

Design thinking for social innovation: Secrets to success for tourism social entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

Tourism Social Entrepreneurship is a market-based strategy for sustainable tourism development. It solves complex social issues to benefit disadvantaged stakeholders, while seeking to achieve financial sustainability and boost the benefits of tourism. Currently, there is little insight into how social entrepreneurs create these innovative social solutions. This black box hinders the understanding and replication of tourism social entrepreneurial success in different contexts, thus preventing the social benefits of tourism from increasing. We suggest that the literature on TSE can be informed by design thinking - a human centered framework for social innovation. Taking a social enterprise in Vietnam as a case study of Community-Based Tourism Travel, this paper reveals that tourism social entrepreneurs have developed an intuitive ability to apply design thinking to social innovation, despite lacking training. The paper thus sheds light on the social entrepreneur's innovative abilities, and contributes to fostering successful social entrepreneurship in a tourism context.

1. Introduction

Tourism is contingent upon diverse sectors working synonymously to deliver a complete experience, thus promoting community level development (Aquino, Lück, & Schänzel, 2018). Interrelated products and services along with interactions between tourists, destination organizations and local communities enable innovation at multiple levels with diverse actors. At the destination level, social capital is a major interest (Pikkemaat, Peters, & Bichler, 2019). Traditional tourism entrepreneurship and development takes a capitalist approach, resulting in lower benefits for host communities (Dredge, 2017). Tourism Social Entrepreneurship (TSE) has been identified as a contributing factor in the social and environmental development of communities, societies, and destinations (Florin & Schmidt, 2011) while reducing externalities of commercial production (Shaw & Carter, 2007).

Research on tourism social entrepreneurs is limited (Boluk, 2011), with existing studies revalidating themes in social entrepreneurship literature such as motivations and asking the 'wrong questions' (Sigala, 2016; von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). Research exploring specific areas of tourism innovation is scarce (Pikkemaat et al., 2019), highlighting the need for further studies focusing on social entrepreneurship and social innovation in the context of tourism (Jørgensen et al., 2021).

The literature has failed to explain how tourism social entrepreneurs overcome barriers to resource mobilization or how they identify and exploit market opportunities (Altinay, Sigala, & Waligo, 2016). So far, the process through which tourism social entrepreneurs and enterprises act to create social value has not been delineated (Sigala, 2016). However, this can be achieved by understanding their decision-making, problem-solving and innovative processes. Additionally, the use of intuitive decision making in entrepreneurship studies has not translated into the social entrepreneurship sphere in a practical sense. While personality traits of social entrepreneurs such as empathy has been discussed previously (Bacq & Alt, 2018), the process of social innovation in tourism resulting from these traits remains a black box of sorts. This hinders the understanding and replication of tourism social entrepreneurial success, thus preventing the expansion of the social benefits of tourism.

One way of approaching this black box is by applying design thinking to social innovation. Design thinking refers to a human centered problem-solving process, which is an effective framework and mindset for human-centered innovation. It provides ways to work iteratively on solutions while simultaneously collaborating with diverse stakeholders (Katre, 2016). The three stages of design thinking are inspiration, ideation and implementation (Brown & Katz, 2011). The inspiration

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phase emphasizes empathy as a key element and includes framing the design challenge, building a diverse team, conducting secondary research, and understanding communities for product design and community inclusion for deep insights. The ideation phase involves collectively making sense of data from the inspiration phase, identifying opportunities for design, generating ideas, and engaging the community in feedback. Iteration, refining ideas and developing prototypes with user feedback are crucial. Finally, the implementation phase includes live prototyping for feedback, forming networks, refining the business model, and piloting the idea. Processes such as resource building, partnerships, forming an implementation team, implementation, funding strategy, setting milestones for success, creating a sales pitch and revenue strategy, evaluation and feedback from the community form an integral part of this phase (Brown, 2008; IDEO, 2015).

This exploratory study focuses on the black box of social innovation in tourism by analyzing a case study of a tourism social enterprise in Vietnam within the context of Community-based Tourism Travel (CBT). It investigates whether and how tourism social entrepreneurs utilize key principles of design thinking to innovatively address complex social problems in communities. This research is among the first studies to explore the nexus between TSE and design thinking, focusing on the blind spot where social entrepreneurial intentions transform into successful social innovations. In a practical sense, it can help inform education policies and initiatives which foster new tourism social entrepreneurs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social entrepreneurship and social innovation

Social Entrepreneurship (SE) aims to solve ‘wicked’ social problems (Hamby, Pierce, & Brinberg, 2010). It encompasses “activities and processes undertaken to discover, define and exploit opportunities to advance social value through new ventures or innovation in existing organizations” (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009, p. 522). Social value creation lies at the crux of SE (Mair & Martí, 2006), enabled through innovation in existing systems. SE also aids democratic governance by fostering citizen contribution in welfare services to fill gaps left by both private and public sectors (Pestoff, 2009).

Social entrepreneurs have a central social mission with empathy as the primary distinguishing attribute (Bacq & Alt, 2018; Dees, 2012). Their decision-making techniques improve proactive management of a constrained context (Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2006), demonstrating high accountability to stakeholders (Bernardino, Santos, & Ribeiro, 2018). An ‘agent centered perspective’ is an individualistic approach (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014) led by the social entrepreneur’s ability to find innovative solutions to social problems (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Recently, their creative combination of resources to innovate towards a social goal has initiated discussion on the collective perspective, which relies on collaboration and alliances within the community (Jørgensen et al., 2021).

