

# Strengthening Community-Based Tourism in a new resource-based island nation: Why and how?



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Stakeholder perceptions of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) networks are analysed.
- CBT networks represent a viable rural development strategy in the developing world.
- Source of funding, leadership and power balance are among the major success factors.
- In resource-rich nations implementation is likely to depend on the government.
- Despite representing social economy, a CBT network may prolong neo-colonialism.

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## ABSTRACT

A manifestation of early destination development, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) enterprises have been emerging across Timor-Leste as a rural development strategy. In the context of this fledgling and oil revenue dependent nation, CBT enterprises will need to overcome various challenges if they are to fulfil their potential. The present paper explores stakeholder perceptions towards the prospective shape and structure of a nationwide CBT network using a multi-stage qualitative research approach. Respondents broadly agreed that a CBT network can support the development of tourism and help enterprises to confront the challenges of deficient knowledge, funding and marketing, prospectively improving rural livelihoods. The researchers consider neo-colonial, social economy and community development perspectives when applying the prospective CBT model in a resource dependent developing country setting. The success of a CBT network relies on an authoritative funding body and on communications between managers and stakeholders that maintains a balance of power.

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## 1. Introduction

Various scholars have identified Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a suitable development model for maximising the socio-economic benefits of tourism and minimising negative environmental impacts (Moscardo, 2008; Ruiz-Ballesteros & Hernández-Ramírez, 2010). Advocates have argued that a networked, collaborative approach to CBT offers better prospects for delivering effective and sustainable tourism development (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010; Stronza, 2008). However, others have criticised such initiatives for their lack of profitability, inadequate

contributions to community development and weak marketing and distribution (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Blackstock, 2005; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Those seeking evidence of genuinely sustainable tourism have attributed the slow progress to a failure by scholars and practitioners in demonstrating tangible economic, socio-cultural and environmental contributions (Liu, 2003; McKercher and Prideaux, 2014). Providing a comprehensive critique of sustainable tourism is outside the scope of the present paper. However the term refers to maximising the positive tourism impacts and minimising the negatives, thereby addressing the needs of hosts and guests without compromising the wellbeing of future generations and of the physical environment.

Most network studies have been undertaken in developed destinations (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Murphy, 1985; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Scott, Baggio, & Cooper, 2008). However, CBT networks have potential to assist the socio-economic development of less developed countries, especially in

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the case of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), where tourism is often associated with colonial and neo-colonial activities that contributed inadequately to local livelihoods (Britton, 1983; Gibson, 2010; Hollinshead, 2004; Mowforth & Munt, 2008). In resource-based developing country economies, where government revenues are the only benefit flowing from the resource (Ross, 2012), CBT networks may also provide an opportunity for rural development by strengthening fragile individual business operations. Advocates of the approach point to its potential for delivering community goals in the tourism and community development contexts (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010). Nevertheless, there has been little exploration of appropriate CBT network structures and functions in rural settings within less developed countries.

The present paper reports on stakeholder perceptions about the optimal structuring of a prospective CBT network in the recently independent oil-rich state of Timor-Leste. It examines organisational and managerial issues associated with developing a CBT network in the context of national development structures and processes. An overview of Timor-Leste is provided, followed by a review of the literature on CBT and networks. The proposed research method is then presented. Drawing from the respondent comments, the researchers then present the characteristics of the prospective CBT network model and its structure and functions. A proposed development process is presented for the establishment of a CBT network along with potential implementation challenges. The discussion and conclusion sections discuss the merits of a networking approach to advance the development of CBT, achieve broader development goals and reduce the negative impacts associated with a neo-liberal approach on less developed states.

## 2. The setting

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (aka East Timor) is one of the world's most recently established nations located on the eastern half of Timor Island, an hour's flight north of Darwin, Australia. West Timor is a province of Indonesia. Timor-Leste was under Portuguese administration from the sixteenth century until 1975, while West Timor was colonised by the Dutch, creating divisions between native people of Timor Island. In 1975 Timor-Leste declared its independence, which prompted an Indonesian invasion, a twenty four year occupation, and an estimated 183,000 casualties (CAVR, 2005). Timor-Leste gained independence from Indonesia in 1999, and was administered by the United Nations until 2002, when power was ceded to a locally elected government. This included reinstating the colonial border between East and West Timor, thereby complicating travel across two parts of a small island and the formation of island-wide networks. A decade after gaining independence, Timor-Leste is still forming its national identity (Brown, 2012).

It is ranked 134th out of 187 in the United Nations' Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014), which suggests basic living standards. Timor-Leste's total population was 1,066,409 in 2010 of whom 70% reside in rural areas (National Statistics Directorate and United Nations Population Fund, 2011). The economy is heavily oil dependent and revenues have been invested in a Petroleum Fund. Government spending has exploded since the earliest withdrawals from the Petroleum Fund in 2008, with the Petroleum Fund financing 85% (\$US1495 million) of the 2012 budget from (Ministerio das Finanças, 2011). Although most Timor-Leste residents are employed in agriculture and subsistence farming, they collectively account for only 26.5% of GDP (CIA, 2012). There is a risk that the economy will be lop-sided unless indigenous enterprise flourishes, especially outside the capital city.

