of this research, CBT in Mawlamyine was in the conceptual stage and no plans to develop a CBT project or form a CBT organizational committee had been forged. A select group of

community members had only just learned about the concept of CBT and Myanmar's CIT policy during introductory information sessions given by the Hanns Seidel Foundation earlier in the year. Mawlamyine's position as a pre-CBT development training ground was an appropriate environment in which to study local residents' perceptions of CBT.

Table 1. Themes and subthemes that describe
the phenomenon of community-based tourism in Mawlamyine

Theme	Subtheme
1. Great natural and cultural heritage	None
2. A link between community willingness and action	Knowledge exchange
3. Awareness of tourism's impact	None
4. A better life	Preservation of social fabric
5. Government policy	None

3. Results

3.1. Research Question One – Tourism Potential of Mawlamyine

Theme One: Natural and Cultural Heritage

Local Residents' Perception

When asked why tourists traveled or would be interested in traveling to Mawlamyine, most local respondents cited nature and outdoor activities such as trekking in the city and its environs, Mon state's history, and cultural heritage as the top tourist draws. Some local residents connected their knowledge of foreign travelers' preferences with their attraction to the physical landscape. Aye, a local woman from Mawlamyine who currently lives and works in Singapore, explained:

> *I think it's the culture. And the nature. I find that, in Singapore I met a few European or those really foreigners, not Asian people, they do like nature things a lot, I find. I met with one of the Belgian girl, and in their country, they didn't see any sun. So when she came to Singapore, at about 12 noon, after lunch, she was sitting in the middle of the—she wants to get the direct sunlight. So just sitting, and the sun. For me it's very hot but she enjoyed it so much. So I think they came here for mostly nature…*

Khine, who works as an English translator, reiterated the idea that Mawlamyine's natural landscape appeals to tourists from the West because they may feel disconnected to nature in their native environments:

> *The thing is because there are so many mountains and hills, because I heard that most of the tourists like hiking, just going around with barefoot and without riding anything because maybe in their countries, they always ride car or they always use transportation, that's why they just want to walk. They like hiking, I think. Maybe that's one of the things, these areas have lots of mountains, that's one of the things.*

Hla volunteers for an organization in Mawlamyine that promotes preservation of the local culture. Not surprisingly, she noted the region's rich cultural environment as one of the main tourist draws, even pointing out that some local practices have faded in other parts of the country but still survive in Mon State:

> *There are about three things: there are traditional lifestyle that they are living here, and also the beauties, the natural beauties that we have, and also the crafts, handcrafts and everything that they have in this area can attract tourists.*

> *Weaving, where you can still see because, in some part of our country, some of them have disappeared. But here in Mon state they still have. In Ogre Island, there, too, they have lots of handcrafts. They make pipes, walking sticks and other, baskets, something like that.*

Foreign Tourists' Perception

From the perspective of foreign tourists, Mawlamyine does provide a connection to nature and a unique culture, but Luc, an experienced traveler from France explained:

> *...we [he and his girlfriend] wanted to go to Hpa-an or to Mawlamyine, and Mawlamyine... One of the point, also what we were thinking that would be...The sea. No, it's no sea, it's a river. So no beach very close. When you go to border, the, where the water, the river, it's not the color of the water, it's also full of dirt, something like that. You see the people who are fishing so at the end you think— So it's like, underdeveloped compared to other places and in a way it's not so reassuring.*

Despite a lack of infrastructure and services, he does acknowledge that he and his girlfriend would return, saying, "For, if we had to do it again, I would do it again."

   Peter, an older traveler originally from California, first visited Myanmar twenty years ago and has returned to Myanmar several times over the past two decades, although this was his first visit to Mawlamyine. He finds the city to be pleasant, remarking about the quality of food and hospitality of the local people, but does acknowledge that access to tourist information is extremely limited:

> *...if there were some kind of tourist office that had general information about the area, that would be a good thing, because there's not much in the Lonely Planet book. I consider myself a pretty experienced traveler, I do a lot of research before I head out to a place and still, it was hard to find information about this place.*

> *That's the only thing I really miss. Other than that, everything has been fine. This hotel has been great, one of my favorites ever in all my travels, like 35 years, I can't believe how nice it is, you know? And how nice they are to us. So that's great. The food has been really good around town, the people are super nice and pretty honest and, I don't know. It's kind of all there. It's a really nice place, I think.*

3.2. Research Question Two – What Is The Perception of Local Residents and Tourism Stakeholders towards Community-based Tourism (CBT) Development in Mawlamyine?