Social entrepreneurs create solutions through social innovation (Zahra et al., 2009, p. 519), associated with planned, coordinated and goal-oriented actions that aim to stimulate social change. This occurs when a new idea sanctions institutional change through novel approaches (Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016). Examples are introducing new goods or a production method, improving existing goods, opening a new market, accessing new sources of raw material or creating a new kind of industrial organization (Bargsted, Picon, Salazar, & Rojas, 2013). Social innovation, which is only recently gaining scholarly attention as a vehicle of change (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014), can also be fostered through capacity building (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004).

Conflicting interests of different actors (Phi, Whitford, & Dredge, 2017) require context specific human centered design innovations. User involvement is central to social innovation as it refers to “changes in the way individuals or communities act to solve a problem or to generate

new opportunities driven by changes in behavior than technology or the market, typically emerging as a bottom-up process” (Jégou & Manzini, 2008, p. 29). Social Enterprises can be deemed ‘natural participants’ or ‘direct results’ as many social innovations have led to social enterprise creation (Selloni & Corubolo, 2017).

2.2. Contextualizing tourism in social entrepreneurship and social innovation

In the context of development, both tourism and SE pursue the overlapping goal to enable communities through social value creation via market based business models (Altinay et al., 2016; Porter, Orams, & Lück, 2018). Tourism businesses in developing countries have adopted a capitalistic approach, minimizing tourism’s contribution in community-based development (Altinay et al., 2016). Thus, spurring innovation through TSE has been suggested as an alternative business model that can contribute to sustainable tourism practices, (de Lange & Dodds, 2017). TSE is defined as:

“A process that uses tourism to create innovative solutions to immediate social, environmental and economic problems in destinations by mobilizing the ideas, capacities, resources and social agreements, from within or outside the destination, required for its sustainable social transformation”. (Sheldon & Daniele, 2017, p. 7)

TSE usually consists of micro, small or medium scale organizations (Dredge, 2017). These can be in different sectors such as souvenir production, tourist performances, hotel, restaurant and tour companies. For example, Soria Moria boutique hotel in Cambodia is managed and owned jointly by its staff from underprivileged backgrounds, promoting environmental and social initiatives (Biddulph, 2018). Another unique example is the Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) which won the UN Global Climate Action Award in 2020 for using tourism and technology to bring electrification through solar to remote Ladakhi communities through expedition tours where participants electrify remote villages (unfcc.int).

Disadvantaged communities frequently consider tourism initiatives as a means for economic growth and community building, emphasizing a nexus between tourism, social entrepreneurship, and community development. Researchers stress that economic ambitions should be combined with creating social value in order to increase chances of success, pointing to tourism social enterprise (Jørgensen et al., 2021). TSE can be socially-oriented with community commitment, or environmentally-oriented through a responsible management of environmental resources (Bargsted et al., 2013). It also incorporates sustainable development as an emerging field (von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012). Through the context of its operations, beneficiaries and geographic settings, TSE can be identified as a catalyst for the sustainable development of host communities (Aquino et al., 2018). Destination sustainability is also related to quality of life through social inclusion (Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017).

TSE can be considered a form of social innovation as alternative approaches to tourism create positive impacts throughout the tourism value chain. Stimulating continuous innovation can help address the negative effects of tourism to positively disrupt the industry. Local tourism businesses can generate competitive advantage by following a TSE model that infuses innovation in its product and service offerings, organizational structure, operational processes, logistics and marketing (Aquino et al., 2018).

Increasingly, scholars recognize the need for studies on what tourism social entrepreneurs do, rather than what they are. This includes research that goes beyond the tourism social entrepreneur to include sustainability, ethics, responsibility, care, social benefit, and value (co-) creation. To date, what tourism social entrepreneurs can do with communities and how communities can use TSE for social change has not been studied in depth (Jørgensen et al., 2021). The conceptual

framework by Aquino et al. (2018) demonstrates that TSE for sustainable community development is a process led by tourism social entrepreneurs engaging with local communities, institutions and decision makers. This is driven by their capacity for social innovation and shaped by a combination of external and local contexts, while also using market-based strategies to mobilize local capital and develop agency and solidarity within the local community.

Tourism social entrepreneurs' personality traits affect their capacity to innovate as "change-makers" (S. Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Empathy is a pre-requisite for social entrepreneurial intentions (Mair & Noboa, 2006) through agencies of self-efficacy and social worth (Bacq & Alt, 2018). They also rely on their networks and stakeholders, sharing intellectual and social capital to foster collaboration between teams, enterprises, institutions and sectors, thus contributing to the innovative process (Phi et al., 2017).

2.3. Role of design thinking in Tourism Social Entrepreneurship

Design Thinking is a complex process that follows a non-linear, iterative, and interactive approach with multiple outcomes. It uses an empathetic framework to solve social problems, organizational management issues and strategic innovation (Brown & Katz, 2011), but lacks a single comprehensive definition (Royalty, Oishi, & Roth, 2014). Initially used by designers, it is now used in several fields including social entrepreneurship (Reddy, 2018). However, tourism development has been extremely slow in adopting it. IDEO (2020) defines Design Thinking as:

"... a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success."

Scholars recognize the opportunity and need to draw on design thinking to equip tourism practitioners with skills to address the rapid global changes that are transforming the future of tourism and hospitality. It can provide a vital approach in tourism for its capacity to inspire innovation and creative thinking (Bhushan, 2019). Design thinking can promote equitable approaches to tourism development and hospitality practices by going beyond western parameters of rationality and scientific legitimacy to include values of care and empathy. Design thinking approaches should lean towards community driven design, using collaborative research for community based tourism, social enterprises and businesses (Jamal, Kircher, & Donaldson, 2021).