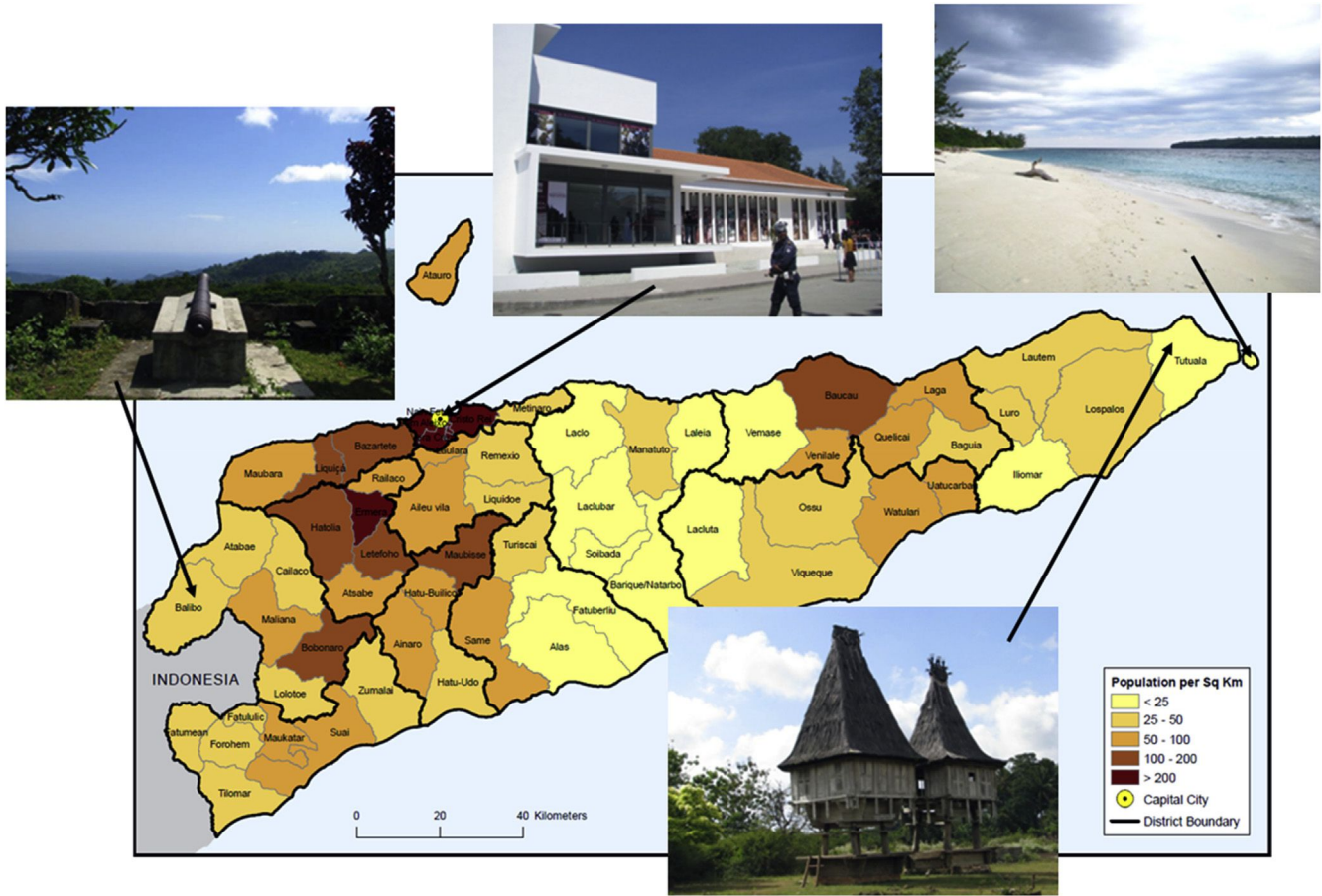
Tourism has been identified as a development priority by government and by various international organisations. It offers the prospect of diversifying the economy, generating employment and fostering rural development (Timor-Leste Government, 2011; Timor-Leste Government, 2002). The Government has pursued a model of sustainable and socially responsible of tourism (Cabasset-Semedo, 2009), consistent with the prevailing United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) philosophy of sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2004). Timor-Leste is suited to this approach since it combines rich offers a combination of environmental and cultural assets which have tourist appeal. As outlined in the national development plan there is also potential to draw upon oil revenues to fund sustainable tourism development as well as agriculture (Timor-Leste Government, 2011).

Timor-Leste's rich natural environment and culture give rise to various actual and potential tourist activities with snorkeling and diving being the most popular. Trekking is another adventure-based option. Timor-Leste's historical and cultural assets are also promoted, including its diverse cultural mix. The history of Portuguese colonisation and resistance to Indonesian occupation is an endemic Timor-Leste attraction (Dutta, 2012; Rose, 2012; Tourism Timor-Leste, 2012a). Fig. 1 outlines the major attractions (clockwise from top-left corner): Jaco beach at Tutuala, *uma lulik* – traditional sacred houses, Portuguese fort in Balibo, Museum of Timorese Resistance in Dili (photographs courtesy of the authors). The existence of the various tourism assets suggests that tourism has the potential to counterbalance the resource sector. However an economy that is dominated by oil extraction companies may be antipathetic to small scale social enterprises. Such enterprises will need a supportive environment offering economies of scale if they are to prosper.

The latest government statistics indicate that Timor-Leste received 26,714 visitor arrivals in 2009 with growth of 41.3% per cent reported from 2008 (Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry, 2011). The only more recent official statistics are from UNWTO (2014), which report that Timor-Leste received 55,000 international visitors in 2012 and 78,000 in 2013. Tourism receipts in both 2011 and 2012 were \$US 21,000,000 (UNWTO, 2014). These figures suggest that the average tourist generates \$US 382. The accommodation sector ranges from backpacker hostels priced at \$US10 per night to luxury resorts charging \$US145 (Tourism Timor-Leste, 2012a, 2012b). Unfortunately, the only available information is limited and sometimes contradictory. With tourism being in the early stages of development, it is unrealistic to rely exclusively on time series data for forecasting purposes.

Most community-based tourism in Timor-Leste involves accommodation located outside the national capital (Dili). Several CBT approaches have been adopted in different settings. The first 'eco-lodge' in the CBT category has been managed by a local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) on the small island of Atauro since 2002. The enterprise was established before the country received its first oil revenues and provided an alternative to the various larger scale tourism ventures which were then being considered. The NGO was alarmed at the prospective impact of large tourism projects on traditional local lifestyles and preferred smaller-scale CBT. The NGO subsequently invested its profits in local community kindergarten and library projects as a means of showing the benefits of CBT to local residents (Pedi, 2007).

In another case, a national environmental NGO supported the development of three CBT accommodation establishments that operate as co-operatives in various villages. The choice of CBT over alternative options has strong ideological overtones. This approach provided incomes for villagers, while empowering them to exert control over community developments, and prevent environmental degradation (Carvalho, Cruz, Vieira, & Samson, 2008). Since



**Fig. 1.** Timor-Leste Attractions and their location on a population density map (2008) clockwise from top-left: Balibo Fort, Balibo; Museum of Timorese Resistance, Dili; Jaco Island Beach, Tutuala; Uma Lulik sacred houses, Tutuala.

Source: Authors, Population density map by subdistrict (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008). Map provided courtesy of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

oil revenues started to flow in 2008, the Ministry of Tourism has also been operating a Community Tourism programme that provides grant funding to already established and locally-owned guesthouses for the purposes of upgrading accommodation. Another pragmatic reason for pursuing small-scale developments in rural Timor-Leste is the inadequate physical infrastructure that has persisted across the island despite high government spending (National Statistics Directorate and United Nations Population Fund, 2011). The various efforts to develop CBT have not yet been

co-ordinated, despite previous efforts by the abovementioned stakeholders. Fig. 2 illustrates examples of CBT in Timor-Leste.

