The Development of Community-based Tourism: Re-thinking the Relationship Between Tour Operators and Development Agents as Intermediaries in Rural and Isolated Area Communities

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The purpose of this paper is to invoke a Foucauldian framework in order to re-think the development of community-based tourism by focusing on the relationship between intermediaries and rural and isolated area communities in Papua New Guinea. Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and governmentality provide a 'way of thinking' about this relationship that challenges the dominant discourse of the tourism industry. To further elaborate these alternative concepts, the researchers lead a discussion through a number of areas that impact on the development of community-based tourism. These include the introduction of western models of management and their ability to undermine traditional forms of knowledge, the conceptualisation of the tourist destination as interactive space, and a critique of the tourism industry through poststructuralist feminist theory. From these perspectives community-based tourism or ecotourism suggests a symbolic or mutual relationship where the tourist is not given central priority but becomes an equal part of the system.

Introduction

This paper argues that the introduction of tourism, or tourism planning into rural and isolated areas has a profound bearing on the social organisation and decision-making process in the respective communities. This, indeed, is no new argument (for an example see Trainer, 1985). But rather than looking at the direct potential and actual effects of tourism on the natural and cultural environment, this paper suggests a broader and more abstract approach in understanding community-based approaches to ecotourism, and more specifically the role intermediaries[1] play.

We suggest that the reasons why the development and introduction of tourism into rural and isolated area communities[2] has such a profound effect should be sought in the different worldviews and practices that are introduced through the development agencies, tour operators and tourists themselves, and the cash-economy enforced in communities which hitherto primarily have been characterised by a subsistence economy.

Following Michel Foucault's notions on power/knowledge and governmentality, i.e. that the way we perceive the world shapes the way we act towards it, we will argue that the relationship between intermediaries and rural and isolated area communities must take relations of power and knowledge into

account when planning and designing programmes for tourism. We ask how intermediaries can contribute to the production of new knowledge, which in turn could facilitate communication between two different 'worlds' – two different socio-political spheres each characterised by different worldviews.

Through case study material we seek to provide a context for the re-conceptualisation of community-based tourism in order to progress toward new and more sustainable approaches.

Background

The Hunstein Range and Tourism Development in Papua New Guinea

The Hunstein Range is situated on the Upper Sepik River in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG). The Range rises to an altitude of 1544 m, making Mount Samsai the highest point in the Sepik plains. The Hunstein Range is largely covered with one of the last intact tropical rainforests in the world and is the home of an abundance of flora and fauna that is largely unexplored by western science. Biodiversity is extremely high, as is the human cultural diversity. The communities that live in this area are characterised by inaccessibility due to rugged geographical terrain and have, until recently, been self-sufficient.

Nationally, only 9.7% of the population has formal sector wage employment and among the rural villages 94% of people rely on non-wage employment. Here the economies are largely based on subsistence farming, which is particularly true for the East Sepik region where only 1% of the population is dependent on earning a cash-income (Chatterton & Waliawi, 1991: 27).

Currently, the communities of the Hunstein Range are finding themselves in a difficult process of change, having been confronted with logging operations and the prospects of earning – to them – a substantial income. Having turned down the logging operations, they now seek new avenues for sustaining their livelihoods, while earning a cash income. The development of an ecotourism venture in the area would seem to be the sustainable alternative, particularly given the recent opening up of tourism in the Lower Sepik.

PNG should rate highly as a tourist destination. It contains all the essential elements that make it desirable to tourists: unique and traditional cultures, high rugged mountains, tropical rainforests and rich coastal reefs. However, tourism in PNG has been plagued by social, political and environmental uncertainty and disruption. The country has a reputation for being unsafe in certain areas and until this destination can enhance its security, tourism development will remain a low priority for the government (Douglas, 1998: 97). This lack of investment in tourism has led to a poorly developed infrastructure, making travel within the country difficult as well as increasing the costs of transport and accommodation.

