The place of backpacker enclaves: Exploring the concept towards its temporariness and situational contexts

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Abstract

In the literature on backpacker tourism, the concept of backpacker enclaves has been recognised as a significant type of tourist space for understanding the travel experience of backpackers. The concept refers to specific areas that are distinct from the surroundings and are popular destinations for backpackers, who reproduce their specific milieus in such areas. However, travellers also often find their "place to be" through diverse networks and intermediaries among residents of destinations, either in tourist or non-tourist spaces. In the article, I discuss the processes of creating alternative, backpacker enclave-like spaces based on the ethnographic case of Sri Lanka, where I conducted my fieldwork on travel practices and tourist spaces of backpackers and domestic as well as foreign residents between 2003 and 2006. In the theoretical part of the article, I will rethink the conception of backpacker enclaves and their role in today's international backpacker tourism and travelling.

KEYWORDS: backpacker enclaves, mobility, travel practices, place-making, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Backpackers' habits and conventions of travelling have been documented and summarised, especially in the last decade. Apart from numerous published works in journals, three comprehensive volumes on backpacking (Richards & Wilson 2004; Hannam & Altejevic 2008; Hannam & Diekman 2010) provide the basic characteristics of this important branch of contemporary tourism. These characteristics include a hunger for experience rather than an interest in a particular culture (Richards & Wilson 2004a), anti-tourism attitudes paired with searching for social status within their own hierarchies (Welk 2004) and great diversity in their way of travelling (Cohen 2004). Particularly in non-Western countries, backpackers still have a bad reputation for culturally and socially inappropriate behaviour (Scheyvens 2002) and even if backpacker tourism proved to have many benefits for local economies (Cohen 2004; Hampton 2013; Lloyd 2006; Opperman 1993; Scheyvens 2002: 151–7; Westerhausen & Macbeth 2003), most of them, especially South and Southeast

Asian countries prefer to support development of high-end tourism (Crick 1994; Edensor 1998; Kravanja 2012b; Saldanha 2007; Westerhausen 2002).

Furthermore, backpacking is also increasingly subjected to processes of mainstreaming, massification, institutionalisation and industrialisation (O'Riley 2006; Paris 2010, 2012; Larsen, Øgaard & Brun 2011). In particular, the emergence of the so-called short-term backpackers – i.e. holidaymakers who travel backpacker-like or temporarily 'switch into backpacker mode' (Sørensen 2003: 861–2) – indicates the diversity within the backpacker scene: only a small proportion of travellers travel for extended periods of time (months rather than weeks) (Cohen 2004) or even devote their lives to travelling (Cohen 2011).[1]

With the rapid development of the backpacker scene and its increasing importance to the global tourism economy (Wilson & Richards 2008), several more or less popular backpacker dominated places and areas have been recognised as "backpacker enclaves" (BEs). As early as 1998, Tim Edensor wrote about enclavic and heterogeneous tourist space (HTS), the former being carefully planned and managed "environmental bubbles" for conventional mass tourists and the latter multi-purpose unplanned quotidian spaces where tourists (predominantly backpackers) mingle with residents (1998).

BEs are more complex, heterogeneous and multifaceted than other tourist enclaves; many of them still hold the characteristics of Edensors' HTS.[2] These traveller centres, backpacker meccas, and ghettoes (Howard 2007) or, in more general terms, a sort of 'Western tourist bubble' (Altejevic & Doorne 2004: 62), were described either as transitional places for backpackers (Cohen 2004) or destinations where crucial backpacker experience can be acquired (Wilson & Richards 2008). As such, they are featured in specialised travel guidebooks (Sørensen 2003; Hampton 2010) and represented and shared among members of the backpacker community through information and communication technologies (ICT) (Paris 2012). Their popularity and diversity change fast, as contemporary backpacking is simultaneously related to growing travel and mobility infrastructures (Paris 2012; Masceroni 2007) on the one hand and the "distinguished" backpacker scene on the other (Cohen 2004).

Apart from the established BEs, a variety of more or less organised meeting points of backpackers of different forms, sizes, and contexts unpredictably emerge anywhere, either within or outside the famous backpacker trails and traditional destinations. For this reason, the concept of BEs can also serve as an ethnographic point of departure for understanding today's backpacking in general.

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[1] Today, it is difficult to distinguish between travellers, backpackers, and tourists. In this article, I will use the labels of travellers and backpackers interchangeably unless explicitly noted.

[2] Edensor (2000) pointed out that such unplanned, contingent, and mixed-purpose spaces usually emerge in non-Western destinations. In HTSs, family-run budget hotels, cafés, restaurants, and shops coexist with schools, offices, places of worship, and resident dwellings. Public cultural and religious events and political parties' demonstrations are organized there, gossip and exchange of information are part of street life and domestic work is often done in front of the houses' doors. Within the environment of HTSs, sensual experiences such as smells, sounds and touching of other bodies in the crowd are varied and tourists are often targeted by touts, transport operators, street vendors, beggars, etc.