Selloni and Corubolo's (2017) "design for social enterprises" is a parallel field of study that explores design thinking's potential for social innovation. They suggest a combination of design approaches, methods, and tools for cultural and organizational change. This enables a human-centered entrepreneurial process that boosts conducive relationships with workers, users, volunteers, public servants, and policy makers and leads to effective co-design.

Human centered design, popular in social solution design, feeds design thinking. It relies on communicative, interactive, empathetic and stimulating techniques to understand people's needs, desires and experiences (Giacomin, 2014). Social entrepreneurship and design thinking are compatible as they have a mutual core focus on human centered design, stemming from empathy. Other similarities include the importance of innovation, collaboration, testing and prototyping, technology and altruism (Chou, 2018).

Previous studies suggest that social entrepreneurs unconsciously adopt design thinking, and become designers by constantly consulting with users and the community (Reddy, 2018). This organic tendency can be analyzed through the cognitive lens of intuition. Intuition originates beyond a conscious thought process (Blume & Covin, 2011), defined as "affectively charged judgments that arise through rapid, nonconscious, and holistic associations" (Dane & Pratt, 2007). Conditions suitable for intuition are high uncertainty (Baldacchino, Ucbasaran, Cabantous, &

Lockett, 2015); limited precedents for emerging trends; and multiple solutions (Agor, 1990). Here, design thinking is analyzed for its contribution to added social value creation in TSE through social innovation.

2.4. Conceptual framework of social innovation and design thinking in tourism social entrepreneurship

This research focuses on the black box of social innovation in tourism. It explores the link between design thinking and innovation by tourism social entrepreneurs to address complex social problems in the community. Tourism social entrepreneurs' abilities and decision-making processes can be informed by design thinking to create social value through social innovation. It examines the connections between tourism social entrepreneurs' character traits such as empathy, innovation through expertise and maximizing network resources, as well as their connection to social innovation. The link appears to be tourism social entrepreneurs' intuitive response to wicked problems, organically pushing forward a design thinking response.

Entrepreneurial intuition combines existing knowledge patterns (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999) in which entrepreneurial alertness cognitions interact with domain competence in order to identify value creation opportunities (Dacin, Dacin, & Tracey, 2011; Mitchell, Friga, & Mitchell, 2005). Expert decision making relies heavily on intuition developed from extensive experience in a specific domain (Salas, Rosen, & DiazGranados, 2010). The study of intuition in entrepreneurship relies on the decision-making process, whereas intuitive social entrepreneurial responses are linked to innovation, which fits better to strategic intuition suitable for new situations and developing strategic ideas (Duggan, 2011, p. 120). Tourism Social entrepreneurs benefit from a combination of domain related expertise stemming from direct experience in the tourism industry along with exogenous domain expertise, which is indirectly accumulated. This added to local knowledge developed from extended community embeddedness helps develop strategic social entrepreneurial intuition (Duggan, 2011).

Empathy feeds quality user-centric research on stakeholder needs, thus enabling solution development through human centered design by using feedback loops. Social entrepreneurs are "network architects" who use their local and external networks to acquire scarce resources (Motiari, Boluk, & Kline, 2018). Network embeddedness is also important to develop support and credibility for a social entrepreneur (Shaw & Carter, 2007). They strike a balance between being an outsider and an insider to spot gaps for social innovation, perspective, resources, and knowhow. The social entrepreneurial passion fueling social innovation results in positive network connections, especially links with commercial enterprises (Li, Liu, & Li, 2019), also reflected in TSE.

Thus, social innovation occurs through pathways of human centered design, network architecture and strategic social entrepreneurial intuition. Based on the elements highlighted in the literature review, we propose a conceptual framework for the design thinking process that facilitates social innovation via tourism social entrepreneurs (Fig. 1). By delineating the underlying process of how tourism social entrepreneurs innovate, this paper expands on current TSE theory.

3. Methodology

A detailed case study analysis helps illustrate the intuitive design thinking process leading to social innovation. Qualitative case studies are a suitable method of enquiry for poorly understood phenomenon and ill-defined links amongst actors (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), and develop existing theory by finding and attempting to fill gaps (Siggelkow, 2007). This generates new insights into contemporary phenomena in a physical context (Yin, 2003), and also helps tease out the specific mechanisms (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004) underlying SE processes.

While the researchers recognize that lessons can be learned from poor or failed practices, the focus of this research was aimed at

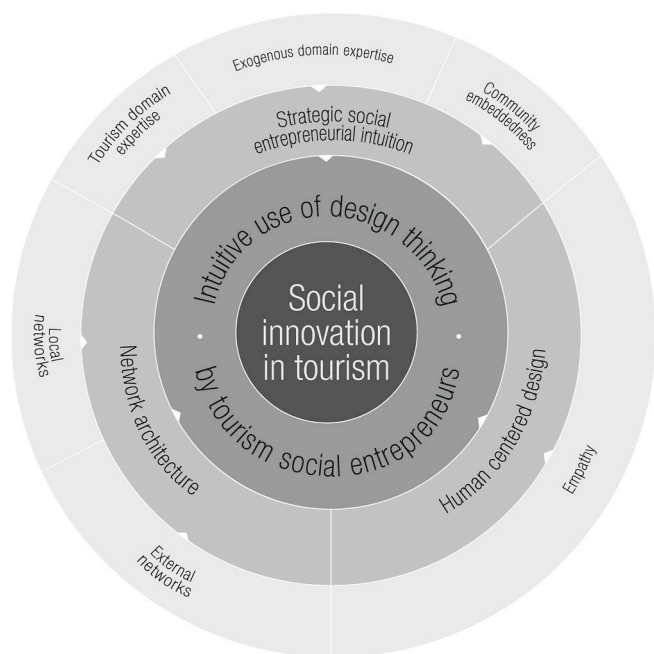


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of social innovation and intuitive design thinking processes in TSE.

identifying and reporting best practice (Cox & Wray, 2011). Researchers have noted the value of studying and learning from the good practices of others for destinations in need (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2005). Thus, this study expands existing research by exploring the best practices contributing to social innovation by a tourism social entrepreneur to enable community-based tourism development. The process of identifying best practice in this context included a) case study selection b) case study analysis and c) comparison with the proposed conceptual framework.