This paper is based on the experiences from the Hunstein Range, but reaches beyond the findings contained in the research, in questioning how two different 'regimes of truth' can be aligned or made compatible. In other words, what happens when tour operators enter into a world bringing with them new concepts and ideas such as cash-economy? How can local decision-making
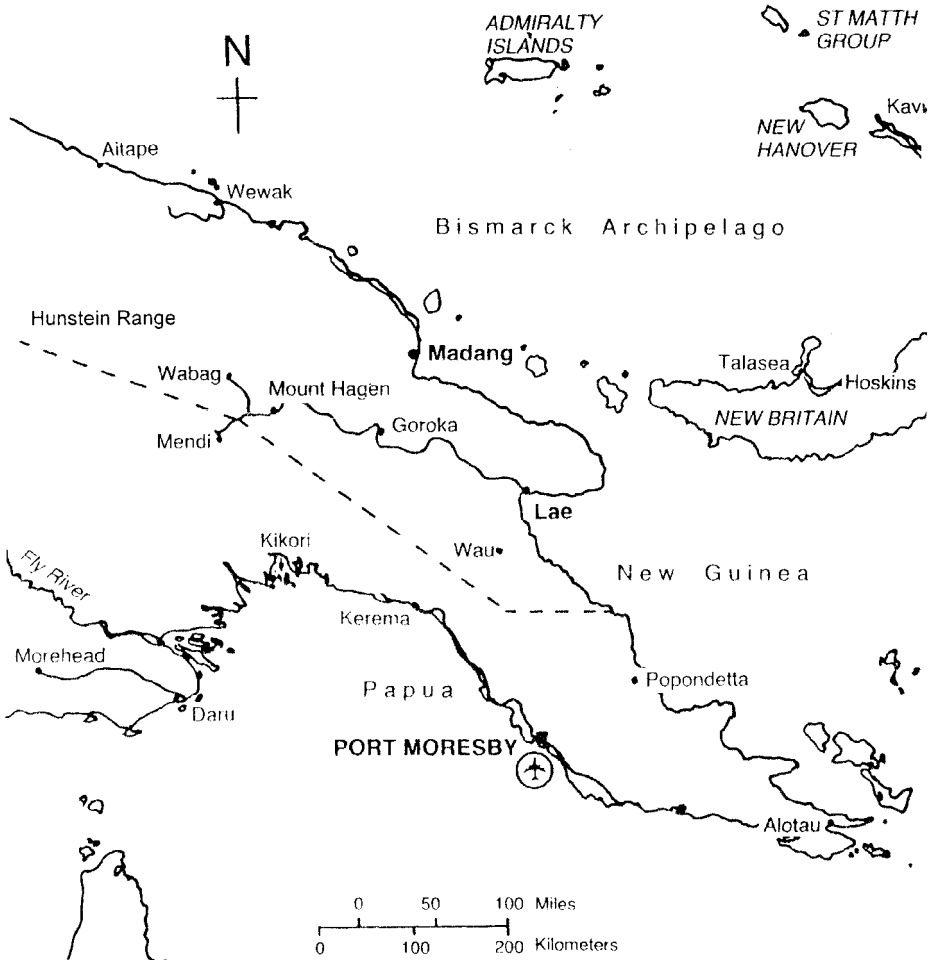
Figure 1 The Hunstein Range of Papua New Guinea

capacity be enhanced without quickly and totally altering the social organisation of the community?

Methodology

The aim of this study was to undertake exploratory research. The desired outcome was the development of a research framework for future independent investigations overseen by development agents and tour operators wishing to facilitate the development of community-based tourism in PNG. To gather data this study involved participatory observation/research involving three main elements. These included:

(1) Studying 'outside' organisations currently operating in the Hunstein Range. Primarily, this turned out to be the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) who

worked in conjunction with the East Sepik Local Environment Foundation (ESLEF) and the East Sepik Council of Women (ESCOW).

(2) Participation in some of the operations of the WWF, ESLEF and ESCOW in a number of villages in the Hunstein Range. The researchers spent a total of 16 days in 1998 working in the area.

(3) Undertaking informal conversations with members of the villages about their hopes and aspirations, their relationship with the development agencies and the possibility for ecotourism in the area (for more detailed information on the research process please see Kirk & Wearing, 1998).

To record observations and informal discussions the researchers took notes; however, this proved to be both inappropriate and difficult (e.g. due to bad lighting). To aid the note taking in more formal situations and settings, a tape recorder was used. In these cases, it was discovered that replaying the tape for the participant was greatly appreciated.

In the gathering of data the researchers sought to reach an understanding of what actually occurs in rural and isolated area communities, thereby allowing the development of a tourism programme which is wanted, and hence can be locally sustained. The study is based on the knowledge produced through informal interaction with people, who each carry their own story and interpretations. The methodological aim, therefore, has been to strive for intersubjectivity, i.e a common and shared understanding of the reality in any one community (Crossley, 1996).

