

Suspending Reality: An Exploration of Enclaves and the Backpacker Experience

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Backpacker enclaves have become important arenas for social and cultural exchange and identity formation. As customised spaces catering for visitors, they provide home comforts as well as points of contact with home for those on the road. Backpackers striving to experience something different often end up surrounded by the extended familiarity of home even in the most remote destinations. This problematises concepts such as the rite de passage or culture shock, which suggest a sudden and substantial shift between home and away. The concept of suspension is put forward as an alternative model, which sees culture shock and reversal being deferred by taking refuge in the enclave, providing difference without seriously challenging the basic cultural and social norms of the visitor. The suspended experiences in traveller enclaves are neither here nor there – not here because the real experience is outside the enclave, and not there because of the familiar surroundings of the enclave. Drawing on research from Bangkok and Sydney, this paper examines the way in which the roles of hosts and guests are negotiated in enclaves. Suspended environments provide a relatively neutral space in which the cultural knowledge of the host can be offered as a gateway to the authentic experiences outside the enclave. The neutral space of the enclave also provides the locals with the opportunity to consume the exotic cultures brought by the visitors in a safe way. The enclave therefore becomes a tool for mediating cultures, so that culture confusion is avoided from both sides, although true reversal is also prevented by the constructed familiarity of the enclave.

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Introduction

The backpacker scene has become an essential part of the tourism economy in recent years, particularly in certain major traveller or backpacker enclaves. However, this growth has itself been accompanied by a number of changes in the nature of backpacker tourism and the supply of facilities. These include spatial changes, such as the growth of enclaves, which Richards and Wilson (2004a) have signalled as a major development deserving further research.

In spite of the rapidly changing nature of the backpacker scene and the shifts taking place in the structure(s) and role(s) of backpacker enclaves, research has tended to lag behind these changes. One of the reasons for this is the continuing division between research encompassing anthropological and managerial traditions. Both of these traditions have tended to focus on the individual backpacker, rather than the scene as a whole, or the individual enclaves in which the scene is (re)produced. Some studies have also begun to point towards the growing gap between the ideology and practice of backpacker travel, and the fact that the experiences backpackers aspire to are rarely attained. This produces a stark contrast between anthropological perspectives which tend to focus on individual aspiration, and quantitative surveys which are better at capturing activity patterns.

In this exploratory paper, we suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the role of the enclave, as a social and inter-cultural space in which the gap between ideology and practice in backpacker travel is not only created, but also reconciled for (and by) the participants of the scene. Enclaves are not necessarily sites of pure reversal or extension, but rather a suspension between these two extremes; metaspaces which provide the possibility for backpackers to combine familiarity and difference in appropriate circumstances.

Previous approaches to the study of backpacking

The gap between backpacker theory and practice, or between desire and experience, noted by Cohen (2004) can arguably be traced to differing research traditions in the field. In broad terms, backpacker research has tended to be divided between anthropologically-based and market-based approaches (Richards & Wilson, 2004a). This division is mirrored in terms of theory, methodology, the research subject and newly emergent discourses.

Anthropological studies tend to focus on qualitative, ethnographic studies of the individual backpacker (e.g. Binder, 2004; Cederholm, 1999; Sørensen, 2003; Welk, 2004) that attempt to understand the meaning of backpacking from an emic perspective. Such studies are often undertaken in the field by researchers who themselves are backpackers. This tends to produce a geographic focus on popular backpacker destinations, particularly in exotic locations in South East Asia and India (e.g. Hottola, 1999; Johnsen, 1998; Maoz, 2004). The predominant anthropological paradigm of such studies has tended to produce a focus on a limited range of dimensions of backpacker experience. These include issues of alienation, rite de passage/moratorium, ritual, extension/reversal, the search for authenticity and distinction or cultural capital.

The predominance of analytical dichotomies in such studies, in turn, tends to polarise the discussion of backpacking. The idea that backpackers tend to struggle against the growth of tourism in order to preserve their lifestyle is also contained in the narratives of loss which are common in backpacker literature as well as academic studies of backpacking (Richards & Wilson, 2004b). For example, studies of identity tend to be based on externalising the other traveller, where inclusive membership of one community meets the exclusion of others: 'to be an "x" means not being a "y"' (Sollors, 1989; cited in Welk, 2004). This is often echoed within the backpacker scene, with some of those who might be externally labelled as backpackers tending to define themselves in terms of their *not* being backpackers. This form of backpacker angst mirrors earlier trends towards tourist angst (Welk, 2004) which according to many studies is prevalent

among older, more experienced independent travellers lamenting the loss of their pioneering travelstyles due to the changing nature not only of tourism but also of backpacking. Other commentators have implicated those researching backpackers as being often guilty of such backpacker angst in their research perspectives (e.g. wilderness.com's [2002] dismissal of these narratives of loss among 'well-backpacked' researchers as 'the whingeing of purists').