Mr. Binh Minh Duong, a tourism social entrepreneur and his social enterprise CBT Travel in Vietnam was chosen as a case study as he helped solve complex social issues through community-based tourism interventions using unique combinations of resources and abilities using design thinking interventions. His interventions significantly reduced poverty, drug abuse and drug trade, and developed cultural pride in minority communities.

Data was collected in two stages using semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Phase one data was collected at ‘The First Vietnam Walking Symposium’ organized by Tourism Co-Lab and CBT Travel from January 8–16, 2020. The symposium enabled overnight visits to 5 homestays and daytime visits to 2 other homestays in different villages, all holistically developed and managed with the assistance of Mr. Binh.

Each homestay owner was interviewed for an hour. Five formal interviews took place with Mr. Binh and his core team, along with multiple conversations to answer additional questions during the symposium. The list of interviewees have been reflected in Fig. 2. Locals and tertiary service providers were also briefly questioned during visits, thus providing a well-rounded sample. Sessions were recorded, intermediated by a translator. A notebook was maintained to record reflections from conversations, discussions, and presentations. Phase two consisted of a follow up interview with Mr. Binh via skype to fill any gaps in the data.

The role of the researcher was ‘observer as participant’ (Junker, 1960, pp. 35–37). Field observation provided an opportunity to observe the relationship between CBT and homestays and interactions between Mr Binh, CBT employees, and local residents in order to grasp cultural and situational specificities. The field notes were descriptive with a reflective analysis undertaken each evening. The research journal contained observations and fieldnotes from different meetings and visits to homestays.

The data analysis shown in Fig. 3 was performed in three stages. The first stage required interview transcription and organization of field notes. Stage two involved drawing up a narrative account establishing

| PARTICIPANT | AFFILIATION | LOCATION |
|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| A1 (Mr. Binh) | Founder of CBT | Hanoi + Homestays |
| A2 | CBT Employee | Hanoi + Homestays |
| A3 | CBT Employee | Hanoi + Homestays |
| A4 | A Chu Homestay | Moc Chau |
| A5 | Mai Hich Homestay | Mai Chau |
| A6 | Kho Muong Homestay | Thanh Hoa |
| A7 | Buoc Village Homestay | Mai Chau |
| A8 | Kho Muong Homestay | Thanh Hoa |
| A9 | Lac Village Homestay | Mai Chau |
| A10 | Pu Luong Retreat | Thanh Hoa |

Fig. 2. List of participants.

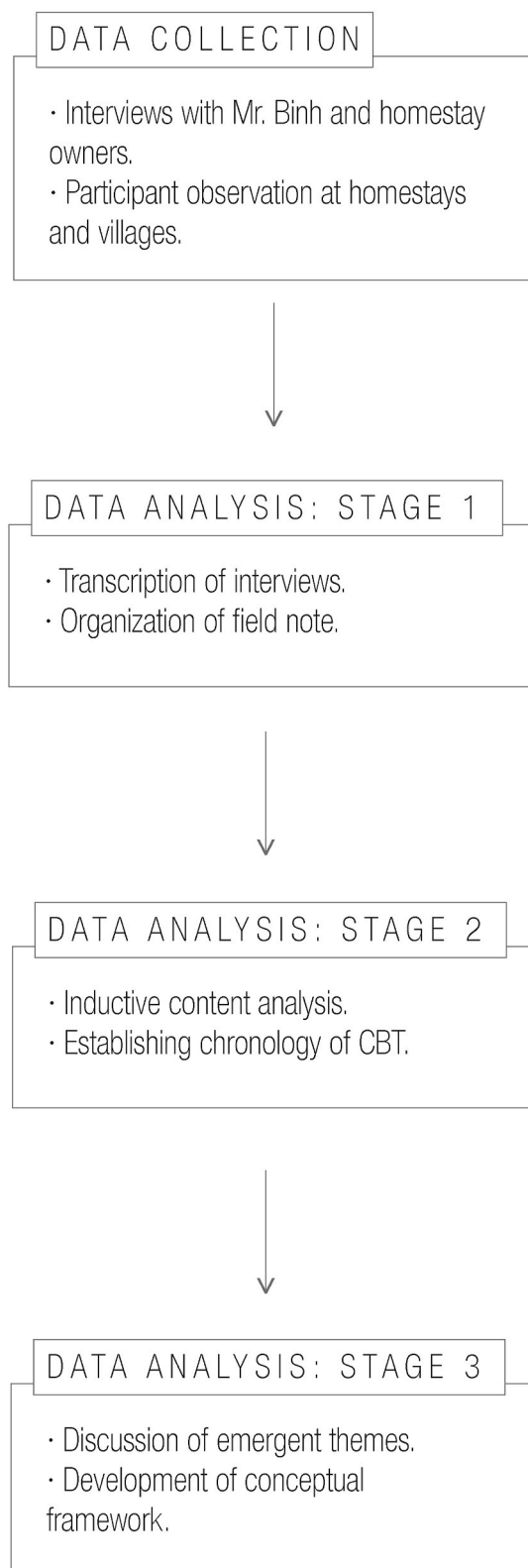


Fig. 3. Stages of data analysis.

the CBT chronology and its outreach. Data was then analyzed along with previous reports to grasp the issues CBT Travels confronts. The researchers discussed emergent themes and connections which further developed the discussion. Stage three focused on mechanisms underlying decision making in TSE in the context of community-based tourism. The objective was to offer insights into the decision-making process, its

development, and parallels to the design thinking process.