Reaching intersubjectivity is not a simple task. It involves challenging one's own beliefs and perceptions as the researcher that stem from a world so different to that of the rural and isolated area communities. It also requires participation from host communities by actively taking part in shaping the research (defining their own standards, symbols and ways of representation and interpretation). It is also participatory in the sense that the researcher himself/herself is very much a part of the studied field. Hence, ways of inquiry and interaction become crucial to the outcome of the study, where the key concern is establishing mutual trust.

A number of approaches are of special significance in establishing mutual understanding and were undertaken by the researchers while collecting data in the field. They include:

Language: Speaking *tok pisin* (the basics) not only facilitates communication, it is also a signifier of good intentions.

Ways of inquiry: Keeping an open mind is also important in the way questions are asked. Misunderstandings are minimised if questions are formulated broadly to start with and thereafter narrowed down (thereby allowing for points of reference to be established).

Participation: Establishing trust involves respecting and participating in the activities of the community. Not all communication is verbal.

Presentation: The community needs to get to know the outside agent and what he or she brings to the process from prior education and experience as well as from the mandate of the sponsoring organisation (cf. Jackson 1997: 258).

The Need for New Approaches to Tourism Studies

There seems to be a growing recognition that 'power' is a central concept to tourism studies. For example, Wearing (1998a: 243) suggests that the relationships between the tourist and representatives of the host community create power relations inherent in their respective social structures and construct a position where the host community member is seen as being the 'other'. Mowforth and Munt (1998: 44–83) reviewed the various ways in which critics of Third World tourism have placed relationships of power at the heart of their analysis. Richter (1989: 1–11) examines, in her political analysis of tourism in Asia, the many instances of nation states using tourism as a tool to leverage gains in international relations, and Urry (1990: 56–63) discusses power in terms of impacts, particularly those relating to overseas tourism.

Yet, in discussions of power and tourism, Foucault is only sparsely dealt with in the body of knowledge, through Cheong and Miller (2000) and Hollinshead (1999).

> Foucault's notions of 'power', 'discipline' and 'knowledge' have made a profound imprint on thought in many fields of human concern and socio-political action in the last three decades, but they have perhaps been the kind of expansive Parisian philosophical conceptualizations which have not been recognized as hard currency in tourism research. (Hollinshead, 1999: 8)

Probing the 170 pages of a multidisciplinary review of the social sciences that appeared in the Annals of Tourism Research (1991), Hollinshead found only one reference to Foucault. In a more recent paper Hollinshead (1999) begins to redress this gap in the field of knowledge by applying Foucault's thoughts concerning surveillance and the eye-of-power to the institutions/organisations/agencies of tourism and travel. In it he states:

> In tourism, Foucauldian thought can help practitioners and researchers become vigilant to the fact that their own actions are not as 'neutral' and axiomatically equitous as they may have assumed, and that they are indeed themselves working to entrenched *a priori* understandings in or of cultural, environmental matters, and preformulated understandings about the religion or the spirituality of a distant interpreted populations. (Hollinshead, 1999: 17)

More recently Cheong and Miller (2000) attempt to foster a Foucauldian agenda by asking for a conceptual change in how analysts study power in tourism. The authors note that power relations are conspicuously deserving of inspection in the micro-interactions of brokers, locals, and tourists in tripartite tourism systems. In many respects this paper will explore this particular notion.

While recognising the specific ambitions of Hollinshead's paper, we intend to take an approach to the study of power and knowledge as it pertains to tourism which the researchers claim is more in accordance with Foucault's own ambitions. Foucault (1980) never intended that he would be used as a theorist. He adamantly opposed the idea of Grand Theory (which was the core difference between himself and Anthony Giddens) and insisted that research be context-

bound, thereby allowing for specific rationalities to be unveiled (Gordon, 1991). In line with this thinking, we will predominantly use the work of Foucault as a 'way of thinking'. In order to conceptualise the issue of power and knowledge as it pertains to development and tourism efforts, a short introduction to Foucault's notions is needed.

