



BACKPACKER TOURISM AND THIRD WORLD DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Third World governments often scorn international backpackers, professing instead an enthusiasm for pursuing higher-value, luxury tourism. This article presents an alternative perspective, elaborating upon ways that providing goods and services for backpackers can promote development, especially at the local level. Several challenges will need to be addressed, however, if such communities are to have some control over the backpacker submarket and maximize the benefits they gain from it. Such challenges include overcoming the self-centered attitudes of some backpackers who might behave irresponsibly, and encouraging Third World governments to establish a policy environment and effective infrastructure which support community involvement in this form of tourism. **Keywords:** Backpackers, budget, Third World, development. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Résumé: Le tourisme des routards et le développement du tiers-monde. Les gouvernements des pays du tiers-monde sont souvent très critiques à l'égard des touristes du type routard (backpackers), voulant plutôt développer un tourisme de luxe à forte contribution. Cet article porte un regard différent sur le phénomène en élaborant les moyens par lesquels les prestations pour la clientèle backpacker peuvent être un vecteur de développement, surtout au niveau local. Cependant, les acteurs locaux devront se montrer à la hauteur de la situation s'ils aspirent à contrôler le tourisme des backpackers et en maximiser les retombées. Il faudrait œuvrer pour transformer l'attitude égocentrique de certains backpackers qui se comportent de façon irresponsable et encourager les gouvernements du tiers-monde à mettre en place une politique et une infrastructure qui soutiendra les initiatives des acteurs locaux vis-à-vis de ce genre de tourisme. **Mots-clés:** routards, tiers-monde, développement. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Almost wherever it is viable, Third World governments are actively pursuing tourism growth in their countries. They are particularly interested in international tourism (Harrison 1992), believing it brings their countries numerous economic benefits including employment opportunities, small business development, and foreign exchange earnings. They tend to assume that more money is earned by attracting tourists who can afford luxury goods and services, despite the fact that this often leads to a country's dependence on imported products, foreign investment, and expatriate skills, resulting in repatriation of resultant

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profits (Baskin 1995). But those financial benefits received from luxury tourism developments in the Third World very rarely “trickle down” to be of any significance to people at grassroots level.

While a number of academics have noted this problem, thoroughly critiquing forms of tourism development dominated by overseas investors (Britton 1982; Brohman 1996), they have rarely proposed support for alternative forms of tourism based on the village economy (Brown 1998). The presumption that high-spending tourists bring the greatest benefits to Third World countries is questioned in this paper. Instead, it argues how local communities in the Third World might benefit from involvement in budget tourism. In particular, the often maligned backpacker market segment is considered.

The academic literature provides clues as to how the backpacker segment can be described. This submarket is characterized by budget-consciousness and a flexible tourism style, with most participants traveling alone or in small groups. Backpackers are often keen to share the local lifestyle (Loker 1993:33), citing “meeting the people” as a key motivation (Riley 1988:325). Their recreational activities are likely to focus around nature (such as trekking), culture (village stays and more), or adventure (including river rafting or riding camels) (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). This is associated with the tendency for backpackers to travel more widely than other tourists, seeking unusual or out of the way locations and/or experiences (Haigh 1995). According to Riley, “the less traveled route and more difficult way of getting there has a high degree of mystique and status conferral” (1988:321). The tight budget many backpackers impose on themselves is largely related to the longer duration of their travels (Gibbons and Selvarajah 1994). As Cohen warns, however, one could be misled by the idealized image of the backpacker (or “youth tourists” in his study of southern Thailand beaches) “as a curious and adventurous traveler in search of ‘authentic’ experiences” (1982:221).

Perhaps because of its association with the “hippy” and “drifter” tourism of the 60s and 70s, the backpacker segment of the tourism market has not always been welcomed by Third World regional or national governments (Cohen 1973; Erb 2000; Hall 1997; Hampton 1998; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995). Much credence has been given to the stereotypical image of the backpacker as an unkempt, immoral, drug-taking individual. In Southeast Asia, the interest paid by most government planners to the backpacker sector is either negligible or negative. According to Hampton, this “sector is at best tacitly ignored, or at worst actively discouraged in official tourism planning” (1998:640). Independent travelers (hereafter tourists)—who include backpackers—are actively discouraged in the Maldives (Lyon 1997), and have been banned completely in Bhutan as they are seen as posing a threat to the country’s gross national happiness, with only approved tour parties allowed (Wood and House 1991). Meanwhile in Goa, the Director of Tourism believes that “Luxury tourism was the way forward. Hippies and backpackers do not bring in enough money” (cited in Wilson 1997:68). Similarly, efforts to attract tourists in southern Africa

are centered on organized mass international tourists who have travel arrangements made for them (Baskin 1995).

In some cases, government interest in discouraging backpackers and other budget tourists has been translated into policy. For example, government policy in Botswana states:

Foreign tourists who spend much of their time but little of their money in Botswana are of little net benefit to the country. Indeed, they are almost certainly a net loss because they crowd the available public facilities such as roads and camp sites and cause environmental damage It is important to shift the mix of tourists away from those who are casual campers towards those who occupy permanent accommodation. Encouraging the latter while discouraging the former through targeted marketing and the imposition of higher fees for the use of public facilities, are obviously among the objectives to be pursued (cited in Little 1991:4).