Theme One: A Link Between Community Willingness and Action

Respondents drew an obvious theme of perceiving CBT as a business link connecting community willingness and alacrity to develop their ideas to the tools and resources required to materialize those ideas. Hla explained:

> *We have a kind of a culture group. ...this organization has been doing this for nearly 10 years already. They have the players as well as the singers. They have this and it is in action already. They are working here, they are grouping and they have the organization already, but the thing is the link. They still have no link at all. If there is a link that would be interested in this, then they can join and try and get connected. The person who would like to do CBT, then can form a kind of partnership.*

Sein manages a small hotel and said, "We are also thinking that, if we become friendly and know these foreigners, we could work together, if possible, to be partnerships."

Khine explained the need to implement CBT as a strategy to proactively prepare for the growing stream of tourists:

> *And now, the local community, they would like to start a CBT, they just want to start this CBT and they have to write a proposal and then they would like to submit this proposal to the office, the government of Mon State and at that time, although they don't get the policy to allow this CBT system at this time. But when the tourist come here, more and more, to accommodate tourist is the problem. Only then, they will consider about the CBT project and business.*

> *It's not too late now. It's not too late. I'm worried that if they didn't get the permission, they don't— let it be, okay we don't do it, after that we will do it, it will be late for them. They should start now, the CBT projects, although they don't get the permission. They should start now, on their own.*

Myo, an archaeologist, expressed the urgency of implementing CBT, comparing Myanmar to other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), saying, "We start, we must start, because the whole ASEAN countries practice, use this kind of CBT, so we must do…"

Subtheme A: Knowledge Exchange

In addition to a business partnership between the local community and tourists, local residents also hope to share experiences with tourists on a personal level. Aye talked about it in this way:

> *…they [locals] will have more ideas because, those tourism—less or more, they will bring some sort of culture and ideas back to our country. So the positive point is, foreigners, they come from different countries so our Myanmar people will learn more about how the world is changing, how other people are doing, how other people are thinking, you know?*

Nai, a 26 year-old man, divulged his personal desire to connect with foreigners and explains why knowledge exchange between locals and foreigners is necessary:

> *I want to get so many experiences from the foreigners, from tourism. Foreign experiences, and we need to promote our education level and we need to be more smart. We need to be more educated.*

Many respondents commented on the seemingly inherent hospitable nature of Myanmar people, a cultural attribute that may potentially act as a contributing factor to the community's overwhelming desire to connect with foreign tourists. Thi, an English teacher, explained:

> *We are happy, I mean, our – according to our own tradition, we are very happy to have visitors, I mean, not like, in your country. To my house, any visitor can visit me at any time, and they are always welcome, they are always welcome. No need to arrange and no need to phone and no need to say or something like that. You are forever welcome. So, people like you, too, they are treated the same way, welcome, very warmly, it is our duty, the host's duty, not to make the visitor feel any kind of inconvenience, you know?*

Myo put it into perspective in this way:

> *We are the Buddhist, most of our people are Buddhist. Our mind or something like that is gentle, very gentle. We, our mentally our emotions how we can help some other*

people. We are very love, the love of the guest our nature. So we will give much service, as much as we can. How they return, or what we return is another thing.

Through an interpreter, Saw described the significance of meeting with the interviewer in this way:

He feel happy that, because this is big change, talking to a tourist, having these snacks together, because five or six years ago, we can't do this kind of conversation with tourist directly.

His reference to the xenophobic tendencies of the past military regime, which once prohibited communication between locals and foreigners, amplified the eagerness of the local people to connect with foreigners and embark on CBT development.

