De-constructing Wonderland:

Surfing Tourism in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia.

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to deconstruct surfing tourist space (Wonderland) in the Mentawai islands Indonesia, and show the distribution of wealth generated through foreign tourists accessing local resources is inequitable and unsustainable. The discovery of world-class surf in this region in the early 1990's spawned the rapid development of a foreign-controlled surfing tourism industry. This paper seeks to establish the notion of 'tourist space' as a conceptual tool for analyzing the rise of surfing tourism in Indonesia based on 50 years of narrative, surf exploration and idealized media representations of un-crowded surf breaks and high adventure – in short Wonderland. In the Mentawai context a marketing synergy between foreign surf-tour operators, the media and surfwear manufacturers has written local populations, government and NGOs out of the 'Wonderland' equation. This paper analyses the construction of surfing tourist space in Indonesia by unpacking its components to reveal foundations historically based in surfer mythology. We argue that through a comparison with best practice principles of tourism development, a re-evaluation of self and other, and empowerment of community based organizations that a re-conceptualisation of tourist space may allow new, more effective foundations to be laid in pursuit of sustainable tourism development.

Introduction

Due to favourable weather trends and a vast exposed coastline, the islands of Indonesia contain perhaps the world's richest 'surf fields'. Following the use of imagery of world-class waves in the remote Mentawai archipelago for international surf marketing in the early 1990s, the region was rapidly colonised by a foreign-controlled surfing tourism industry annually catering for thousands of surfers. We argue that this process has culminated in the construction of a surfing tourist space based upon adventure, the search for the perfect wave, uncrowded breaks and absent or compliant local communities: in short, 'Wonderland'. In the Mentawai a 'business-class' version of the surfing tourist space initially constructed by surf explorers of the 1960s and 70s serves the marketing purposes of tour operators, the media, and surfwear manufacturers. This Wonderland has proven extremely effective in boosting revenue for those comprising this marketing synergy, yet it is based upon myth (Barthes, 1973; Dann, 1996; Doyle, 1989; Eliade, 1984) enabling the extraction of value from the resources of destination communities without compensation.

The myth that underpins Wonderland has seen indigenous communities largely written out of marketing copy and imagery, or relegated to the role of exotic curios. The reality is that the Mentawai people live in poverty. 'Copra' harvesting may yield a family breadwinner up to AUD$30 per month (Barilotti, 2002: 39). Infant mortality rates (largely preventable) of sixty percent affect some areas (Surf Aid International, 2003), while within sight western surfers enjoy sumptuous feasts and sip chilled beer aboard luxury yachts, paying up to AUS$500 per day each, virtually none of which filters back

to local communities. Indeed, Barilotti (2002: 36) commented that 'Mentawai boat trips have become the surfing equivalent of 19th century "Gentlemen Adventurers" shooting buffalo from rail cars as they sped across the vanishing frontier'.

Doyle (1989: 1) argues that attitudes and politics will not change if the bedrock of unassailable truths - myths – remain unquestioned. 'It is this bedrock of ideas which constantly legitimates both social and political structures and compatible attitudes, values and goals. In short, myth is the basis for ideology and political organisation'. The empty tourist space of Wonderland has been made to function by neo-liberalist ideals that attempt to subordinate the interests of destination communities in developing countries, focussing instead upon the marketplace of developed countries. We attempt to deconstruct this by tracing the development of surfing tourist space in Indonesia, unpacking its elements, and questioning the myth at its foundation with a view to providing a more sophisticated analysis of how tourist space is operationalised.

According to Derrida (1972) deconstruction involves working through narratives in such a way as to discover and determine their basic assumptions and/or conceptual building blocks. In the absence of an explicit philosophy regarding development (which is a philosophy in itself), Wonderland has adopted an approach that has marginalised the concerns of stakeholder groups and tended to portray indigenous communities as unchanging, 'other to' and inferior to travelling surfers. This approach has also impacted upon the type of tourism practiced in the Mentawai. In the absence of controls, the surfing tourism industry has proceeded along economically neo-liberal lines. This

approach to development has been discredited in recent times due to a tendency to encourage concentrated external control of revenue and resources while the true costs of such ventures are shouldered by the wider community (Brohman, 1996; Harrison, 1992; Mahapatra, 1998; Peet, 1999; Rahnema, 1988; Redclift, 1987; Telfer, 1996; 2002; 2003).