While denigrating budget tourists, this policy aims simultaneously to “provide local communities with direct and indirect benefits from tourism activities” (cited in Little 1991:6), without specifically considering whether it is realistic for impoverished rural communities to cater for higher end tourists. Local communities do not usually have the skills, experience, or resources to provide services for luxury tourists. In many cases, therefore, such communities miss out completely on the benefits of tourism ventures in their own backyards.

In order to ensure a strong likelihood of economic, political, and social benefits accruing to a local community, Ashley and Roe (1998:25) stress the need for *full* participation of communities in tourism. This can occur where communities supply the majority of goods and services to tourists, have considerable input into planning decisions, and collectively manage common resources. When tourism ventures are largely dependent on local cultural and natural resources, and are locally managed, communities can “participate with equity in the [tourism] process” (Lillywhite and Lillywhite 1991:89g). This paper will argue that such conditions are more likely to be present when communities target the needs of budget tourists, especially the significant backpacker segment.

BACKPACKERS AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

This paper considers both pros and cons of backpacker tourism in terms of whether it promotes local level development. It provides a review of the literature on this general research theme while also drawing on the author’s backpacking experiences through Asia in 1989–90, and more recent fieldwork on related issues of sustainable livelihoods in southern Africa and the South Pacific.

Reservations About Backpackers

Before considering ways in which catering to the backpacker segment can promote local development, the discussion raises some con-

cerns about backpackers rather than assuming that they are an inherently desirable submarket. The very tenets of backpacker culture, including the independent nature of backpacker travel and their cultural sensitivity, have been questioned, both in academic writing and popular fiction. For example, the filming in Thailand of one of the novels discussed below, *The Beach*, starring Hollywood golden boy Leonardo DiCaprio, has sparked numerous discussion sites on the internet and a torrent of media interest in backpacking, particularly focusing on undesirable traits of backpackers. Similarly, when the London-based nongovernmental organization, Tourism Concern, addressed them in a special issue of their magazine, *In Focus* (Spring 1999), the British press were quick to pick up upon negative aspects of backpacker culture.

One criticism of backpackers is that, in ensuring that their funds will last for the duration of their travels, they become excessively concerned with bargain hunting (Goodwin, Kent, Parker and Walpole 1998). They may regard haggling as a game, to the extent that they exploit artisans and traders so desperate for a sale that they accept unreasonably low prices for their products (Bradt 1995). According to Riley "Status among travelers is closely tied to living cheaply and obtaining the best 'bargains' which serve as indicators that one is an experienced traveler" (1988:320). Budi, an experienced tour guide, argues that the average independent tourist to Indonesia has changed somewhat in recent years:

Now tourists are going to Indonesia not to see the culture or the people, but to compete with other travelers about how cheaply they can travel. They all want to be the winner, and don't realize how rude they are to local people (cited in Wheat 1995:50).

While in the past the tendency for backpackers to seek out more intensive contact with local people has generally been posed in a positive light, some commentators have recognized that such "alternative" tourism forms are also more invasive (Butler 1990). Because they seek "out of the way" destinations, Spreitzhofer argues, the influence of backpackers on Third World societies "... proves often to be more lasting and shaping than organized, spatially selective package tourism" (1998:982). Furthermore, their very search for authentic experiences is based on exclusion of other tourists (Jamieson 1996), which is why Mowforth and Munt suggest that backpackers can be included in the category of the self-centered tourists they call "ego-tourists" (1998:135).

Possibly, backpackers' more lasting influence will involve the problem of seeking out new destinations but failing to understand cultural norms of appropriate behavior in these new locales (Bradt 1995). Some suggest that backpackers simply do not care about local customs and acceptable behavior, instead showing blatant disregard for social norms (Noronha 1999). Acting out their perceived freedom from social commitments and constraints (Jamieson 1996) may lead then to culturally and socially inappropriate behavior. This seems to be a problem particularly in backpacker ghettos or enclaves, places where large numbers congregate to experience home comforts (from good phone

and internet services to familiar foods, such as the ubiquitous banana pancake) and the company of tourists of similar mind. Such places can be found in Khatmandu, Bangkok, and Pushkar, major points of reference on the great backpackers' overland route through Asia. There is increasing evidence that such ghettos are now emerging outside of the Asian region as well (Aziz 1999). As one guesthouse manager stated, "The Indian tourists that visit Pushkar have a holy respect for the place, but the foreigners just treat the place as a fun theme park. They drink and smoke in the temples and show no respect" (cited in Mandalia 1999:17). Scanty or excessively casual dress, drug and alcohol abuse, and casual sexual encounters can all cause insult to local residents (Aziz 1999; Mandalia 1999), whose reliance on income from tourism often leads them to tolerate what they feel is outright denigration of their customs.