**3. CBT and networks review**

*3.1. Concept of CBT*

The term Community-Based Tourism (CBT) describes alternative forms of tourism development which maximise local benefits and



**Fig. 2.** Examples of CBT accommodation in Timor-Leste: Valu Sere Co-operative, Tutuala (left), Tua Koin eco-lodge, Atauro (right). Source: the authors.

advocate capacity building and empowerment as means of achieving community development objectives. CBT-related attributes which have been documented in the literature include benefits to local communities, promoting active community participation in tourism planning, enhancing host–guest interactions, communal involvement in managing tourism in general and of profits in particular, and preserving cultural and natural heritage (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Moscardo, 2008; Rocharungsat, 2008; Trejos & Chiang, 2009; Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, 2011). CBT aligns with the view that appropriate tourism development should be accompanied by community participation and stakeholder cooperation (Dodds, 2007; Moscardo, 2008; Murphy, 1985; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Reed, 1997; Timothy, 1999; Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2013).

There has been extensive debate about the merits of participatory tourism development. Matters of contention have included whether there is genuine understanding of tourism amongst communities, the exercise of power between stakeholders and the capacity to achieve community development objectives (Blackstock, 2005; Butcher, 2010; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Mair & Reid, 2007; Tosun, 2000; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008; Yang et al., 2013; Zapata et al., 2011). Critics have noted that the term ‘community’ is frequently idealized. It is generally used in reference to geographic localities that enjoy substantial autonomy and to groups that exhibit shared interests and needs and a sense of common identity (Sin & Minca, 2014; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006). In practice, communities tend to be incomplete, divided and changeable. Confronted by the advance of globalizing forces, groups occupying a common geographic location are less readily identifiable as a single community (Brent, 2004; Shaw, 2008). In practice tourism development has often exacerbated existing social divisions within communities, particularly involving indigenous peoples. As has been the case with conventional mass tourism development, CBT has often benefited the more powerful within a community (Farrelly, 2011; Litka, 2013).

Most of the accepted definitions characterize CBT as part of the social economy (Johnson, 2010). The latter describes public-sector not-for-profit, market-based social organizations, and civil-society organizations, including co-operatives and worker associations (Johnson, 2010). The social economy has sometimes been described as people-centred and as strengthening social cohesion, promoting civic participation, providing employment and financial opportunities and advocating broader social change for the oppressed, thus challenging the prevailing approach to industrial relations (Azzellini, 2009; Lechat, 2009; Vidal, 2010). CBT is emblematic of Schumpeter’s (1973) proposition that ‘small is beautiful’. The concept is characterized by small-scale enterprises with strong ties to other local industries, and is human centred.

CBT has sometimes been embraced as a counterweight to neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism and conventional mass tourism. Neo-liberal policies aimed at economic development in the least developed countries tend to favour large resorts, cutting taxes and converting customary owned land into a traded commodity and may impact adversely on communities. Large scale developers often limit local access to traditional lands, create no links with local industries, rely on imported products, employ foreign staff, deny careers to local residents and expatriate profits from the country (Anderson, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Hall & Michael, 2006; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Scheyvens, 2011). Mass tourism has sometimes been viewed as a new plantation economy operating around metropolitan interests along the colonial periphery, and favouring companies that are based in the metropolis and elites that are based on the periphery (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Mowforth & Munt, 2008). The alternative tourism phenomenon, and CBT in

particular, has been criticised for pursuing the dispersal of tourism to increase industry profitability rather than to empower host communities, improve their livelihoods and/or preserve environments (Blackstock, 2005; Hall, 2007; Harrison, 2008; Schilcher, 2007; Sin & Minca, 2014; Wheeler, 2003).

### 3.2. Collaborative networks as a strategy for successful CBT

In practice CBT related successes have been rare and the achievements have been modest. CBT initiatives have tended to generate limited economic benefits and have led to dependence on long term external support (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Mitchell & Ashley, 2010; Moscardo, 2008). The many CBT failures have been associated with a lack of private sector partnerships, and poor linkages with global tourism distribution channels and markets (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010). There has been a commonplace failure to empower and transform communities, and power typically remains in the hands of the national and global tourism industries (Blackstock, 2005; Butcher, 2010; Gascón, 2013; Johnson, 2010; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008; Zapata et al., 2011).

In acknowledging these limitations, the present paper examines the prospects for mitigating these difficulties by adopting a collaborative network approach in a particular national setting. This approach is consistent with what has previously been proposed as a means of delivering community development goals in the contexts of both tourism and community development. It involves fostering best practice, disseminating knowledge, building capacity, exchanging information and disseminating promotional messages (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010; Dredge, 2006; Gilchrist, 2009; Holladay & Powell, 2013; Iorio & Corsale, 2013; Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2011; Robertson, Lewis, Sloane, Galloway-Gilliam, & Nomachi, 2012; Stronza, 2008; Taylor, 2011). Drawing upon the language used by Schumpeter (1973), the idea that ‘small is beautiful if networked’ is proposed.

Previous researchers have used the terms ‘network’, ‘networking’ and ‘clusters’ to describe socially constructed intangible linkages and collaborations between entities, such as individuals, non-government organisations (NGOs) and businesses (Lynch & Morrison, 2007; Scott et al., 2008; Svensson, Nordin, & Flagestad, 2005; Todeva, 2006). The objects or events comprising the network are described as ‘actors’ or ‘nodes’ and the various relationships between nodes are described as ‘links’ or ‘ties’ (Iorio & Corsale, 2013; Mitchell, 1969; Scott et al., 2008). For the purposes of the present investigation a ‘network’ describes a formal relationship that has been consciously and purposefully established to connect multiple actors (Giarchi, 2001). Tolkach, King, and Pearlman (2013) discussed alternative CBT network models, outlining possible structures, functions and attributes. The attributes of CBT networks may include the level of centralisation, integration and interdependence, organisational attributes relating to organisational structure and the relationship between actors. The functions of CBT networks may draw upon those found in tourism and in community development organisations. While alternative CBT networks have been proposed, little research has examined how stakeholders view an appropriate CBT network in a developing country setting. The present paper addresses this gap.

## 4. Research methods

### 4.1. Theory and method

The present investigation explores collaborative models offering the prospect of a CBT network that yields benefits for rural Timor-Leste. In Timor-Leste all areas outside the two major urban centres (Dili and Baucau) are described as rural communities (Silva, 2011).

The investigation was conducted over three stages, namely initial, exploratory and evaluation and was inspired by previous research on indigenous communities (Stewart & Draper, 2009; Stewart, Jacobson, & Draper, 2008) and in developing countries (Stronza, 2008). The initial stage was conducted in July 2010 and generated a research question which aimed to make a contribution to both knowledge and application. Undertaken during June–July 2011 the exploratory research stage identified whether CBT is a desirable form of tourism development and the extent to which stakeholders view a potential network as a realistic prospect for assisting existing and future CBT initiatives. Where the response was affirmative, the researchers sought commentary about developing and structuring such a network. The evaluation stage (during May 2012) sought refinements to the proposed CBT model and commentary about the prospects for implementing the network.