Power, Knowledge and Governmentality

Foucault defined power dynamically – as being immanent in all relations (Foucault, 1987). 'Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away', and or that 'power is employed through a netlike organization' (Foucault, cited in Rouse, 1994: 105). To Foucault, power is always a specific kind of social relation, which only exists through people's actions. For this reason, Foucault abstains from using the concept of power alone, and chooses instead to use the term 'relations of power' (see for example Cheong & Miller, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 1991; Hollinshead, 1999; Kraft & Raben, 1995; Smart, 1985). This understanding of power stands in contrast to a dominant conceptualisation of power as being a resource that can be 'obtained' and which can be utilised to achieve specific objectives. Foucault's understanding of power is fundamentally different, in so far as he regards power as something that is 'exercised'.

By emphasising that power is exercised and not possessed, it can never take the form of an institution. Nor is power a structure, or a certain force, which some chosen few are endowed with. Rather, power is the name with which we describe a complex strategic situation. As defined by Foucault in his later work, it is 'actions on other actions' (Gordon, 1991: 5). Wartenburg (cited in Rouse, 1994: 106) elaborates, 'even in situations in which we might characteristically describe one person as having or exercising power over another, that power depends upon other persons or groups acting in concert with what the first person does'. An example of this is when 'teachers grade students or employers discipline or fire employees, they exercise power only when others (the school admissions officers, or future employers) act, or are prepared to act, in ways oriented by their own actions' (Wartenburg cited in Rouse, 1994: 106). 'Power is exercised through an agent's actions only to the extent that other agents' actions remain appropriately aligned with them' (Rouse, 1994: 108). We begin to understand what constitutes relations of power and that 'power is everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault, cited in Rouse, 1994: 106).

The strategic actions in power relations are guided by an understanding of us and our environment. Through our actions (what we say, what we think) we acquire knowledge of reality and thereby influence, consciously or subconsciously, our surroundings, just as we ourselves are influenced by what goes on around us. Foucault expresses this relation between knowledge and power in the following way:

> Power and knowledge directly imply one another; there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977: 27)

In this light, the exercise of power is determined by the knowledge every agent in the relationship possesses. The knowledge lays the foundations for new strategies and actions, which in turn creates new knowledge, as the individuals each obtain new experiences in the strategic process. This is why Foucault regards power as being a productive and positive phenomenon. In contrast to the traditional negative connotations that the term 'power' often evokes in political and social theory, Foucault claims that:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms. […] In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1977: 194)

It is knowledge that creates the boundaries of the 'domains of truth' and, therefore, it is the basis for the process of comprehension, realisation and legitimisation that guides agency. For every action, there is always room for counter-action:

> Power is exercised only over free subjects and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse compartments may be realized. (Foucault, 1980: 221)

As we shall elaborate, this is an issue to keep in mind when examining neo-colonial theory and the concept of the 'other' as being passive, eventually getting overrun by dominant global contentions. For example, the villagers living in the Hunstein Range are perfectly able to use their own forms of sophisticated knowledge, within their own domain of truth, sometimes even having 'logical' outputs or results in relation to western thought. When new information is presented to them a complex strategic process is sparked, in which new knowledge is produced. Yet, in accordance with Foucault's understanding of power, the communities do not cease to 'have' power, because their way of governing is inspired by new information and knowledge. Rather, power is exercised in relation to the knowledge obtained and recreated.

To Foucault, the analysis of 'governance' must found itself on the key concepts of power and knowledge. Foucault takes his starting point in the claim that the 'state' should not be the focal point of political studies. Rather, he suggests that the political scientist should investigate how political praxis is formed on the foundation of specific power/knowledge relations. The implicit assumption is that the 'states' and 'politics' of development should not be understood on the grounds of the history of the 'sovereignty' (which deals with explaining the state's or the ruler's authority), but rather take its point of departure in the history of 'the art of governance' – governmentality (Rasmussen, 1992: 31). Governmentality, according to Foucault, is largely a question of 'how people govern themselves and others through the production and reproduction of knowledge'. In this light, governmentality opens space for heterogeneity: at any time, more than one programme, for example tourism, may exist and be founded in its own rationality. That is, a specific rationality that is tied to the particular discourse permeating that field. As such, governmentality is a 'problematizing activity' (Rose, 1989: 181).