Such anthropological perspectives on the backpacker neotribe (Maffesoli, 1995) contrast sharply with market or policy based studies, which are largely based on the economic potential offered by attracting more backpackers to a specific destination. There is less concern for the nature of the scene, but more interest in the decision-making processes, expenditure, activities and information sources of the backpackers. These studies of the characteristics of independent/backpacker travel are usually aimed at improving the marketing or management of backpacker destinations (e.g. Loker, 1993; Pearce, 1990). This type of research has been particularly prevalent in Australia, where the backpacker industry has grown rapidly in recent years. The major limitation of this tradition tends to be a lack of theoretical basis. Instead of linking to theories about backpacker travel developed from a more anthropological tradition, the theoretical content is usually limited to a review of the findings of previous positivist-empiricist backpacker studies. Another limitation is that backpackers are usually studied in relation to other types of tourists (age groups or travel styles), which also tends to underline the apparent coherence of the group. Definitions are usually externally derived, and the backpackers themselves are rarely asked if they see themselves as backpackers or not.

The polarisation of theoretical perspectives is also linked to a methodological divide, with anthropological studies being concerned to use qualitative, ethnographic methods to uncover the meaning of backpacking, whereas the market studies almost invariably use quantitative survey techniques to uncover the volume and impact of backpacker flows and expenditure.

Arguably, this methodological divide has meant that backpacker studies have not generally taken a holistic view of the backpacker scene. Anthropological studies, usually based on depth interviews with backpackers by backpackers, tend to have set ideas about who qualifies as a backpacker, to the exclusion of other independent travellers with similar destinations and behaviour. The emphasis tends to be on the so called *real* backpacker, who is usually seen as somebody travelling independently for several months and only staying in budget accommodation. Such studies are usually unable to capture the changing nature of backpacking, since the largely pre-determined view of who is a backpacker tends to preclude newcomers to the scene or those utilising new backpacker products. The focus on a backpacker archetype also tends to emphasise the individual at the expense of the group, generally avoiding the issue of intra-group diversity. As we show later in this paper, however, the backpackers themselves tend to differ greatly on the issue of backpacker identity.

The theoretical gap between the ideology and practice of the scene is therefore largely reproduced in the emic/etic divide in previous research. There is some evidence that this divide is now beginning to soften, as some studies attempt to combine traditions (e.g. Westerhausen, 2002) and new case study areas emerge, such as the increasing body of European, Asian and Central and South American-focused studies – in terms of destinations and participants

(Anderskov, 2002; Prideaux & Shiga, 2004; Speed & Harrison, 2004). There is also a growing recognition of the need to develop more sophisticated analyses of enclaves, as evidenced by recent contributions to a *Tourism Recreation Research Special Issue on Backpacker Tourism* (Pearce & Cohen, 2006). This contains detailed studies of enclaves in Thailand (Cohen, 2006) and Vietnam (Lloyd, 2006), although both of these studies concentrate on the local enclave entrepreneurs without analysing the role of the backpackers. More enclave-related research is also presented in the volume on backpacker travel edited by Hannam and Ateljevic (2007), which collates the papers presented at the ATLAS Backpacker Research Group meeting in Bangkok in 2005.

However, a number of problems remain with the analyses that currently derive from the two traditions, which have created gaps in the analysis of backpacker experience and the enclaves that support them. This indicates a need to develop new theoretical approaches to the study of backpacker-style travel which broaden current perspectives and recognise the important spatial dimensions of the phenomenon. Because most of the theory related to backpacking is derived from anthropology, most analysis is limited to backpackers as the participants, rather than the wider field of the social construction of backpacking, which includes the producers, residents and other non-participants who help to create and define the scene (Cohen, 2004).

We support here a new conceptual approach to the study of enclaves which attempts to move away from previous dichotomies towards a more holistic view of the backpacking experience. This takes into account not just the views of backpackers as consumers of experience, but also the backpacker role as experience producer, as well as the roles of other actors, including the local residents and service industry workers.

