

Tourism Development in Thandaung Gyi
A Grounded Theory Study on Tourism Development



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Preface

The writing process of this thesis has been long and at times very hard for me. However, I am incredibly proud of the result, with which I am about to complete my Cultural Geography and Tourism master's degree and thus conclude my studies at Radboud University Nijmegen. My time at Radboud University has been incredibly rewarding and I am looking forward to what the future might hold.

The research and writing process of this thesis would not have been possible without the help of several people. First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Dr. Huib Ernste for his time and support. My time in the Republic of Myanmar would not have been as fulfilling as it was without the help of my internship supervisor Marlo Perry and the team of the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute in Yangon. I would like to thank them and the people of Thandaung Gyi for their hospitality and support. I would also like to thank Jan and Marlon for their support and last, but not least, I would like to thank my girlfriend Hannah for her love and dedication to me.

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Executive Summary

This thesis seeks to understand the process of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi, within the context of the region's economic development and ongoing peace process. Thandaung Gyi, a small mountain village in the north of Myanmar's Kayin State, was secluded for decades, as civil war raged in the state. Following the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 2012, the formerly conflicting parties joined forces with (international) NGOs to identify the state's strengths and to stimulate its economy. In this process, Thandaung Gyi was found to have a high potential for tourism development.

This research project was developed during an internship at Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI) and in response to the institute's involvement in the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. The aim was to help MRTI gain insights into the experiences, views, ideas, and concerns of local stakeholders and the active NGOs with regards to the tourism development. A grounded theory approach was used to tackle the subject.

Interviews with local stakeholders as well as with members of active NGOs resulted in an extensive data set. The analysis of this data showed that the – at times complicated – cooperation between the formerly conflicting parties has ensured that the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi can be seen as a development tool that has successfully elevated the region's economy. This process is complicated by challenges, such as a lack of funding, complex bureaucracy, brain drain, and the conflict in the region. Despite these challenges, the development continued, and more and more visitors have found their way to the village. Tourism has brought prosperity to the people of Thandaung Gyi, as they have been able to open restaurants, bed and breakfasts, and shops.

Keywords: tourism development, peacebuilding, grounded theory, Myanmar, community-based tourism

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Introduction

1.1 Overview

Tourism in and to The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, commonly known as Myanmar or Burma¹, has long been a controversial issue. In the past, the proceeds from tourism, including the incoming flow of foreign currency, directly funded the repression of the country's population and enabled the creation of a tourism infrastructure built on forced labor (Shenon, 1994). As a consequence, as well as of the current (2017) Rohingya Refugee Crisis, tourism to Myanmar is often eyed with skepticism. Seeking to put an end to this negative historical trend are organizations that aim to use the development of the country's tourism industry for positive outcomes. The development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi, a village in the mountains of Kayin State that is located in a cease fire zone, is an example of such an endeavor and the focus of this thesis.

Before delving into the research questions of this thesis, as well as its academic and societal relevance, this chapter presents background information on Myanmar, its tourism development as well as on the village of Thandaung Gyi. This information is important in order to understand the questions asked, as well as any decisions that were made during the research process.

1.2 Myanmar

1.2.1 Location and population

Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia and shares borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos, and Thailand. Since 2005, Nay Pyi Taw is the country's official capital, as the republic's government moved away from Yangon (formerly known as Rangoon). Yangon is still Myanmar's economic and cultural capital. Myanmar is the 25th most densely populated country

¹ This thesis will use 'Myanmar' to abbreviate the country's official name.

in the world and its population of 53,86 million is ethnically diverse ("Myanmar: By the numbers," 2019). The country's national government recognizes eight major national ethnic races, Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, which consist of 135 distinct ethnic groups ("The 8 major national ethnic races in myanmar," 2007). It is important to note that this differentiation is controversial, as the groups are mostly categorized by region and not by a peoples' language or cultural association. In addition, numerous (sub)group are not officially recognized and have struggled for ethnic and political rights for decades (Kramer, 2015).



Figure 1.1 The location of The Republic of the Union of Myanmar with regards to its surrounding countries (UNCS & ESRI, 2013)

While Myanmar is ethnically diverse, it is less religiously varied. The majority of Myanmar's people (87.9%) is Buddhist. The most notable religious groups next to Buddhists are Christians and Muslims. About 6.2% of the population is Christian and 4.3% of the population is Muslim (including the Rohingya) (*The union report: Religion*, 2016).

1.2.2 History

Myanmar is a relatively new democracy and has undergone significant political, economic, and cultural change over the past decades. From 1824 to 1948, the country, then known as *Burma*, was a British colony. This period was marked by civil unrests and active resistance against British rule in many parts of the country. Following the occupation of the Imperial Japanese Army during the Second World War and the country's independence from Great Britain, it became clear that the newly founded *Union of Burma* was economically and politically unstable (Aung, Steinberg, & Aung-Thwin, 2019).

Shortly after the country's independence from Great Britain, a civil war erupted that would rage for decades and goes on until today. Insurgencies, fighting for the independence of their states, as well as other internal disagreements eventually led to a military coup in 1962 (Meixler, 2018). The military government closed the country's borders and sought to turn it into a socialist state, which was ruled through a one-party system. The constitution, which had been established following the country's independence from Great Britain, was suspended and the constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted in 1974 (Aung et al., 2019). As a consequence of these isolationist and destructive policies, Myanmar, which until the beginning of the 1960s had been thriving and been known known as the rice bowl of Asia, became one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia (Meixler, 2018).

At the end of the 1980s, civil unrest and protests spread throughout the country. Pro-democracy demonstrations, known as the 8888 uprising, escalated in August of 1988. When the widespread protests were violently broken up, thousands of demonstrators were killed and,

following another military coup, martial law was imposed (Tallentire, 2007). As a result of the uprisings and the continued tensions, the military government planned and organized free national elections in May of 1990. While Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), won the elections, the military did not concede power and ruled Myanmar until 2011. Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, Myanmar gradually went through reforms and began to open its borders.

As part of these reforms, a new constitution was adopted in 2008, which defines Myanmar as a unitary parliamentary republic. Elections of the president as well as the national legislature are to take place every five years. Partly-free elections were held for the first time in 2011, and the country's first free democratic elections took place in 2015 (Fisher, 2015). It is important to understand that Myanmar's constitution was written by its military junta, which ensured that the military still has significant power and influence on political affairs today. In 2018, The Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Myanmar 118 out of 167 in its Democracy Index and rated its regime *authoritarian* (*Democracy index 2018: Me too?*, 2018).

1.2.2.2 Sanctions and ceasefires

At the beginning of the 1990s, most Western governments, including the United States and the European Union, utilized economic sanctions against the country because of human rights violations and the repression of ethnic minorities. Most of the sanctions were lifted as recently as 2013 and 2016 respectively (Lester QC & O'Kane, 2019). At this moment, the EU still imposes an embargo on the export of weapons to Myanmar, because of the violent civilian conflict in Rakin, Kachin, and Shan States and the repression of different groups by the government. New sanctions were imposed by the EU as well as the US as a response to the ethnic cleansing campaign against the country's Rohingya minority ("Myanmar/Burma: Council prolongs sanctions," 2019; "US imposes sanctions on Myanmar's military leaders over Rohingya abuses," 2019).

Over the past decade, tentative steps have been taken to end Myanmar's civil war, which resulted in several ceasefire agreements. In 2012, Myanmar's national government signed a ceasefire agreement with the Karen National Union (KNU), a rebel groups fighting for the independence of Kayin State. In 2015, a National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was signed with eight ethnic insurgent groups. However, while two more groups joined the NCA in 2018, the ceasefire does not have nationwide support as seven groups decided not to sign the agreement. The groups decided not to partake in the peace process, because of conflicting views and because they do not trust the national government. Three groups were not invited to participate in the peace process, as active conflict is going on between their armies and government forces (Kramer, 2015). Thus, while regions are relatively safe and peaceful, others are still engulfed in conflict.

1.2.3 Tourism development

Myanmar's development from an open trade-based economy to a very closed and isolated socialist republic to a now again opening up modern state has strongly influenced the country's tourism industry. While the previously mentioned civil war and international sanctions made it complicated for international tourists to visit Myanmar, a limited number of tourists explored the country and navigated its barely existing tourism infrastructure. Parts of the country, such as Inle Lake and Bagan, have been popular among tourists since the 1990s and have been accessible since then (Henderson, 2003, p. 103). However, other parts of the country, such as Kayin State, have only recently become accessible to foreigners. Yet, still today, other parts of the country are still no-go areas because of civil war, and more practically, because of a complete lack of tourist infrastructure.

Myanmar's gradual transition to civilian rule, in conjunction with the abolishment of Western sanctions and boycotts have resulted in a steady growth of tourism. The tourism industry has become an important potential economic growth factor for the country, as it brings foreign currency and is a labor-intensive industry; more tourism means more employment (Agaraj & Murati, 2009). Since 2011, tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors in Myanmar. Between 2012 and 2015, Myanmar has experienced a significant expansion of its tourism industry with a tripling of international arrivals. According to the Asian Development Bank, Myanmar's tourism revenues grew by 19% in 2015, which amounts to a total expenditure of more than 4% of the country's GDP (Oxford Business Group, 2016). The World Travel and Tourism Council predicted in its 2016 outlook that in 2025, Myanmar's tourism industry will rank second out of 184 countries for long-term growth ("Myanmar's tourism industry set to rapidly expand," 2016). This indicates a strong potential for tourism development, even though the ethnic cleansing campaign against the Rohingya minority might have tempered international enthusiasm.



Figure 1.3 Temple complex in Bagan, Myanmar. August 20, 2017.

Over the past years, Myanmar has sought to increase its profile as a destination for international (western) tourism. While destinations such as the country's former capital Yangon with its Shwedagon Pagoda and Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments with its over 2,000 ancient structures have been capturing tourists' imagination for a long time, the countryside has not yet had the chance to be on the international tourist radar. Myanmar therefore presents itself to tourists around the world as a destination of unspoiled beauty and numerous cultural artifacts and it tries to stand apart from other countries in Southeast Asia by focusing on its 'unexploredness'. It can be argued that, even though it sounds a bit paradoxical, Myanmar's isolationism and poverty contributed to a conservation of traditional ways of life which now can be seen as one of the country's touristic treasures; mass tourism has not yet ruined the country and its mysteries.

1.3 Thandaung Gyi

1.3.1 Location

One of Myanmar's relatively unexplored villages is Thandaung Gyi, which is in the north of Kayin State. It takes two hours to reach the village from Taungoo, which is located 270 km north of Yangon, and which is the largest city in the region. Travelling east and almost continuously uphill by truck or motorbike, the temperature and surroundings quickly change as the heat from the lowlands and the plains are left behind and make way for jungle covered mountaintops.

Despite a ceasefire agreement between conflicting parties in the region, which will be discussed later in this thesis, movement around Thandaung Gyi is restricted. Consequently, Thandaung Gyi has become a one-way-destination, as the road is closed off at the end of the village. While Thandaung Gyi is geographically on the way to another popular (but remote) destination, the Karen State capital Loikaw with its Taung Kwe Pagoda, travel restrictions prevent travelers from taking the road through Thandaung Gyi.

1.3.2 History and tourism development

The village of Thandaung Gyi has a storied history. It was founded in the 1852 by the British as a hill station. In order for them to escape the oppressive summer heat of the plains they built towns in the mountains where it was cooler. Several colonial mansions and a hotel were built in Thandaung Gyi. The remnants of the towns colonial history are still reflected in its architecture today, as colonial buildings stand side-by-side with traditional houses, churches, and pagodas.

The previously noted civil war, which erupted in Myanmar after the country's independence from Great Britain, was also fought in Kayin State. The Karen, the main ethnic group in Kayin State, fought for the independence from the Union of Burma. In addition to the conflict that raged in the region, the 1962 military coup that isolated Myanmar, ensured that Thandaung Gyi became a secluded and isolated mountain town.

The isolation of Thandaung Gyi decreased when the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar's Armed Forces, gained the upper hand in the Karen insurgency in the 1990s. As part of the previously mentioned 'Visit Myanmar Year '96' campaign, the country's military government initiated the building of hotels in the Thandaung region, including in Thandaung Gyi. However, when the 2004 ceasefire between the KNU and the Tatmadaw collapsed, the development of these construction sites ended. The remains of several unfinished hotels are still visible on top of a hill above the town.

In addition to the unfinished hotels, another more impressive sight is visible on top of the highest mountaintop in Thandaung Gyi. In 1995, the local population, who are predominantly dedicated Christians, built what was to become their village's main tourist attraction: a big cross and a church, shaped to symbolize the Arch of Noah. The mountain on which the cross and the church are located, is considered to be holy by many people in the area. The creation of this church is significant, as it attracts a lot of (mostly) regional religious visitors, who visit Thandaung Gyi to worship.

While, as previously mentioned, 6.2% of Myanmar's population is Christian, 10% of the population of Kayin state identifies as Christian, and the Karen count an even higher percentage of Christians among them. Thandaung Gyi, being founded by the British, was in a good position to accept missionaries, and is almost completely Christian. Three Christian denominations are active and Baptist, Anglican, and Roman-Christian churches are scattered throughout the village. It is one of the few places in Myanmar where Christians are the majority. As a consequence, the regional folkloric worship and a famous legend that surround the mountain became mixed with Christianity, which makes it an attractive place for Christians to visit and worship, but also to other Karen and Burmese who are familiar with the legends.

After the KNU signed the previously mentioned ceasefire agreement with the national government in 2012, it wanted to stimulate the region's economy and sought to identify opportunities for economic growth in Kayin State. These opportunities were required to benefit the people and supposed to "help consolidate the ongoing peace process" ("Business Opportunities in Kayin State," 2013). PeaceNexus Foundation (PNF), a peacebuilding NGO, was approached by the KNU. In turn Vriens and Partners, a consultancy firm, was hired to map high potential areas for development in Kayin State. Thandaung Gyi was one of the areas defined as having a high potential for tourism development. In the assessment, Hanns-Seidel Foundation (HSF) was named as a potential partner. Together with the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF), HSF was approached to support the development of a tourism model for Thandaung Gyi and implement a pilot project "of community tourism in [a] post-conflict area" (*Conference report: Thandaunggyi community tourism development*, 2016, p. 3). Support for this process from MTF later shifted to the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI).

Following the signing of the ceasefire, a group of locals saw an opportunity for further development, as Thandaung Gyi had become a pilgrimage destination for Myanmar, and especially Karen, Christians. The group of people attended conferences and sought to find

support from the different governments and development organizations in Myanmar to make Thandaung Gyi more accessible, and to gain support and knowledge to further develop tourism in the region. They organized in the Thandaung Gyi Tourism Development Working Group (TTDWG), which organizes and supports local initiatives in tourism development and acts as facilitator between state and non-state actors, such as the KNU and the military.