The characteristic feature of governmentality is that it often takes on the form of 'programmes', which rest on different specific rationalities and can thus be heterogeneous and rivalling. Resolving one programme can, therefore, be another programme's problem (Rose & Miller, 1990: 8). For example, in the Hunstein Range, resolving the programme of conservation (given that logging is not seen as a viable way of earning an income) brings about new programmes – in this instance programmes for development and tourism.

Conventional tourism development often brings with it many of the same problems we have found in the exploitation of natural and cultural resources in the past. It is often driven, owned and controlled by outside companies and owners with a high leakage outside rural and isolated area communities. Packaged tours are frequently offered, and the only involvement of local people is through the use of their natural resources at minimum or no cost to the operator. Where rural and isolated area people are used as guides they are paid minimal salaries, in contrast to the profits made by the investors and owners. This inequality often proceeds on the pretext that if these operators did not come there would be no money injected into the community at all. Thus tourism brings with it a range of problems, or it is put forward as a way of solving some of the problems that have arisen in rural and isolated area communities, but brings with it inappropriate economic growth.

The Language of Resource Management

The communities in the Hunstein Range have hitherto managed natural and cultural resources in a way that has allowed for the continuous maintenance of the eco-systems. As such they have employed their own conservation and development techniques. Or in Foucault's terms, they are governed 'men and things' within a complex land and language structure which sets the boundaries for every individual's actions within a specific rationality. But 'conservation' and 'development' are terms that only recently have been introduced to the communities in the Hunstein Range area. As the following quote expresses, the introduction of new terms – notably the languages of management – influences the practices bound to the terms:

> The world is out there, but the descriptions of the world are not. The concepts and categories and metaphors we employ to categorize and structure our perceptions of reality are subject to revision, constantly changing, being reinterpreted and replaced both by borrowed elements and by new creations. We use – and change – language to describe reality. Changing worldviews or ways of talking about the world arise holistically and pragmatically through trial and error, being naturally selected by human experience. But the way we talk about the world may well shape the way we act toward it. (Jamieson, 1991)

In this context one might ask why it is necessary to introduce new ways of thinking about conservation to communities who up until now have managed their resources very well. The answer follows two lines of thought. Firstly, as the communities become increasingly open towards outside influences (logging companies, development agencies, tour operators and tourists), it is necessary

that the communication of their own objectives and values is efficient. Secondly, notions of scarcity (or threats of scarcity) have been introduced into the area with the proposals for logging operations and to some extent also for the need for tourism. This challenges existing ways of thinking about conservation.

The concept of conservation originates from a western world that is indeed very different from village life, and as such it represents a new time – new ways of thinking of the environment – that is foreign to the communities. The concept implicitly suggests that the environment should be thought of in terms of scarcity, or threats of scarcity; this being an understanding of the environment which is foreign to communities who traditionally have lived in an ecologically sustainable manner. As Tim Flannery clearly expresses this point of view, there is cause to quote him in some detail:

> The development of conservation programs in countries such as Papua New Guinea is fraught with difficulty. Western notions of conservation often appear to be completely nonsensical to the local people. Many villagers believe that the animals of the forest have always been there and that they will always remain … The problem goes much deeper than that, for the Melanesian world-view incorporates humans and animals, the seen and unseen, the living and the dead, in a way that is vastly different from the European outlook. What Europeans call 'supernatural' factors are for New Guineans simply the non-visible parts of a single continuum of life. Indeed they are eminently 'natural'. Such considerations often determine the fate of species. (Flannery, 1998: 200)

Flannery's book argues that the main impacts of ecotourism and related educational programmes can be contributions to the presentation of new worldviews. The cash-economy not only introduces material goods. In its wake, other ways of thinking and interacting are formed, and new expectations and aspirations are created, and these challenge traditional ways of making and implementing decisions. For example, the cash-economy can be seen as being based on quantitative valuations (or measurements) of resources and expected returns. This stands in contrast to established ways of reaching decisions, which rest on more qualitative or cultural assessments of the worth and value of resources. Having said that, conservation and development is not about choosing between two mutually exclusive modes of practice – tradition or modernity. Rather it is concerned with finding a new balance in a changing time and enabling people to communicate their priorities to outside influences.

Community-based tourism planning, therefore, would not only introduce new management tools, it would also introduce a 'language of management' and new ways of thinking. On the positive side, this may enable the communities of the Hunstein Range to communicate and enforce opinions towards outside influence. On a more negative note, it may indirectly disrupt the relations of power within the community, bringing about changes in the social organisation too quickly for supporting institutions to arise. Subsequently 'outside' institutions are quickly imposed and begin to manufacture a 'regime of truth' that undermines the existing knowledge structures.