In order to pursue sustainable tourism and development a view of tourist space that transcends the myth of Wonderland and incorporates a range of stakeholder subjectivities including destination communities is required. Over the last fifteen years the focus of ecotourism has shifted from Western conservation principles to a more pragmatic view that attempts to encompass destination communities (Page & Dowling, 2002; Wearing and Neil, 1999**;** Weaver, 2001). This shift reflects change within international NGOs such as WWF International where the focus has moved from habitat based conservation to community based and led conservation initiatives. Evidence of this shift may be found in recent definitions of ecotourism (*c.f.* Honey, 1999; Wearing &Wearing, 1999). We therefore suggest that ecotourism principles are now closely aligned to best practice community based approaches where alternative forms of tourism and markets are being established in less developed countries. As such we compare current tourism management practices in the Mentawai to principles of ecotourism. Despite the industry's rhetorical commitment to sustainability, current management practice remains unsustainable in a number of ways - these are discussed in the context of destination communities. We argue that such analysis enables the limits of the dominant discourse (Wonderland) to be tested and transcended, creating a basis for a re-conceptualisation of tourist space incorporating best practice principles.

Tourist Space

A range of disciplines have begun to conceptualise space and place as complex socio-cultural constructions, rather than simply physical locations (Gustafson, 2001; Meethan, 2001). Social scientists have traditionally referred to space in terms of a physical location, and the meanings that people bring to space have been referred to as place. Initially described in terms underpinned by positivist notions of the authentic (Agnew, 1987; Relph, 1976), conceptual notions of place have evolved to be considered individual human creations, products of social, cultural, and political processes with different discourses constructing and reappraising individual notions of place (Driver, Dustin, Baltic, Elsner, & Peterson, 1997; Eade, 1997; Gustafson, 2001; Massey, 1994; 1995; Mowl & Towner, 1995; Pries, 1999).

French philosophers Michel De Certeau and Michael Foucault parallel these ideas though invert the traditionally held relationship between space and place. De Certeau (1988) conceptualises 'space' as being 'place' (an instantaneous configuration of positions, relatively static in space and time) that resonates with experience and stories. Stories transform places into spaces by providing spatial organisation, opening a 'legitimate theatre for practical actions' and 'authorising the establishment, displacement and transcendence of limits' (De Certeau, 1988: 125). In this view a variety of discourses may interact in one geographic location or place, no one having absolute authority or legitimacy.

Foucault refers to these contested places as heterotopias - 'the juxtaposing in a single real place (of) several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 1986: 25). Wearing (1998: 146) argues that tourist spaces can act as heterotopias for resistance to domination, allowing room for discourse other than that of the powerful. Citing Foucault, Edensor (1998; 2000) described a continuum between 'heterogeneous' tourist spaces (likened to Foucault's heterotopias), in which tourism represents but one of many understandings of place, and 'enclavic' tourist spaces, tightly controlled by the tourism industry seeking to control and contextualise difference. He suggested that tourist space moves along this continuum as it becomes increasingly commodified by the tourism industry.

Despite the best efforts of tourism marketeers to control heterotopias we argue that tourist spaces cannot be reduced to a single discourse with prescribed meanings, rather space represents an individual's dynamic dialogue between the past and the present (Sahlins, 1985: 144). In this way tourist space can provide a context for examining the ways in which, 'power, identity, meaning and behaviour are constructed, negotiated and renegotiated according to socio-cultural dynamics' (Aitchison & Reeves, 1998: 51).