Theme Two: Awareness of Tourism's Impact

When discussing their perceptions of the potentially negative effects from tourism development and CBT's role in mitigating those effects, respondents with a higher education level or experience traveling outside of Myanmar explicitly described possible negative impacts, whereas those with no "awareness" or international experience typically didn't foresee any negative effects. The former stressed the need to inform and educate those who are not aware of the potentially destructive impacts. Khine talked about the ignorance of others of tourism's impact but concludes that CBT has the potential to allay negative impacts:

I'm really worried, I've heard a lot about the tourist coming into our country, and after they come back to the places, what we have got is only the rubbish, you know that? And also the resources are getting less and less because of that. And so I'm so worried that, people, most of the people, the illiterate people, local people, simple people, they don't know these disadvantages. They don't, they are not worried about that. For me, as I have lot, read a lot about these from the Internet, that's why I'm a little bit worried about tourism. But now, CBT is the best way to solve the conflict between my mind. I think CBT is the best way.

Nu is a university professor and reiterated the concern about increased trash, and discussed her concern about potential negative social change from tourism in this way:

We need training for the awareness of the tourist industry…For the social, because our social lifestyle, ways of life, I worry maybe change. Foreigner and local people, social network maybe wide. Ways of life maybe change. They have low awareness about the tourist industry. We need training for the awareness of the tourist industry, …Yes, social life can change. For example, two people. If the one people, his life or his time only. Two people, relationship. This is a change. Natural change.

Thi, the English teacher who also once lived abroad, revealed what she believed to be potentially negative impacts almost as a warning to those less educated:

I think our town, without tourists, we already have our own problem with all these trash. It's a big problem, and another thing is, I don't know, electricity, we still have electricity problem, and if they come, the hotels come, how are we to provide enough electricity? They are building one there [power plant], but I don't know whether it's going to be enough for the local people as well as for the tourists. And also we have water problem, in fact, in summer we have water problem. They might use, what we call artisan well. But, to take up too much is not very good for us.

So, all these will come, I think. And another thing, you can't – quite close to the border, and Thai in fact, is very for its, you know? Human trafficking and all these business, you know? Something to do with all the sex and all, and our problem with

the local people, very simple, and we are not that much well-educated. So they don't know, I mean, they don't know the effects that can come upon us.

3.3. Research Question Three – What Do Local Residents and Tourism Stakeholders Want to Achieve through Community-based Tourism (CBT) Development?

Theme One: A Better Life

The expectation that CBT development – and in a broader sense, the increased interaction with foreigners that CBT would create – will increase local incomes and improve the standard of living of the people of Mawlamyine was a shared sentiment among all respondents. Saw described his feelings in response to the interviewer's question about his opinion of the international boycott against traveling to Myanmar that began in the 1980s:

> *Everybody hopes to make their life better with that [tourism]. So when the tourist come, if the tourist come and we don't look at people, don't make the profit. To say don't come, angry. Now we don't feel that way anymore because it's becoming more open.*

Nai expressed his expectation in simplified terms, saying, "I hope it can help the income of the people," and Aung, a local doctor, stressed that "CBT is the only one for benefits," specifically "Economic. Economic advantages." He then earnestly said that there are too many needs that he hopes CBT and tourism can fulfill: "Job security. It's hard to explain. Everything, we need the help of the foreigner. Right now, he doesn't really know what it is, but he hopes foreigner can help."

Hla described her vision of CBT in this way:

> *If it is long-term, we will slowly learn, what are the chances, what are the good things that we can get from tourism. And if we know what these things are, then we can grab all these good things to build up their society, better than before. Slowly we will learn, step-by-step. It's going to be a long process. I think that it's going to give good benefits to society. We will learn, this is the way tourism works and these are the way that we have to protect, get the chances and make society good.*

Foreign Tourists' Perception

When asked what he thought about the concept of CBT, Peter, the American tourist, also agreed with the local residents that it could create positive change:

> *This CBT, I haven't heard the term before but, if that works here, you know, or that becomes installed here in some level or other, that would really be a good thing. If the local guides that have boats can take people to the island, and be able to keep the profits for themselves, and if the people on the nearby islands can sell crafts and stuff to tourists and earn a little bit of profit, I think that's great…*

But later, when sharing what he believed to be negative impacts from tourism, revealed inner conflict as a tourist wanting an authentic experience while acknowledging that his is not a panoptic view of tourism. The "better life" that locals hope to achieve through CBT is not an obvious shared goal of tourists:

> *…backpackers, maybe lower-budget travelers, maybe want to see the exotic Asia, want to see old, unchanged Asia. Even people like me, who have been doing this for a long time, are not too excited about staying in a high-rise hotels and stuff like that. We want to do things, you know, at ground level and see the real thing. But I gotta think that that's gonna change here. This city, now, it has this old, crumbling British charm, which is neat and I really enjoy seeing it, maybe it's not so great for the locals though, you know? I mean, the buildings are crumbling, so there's nothing really*

good about that. It's sort of charming and fascinating for me, as a foreigner and it gives you a sense of what it might have been like 100 years ago, or something.