Two popular novels have recently explored issues surrounding backpacker culture, William Sutcliffe's *Are You Experienced?* (1999) and Alex Garland's *The Beach* (1997). The former follows the anti-hero, Dave the British backpacker, as he travels around India as part of his "year-off" before university. At one point, at a train station, he is delighted to find a fellow European (who turns out to be a journalist) with whom he can strike up a conversation. He is soon taken aback, however, as the journalist starts to probe and question Dave's travel experience. The journalist sums up backpacker travel in India:

University of Life. Year one: Advanced Adventure Playgrounds. Part One Exam: go to the Third World and survive. No revision, interest, intellect or sensitivity required ... (Sutcliffe 1999:138)... it's not hippies on a spiritual mission who come here any more, just morons on a poverty-tourism adventure holiday ... going to India isn't an act of rebellion these days, it's actually a form of conformity for ambitious middle-class kids who want to be able to put something on their CV that shows a bit of initiative Your kind of travel is all about low horizons dressed up as open-mindedness. You have no interest in India, and no sensitivity for the problems this country is trying to face up to. You also treat Indians with a mixture of contempt and suspicion which is reminiscent of the Victorian colonials. Your presence here, in my opinion, is offensive (Sutcliffe 1999:140).

The sentiments of the journalist character are supported by Hutnyk, who suggests that most backpackers visiting Calcutta have little interest in meeting Indians and learning about their culture: "... there is much doubt as to how far the desire to know others governs the activities of the traveler. Certainly 'foreign tourists' in Calcutta seem to do a good deal of avoiding 'others'" (1996:61).

The other novel, *The Beach*, was written as a critique of backpacker culture. It explores a group of backpackers in Thailand seeking escape from the well-traveled route, and serves "... as commentary on the folly of smug, young tourists, who call themselves travelers—a special breed more sensitive to the local cultures and locations they trample over" (Gluckman 2000). When a British backpacker, a new arrival in Bangkok, asks a more seasoned French backpacker if he has been to Chiang

Mai (main stop off point for tourists setting out to see hill tribe peoples), he replies:

“Yes, we went on a trek. We rafted on a river. Very boring, no?” He sighed and leant backwards, resting his back on the stone step behind him.

“Boring?”

Etienne smiled. “Raft, trek. I want to do something different, and everybody wants to do something different. But we all do the same thing. There is no ... ah ...”

“Adventure” (Garland 1997:19).

In the documentary *Thailand Backpackers: Full Moon Party* (Pendry 1998), which also addresses the subject of backpackers in Thailand, it is clear that their experiences are framed more by group behavior than the search for adventure. The bulk of this film focuses on backpackers in the south of the country seeking self-fulfillment through a combination of the following: searching for the perfect beach, taking drugs, having (sometimes unconventional) sexual experiences, going on a meditation retreat, and partying. When one of the backpackers, who has just eaten a “magic mushroom” omelet is asked: “Do you think this is the real Thailand?”, he replies, “No, but I didn’t come for the real Thailand—this is purely hedonistic”. The documentary finishes with a full moon party on a beach, the atmosphere set by Ecstasy and techno music. The next morning, the “perfect beach” so many have searched for is littered with human bodies, and being used as a toilet by some of the male backpackers. The only backpackers shown rejecting this aspect of backpacker culture decide to go north, in search of “the real Thailand”, meaning hill tribe peoples in colorful dress. Presumably there is nothing valuable to see or learn from the millions of Thais inhabiting the rest of the country who have adopted a more west-ernized style of dress.

Based on such characterizations of backpackers, it is not at all surprising that some authors have questioned the right of backpackers to take the moral high ground when comparing their tourism experiences to those of conventional tourists (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Spreitzhofer 1998). Indeed, Aziz, commenting on backpackers in the Egyptian beach resort of Dahab, suggests that far from being an alternative form of tourism, backpacking has turned into just another strand of mass, institutionalized tourism:

The idea of backpackers as drifters and explorers who desire to set themselves apart from the mainstream ... is challenged. Backpacker culture is now established for the tourists in Dahab as if waiting to be consumed by them upon arrival (1999:15).

In Dahab, this “backpacker culture” includes particular forms of dress (tie-dyed T-shirts), music (“rap, hip-hop, and sixties”), and behavior (moving from coffee shop to coffee shop, consuming endless pancakes, pizzas, and milkshakes, engaging in casual sexual liaisons, and consum-

ing drugs). Undoubtedly aspects of this culture can be found in backpacker ghettos throughout Asia, if not more widely. Doorne (1993), for example, talks about institutionalized backpacker culture associated with backpacker buses in New Zealand. Back in Dahab, Aziz (1999) found that far from showing an interest in local culture, there was little evidence of backpackers establishing contact with local people unless it was for commercial transactions or to secure an Egyptian boyfriend, and Egyptian food was not even available on the coffee shop menus.