Wonderland's Foundations

John Urry highlighted the importance of the media in creating the anticipation of 'intense pleasures…constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records, and videos' (Urry, 1990: 3; 2002: 3). Over the

last 50 years a range of media have produced Wonderland imagery of perfect surf on deserted paradisiacal islands (Cronley, 1983; Kampion, 2003; Walding, 2003; Warshaw, 2004).

Preston-Whyte's (2001: 309) research highlights the pivotal role of surf media in constructing and maintaining imagery of 'the perfect wave' and 'surfing space'. This imagery is credited as the source of surfers' search for the perfect wave.

> Normative images of the wave environment are provided by surfing magazines that contain colour photographs of surfers demonstrating their skill on formidable waves. Particularly favoured is the image of a surfer negotiating a 'tube'. The image of these waves becomes the model that informs the notion of the perfect wave…For surfers the 'perfect wave' represents this ideal and perhaps unattainable vision. It is assumed to exist, is difficult to describe, and is the source of a quest that leads surfers in search of spaces where this wave can be found. (Preston-Whyte, 2001).

The focus of surf travel media, based on the interest of the consumer and industry sponsorship, is based very much upon product and logo placement, surfing conditions and the reactions of professional surfers to those conditions rather than informed representations of cultural and environmental diversity. Duncan (1993: 46) notes the 'other' in travel media is generally located in the past and exoticised by the dominant discourse. Surf marketing bears out this observation tending to represent contemporary indigenous Indonesian communities as 'lost tribes' even head-hunters, highlighting the 'timeless' nature of the idyllic islands and clear blue waters around which surf breaks are located (GBI, 2000) as the following quote demonstrates:

> It started as a whisper, one of those great rumours that surfers around the world love
> to believe in: on a remote unknown island in Indonesia – a place of malaria-infested

jungles and head hunters – huge, perfectly formed waves rolled into an idyllic bay. According to the tales, these were no ordinary waves: they were giant crystalline tubes, so hollow you could stand up inside them, stretch your arms above your head and still not touch the top of the barrel. (Ridgway, 1995)

Taking a position similar to Edensor (1998; 2000), Suvantola argues that tourist space is largely mythical and involves the deployment of standardising mechanisms associated with commodification so that 'different places are easily perceived to be similar everywhere' (Suvantola, 2002: 132). In this view, by marginalising and standardising the 'other', surfing tourist discourse encourages perceptions of generic tropical paradise locations with perfect surf and a hint of adventure – Wonderland.

Terkenli (2002: 228) conceptualises a global cultural economy of space in which the tourist is positioned as an 'increasingly passive agent observer, fascinated, entranced and entangled with the images of the contemporary objective world'. The tourist in this case is seduced by surf media imagery of the perfect wave in a generic tropical paradise. In Terkenli's view the tourist's focus has become more centred upon pleasure and hedonism. The pleasure/hedonism concept applied to tourist space can be likened to the global homogeneity of shopping malls, leisure centres and supermarkets, or 'non-places' offering comfort in a 'dream-like admixture of codes' – this type of commodified leisure Rojek (1993) argues is 'the dreamworld of Modernity'. Zukin (1991: 27) makes the case that the mobility and flexibility associated with postmodern space undermines one's sense of living in specific and unique locales and increases the feeling of belonging to a universal cultural space. Giddens (1990) referred to universalised cultural space in terms of 'disembeddedness', meaning that identity and action are influenced by references with vast geographical reach. In the context of surfing tourism the constructed notion of the

'perfect wave' and the comfortable hedonistic pleasure associated with Wonderland provides references that prevail over multiple destinations in euphoric physical transcendence of, and detachment from, the realities of everyday life in each geographic location. The disembedding of Wonderland has enabled the development of a model of surf tourism which is market focussed, economically neo-liberal and disconnected from local place and people.