With the ceasefire in place, and with official, local, and NGO support, tourism development in Thandaung Gyi started in earnest in 2015 and has thus far proven to be a success for the local community. Visitor numbers increase yearly, and more and more B&Bs, shops, and restaurants open along the main road. While there were only very limited places to eat in 2013, this is not a problem anymore in 2017 with over eight restaurants located on the main road (Long, 2013). Several bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) were built, guest houses were expanded, and after some struggles, licenses to house foreigners were granted in 2016. By 2018, twelve of such licenses were awarded (Haeusler, Than, & Kraas, 2019, p. 98). Although those foreign licenses are important for the future of tourism development, so far, most visitors are domestic religious tourists. It is estimated that Thandaung Gyi receives between 80,000 and 150,000 visitors who only come to the village for a day yearly. In the peak season between September and April, an estimated thirty to forty individuals per week stay overnight (Haeusler et al., 2019, p. 98).

1.3.3 Thandaung Gyi Tourism Development Working Group

Before moving on to a discussion of the research topic of this thesis, it is important to briefly focus on the Thandaung Gyi Tourism Development Working Group and its role in the development of tourism in the village. As previously noted, the TTDWG was established when a group of individuals sought support from the different governments and development organizations in Myanmar to make Thandaung Gyi more accessible. During the TTDWG's first official meeting in December of 2014, it was agreed that the working group would have a structure that consists of three parts:

[A]n overarching advisory board with KNU, CSOs and government as members; a community-level implementing body; and a supporting body comprising organizations from outside the community such as HSF, PeaceNexus and MTF (later replaced by the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute – MRTI). (Haeusler et al., 2019, p. 98)

In addition to the structure, it was agreed that the focus of the working group’s activities “would reflect community priorities, and that the activities would be implemented by community members” (Carr, 2016, p. 5). It is important to stress this last point especially with regards to the context of tourism development in Myanmar, as development was usually carried out by organizations closely aligned to the military government (Isaac, 2014).

During the meetings that followed the initial meeting in December 2014, numerous topics were discussed by the representatives present. Topics that were discussed included the “assessment visits to nearby tourist sites ... license approval process for bed and breakfast guesthouses, including overnight stays for foreigners ... hospitality and village guide training ... and establishment of a tourism information center” (Haeusler et al., 2019, p. 93). Following the discussions, the ideas were implemented with the help of (international) organizations.

In 2016, it was decided that the structure of the TTDWG had to become more structured and organized, in order to ensure that the group would be able to operate more independently from outside organizations. In order to achieve this goal, the working group was structured as follows:

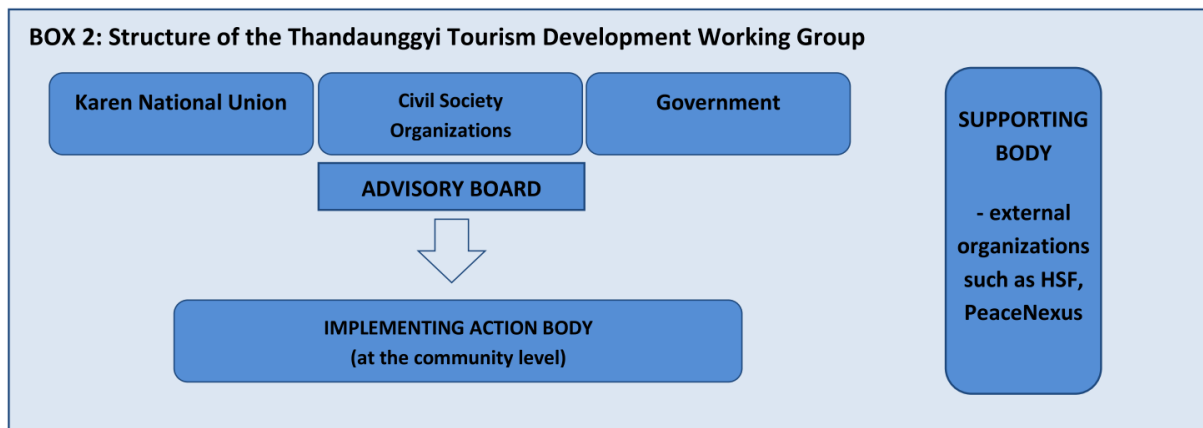


Figure 1.4 Structure of the Thandaung Gyi Tourism Development Working Group (Carr, 2016, p. 5)

At the community level, which aims to implement the policies designed by the government, the KNU and civil society organizations, the working group is headed by a chairperson and a secretary.

In addition to creating a sustainable structure for the working group, the members ratified a vision statement and objective. The TTDWG vision statement that was approved reads:

We aim to establish a community-based organization that promotes responsible tourism development in the Thanddaunggyi region, and acts as a role model, supporting locally owned tourism-related businesses, educating the community and helping to conserve natural and cultural resources. The organization aspires to provide a model approach to peace building and help to facilitate free movement in the Thanddaunggyi region.

(Schott, 2016, p. 8)

In addition to the vision statement, the TTDWG established the following eight objectives:

Objective 1	To provide a platform for information exchange for locally owned tourism-related businesses and development actors
Objective 2	To spread economic benefits among the local community
Objective 3	To educate and raise awareness of local communities about conserving natural resources
Objective 4	To provide skills development and capacity building in tourism and hospitality
Objective 5	To promote and provide guidance for sustainable principles (waste management, hygiene, monitoring and evaluation, etc.)
Objective 6	To establish role models for CBT in the region
Objective 7	To maintain Kayin Culture and revive traditional crafts and activities
Objective 8	To share knowledge and lessons-learned on community development in post-conflict areas in Kayin State

Table 1.1 Objectives of the TTDWG (*Conference report: Thandaunggyi community tourism development*, 2016, p. 9)

These objectives of the TTDWG are similar to other Community Based Tourism (CBT) projects. Although it is not a rigorously defined field, several general features of CBT processes can be identified. Following a review of academic and grey literature, Dodds, Ali, and Galaski (2018) determined that next to a “community-owned/managed” aspect, there are six key elements, for CBT success. These aspects read similar to the objectives of the TTDWG (p. 1549):

- (1) Participatory planning and capacity building – to strengthen community’s tourism management skills
- (2) Collaboration and partnerships facilitating links to market – to ensure financial viability
- (3) Local management/empowerment of community members
- (4) Establishment of environmental/community goals – to ensure outcomes are in alignment with community’s values
- (5) Assistance from enablers (government, funding institutions, and private sector) – to facilitate access to the formal economy
- (6) Focus on generating supplemental income for long-term community sustainability

Figure 1.5 Key Elements for CBT Success (Dodds et al., 2018, p. 1550)

It is notable that, in contrast to ‘regular’ CBT projects, the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi is in the hands of local private entrepreneurs. While these entrepreneurs have always been part of community where the development takes place, outside investors are not explicitly excluded from the process. Rather, the working group aims to bring stakeholders together and provide a forum for discussion and links to governments or supporting organizations. This approach ensures that potential problems with governance and ownership, subjects that are oftentimes problematic in CBT projects, are tackled head-on (Dodds et al., 2018; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

1.4 Research topic

1.4.1 Background

This study was developed during a research internship at the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute. MRTI is an organization that envisions Myanmar to be simultaneously safe for visitors and the people employed in the tourism industry. The institute works on this goal and their mission statement is “to support responsible tourism development in Myanmar through knowledge sharing, training, and research” (“MRTI website,”). MRTI tries to support the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi by advising the TTDWG in order for it to operate independently. The institute also provides trainings to support tourism development on themes such as hygiene and the English language. It also tries to support product development such as making maps and working with the local population to open new attractions in and around

Thandaung Gyi. The organization has no constant representation in the village, rather, it works with the TTDWG in an advisory role, and intermittently arranges for training in tourism skills.

This research project is developed in response to MRTI's involvement in the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. As MRTI has an advisory role, their contact in Thandaung Gyi is limited to working group members. This means that MRTI does not have any information with regards to how people who are not involved in the working group view the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. It was thus unclear to them whether the tourism development project was supported by the local community or not. MRTI was interested in an analysis of the project and the notions held about it by a wider group of stakeholders, including NGO workers, working group members, and non-working group members. Specifically, MRTI wanted to find out how these individuals perceive the development of tourism in the village, the working group, and the outsiders coming to their village. By placing these questions into the broader context of tourism development as a peacebuilding and development tool, the subject for this thesis was born.

1.4.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions

This thesis sets out to understand the process of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi as a development and peacebuilding tool. The experience of local and external stakeholders for this process is very important, because of the lack of formal written resources. By delving into the experiences, views, ideas, and concerns of local stakeholders and the active NGOs with regards to the development of tourism, a comprehensive picture is painted of the processes that constitute the tourism development in Thandaung Gyi. To better understand, and to place the implementation of the development help received by Thandaung Gyi in a broader development perspective, a review of relevant literature is needed to compare and contrast the empirical findings of Thandaung Gyi to develop a theory applicable to the situation in Thandaung Gyi.

In order to conduct the field research and to explore the intricacies of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi, the following research question was formulated:

How can the tourism development in Thandaung Gyi be understood, considering its context of economic development and the region's ongoing peace process?

To focus my research question and to help answering it, several sub-questions are formulated in order to make the scope of the research feasible. The sub-questions are:

1. *How do stakeholders experience and view the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi?*
 - a. What is the impact of recent efforts in tourism on the town of Thandaung Gyi?
 - b. What are the challenges for the tourism development of Thandaung Gyi?
2. *Does the development of tourism have any tangible benefits on the peace process?*

There will be an elaboration on how these research goals and questions will be met and answered in Chapter 3.

1.5 Relevance

1.5.1 Societal relevance

By shedding light on the tourism development in Thandaung Gyi from the perspective of people tied to the project, lessons are potentially learned for the future of this project or for other projects in the region. MRTI and the other stakeholders in Thandaung Gyi might be directly helped by the results of this thesis by exploring how stakeholders as well as inhabitants of Thandaung Gyi view the development of tourism in the village. The information will help stakeholders to be aware of possible problems and formulate future steps with regards to entrepreneurship, economic development, and the improvement of the standard of living through local initiatives. This broader picture is also seen by PNF, one of the prime movers of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi noted:

This project offers one model of how to maintain a license to operate from both sides, and hence reach communities that would otherwise not receive assistance. On top of that,

it shows one way peacebuilding and development actors can bring government and [armed group] representatives together to build the foundations of a working relationship. (Carr, 2016)

The knowledge won from research done in Thandaung Gyi might be beneficial for the creation of a sustainable tourism development strategy for villages in Myanmar and subsequently possibly for the country itself.

Standing apart from the direct connection to Thandaung Gyi and the more practical societal relevance, is that this is a work on society in Myanmar, a subject that has not received a lot of (academic) attention yet. By exploring and writing on Myanmar, the country will be exposed to more scrutiny, from inside and out. Now Myanmar wants to be a part of international society after decades of being isolated from the world, it needs this scrutiny to shed its old feathers and look at itself critically what it wants to become.

1.5.2 Academic relevance

Focusing on the expanding tourism industry in Myanmar as an emerging market, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic debate on tourism generally and as tourism as a tool for local welfare creation specifically. It does so by analyzing the situation of Thandaung Gyi, a small mountain town kept secluded by civil strife and a militarist dictatorship, where recently a ceasefire agreement was signed and is now being opened up to the world, in the context of broader debates of development and peacebuilding and their relationship with tourism.

This study is an addition to the empirical work already being performed on tourism as a development tool, tourism in post conflict tourism, and tourism and peace, such as the works by Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner. It has as its goals to describe the inner workings of tourism in Thandaung Gyi and sets out to generate a theory on how this works there. Those results may be interpreted or contrasted with regards to the larger field of tourism and developmental studies. This thesis gets its ideas from Thandaung Gyi, from the field, and as far as that is possible has

tried to be free of judgement and to not enter the field with precise ideas of what tourism as development has to entail. The knowledge gained in Thandaung Gyi will be presented to the world through a lens shaped by its researcher and may contribute to a wider discussion of tourism development as a tool for development. It is such that the academic relevance might lay close to its societal relevance. As this is not a very theoretical or abstract work, it will not try to push theoretical or paradigmatic boundaries.

1.6 Thesis Structure

Concluding this introduction is an outline of the thesis structure. Chapter 2 of this thesis provides an overview of the current debates on tourism, tourism and peace, and sustainable tourism development and presents the theoretical background for this thesis. Chapter 3 presents and explains the choice for the chosen research methodology and ties it to the research objective. In addition, the chapter outlines the methodological considerations in gathering and analyzing the data for this research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis and core categories that emerged from the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of this research by answering the research questions. In addition, this chapter offers recommendations for further research as well limitations on the research.

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the current debates on tourism, tourism and peace, and sustainable tourism development and presents the theoretical background for this thesis. This literature review is based on the knowledge gained during the master program Cultural Geography and Tourism and can be read as a formalized reflection on my own knowledge and the academic background that I bring to the field. It is also a way to sensitize the concepts that are relevant to my research question and to show how these concepts were constructed. This is not to say that this chapter provides a complete view of my predispositions or assumptions about the world. This thesis is written with the assumption that knowledge is created through interaction with others, be it through the papers we read or the people we talk to.

This chapter consists of four parts. The first part discusses academic definitions of tourism and the tourist. The second part of this chapter delves into the academic field of tourism. Thirdly, tourism as a tool for peace is discussed. Finally, this chapter discusses the links between tourism and development thinking, specifically with regards to the context of this research: tourism development in a relatively poor country with a history of civil war.

2.2 Tourism

Throughout the past decades, several international organizations, scholars, and the industry itself have been concerned with defining the term *tourism*. According to the United Nations, *tourism* is “a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence pleasure being the usual motivation” (*International recommendations for tourism statistics*, 2008, p. 1). The academic debate on what tourism is focusses mostly on the peoples’ motivations to travel. Often, tourism itself is thus not

defined, but the motivation of the travelers is what makes something tourism and the participants in this activity the tourists.

MacCannell (1973) argues that an authentic experience is the motivation for travel. MacCannell writes that we, as individuals, find ourselves alienated from ourselves and our society. By traveling elsewhere, MacCannell states, it is possible to find oneself, as “reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere; in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer simpler lifestyles” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 3). Individuals find themselves again through a true experience.

It must be noted that MacCannell’s work does not seem to account for domestic tourism. To the contrary, he writes: “sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is lived, even to get in touch with the natives” (MacCannell, 1973, p. 4). This indicates that his view of tourism is limited to people who travel from a (Western) modernist to a non-modernist society or country. Consequently, his concept does not consider people travelling within a country to be tourists.

MacCannell invited a lot of criticism with his reasoning for tourism motivations. According to Cohen (1979), the experiences and motivations of tourists cannot be structurally explained in broad terms and disagrees with MacCannell in his reasoning. Consequently, he reasons that the ‘for pleasure’ reasoning for travel, while often adequate, is at best superficial (p. 179). Rather than considering (the search for) authenticity to be a driving factor in tourist’s motivations to travel in general, the focus pivots to the tourist as an individual (Cohen, 1979). With his critique on MacCannell, Cohen lays the foundations of the establishment of tourist typologies that became a dominant force for research in the late 20th century (Wickens, 2002, p. 835).