The above accounts may suggest that contemporary backpackers are engaging in a self-centered form of poverty-tourism, traveling around shrouded from the “real Third World” by the backpacker ghettos which provide the major stepping stones along their well-trodden route. However, such negative generalizations about backpackers derive largely from their recent representations in the popular media and the associated hype, rather than providing an accurate representation of what appears to be developing into an increasingly diverse demographic group. While self-gratification and indulgence may be the primary motivation for one category of backpackers, others may be driven by a genuine interest in learning about other peoples and environments, and many may fall somewhere between these extremes. Detailed research on backpacker characteristics is needed before one can make assumptions about a general change, for the worse, in backpacker attitudes and behavior over time. Furthermore, while concerns about cultural insensitivity and inappropriate behavior of some backpackers show that this submarket should not be seen as ethically superior to other types, it is not as if other groups of tourists are immune to such faults.

Both Hutnyk (1996) and Noronha (1999), however, identify a more fundamental problem with backpacking, seeing it as just another variant of global tourism which reinforces inequitable links between the West and the Third World:

Budget or “alternative” travel ... can be criticized as an illusion of “nice” cottage capitalism, soothing ideological anxieties while extending commercialization and the tourism industry. Rather than working towards social transformation, alternative travel ... seems often to tinker at the edges of capitalist expansion into new market niches (Hutnyk 1996:x).

While recognizing the validity of the above criticisms, there are some who seriously question academic perspectives which suggest that “development” in general holds no possibility of improving the lives of Third World peoples:

It seems ironic that contemporary scholarly debates should clamor for a “post-development” era, just when voices from the margins—so celebrated in discourses of difference and alternative culture—are demanding their rights to greater access to a more generous idea of development (Rangan 1996:222).

It seems particularly inappropriate to reject all tourism notions as a strategy for development when this has been identified as a desirable livelihood option by many Third World communities:

Tourism is part of the process of modernization, and globalization, but local actors are agents in this process, and not just the recipients of modernization processes. They attempt to develop strategies by which encounters with tourists can be beneficial to them (Erb 2000:710).

Rather than reflecting on problems inherent in being integrated into global tourism essentially as underdogs, local communities often enthusiastically pursue the opportunities they feel this industry will bring to them. For example, even in locations like Goa, with its well-developed anti-tourism lobby, protests in the past have seemed to aim at mass rather than independent tourists, even though this latter group has given the area its “hippy haven” reputation. Wilson (1997), for example, cites a well-publicized case of Goan people throwing rotten fish and cow dung at tourist buses. Rather than an attack against all tourism forms, he explains, this incident was instigated by small-scale local entrepreneurs who felt that charter-package tourism was putting them out of business by providing for all of the needs of tourists (accommodation, transport, and food) in a single outlet. Wilson argues that in general, Goans welcome backpackers because they can easily service their needs, and this has resulted in an industry characterized by “... wide local ownership of resources and the broad distribution of benefits throughout the local community” (1997:63). It is thus important to balance backpackers’ problems with an exploration of the literature which unearths positive contributions they can make to local development.

Backpackers’ Contributions to Local Development

With the notable exceptions of Wilson (1997), Spreitzhofer (1998), and Hampton (1998), few tourism researchers have explicitly examined ways in which backpackers contribute to local development in Third World contexts. A body of evidence on this issue does emerge, however, when research on related issues is also scrutinized. For example, some useful ideas have been expressed about budget tourism in general, and about backpacking in Australia and New Zealand. Such evidence, as a whole, suggests that there may be much to gain from aiming “low”, and providing for backpackers. Both economic and non-economic development criteria need to be considered (Table 1).

A key reason behind the negative attitude of Third World governments to backpackers has been the perception that their living on a budget means they bring little revenue to the destinations. This perception has been seriously challenged, however, by research in New Zealand and Australia which found that, largely due to the longer duration of their stay, international backpackers actually spent more money than any other tourist category (Haigh 1995; Gibbons and Selvarajah 1994). In Australia, for example, a 1992 survey revealed that the average expenditure per backpacker was US\$2,667 (the 1992 average exchange rate of AUS\$1=US\$0.7353 has been used for conversions throughout this article) compared to an average for all tourists of only \$1,272 (Haigh 1995:1). Furthermore, backpackers spread their spending over a wider geographic area, bringing benefits to remote and

Table 1. How Backpackers Can Facilitate Local Development

Economic Development Criteria	Non-Economic Development Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Spend more money than other tourists because of longer duration of visit. ● Adventurous nature and longer duration of visit means money spent is spread over a wider geographical area, including remote, economically depressed, or isolated regions. ● Do not demand luxury therefore will spend more on locally produced goods (such as food) and services (transport, homestay accommodation). ● Economic benefits can be spread widely within communities as even individuals with little capital or training can provide desired services or products. Formal qualifications are not needed to run small enterprises; skills can be learned on the job. ● Basic infrastructure is required therefore ensuring low overhead costs and minimising the need for imported goods (such as can use bamboo and thatch to create a beach stall). ● Significant multiplier effects from drawing on local skills and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enterprises catering for backpackers are generally small and thus ownership and control can be retained locally. ● Local people gain self-fulfillment through running own tourism enterprises rather than filling in menial positions in enterprises run by outside operators. ● Because they operate their own businesses, local people can form organizations which promote local tourism, giving the community power in upholding their interests and negotiating with outside bodies. ● The interest of backpackers in meeting and learning from local people can lead to a revitalisation of traditional culture, respect for the knowledge of elders, and pride in traditional aspects of one's culture. ● Backpackers use fewer resources (like cold showers and fans rather than hot baths and air conditioning), therefore are kinder to the environment. ● Local servicing of the tourism market challenges foreign domination of tourism enterprises.