Tracing the Lineage of Mentawai Wonderland

The Mentawai archipelago consists of four main islands (Siberut to the north, Sipora to the south, and further south again North and South Pagai) and many other smaller islands approximately 130 km off the coast of central west Sumatra (see Figure 1. below). The islands receive consistent ocean swell that generates regular surf of high quality around the scores of reefs and islands. Surfing tourism entrepreneurs were alerted to the potential of the area in the early 1990s and moved quickly to establish yacht-based tours (Martin Daley, 2002 pers. comm.; Paul King, 2002 pers. comm.; GBI, 2001). The Mentawai archipelago become the flavour of surfing culture in the 90s, featuring in thousands of advertisements, scores of videos and dozens of travel articles (Carroll, 2000, Hammerschmidt, 2004). By 2000 the Mentawai surf tourism industry involved over thirty live-aboard yachts, one functioning foreign owned surf camp and at least four locally run *losmen* (homestay) operations in three locations. Larger operators began to procure land, even entire islands upon which to construct luxury resorts (Ponting, 2001).

Figure 1. Location of the Mentawai Archipelago

NGOs concerned with conservation, development and health have been working in the Mentawai region for several decades including the WWF International, UNESCO, local organisation 'Citra Mandiri Foundation', the 'Siberut National Park Authority', and national health care NGO 'Bhinekka Tunggal Ika Foundation' (Bakker, 1999; Persoon, 2003; Reeves, 2001). Most recently a surfer initiated and funded NGO Surf Aid International (SAI) has begun to tackle the Mentawai's health issues (Surf Aid International, 2003). Tapping into surf industry funds drawn from the uncompensated use

of Mentawai resources has proven difficult. In response SAI have resorted to bold advertising campaigns in surf media with the intention of shattering the comfortable apathy encouraged by imagery of Wonderland by juxtaposing it with slogans such as "No wonder the Mentawai Islands are uncrowded, three out of five children there will die" (Tracks, 2001: 96).

Recent world events have impacted upon the Mentawai tourism industry by limiting growth beginning in 1998 with the process of political reform in Indonesia. Then the New York terrorist attacks of 2001; the Bombing of Indonesian tourist enclave in Kuta Bali in 2002; the start of the second Gulf War in 2003; global concern over the SARS virus in 2003; the bombings of Jarkarta airport and Marriott Hotel in 2003; the Australian embassy bombing in Jakarta in 2004; the tsunami of 26th December 2004 which devastated mainland Sumatra and offshore islands north of the Mentawai archipelago; and the Nias earthquake of March 28th 2005 and powerful aftershocks which continued into May 2005 causing structural damage to buildings in Padang. Despite these set backs the 2005 charter boat fleet had swelled to perhaps fifty boats and additionally three foreign owned land based resorts and increased numbers of local homestay operations were scheduled to open for the April to October surf season. Further, in 2005 the industry is due to be subject to the Mentawai government's third attempt to introduce legislation aimed at encouraging foreign investment through the privatisation of capacity control which would see charter numbers limited, upmarket resorts favoured with capacity linked exclusion zones, and small-scale local operations deemed unlawful.

In the Australian context, surfing tourism to Indonesia was born out of surfing culture's rejection of conservative societal expectations and leisure opportunities in the 1960s and 1970s (Mercer, 1977). The late 1960s and early 1970s saw the beginnings of the commercialisation and popularisation of the emerging alternative surfing culture in Australia. The 'big-three' trans-national surfwear giants (Billabong, Rip Curl and Quiksilver) had their humble Australian beginnings in this period. While popular beaches became crowded, stories began to filter back from adventurous early surf explorers and 'hippy trail' tourists of an Indonesian surfing Wonderland (Verrender, 2000). Surf journalist Nick Carroll recalled this process from his childhood on Sydney's northern beaches:

> I loved the idea of these surfers who struck out into the unknown, suffered torments, and finally arrived at their own visions of Heaven…They would up and vanish one day, then stumble back into town six months later, sunburned, malarial, missing teeth, a stone lighter, but with a light in their eyes that spoke of waves beyond my dreams. (2000: 59)