Other scholars have sought to find the intrinsic motivations of tourists to travel. Beard and Ragheb (1983) argue that motives for travel have four components: intellectual, social, competence-mastery and stimulus-avoidance (p. 225). Ryan (2002) argues that these motives

“have shown stability over time” not only because respondents can easily identify with them (p. 27). Rather, the motives also align with the escapist narrative described through the years of leisure research and are in line with research by humanistic psychologists on intrinsic motivation (Ryan, 2002). The escapist motive is also described by Wickens (2002) who, basing herself on Cohen’s research, identifies three forces that motivate tourists to travel. The motivations she identifies are “the wish to escape from everyday life, the pursuit of pleasure, and ontological security” (p. 835). It can thus be noted that although pleasure plays a role in most definitions on tourism, it is superficial to name it as its only signifier.

The debate on tourism in academia has long been focused on the Western world. Fu, Cai, and Lehto (2016) argue that “tourists in other cultures may see the world quite differently; their social and cultural needs may be different, and their perspectives on vacation-taking may be unconventional” (p. 150). For example, North America and Europe are focused on the self and the individual. Most of the research into motivations reflects this by highlighting the search for self, authenticity, and the escape from everyday life. Ryan (2002) describes it as the “humanistic existentialist school of philosophy if not psychology, where the emphasis is placed upon human existence, the nature of humanity, a wish to retain human individuality in an age of growing technological complexities” (p. 31).

In contrast to North America and Europe, individuality is much less important in other parts of the world. In India, metaphysical and spiritual thinking is the leading paradigm, while Confucianism is one of the main influences on the ways of thinking in East Asian countries. There is an implication that within those paradigms social interactions are deemed more important than the self (Yum, 1988, p. 376). The tourism industry for domestic Asian travelers might thus look considerably different from what Westerners think that tourism is.

In her work, Singh (2009) argues that in many Asian cultures, tourism and tourists do not necessarily have any negative connotations, as it has in the West (Cohen, 1974; Gillespie, 2007;

McCabe, 2005), but that it is seen as an activity carried out by Westerners. She argues that Asians oftentimes do not consider themselves to be tourists when they travel in their own country, because they move outside the system designed for foreign travelers (Singh, 2009, p. 2). Asian domestic travelers also seek to avoid finding themselves in ‘tourist’ locations in their own country and describe the trips they take as journeys or pilgrimages (p. 11). As the Asian domestic travelers do not consider themselves to be tourists, and their governments are hesitant to call them that as well, it is often difficult to find and use quantitative data on domestic travelers in Asian countries, as these types of travelers are often not counted as tourists (Singh, 2009).

Singh’s argument that many people in Asia consider tourism to be something for Westerners, ties in with the notions of *othering* or *otherness*. In his work, Fred Dervin (2011) argues that individuals and communities can assert and confirm their own identity by differentiating themselves from *the other*. Jean-François Staszak (2009) underlines this notion and describes othering or otherness as follows:

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“US,” the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them,” “Other”) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. (p. 2)

By stressing the differences between the Self and the Other, the Self of an individual or a community is established and conserved.

Asian domestic travelers generally undertake activities that might not be usually regarded as touristic, according to Western ideas, while travelling. The main reason for many visitors to come to Thandaung Gyi, for example, is to pray. While praying might not be a ‘typical’ tourist activity, the travel to sacred sites has been an integrated aspect of many religions and a reason to travel throughout history. As humans have created or designated spiritual sights, which were often located at a distance, they had to travel in order to get there (Raj, Griffin, & Blackwell,

2015, p. 104). There is an argument to be made that a pilgrimage is an escape from everyday life. However, it might not always be pleasurable. These sacred visits or pilgrimages have also been characterized by an in-person *journey* during which the participant pursues authenticity and the divine (Vukonić, 1996, p. 80). While some religions require their followers to make these visits or journeys, their overall popularity has grown significantly over the past decades (Timothy & Olsen, 2006, p. 1). With this in mind, this thesis regards all visitors, domestic as well as foreign, to Thandaung Gyi that make use of (a part) of the tourism infrastructure as tourists. Whether they are there to pray, visit family, or escape the heat of the plains; they are all adding to the development of tourism and its infrastructure in Thandaung Gyi.

2.3 Tourism as a Research Field

Since both the travel and tourism industry continued to expand over the past century, academics started to research the phenomenon of tourism and tourism as a field of research has become a much-discussed topic in academia. Academic journals have been filled with papers on tourism, which oftentimes argue that the field is too multidisciplinary, consists of too many theories, is too adjacent to another field, is not a field at all, is writing too much from a tourism industry perspective, or that it is not practically applicable (Echtner & Jamal, 1997; Tribe, 1997). Seeking to bring order into this theoretical jungle, several meta-studies on tourism theory have been conducted (Aramberri, 2010; Stergiou & Airey, 2018). Most of these studies agree that few theories have been developed in the field of tourism research. Consequently, this thesis focusses on works deemed relevant for the research at hand.

According to Mowforth and Munt (2016), tourism is a very multi-faceted field in practice. It is therefore only logical that there are a multitude of academic approaches towards it and that it therefore ‘lacks’ its own solid theoretical basis (p. 3). Stergiou and Airey (2018) echo this sentiment in their study amongst tourist academics and practitioners on the role of tourism theory. However, these scholars argue, it is not problematic for tourism research to be an

amalgamation of different theories. Because the scope of tourism research is so broad, it is conceivable that it is a multidisciplinary field. This thesis accepts the broadness of the field and incorporates aspects, such as tourism and peace and sustainable tourism development.

2.4 Research on Tourism and Peace

Although tourism research, and especially tourism and peace research, are in its infancy in an academic sense, the connection between tourism and peace was already established as a political talking point in the early 20th century. Tourism and peace have been linked to each other, based on ideological ideas that understanding and knowledge fosters peace. After the first World War, ‘Travel for Peace’ was a slogan of the British Travel and Holidays Association (Honey, 2008, p. 1). After the Second World War, cultural exchange programs between European nations were again set up to promote a lasting peace. And this connection between tourism and peace was not limited to the interbellum or post-war periods. The UN, in its 1967 International Tourism Year, had as its slogan ‘Tourism: Passport to Peace’ (“UNWTO history,” 2019). Tourism and peace kept being intertwined on the world stage throughout the second half of the twentieth century. A caveat exists however, as the editors of the handbook, Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner (2014a), editors of the *International Handbook on Tourism and Peace*, acknowledge: the scientific foundations for tourism in the name of peace are scant at best.

Even though the academic foundations for a positive relationship between tourism and peace are seemingly based on idealism instead of theory, a substantial number of influential articles linking the development of tourism to peace have been written. Louis D’Amore organized a conference in 1989 with the title: ‘Tourism – A Vital Force for Peace’. This was one of the more notable scholarly events in the academic path towards linking tourism and peace. In a discussion of the conference by Jafari (1989) it is made explicit that “peace is an essential precondition for tourism” (p. 441). In his conclusion Jafari notes: “the value of tourism as a force for peace” (p. 442). Jafari comes to these seemingly contradictory claims of tourism being

dependent on peace and contributing to peace at the same time, because of the definitions used to describe peace. D'Amore (1988) specifically indicates tourism contributing to positive peace (p. 270). Positive peace is heavily tied to (global) social justice, where negative peace only entails the absence of violence.

After thirty-odd years of papers on tourism and peace, the paradigm in academic discourse shifted. Whereas in the 1980s, there still was a jubilant feeling about the link between tourism and peace that took hold over the academic debate, this turned to skepticism and rejection in the 1990s and beyond (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Litvin (1998) problematized the relationship between tourism and peace and noted that most researchers were getting the “basic research axiom that distinguishes between co-relational and causal relationships” wrong (p. 63). In other words, tourism is the benefactor of peace and not the other way around (Litvin, 1998; Pratt & Liu, 2016). In the way that tourism can lead to peace, it can also exacerbate violence and war. Noel (2006) writes that tourism can be counterproductive to peace as well. Case in point Myanmar: the foreign currency received from tourism flowed directly to the military junta to further oppress the country's population, and much of the tourism infrastructure was built by forced labor (Isaac, 2014).

Although there are numerous authors that still adhere to a more traditional interpretation that tourism contributes to peace (Becken & Carmignani, 2016), the concept has evolved. While the World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) keeps faithful to the 1980s mantra that tourism is a “vital force for world peace,” it is now often questioned how tourism can contribute to peace instead of proclaiming that it does (Farmaki, 2017; Isaac, 2014; Wohlmuther & Wintersteiner, 2014a). To reflect this changing attitude and address the skepticism about tourism as an “instrument of peace,” Wohlmuther and Wintersteiner (2014b) prefer to talk about “peace-sensitive tourism” (p. 20). Tourism can thus be seen as part of a broader post-conflict reconstruction approach, and in that sense falls under a broader and current development

paradigm where solutions are sought on a case by case basis (Alluri, 2009; Anson, 1999; Novelli, Morgan, & Nibigira, 2012). With this broader definition of peace in mind, this paper assumes that it is feasible that tourism can contribute to peace, if it is part of a wider development strategy.

2.5 Sustainable Tourism Development

After the Second World War, modernization theory based on a liberal world view dominated the development paradigm. At the basis of modernization theory, which itself is based on Keynesian foundations, is economic growth (Redclift, 2005). A development strategy based on economic growth will ensure that a society moves from a ‘traditional’ way of living to a society of mass consumption (Rostow, 1960; Sharpley, 2000). In this post-war system, development thinking was marked by a state-led approach. According to Rapley (2007) strong states could intervene in the economy and “embody collective will” (p. 2). Under this liberalist modernization paradigm, poor countries developed their economies, but not enough to improve the living standards of the world’s poorest inhabitants (Rapley, 2007).

In response to the failings of modernization theory a two-fold response was developed. On the one hand, dependency theory argues that because of the economic might of rich countries, poor countries can only function in a dependent role on those rich countries (Sharpley, 2000). On the other hand, the shift in political thinking in the developed world towards a more neoclassical economic thinking also led away from state-led approaches towards development. It is argued that development thinking is greatly influenced by political thinking (Pieterse, 2010). Mowforth and Munt (2016) expand that “the politicization of development should not be underestimated, from counteracting communism to the concerns about the links between poverty, terrorism and First World security” (p. 35). It is in that light that we can see the approach to development shifting away from being ‘state led’ in the 1980s, after rich countries themselves began shifting towards neo-classical economics. In a neoclassical economic world, the state is assumed to hinder development by the free market. It holds development back instead

of focusing where it is really needed and viable. This paradigm shift occurred around the tail end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. From then, development help could be applied in a different way than to buy allegiance to a certain world view.

After the World Commission on Environment and Development released the 1987 Brundtland Report, which first presented the idea of sustainable development and outlined how it can be attained, development became, at least rhetorically, sustainable. Since then, the term sustainable development has come to mean many things to many people and is characterized by some as an oxymoron. It is therefore important to look at the discourse surrounding the term (Mowforth & Munt, 2016; Redclift, 2005). Mowforth and Munt (2016) describe the complexities of the term *sustainable development* as the “need to face up to the global ills of ecological meltdown and compounding poverty, but with a business-as-usual mentality to global economic growth” (p. 38). It is in this context that Sharpley (2000), tries to find theoretical foundations for sustainable tourism within the paradigm of sustainable development. He perceives the inherent ambiguity of the term *sustainability* to be a benefit and sees it as a potential mediator between the technocratic neo-liberal growth-focused politics of the developed world and the complete non-exploitation of natural resources (p. 3).

Sharpley (2000) argues that there are problems with the term sustainable tourism development, because of the often “‘tourism-centric’ orientation of most sustainable tourism development policies [...] potential for achieving the objectives of sustainable development through tourism” is undermined (p. 11). The problem is that the focus of government and tourism developers are often focused on big tourism projects, and not as much where the proceeds end up, or what the actual environmental consequences of the development are. It is often a growth first, sustainability later kind of affair. In other words, it leads to short term thinking and strategies, as opposed to long term investments, which results in economic growth taking precedence over sustainability. It can be argued that this is caused by “the rationale for

tourism as a means of development remains firmly embedded in economic growth-induced modernisation theory” (Sharpley, 2000, p. 14). The sustainability name is thus used, but it can be critically questioned if this term applies. Sustainable to whom? As the distribution of revenue often has a sustainability problem, in combination with the ecological pressure associated with tourism development, Sharpley (2000) comes to the somewhat depressing conclusion that ‘true’ sustainable tourism development is unachievable” (p. 14).

Oxymoronic or not, thinking on sustainable (tourism) development goes hand in hand with another shift in development thinking in the 1990s that is focused more on the needs and rights of the local population. The 1990s saw the introduction of the Human Poverty Index, and the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Development became focused on the alleviation of poverty. According to Kakwani and Pernia (2000), pro-poor growth differs from the development models before in its focus. They describe that older models starting in the 1950s were essentially based on trickle-down economics that in the best cases raised income and kept inequality equal, but in other cases also led to worsening inequality and thus increasing poverty. Kakwani and Pernia (2000) argue that pro-poor growth asks for an approach that favors the growth of the poor over the growth of the rich and that methods should include broader policy goals such as healthcare and education to take away barriers of growth to the poor.

Tourism is seen as a way to favor growth for the poor and to alleviate poverty in developing countries. In a lot of formerly third world countries, tourism is one of the only sectors of growth and the main influx of foreign currency. Tourism is a very labor-intensive industry which can be developed in areas that have few options for growth otherwise, and since the 1990s, tourism is seen as a good way alleviate poverty (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000). Scheyvens (2007) argues it is necessary to reflect critically on the “origins and approaches associated with pro-poor tourism” (p. 233). Pro-poor tourism has introduced itself to the development / aid paradigm in the 1990s and is a concept that is actively used in aid programs.

This thesis accepts the notion that idea that sustainable tourism can help to stimulate the economy and alleviate poverty in developing countries. This idea is reflected in the tourism development project in Thandaung Gyi. The project was specifically designed “to bring peace dividends and greater development to conflict-affected regions in Kayin State” (Carr, 2016, p. 4). The aim was to stimulate the economy through tourism in order to create economic stability for the local population.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The first work on grounded theory, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, was published by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1968. Since then, the authors have parted epistemological ways and progressed the ideas of grounded theory in their own manner. Other scholars, such as Kathy Charmaz, have also added to the methodical discussion with their own ideas about grounded theory and updated it to fit a modern constructivist research paradigm. In this chapter, the choice for the chosen research methodology is presented, explained, and tied to the research objective of this thesis.

3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods

A qualitative research approach is most suited to understand the process of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi. In addition to focusing merely on numbers, rather than on the experiences and views of stakeholders, a quantitative approach would limit the research of this study to falsify or corroborate a hypothesis based on existing literature or theory alone. In addition, it would risk losing sight of the unique situation of Thandaung Gyi specifically, or tourism development in Myanmar generally. Consequently, this thesis does not set out to formulate and test a hypothesis based off on literature elsewhere. Rather, by using a qualitative approach, it is possible to explore and include different aspects of the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi.