otherwise economically depressed regions where other tourists rarely venture, except perhaps if they dash past in their luxury coach (Baskin 1995; Gibbons and Selvarajah 1994; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

Backpackers can contribute significantly to local economic development because they generally purchase more locally produced goods and services than other categories of tourists (Hampton 1998; Goodwin et al 1998; Wheeler 1999; Wilson 1997). While there are exceptions to this generality (Goodwin 1999), what needs to be stressed is that in economic terms backpackers are worth more to the local economy than they commonly receive credit for. The very nature of this practice often results in their spending more money locally, while the more structured nature of package tours limits contacts with local people. For example, while package tourists traveling by coach in India are delivered to the compound of their hotel, backpackers arrive at bus and train stations where local traders have more opportunities to sell them their wares (Goodwin 1999). Similarly, tourists staying in higher class seaside resorts are likely to find that they have a private beach, fenced off partly to shield the guests from local touts. Further down the beach, however, these same touts can find backpackers willing to

buy a sarong, some jewelry, or a fresh pineapple. As another example, Pobocik and Butalla (1998) compare the economic contributions of independent and group trekkers, the latter being on pre-paid organized trips, in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal. They found that while group trekkers spent \$31 a day in Nepal compared to only \$6.50 a day for independent trekkers, independent trekkers were found to contribute much more to the local economy within the Annapurna area. This was because the groups usually camped and the companies brought in most provisions for their clients, whereas independent trekkers stayed in local lodges, consumed local food and drink, and purchased local souvenirs:

... group trekkers contribute little to local economies, which is a fundamental factor in the successful trekking agency management paradigm of supplying all needs and reaping all profits. This practice is in direct conflict with the accepted ecotourism paradigm of maximizing local economic benefits (Pobocik and Butalla 1998:163).

Tourists visiting the Komodo National Park in Indonesia, attracted by the unique “Komodo dragon” reptile, also support this trend. Those in the highest spending category visit Komodo from cruiseships which provide all food and accommodation, so that they spend very little on Komodo; and the same applies to those who use charter boats for their visit. Budget tourists, however, use the government ferry, which necessitates a stay of at least one night on Komodo’s main island, and consequently they spend two to three times as much money within the park as do the other tourists (Goodwin et al 1998). Meanwhile, many families in Samoa have built basic beach *fales* (traditional thatched houses) which are popular with backpackers. Morning and evening meals are included in the price of the accommodation and most of the money generated is retained locally (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998). Such findings from a variety of Third World countries support the conclusion of Gibbons and Selvarajah who note that in the New Zealand case “... observational and anecdotal evidence suggests a lower degree of leakage from the backpacker segment than any other” (1994:19).

Local people and products can meet the needs of backpackers largely because they do not demand luxury (Polit 1991). Backpackers are:

... not so concerned about amenities (e.g., plumbing), restaurants (e.g., Westernized food), and transportation (e.g., air conditioning) geared specifically to the tastes of the mass tourist. If a budget traveler place has an appeal to western tastes (e.g., banana pancakes), it requires minimal infrastructure (Riley 1988:323).

The lack of importance of infrastructure is witnessed by “beach shacks” selling food and drink to backpackers in Goa (Wilson 1997), or families renting out rooms in their homes to backpackers, as is common practice in Bali (Wall and Long 1996). These tourists may even be interested in staying in very basic accommodation, such as could be provided by a family in a township in South Africa, because of the adventuresome nature of this experience.

When local resources and skills are used to provide facilities for tour-

ists, there can be important multiplier effects (Cater 1996:6). On Gili Trawangan in eastern Indonesia, for example, backpacker bungalows are built of local bamboo and concrete blocks manufactured in the village, and they are furnished with bamboo tables and chairs made in neighboring Lombok and curtains made of the traditional *ikat* fabric (Hampton 1998:649). Such ventures can be economically viable even with small numbers of tourists because of low overhead costs and minimal leakages (Wall and Long 1996).

Backpackers are also likely to support certain economic enterprises developed by local communities which other tourists, because of their less flexible travel schedules, can not. For example, there are many skilled artisans in the Third World whose work is much admired by backpackers, among others. But it is these budget tourists who can decide to attend a workshop on craft manufacture, such as weaving, carving or pottery. In 1998, a week-long workshop on drum making was held in a rural area of Zimbabwe, after being advertised in major backpacker establishments in Harare. The fee charged covered accommodation, food, training, and all materials. In New Zealand, many in Northland choose to attend a one day workshop in which they learn from Maori artisans the skill of bone carving.