Surf media documentation of the discovery of a high-quality surf break at Uluwatu, Bali in 1971 (Elfick, 1971a) and 1972 (Falzon, 1972) has been acknowledged as something of a starting point for the mass colonization of Indonesia's surf breaks by Australian surfers (Abraham, 1996; King, 1996). In de Certeau's terms, the media established the nature and boundaries of a new space for surfing tourists. In defining this new space a style of reporting supporting Pratt's (1992: 204) notion of the 'monarch of all I survey' and Selwyn's (1993) 'view from the throne' undermined the legitimacy of local ownership of environmental resources whilst elevating the surfer to the status of superhero. The

following quote from 1971 describes the scene as surfers first encountered the waves at Uluwatu:

> The natives who were lining the cliff tops freaked at this man walking on the water. They are frightened of the ocean, only venturing near it at low tide to set their lines, and here were these men walking at great speed on the water…smiling and ripping across the surface with excitement…they were sunshine supermen. (Elfick, 1971b:16-17)

The Australian surf media was defining a new tourist space. Bali became synonymous with 'juice surf…cheap living, ganja and a lush tropical climate', considered to be the components of an 'ideal place to surf it out' (Elfick, 1971). Wonderland was primarily concerned with perfect surf and the freedom of exploration, its' discourse encouraged a certain level of political and cultural disengagement with the destination. Barilotti (2002: 37) observed that 'most surfers travel not to experience another culture…the indigenous people are an obstacle or a friendly nuisance to sidestep on the way to the water'.

After the media exposure of Uluwatu in 1971 and 1972, surfing tourism to Indonesia began to flourish and was first targeted by the wider tourism industry in the mid 1970s (Bartholomew & Baker, 1996). Rudimentary 'surf-camp' and live-aboard yacht charter tours emerged in the early 1980s and by the end of the decade entrepreneurs targeted less adventurous but wealthy surfers with a new, exclusive, industry produced 'business-class Wonderland' involving direct flights, prompt and comfortable transfers and luxury yachts or resorts (Bartholomew & Baker, 1996; Buckley, 1999; 2002a; 2002b; 2003; Carroll, 2000; Rich, 1981; Sparkes, 1985; Verrender, 2000).

'Soul marketing' emerged in the 1990s to exploit the adventure and freedom associated with Wonderland and the ethos of early surf explorers in mass marketing campaigns (Brown, 1997). A simulation of surf exploration in Indonesia was used to sell Coca-Cola on television, film, and print advertising. Surfwear company 'Rip Curl' soon followed with a marketing campaign that included continuous surf exploration, a video shoot, and a print media advertising campaign featuring images of empty, perfect, undisclosed and often retouched surf breaks accompanied by slogans urging consumers to 'go search' and 'travel a little further, search a little longer' (Carroll, 2000). In more recent times rival surfwear multinational 'Quiksilver' launched the 'Quiksilver Crossing' involving a chartered boat and amphibious aeroplane in an eight-year global circumnavigation with professional surfers, photographers and cinematographers (Hammerschmidt, 2004).

A powerful marketing synergy between surf media, corporations and tour operators has created a sense of nostalgia for the 'pristine' surfing spaces constructed by the early surf explorers. Buckley (2003) captured the essence of this arrangement in describing the content of surfing magazines.

> The main bulk of these magazines, however, consists of heavily illustrated articles, most of them featuring sponsored surfers at locations visited by surf tour operators, photographed by professional surf photographers. Video footage from the same trip is used to make surf videos and DVDs, which are advertised through the same magazines…These magazines help to sell surfing equipment and surfing tours, and the equipment advertisements and surf tour stories help to sell the magazine. (Buckley, 2003: 131)

All of this prompts an important question, what discourse has emerged from this marketing synergy and what influence has it had upon the development of surf tourism?