The qualitative research approach that was adopted combined elements of the following: grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Goulding, 2002), critical theory (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Kincheloe and McLaren; 2011), action research (Jennings, 2010; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) and Delphi studies (Donohoe & Needham, 2009; Linstone & Turoff, 2011). The researchers set out to explore and critique CBT related developments in the context of a newly independent nation, and provide potentially practical solutions that may help improve rural livelihoods. The tourism literature has noted that sustainable tourism requires inputs from multiple stakeholders. The present investigation acquired relevant data by conducting workshops, semi-structured interviews, and roundtable discussions. A number of questions were posed about alternative scenarios, such as roles for various stakeholders, prospective functions of the network organisation and integration. It is acknowledged that the provision of set alternatives might be perceived as neo-colonial and limiting. However, it was intended that this would increase respondents' awareness of stakeholder collaborations, consistent with an action research agenda. Respondents were encouraged to provide different views from those presented.

#### 4.2. Sampling

Respondents to the investigation included representatives of the organisations involved in tourism development in rural Timor-Leste. Consistent with the research objectives and with the focus on network development, sampling involved a combination of purposive expert sampling and snowballing. The Timor-Leste Ministry of Tourism was approached to identify respondents, along with non-government organisations that have been active in tourism and tour and accommodation operators operating in rural Timor-Leste that have advertised online. These organisations were then asked to suggest further contacts.

Interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed as field notes, with the content being analysed using key themes. Wherever possible the researchers recruited the same participants for all stages of the research. In practice four new respondents were recruited for the evaluation phase. The reasons provided for non-participation were lack of time, non-presence in the country (either Australia or Timor-Leste) and change of workplace. The new respondents were recruited through contacts that were provided by previous interviewees. Table 1 lists the respondents by stakeholder group and nationality. The five representative CBT initiatives are located in different districts and the relevant village chiefs have been identified. Staff from the Ministries of Tourism and of Education and from the President's Office represent the government. Dili-based hotel owners and tour operators based in Dili and Melbourne are considered to represent the "other" tourism sector. NGOs are represented by local, national and international

**Table 1**  
Research sample.

Respondent#	Stakeholder group	Nationality	Stage of participation		
1	NGO	Timorese		3	
2	CBT	Timorese	2		
3	Other tourism	UK	2		
4	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
5	NGO	Timorese	2	3	
6	CBT	Australian	2	3	
7	Government	Australian	2		
8	CBT	Australian	2	3	
9	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
10	Other tourism	Australian	2	3	
11	NGO	Timorese	1	2	3
12	CBT	Timorese	1	2	3
13	Other tourism	Australian	1	2	3
14	NGO	Timorese	1	2	3
15	Education	Timorese	2	3	
16	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
17	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
18	CBT	Timorese	2	3	
19	NGO	Australian	1	2	3
20	Other tourism	Australian	2	3	
21	Other tourism	Australian	1	2	3
22	Education	Timorese	2	3	
23	Government	Timorese	1	2	3
24	CBT	Timorese	2	3	
25	Government	Timorese	2		
26	NGO	Japanese	1	2	3
27	NGO	Timorese	2	3	
28	NGO	Australian	2	3	
29	CBT	Timorese		3	
30	NGO	Malaysian	1	2	3
31	Researcher	Brazilian	2		
32	NGO	Timorese	2	3	
33	Other tourism	Timorese	2	3	
34	NGO	Timorese	1	2	3
35	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
36	Education	Australian	2	3	
37	Village Chief	Timorese	2	3	
38	NGO	Australian	2	3	
39	Government	Australian	2		
40	Other tourism	Australian		3	
41	Government	Australian		3	
42	CBT	Australian	2		
43	Tourist	UK	2	3	
44	Other tourism	Australian	1		

organisations involved in environmental conservation and community capacity building. The education sector is represented by higher education and vocational education institutes located in Dili and Melbourne.

There are several reasons for the large proportion of Australian nationals amongst the foreign representatives. Australia deployed peacekeepers to Timor-Leste following the restoration of independence and has also been providing extensive development aid. Australia considers Timor-Leste to be within its sphere of influence and many Australians were active supporters of independence from Indonesia. It is also the largest source of tourists. Moreover, the snowballing technique stimulates recruitment of respondents with similar characteristics. The numbers corresponding to particular respondents refer to quotations that appear in subsequent sections of the paper.

#### 4.3. Application of research design

Drawing upon the feedback provided by eleven respondents during the first stage of data collection, the research focused on the prospective process and structure for implementing and operating the network. The research sought a model that would be capable of

achieving stakeholder consensus. There are several noteworthy research specifics and limitations. Due to the qualitative and constructivist nature of the present investigation, the results of the research cannot be separated from the background of the researchers. The principal investigator is a Russian national and was known to many of the respondents. This may have affected the themes and contributions of the participants during interviewing. The background and world view of the principal investigator may have also impacted on the analysis and representation of the findings. The principal investigator's status as a non-native Tetum speaker may have affected the data collection and interpretation, since some respondents knew no English. Though financial constraints prevented the deployment of an interpreter, the research materials were professionally translated to strengthen effective communications with the respondents. Financial constraints restricted the data gathering period in the field.

## 5. CBT network characteristics

### 5.1. Respondent perspectives on CBT

Exploratory research revealed that the CBT is viewed as benefitting local communities more than conventional tourism. In response to an open-end question about preferred type of tourism in Timor-Leste eighteen respondents opted for establishing CBT over other forms of tourism. The others that were mentioned included: ecotourism (12 respondents), cultural tourism (6 respondents), adventure tourism (4 respondents) and a cooperative tourism model (3 respondents). CBT and ecotourism received many mentions from respondents of various backgrounds. Whilst adventure tourism was supported by foreign nationals, it was not mentioned by any Timorese respondents. It is possible that the answers provided by Timorese respondents were confined to a few more familiar options because of their lack of exposure to global tourism practices. CBT operators overwhelmingly supported CBT and ecotourism, whereas tourism business representatives were almost equally supportive of the following concepts: CBT, ecotourism, cultural tourism and adventure tourism.

NGO representatives and those local leaders who were engaged actively with community developments were more vocal about the prospective community impacts of tourism on the community, such as income, cultural exchange and reviving traditional culture along with intrusion and the need to share scarce resources with tourists. In turn, tourism-involved participants voiced more concern about the allegedly poor quality of Timor-Leste's hospitality and tourism products. The respondents perceived CBT as a means of organising tourism enterprises and of ensuring community-based ownership and management. In contrast, the ecotourism or adventure tourism types describe a category of product provision. It may be concluded that CBT provides a potential means of delivering ecotourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism products in Timor-Leste. However, respondent #23 (government, Timorese) noted that defining the types of tourism is unimportant and that it is more appropriate to focus on developing tourism to achieve better livelihoods for the Timorese. This was evidence of a reluctance to embrace some academic preoccupations and of a pragmatic focus on outcomes in preference to engaging in debate about definitions.