The spread of economic benefits within communities may be greater when catering to tourists on a budget, as more community members can participate. For example, a study in Namibia found that informal sector activities associated with tourism, including the sale of fuelwood and vegetables to campers, offered a valuable means of enhancing the livelihoods of the poorest groups in society. Individuals did not need capital, a broad range of skills, or a good command of a foreign language to participate successfully in tourism in this way (Ashley and Roe 1998:21). It has similarly been found that women, often excluded from formal economic activities, are more likely to operate informal tourism enterprises by selling handicrafts, operating food stalls, or working as beach vendors (Goodwin et al 1998; Kindon forthcoming; Wilson 1997). Catering to backpackers will not usually require community members to have any formal qualifications; rather, they can develop skills on the job or build on their existing skills.

Contrary to the beliefs of many tourism policymakers, it appears that starting small can offer greater economic benefits to a community than investing in more sophisticated, capital-intensive projects. For example, a Namibian study has shown that the establishment of a very basic campsite with enough room for two tents and no paid staff can gain a high rate of return on investment, while an upmarket campsite of similar size and with a similar number of campers but with a paid manager and individual ablutions, would run at a loss (Ashley and Garland 1994:20).

Therefore, if tourism moves "up scale" in an area, local people can lose important economic advantages they have gained. This is certainly a concern in Pangandaran, a fishing village in Java which has developed into a beach resort popular with backpackers as well as domestic tourists. As noted by Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995:295), Pangandaran may not retain the feeling of being a village for long, particularly

as tourism development here has been identified as a major priority by the government. Major land ownership changes have started to occur with both a proposal for a golf course and the development of a five-star hotel on what was previously communal village land:

Such dramatic changes will have the greatest effect on lower-class people: the poor. Many of them live on and cultivate household crops on *tanah negara* (the nation's land) which appears slated for tourism development. They face the possibility of being displaced from their homes and losing employment in their informal sector jobs *as the tourism product moves up-scale* and creates demands for higher standards of facilities and services (Wilkinson and Pratiwi 1995:295; emphasis added).

Some governments are slowly starting to recognize the economic benefits backpackers can bring. Following the interest from tourists expected to accompany filming of the *The Beach* in Thailand, for example, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is now welcoming backpackers, largely in recognition of the fact that the nature of their spending leads to local-level jobs (Gluckman 2000). As yet, however, such proactive support for the backpacker sector has not arisen, as found in other parts of the world, like Australia and New Zealand. For example, the Australian Department of Tourism allocated \$3 million to developing the backpacker market between 1993–97 (Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995).

It is important not to confine discussions of the relationship between budget tourism and local development to economic criteria. A discussion of some significant social and environmental benefits to communities catering to backpackers is also in order. Encouraging local people to cater to the needs of backpackers poses a challenge to foreign domination of tourism enterprises within Third World countries. There is a global economic concentration of wealth in tourism, witnessed by the domination of the package tourism market by a small number of key players with advanced forward and backward linkages controlling aspects of the industry. For example, company mergers taking place in the United Kingdom are likely to result in just four tour companies controlling up to 90% of outbound charter capacity. These companies do not just own tour operators in Britain and abroad, they also own hotels, self-catering accommodations, airlines, cruiseships, and retail chains (O'Connor 2000). As noted by the managing director of Sunvil Holidays, Neil Josephides, such dominance is not necessarily in the interests of host countries, such as his home, Cyprus:

Thomson combined with Preussag will control 20–30% of tourism to Cyprus. Tourism represents over 20% of the country's Gross Domestic Product, so the operators don't just control the hoteliers, they control the country. It's very depressing (cited in O'Connor 2000:5).

It has been suggested that through supporting smaller players in the industry, backpackers pose a threat to such corporate domination:

Given the political will to constrain the larger players, backpacker tourism could increase local participation in real development, part

of a more sustainable long-term strategy which attempts to balance local economic development needs against powerful interests wishing to build large international tourism resorts (Hampton 1998:655).

As was suggested in the case of Pangandaran, communities providing services to backpackers are more likely to retain control over their enterprises. This is also the case with the food and *fale* accommodation options offered by Samoan families, as mentioned earlier. This provides an example of the local ownership and participation which characterizes Samoan tourism, leading to a "... more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable tourism industry" than that found in neighboring Fiji where much is foreign-owned (Twining-Ward and Twining-Ward 1998:270). The same trend has been noted in New Zealand, where many small- to medium-sized businesses serving the backpacker market are locally owned and operated. Much investment in the traditional package tourism, meanwhile, is overseas-based and thus profits also flow offshore. Therefore, "If the package tourist segment is pursued solely, New Zealand risks creating jobs mainly in servile positions at the cost of small business entrepreneurs" (Gibbons and Selvarajah 1994:20).

Controlling one's own enterprise is certainly a positive step in the direction of self-determination for people otherwise dependent on tourism for menial jobs or handouts, and appears more likely to lead to self-fulfillment. For example, there is a notable difference for an individual "... between being a cleaner in a large international hotel compared with being the owner of a small *losmen* [homestay], cooking and serving at tables in their own place" (Hampton 1998:650). An example from Goa highlights this point. Wilson is concerned that a growing emphasis on luxury tourism development in Goa, which has traditionally been characterized by small family businesses catering to the domestic and backpacker markets, may undermine local development:

... this focus on upmarket tourism is out of keeping with the present structure of the tourism industry in Goa, which is mainly low-budget and served by a multitude of small hotels, guest-houses, rented rooms, and a host of ancillary services The danger here is that control over upmarket tourism could pass out of indigenous hands into foreign ownership and that these multinationals might be ... less sensitive to ... social, cultural, and environmental issues (1997:69).