To answer your question, there's a part of me, I'm glad that I'm here now and I'm seeing it now because I suspect that in one year or five years, it's going to be a lot different and I'll be glad that I was here in 2013. But on the other hand, maybe these crumbling buildings aren't so great and maybe the sanitary conditions aren't so great.

Subtheme A: Preservation of Social Fabric

The disappearance of village life due to local residents emigrating to foreign countries like Thailand and Malaysia to earn higher wages was an issue raised by many respondents. Not surprisingly, they have hope that CBT will contribute to those families' incomes to incentivize them to stay in Mawlamyine, eventually preserving their social fabric. Aung described the situation in this manner:

Yeah, that's the reason he's trying to make this CBT. People who work there [Thailand] save money and come here. They stay for a period but, if the situation, the money. They try to have a job here. They have to go back because of the financial problem. If they could stay here, they are willing to stay here.

Hla elaborated:

Lots of people go and work abroad and they sometimes come back with disease and here, they leave their children behind and their children are not in the care of their parents. They have to stay away from the parents. They have all these problems. The children alone, drugs, and they don't want to go to school. All these problems follows. If the parents are here and if they can work here, so the family will be together, and then we will be peaceful. A better life we will have.

Thi explicitly described her vision of CBT's role in enticing young, unemployed people to stay in Mawlamyine:

I think it's [CBT] a kind of, it's a kind of project that is going to work for our people…for example, our graduate students who has no work will have some kind of work in their community, they no need to travel to other places…They can stay in their village and they can earn a certain amount of money and that could satisfy them, I think, the amount of money they get is going to be more than enough for them because, they can live on very small income… so the income that they are going to have from the CBT, is going to be more than enough for them, I think. They could have a proper life, right?

3.4. Research Question Four — What Potential Challenges or Barriers to Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Implementation do Local Residents and Tourism Stakeholders Foresee?

Theme One: Government Policy

The overarching theme among respondents was frustration towards policies regulating certain CBT activities, such as homestays. Under the current law, it is illegal for local Myanmar residents to host foreigners in their homes, and an enigmatic procedure to establish a guesthouse for foreigners stymies locals eager to do so. Aung explained his understanding of this policy:

For the hotel, tour company or something, they say that government taxes. So where you stay [interviewee's hotel]…they already pay the government the taxes that you can stay. But if this business, we call it CBT, there's gonna be no taxes. That's what we want. But we are not allowed to do CBT here yet, that's the problem. …for

individual people, it [taxes] gonna be too much. We can start, but for individual—if I do a guesthouse, I have to pay taxes. But for me, one person only, can't, gonna be too much.

Even if the interested party is willing and able to pay the government taxes, permission from the government must be obtained prior to starting the business. Aung stated that permission is not always granted, and Saw followed-up with this response when asked why not:

Policy. They just don't want we having contact with the foreigners so much. The government don't want us to be friendly with the foreigner because we gonna be well-educated. Want to keep us this way, so they can have all the profit.

Simply put, they are bound to permission in order to move forward, as expressed by Saw through an English translator:

When you were doing that meeting, he feel bad because you said, what do you want to do, and you ask them, what can CBT do to help the people? But, everything still depend on the government. It's no help asking that question because they want, but entirely the decision is still on the government.

4. Discussion

This study examined the perceptions of CBT by the local community of Mawlamyine where, at the time of this research, CBT as a concept was introduced but no plans to develop or plan a concrete project existed. The intent of this research was to use local residents' attitudes towards CBT as a measure of the potential for CBT success. Based on a review of the literature on CBT success, the three critical factors required are market access, good governance, and financial viability (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). The results of the study will be discussed by answering the four research questions posed.