3.3 Qualitative Research Approaches

While there is a multitude of qualitative approaches that exist within their respective associated fields, Creswell's *Qualitative Research Design* (2007) serves as a guide to navigate the field of qualitative research approaches and to select the most appropriate one to answer this thesis' research goals. Based on professional experience, data gathering differences, and the availability

of literature on the methodology, Creswell selects five perspectives representing different approaches and fields of inquiry: Narrative Research, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. The following briefly outlines what these fields encompasses:

Narrative Research:	Used when the <i>(life) story or experience</i> of a small number of people, maybe one or two) is the focus of the research (p. 54).
Phenomenology:	Describes a common experience of a phenomenon. “the meaning of people’s experience toward a phenomenon” (p. 95) and “the essence of the lived experience” (p. 58). The phenomenon to be studied is decided before the beginning of the research process.
Grounded Theory:	This research approach is meant to “move beyond description and to <i>generate or discover a theory</i> ” (p. 62-63). In order to generate this theory, any number or kind of sources can be considered by the researcher, if the data is continuously compared with each other and the theory arises from the data.
Ethnography:	An approach that is used to research the behavior of a specifically defined cultural group, where this group has shared patterns of language or behavior. (p. 68-69)
Case Study:	According to Creswell, a case study “explore[s] a bounded system (a case) [...] over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving <i>multiple sources of information</i> ” (p. 73).

Table 3.1 Qualitative Research Methods (Creswell, 2007)

3.3.2 Chosen Research Approach

As previously noted, this thesis sets out to understand the process of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi as a development and peacebuilding tool. Based on this research goal, as well as the brief discussion of the different fields of inquiry and conversations with my thesis supervisor,

it was decided that a grounded theory approach is the preferred approach for this thesis. This approach enables a researcher to ask questions during the research project about a specific topic, in this case the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. If the researcher has more questions about the answers he or she received, it is possible to continue asking questions. The entire process leads to answers as well as possibilities for further research.

As I had yet to familiarize myself with Thandaung Gyi when I first arrived, it was important that the research approach allowed for the project to become clear, while engaging with it first-hand. Grounded theory allows the research process to become part of the relevant research for the study. In addition, a grounded theory approach allows the researcher to explore the experiences, views, ideas, as well as any number or kind of written sources. As the data is continuously compared and the theory arises from the data, it provides a comprehensive picture of how tourism development in Thandaung Gyi can be understood. A more detailed discussion of grounded theory follows in the subsequent section.

3.4 Grounded Theory

3.4.1 Not a Theory, a Method

Glaser and Strauss' *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) was a response to the dominant sociological methods of that time as well as the positivist paradigm that were mostly focused on the verification of theory. The *Discovery of Grounded Theory* is post-positivist in its leanings, which implies that there is still an 'objective truth' to be discovered (Charmaz, 2014). The work moves away from a purely quantitative perspective and its authors argue that this objective truth can also be found with qualitative methods. Glaser and Strauss therefore speak of the ***Discovery of Grounded Theory***.

In grounded theory, the constant comparison between the data is essential, as it serves as a purpose to generate theory. Charmaz (2014) describes this process, which was defined by Glaser and Strauss, as follows: "[g]rounded theory begins with inductive data, involves iterative

strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods, and keeps you interactive and involved with your data and emerging analysis” (p. 1). Charmaz thus argues that grounded theory is a method and that the word *theory* in its name comes from the product the method produces. Willig (2013) agrees with this notion and stresses that the grounded theory method “provides us with guidelines on how to identify categories, how to make links between categories and how to establish relationships between them” (p. 70). This process delivers an end-product which is considered a theory that “provides us with an explanatory framework with which to understand the phenomenon under investigation (p. 70).

3.4.2 Validation

While grounded theory concerns itself with the generation of theory, it is important to note that it does not strictly ask for the verification of this theory. In their work, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that, in order to find truth with qualitative methods, a focus on the verification of theory results in a “de-emphasis on the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to research” (p. 2). Consequently, while grounded theory aims to verify, it does *not* do this “to the point where verification becomes so paramount as to curb generation” (p. 28). The verification in grounded theory can therefore be seen as a part of the process of generating theory, but it is not a goal of its own.

The generation of grounded theory aims to be more valuable than the testing of hypotheses or logico-deductive theory. The latter of which is generated but based on “*a priori* assumption and a touch of common sense,” which are not necessarily fit for the area of study at hand (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 29). As previously noted, grounded theory seeks to do this by generating theory through systematic and constant comparative analysis and verification of the obtained data. This means that a single indicator in the data can become a data point for a conceptual category. Consequently, the information derived from the data is not always true

beyond doubt or is necessarily a fact. However, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that the theoretical abstraction from the datapoint can still be a meaningful way to tell a story in the data.

3.4.3 Critique

Although Glaser and Strauss sought to move away from a positivist paradigm with their *Discovery*, they are only partly successful. Pidgeon and Henwood (2004) note:

The Discovery of Grounded Theory [...] rests upon a positivist empiricist philosophy: specifically, adoption of an inductive process of ‘discovering’ theory from data. This implies that a set of social or psychological relationships and processes exist relatively unproblematically and objectively in the world, can be reflected in appropriate qualitative data, and hence are there to be ‘captured’ by any sufficiently skilled grounded theory researcher who should happen to pass by. (p. 629)

What makes it similar to a positivist undertaking is the understanding of Glaser and Strauss that empirical data is without theory, that theory can be generated from this unproblematic data, and that those results can be generalized (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017). The ‘emergence’ of theory out of data is also problematized by Pidgeon and Henwood (2004), who argue that the whole grounding of grounded theory gets doubtful. To deal with this criticism, Strauss has taken up with Corbin to write a revised version with new thinking of grounded theory. The latest version of their work *Basics of Qualitative Research* has mostly left the positivist leanings of earlier works on the wayside and finds its inspiration in social constructivism (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Charmaz is one of the people that pushed for a constructivist turn in grounded theory. Her book *Constructing Grounded Theory* highlights the differences between the more ‘orthodox’ manner of thinking in grounded theory, still professed by Glaser, and her constructivist views on it.

While scholars may disagree on the context, implementation, and consequences of grounded theory, there are several steps that are common in a grounded theory research project. The first step in a grounded theory research project is the collection of data, for example

conducting interviews or questionnaires. This process is highly explorative, as the researcher goes back and forth between the collected data and his or her analysis. Following this step, there is, according to Pidgeon and Henwood (2004), a “core set of analytical categories” that a grounded theory research project must follow (p. 629). These categories are:

1.	developing open-coding schemes to capture the detail, variation and complexity of observations and other material obtained;
2.	sampling data and cases on theoretical grounds, and as analysis progresses, to extend the emergent theory (‘theoretical sampling’);
3.	constantly comparing data instances, cases and categories for conceptual similarities and differences (the method of ‘constant comparison’);
4.	writing theoretical memoranda to explore emerging concepts and links to existing theory;
5.	continuing to make comparisons and use of theoretical sampling until no new or further relevant insights are being reached (‘saturation’);
6.	engaging in more focused coding of selected core categories;
7.	tactics to force analysis from descriptive to more theoretical levels (such as writing definitions of core categories and building conceptual models).

Table 3.2 Seven common analytic steps in grounded theory (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004, p. 632)

3.5 Research Design

3.5.1 Literature Review

According to orthodox ideas about grounded theory, it is wrong to write a literature review before the analysis of the collected data. When following Glaser and Strauss *Discovery of Grounded Theory* to the letter, or read Glaser’s later work on grounded theory, it is advocated that the literature review is delayed until after the analysis as to not cloud the researcher’s mind

with concepts or ideas from other data (Dunne, 2011). This way, it is believed that a grounded theory analysis is done with no preconceived ideas.

A flurry of critique has befallen this early thinking about grounded theory. First, constructivists point out that no researcher is a *true* tabula rasa when doing research. Every individual brings their own preconceived ideas, expertise, or knowledge from previous research to the table. In his later work with Corbin, Strauss acknowledges this point (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The second main area of critique on delaying the literature review until after the analysis is that a whole field of knowledge is potentially ignored until after the analysis. There is also a possible risk by not diving into literature beforehand to rehash the same concepts over and over again. Thornberg (2012) thus likes to speak of an informed grounded theory, where literature is used not as dogma, but to inform possible areas of enquiry or to spark creativity (p.7).

Agreeing with the critique that due to a delayed literature review certain fields of knowledge would potentially be ignored; the decision was made to write the literature review of this thesis before collecting the data. The literature review was written in part as part of my preparation before my departure to Myanmar as well as during my stay there.

3.5.2 Data Collection and Processing

During a research internship at the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute, field work was carried out in Thandaung Gyi. As there is not a lot data available on the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi, other means had to be explored to gather the necessary information. Based on the previous discussion of research methods and designs, questionnaires or interviews were possible options.

Soon after starting the exploration into suitable data collection methods, it became clear that using questionnaires in Thandaung Gyi is complicated by several factors. Questionnaires have been used to explore the perceptions and impact of tourism, as they enable the researcher to contact a large number of stakeholders at once (Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009). However,

questionnaires are rigid in form and miss the option to gain more information on potentially interesting avenues, which is possible with interviews. Another potential issue might be that the people of Thandaung Gyi would not respond to a sent questionnaire. This worry is related to the fact that the village has only recently been opened to foreign visitors. Therefore, the local population does not necessarily trust non-locals and is therefore not necessarily willing to fill out a questionnaire. While it is possible to establish personal connections over time or have a trusted source in the village distribute the questionnaires, interviews offer a better opportunity to establish a personal relationship as well as trust. The interviewees' time and trust might be partially repaid by taking the time to ask them questions in person. As questionnaires were ruled out as a qualitative research method, the interviews became the primary method of collecting data for this thesis.

Interviews are essentially directed conversations (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Whenever the researcher deems it necessary, he or she can ask supplementary questions to gain additional insights and information. Charmaz (2008) states that "intensive interviewing permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience and, thus, is a useful method for interpretive inquiry (p. 25). Although that is reasonable, it is important to not forget that an interview is not a reflection of a reality that existed before the interview took place (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001; Silverman, 2000). The story that is told in an interview "provide accounts from particular points of view that serve specific purposes" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 27).

While there are numerous types of interviews, the use of which depends on the goal of the interviewer, structured and semi-structured interviews are often used in human geography. During structured interviews, the same set of pre-formulated questions is asked. The order of the asked questions does not vary, and the wording is the same during every interview. In contrast, semi-structured interviews are oftentimes prepared, yet, the questions that are asked are not necessarily the same during each interview, as the interviewer has the opportunity to alter the

course of the interview depending on the answers he or she receives. This means that the interviewer gets to adjust their questions on the person, situation and context and thus to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to express their opinions and perceptions.

It was decided that semi-structured interviews would ensure the flexibility the collection of data for this research project required. An interview guide with open-ended questions (see: *Appendix A*) was created. This interview guide helped organize a brief introduction of myself, thoughts about what to ask and how to ask it, as well as words of thanks at the end of the interview.

3.5.3 Sampling and Saturation

Once it was clear that semi-structured interviews would be the most suitable method to gather information in Thandaung Gyi, the questions arose how many interviews had to be conducted. Within classic grounded theory, there is no set sample size, nor are limits set on the number of participants or data sources. The idea is to sample until theoretical saturation, or completeness, is reached. This then results in an ideational sample as opposed to a representative sample (Glaser, 1998). Theoretical saturation is reached when no new categories emerge from the data.

The collection of the data for this research was complicated by a mixture of resource constraints, namely time and the availability of a translator. As a consequence, a choice had to be made between on the one hand, a ‘prescribed’ more textbook case of data gathering and theoretical saturation as described above, but with a limited number of people interviewed. The choice that was made was to take some leeway with the prescribed methods and focus on the gathering data by talking to more individuals, but without the chance to go back into the field during the analysis in order to reach theoretical saturation. There was not enough time to transcribe, code, and categorize between interviews. As a consequence, the method of constant comparison had to be adjusted, and the solutions of theoretical saturation and theoretical sampling are different from the traditional sense. With those caveats in mind, this study is still a

grounded theory study in terms of the description of the common traits of grounded theory described by Kenwood and Pigeon.

In her work, Willig (2013) describes the feasibility of doing a grounded theory study on a limited data set. To gain more perspective on working with grounded theory and a fixed data set, a quick look is given to some sources that deal with grounded theory on secondary data, because that is also an inherently limited dataset. Some caveats of a grounded theory on secondary data exist, although it was possible to move back and forth between the transcripts and to theoretically sample for emerging ideas and concepts, it was not possible to sample new participants, events or other sources of data to inform the emerging categories and their properties. Therefore, in secondary data analysis, theory development is limited to the data at hand, as concepts and questions that arise cannot be pursued in subsequent interviews (Andrews, Higgins, Andrews, & Lalor, 2012).

3.5.4 Interviews

Throughout the fieldwork in Thandaung Gyi, it became evident that interviewing people was complicated by several reasons. The people of Thandaung Gyi do not necessarily trust people from outside the village, specially foreigners. Even though the region around Thandaung Gyi relatively peaceful now, several decades of civil war and little rule of law have made people somewhat hesitant to speak to strangers. It was therefore important to build trust with the interviewees. However, despite spending multiple weeks in the village and being introduced, it is important to note that some people were still hesitant to speak their mind.

In total, 14 interviews were conducted for the purpose of this research project; this number includes both locals as well as external experts in the field of tourism development. Charmaz (2014) mentions in her work that “12 interviews [are] enough to generate themes, but not respect” (p. 107). More interviewees allow for gaining or coming closer to theoretical

saturation with a fixed data set. All interviews were recorded, and notes were taken during the interview process.

The local interview candidates, who were not associated with the NGOs, were selected through snowball selection. This means that, in order to gain a broader understanding of the region of Thandaung Gyi and the tourism project that was undertaken there, personnel of the development organization who were involved from the beginning were selected as interviewees, and they were asked who of the local population to speak with. This resulted in two English speaking contacts in the village, which resulted in a third individual involved in tourism development as well. Two of these people were also interviewed and thus form part of the data. These people provided recommendations of other people to interview. The main source of information and data used for this thesis thus derives from interviews with individuals who are in some way connected to the development of tourism in the village, or at least know people that are active in that area. Several interviews are not directly connected to the project and were included in order to get a sense of what other community members think and experience.

As I did not speak the local language and English is not widely spoken, I had to depend on a translator². It is important to stress that, as translators or interpreters carry their own cultural background and viewpoints with them, the translation process is never entirely transparent. Words might mean something different to the interpreter than they do to the interviewee or interviewer, and it is also possible that certain concepts and subtleties which might indicate certain feelings do not translate well or are be lost in translation. However, richer data can be gathered when hearing from people whose English skills are not necessarily good enough to have a sustained conversation with. This method was chosen to include these individuals who otherwise would not have been heard.

² A reflection on the use of the translator for this research project is included in the section *Reflections and limitations of the research* of the final chapter of this thesis.