We argue that studies of enclaves as sites of production, reproduction and consumption of backpacker travel need to come to terms with the spatial consequences and the social reproduction of the phenomenon. It is suggested that rather than analysing backpacker travel and backpacker enclaves as either extensions or reversals of conventional tourism and of life back at home, they should be viewed as a more complex mixture of experiences, which can help to mediate between the ideology and practice of backpacker travel.

Traveller Enclaves as Spaces of Suspension

The term enclave has been applied to a wide range of tourism phenomena (see Lew, 2004), ranging from backpacker destinations to conventional tourism places (such as the *Costas* of Spain, see O'Reilly, 2003) to cruise ships (Weaver, 2005) to the tourist bubble (Judd, 1999). What tends to link these different concepts of enclaves is the idea of relative uniformity, or their role as homogeneous tourist spaces (Edensor, 1998). In the case of backpacker enclaves, however, this idea of homogeneity is challenged by the sheer variety and diversity of such spaces.

Enclaves may be located at crossroads or intersections; meeting points which 'permit backpackers to socialise with each other after traversing "alien territory" and serve to reinforce a communal ethos and the creation of an, albeit temporary, Utopian society populated by their peers' (Westerhausen & Macbeth, 2003: 73). They can be found in chaotic commercial districts (Jalan Jaksa, Jakarta and Banglamphu, Bangkok) or rural paradises with low accessibility (Ubud, Bali) or

scenes of subcultural gatherings (such as Goa's trance music scene) (Saldanha, 2002). They can also be temporary enclaves – punctuation marks in well-trodden festival circuits (Glastonbury Festival, Fiestas de San Fermin in Pamplona, Oktoberfest in Munich), or on the work trail (Harvest Trails in Australia). The key difference between backpacker enclaves and more traditional concepts of enclaves tends to be their permeability. Locals are not excluded and visitors are not totally protected from the world outside. The penetration of the enclave is actually welcomed by the visitor searching for contact with *real* locals, on the basis that the security of home is close at hand. In fact, there is often a whole infrastructure created with the aim of maintaining this balance.

The idea of the function of the enclave as maintaining some form of stasis for the backpacker is a theme which has been addressed recently in the work of Hottola (2005). Hottola analyses backpacker enclaves as *safe havens* travellers can retreat to in order to increase their level of control and counter the *culture confusion* that reigns outside. The pressure of the host culture forces backpackers to congregate in enclaves that provide company, support and information from fellow travellers. Hottola underlines the fact that the expressed desire of backpackers to experience local culture is often not fulfilled, as the problems involved in making real contact with local people are often too great. The other backpackers in the enclave provide a surrogate cultural experience of difference which is more akin to the home culture of the traveller. Similarly, Westerhausen (2002: 69) refers to enclaves as 'a cultural home away from home' where a temporary social world comes into existence; generally with English as the lingua franca (although this is not to suggest that the inhabitants of this temporary social world are by any means homogenous).

In a pioneering study of Vietnam's urban traveller cafés, Lloyd (2003) argues that the café zones (synonymous with backpacker areas, or enclaves) function as oases from which to escape from Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi's busy streets: 'catering to mainly Western backpacker clientele, traveller cafés form a safe bubble from which travellers can gaze out at the unfamiliar, while surrounded by comforts from home' (Lloyd, 2003: 355). Similarly, Hottola (2005) sees the backpacker enclaves as examples of 'metaworlds' or spaces in which the visitors can exert more actual or perceived control over their situation. He emphasises, however, that backpackers differ greatly in their motivations and their ability to handle difference. This effectively means that the spaces of the enclave are also differentiated according to the degree of control required, from the private spaces offered by the hostel room, to the communal traveller only spaces in hostels and spaces where locals are restricted by entry charges or other barriers, such as bars, restaurants and tourist attractions.

Hottola's analysis of backpacker enclaves as metaspaces is a significant advance in the analysis of the backpacker phenomenon. It moves beyond the individual backpacker, or even the idea of a coherent backpacker group, towards the relationship between structure and action. In our view, the gap between desire and fulfilment in the consumption of difference is a crucial part of this dialectic relationship, helping to explain some of the peculiarities of backpacker behaviour as well as the spaces of backpacker consumption.

However, we would argue that this shift away from the individual backpacker needs to go even further, to consider other actors who help construct the

notion of backpacking and who can influence the degree of control exerted by backpackers in the metaworlds of the enclave. Extending the analysis to provide a more holistic view of the process of experience creation in the enclave (and on the road as well) is particularly necessary because of the relative permeability of backpacker enclaves compared with other types of tourist 'bubbles'.