### 5.2. Proposed CBT network structure and functions

The idea of using a network to assemble current and future CBT initiatives received overwhelming respondent support (36 respondents out of 39). In response to an open-ended question about the potential benefits of a CBT network, respondents advocated

joint marketing (20 respondents), ongoing training (19 respondents), information and experience exchange (15 respondents), the development of standards (8 respondents) and effective government lobbying in the interests of CBT and rural communities (5 respondents). The listed functions were provided by both Timorese and foreign nationals, except for the case of lobbying government which was mainly suggested by foreign nationals. Respondent #16 (village chief, Timorese) proposed the following as a need for rural communities: "... someone to come and show us what we can do to attract tourists and get more income from them".

When asked about network operations, the representatives of different groups typically observed that the network needs a medium level of integration to ensure common objectives and goals, but should avoid interventions into day-to-day member operations. Other commentary noted that a loose network would be unable to achieve the desired goals, while managing a strongly integrated network would be difficult because of the dispersal and isolation of the relevant communities. Several community-based tourism operators and NGO workers suggested that the network could be a prospective mediator during any tensions between communities and tourism businesses. This is a potentially worthwhile suggestion, given the prevalence of differences of opinion between community development stakeholders and non-CBT tourism operators. It was suggested that the network should schedule regular meetings, seminars and workshops.

Over half of the respondents agreed that a central body is required to coordinate the activities of the network. It should consist of a directorate formed by the representatives of CBT initiatives and a management team employed to administer the network. Commentators have extensively debated the appropriate level of centralisation. The presence of a central body may support the coordination of network activities, but may also create a hierarchy that produces bias and inefficient decision-making (Yang & Wall, 2008). Participants felt that the network should prioritise CBT as a distinct Timor-Leste tourism product that meets visitor expectations and leaves development controls in Timorese hands.

Lower priority was attached to non-tourism functions such as access to water and sanitation. Respondent #30 (NGO, foreign national) expressed the opinion that network managers and members should not focus on community development projects: "They have to be CBT specialists and support CBT. Community development is very important. They need to outsource it: link up to NGOs. With things like sanitation, they could set standards and educate members about standards, but not to do community development". Further research is required to identify the optimal collaborations between community development and tourism organisations. Respondents recommended a flexible and inclusive network. In practice there is an inherent tension for governing of the network. A highly integrated network may be appropriate in instances where economic outcomes dominate and inclusiveness and flexibility may hinder efficiency (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Provan & Kenis, 2007). Inclusiveness may however be an objective in itself in instances where validation and legitimisation are needed from the affected communities (Ledwith, 2011; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006).

## 6. Implementation challenges for a CBT network

This section presents respondent opinions about implementation challenges for a CBT network and integrates author reflections and inputs from the relevant literature. Respondents made cautious assessments about whether a CBT network can be implemented. Twenty-four respondents supported the possibility, whereas ten used the description "challenging". Two participants referred to the legacy of previous failed attempts to establish a tourism

association: a membership-based tourism business association that would promote and support its members. As is evident from the following comment by respondent #3 (other tourism, foreign national), interpersonal relations were one reason for failure: “It was like ‘I don’t like him or I don’t like them’ ... Far too many reasons not to connect, which seem to completely overwhelm the imperative need to connect”. Respondent #13 (other tourism, foreign national) suggested that a successful CBT network would start from a small group of participants: “I’d keep the program national, but I’d put some effort only into a couple of places ... I’d try to get some quick wins in the first years of operation”. Participants mentioned the groupings of factors that may undermine the implementation and operations of the network as follows (represented in the descending order of the number of comments):

- involving all actors and achieving consensus;
- information access and capacity building;
- funding;
- power balance;
- other barriers to success of the CBT network (e.g. land tenure, continuous progress, maintaining enthusiasm);
- leadership;
- CBT branding;
- mentality and attitudes of communities;
- government support; and
- sustainability.

Similar implementation challenges have been noted previously in the respective literatures on pro-poor and sustainable tourism (Ashley & Haysom, 2006; Halstead, 2003; Tolkach, Pearlman, & King, 2012). The following section discusses eight of ten aforementioned factors under the four subsections: consensus achieved by involving all actors (involving all actors and achieving consensus); funding (funding and government support); leadership (information access and capacity building, leadership, government support, mentality and attitudes of communities); power balance (power balance). CBT branding has been covered earlier in relationship to marketing, while sustainability is discussed in the following sections.

### 6.1. Consensus through the involvement of all actors

It was felt that relationships between different stakeholder groups should be improved, though the respondents generally acknowledged that different sectors do collaborate when engaging in tourism development. Three Timorese respondents from the CBT sector commented negatively about the absence of community consultation in the practices of foreign-owned businesses. Respondent #22 (education, Timorese) criticised the operations of international development organisations as follows: “Most of the trainers or NGOs, when they come to work with the community, they bring all people from overseas. They have good ideas, they say to build this and that and then they train. But after they left, no one [in the community] understands ... what the objective is. Local context is very important”. Consistent with the relevant literature, respondents stressed the importance of involving all stakeholders and advancing any network on the basis of trust, equity and transparency (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Gilchrist, 2009; Robertson et al., 2012; Taylor, 2011). Respondent #22 (education, Timorese) commented as follows: “[Network implementation] is not a long process ... It depends. If we have the same idea, we can start already. That’s because the trust is there”. Several respondents proposed an overarching rationale for working together under a CBT network framework. As such, three Timorese respondents mentioned that the network should

“oppose” capitalism and globalisation. One village chief (respondent #4) suggested that: “Together under one network we are strong to fight the globalisation. If we fight it separately, we will lose. The development will lose”. Some respondents advocated opposition to multi-national business and for retaining control over the development in Timor-Leste. A CBT network could potentially provide a means to mobilise different communities.

### 6.2. Funding

Various views were expressed about potential financing of the network. Government funding was the most popular option (24 respondents, some of whom proposed multiple options). Fourteen respondents suggested that funding should be obtained from international organisations. Another fourteen proposed self-funding. However some respondents, especially Timorese nationals, acknowledged that CBT initiatives cannot be expected to finance the network single-handedly in the early stages of development. Others suggested that the autonomy of the network will be endangered if funding is provided by government or by international organisations. This valid concern is prevalent in the literature (Butcher, 2010; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; King & Pearlman, 2009; Trejos & Chiang, 2009; Zapata et al., 2011).