3.5.5 Transcription Process

Scholarly opinions differ on whether interviews should be recorded and/or transcribed before the beginning of the coding process. Glaser (2013) argues against recording and transcription of interviews, because that gives “too much coverage and [it makes it] too slow to get to analysis because of waiting for type written form” (par. 45). He prefers to code from field notes or during the interview itself. However, relying on just codes and field notes acquired during interview has certain detrimental side-effects, such as the injection of preconceived ideas. In addition Charmaz (2014), argues, the coding of full transcripts will give a fuller and more detailed understanding of the data (p. 136). Transcriptions also give the opportunity to go back to the raw data itself multiple times.

As transcriptions provide the opportunity to revisit the raw data, it was decided to transcribe all the interviews verbatim and subsequently code them in a grounded theory style. As most of the interviews are conducted via a translator, using a deeper transcription style where intonation is marked was deemed irrelevant. It was decided to use the gerund style, or the coding for activities, which mitigates coding people as certain types (Charmaz, 2014). This style also prevents conceptualization about the themes of the text, before arriving at the analytical phase of the research, and instead focusses the attention on the text itself (p. 117).

3.5.6 Coding

Coding data is a common step within qualitative research methods. Saldaña (2012) describes 32 coding methods in his *Coding Methods for Qualitative Researchers*. It is a way to make sense of and structure data. Some studies use theory to create a codebook in which the codes are explained in detail beforehand. In grounded theory methods, the codes ‘emerge’ from the data, and are used “to capture the detail, variation and complexity of observations and other material obtained” (p. 629). What is seen in the data is defined in a code, but even though this step can be taken for granted, Charmaz (2014) reminds us that “we choose the words that constitute our

codes” (p. 114). In this step the hand of the coder is thus always seen, but the same will be true of the selection process to create a codebook based on theory.

A grounded theory researcher might go to the field to interview interviewees and subsequently return to their desk to code and compare their interviews before further theorizing. Subsequently the researcher could return to the field and continue the data gathering phase by interviewing a different person, or maybe some of the same persons as before but with different or more specific question to progress the data gathering. This lets a researcher do some initial coding on a limited amount of data to give a direction to the research, and to focus codes later. It also gives a dynamic set of data where the true depths of some themes can be explored. To compensate for having a limited data set, all the interviews in this research project are both coded in an initial coding style, and in a focused coding style to ensure no loss of potential categories from the data.

All interviews that were conducted for this research project were coded incident by incident in a gerund style with the help of RQDA³, a library that was written to conduct qualitative data analysis in R. The choice to use RQDA was made because of its open source and free software license in comparison to more restrictive licenses applied to software packages such as NVivo and ATLAS.ti. RQDA saves its data in a standard SQLite database which can be accessed independently from the program.

The first interviews were done in a line-by-line coding fashion. This method might be preferable to other methods of coding, because it does rely less on the creativity of the coder to see an incident or theme. However, as the density and amount of data made progress extremely slow, it was decided that incident-by-incident coding captured enough detail from the data. Consequently, the rest of the interviews were coded in this fashion and the gerund style of coding was used consistently through all interviews. This gerund style of coding differs from a

³ For more information see: <https://rqda.r-forge.r-project.org/>

theme-based coding style. The code is a description of what is happening in the text, and not as in a theme-based coding style. Charmaz argues that by “starting from the words and actions of your respondents, [it] preserves the fluidity of their experience” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 49). By describing the actions in the interviews, rather than imposing a theme on what is being said, an attempt is made to stay close to the meaning of the interviewees.

During the coding process of the interviews for this research project, 268 codes were identified (see: *Appendix B*). These codes were extremely diverse and ranged from ‘acknowledging WG leadership struggles’, to ‘worrying about outside investment.’ Once all interviews were coded, categories and sub-categories emerged. This work was partly done in RQDA and partially on paper. The categories shed light on how tourism development in Thandaung Gyi can be understood, considering the village’s context of economic and economic development and the region’s ongoing peace process. The categories and their subcategories are discussed in the next chapter.

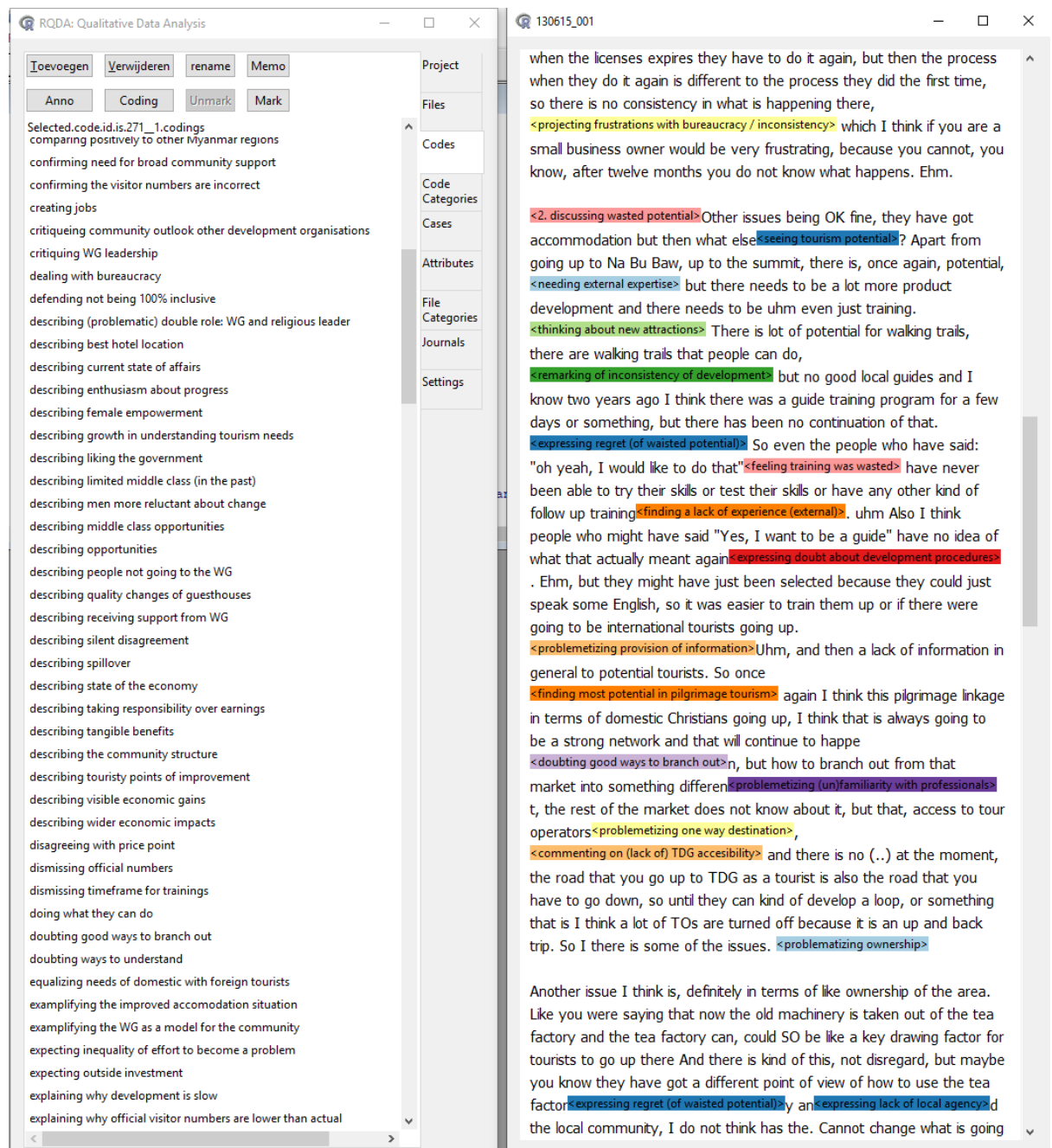


Figure 3.1 Screenshot of a part of the initial coding process

3.5.7 Memo's

Throughout the research process, and specifically during the coding process, memos were written in order to record the researcher's ideas and notions. According to Glaser (2013),

“[m]emos are a very important GT procedure that is fundamental to the GT generation analysis of grounded theory”. Memos aim to ensure that the researcher does not forget his or her ideas on

a variety of subjects or theories. As a consequence, Glaser argues that memos can and should be written whenever a thought or notion occurs to the researcher and can be written in any way he or she sees fit.

As any type of memo is, according to Glaser, beneficial to the research project, the memos for this thesis varied from being jotted down on a piece of paper to being typed down in the 'memo-option' of the used data analysis program. The style in which the memos were written largely depended on the time of day, as well as on the location on which the researcher found himself when certain thoughts and ideas popped into his head. The memos ensured that thoughts were organized and eventually supported the crystallization of the categories that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

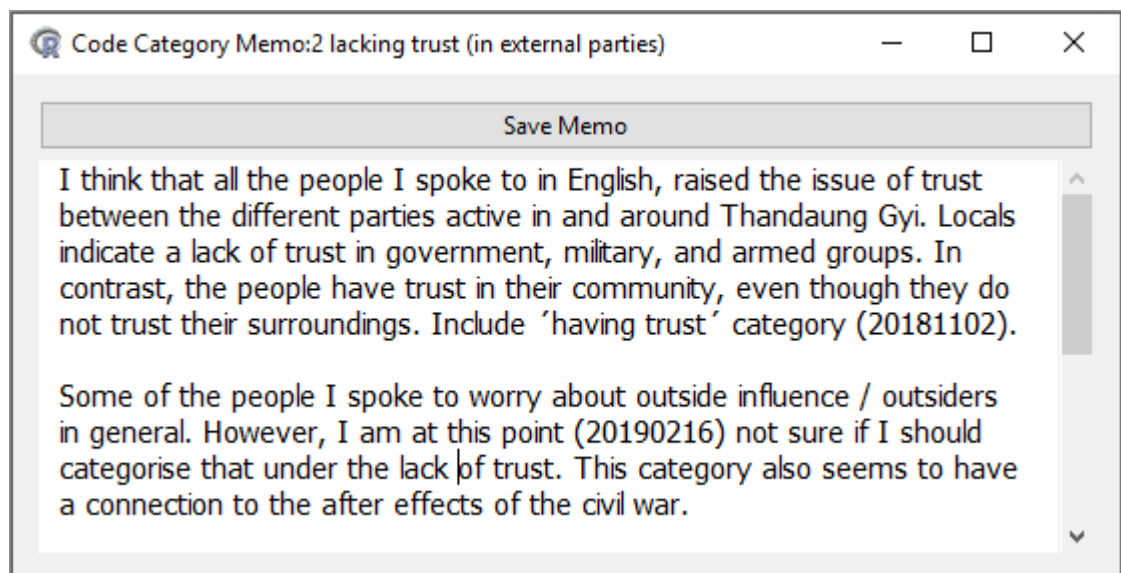


Figure 3.2 Example of brief memos.

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis and the core categories that emerged from the data are presented in this chapter. Five categories and eleven sub-categories emerged from the coded data, which shed light onto how tourism development in Thandaung Gyi can be understood, considering the village's context of economic development and the region's ongoing peace process. The identified categories and their respective (sub-)categories are:

- Conflict
 - Security situation
 - Outsiders
 - Self-reliance / Trust in self
- Visible and invisible changes
 - Increasing visitor numbers
 - Growing prosperity
 - Changing attitudes
- Challenges
 - Funding and bureaucracy
 - Brain drain
 - Conflict
- Potential and opportunities
- Thandaung Gyi Development Working Group
 - Communication
 - Leadership

It is important to note that all listed categories are not isolated. Rather, they influence another in complex ways. Despite this interconnectedness, categories are analyzed as separate entities for the sake of cohesiveness.

4.2 Conflict

4.2.1 Security situation

Throughout the interviews it emerged that the village of Thandaung Gyi has seen tourism development at varying times during the past decades. In the 1990s, after the federal government of Myanmar established military control of the region, it wanted to build hotels in the village in order for it to become a tourism destination. Soon, however, it became clear that poor security conditions in the region prevented this development to continue. An interviewee noted that the conflict between the national government and the KNU did not only prevent the development of the hotels, but the region's development in general. The interviewee noted:

R: Earlier time the other people wanted peaceful, but (Inc.) the administration, the government, the armed forces they stay (Inc.) so the people they became the hostage and they could not get any peaceful.

It can thus be noted that the interviewee believes that the local population and the region's development were held hostage by the conflict in the region.

Due to the signing of the 2012 ceasefire agreement between the national government and the KNU, the life of the local population has changed profoundly. An interviewee described this change as follows:

R: Earlier time they [the people] feel not secure. They cannot move freely, they cannot live in the city they can trust no one, they have nothing to rely on. And the latter is much better, they can move freely, and they live in the city. They can do the trading and they do not have to worry about anything or anyone.

As the security situation in the region has become more stable, the life of the people of Thandaung Gyi has changed. The people feel more secure and are able to move and trade more freely than before the ceasefire agreement was signed.

As previously discussed, the initiative to start the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi was taken, as parties in the region wanted to stimulate its economy and sought to identify opportunities for economic growth in Kayin State. An interviewee described the importance of this step as follows: “The peace process and the development of tourism can be considered to be at the basis of a democracy.” Thus, the peace process and the development of tourism are very important for the village and its people.

While the peace process is thus important for the development of tourism, opinions differ on the level of influence that the development of tourism has on the peace process. Opinions differ from an interviewee believing that tourism will not affect the peace process to another who stressed that the development of peace helps the development of tourism and that the development of tourism stimulates peace. Another interviewee stressed that the development of peace helps the development of tourism and that the development of tourism stimulates peace. Yet another opinion was that tourism development in Thandaung Gyi has contributed to peace, as the conflicting parties have come together in order to promote the region as a tourism destination. This notion is underlined by another interviewee who stated:

R: Now they working together on the same road. Now there is a KNU gate and later, you go a little further and you can see a government gate. They are working on the same places. No problem.

Yet another interviewee contributed the influence of tourism development on the peace process to another aspect:

R: If the tourism develop, more visitor come, and also the organization they focus on this region so can make a lot of money so they can make it better. If it became better, it will be more secure. We can go more places, and also the armed force, the armed force themselves will feel shame and they will try and find a better way

to make their own money. So they have also their own farm. So they make that and they focus on their farm.

Although this interviewee believes that the armed forces in the region will be inspired to look for legit sources of revenue as development continues, not everybody agrees that it will go smoothly. According to several individuals, the KNU and the military, have the same structure as a protection racket. People pay the KNU with money or goods, such as chickens or vegetables, or by providing personnel. In return, the KNU promises to protect the community. As the influence of development spreads, the KNU might be afraid they will become redundant as people start to rely more on being part of a broader (international) economy.

4.2.2 The Other

Although the effects of civil war seem almost invisible in Thandaung Gyi, its aftermath is still tangible. In addition to people being afraid of the armed forces that are still stationed in the region, the conflict taught locals to be suspicious of ‘other’ people. An interviewee described the situation during the conflict as follows:

R: Because earlier time, not even ten years. (Inc.) We cannot even sit here and chat here like that. Because a lot of people, a lot of eyes are watching us, and if you are talking with a stranger, the armed force says: “Hey, who are you, what are you talking about?” So all the people have suspect.