This leads to the question of the role of the intermediary as 'interpreter' between two different domains of truth. Firstly, we will take a critical look at the

'stage' – the space created for governance and interpretation. Secondly, we take a closer look at the role of the intermediary and discuss his/her ability to act as interpreter within the principles of 'participation'. Implicitly in this critical approach, lies a review of the neo-colonial concepts of the 'other'. Finally, we will turn our attention to the relationship between intermediaries and rural and isolated area communities in PNG.

The Interactive Space

In accordance with the views expressed above, the relationship between intermediaries and rural and isolated area communities can be seen as a process involving many actions and participants' fields of knowledge.

In the light of the concepts of power/knowledge it is meaningful to regard the tourist destination site as an interactive space – a continuous process where different social values meet and new meanings are created:

> Each individual meaning will be constructed according to the tourist's own cultural and social background, the purpose of the visit, the companions, preconceived and observed values of the host culture, the marketing images of the destination, and above all the relationships of power between visitor and within the host culture. (Wearing, 1998a: 248)

'The interactive space' is a place where institutionalized beliefs, worldviews and intuitions come into play. New meanings do not just 'happen' in the interaction between people, as the most orthodox interactionist theories might claim. Rather they can be seen as the outcome of a long history of complex power/knowledge relations, which are institutionalized in society and in the individual. As the hermeneutically orientated Gadamer (1975) would term it, it is a place where existing prejudice becomes visible and can be challenged or modified. (It is important to note that his use of the word 'prejudice' is very positive. Instead of regarding it as a barrier to interaction he sees it as a threshold: by confronting oneself with the 'other' – for example by reading a paper or by travelling – new meanings and attitudes are created.)

Participation and the 'Other'

The changing position and focus of some in the tourism industry has created in certain circumstances a movement away from a predominance of ownership and control of rural and isolated area tourism operations by western industrialised societies. However, the models of operations that have been represented to rural and isolated area communities has led to a paradoxical problem. This is that rural and isolated area communities have very few other models than those of the dominant western models to operate within, and local tour operators then tend to treat their own communities as the 'other' to be exploited as before. However, due to changing discourses on the role of rural and isolated area communities and the increased availability of economic access, there are now expanding opportunities for these communities to explore tourism as a business.

In achieving all this there is a need to change the balance between the dominant western values in tourism and their treatment of developing countries as 'other' in the development of community-based tourism. This requires the

breaking down of the self/other dichotomy in mainstream theory, where the 'self' of the western tourist has been prioritised over the 'other' of the rural and isolated area community. Postcolonialist feminist theory draws attention to cultures in which the western notion of an individualised tourist self is a dominant construct within the tourist industry with all others reduced to the 'other'.

Wearing (1998b) suggests that poststructuralist feminists such as Lloyd (1989) and Grosz (1989) have challenged and deconstructed many of the binary oppositions beloved of male post-enlightenment rationality. The deconstruction of this dichotomy, where the tourist and tourism have been perceived as superior and more meaningful human activities, can contribute to the valuation of community in this post-modern era. If the rural and isolated area community comes to value its culture over that of the view presented to it by western operators in terms of cash returns, then the community empowers itself to look for alternative views.

When poststructuralist theory is applied to tourism and the self/other binary opposition is deconstructed it becomes clear that the dominance of the tourist and tourism industry can be changed and that communities can obtain access to countervailing ideologies or discourses that may give access to other opportunities outside of those constructed by the tourism industry. Postcolonialist theory alerts us to the fact that worldviews ask us to consider the biases that this industry has produced. One effect of postcolonial criticism has been to 'force a radical re-thinking of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and Western domination' (Prakash, 1994: 87). We argue here that the strength of postcolonialism is its insistence on the view from the 'other', that is to give insight into the subjectivities of colonised communities, especially with regard to tourism. Today there are many marginalised communities who are voicing opposition and alternatives to the traditional western-based tourism industry (cf. Wearing, 1998a) and they can help develop strategies for changing the operation of tourism.