The enclave experience

The experience of the enclave is highly differentiated depending, as Hottola suggests, not just on the level of control exerted by the traveller, but also their needs and desires for experience. Many backpackers want to experience it all; they want to be away from it all *and* at the heart of things; they want to be a part of local *and* global culture; they want to be here *and* there. These often contradictory desires create tensions for backpackers in their search for experience, which are often revealed in the gap between the ideology and practice of backpacker travel. Not only is the backpacker journey shaped by such tensions, but the enclave is too. As the enclave develops through a process of interaction between locals and backpackers, this interaction is shaped by the nature of the enclave space, but the enclave space is also reshaped by that interaction. For example, the private and communal backpacker spaces are shaped by the demand that individuals have for privacy and interaction, and the availability of such spaces in turn makes more and different interactions possible. This dialectic relationship between space and experience begins to shape a specific type of enclave experience which we have termed *suspension* (Richards & Wilson, 2004a).

Rather than being totally isolated or totally immersed in local culture, many backpackers who inhabit backpacker enclaves tend to be in fact *suspended* between local and global culture, between a totally tourist culture and a totally local culture, in a space that is neither homogeneous nor totally heterogeneous. It may be the case that many modern backpackers are not so much engaged in either reversal or a strict extension of everyday life, but rather a suspension of it.

Instead of seeing the enclave as a homogeneous space, we would prefer to see backpacker enclaves as the product of dynamic forces that are constantly changing. The backpacker enclave is not so much a tourist space (an extension of home for the tourist) nor a local space (a reversal of tourist experience), but rather a space suspended in the field created by a series of apparently opposing forces. Some of these basic forces or parameters of the spaces in which suspension takes place might be as included in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Basic forces or parameters of spaces in which suspension takes place

We would not argue that suspension represents a clear mid point between a series of opposites. Rather the moment of suspension for each visitor will depend on their own motivation and desires as well as the opportunities and limitations offered by the enclave. Rather than see backpacking as one extreme or the other of a continuum, we have tried to adopt a more dialectic approach which posits the integration of such opposites as essential elements of the whole.

As spaces, backpacker enclaves provide customised spaces catering for (predominantly young) visitors, which often appear to have little connection with their local surroundings. Often they provide many of the home comforts that visitors seem to demand, as well as the increasingly essential means of contacting home (particularly through internet cafes). Backpackers, supposedly driven by desire to experience something different from their home environment, often end up surrounded by the extended familiarity of home even in the most remote and exotic destinations. The people that supply both the exotic and the familiar in the enclave are also effectively suspended together with their guests. In Bangkok, for example, Banglamphu has become a *western* leisure area of interest to locals as well as backpackers (Richards & Wilson, 2004a). What underpins the suspension of backpacker enclaves, as opposed to the homogeneous nature of other types of enclave, is the permeability of these spaces, which allows apparently opposing forces to interact to produce a state of suspension.

At present, there is relatively little consideration of such processes in the backpacker literature. We would argue that there are a number of interesting dimensions of suspension which should be worthy of further analysis.

Spatial suspension (enclaves; touristic metaspaciality)

In spatial terms, the Western backpacker may be suspended between two cultures in a backpacker enclave that combines elements of the *West* and the *Other* in digestible doses and is, as Noy (2004) suggests, neither 'here' nor 'there'. Backpackers cannot be 'here' because the 'real' experience is outside the enclave, but they are also not 'there', because they are surrounded by the familiarity of the enclave.

This makes it very important to think about the spatial context of the enclave, because this will condition the relativity of *here* and *there* as well as the influence of the difference actors on the enclave experience. Bangkok and Sydney, for example, are very different types of enclaves, even though the backpackers using them may at first seem very similar. This underlines the importance of studying enclaves in their wider local, regional or national context. Each enclave can have a different role at each of these scales.

Temporal suspension (changing routine, rhythms)

The backpacker's journey, as conceptualised by Hottola, involves a series of encounters and periods of cultural confusion interspersed by periods of retreat to the metaworld of the enclave. The enclave is therefore a period of leisure, contrasted to the cultural work undertaken on the road and the real work waiting at home. For each person, the relationship between periods of cultural work and leisure will be different. Most backpackers can switch between a leisure

experience or a western tempo again, simply by reaching for an American Express card (Binder, 2004). The trip may therefore involve multiple periods of suspension, as periods of roughing it are interspersed with periods of more expensive accommodation, air conditioning and other home comforts.