A “naturalistic inquiry” mode was adopted (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This mode used inductive reasoning to highlight connections between processes, while taking cultural and situational backgrounds into consideration. Thematic or inductive content analysis was carried out manually. Researcher triangulation between three authors helped eliminate bias.

4. Findings & discussion

Based on Fig. 1 and case study analysis, findings reveal that the key phenomena of empathy, network architecture and use of strategic intuition contribute to the intuitive design thinking process, as detailed below.

4.1. Case study - CBT travel

The case study is situated in rural north-western Vietnam, inhabited by approximately half the Vietnamese ethnic minorities. Social Entrepreneurship in Vietnam remains in its infancy, assisting disenfranchised ethnic communities suffering from cultural and linguistic exclusion, deficient opportunities and lack of financial resources for education (Karlidag-Dennis, Hazenberg, & Dinh, 2020).

Founded in 2012, CBT Travel develops rural destinations holistically via marketing activities, package tours for value-added tourism activities, and homestays offering community-based tourism. The relationship between CBT and homestays operates similarly to a franchisee system. CBT is a bootstrapped entity with three employees. Local voluntary coordinators (usually widows or elderly citizens) manage operations in coordination with tour operators. CBT provides NGO’s and provincial governments in Vietnam with consultancy services to help them develop community-based tourism, as well as pro-bono services to communities. CBT operates under the “provider capacity building model”, where social entrepreneurs organize and involve the wider community, identify community needs, and develop local capacity to address these needs through human resource development and tourism training (Aquino et al., 2018). CBT’s projected goal for 2020 was 500, 000 tourist arrivals, achieved before COVID-19 disrupted tourism.

The NGO Community Health and Development (COHED) implemented the Mai Hich project in 2011, aimed at reducing poverty by providing sustainable livelihoods and social equity. Implementation of the project was unsuccessful, so in 2012 Mr. Binh was recruited as a consultant, and identified problems with the tourism development model as noted in Fig. 4. The Center for Social Initiative Promotion (CSIP) recognized the social benefits obtained from restructuring and encouraged Mr. Binh to set up his own tourism social enterprise to replicate the Mai Hich model (Phi, 2017). Isolation from commercial tourism had led to a disconnect with the market, and locals lacked incentive to invest in tourism development. Locals were afraid of insufficient tourists, possessing inadequate capacity and skills to implement successful tourism related businesses and of amassing large debts to start the business. Mr. Binh designed solutions for these issues via intuitive application of design thinking (Fig. 5), comparable to the three stages in the IDEO human centered design handbook (IDEO, 2015). The Inspiration phase helped him gain a holistic understanding of community challenges through stakeholder dialogue. The community was included in the Ideation phase to encourage ownership and gain insights for innovation in the tourism model. The implementation phase led to partnerships within the community for value added services, community feedback and development of future goals. There was no formal prototyping before homestays opened up. However, initial guest feedback was used to implement changes, mimicking the process. Sales and revenue management were then analyzed for financial sustainability.

Today, years after implementation, this non-linear cycle continues to improve tourism design. CBT demands a set of standards from the

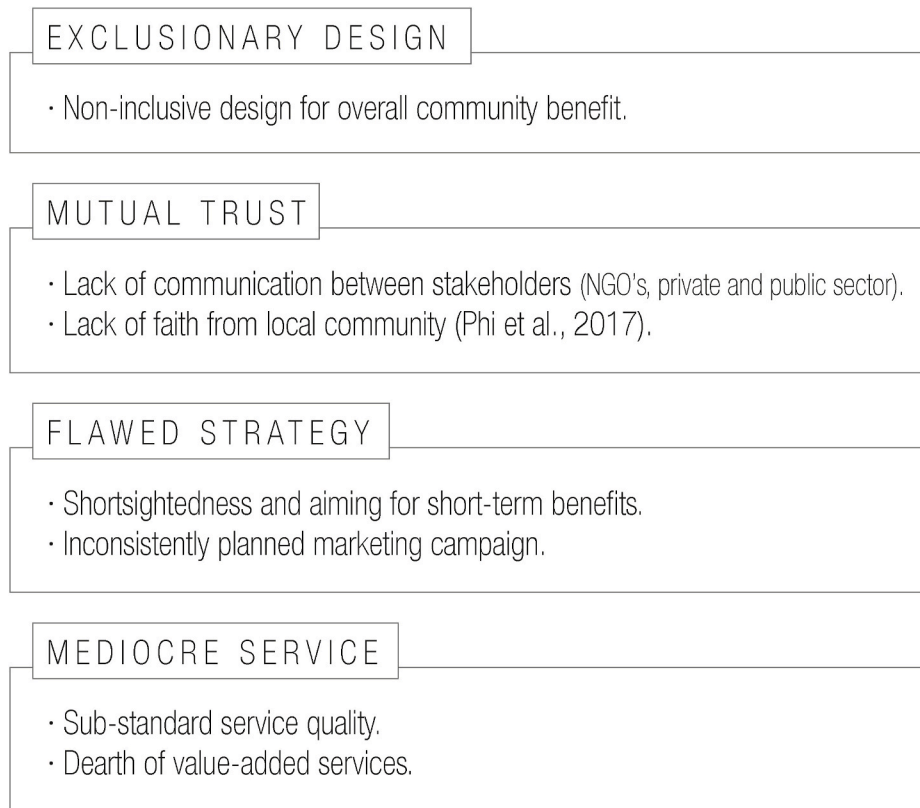


Fig. 4. Wicked problems identified by CBT Travel.