Research Question 1

What is the tourism potential in Mawlamyine?

Although local residents believed that Mawlamyine has tourism potential, it took some probing to extract specific qualities that attract tourists. Upon asking the question "Why do you think tourists come to Mawlamyine?" some interviewees gave a long pause before answering or didn't respond at all, prompting the interviewer to pose the question again. The most common tourist draws given were Mawlamyine's untouched natural landscape, outdoor activities such as trekking, and culture. That some respondents described Mawlamyine's natural environment in the context of Western tourist behavior and preferences suggests that they don't necessarily believe Mawlamyine is particularly rich in tourism potential. Thi, the English teacher, supported this theory when she commented that local residents "don't know, they don't know what they have to offer." This general state of local residents being unfamiliar with their community's tourism potential may be a result of the historic isolation Myanmar experienced for the past two decades. As such, extensive training and education of local residents about the tourism opportunities in Mawlamyine would seem necessary to create quality tourism and encourage market access to Mawlamyine.

Comparatively, foreign tourists described their impressions of Mawlamyine and reasons for traveling there. Both respondents commented that the city was easily accessible from Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar, by bus or train, which was one reason for visiting Mawlamyine. It is also a two hour drive from Mount Kyaikto, a famous tourist stop popular for its leaning rock pagoda; Peter the American tourist, planned to go there on his way back to Yangon. He commented that it was a challenge to locate transportation information from locals in town advising how to get from

Mawlamyine to Mount Kyaikto. Accessing tourist-related information, such as bus schedules, was a shared complaint among foreign tourist respondents. And while they appreciated the authenticity of Mawlamyine and the absence of mass tourism, they simultaneously lamented the lack of available information for tourists. However, both respondents said they would visit all over again if they could. Due to the limited time and resources, the researcher was unable to interview a wider range of foreign tourists to determine if this attitude is generally shared among tourists to Mawlamyine. However, there appears to be strong market access due to easy access to transportation from Yangon, a major tourist hub. Mawlamyine's location is also a gateway to Mount Kyaikto, which has the potential to bring large groups of tourists to the city.

Research Question 2

What is the perception of local residents and tourism stakeholders towards community-based tourism (CBT) development in Mawlamyine?

Participants' responses to this question are marked by a sense of urgency to embrace the social and economic changes from the recent shift in politics that they were denied during decades of isolation. Some locals referred to CBT as a business strategy (or business itself) or gateway to engaging with foreigners. In Hla's case, the woman who is involved with the local culture group, CBT will offer the group of local residents who perform traditional music and dance an outlet to perform. The group already exists and is eager to connect with foreigners to proudly share their Mon culture. Others perceived CBT as education; engaging with foreigners professionally and socially would educate and inform locals on the world around them, and in return, would inform the international community about their local community. CBT and tourism were interchangeable to local residents.

Other respondents admitted that they simply didn't know what CBT was (locals who completed a questionnaire after a town hall meeting often left this question blank) yet communicated that it was a positive force that would help their community gain access to economic benefits. These same respondents were also eager to participate in CBT, despite not understanding it.

Research Question 3

What do local residents and tourism stakeholders want to achieve through CBT development?

To the local community, CBT is a strategy towards improving their standard of living, an income generator, a "better life." When asked what needs the community had, or what social or economic services or infrastructure was lacking, most undereducated respondents were generally unable to give examples without the help of the researcher to provide further explicit explanation to clarify the question. Aung's comment that the people need "everything" suggests that it was naïve of the researcher to pose this question at all. CBT was expected to fulfill all of their needs and lift their current social and economic status – both individual and international.

The CBT approach in this case, then, could be viewed as misleading to a community if not carefully explained to its members. The researcher met the regional director of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, the German-based non-profit organization who co-authored the CIT policy and is implementing CBT training in Mawlamyine, who candidly talked about CBT in Mawlamyine in this way:

> Not everyone is going to benefit, not everyone will get a job in tourism or make money from it, but if we can at least teach some local people a formalized process of delivering tourism and train them to create a better quality product to the customer, then we're helping.