It could be interesting to study the temporal rhythms within the enclave as well as the enclave as part of the rhythm of a whole trip (Amin & Thrift, 2002). The normal notions of time tend to be suspended in the enclave, both for the backpackers who try and avoid western notions of time (by discarding their watches, for example) and for the locals, whose rhythm often becomes attuned to that of the travellers. Again, there seems to be a need to study the rhythms of the enclave in the context of the rhythms of its surroundings.

Behavioural (hybrid identities; adaptive behaviour)

Suspension becomes a means of managing personal contradictions that emerge from shifting identities. The enclave provides a social space which is suspended between intimacy and anonymity. At home the backpacker is constrained by set patterns of behaviour, norms and meaning. Entering the host culture replaces individual identities with stereotypes of the tourist. In the enclave, suspension provides a space in which new identities can be forged, based on the shared lifestyles of fellow backpackers, who at the same time maintain the distance of strangers. Backpackers may engage in behaviour that challenges the norms of their home environment, such as the use of drugs or hanging around doing nothing, but at the same time they conform not so much to the norms of the host culture they are visiting, but to those of the backpacker subculture they are suspended in.

Similar opportunities are also available to locals, who can use the enclave as a space in which the norms of the locality are tempered by the presence of the backpackers. Suspended environments also provide a relatively neutral space in which the cultural knowledge of the host can be offered as a gateway to the authentic experiences outside the enclave. This creates a position of power for certain brokers within the enclave who provide this cultural intermediary function (Dahles & Bras, 1999).

This dynamic relationship between the locals and their guests may also apply to enclaves where the cultural distance is not great. In western-style cities, the factors that attracted the backpackers to a certain enclave, such as the edginess of inner city areas, or the cheapness of the rents may also eventually become attractive to other users of the space. It is no coincidence that the backpacker enclaves in Sydney, such as Glebe, have been subject to gentrification processes in recent years, whereas in other districts the backpackers' presence was felt after gentrification processes had been set in motion. In this way, the processes of development kicked off by the backpackers may become an economic springboard for local residents as well.

The enclave may also be a space which allows the illusion of a contemporaneous existence of reversal and extension. Instead of finding *communitas* (Turner, 1973) through submersion in the host culture, perhaps backpackers find a similar experience through the communal spaces of the enclave – areas in which cultural difference is clearly present, but not in the form imagined when leaving home. An exploration of the role of narrative in supporting the gap between

theory and practice and in forming a surrogate *communitas* would be an interesting line of enquiry.

The above potential realms of suspension could yield fruitful areas for further research. As an illustration of what could be done, the following section presents a small scale empirical study of backpackers, residents and service providers in Bangkok and Sydney.

The 'Gap' Between Ideology and Practice in Backpacker Enclaves

The development of a more holistic understanding of backpacker experience and how this produces and is produced by backpacker enclaves requires the application of methodologies that can bridge the methodological divide in backpacker studies. As argued elsewhere (Richards & Wilson, 2004c), Q-methodology is a potentially useful tool, since it has been used for some time to combine qualitative and quantitative methods, although it has yet to be widely applied in backpacker studies.

In our study of backpacker enclaves in Bangkok (Banglamphu) and Sydney (Kings Cross/Darlinghurst, Bondi, Glebe), Q-methodology was used to develop a series of statements (constructs) related to the social construction of the notion of backpacking, which were then used to conduct surveys with a significant qualitative element. The surveys covered around 250 respondents, including visitors, local residents, policy makers and service providers. The fieldwork was conducted in July and August 2002, and further details of the methodology can be found in Richards and Wilson (2004c). In this paper, we look only at the views of the visitors in the sample.

When looking at the motives for travel, the things that the visitors are most likely to be seeking are cultural difference, excitement, learning and relaxation. Those calling themselves backpackers were particularly likely to be motivated by exploring other cultures and searching for knowledge and excitement (Richards & Wilson, 2004a).

In general, the backpackers in the enclaves of Bangkok and Sydney think that they are better equipped than other visitors to make contact with local people, learn about local culture and contribute more to the local community (Figure 2).

Backpackers and other visitors also perceive backpackers as different, which tends to confirm the classic anthropological concepts of travel as a source of identity as well as the idea of backpacker angst among other visitors (Figure 3).