When the 'other' assumes as much importance in the conceptualisation of tourism as the tourist, tourism theory is pushed beyond the boundaries of concentric circles focusing on economic profit, better experiences and authentic presentation. This is not, however, to eliminate these ideas but to hold them in balance with other views from host communities and to recognise the complete interdependence of both in tourism. A scenario of tourism in the future based on a deconstruction of the self/other dichotomy, where the tourist assumed priority, may see some of the values of self-worth and dignity associated with host communities, incorporated into tourism.

Ecotourism has offered a locus for the tourism industry to not only rejuvenate tourism's flagging image but also to provide a philosophical basis that moves the focus to the 'other', such as to nature and communities. This status, however, places ecotourism in a precarious position as it sits between the marketeers' desire for profit and the conservationists' desire to use it to preserve and support rural and isolated area communities. Aligned to this view is an argument for a clearly elucidated philosophy to underpin the way tourism works with communities. It is argued that there will be an inadequate basis for the development of theoretical approaches and practice without the establishment of tenets that incorporate Foucauldian ideas of power and an elucidation of practices that acknowledge the

exclusion of communities and dominance of western male practice in tourism. If the tourism industry, or at least ecotourism focused on community-based approaches, is to succeed in its goal of cultural and environmental integrity, it requires the development of theory that contains that same integrity.

The Development Agent and the Tour Operator

> Ultimately, the success or failure of 'appropriate' or 'sustainable' tourism programs lies more substantially in the power of brokers and locals than in the power of tourists. This understanding about power in tourism can assist in the re-thinking of tourism development, and can perhaps contribute to the formulation of innovative tourism policies. (Cheong & Miller, 2000: 387)

The development agent and the tourism operator who enter into rural and isolated area communities have no real prior insight into rural and isolated area knowledge and the strategies of power that take place within this reality. This must be learnt, if he/she is to act as an intermediary. As Chambers (1983) points out, the problem with much development work is that it adopts a top–down approach. Chambers challenges the preconceptions that dominate rural development, and lays the cornerstones for new approaches, such as 'Rapid Rural Appraisal' (RRA) and 'Participatory Rural Appraisal' (PRA). The central objectives of these programmes is to bring to light unseen rural poverty and to ensure that researchers, administrators and development agencies take a more participatory approach to rural development in Third World countries.

The development agent and tour operator require on-ground knowledge in order to be able deliver a successful development project. But how do these techniques comply with life in the communities? Has 'participation' become yet another more or less empty buzzword, which serves to justify a project, rather than it truly creating an interpretative tool to be used by the communities themselves?

The principles of participatory research place an emphasis on planning with – rather than planning for – in the search for ways to build a community's capabilities to respond to changes as well as to generate change themselves. Participation techniques can be seen against this backdrop as a response to the dominant tendency in development circles (up to the early 1980s) to regard development plans as blueprints, easily adopted to any context, and to regard the role of the development agent as an 'outside' observer. The critique is indeed still relevant. However, it can be said that it is impossible to avoid prejudice. Yet Gadamer (1975) points out that prejudice should be regarded as the thresholds rather than barriers for reaching an understanding of a given text or situation. Participation techniques today are bound to notions of 'empowerment'. The term has become a buzzword of the 1990s and seems to be a normative goal, which goes hand in hand with 'participation' and development.

These concepts have become inherent components of development programmes, where it is envisioned that by conducting wealth ranking, mapping, etc., the voices of the 'marginalised groups' – particularly women – will be heard. Furthermore, it is assumed that this process of 'empowerment', and involvement of whole villages, will ensure a successful project. In this day

and age, a 'successful project' is often evaluated in terms of its ability to alleviate poverty.

While recognising the history of these notions and the benign intentions of poverty alleviation as largely being intertwined with (re)distribution, we claim that, depending on the context, there are inherent problems of both the relevance of the techniques as well as of these techniques not complying with the area sought to be 'governed'.

Firstly, one must ask how wealth ranking, social mapping, etc. fit in with traditional decision-making practices. These techniques may contribute to rendering the world more 'ordered' – but for whom? As Foucault would see it, these techniques are an expression of a specific rationality, which falls within the western regime of truth. Jackson (1997) provides good examples of how development agents on a street level often find themselves in dilemmas caught between the objectives of the project and the wishes and needs of the communities:

> development agents face(d) a double challenge; the misconception that they had more resources on offer than they in fact could command, and the mismatch between what they actually had to offer, given the project objectives, and what emerged as open discussions with villagers. In discussions of need, most villagers expressed their need for irrigation facilities…. One can understand the puzzlement of those who, after clearly articulating what they saw as problems (lack of irrigation) are asked to play games with tamarind seeds to discover what the problems were. (Jackson, 1997: 241, 243)

Apart from silencing spontaneous demands, the PRA in this instance has become yet another development vocabulary – not an interpretation. It is then a discourse which brings them into transactions with project staff, but from which they still seek material gain.