The participants' perceptions of the power of CBT as a development tool reflect a general assumption about the concept of CBT. What they hope to gain is impactful social and economic

change. CBT is expected to create jobs for the unemployed, to lure back to their villages men and women who deserted the country for higher wages abroad, and to create social exchanges between them and foreigners.

Research Question 4

What potential challenges or barriers to community-based tourism (CBT) implementation do local residents and tourism stakeholders foresee?

Local residents named the government and its current policy regulating the procedure to open accommodations as the major barriers to CBT implementation. Homestays are prohibited in Myanmar, and guesthouses are expensive endeavors to develop that first require permission from the local government to register. Respondents candidly stated that the government tends not to grant permission as a strategy to maintain control over the people. It remains unclear what precisely is the official procedure for opening a guesthouse or for developing a CBT project; due to the language barrier despite using an English-translator, the explanations provided by the respondents seem to contradict the purpose of the CIT policy, which includes the participation of governmental bodies in CBT development. Local residents were hopeful that the attitude and policy will change, but their hope is counterbalanced by a looming skepticism. If CBT is implemented in Mawlamyine and local residents feel excluded from the planning process, it will have implications for the potential success of the CBT project, (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Openness and transparency, conditions that have been absent in Myanmar for the past four decades but that are essential to community participation (Karkkainen, Packalen, & Hamunen, 2013), must be encouraged and sustained throughout the CBT implementation process.

Additionally, there is a sense among local residents of a wait-and-see attitude. The next presidential election in 2015 is much anticipated because of the candidacy of Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of General Aung San who is widely recognized as being the founder of a democratic Myanmar. To local residents, the country's only chance to move forward lies with Aung San Suu Kyi winning the 2015 election. Saw, the outspoken man who owns his own business, said through an English translator that he is hopeful that the government will open up their policies and allow locals to develop CBT, but that freedom will have to wait: "After 2015, he hopes it will be free—election, election. Because there is election." Phyo owns a hotel and explained the wait-and-see attitude in this way:

> *If the country is stable and if the people who are leading the political organization is stable, then can develop and grow. At the moment, as a hotelier, the rooms should be at least 200 or maybe 300. But at the moment, dare not do that, because can't believe that number of tourism, they dare not invest that amount because of the political situation. Dare not completely invest for 200 room hotel. Only when the political situation is stable, the investors from abroad will come and they too will pool in. There are four Ls: Learn, Listen, Look, Leave. If the political situation is not as stable as they think, then maybe fewer visitors.*

5. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine the local community's expectations and understanding of CBT as a preliminary indicator of the potential for CBT success in Mawlamyine. Analyzing the data within the context of the critical success factors as stated by Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) that contribute to successful CBT – market access, good governance, and financial viability – it was found that locals and foreign tourists believe that the city's tourism potential lies in its rich natural and cultural environment, but infrastructure, services, and hospitality/tourism training of locals to support

tourists are severely lacking. Mawlamyine's proximity to Mount Kyaitko, a popular tourist destination, and Yangon, Myanmar's former capital and major transit hub, is also an asset that may facilitate connecting the private sector with CBT projects, thereby strengthening market access. The major barrier to CBT implementation as cited by local residents is the government and its restrictive business-ownership policy. Local residents have great expectations of how CBT will improve their current standard of living, provide jobs for the unemployed, and mend broken villages where men and women have emigrated to neighboring countries for higher wages. A lack of transparency and openness by the leaders of CBT projects about the structure and process of CBT development, and certainly the distribution of funds of the project, will threaten the level of community participation (Karkkainen *et al*., 2013). Lastly, it was stated by local residents that the installment of true democracy in Myanmar resides in the outcome of the next presidential election in 2015. The hopeful candidate, Aung Suu Kyi, espouses the transparency and democracy the people of Myanmar have been denied. Local residents are waiting until 2015 before confidently believing in a democratic society. Investors are surveying Mawlmayine and going through the four L's – looking, learning, listening, and leaving – which could potentially negatively affect the financial viability of CBT development. In summary, tourism in Mwlmayine is in the exploratory stage and market access seems to be possible. Good governance and financial viability are yet to be determined, but possible with the right leadership and stakeholders. Training, planning and market research should start now to ensure a successful CBT project.

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