The funding related issues that were highlighted by participants necessitate broader interpretation and reflection. Being an oil rich country provides Timor-Leste with an opportunity to re-invest revenues from the Petroleum Fund in nation-building activities. There is ongoing debate within Timor-Leste about the limits that should be applied to withdrawals from the Fund to preserve it for the future generations. Due to Timor-Leste’s developing country status, there are enormous demands for investment in areas such as health, education and infrastructure development. In this environment of keen competition for resources, tourism development has been a low government priority when formulating budgets. This is despite acknowledgement of the importance of tourism in the various development plans. In some respects the Petroleum Fund has negative connotations since it may reduce the sense of urgency surrounding diversification of the economy and may be steering the government’s attention away from sectors of the economy other than oil and gas (Dunn, 2011; La’o Hamutuk, 2012; Neves, 2011; Thaler, 2011). This observation may apply to other resource dependent nations, but is particularly acute in the case of Timor-Leste. As a newly established developing island nation with fragile politics, Timor-Leste lacks human capital.

Tourism planners in resource rich environments, albeit in the context of a developing country have two alternative funding options: from government petroleum revenues or from international donors. A number of respondents believed that it is easier to negotiate and attract funding from the national government, than from international organisations, due to the relative geographic proximity to Dili and the capacity to make use of personal connections. However, acquiring funding from both aforementioned sources has been shown to be problematic. Since few international organisations focus on tourism, it is hard to source funding for tourism development in poorer countries (Cheer & Peel, 2011). Data from the Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute (2014) suggests that countries with substantial wealth funds that owe their origins to oil and gas exploration rarely make investments in developing the tourism sector. Examples of countries with substantial revenues from oil and gas exploration include Norway, the Gulf Arab States, Brunei, Russia and Kazakhstan. A more evidently comparable oil and gas reliant state is the small island nation of Trinidad & Tobago. Relative to most other Caribbean nations its tourism is undeveloped and makes a smaller contribution to the economy (Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, 2014).

### 6.3. Leadership

Development of a CBT network will require leadership (Ashley & Haysom, 2006; Iorio & Corsale, 2013). This appears to be lacking amongst the respondents. The following quote from respondent #36 (education, foreign national) captures the overwhelming majority of answers about prospective candidates for the network management team: “the potential candidates ... who knows where you can find them?”

Respondents emphasised the importance of government involvement in the CBT network. Respondent #36 (education, foreign national) expressed this as follows: “Initially the line of attack should be to engage government ...” However, four participants explicitly criticised the low level of government involvement in tourism development, with one village chief (respondent #16, Timorese) noting that: “An NGO helps us, but liaison with the central government is minimal”. Nevertheless, the government of Timor-Leste was the entity acknowledged as having the most active prospective nation-wide role. However, respondents noted that government involvement may jeopardise the independence of the network. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism is subject to political decision-making, to periodic elections, and to changing priorities and personnel. As noted by King, McVey, and Simmons (2000) government and community interests do not necessarily coincide, even in the case of small island nations. Governments may seek to avoid the type of public scrutiny which characterises community consultation processes.

Several respondents expressed the view that the government was bureaucratic and slow to implement strategies. It was noted, for example, that it has been unable to pass a draft tourism policy into legislation over the course of the present research investigation (2010–2013). Government changes after the 2012 elections included an amendment to the Ministry of Tourism structure and shift of personnel, thereby depleting linkages with industry and civil society. ‘Short-termism’ and political change have combined to undermine tourism development in other settings (Hummel & van der Duim, 2012).

Domestic and foreign participants described Timorese communities as passive and the mentality as needing to change if genuine CBT is to be achieved. Respondent #28 (NGO, foreign national) commented as follows: “There is no this kind of entrepreneurship in private industry or government ... And it's related to the idea from Indonesian occupation that if you put your head up, you'll be in trouble”. It is understandable that community mobilisation is a significant challenge in a country that has experienced four centuries of colonial rule followed by 24 years of violent occupation.

### 6.4. Power balance

Several respondents (both Timorese from the CBT sector, and foreign nationals from the tourism sector) suggested that clear rules and principles should be established to maintain a balance of power between stakeholder groups. Respondent #8 (CBT, foreign national) commented on the possible relationship between the government and communities in relation to community-based tourism development as follows:

“Is this a government program? Who tells who what to do? Is it communities standing up to the government and saying ‘hey, government, we're doing community-based tourism here ... where is our electricity, water and sanitation’ ... or you have government coming down to them and saying ‘you should be doing this and that?’”

The lack of expertise within Timor-Leste about tourism in general and about CBT in particular was mentioned by thirteen respondents. The view that enjoyed the support of both Timorese and

foreign nationals was that a foreign expert should manage the network along with a Timorese counterpart. This approach has the potential to impact negatively on the community empowerment agenda of a CBT network, since foreign involvement may disempower communities by transferring authority to foreign organisations and creating dependency on external experts and agencies (Butcher, 2010; King et al., 2000; King & Pearlman, 2009; Sakata & Prideaux, 2013; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008). One foreign national suggested that a Timorese counterpart may be biased towards his own linguistic group. This may be due to Timor-Leste's history of isolation leading to sixteen distinct languages under two broad language groups (Taylor-Leech, 2007). There is an evident risk of local participants advantaging their home village or ethnic group rather than working towards benefits for communities across the country.

## 7. The process of CBT network development

This section outlines a sequence for developing a network and proposes its final structure with particular reference to the roles of stakeholders and their interrelationships. Discussion is focussed on the human and financial resources that are at the disposal of stakeholders and their associated power. This highlights the tensions and connotations of tourism development in the context of a post-conflict neo-colonial developing island setting. It is notable that participants proposed commencing the CBT network development process with the formation of a steering committee made up of stakeholder representatives. An exception was respondent #11 (NGO, Timorese) who noted that:

“If you create a national network, which doesn't connect to communities, you create another mechanism of bureaucracy. Representative, representative, representatives are taking out the ideas, demands and expectations from communities ... In the end of the day there will be not much difference from the parliament. For example, on CBT policy debate a government could call on all the private sector to consult and invite communities to participate. No need to create one or two representatives”.

As often occurs in practice, it is difficult to consult all relevant organisations simultaneously. It took for example three attempts for a local NGO to assemble a gathering of village chiefs and interested local residents from within a single sub district (five villages).

Based on participant responses to open-ended questions, a prospective steering committee might be expected to perform the following functions:

- define the network terms of reference and objectives;
- engage with CBT initiatives and community leaders in regional Timor-Leste; and
- recruit a management team consisting of one foreign expert and one Timorese.