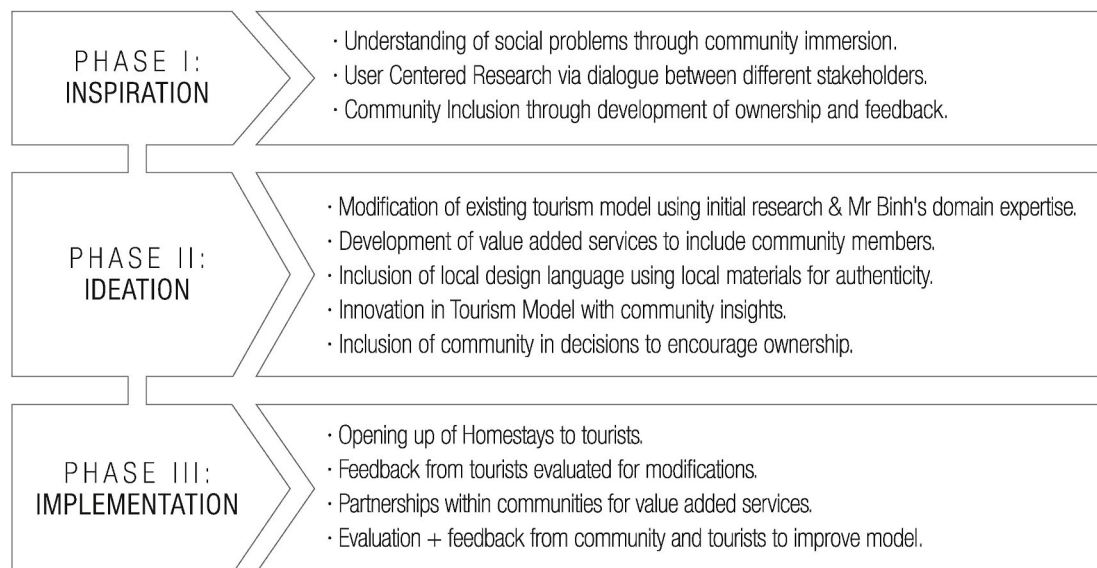


Fig. 5. Juxtaposing CBT social innovation process to design thinking.

communities, frequently updated with user feedback. CBT standard guidelines act as an innovative approach to the iteration process through its process design. It is feasible and replicable for use in other tourism outlets with constant tourist feedback. Additionally, the design language is authentic and visually appealing. The unique design of homestays, value added services and locally produced souvenirs contributes to this appeal.

Homestay owners shared financial and physical progress over the years along with other changes in the region. One owner, Mr. A. Chu, showed us positive physical and infrastructural changes brought about

by tourism in his area, previously affected by crime from the opium trade. Tourism has also helped maintain cultural identity. Most homestay owners report a growth in cultural pride within the community as more people wear traditional clothes daily. Quoting a member of the minority Thai community:

“Previously, I hesitated to wear traditional clothes as we were mocked by the Viet people, but now I wear it even while traveling internationally because tourists appreciate it.” (Interview with a visiting member of the Thai Community, A Chu Homestay, 2020)

Tourists benefit from quality accommodation and innovative value-added services for authentic experiences in underexplored areas. Environmental benefits mentioned were a general increase village cleanliness, as well as conservation efforts by locals to enable tourism. One innovative solution initiated in Mai Hich was the construction of a biogas plant which remunerated villagers for bringing in animal waste. Homestay owners collectively commented that tourism had improved roads quality in the region. Cultural events during the tourist season also helps fund inter-village visits, and where homestay owners can exchange knowledge and ideas.

4.2. Role of empathy

Tourism social entrepreneurs participate in the experience economy, simultaneously enabled, and constrained by the community. Although embeddedness benefits TSE through physical resources and local networks, traditional norms are resistant to innovation and change (Fuglsang & Sørensen, 2013). In this context, an empathetic disposition enabled Mr. Binh and his CBT Travel social enterprise to work through these constraints. Mr. Binh mentions that:

Sometimes, NGO's working here don't succeed because they keep coming and going, without forming deeper relationships with the community. In this village, it was the same – they come, do workshops and go without fully understanding needs to be able to make practical progress. (Interview with Mr Binh II, Mai Hich, 2020)

Mr. Binh's effectively utilizes empathy – a key principle of design thinking to create social innovation in tourism. He spent an extensive amount of time living in each community to observe and openly communicate with different stakeholders in order to reach deeper understanding of local issues, mitigate concerns and develop further hope for tourism development. This finding aligns with the literature, where SE and design thinking are found to possess analogous attributes, particularly the role of empathy in incentivizing social entrepreneurs to use of design thinking for building comprehensive, human centered innovations (Chou, 2018). Participation in tourism development empowers local stakeholders, prioritizes community interests, and preserves natural heritage (Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). Community managers should foster community attachment as it supports sustainable tourism development (Lee, 2013).