This sentiment was echoed by another interviewee who noted: “In earlier times I could not talk to you because there might be someone who is watching you”. This illustrates that the people were careful and watchful, as they could never be certain whether those around them could be trusted.

This apprehensiveness is reflected in the fact that most interviewed local English speakers noted their skepticism of outside influence on Thandaung Gyi with regards to tourism development as well as development of other business ventures. A source of the concern is that

some people believe that the benefits of tourism development will not go to the people of Thandaung Gyi, but to outsiders. An interviewee noted: “I think there will be more benefit for the external people, the outside people, the external investors, because the local people will go with the constant. So yeah, of course I worried and think that, I do not think that it will be good in the future”. In order to ensure that the local community benefits from the development of tourism, the same interviewee noted, it would be good if outsiders have to share what their ambitions are. The development should not be imposed from the outside, as it would not be supported by the locals, who would consequently reject it.

4.2.3 Self-reliance / Trust in self

While the conflict still negatively influences the people of Thandaung Gyi, the interviews showed that it has ensured that they trust in God and their ability to create a better future for themselves. An interviewee noted that:

R: I do not expect any help from the NGO or the state government, because since from the beginning we try by ourselves, we are on our own. So it is already developed and it will be more developed by our action.

The notion that the community’s own actions will lead to a more prosperous future, as well as its self-reliance was stressed by several interviewees. One interviewee described this as follows:

R: Whatever happens in our community, we have each other. We do not need to send out invitation. We are having each other.

This belief in the community’s abilities and perseverance also extends to the development of tourism in the village despite the conflict between the KNU and the national government’s military. It was stressed during the interviews that the community will not relinquish because it has its own mission forward and the patience to overcome any obstacle. An interviewee from a development agency described this perseverance as follows:

R: And I think that I quite liked that at the beginning, because it gives the community room for negotiation because they are confident. They have seen so much shit and they know they have, how they have been treated. And that is not what a lot of communities have is that self-confidence.

As the strength of the community was repeatedly stressed during the interviews, it can be noted that this aspect could play an important factor for the future success of tourism development of Thandaung Gyi.

4.3 Visible and invisible change

4.3.1 Increasing Visitor Numbers

Because of the previously mentioned ceasefire agreement, visitor numbers to Thandaung Gyi have started to increase since 2012. Since 2016, foreign visitors are allowed to stay at B&B's in Thandaung Gyi. As the B&B's are required to register the tourists, it is possible to track the increase of visitors to the village. In 2016, 89 foreigners were counted. At the end of May 2017, the count was already at 110 (NPT CBT Conference). One of the interviewees noted that 10.000 foreign visitors traveled to Thandaung Gyi in 2016 and 2017. The individual stated: "From 2016 the foreign visitor they also came here, and as far as I know it is about ten thousand." Although, according to the data of actual visitors, this is an overestimation, it points towards the experience/perception of the inhabitants regarding the changes the town is going through. The increase of visitors is not only noted, it is considered to be profound.

While the number of foreign visitors has increased, the number of domestic visitors has increased even more. In 2016, 672 overnight domestic visitors were counted. The first five months of 2017 saw 1684 arrivals. Most visitors travel to Thandaung Gyi during the first five months of the year, as this time is regarded as the hot season (or summer) in Myanmar. During the months July and August, virtually no visitors come to Thandaung Gyi, except for a lost

foreign researcher, because of the extremely low visibility and general wetness that characterizes the rainy season.

It has been suggested that there is a snowball effect with regards to the growing number of visitors; as Thandaung Gyi has become more known, more domestic people, as well as foreigners, have come to visit it. The village was for example featured in the 2017 edition of Lonely Planet's travel guide of Myanmar. In addition, as Facebook has become an important messaging tool in Myanmar, the people of Thandaung Gyi seek to promote their village and businesses online. An interviewee noted:

R: Even from the village they can sell the products from here, so it is much better. And also they give the information. They try to put it on the website but they have not try yet. (Inc.) So they make a Facebook page. (Inc.) [...] So this year a lot of visitor they found it on the Facebook and they come and visit because of Facebook.

While marketing Thandaung Gyi through the internet to the outside world does not yet come natural to many members of the community, it has made the village more known to outsiders.

It was noted that the people of Thandaung Gyi consider tourism to be something Western. An interviewee noted that the people of Thandaung Gyi “think that tourism is for the white people.” This indicates that domestic visitors are not considered to be tourists. Rather, they are viewed as visitors or pilgrims, who visit Thandaung Gyi to pray.

4.3.2 Growing prosperity

During the interviews, it became clear that tourism development has led to more jobs and growing prosperity in Thandaung Gyi. An individual noted that the visitors ensure that there are jobs, where there were none before. She stated: “Other time in the summer some people did not have a job and now they do have a job, now they have a lot of job opportunities.” Tied to these

jobs is more income for the local population, which ensures a more financially stable future. An interviewee expressed her excitement about the increased income by noting: “I love the money.”

As people from the village earned more money, several street level changes have taken place: houses have been fixed or decorated and small restaurants or shops have opened along the main road. This change was described by an interviewee as follows: “Earlier time there is only one shop. They sell the local product like coffee, and the tea, and the pickled tea leaf, and green tea and like that. First there was only one and nowadays there is a lot of.” Even if people do not own a shop but are, for example, small scale farmers, the influx of (foreign) visitors to town provides a direct link to potential customers.

In addition to shops and restaurants being opened to facilitate arriving visitors, B&Bs have opened as well. It is essential to stress importance of the opening of the B&Bs in Thandaung Gyi, as the town is the only location in Myanmar where, as a pilot project, small-scale hotels have been granted licenses to cater to foreigners. Before 2013, there were no places in Thandaung Gyi that were able to accommodate visitors overnight, except those that were tied to the several churches that are located in the region. Since 2014, about forty rooms where (foreign) tourists can stay have been realized.

It was noted that women and men responded differently to the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. While women oftentimes seemed more happy or eager to participate in the tourism business, men do not seem to care much about the extra income. An interviewee noted:

R: Especially the men they do not very interested about income, because they think: just go to garden, they clean up, and they bring what they can to the garden, they bring back but for the market the wife have to send and sell it to the markets.

During the interviews it was hypothesized that may be because women hold the household purse and the extra income is nice on top of the traditional (low) income of farming.

4.3.3 Changing attitudes

While some interviewees indicated that some villagers are not able to let go of their suspicions and fears towards outsiders, many people in Thandaung Gyi seemingly have become more *open-minded*⁴ and there is hope that this trend will continue, as the village community's connection and exposure to the 'other' continues to grow. This change was described by an interviewee, who noted:

R: [The people] will become more open minded, so they can have an idea how to neglect the armed forces. So they will not need to be afraid anymore and have more courage.

This interviewee thus expressed the hope that the visitors and tourists will teach the people of Thandaung Gyi to be courageous.

It was noted that in order for development of the village through tourism to be effective, it needs to be broadly supported by Thandaung Gyi's community. This means that (a part of) the community needs to be open to changing the way of life they have known until that point. Interviewees noted that the willingness to change is stimulated by several aspects. The aspects that were mentioned during the interviews are discussed below.

Interviewees noted that the income that can be generated through tourism development has influenced peoples' willingness to participate in the development process. As the people of Thandaung Gyi see the positive effect that the influx of money has on others in the village, they want to benefit as well. At first, for example, one of the interviewees was not open to the idea of starting a business, however, after tourists had arrived and subsequently people saw that their neighbors benefitted financially, they decided to open a shop to sell things 'everyone can afford.'

⁴ The term *open-mindedness* is used in this thesis as it was used by the translator in several interviews to describe the change in opinion towards (foreign) visitors and tourists.

With regards to the changing attitude within the community, the *open-mindedness* of the community is an aspect that was oftentimes mentioned during the interviews. In this case, the term *open-mindedness* indicates a person's willingness to accept (tourism) development as well as him or her being open to 'other' people visiting Thandaung Gyi. An interviewee described the process as follows: "When more tourist come, the local people they become open minded. They learn different culture, different mind, different thinking style." Another interviewee underlined this sentiment and noted that: "The more people meet, they get more different idea and they will become more open minded. They can gain knowledge. They can find more knowledge and find a better solution, better idea." By learning about other cultures and 'different' things, people are inspired and learn to let go of suspicions and fears towards outsiders.

As the people of Thandaung Gyi learn more about other cultures and thus become more *open-minded*, they become inspired. An interviewee noted of tourists:

R: They also inspire them [the people of Thandaung Gyi] to learn the language. So they saw the people speaking a different language, especially English language, and according to our education they can read and they can write, but for the speaking they cannot yet. So they just inspire themselves. They want to speak so they inspire, get motivated.

Once people are able to communicate in English, participating in the development of tourism is easier for them. Young people who speak English, for example, are able to work as tourist guide; while they are working, they are able to improve their language skills.

For tourism development it is important that tourists feel safe, however, it is also important that the locals feel safe. One resident hopes that tourism contributes to this in a remarkable way:

R: *[The people] will become more open minded, so they can have an idea how to neglect the armed forces. So they will not need to be afraid anymore and have more courage.*

This could be an indication that certain individuals hope that tourists bring additional intangible positive benefits, such as trust, to the community of Thandaung Gyi.

4.4 Challenges

Throughout the conducted interviews, it became clear that there are several issues that limit the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. While the development is faced is numerous problems, such as the insufficient quality of the infrastructure to and in Thandaung Gyi, this section discusses the issues repeatedly raised during the interviews.

4.4.1 Funding and bureaucracy

There are limited funds available for the development of facilities that would attract more tourists to Thandaung Gyi. Two interviewees indicated that the government did not allocate enough funds to the local municipality for the tourism sector to thrive. One interviewee used the struggle his father has gone through to find funds for building a church in Thandaung Gyi as an example:

R: *Earlier times, my father tried to build the church by himself. He go around the country and he find the donor and they built this. And after it became famous also another people donate. They do not receive any government support, and even the road we crossed are built by the people and the donor, not by the government.*

People thus do not believe that their community will receive necessary funds from the government. Rather, they seek financial means elsewhere.

Even though the national government perceives tourism as an important part of their growth strategy, it is incredibly difficult to enter the tourism market as a small player. Officially,

in order to qualify for a license, a hotel must have at least ten rooms, and the host must sleep in a separate building. An additional license has to be acquired in order for foreigners to be allowed to stay at the hotel. These rules and regulations made it hard for the people of Thandaung Gyi to enter the tourism business. An interviewee described the process of gaining a license to open a B&B in Thandaung Gyi: “there is a lot of difficulties and also to get permission from the government. I try, I cannot even remember how many times I go to the government office and come back.” While exceptions were made for the village of Thandaung Gyi, and B&Bs were allowed to open, it is probable that this only occurred because of the perseverance of the community as a whole, combined with lobbying from NGOs. In other parts of Myanmar, small-scale hotels or B&Bs oftentimes operate illegally.

4.4.2 Brain drain

Several interviewees noted that existing knowledge regarding the development of tourism was lost throughout the years due to the phenomenon of what is often coined ‘Brain Drain’, which refers to the departure of educated or professional people. According to the interviewees, the knowledge is lost due to two reasons. Firstly, although trainings on tourism have been given since the 2000s, most people have not cultivated their knowledge. Secondly, it is hard to keep qualified personnel in Thandaung Gyi, as it is easy for them to find a job outside the village. An interviewee described this by noting: “Nowaday, more and more students move away. They are more open minded, and they want improve their life more.” This sentiment was echoed during additional conversations with high school students in their senior year.

The fact that qualified personnel leaves Thandaung Gyi to find work elsewhere might be tied to a sentiment that was expressed during the interviews: local opportunities are very limited. One of the interviewees indicated that he had to look for new personnel almost every year because the people he hired would leave for better opportunities in Yangon or elsewhere. This outlook became very clear during one of the interviews, when the dialogue focused on a business

owner's daughter leaving the village in order to go to university. The following response was given, when the individual was asked if they believed their daughter would return to Thandaung Gyi: "I do not want her to come back. It is better if she would farther, even foreign, and that would be much better. As long as she is doing for her good, to get a good life, it is fine." This indicates that, despite the positive influence of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi, the opportunities for young people are considered to be too limited and seeking opportunities elsewhere is preferred and even stimulated by family members.

4.4.3 Conflict

Although the ceasefire agreement is considered to have brought more stability to the region, several interviewees stressed that this agreement is not the equivalent of permanent peace; a situation that would be preferred. One individual noted: "There is actually a contract, but it is just a ceasefire. Ceasefire does not mean it is peaceful." Another individual noted that it would be better to "have peace forever" and that while he is pretty old, he would like to see "peace in his lifetime."

According interviewees, there are several aspects that are needed in order for the peace process between the conflicting parties to succeed. The first requirement is trust, as "the community needs to believe that the village's future will be peaceful." Secondly, it was noted that in order to reach a permanent peace agreement, interviewees believe that it is important to involve the local population. An interviewee stated: "both sides the need to listen what the people actually want. They need to listen. The people are wise. They also have to care about the people that have the different mission and the different ambition."

The land in and around Thandaung Gyi is controlled by different factions, such as the government and the KNU, which complicates the development of tourism as well as development in general. An example is a cell tower to provide phone and internet services to the

village, which has long been delayed because of disagreements between the parties where it should be located. An interviewee described this as follows:

R: [The government] try to help with the development. But with the mobile tower, they want to build, but on the mountain we just visited (Inc.) other place where KNU allows to build, but the forest ministry (Inc.) do not allow. But in the city they want to build the mobile tower, but the KNU do not allow. And also for electricity, the government they are trying to support a generator, so they can get electricity, but the local armed forces, especially KNU, they reject it.

Thus, while the establishment of phone and internet services would contribute to the development of Thandaung Gyi and to making the village more connected to the ‘outside world’, parties prevent such development if they are not aligned to their own interests.

In addition to projects being complicated because the involved parties have different or conflicting interests, movement around Thandaung Gyi is still restricted by the KNU and the military. This means that, while the surrounding area of Thandaung Gyi lends itself to trekking, there have been problems getting approval from the different parties to create or enable access to existing facilities, such as the hot springs and waterfalls near the village.⁵ In addition, the restriction of movement is also one of the reasons that Thandaung Gyi is a one-way-destination while it is geographically on the way to another popular (but remote) destination. Travel restrictions, and the state of the road, almost double the travel time to Loikaw.

4.5 Potential and opportunities

While there are numerous challenges with regards to the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi, locals as well as NGO workers stressed that the community has benefited from the development and underlined the village’s potential as a tourism destination. In order for the

⁵ When the interviews were conducted, the hot springs and waterfalls which are near Thandaung Gyi were not accessible. A year earlier, tourists were able to visit these sights.

potential to be fulfilled, however, changes need to take place. In addition to practical changes, such as improving the quality of the existing tourism infrastructure and the creation of more attractions, interviewees noted that the knowledge of the community concerning what tourism is could be improved upon.

While tourism development has taken place in Thandaung Gyi, the community's knowledge about what tourism is, as well what this implies is limited. An interviewee described this challenge as follows:

R: [There is] a general lack of tourism knowledge, so I think when an area is being chosen to develop new tourism there. And I think the vast majority of people in the region do not understand what that means [...] or the exposure they have had to tourism has been ehm [...] from Yangon going up to spend a weekend, or a church group going up [...] there is just not much knowledge of what tourism actually means.