Having scrutinised participatory techniques, we still recognise the fundamental value of participation. The importance of participation, in our view, is not the techniques but the ranking in itself and the results it produces. There is a need to make a clear distinction between the 'idea of participation' and the techniques themselves. Neither is it about their scientific relevance, value and reliability in an overall project. The main point here concerning the 'idea of participation' is that it should create a forum for debate and, not least, impose or spark awareness about prejudice and knowledge within the development agent himself/herself.

As we have seen, the notions of participatory research are in some instances expressions of hidden agendas and 'normalising' patterns. Some would perhaps call it a current form of neo-colonialism, although the changes in development thought and practice are certainly better in terms of respecting rural and isolated area knowledge.

Although development agents and tour operators can definitely be regarded as intermediaries between the rural and isolated area people and the project, we seek to regard the process of community-based tourism planning as a long-term programme of governance to be carried out with and for the community. Instead of viewing tour operators as direct 'intermediaries' in community-based tourism planning, we argue that they should rather be viewed as 'facilitators' – sources of information that eventually can be utilised and transformed into knowledge by

the communities themselves. As Connell articulates this role clearly, there is reason to quote his thoughts:

> The central challenge to the development agent, whether acting alone or as part of a team, is to engage key sectors of the local population in the process and then to nurture this engagement until it blossoms into direct, active participation … As such, the development agent is more a catalyst or a facilitator than an independent initiator – presenting ideas but not issuing orders, encouraging rural and isolated area initiatives, but not organizing people around his or her preconceived ideas of what is best for them. (Connell, 1997: 257)

Instead of focusing on how tourism can succeed in its own right, one should ask how communities such as those in the Hunstein Range can be 'assisted' in finding a balance in a rapidly changing world?

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to provide an analysis of the relationship between intermediaries and rural and isolated area communities in PNG. By summoning Foucault's concepts of power/knowledge and governmentality, this paper has sought to develop an alternative understanding or 'way of thinking' about the interaction of two very different worldviews, and how these 'regimes of truth' can better be aligned and made compatible.

We have argued that traditional knowledge is vulnerable to the introduction of new forms of language. Western models of management bring about new perceptions of reality in relation to the natural environment and human behaviour. The concept of the tourist destination as interactive space articulates these alternative forms of thinking that challenge the dominant western values that view Third World countries as 'other'. The feminist critiques of the tourism industry elaborate the logic of capital accumulation and its potential for unsustainable tourism practices when applied to subsistence economies.

Having invoked the Foucauldian framework as a 'way of thinking', we would suggest that the most appropriate method for pushing these alternative conceptualisations forward would be to recommend it as a descriptive and explanatory tool for use by researchers, planners and analysts in developing community-based tourism in rural and isolated area communities. In this context we would suggest that the actions of development agents and tour operators, in developing an ecotourism venture, should be guided by the principles of participatory research set out in the methodology section of this paper. Undertaking preliminary research before entering into a formal planning process would provide a forum for sharing knowledge and developing relationships based on trust between intermediaries and community members.

Ecotourism seems to have widespread and global appeal in the search for sustainable ways of securing an income for many rural and isolated area communities. Relatively speaking, it is not reliant on access to markets; it is not perceived as harmful to the natural environment, at least not compared to logging operations. And it is often viewed as a welcome opportunity to meet new people from foreign places. But the question remains, under what conditions can

community-based tourism or ecotourism, strike a balance between conservation and development – between the old forms of knowledge and the new? The answer to this question must lie in the hands of the communities themselves.

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Notes

1. Throughout this paper the term 'intermediary' will denote development agents working for NGOs and tour operators who function as brokers between the communities and the tourist.
2. The term 'rural and isolated area community' in this paper is defined as villagers that depend on their livelihood from the production of foodstuffs (animals, vegetables, fruit) and are characterised by inaccessibility due to rugged geographical terrain.

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