4.3. Network architecture and network leadership

Mr. Binh's social innovation model relies on connections with commercial enterprises such as tour operators for long-term financial sustainability through steady tourist inflows (Li et al., 2019). Before CBT's intervention, inefficient marketing meant a lack of awareness of the villages as destinations. Mr. Binh acts as a bridge between tourists and the community, using his networks to understand tourist needs and community inclusion to develop community ownership. He also used his external connections with industry professionals to help develop service quality. One example was inviting a reputed chef for pro-bono training workshops to train homestay owners and help develop menus. The homestay owners consider the trainings integral to maintaining basic hospitality standards. Mr Minh, homestay owner at Mai Hich, says:

“Initially the NGO sent me to Sapa for a three-day tourism training course. The villagers helped me set up my homestay, but the NGO withdrew after the first tourists, and I was struggling. I met Mr. Binh later and he helped me with further training to manage and upgrade my homestay. He also investigated the area to make activity maps and helped others develop tourism services. In 2013, I had 400 visitors and by 2017, I had almost 7000 visitors. Today after seven years, with CBT advice I have reinvested profits to upgrade the homestay, added private rooms, amenities, and a swimming pool. The villagers also benefit through providing laundry services,

rafting, guiding and most families have more cattle from increased income.” (Interview with Mr. Minh, Mai Hich Homestay, 2020)

Network architecture contributes to design thinking as its success relies on collaboration between different stakeholders in co-creation of mutually beneficial solutions. Community and stakeholder engagement through immersion and dialogue occur at the inspiration stage. During ideation stage, innovational changes with community input take place to improve compatibility of solutions. Feedback from tourists and the community is designed to improve the tourism model in the implementation stage. Additionally, Mr Binh's extended experience with international tourists enabled creative solutions such as using authentic local materials in accommodation, modifying traditional dishes to create options palatable to international tourists and improving service standards to match international expectations for a competitive product. Mr. Binh mentions that:

“The average tourists in the area seek transformative experiences through experiencing an authentic culture that is different from their own. Authentic cultural experiences with community ownership is key for the model to work.” (Interview with Mr. Binh I, Hanoi, 2020)

Mr. Binh used a bottom-up approach of integrating stakeholders by developing a system that engages and benefits each stakeholder. Regular meetings and practical projects organized with local governments enabled tourism development in remote areas. Network Leadership includes the challenges of leading, organizing and communicating with individual stakeholders and the destination network as a whole. Destination leadership aids destination governance by motivating human stakeholders to set long term values and direction (Pechlaner, Kozak, & Volgger, 2014). This advocates self-governance resting on stakeholder's co-operation for collective action. Managing tourism destinations as networks has seen growing interest (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014) as it aids sustainable tourism development (Roxas, Rivera, & Gutierrez, 2020). Efficient, sustainable, legitimate network co-ordination requires a participative stakeholder-oriented governance, rather than top down management (Pechlaner, Beritelli, & Volgger, 2015). This approach helped CBT develop holistic destinations, including identifying and developing value added services by involving different community members individually, as well as organizing their cohesive functioning as a destination. The respect shown to Mr. Binh as a community leader was evident in visits to various homestays.

4.4. Use of intuition

When asked about how he achieved the collective success of CBT, Mr. Binh responds:

“It requires passion, motivation and experience.” (Interview with Mr. Binh V, Hanoi, 2020)

Mr. Binh's tourism expertise aided by cumulative user research helped recognize untapped tourism potential both in cultural and nature-based tourism. However as clarified during interviews, he doesn't have any clear procedures for his CBT Model. New solutions and initiatives come up as he works with the community to find solutions. Expert entrepreneurs engage in higher intuitive processing when opportunity identification involves greater uncertainty (Baldacchino et al., 2015; Gustafsson, 2006). Seasoned social entrepreneurs like Mr. Binh exhibit mature intuition (Baylor, 2001), relying heavily on intuition to identify opportunities and innovate. Stakeholder coordination and meetings helped him understand the theoretical focus of pre-CBT training sessions in Mai Hich which failed to empower locals with practical tools to design successful tourism products. Design thinking solutions stresses the importance of research and communication with stakeholders to gain multiple perspectives. During the ideation phase in the design thinking process as explained in Fig. 5, Mr. Binh's empathetic approach helps frame the problem and user needs while intuition helps

him draw from his previous experiences, training and knowledge in the tourism industry while supporting his creativity. Consequently, Mr. Binh intuitively applies design thinking for innovative solutions through community-based tourism, following a process similar to Fig. 1. The quote below elaborates further:

“As a tourism professional it was easier for me to help change the way in which tourism was organized and developed in these areas while involving locals. NGO’s didn’t know the tourism market enough to understand tourist needs. CBT helped create a differentiated product for the tourist looking for authenticity. These tourists don’t need fancy hotels or high end services, they want original experiences and local communities can provide that with guidance.” (Interview with Mr. Binh V, Hanoi, 2020)

4.5. Discussion

Based on the findings, the path followed by Mr. Binh corresponds with the conceptual framework in Fig. 1, where the blind spot converting social entrepreneurial intentions into a successful intervention is an innovative approach using design thinking. This developed a competitive community-based tourism product by simultaneously opening access to new markets and developing productive relationships between diverse actors such as workers, users, public servants, and volunteers. Social innovation creates value by synergizing capabilities, products, processes and technology (Auerswald, 2009). Social entrepreneurs tap into high risk, underdeveloped and unexplored markets through sustainable innovative processes in order to participate in mainstream markets, creating socio-economic development (Hwee Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010). Mr. Binh’s intuitive approach to solution design is further explained by Fig. 5. He displays typical design thinker characteristics summarized by human and environment centered concerns stemming from empathy, ability to visualize and modify the tourism model to benefit the community, optimism to overcome wicked problems through human centered design solutions and affinity for teamwork through network architecture for community inclusion and feedback from tourists (Vol & Owen, 2007).