Thus, he notes further, "... low-budget tourism might be the least destructive path to follow in spite of the government's promotion of upmarket hotel development" (1997:52). Erb (2000) has similar concerns about plans of regional Tourism Board officers to encourage luxury resort development in the otherwise backpacker-dominated areas of Flores, Indonesia.

When communities control their own tourism enterprises, as is more common where they provide for the budget sector, they are in a better position to participate in local business or tourism organizations through which wider development goals and the well-being of their people can be promoted. In Bali, Wall and Long (1996) explain how

a strong tourism organization was initiated in one neighborhood where homestays were common. Its aims were to promote tourism in the area, to protect the local environment, and to address any issues which concerned the community, including the in-migration of outside entrepreneurs. Therefore, forming organizations can help communities gain greater control over tourism development in their areas and give them political strength to deal with outsiders, including the private sector and government officials (Ashley and Garland 1994).

There is also evidence that the development of backpacker enclaves has transformed some run-down, crime-ridden parts of cities in the Third World. In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for example, a *kampung* (urban village) which formerly housed the red light district and was characterized by poverty is now a thriving backpacker area with numerous small businesses in a setting of well-kept lanes and houses. "The local kampung residents are in no doubt at all that the arrival of the backpackers has transformed their place for the better" (Hampton 1999:7). Similarly, Edward Hasbrouk (a political activist and tourism writer) has suggested that backpackers in Thailand "... are the foreign tourists least interested in, and least drawn to Thailand by, sex tourism", and that the renowned backpacker ghetto in Bangkok, Khao San Road, is the only area in this city not characterized by sex tourism (cited by Bly 2000).

Finally, for the simple reason that backpackers want to spend less and thus generally consume fewer resources, they can be more environmentally friendly. In Goa, for example, backpackers are content with swimming at the beach and bathing under cold water showers, while other tourists demand hot baths and large swimming pools within their hotel complex. Therefore, the backpacker market has been quite kind to the environment, especially "... compared to the resource-guzzling five-star tourists" (Noronha 1999:5).

CONCLUSION

Clear evidence has been provided as to the potential benefits backpackers can bring in terms of promoting local development in the Third World. Communities can provide services and products demanded by these tourists without the need for large amounts of start-up capital or sophisticated infrastructure, and they can retain control over such enterprises. Conversely, comparatively few local people have the skills, knowledge, networks, and so forth to be able to establish businesses which cater to luxury tourists, so such enterprises are often monopolized by outside owners and bring few local benefits (Cohen 1982). In addition, the foreign exchange brought in by backpackers often surpasses that provided by other international tourists who stay for shorter periods of time, and these expenditures are spread far more widely than most, both geographically and to marginalized social groups. This is not to suggest that this submarket should be the main form of international tourism pursued by Third World governments. In fact, it is likely that smaller-scale, budget-oriented enterprises will exist along with larger-scale developments in many circumstances

(Jenkins 1982). At the same time, for too long, Third World governments have overlooked the ways in which backpacker tourism may bring numerous local economic benefits to small-scale entrepreneurs and informal sectors actors. There are also significant non-economic benefits which can come to communities from this form of tourism. Aiming "low" builds upon the skills of the local population, promotes self-reliance, and develops the confidence of community members in dealing with outsiders, all signs of empowerment (Scheyvens 1999).

However, this paper has also raised concerns about the behavior and attitudes of backpackers which, in some circumstances, can be harmful from the perspective of local peoples. This may particularly be the case in ghettos or enclaves frequented by them. However, a simplistic analysis which asserts that they are all self-centered individuals following each other around the world on a well-trodden route in search of sex, drugs, and banana pancakes, is neither correct nor helpful. Neither is the suggestion that backpacker are necessarily the saviors of local level development in the Third World. By way of conclusion, therefore, a number of challenges need to be addressed if communities are to maximize the benefits from backpacker tourism without compromising their cultures, their environments or their general social-well-being. In addition, recommendations for further research on backpacker tourism are made.

Communities which choose to be involved in tourism need the opportunity to participate in an active and equitable manner. In the past, commentators have distinguished two major limitations for local communities in engaging with tourism: the unequal distribution of benefits and the fact that control often remains with outsiders (Ashley and Roe 1998). Therefore, local communities need to be empowered with both knowledge and confidence so that they can assert some control over any backpacking tourism which occurs in their area and determine the limits of their involvement with this segment of the market. Ideally a strong community will organize itself to meet only those needs of backpackers that do not compromise their own values, or the integrity of their environment and social system. At the earliest stage possible, communities need accurate information about both the benefits and pitfalls of backpacker tourism. Study tours—which take community members to visit existing such businesses or enclaves and encourage them to talk with vendors and operators, and to see impacts for themselves—could be very useful in this regard (see examples in Scheyvens forthcoming).