The power of media representations of Wonderland is articulated in the following extract from an interview with a surf tourist in Indonesia:

> I think I was chasing these perfect waves more than anything. You hear so much about Indonesia and see so much, so many photos in magazines, and when you surf and to see that stuff and not be able to experience it; it could drive a man insane. (Ponting, 2000)

The surfing media has, to a large extent, created the symbols sought out by contemporary surfing tourists. Surf tourism has become a commercially motivated and controlled leisure experience, the surf media creates a voyeuristic keyhole into a mythical Wonderland. Surfwear consumers and would-be surfing tourists dream of falling through the surf media looking glass to find themselves cast in their own adventures in Wonderland. Cushioned adventure, remote, mysterious, exotic, undeveloped, uncrowded perfect waves are the essence of Wonderland that sells magazines, surfwear and surf vacations (Surfer's Path, 2002: 73).

Indeed, the values associated with early surf exploration now calibrate the relative value of contemporary surfing tourist experiences. The following surf media reference to Uluwatu provides an insight, 'It's a badge of honour. Who remembers the most change? Who experienced this wave, and this land, closest to it's most…pristine state' (Mondy, 2001: 23). As media exposure continued to transform yesterday's Wonderland into today's over-developed and crowded surf destination the cycle accelerated and contemporary surf explorers searched increasingly remote island groups for the new 'pristine' Wonderland and the business opportunities it had come to represent. The Mentawai islands were first surfed in the late 1980s, their location kept secret from the

global surfing community for several years. Surf tourism entrepreneurs began to provide Mentawai charter services to surf industry elite, professional surfers and filmmakers in the early 1990s. The resulting imagery sparked a surf tourism gold rush of unprecedented proportion (Baker, 1997; Kampion, 2003; Walding, 2003; Warshaw, 2004).

Deconstructing Wonderland

By acknowledging that Wonderland is a commercially driven socio-cultural construction - the success of which is dependant upon the appearance of adventure, uncrowded perfect surf and compliant friendly locals - cracks begin to appear in the discourse that holds this mythical space together. Under close scrutiny these cracks reveal the disconnection of the Wonderland myth from its true place (the Mentawai) and destination communities, and further, the impact of a neo-liberal tourism model. Table 1. below examines these cracks through comparison of current management practices in the Mentawai to core ecotourism principles.

Three main inter-related issues arise from Table1.

1. Economically neo-liberal approach to development

2. Lack of formal long-term co-ordinated planning recognising limits to growth

3. Lack of participatory research, planning and management.

It is our contention that these issues are symptomatic of the way in which the priorities and norms of Wonderland have been developed, and have come to assume greater importance than the pre-existing space of Mentawai communities.

Table 1. Comparing Ecotourism Principles and Current Practice in Mentawai Surfing Tourism

Ecotourism Principles	Current Practice in Mentawai Surfing Tourism
1. Should not degrade resources; development should conform to ecologically sustainable best practice.	Whilst the current live-aboard charter based industry has an extremely limited impact upon the environment through anchor damage to reefs and minor pollution through rubbish and sewage discharge, there are no controls in place. The problem has the potential to become much more significant with the impending introduction of larger scale luxury resorts.
2. Should provide long-term benefits to local community and industry.	Local and indigenous populations have been excluded from economic benefits derived from their resources and goodwill. There is no coordinated plan or vision amongst stakeholders as to the future management of surfing tourism in the Mentawai.
3. Should recognise limits to growth and the necessity of supply-oriented management.	Despite recognition of the crowding of many surf breaks in the Mentawai, and concern for the impacts of a growing industry, there is currently no limit on the number of operators in the archipelago and no foreseeable plan to limit new entrants into the market. Lack of legislation coupled with complex enforcement issues and overwhelming non-compliance of suggested schemes has hampered efforts to introduce industry wide management plans. Self-regulation appears unlikely to succeed.
4. Should prepare travellers to minimise negative impacts through education, maintenance of small groups, minimal resource use, and avoiding sensitive areas.	Proposed management systems seem likely to discriminate against Indonesian boat operators unable to meet high safety standards. Several operators plan to use surfing tourism facilities as a base to move into other tourism markets in the Mentawai.
5. Should provide cross-cultural training for appropriate staff.	The equation of power and knowledge in the Mentawai is heavily weighted towards western tourism operators and their business culture as opposed to local community values.
6. Should involve education of and understanding between all stakeholders and recognition of the intrinsic resource value and encourage ethical responsibility towards the natural and cultural environment.	Empowerment of local and indigenous populations through meaningful involvement in decision-making has not eventuated. The opportunity to work with NGOs in the region experienced in development work, healthcare, conservation and tourism planning has not been capitalised upon.
7. Is sensitive to and carefully interprets indigenous cultures. Marketing is accurate.	Few operators engage in informed interpretation of the indigenous Mentawai people who have been written out of Wonderland.