Therefore, the knowledge that NGOs and external experts have brought to the region has been an important aspect for the development to take place in Thandaung Gyi.

In order to improve the quality of services offered to tourists in Thandaung Gyi, NGOs have provided trainings on subject such as hygiene, hospitality, and the English language to the local population in the past. It was noted during an interview, however, that the individual did not remember much of the trainings and that the timing of the trainings was not opportune. The interviewee noted:

R: If the training they could come in the summertime it would be much better, because the students they have the free time so they can go and learn so that will be useful in that, but now they come here just in the school time so all the people who can go are just grandpa or grandma so it is just a waste.

It was thus indicated that the young people had not had the opportunity to take part in the training sessions that had been provided.

An interviewee noted that trainings, however small, can be very effective as the community will take the opportunity to learn from others. However, she believes that the training should come from within the community and not only from outsiders. This would enable the people to learn from each other.

In addition to the training and increase of knowledge concerning tourism aspect, interviewees also noted practical aspects that could improve the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. Currently, interviewees noted, many tourists travel to Thandaung Gyi for the day and make their way back to Taungoo at night. During the interviews, this was linked to the quality of the restaurants, guesthouses, and B&Bs in Thandaung Gyi. The belief was expressed that if the quality of the diners and accommodations were better, more tourists would stay in the village overnight.

While work still needs to be done in order to make Thandaung Gyi even more attractive to visitors, interviewees considered several sights and attractions to be suitable for future development. The attractions and sights mentioned are tea and coffee fields, hiking routes, camping, resort, hot springs, and the waterfalls. Some of these sights, as an interviewee noted, are already visited by tourists: “The visitor they come and they ask: ‘Where can we visit.’ So sometime I take the visitor to (Inc.), the hot spring, and the waterfall.” The attractions could be improved upon: “Apart from going up to Na Bu Baw, up to the summit, there is, once again, potential, but there needs to be a lot more product development and there needs to be uhm even just training” an interviewee noted. In addition to the previously mentioned possible attractions, the village’s pilgrimage potential was stressed, due to its location at the foot of Na Bu Waw, the prayer mountain.

4.6 Thandaung Gyi Tourism Development Working Group

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that the TTDWG plays an important role with regards to the development of tourism as well as development in general in Thandaung Gyi. An individual from a development organization described the group as follows:

R: This is the basics of democracy here, forming a stakeholder group, being a stakeholder group, approaching communities, yeah, an important one here is to realize there is no mayors in these places. There is no elected council. And what we want to do is support more inclusivity, and you got to see it like that in any democratic western country you would have a council normally, yes, and there is also if it is a tourist area you have a tourist group, you have a kind of like what the TDG tourist group is now. You have this as well with economic stakeholders come together. And they influence, they lobby, and they support the council [...]

Now we need to see that we bring more democracy within this group, but that we also hope that this group influences more and more the community structure with regards to democratic elements.

The interviewee thus expressed the hope that the challenges faced by the TTDWG would result in the group identifying their political needs and wants and becoming more democratic.

Despite the positive influences of the TTDWG, it became clear during conversations with my internship supervisor that the NGOs involved in the development of Thandaung Gyi consider the pace of the implementation of practical changes, such as those mentioned in the previous section, to be slow. This slow pace is a point of contention between the NGOs and the TTDWG. Several interviewees commented on aspects that could be improved for development to go faster and smoother in the future.

4.6.1 Communication

One of the aspects that could be improved upon in order to increase the speed of development is the communication between the TTDWG and its stakeholders. While there are bimonthly meetings organized between NGOs and the TTDWG, which are open to all members of the working group, some local tourism actors note that these meetings are not well advertised. The actors note that they require information about when and where the meetings of the working group take place, as well as when and where trainings are given by NGOs. On a question if the communication from the working group was adequate, an interviewee answered:

R: Yeah, I went to get information from the organization, now they said: they just informed them a few hours before. So they do not have preparation time, and also they have their own business, so they can give the time. She says that if they call a training or something, let's say for food, even she do not frame, because she can find someone who is really interested, who had a real passion for those project, but now they do not have any preparation. For themselves, and also not to find another.

Usually, meetings of the TTDWG are announced only a few days (ca. 3) in advance. While some members do not find this tight schedule to be an issue, one interviewee described that they found out about a meeting while they were in a neighboring town and had to hurry back to attend. It was speculated that some people have stopped attending TTDWG activities and meetings due to the communication problems.

In addition to the communication with the people who are already involved, the communication with the people in the village could be improved upon, as it became clear that the TTDWG is not known to all people involved in tourism development in Thandaung Gyi. One of the village's restaurant owners had no idea the TTDWG existed. The individual knew the persons running it but had never heard of an organization for the development of tourism in

Thandaung Gyi. It should be noted that this individual was the only interviewee not familiar with the working group, however, it is still salient that they missed the connection with a business owner. In a similar vein, it appeared that one interviewee was confused about the role of the working group, noting it would be beneficial if they provided financial support.

4.6.2 Leadership

A second aspect that is seen to limit the development of Thandaung Gyi is discrepancy between the group's figureheads. As previously noted, the local leadership of the TTDWG consists of a chairperson and a secretary. While one of the leaders is very self-aware of his position in the working group and tries to limit his involvement in businesses, the secretary is perceived to be too busy with other opportunities. The secretary indicates that he finds it difficult to weigh his own professional duties with the duties of the working group.

At the time the interviews were conducted, some members of the working group were discussing a challenge to the leadership of the TTDWG. It has to be noted that as of medio 2019, leadership of the working group has changed, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to research how and why this came about.

Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The main research question this thesis seeks to answer is: *How can the tourism development in Thandaung Gyi be understood, considering its context of economic development and the region's ongoing peace process?* To answer this question, first the thesis will be recapitalized, after that the sub-questions will be answered to arrive at the conclusion of this chapter by answering the main research question

5.2 Findings

5.2.1 How do stakeholders experience and view the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi?

Throughout the research process it became clear that the majority of the individuals that were interviewed for this thesis believe that the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi has brought positive changes to the town. This section focuses on the experiences of the stakeholders and discusses the impact of recent efforts in tourism on the town of Thandaung Gyi.

The development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi is inseparably tied to the signing of the ceasefire in 2012. Since the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the security conditions have been more stable in the region. Interviewees who live in Thandaung Gyi considered this change to be very positive, as they are now able to move freely and safely throughout the region.

An important aspect of this positive experience is that most of the development is driven by the local community. Locals have been able to open shops, restaurants, and B&Bs, where foreign as well as domestic tourists are able to spend the night. Consequently, the people of Thandaung Gyi have earned more money, which ensures a more financially stable future and thus positive associations with the visitors and the development of tourism.

It can thus be noted that the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi has been able to alleviate poverty in the region. It can therefore be seen as being part of a bigger movement to push peace dividends to an impoverished and secluded region. As previously noted, tourism is one of the only sectors of growth and the main influx of foreign currency in a lot of formerly third world countries. As it is a labor-intensive industry, it can be developed successfully in areas that have few options for growth otherwise, such as Thandaung Gyi.

While contact with tourists has made many locals more open-minded towards outsiders, decades of conflict in the region have ensured that the fear and suspicion of outsiders, the ‘other’, is deeply engrained in a part of the village’s population. People find it hard to trust outsiders, as they have learned through the conflict that the ‘other’ is dangerous and not to be trusted. This is view of the dangerous ‘other’ in contrast to the people of Thandaung Gyi, the ‘self’, who are seen as being trustworthy and reliable. This engrained perception of the outsiders vs. the people of Thandaung Gyi explains why some of the village’s inhabitants appear to be hesitant to welcome tourists into their community.

In addition to establishing the ‘other’ vs. the ‘self’ with regards to outsiders and people of Thandaung Gyi, another form of othering takes place with regards to who is considered to be a tourist. During an interview, it was noted that there are sentiments that tourism is seen as something Western or for white people. This statement illustrates the notion, put forward by Shalini Singh, that, while tourism does not necessarily have any negative connotations, it is perceived as an activity carried out by Westerners. Asian domestic travelers consider themselves to be travelers rather than tourists. As this notion is echoed during the interviews, it can be noted that domestic visitors are differentiated from Western tourists. Consequently, the Asian traveler, the ‘self’, is distinguished from the Western tourist, the ‘other’. It is important to note that in this case, the *Self* is not only limited to the people of Thandaung Gyi but extended to Asian travelers in general.

Throughout the research process it became clear that the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi is complicated by several factors. While this section focuses on the challenges, it is important to note that, numerous opportunities for the development of tourism were identified as well. Interviewees strongly believed that if improvements would be made with regards to the quality of the accommodations, restaurants, and activities in Thandaung Gyi, more tourists will visit the village.

During the interviews it became evident that tourism development in Thandaung Gyi faces several challenges. Firstly, there is limited funding available for the development of tourism in the village. Secondly, the bureaucratic process as well as rules and regulations complicate the establishment of small businesses in a town like Thandaung Gyi. Thirdly, the people of Thandaung Gyi are very much aware that the ceasefire between the conflicting parties in the region does not mean that there is a lasting peace agreement.

Another challenge that was named throughout the interviews as well as during additional conversations with high school students in their senior year, is that many young people, especially when they are qualified, do not stay in Thandaung Gyi. As opportunities in Thandaung Gyi are considered to be limited, parents encourage their children to leave the village in order to find a more prosperous life elsewhere. As the younger generation leaves Thandaung Gyi, the development of the town and its tourism infrastructure is left to the older generations.

While the ceasefire has brought many positive changes to Thandaung Gyi, it became clear during the interviews that the existence of this ceasefire agreement does not equal permanent peace in the region. People express that they wish for permanent peace in the region and thus imply that they experience the lack thereof. As there is no permanent peace, parties prioritize their own agenda over the development of the region. Due to the parties' conflicting interests, it is easy to imagine that it is hard for the people of Thandaung Gyi, as well as for the TTDWG or NGOs to develop a coherent plan for the future.

5.2.2 Does the development of tourism have any tangible benefits on the peace process?

Throughout the research process for this thesis it became clear that there is absolutely no consensus among the interviewees with regards to the question if the development of tourism has tangible benefits on the peace process. In contrast, it has become evident that the peace process enabled the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi. The development of tourism in the Thandaung Gyi region was a joined initiative by parties in the region, some of which had been in open conflict with each other until not long ago. Following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between these parties in 2012, the security situation in the region has become more stable and tourism has been able to develop. This thesis asserts that development of tourism has limited tangible benefits on the peace process, but that the cooperation between the parties is essential for the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi and that it can therefore be seen as a development tool, rather than a peacebuilding tool.

The notion that tourism was able to develop in Thandaung Gyi because of a stable security situation, rather than that the security situation improved because of tourism development is in line with current thinking in academic circles. As previously mentioned in this thesis: tourism is the benefactor of peace and not the other way around. The tourism development in Thandaung Gyi can thus be seen as being part of a broader post-conflict reconstruction approach, and in that sense falls under a broad modern development paradigm where solutions are sought on a case by case basis.

5.2.3 Main conclusions

Throughout the research process it has become evident that in order to understand tourism development in Thandaung Gyi, it is important to factor in the unique circumstances under which the project takes place. The project is unique in Myanmar, as conflicting parties in the region worked together with (international) NGOs in order to make the village of Thandaung Gyi a tourism destination for domestic as well as international tourists. Without this, even although

the cooperation is still complicated, tourism development in this region would not have been possible.

It can be concluded that in the case of Thandaung Gyi, tourism development is not a peacebuilding, but a development tool. The development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi has contributed to local economic growth. The influx of visitors, who are now able to move freely between Thandaung Gyi and Taungoo due to the ceasefire agreement, has brought growing prosperity to the village. Locals have been able to open restaurants, shops, and B&Bs. Based on the conducted interviews, fieldwork and further research, it can therefore be concluded that the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi had a positive impact on the region's economy.

On a personal note, I strongly believe that it is also confidence that makes the community of Thandaung Gyi unique; the people have been through a lot and they know how badly they have been treated. Despite the troubles and horrors of the past, the community has survived and prospered. Consequently, they are sure that they can face any changes that tourism development brings to the village.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 For further research

This research has provided insights into the process of tourism development in Thandaung Gyi as a development tool. Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are made:

In addition to interviewing more locals in possible future research, it would be interesting to include the experiences and views from national government officials as well as of KNU representatives. These points of views would enable deeper insights into the initial decision to develop tourism in Thandaung Gyi. Furthermore, it would enable insights into decisions with regards e.g. licenses for current development projects in the village.

It would also be interesting to see if it would be possible to compare the project in Thandaung Gyi to another town. There are towns in Kayin state that suffer or suffered from some of the same problems, but that are also viable places to develop tourism. An example is the town of Payathonsu, near the Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai border. It is a popular destination for day-trippers from Thailand, however, the border situation is not ideal for tourism yet. Only Thai and Myanmar citizens can use the border crossing, and Thais cannot stay overnight, because the border crossing offers only visas for a day. In comparison, no foreigners were allowed in Thandaung Gyi before the push for tourism came. Like Thandaung Gyi, Payathonsu has a history of conflict, with relative stability since 1990 when the Myanmar government took the area from the KNU. During a longitudinal study, it would be possible to look and compare for example prosperity, safety, and general well-being as tourism development takes place in Thandaung Gyi and Payathonsu.

5.3.2 Practical

While it became clear during the interviews with people in Thandaunggyi that the TTDWG plays an important role with regards to the development of (tourism), this role as well as the reason for its existence are not clear to all people. An example of this unclear role is that an interviewee mentioned that they would welcome financial support from the working group. As an organization, the TTDWG is not designed to provide any kind of financial support to the people of Thandaung Gyi. Rather, the working group aims to make the village more accessible to tourists by supporting the development of a tourism infrastructure in Thandaung Gyi. If the working group and its role would be promoted among the people of Thandaung Gyi, the confusion on the role of the working group would most likely diminish.

Another aspect that would most likely provide more clarity about the TTDWG's role is if the communication between the working group and the people of Thandaung Gyi would improve. Some people expressed fatigue in dealing with the working group, as invitations to

meetings came late or unexpected, and communication or planned dates on provided trainings were sometimes lacking. It also seemed like there is not a lot of communication with the general population of Thandaung Gyi on what tourism and its development mean for the village. They are not aware how they could benefit from the existence of the working group. If the working group would strive for better communication, it will stay a viable platform for cooperation; not only for the people of Thandaung Gyi, but also for the conflicting parties in the region.

If another town or village would consider creating a tourism development working group in the future, I would recommend that the communication with the town's populous as well as working group members needs to be clear from the very beginning. Aspects that should be included in the communication are: What is the working group and what does it do? What are its goals and aims? How do the activities from the working group influence the people of the village? How can one participate? It is important that this information reaches as many people as possible, in order to ensure that those who want to participate and take part in the development of their village get the chance to do so.