One of the things that was also evident from the research was the relatively fluid nature of backpacker identity. Very few of the visitors interviewed saw themselves solely as backpackers, even though a more etic analysis might tend to characterise them as such. Instead of a clear division between backpackers, travellers and tourists, more interesting divisions emerged between purists who identified with a single travel style, and the hybrids, who identified with two, three or more labels (Table 1).

Although backpacker was the single most popular label, the hybrids made up nearly 40% of the visitor sample. This indicates that for many, the label is not as important as the ability to change identity, perhaps in moving in and out of the enclave. One hybrid commented 'after seeing a lot of backpackers who got stuck

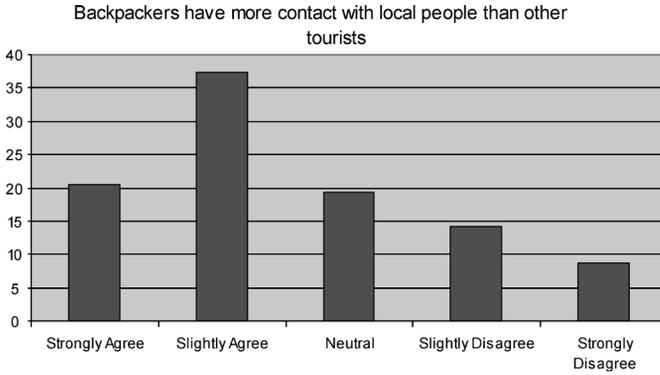


Figure 2 Visitor reactions to the statement ‘backpackers have more contact with local people than other tourists’

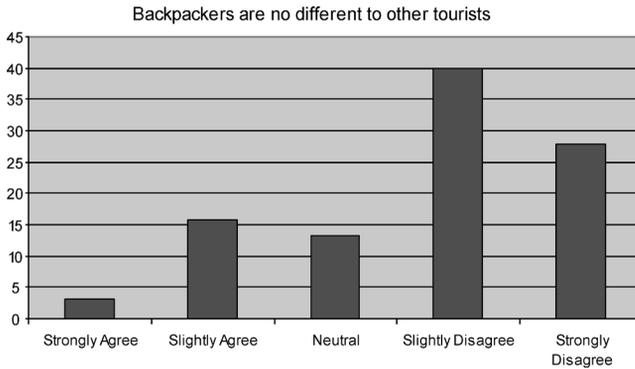


Figure 3 Visitor reactions to the statement ‘Backpackers are no different to other tourists’

in foreign countries, because they liked [the feeling of being] someone “special” for the local people as a backpacker, so much I avoid trying to be a “real backpacker” because if you [exceed] your limits the only thing you are is ridiculous’.

Asked to respond to the statement ‘backpackers spend most of their time with other backpackers’, visitors tended to agree, pointing to a mismatch between the desire to experience the local and their actual degree of contact with local culture (Figure 4). There seems to be some contradiction between the general agreement that backpackers stick together with the idea that they also have more contact with locals than other tourists. In fact, most of the comments made on this statement indicated that backpackers *sometimes* spend more time with other backpackers, suggesting that there is a feeling that, from time to time, contacts are made with locals. It seems that the experience of other cultures that backpackers get in enclaves is actually related to the cultures of other backpackers, rather than the local culture, as Hottola (1999) has already suggested. Despite this, the idea that backpacking provides more contact with local culture remains strong, indicating that backpackers are able to see themselves as experiencing more local culture primarily in relation to other visitors.

Table 1 Self designation by travel style

<i>Self-designation/ label</i>	<i>Purist/hybrid</i>	<i>%</i>
Backpacker	purist	30.7
BP/traveller/tourist	hybrid	22.9
Traveller	purist	21.7
BP/traveller	hybrid	7.8
Tourist	purist	6.0
None	n/a	6.0
BP/tourist	hybrid	2.4
Traveller/tourist	hybrid	2.4

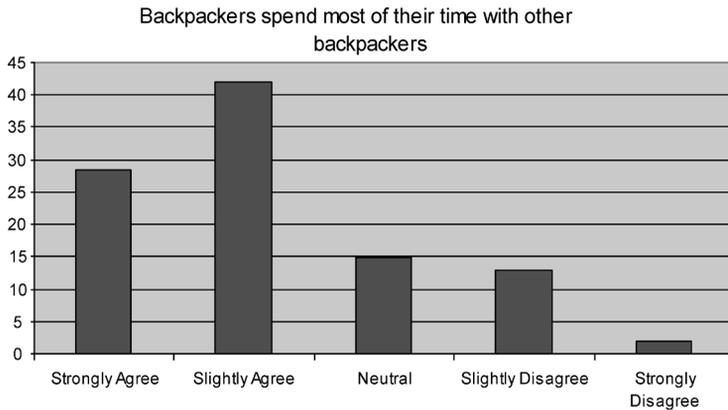


Figure 4 Visitor reactions to the statement ‘Backpackers spend most of their time with other backpackers’