The management team could mobilize support from internships or related programs designed in collaboration with education providers. The management team and the steering committee will need external funding to finance the implementation of such initiatives. Along with the management team, the steering committee should develop a code of standards and CBT operational principles that both meet tourist expectations and are achievable in the context of rural Timor-Leste. Though the lack of infrastructure and telecommunications provision will make this challenging, it will be vital to involve rural CBT initiatives in network developments. When the network governance has been established and funding is established, the network can become a registered legal body, an NGO, and can start issuing CBT network memberships. Several



Timorese NGO representatives and tourism-involved foreign nationals suggested that a modest membership fee may provide a sense of ownership and responsibility. The funding strategy should be established and budgeting should progress in longer-term to self-sustainable funding.

Power over the network would pass progressively from the steering committee to the directorate formed by representatives participating in CBT initiatives, and to the expert management team. The relationship that was proposed by respondents between the directorate and the management team resembles relations between a company board and chief executive. CBT representatives as members of the network would be the owners of it and form a directorate, and the management team will work to deliver positive results to the directorate. The following issues were mentioned by respondent #13 (other tourism, foreign national) as being applicable to these two central bodies: “*This is the directorate that may own the network, but would not know what to do with it. Maybe you have to think about the term used for this group ... The people in the management team have to be very good to manage all this*”. On the basis of the participant responses, the ultimate structure of the proposed CBT network is presented in Fig. 3. Each box containing text identifies a relevant stakeholder group and its responsibilities. The bi-directional arrows identify relationships between stakeholders who are expected to communicate frequently. It is evident that the management team will communicate most actively with other stakeholders.

As portrayed in Fig. 3 the directorate consists of representatives from CBT initiatives and presents the network objectives. Based on the desired objectives, the management team contacts other stakeholders and designs the activities that will help to achieve the goals that have been set. Management team is the link for communication between CBT initiatives and other stakeholders. An appropriate balance of power is achievable through negotiations between the management and stakeholders. Each stakeholder group can contribute in different ways. Private sector collaborations focus on marketing, promoting and selling itineraries that include or focus on CBT. Non-government organisations would advise about improvements to community livelihoods. Ongoing government collaborations can lead to policy support. As discussed

previously, education providers may participate in training and internship programs. The scope of CBT initiatives would provide the directorate with feedback about the management team. Since the authors were unable to identify any existing CBT network which fits this model, it is suggested that further empirical research is required.

## 8. Discussion

The present research presents the proposed CBT network on the basis of neo-colonial and community development perspectives. Since Timor-Leste is a newly established nation with experience of prolonged colonial administration and foreign occupation the example is relevant for exploring the neo-colonial angle. The researchers have opted to refer to neo-colonialism rather than post-colonialism, because of their focus on the prospects of achieving political and economic independence in small developing states. In contrast to debates about neo-colonialism, post-colonial theory has been critiqued for lack of a political economy perspective (Shohat, 1992). Oil is particularly important for Timor-Leste since it provides apparent financial capacity to acquire political and economic independence. The diversity of relevant assets suggests that tourism could provide a potential counterbalance for the resources sector. However an economy that is dominated by oil extraction companies may not be conducive to the survival of small scale social enterprises (Ross, 2012). A supportive environment will be needed that offers prospective economies of scale. The absence of comprehensive or reliable statistical data and market information exacerbates the challenge facing small enterprises.

While improving community livelihoods is the objective of CBT rather than profit maximisation, many CBT initiatives have been ineffective at connecting with markets, attracting substantial visitor numbers and achieving independence from external funding (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008). On this basis it is reasonable to suggest that the proposed CBT network model should be able to deliver satisfying visitor experiences in the context of three perspectives: neo-colonialism, the social economy and community development.

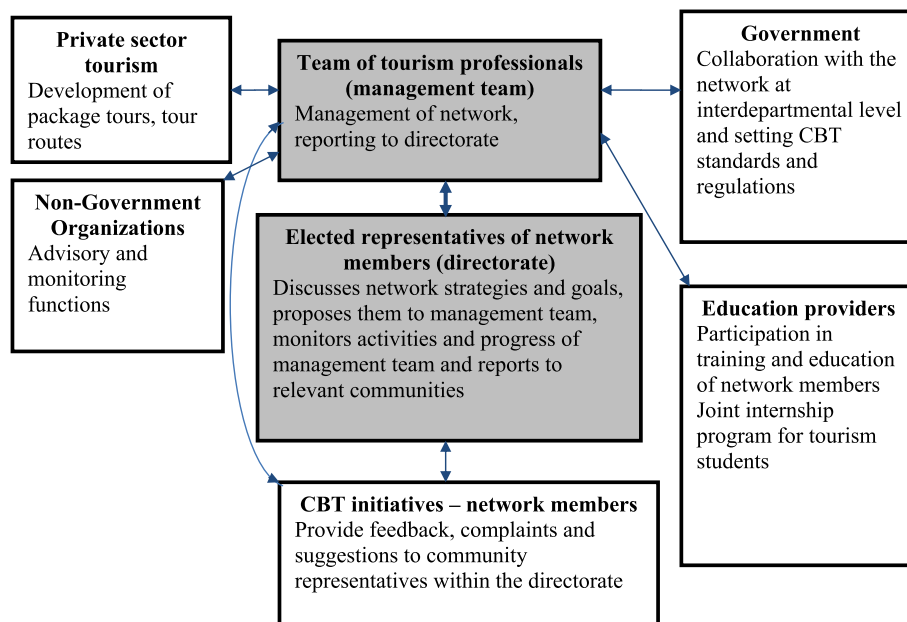


Fig. 3. The role of stakeholders in the CBT network structure.

### 8.1. Neo-colonialism

Host communities are often required to adjust to tourist worldviews and lifestyles (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Hollinshead, 2004; Sin & Minca, 2014). Consistent with CBT philosophy, tourists should be educated about how to behave responsibly and in a culturally appropriate manner. Some respondents, especially from the CBT sector and from NGOs, noted that a network can help to achieve this outcome. However, since CBT forms part of the tourism system, it should connect with relevant distribution channels and supply chains if it is to be marketed effectively and to deliver quality product experiences. It cannot be discounted that CBT may propagate aspects of neo-colonialism, given the prevalent dynamics connecting overseas tour operators, tourists and host communities. Despite opportunities such as indigenous entrepreneurship which offer local communities the prospect of controlling resources and related tourism developments (Higgins-Desbiolles, Trevorrow, & Sparrow, 2014), power lies with the tourism sector, and not with communities, as tourists cannot be compelled to visit particular destinations and attractions. CBT entrepreneurs and cooperatives have no choice but to ensure that their offerings appeal to tourists (Jaakson, 2004; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008). Respondents representing non-CBT tourism businesses expressed concerns about service standards. Whilst operators may wish to benefit local communities, they cannot afford to organise tours that are unpleasant or risky for their clients. The 'least neo-colonial' approach could be achieved if tourists arriving into communities have a sense of solidarity with local residents, are willing to accommodate limited amenities and service, and have a genuine interest in learning from their hosts. Respondents expressed hopes that a network would increase the bargaining power of host communities towards tourism operators and ensure community benefits. Considering the complex power relations that characterise most communities, the question of who and how benefits from CBT may form the basis for ongoing stakeholder discussions.