Throughout the research process it has become evident that in order to understand tourism development in Thandaung Gyi, it is important to factor in the unique circumstances under which the project takes place. The project is unique in Myanmar, as conflicting parties in the region worked together with (international) NGOs in order to make the village of Thandaung Gyi a tourism destination for domestic as well as international tourists. Tourism development in Thandaung Gyi would not have been possible without this – at times – complicated cooperation. It is important that the conflicting parties continue to support the development in the region. In order to ensure their continued support, it might help to make them aware of how they can (continue to) benefit from the development.

Throughout the interviews it became clear that most of the people of Thandaung Gyi have become more open-minded towards outsiders since tourism development started. This process of

becoming open minded, however, is still going on today and not everyone will ever be willing or able to change their mind. Decades of conflict have ensured that the people of Thandaung Gyi have feelings of distrust and fear towards outsiders and the ‘other’ in general. It can therefore be noted that it takes time for people to trust the ‘other’. If people not from Thandaung Gyi want to exploit some of the opportunities tourism development there offers, it would be wise to do this with regards to these feelings, and in good cooperation with the local population. When starting similar projects elsewhere, it would be good to find out if these same sentiments apply there, and to what extent.

5.4 Reflections on limitations of the research

During the research as well as writing process for this thesis, several choices had to be made that impacted the outcome of the research. This section focusses on the most important decisions as well as on the impact these decisions had on the research process and outcome.

Firstly, the dependence on a translator turned out to complicate my research project and possibly limit it as well. A translator working with the organization I was associated with and who was supposed to accompany me on several trips into the village had to cancel for personal reasons. This led to some difficulty in my schedule in Myanmar. Instead of waiting on their availability and possibly jeopardizing the possibility of interviewing non-English speakers I decided to hire my own translator: a tour guide with good conversational English skills. Due to the limited amount of personal funds, I had to limit the number of days on which the interviews could take place. Most of my interviews thus took place within this four-day timeframe, withholding me to better my own interview technique, and finding saturation in a more traditional way.

Secondly, I used the interview guide found in *Appendix A* as a base. Wherever possible themes remembered from past interviews were injected in the interviews; however, this was not a systematic endeavor. It is therefore feasible that a dataset that was procured over a longer time

span, with the appropriate time in between to code and analyze the interviews, and with the possibility to hold follow-up interviews, would yield somewhat different results. Although I am fairly convinced of the reliability of the found themes, an approach as described above could potentially find deeper understanding, or additional themes that are covered further below the surface.

Thirdly, oftentimes the interviews were often not conducted one-on-one because of the differing ideas of privacy in Myanmar. It seemed inappropriate to insist on talking to people one-on-one. In several cases people, who walked in during interviews or were there from the start of an interview, started to intervene or discuss things amongst themselves. The translator tried to keep up with everything, but this proved difficult at times. Wherever possible, different ideas from different people are marked in the interview transcripts or spliced into their own transcript if it was appropriate.

Fourthly, walls are also considerably thinner in Thandaung Gyi than for example in Nijmegen, or even non-existent on the different locations where interviews were conducted. With engines of cars and busses seemingly considerably louder than in Western Europe this sometimes led to incomprehensible recordings in spite of having a dedicated audio recorder. In the cases where parts of the interview were incomprehensible, I tried to reconstruct as well as possible what was said by repeat listening. Otherwise these sections were marked as (Inc.). Ideally, better audio equipment should be used, with dedicated microphones for all speakers, and/or a microphone for noise-reduction. One way around this would be to scout for a suitable location with less noise pollution and to invite people to be interviewed in that location. This would put an extra burden on the interviewee and would also risk making them feel uncomfortable.

Fifthly, as mentioned in the section on coding, all coding was done in the program RQDA, the work on the categories was partially done on paper. The decision to use paper, rather

than the program was made, as it was easier for me to create an overview of what categories emerged from the interviews. The decision to use RQDA instead of the departmental standard Atlas.ti was made because R and its plugins are all offered as free open source software. As far as I know, Atlas.ti has some more features regarding the linking of codes, but altogether it does not seem that this would affect the results in any way. It is speculative to state that using one of the more standard CAQDA tools would have been easier or made the data processing faster. However, I had some issues with RQDA as my interface got cluttered with more and more codes that were increasingly difficult to manage.

5.5 Since I left

Since I left Myanmar in August 2017, development in Thandaung Gyi has continued steadily. Mobile infrastructure has arrived, as a cell tower was built in the field that I used to frequent to keep in touch with home. The tower improves connectivity and ensures that local businesses can promote themselves online; several B&Bs in Thandaung Gyi are on Booking.com and the village can now be found on websites such as TripAdvisor. In addition to this transformation, the leadership of the Thandaung Gyi Development Working Group changed. What these changes will mean for Thandaung Gyi will have to be seen at a later point. As for myself, I know for sure that I would love to return.



Figure 5.1 Checking messages at the site of the future cell tower location in Thandaung Gyi, Myanmar. June 28, 2017

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction

- My name is Thomas Maatjens. I am from the Netherlands and I am conducting research for my masters' thesis and would like to ask you questions about the development of tourism in Thandaung Gyi.

Interview

The following information can be part of a casual conversation to gain a little trust and let the participant speak more freely. I also want to know this because it might be useful data to distinguish between participants and might be relevant for my analysis or results.

- Work: yes/no what?
- Gender
- Age
- Religion
- Children: age, still here, moved away etc.

Initial Questions

- When, if at all, did you learn about the new tourist development here?
- What was that like? What did you think then?
- Could you describe the events that led up to the development of tourism in Thandaunggyi?
- What was your involvement like?

Intermediate questions

- Tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you learned that new tourism development was coming to Thandaunggyi?
- What changes in your life have occurred since the development of tourism here?
- Could you describe to me, if at all, how you were involved or had the chance to be involved in the development of tourism in Thandaunggyi?
- What positive/negative changes in your life have occurred since the development of tourism here?
- Can you tell me something about the ceasefire?
- How do you feel about the KNU / Military?
- Where do you see yourself in X years?
- Can you tell me about your feelings about the future for Thandaunggyi?
- (If there are any children) How do you see the future of your children in Thandaunggyi?

Final questions

- Is there anything that you might not have thought about before we did this interview?
- Is there anything that you think I should know or understand better?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

End of the interview

- Thank you very much for your time and for answering my questions.

Appendix B: Codebook

RQDA was used in order to code the data for this research project. The list below shows the codes that emerged from the data as well as the frequency in which they were found in the interviews.

acknowledging WG leadership struggles	1
agreeing with another expert	1
arguing for the need of the WG to involve the community more	2
being affected positively by NCA	8
being grateful for the development organizations	2
being held back by conflict	9
being needed / needing to broker between actors	2
being optimistic about the (future of) WG	2
being optimistic about the future of tourism in TDG	4
being part of WG	1
being selected for WG	2
believing competition is good	1
believing development helps peace	3
believing economic development helps peace	2
believing god needs to support development	1
believing in (knowledge) spill-over	1
believing in adjusting to unequal starting positions	1
believing in spill-over effects	6
believing process inclusive enough	1
believing tourism income helps stability	1
believing/wanting conflict parties should work together	3
benefitting personally from tourism	1
challenging current WG role	1
commenting on (lack of) TDG accessibility	2
commenting on not having actual peace	2
commenting on reluctant attitudes towards tourism	3
comparing favorably to the past	18
comparing positively to other Myanmar regions	1
confirming need for broad community support	1
confirming the visitor numbers are incorrect	1
creating jobs	1
critiquing community outlook other development organizations	1
critiquing WG leadership	9
dealing with bureaucracy	3
defending not being 100% inclusive	3
describing (problematic) double role: WG and religious leader	3
describing best hotel location	1
describing current state of affairs	8

describing enthusiasm about progress	3
describing female empowerment	1
describing growth in understanding tourism needs	1
describing liking the government	1
describing limited middle class (in the past)	1
describing men more reluctant about change	1
describing middle class opportunities	1
describing opportunities	9
describing people not going to the WG	4
describing quality changes of guesthouses	2
describing receiving support from WG	1
describing silent disagreement	1
describing spill-over	3
describing state of the economy	4
describing taking responsibility over earnings	1
describing tangible benefits	3
describing the community structure	10
describing touristy points of improvement	2
describing visible economic gains	4
describing wider economic impact	2
disagreeing with price point	1
discussing wasted potential	1
dismissing official numbers	1
dismissing timeframe for trainings	2
doing what they can do	2
doubting good ways to branch out	1
equalizing needs of domestic with foreign tourists	3
exemplifying the improved accommodation situation	1
exemplifying the WG as a model for the community	1
expecting inequality of effort to become a problem	2
expecting outside investment	1
explaining why development is slow	4
explaining why official visitor numbers are lower than actual	1
expressing doubt about development procedures	2
expressing hope (for continuation of project)	1
expressing interest	1
expressing lack of knowledge (other)	7
expressing lack of local agency	2
expressing need for strong institutions	1
expressing need for trust	3
expressing need to understand the community	2
expressing regret (of wasted potential)	3
feeling conflict parties should listen to the people	2
feeling desperate about the people there not taking advice	2
feeling enthusiastic about guesthouse quality	2
feeling frustrated with lack of progress	2

feeling good about improvements	1
feeling need for more information	1
feeling need of better communication with WG	1
feeling negative about attractiveness TDG	2
feeling negative about guesthouse quality	2
feeling negative about local education	3
feeling passiveness (or different priorities) is holding TDG back	1
feeling positive about all parties	1
feeling positive about military	2
feeling positive about tourists	9
feeling regret about WG	2
feeling responsible for education	1
feeling strongly about garden upkeep	1
feeling that the army presence does not help the security situation	1
feeling the need for improvement	2
feeling they should learn from domestic tourists	2
feeling tourism might be fleeting	1
feeling training was wasted	5
feeling WG communication is lacking	11
feeling WG is failing	2
feeling WG not active	3
feeling WG should be more independent of development organizations	1
finding a lack of experience (external)	5
finding accommodation price too high	1
finding alternative ways of inclusion	3
finding external religious support	1
finding most potential in pilgrimage tourism	1
finding tourism development for the wealthy	2
finding understanding from (conflict) actors	1
finding way to participate in development	1
finding WG not inclusive enough	2
finding WG not inclusive enough	2
going because of meeting	1
having difficulty separating emotion and business	1
having faith in the community	1
having to broker between different parties	8
helping others sell	2
hoping for (local) development	3
hoping to democratize	1
hypothesizing about opportunities	2
hypothesizing CBT s.o.p. works with high levels of poverty	1
hypothesizing wealth differences as explanation for B&B distribution	1
idealizing the WG	1
indicating a lack of marketing skills (external)	1
indicating challenges because of conflict	9
indicating challenges of bringing multiple actors together in a conflict environment	2

indicating government ignorance	3
indicating KNU might be afraid of development	6
indicating lack of government communication	1
indicating lack of trust	3
indicating locals not trusting both	5
indicating missed tourism opportunities due to conflict	3
indicating young people leaving	3
inflating visitor numbers	2
keeping development goals in mind	1
liking outsiders to stay outsiders	1
looking at the sights	1
needing external expertise	6
not being listened to	1
not feeling trainings are/were sufficient	1
not seeing infrastructure problems	1
not trusting the all-inclusive approach (will work in TDG)	2
not worrying about outside investment	2
noting aftereffects of extended war	2
noting change in tourist behavior	2
noting changing attitudes	2
noting development responsibility should be with community	1
noting getting more known	1
noting interest from the community	2
noting lack of financial means	1
noting missing tourism infrastructure	4
noting more overnight stays	1
noting shifts in WG workings	1
planting seeds	2
pointing out (mis)conception of tourists	1
praising the community	2
problematizing (un)familiarity with professionals	1
problematizing double loyalties	2
problematizing informing tourists	1
problematizing one-way destination	1
problematizing ownership	3
problematizing provision of information	1
problematizing standard CBT discourse	2
problematizing WG workings (democratic)	1
projecting frustrations with bureaucracy / inconsistency	3
providing a unique service	1
putting development responsibility in local hands	1
questioning their organizations' involvement	1
recognizing early steps	4
reflecting on internal conflict other communities	1
reflecting on own role	1
relating to miscellaneous religious experiences	1

remarking of inconsistency of development	1
remarking on 'normalcy' of development	1
remarking on bureaucratic issues	5
remarking on inconsistent bureaucracy	1
remembering getting training	1
seeing basics of democracy	1
seeing changes in community	3
seeing changing economic partnerships	1
seeing development difficulties due to conflict	4
seeing development potential due to conflict	1
seeing domestic potential	1
seeing earlier stated problem as opportunity	1
seeing economic gain	5
seeing growth in tourism numbers	9
seeing job growth	2
seeing limits of car infrastructure	1
seeing pilgrimage potential	2
seeing potential for wider scope of benefits from tourism	1
seeing success where others see failure	1
seeing TDG as a model	1
seeing the (potential) benefits of training	11
seeing tourism potential	8
signaling community needs to be OK with outside investment	2
signaling strength in the community	1
singling out the project for its uniqueness	8
speaking out against big developments	1
spit-balling extra development ideas	1
starting business	1
stating people do not have time to follow trainings	3
stereotyping development SOP	1
stimulating local economy	2
suggesting a different procedure for trainings	1
supporting local development	3
supporting the community	2
taking action for collective good	1
taking ownership of their future	4
taking responsibility for development	6
taking responsibility over their process	4
taking training into practice	1
talking about weather (+/-)	2
telling their intentions (in the development)	1
thinking about consequences of more tourists	4
thinking about lost opportunity	1
thinking about new attractions	10
thinking about support possibilities	1
thinking about the future	5

thinking about tourism retention	1
thinking better facilities will improve returning visitor numbers	1
thinking ceasefire helps tourism	1
thinking cooperation helps peace process	1
thinking development snowballs	1
thinking development will lead to (external) development	1
thinking interplay between tourism and peace process helpful	6
thinking outsiders will inspire locals	14
thinking peace leads to development	2
thinking too few attractions	4
thinking tourism is sustainable	1
thinking tourism will not affect peace	3
trusting entrepreneurship will pay off	2
trusting in competitiveness of locals	2
trusting in own perseverance	3
trusting in peace process	1
trusting infrastructure to Taungoo is OK	2
trusting skin in the game makes for better development	1
trusting they can develop	2
trusting WG can deal with its own issues	1
trying to market TDG	1
understanding the situation	1
valuing herself by her unique position	2
wanting a better security situation	3
wanting attitudes to change	5
wanting better government	5
wanting better opportunities for her children	1
wanting conflict parties to show trustworthiness	2
wanting control of development	1
wanting development	6
wanting government to listen	1
wanting more attractions	4
wanting more training	1
wanting more visitors	1
wanting outside investment	2
wanting outsider to add something	4
wanting outsiders to need to raise their game	1
wanting progress	1
wanting real peace	2
wanting the locals to see benefits	3
wanting to change WG	1
wanting to vet the outsiders	1
warning for potentially missed revenue	1
worrying about harsh climate	1
worrying about outside influence	3
worrying about outside investment	5