Respondents had divided opinions about the extent to which backpackers experience more of local culture than other visitors. One visitor respondent commented that ‘it is nonsense to say that backpackers learn more’ about the countries they visit, whereas another argued that backpackers do learn more about local culture ‘because they spend longer in the country’. A 35-year-old Dutch airline pilot traveller said ‘between the age of 20 and 30 we were backpacking, travelling very basic through countries which were just “opening up”. Nowadays it looks like there are not [so many] countries to discover, unless they are dangerous (e.g. Afghanistan). So backpacking nowadays is becoming so easy and accessible even for naïve travellers. So backpacking has become travelling for most people coming to Thailand [...] the real edge from fifteen years ago is gone’. So in the view of the nostalgic backpacker, the growth of enclaves and travel infrastructure between them has reduced the opportunity for *real* travel, and also helped to push the enclave into a state of suspension.

One of the important functions of the enclave, therefore, is to provide a basis for comparing the behaviour of backpackers with other visitors. This applies not just to the visitors themselves, but also to local residents and travel industry staff. For example, in response to the statement 'backpackers are no different to other tourists', one local resident commented 'yes, they play a bigger part in our community', whereas a backpacker supplier said 'backpackers stay longer – it comes down to money'. For the backpackers, however, the difference tends to be underlined by travel style: 'tourists stay in resorts and do towns, backpackers do as they please'. This idea of backpacking as a relatively unstructured, free form of travel is common in the backpacker community, but tends to be undermined by the institutionalisation of backpacker travel. As the survey responses also show, the Lonely Planet is the backpackers bible, and eventually tourists, travellers and backpackers all tend to end up in the same enclaves (Geisbers, 2002).

Backpackers also end up in fashionable destinations (Figure 5), rather than those places where they might expect to find real locals. As one visitor commented, 'some fashionable destinations are great', suggesting that mainstream, fashionable destinations are somehow undesirable, but still something to be experienced by the backpacker. As another said 'we want to experience it anyway'. But another respondent indicated that more would visit fashionable places if they could: 'those that can afford it choose fashionable destinations'.

At least for some, then, the ongoing desire to avoid the masses and inauthentic experiences does imply that there is little evidence of post-tourist irony or playfulness (Feifer, 1985) taking place for these participants of the scene. Others, however, revel in the fake and inauthentic, using their imaginations to create their own tourist experience. This tends to problematise the resort cycle in the context of backpacker destinations, which are usually conceived of as pioneer resorts.

The overall picture that emerges from the analysis of visitors' responses is that there is a visible gap between the theory of experiencing difference or being explorers, and the reality of the enclave. This view is also generally supported by residents and those involved in servicing backpackers in the enclaves of Sydney. There was a significant difference in responses between visitors and residents for very few statements. The visitors were less likely to agree that backpackers exaggerate their stories, that there is a difference between tourists

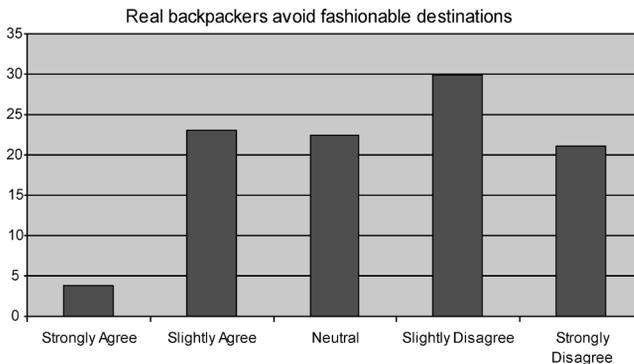


Figure 5 Visitor reactions to the statement 'real backpackers avoid fashionable destinations'

and backpackers, that older backpackers are more sophisticated and that backpackers travel to get away from it all. Otherwise, the patterns recognised by backpackers and other visitors regarding the norms, values and symbols of the scene are also noted by residents and workers in the enclave. The gap between ideology and practice in backpacker travel in the environment of the enclave is therefore reproduced in the social construction of the backpacker concept.