Communities also need appropriate structures, such as a village development committee or a local tourism board, which can represent and protect community interests with regard to tourism. The neighborhood tourism organization in Bali, mentioned earlier, provides one such example. However, it is essential that the heterogeneous nature of communities is recognized when considering how communities can organize themselves to benefit from backpacker tourism in an equitable manner. Communities are typically characterized by a multiplicity of interests and hierarchies of power, making it problematic to assume that a community can work together for mutual benefit (Taylor 1995).

Social relations such as class, ethnicity, and gender assume great significance in the distribution of the benefits and costs of tourism. Thus, all too often, it is local elites, particularly men, who co-opt and come to dominate community-based development efforts, thereby monopolizing the economic benefits of tourism (Wilkinson and Pratiwi 1995). Consequently, it is critical to ensure democratic structures which allow for representation of a variety of community groups and interests are in place.

If a community decides to proceed with a tourism venture catering to backpackers, institutional support will most likely be needed (Baskin 1995:111). This backing, from governments, nongovernmental organizations, or the private sector can involve provision of information, networking opportunities, and capacity building through skills training. Such assistance can help to overcome the disadvantage that most local communities face when engaging with the tourism industry as,

The local destination remains relatively isolated from the international market, receiving tourists but not understanding or playing any part in controlling the terms on which, and the processes by which, they arrive (Goodwin et al 1997:5).

Third World governments, in particular, have an important responsibility to facilitate equitable involvement of local communities in the industry. If they wish to support local development, they need to avoid the temptation of focusing exclusively on higher end tourists and consider strategies for encouraging and supporting carefully planned and managed budget tourism. This may include providing investment capital for small-scale ventures such as homestay accommodation, as well as removing restrictive legislation. For example, in the Solomon Islands, where building codes are based upon Western standards, local artisans cannot meet the requirements of the building code if they use traditional construction methods and materials, available locally at little cost. If building regulations were adhered to, a small-scale venture would cost around \$100,000 (Sofield 1993:737). Similarly, in some countries official tourist guides need to pass extensive written tests to gain a government endorsement, thus disqualifying illiterate or semi-literate guides who may be excellent at their trade.

The independent position of the nongovernmental organization sector places it in an important position to support the interests of communities involved in backpacker tourism. Such organizations can, for example, work with community counterparts to establish ongoing monitoring of the positive and negative impacts of tourism, to determine whether or not this business as they are pursuing it offers an appropriate form of development for their community (Joppe 1996:479).

Tourism involves both hosts and guests and responsibilities by both parties (Pearce 1995). As such, backpackers should not assume that by choosing what they see to be an alternative tourism experience, their ethics will be beyond scrutiny. As Noronha (1999:5) concludes,

If backpackers would like to distance themselves from the unjust face of global tourism, there's a long trek ahead ... [They] need to be

more critical, more honest—and less selfishly enthusiastic—about how they currently benefit from a patently unfair global system.

Both nongovernmental organizations and private sector interests, such as guidebook publishers (including Lonely Planet and Rough Guides) and travel agencies, could play a role here, providing backpackers with thoroughly researched information on appropriate behavior and cultural norms in their chosen destinations. In 1999, Tourism Concern (UK) together with Gambia Tourism Concern produced a film entitled *Our Holiday, Their Homes*, to be shown on flights to the Gambia. This addresses issues such as local poverty and appropriate dress. Similarly, Action for Southern Africa's "People-First" tourism campaign in the United Kingdom seeks to ensure that tourists to southern Africa are aware of ways in which their experience is both rewarding for themselves and for the countries they visit. It would be useful for such material and campaigns to specifically target the growing number of backpackers.

Given the growing significance of the backpacker market and its impact on Third World societies, environments, and economies, further research into backpacking tourism is warranted. One important issue which could be explored is implications for local communities of the planned up-scaling, by some governments, of backpacker ghettos into luxury tourism resorts (Aziz 1999; Wilkinson and Pratiwi 1995). This raises serious issues of concern regarding interference with the economic opportunities provided for the local people by a backpacker presence. It is also clear that one needs to know more about this submarket. Is it transforming into just another variant of mass, institutionalized tourism, as some have suggested (Aziz 1999), or have distinct types of backpackers emerged, some of whom are quite independent and others who are more institutionalized? If so, what implications do these different types have for communities in different destination areas?

Undoubtedly Third World tourism destinations have been incorporated into the global economic system on what are often unfair, exploitative terms, and the industry in many countries is dominated by foreign ownership and capital with little meaningful local involvement. There are positive signs, however, which indicate that by catering to backpackers, Third World peoples are able to gain real benefits from tourism and control their own enterprises. This market segment is not the universal scourge it is sometimes painted to be. Local participation is necessary in defining and managing what is for destination communities a desirable form of backpacking. National and local government as well as nongovernmental organizations can play important roles in facilitating a process to enable local communities to maximize opportunities that international backpacking presents to them. The advantages to local communities will also depend on the attitudes and behavior of backpackers themselves. Private organizations which promote this form of tourism business can take advantage of their position to promote attitudes that place sensitivity to local peoples and their environments foremost in the minds of backpacking tourists. ■

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