Product and service design contributes heavily to business competitiveness, prompting companies like CBT to become design leaders (Dunne & Martin, 2006). The design thinking competency model evaluating good design thinking characteristics (Razzouk & Shute, 2012) helps contextualize Mr. Binh’s intuitive operationalization of design thinking. Through persistent problem solving, he created deliverables synced with tourism seasonality despite a lack of infrastructure, training, stakeholder unity, inefficient marketing and strained financial resources. He used an empathetic approach to identify community needs, fighting resource constraints and generating ideas with diverse up-to-date resources through network architecture. Adjusting the previous homestay model to fit current tourist & community needs aided holistic development and community inclusion. Using domain expertise to make the villages tourist-friendly mirrors the process of modeling a system of sustainable tourism development. Direct involvement in the daily operation is a key factor in promoting best practice in SME’s, as informal methods are largely followed. Mr. Binh is involved in setting standards in operational style, training staff on standards, monitoring and controlling delivery of the tourism product and service along with gathering customer feedback (Jessica Hwang & Lockwood, 2006).

However, developing tourism products solely centered on meeting tourist needs may shift the focus from community well-being and digress from local community practices, especially cooking and traditional architectural design. For instance, A. Chu’s first homestay design deviates from the local single story houses Hmong people build. As the restaurant occupied most of the downstairs space, two floors were needed to accommodate tourists. Mr. Binh’s enforcement of CBT standards as an outsider may cause resentment as CBT does not send clients

to homestays who fail to achieve the standards. Power dynamics within the communities might also change due to tourism development creating imbalances. Also, Mr. Binh might be absent if negative externalities arise from tourism expansion. Sustainability issues stemming from tourism development should be solved by locals’ own creative solutions. Looking forward, capacity building should be focused on enabling social innovation in tourism via local tourism social entrepreneurs. Educating locals in design thinking will help communities find their own creative solutions.

Furthermore, the cost of Social Entrepreneurship should be reflected upon. Researchers are now starting to investigate darker sides of this phenomenon, including green-washing, misuse of social enterprise labels to further selfish agendas, or limited access to and availability of resources (Altinay et al., 2016). Some authors criticize the foundation of social entrepreneurial responses on a neoliberal worldview of moving towards a more inclusive form of capitalism (Dey & Steyaert, 2016). In reality, market logic often clashes with social value (Phi, 2017). Despite great intentions, tourism social enterprises can potentially be overrun by commercial interests, especially during the process of scaling and expansion. Novel approaches to create tourism based solutions can still fuel inequalities in the system where power is usurped by those who control resources in the industry while taking advantage of the underprivileged (Scheyvens, 2012). This may also give tourists a false sense of superiority while still unintentionally creating negative externalities with their travel experiences (Tomazos & Butler, 2009).

5. Conclusion

This paper sheds light on the black box of social innovation in tourism by focusing on the blind spot where social entrepreneurial intentions become successful interventions. Through delineating relationships between strategic social entrepreneurial intuition, human centered design and network architecture powered by design thinking, it analyzes how this relationship contributes to creating social value and destination governance while informing TSE research through the proposed conceptual framework.

Social innovation contributes to competitive advantage of TSE through differentiation, offering long term sustainability (Weerawardena & Mort, 2012). Over eight years of consultation, CBT Travel has built a homestay network delivering social value through an emergent value-based local network. This network synonymously provides competitive tourism experiences, enabling the holistic participation of the community. Thus, this study contributes to highlighting best practices for tourism social entrepreneurs to enable social innovation. By examining some of the detailed decision-making processes leading to social innovation in tourism, the key contributions of this paper are:

- 1) A novel conceptual framework outlining the interaction between personality traits of tourism social entrepreneurs and the process mechanism of social innovation in tourism. It unpacks the connection between these processes using arguments linking social innovation in tourism with design thinking, entrepreneurial intuition theories and network architecture.
- 2) Advancing social entrepreneurship literature by connecting social entrepreneurial characteristics such as empathy to social innovation, and outlining the process in which it develops through human centered design in a community-based tourism context.
- 3) Establishing design thinking in the social innovation process by teasing out parallels and highlighting the connection between design thinking and decision making, emphasizing the importance of expanding this area of research. This study suggests that creating nurturing environments with sturdy networks and opportunities to develop design thinking skills will help individuals with social entrepreneurial intentions build sustainable ventures.

As business schools begin to pay attention to SE (Amundam, 2019), a

focus on design thinking training and related entrepreneurial skills can potentially convert social entrepreneurial intentions into successful interventions, rather than relying on intuition alone. Lastly, the intersectional nature of destination governance as a byproduct of the social innovation process provides another incentive to foster TSE in destinations.

Regarding limitations, a single exploratory case study may not allow for generalization as findings could be case specific, even when a theoretical framework is developed from preexisting literature. The field observation was based on direct contact with CBT Travel, homestays, and local residents, and minimal critical views of processes developed by Mr. Binh was found. This may lead to potential bias in the data collected. Participant observation was carried out over a short period of time, hampering the development of complete trust between the researchers and the community.

6. Recommendations for further research

Avenues for further research include exploring the financial opportunities available to social entrepreneurs to aid social innovation, destination governance through TSE and exploring how different forms of privilege contribute to successful TSE interventions. These could fall under the broader umbrella of perceptions and barriers to financing TSE, policy environments supporting TSE and promoting destination governance through TSE. The relationship of trust between communities and social entrepreneurs, in relation to empathy is another avenue that requires further exploration.

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Declaration of competing interest

None.

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