The proposed CBT network model has two dimensions which will require careful management: external funding and establishing a management team. The source of funding will affect the development of the network (Butcher, 2010; King & Pearlman, 2009; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008; Zapata et al., 2011). To be independent and empowering, a network would ideally be self-funded and self-sufficient. Unfortunately, this is unrealistic in the current case since rural CBT initiatives rarely possess adequate financial resources to make the initial network investment. The attitudes of the network members towards management are likely to be impacted by factors such as trust and a capacity to influence decisions, as evidenced by both present and previous research (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011, 2012). It is apparent that trust is currently lacking between tourism stakeholders within Timor-Leste. This is demonstrated by the comments that respondents made about various stakeholders. Community mobilisation and diminished reliance on external interventions (financial or otherwise) have been effective elsewhere, notably in Papua New Guinea (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013). Where external interventions occur, a well-planned exit strategy is required to achieve long-term sustainable tourism development (Salazar, 2012).

### 8.2. The social economy and community development

The proposed CBT network adheres to the principles of community benefit and knowledge exchange. It aims to spread the benefits of tourism to Timor-Leste's rural population, provide entrepreneurship and job opportunities and use economic flows arising from tourism for community development initiatives including education and health. The principles of inclusiveness, trust and balance of power are used as a guide. The findings suggest

that the values, objectives and operational principles of the network are synonymous with the social economy, are grounded in solidarity between members and benefit affected communities (Azzellini, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Lechat, 2009; Vidal, 2010). However, the proposed CBT network model is likely to have limited influence over the operations of individual CBT initiatives. It was evident that respondents preferred the prospect of a flexible and inclusive approach. In the spirit of flexibility not every CBT initiative may be a social enterprise, though the network generally fits under the social economy classification. Private sector guesthouses, for example, may be more aligned with a private sector neo-liberal philosophy. The network may however play a role in persuading such guesthouses to review their operations and spread benefits more widely across the community.

The proposed CBT network can contribute to sustainable development by stimulating local economic development and strengthening resident perceptions about the value of the physical environment and local culture (APEC Tourism Working Group and STCRC, 2010). The research findings indicate that stakeholders are optimistic about disseminating the knowledge that is required to establish a successful tourism destination by connecting entrepreneurs with CBT initiatives. The CBT network should have the capacity to improve the quality of rural Timorese tourism products, the livelihoods of local residents and develop more independent and pro-active communities. The CBT network should also pursue optimal outcomes by providing a medium for negotiations between stakeholders.

The network is likely to contribute to community development objectives as a by-product of CBT including basic infrastructure development, access to water and sanitation and training and education. It was evident that respondents expect the proposed CBT network to focus on tourism development and not to participate directly in community development. In practice it is uncertain whether the network will be capable of bringing about radical social change or of empowering either communities, or the powerless within communities, in a way that constitutes radical community development (Mayo, 2011; Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006). This will largely depend on the exercise of leadership by steering committee members and management. Communities will also require mobilisation and CBT practitioners will have to take ownership of and responsibility for the network and for tourism development. Timorese and foreign respondents acknowledged that this was a major challenge.

## 9. Conclusions and opportunities for further research

This paper has discussed organisational and management issues related to CBT in the context of national development issues and structures. It investigated stakeholder perceptions towards establishing a CBT network in a newly independent developing state - Timor-Leste - which is seeking opportunities to diversify its economy and develop rural communities. It is evident that stakeholders view CBT as an opportunity to address Timor-Leste's socio-economic challenges and to stimulate community benefits. However, CBT development faces difficulties, including a lack of tourism skills and knowledge amongst local residents and limited ongoing support. The foundation of a collaborative network offers the prospect of addressing the challenges of training, promotion and government advocacy. A potential network model was identified following the conduct of qualitative research. It would have a common vision, values and objectives and require the sharing of information between communities. It was acknowledged that there is a need to accommodate sufficient flexibility to empower the membership of the network, and sufficient integration to allow the development of common goals.

The potential success of the proposed CBT network development will depend on the source and conditions of funding, the capabilities of the steering committee and management team and whether CBT practitioners assume ownership of and responsibility for the network. It appears as if government funding is the preferable solution in a resource-rich developing state setting. Though a prospective CBT network may empower local communities over tourism development, the proposed network may prolong aspects of neo-colonialism. Tourism is a remote and alien concept in many developing nations, which lack experience, depend on external expertise and struggle to distinguish shorter- and longer-term positive and negative community impacts. Moreover, since the potential success of each CBT initiative and of the network will depend on tourist expenditures, overseas tour operators and consumers (i.e. tourists) will retain the dominant control (Hall & Michael, 2006; Scheyvens, 2011; Van Der Duim & Caalders, 2008; Zapata et al., 2011). Whilst the potential network may provide individual enterprises with greater access to global networks which are a reality of contemporary global capitalism, there is a risk that the founding ethos and “the small is beautiful” philosophy of the network may not be maintained upon its institutionalisation. The proposed network should however improve the balance of power between the various stakeholders. Community-based organisations can lobby for improved conditions through collective bargaining and negotiating with government agencies and tourism operators. It should be acknowledged that a CBT network may promote the social economy and sustainable development, but may not produce the radical social change that some respondents advocate as a counter to globalisation. In aggregate, the present paper addresses a gap in knowledge about the merits of collaborative networks as a tool for the sustainable rural development in developing countries. The paper combines theoretical discussion about the extent to which such networks can empower local communities and achieve sustainable development with practical recommendations about establishing a network.

Though the history and geography of Timor-Leste is unique, it may be argued that its challenges resemble those prevalent in other SIDS and in attraction-rich post-colonial states (Ashley & Haysom, 2006; Croes, 2006; Gibson, 2010; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Harrison, 2008; Jaakson, 2004; King et al., 2000; Scheyvens, 2011). The results of the present research suggest that CBT networks offer a potentially valuable strategy for achieving successful CBT development, thus benefitting local communities in developing countries. It is suggested that future research initiatives should be action-oriented and focus on assisting CBT entrepreneurs to network effectively amongst themselves and with other stakeholder groups. Such research should verify whether the proposed approach towards implementing a CBT network results in long-term benefits for rural communities in the developing world. Comparative analyses of tourism development in resource-rich versus resource-poor developing states would also be of potential benefit, especially in view of current debates within the development studies community about whether plentiful oil resources are a “blessing” or a “curse”. Finally it will be worth exploring evolving relationships between CBT networks and global travel distribution networks with a view to identifying the potential for small scale initiatives to prosper in the global marketplace.

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