(After Blamey, 2001: 11; Lindberg & Hawkings, 1993; Wight, 1994)

Unregulated free-market approaches to development in less developed regions place local people as just one relatively powerless stakeholder group amongst many others. As a result local people are usually the last to benefit from economic development based upon the exploitation of their resources yet shoulder the bulk of deleterious impacts (Mahapatra, 1998; Smith, 2000; Timothy & Tosun, 2003). Two of the main issues emerging from Table 1 will now be briefly discussed, while the third will be dealt with in the conclusion.

In the rush to establish a foothold, foreign tour operators have colonised the Mentawai's resources with western business models. Studies show that such models often result in high levels of revenue leakage from the destination region back to the foreign financiers, as well as the intrusion on local populations through unwanted social and environmental changes (Brohman, 1996; Butler, 1991; Fennell, 1999; Mahapatra, 1998; Marfut, 1999; Orams, 2001; Rodenburg, 1980; Wearing & Neil, 2001; Wearing & Wearing, 1999; Weaver, 1998; Weiler & Hall, 1992).

The charter operations that currently dominate the industry have as yet had little widespread environmental, cultural and social impact. Significant impacts are however being felt in those communities with the greatest levels of interaction with surf tourists. For example the village of Katiet on Sipura which lies adjacent to the Mentawais most famous surf break 'Lance's Right' has changed markedly in terms of its physical appearance, as villagers move closer to the break and build houses in which to accommodate land-based surf tourists. The local economy has altered as many now rely

upon the sale of handicrafts directly to tourists from canoes paddled out to anchored charter boats. Others have taken the first tentative steps into the hospitality industry and village youth now grow up surrounded by Western influences which impact upon the very fabric of village identity as it changes through the integration and interpretation of Western surf culture (Baker, 2004).

It should also be noted that surfing tourism has a history as a 'colonising' activity. Surfers tend to venture into areas previously unvisited by mainstream tourists, opening up new routes and new systems of development - surfing tourism has nudged unprepared destinations down the slippery slope to large scale industrialized tourism and its related issues (Rick Cameron, 2000 pers. comm.; Paul King, 2000 pers. comm.; Ian Lyon, 2000 pers. comm. Martin Daley, 2002 pers. comm.).

Despite a conspicuous absence from the Wonderland equation, more than 22 000 people live on Siberut alone, 90% of these people are indigenous to the islands. The indigenous Mentawai population remain largely excluded from surf-generated foreign exchange. It is Minangkabau people from Sumatra who control local politics and the economy (Bakker, 1999; Kramer, Pattanayak, Sills, & Simanjuntak, 1997). In 2001 the position of the indigenous population began to make mainstream media headlines in Australia through the publicity work of SAI. Until recently Mentawaians were observed to feel apathetic towards tourism development, perceiving it as something over which they have little control and which brings little economic benefit to them (Bakker, 1999). Signs of frustration with the ongoing exclusion from surfing tourist revenue are beginning to

manifest in strained relationships between tourists, operators and local communities (Persoon, 2003; Reeves, 2001).