Discussion

Our initial empirical analysis has underlined the gap between ideology and practice that underpins the backpacker experience of the enclave. We would argue that the enclave, in seeking to meet the needs of the backpackers to reconcile desire and attainment, provides them with a space in which norms, values and expectations are effectively suspended between the two. The enclave replaces the *Other* with *An Other* constructed by the community of backpackers and maintained with the help of local residents and service suppliers. In the suspended reality of the enclave, the disappointment of unattained experiences is tempered by the new possibilities that are offered, and which are not generally available in other situations; a concentration of new acquaintances, a stage on which to perform, a ready audience (locally and in cyberspace) and a cosmopolitan mix of the local and the global (such as the ubiquitous banana pancakes).

The reassurance of the enclave is therefore provided not just by a rest from the stimuli that are supposed to cause culture confusion, but also through replacing them with new stimuli. In this sense, the enclave is not just a place of rest; it is also a place of active leisure (although some work-orientated enclaves, such as a couple of those in Sydney, may function differently). Although many may wish to leave the leisure of the enclave and get down to some real cultural work outside, the ability to escape an increasingly institutionalised system is limited. Travellers are led by the Lonely Planet and other guidebooks and websites to locations where other backpackers congregate. For most people, these are also desirable locations, providing the services needed to support the backpacker lifestyle and a ready supply of new interpersonal encounters to weave the narratives that support backpacker identities. These narratives help to bridge the gap between ideology and practice, because they allow the backpacker to live their adventures vicariously through the exploits of the more outgoing (or exaggerated), and to position themselves as more experienced than the less adventurous or less travelled.

The enclave brings the backpacker into contact with the local in a controlled way, where the locus of control seems to be with the backpacker. However, the ability of the enclave to concentrate the backpackers also turns them into an economic resource and a spectacle for the locals. The issue of control is therefore far from clear, since the backpackers not only become an economic resource to be exploited by locals, but eventually may also be subject to local consumption, as enclaves become leisure areas for locals and backpackers alike. The enclave therefore becomes a tool for mediating cultures, so that culture confusion is avoided from both sides, although true reversal is also prevented by the constructed familiarity of the enclave. This state of suspension should be a major avenue for future backpacker research, as Pearce (2006) suggests, and perhaps it could also provide a useful way of analysing other *tourist bubbles* as well.

There is therefore, a need to look at the function the enclave takes on in different contexts, and the influence of different cultural and social forces on the process of suspension in these different contexts. For example, it would be interesting to know whether there is such a clear difference between work and leisure-oriented traveller enclaves. Where there is a common language (usually English), there is a far higher tendency for participants to take paid work and this may equate to a longer and very different relationship with the given destination. When do backpackers working in the community become local? Are backpackers in some contexts becoming a model for the modern mobile worker as well as the modern tourist?

Are some traveller enclaves for work and some for play? What it does imply is a need to avoid treating backpacker enclaves as the pioneer destinations in wider tourism spatial and economic development models and start to consider them with more sophistication in terms of their function and also their relationship to their host city, region or country as well as their position in international travel circuits. Do London, Paris and Amsterdam (the gateways to Europe) have a similar function to Bangkok and Singapore (gateways to South East Asia)? To what extent does cultural distance make a difference in the experience of these different places? Certain recent studies have contributed much to understanding of the work and learning-oriented, as well as the 'more-than-just-temporary leisure and lifestyle mobility' dimensions of the traveller/backpacker experience (e.g. Clarke, 2004, 2005; Duncan, 2004; Simpson, 2003; Wilson *et al.*, 2004). A continuation of this and other trends outlined in this article would constitute a major contribution to research on backpacking and independent travel.

In opening up all of these potential research areas, we need to be aware of the considerable limitations of the current study. In advocating a holistic approach to enclaves, for example, it may also be argued that this obscures the relationship between enclaves and periods of travel. The relationship of experiences gathered in the enclave relative to those on the road is also an important area for future research. The empirical evidence presented here is also preliminary and needs to be followed up with more detailed fieldwork among visitors, service providers and local residents. The enclave spaces could also be mapped through GIS to show spatial inter-relationships. The most important point, however, is to avoid focussing too heavily on the backpacker as individual consumer, and to pay more attention to the actors and systems which support such activities and to their local-specific spatial and temporal contexts.

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