According to industry rhetoric most operators are essentially seeking the same outcome - a regulated, profitable surfing tourism industry based on high value industrialised tours which are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, and which provide real benefits to local communities (Ponting, 2001). The notion of sustainable development is widely used to legitimate and build support for industry activities (*c.f.* Khan, 2002: 8). Despite this the surfing tourism industry has in the main failed to form adequate economic links with Mentawai communities. An entire body of sustainable tourism and ecotourism literature and case examples suggest that success requires the broad spectrum of stakeholders be involved in the planning process (*c.f.* Bramwell & Sharman 2000; Buckley, 1999; Butler, 1991; Clarke, 1997; Dowling, 1993; Fitton, 1996; Gunn, 1994; Hall, 2000; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Johnston, 2003; Long, 1993; Marfut, 1999; Murphy, 1988; 1994; Pearce, 1995; Prentice, 1993; Rahnema, 1988; Scheyvens, 1999; Simmons, 1994; Stabler & Goodall, 1996; Swarbrooke, 1999; Timothy, 2001; 2002; Timothy & Tosun, 2003; Tosun, 1999; 2000; Woodley, 1993).

The issue of long term co-ordinated planning is particularly complex. A climate of animosity, mistrust and secrecy has smothered most attempts at co-operation initiated by tour operators. The Islands are administered under the umbrella of the West Sumatran Provincial Government as 'regency in their own right, with their own political representative or 'Bupati' (Cameron, 1996; Reeves, 2000; Turner, Delahunty, Greenway,

Lyon, Taylor & Willett, 1997). The Bupati has received overtures from a variety of surf-tour operators wishing to institute barriers to entry and limitations upon the existing industry (Cameron, 2000). Reeves (2001: 12-13), in a view echoed by Persoon (2003), predicts the future may witness 'a more organized effort on the part of the indigenous population to claim a greater share of the value that is generated by resources - which are beginning to be defined as resources - control over which is seen as the right of those communities within whose bounds those resources fall'.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to deconstruct surfing tourist space in the Mentawai islands Indonesia, and to show that the distribution of wealth generated through foreign tourists accessing local resources is currently inequitable and unsustainable. The theoretical basis of this paper is that notions of space and place are socially constructed and transformed through stories that provide spatial organisation, opening a legitimate theatre for practical actions and authorising the establishment, displacement and transcendence of limits. Through this framework we traced the lineage of surfing tourist space in the Mentawai islands and unpacked its component parts to discover foundations based in 1970s surf mythology. The marine resources of the Mentawai were transformed into a surfing Wonderland by a marketing synergy between foreign surf tour operators, the media and surfwear manufacturers.

We have also demonstrated that Wonderland has facilitated the development of a tourism model that is unsustainable and lacks any explicit philosophy other than economic neo-

liberalism. Furthermore, it has written local populations, government and NGOs out of the Wonderland equation. By viewing the Mentawai islands through the lens of tourist space we were able to recognising a range of stakeholders and expose the myths that underpin the functioning of what is currently an inequitable and unsustainable industry. This acknowledgement of foundational myth and the inclusion of less powerful stakeholders enables movement beyond the limits of Wonderland. Coupled with a deconstruction framework, we argue that the application of ecotourism principles has the potential to facilitate a theoretical reorientation of the trajectory of surfing tourism in the Mentawai toward a more sustainable path.

We suggest the first step in the process of applying ecotourism principles is to undertake participatory research and planning. In the Mentawai the overlaying and displacement of local space by surf tourist space has taken place in the absence of systematic attempts to foster cross-cultural understanding. This appears to have lead to a conceptual barrier to effective cooperation. Empowered by recently granted regional autonomy, and a growing climate of democratisation, the local Mentawai communities and government are no longer willing to accept use of their resources without sharing in their benefits and have begun to insist upon a presence and stake in surfing tourist space (Persoon, 2003).

One operator reported that most efforts to meaningfully involve local indigenous communities in planning and managing tourism have been largely unsuccessful due to what Glenn Reeves (whose doctorate in anthropology provides an ethnographic study of Southern Siberut) has described as 'a gulf of understanding, a chasm across which the

conversation and the negotiation of identity takes place' (2000 pers. comm.). In order to

bridge this chasm we advocate the use of participatory research and planning involving

active participation from host communities in defining their own standards, symbols and

ways of representation and interpretation.

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