In this article, I will discuss the concept of BEs on the basis of my intermittent nine months of fieldwork among backpackers in Sri Lanka between 2003 and 2006. In Sri Lanka, BEs are not concentrated spaces, but rather dispersed across its southern coast and central highlands. BEs-like spaces are therefore confined to non-expensive guesthouses and hotels, through which backpackers transit while they *do* their routes. However, the diversity of guests in such places stretches far beyond solely backpackers or travellers. Other visitors, who are involved in Sri Lankan life differently, and individual non-tourist (or at least not solely tourist) passengers frequent guesthouses, hotels and their attached bars or shared areas. In my view, these informed individuals crucially influence the backpackers' decisions and indeed their routes, even if they do not intentionally act like intermediaries of formal or informal tourism business.

New BE-like spaces emerge from these interactions, which are not anchored in local tourism spaces but stretch to the everyday life of residents as well as to social networks of backpackers. While backpackers always find and negotiate places to gather, socialise, have fun, share and make up their life experiences, stories, aspirations and indeed their identity, the specific contexts of guesthouses as (trans)formative places are limited to transitory guests and newcomers. However, by including a wider array of stakeholders, regular guests, old-timers and domestic visitors, backpacker activities can stretch well beyond the established BEs.

In itself, the discussion of BEs from the point of view of alternative place-making is not something entirely new. Petri Hottola (2004, 2005), for example, thought about BEs in a rather deterritorialised fashion and developed his 'dynamic model of culture confusion' (2004: 450–60); a process of intercultural adaptation to the new environment that implies frequent escapes of backpackers to the 'metaworlds,' the 'tourist safe havens,' the 'restricted spaces that are used as places of recovery; the behavioural and physical tourist "bubbles" where the locus of control is with the tourists rather than with their so-called hosts' (2005: 2).

While Hottola's "metaspatiality" can be a good starting point for the exploration of improvisatory backpacker gatherings, the situational BEs can also be seen as, first, a regular content of conventional tourist enclaves and, second, as a potentiality that is based on interactions with either domestic or foreign intermediaries in tourist spaces.

Backpacker enclaves revisited

Internationally, the best-known BEs are concentrated in South East Asia, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, which are not only the most developed backpacker destinations but also among the most studied areas in backpacker literature.[3] Such centres, which may nowadays be called classic BEs, started to shape with the establishment of the hippie trail between Istanbul and South Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. Along the 'three Ks' (Kabul, Kathmandu, and Kuta (Bali)) (Hampton 2013: 10), many other towns and beaches of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia were turned into destinations for

[3] For example, the second part of the initial volume on backpackers The Global Nomad (Richards & Wilson 2004) by BRG ATLAS deals almost exclusively with destinations of South East Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

Western hippie travellers and had been forerunners for later *Lonely Planet* and other travel guidebooks' trails (Kravanja 2012a; Hampton 2010; Paris 2010).

From the times of the hippies, these centres have gradually consolidated into Western tourist "bubbles"; either territorially less delineated HTSs (Edensor 1998; see note 2), or proper BEs established together with other forms of tourist enclaves at micro-levels. Each classic BE has its own unique history, which usually started with temporary travellers' communities on localities untouched by the tourist industry (Cohen 2006; Kravanja 2012a; Scheyvens 2002). Many of them followed the path of development towards the "up-market" forms of conventional or mass tourism (cf. Hampton 2013) and were sometimes abandoned by travellers or even cracked down upon by governments (Edensor 1998; Westerhausen 2002). Even if they persisted, they became much more complex than they had been in the hippie era, as they were intertwined with different sorts of other tourism spaces (Cohen 2006; Howard 2005, 2007; Lloyd 2006; Sörensson 2012).

Different BEs developed in Australia and New Zealand, where the governments recognised the importance of the backpacker market to the tourism industry and have supported its research, planning, management, commercial promotion, and branding since the 1990s (Richards & Wilson 2004a; Westerhausen & Macbeth 2003; Welk 2010). Apart from supporting the development of backpacker tourism in general, part of the Australian governmental program was also arrangements for working and holiday trails (O'Regan 2010).

With the new backpacker industry, new enclaves also mushroomed elsewhere, especially in large cities. As backpacking has become an important part of tourism in general (see Cohen 2004), some BEs are popular among backpackers internationally, while others are smaller, local and less known to the global backpacker community.

Theoretical conceptions of backpacker enclaves

As researchers have studied backpackers, whether within a BE or (much less) on the road, while travelling by different means of transport (see Johnson 2010; Vannini 2009), they did so 'usually without much studying the enclave itself' (Howard 2007: 73).[4] The 'sheer variety and diversity of such spaces' (Wilson & Richards 2008: 190) has been predictably revealed in such attempts and the question of difference from other tourist enclaves (e.g. ecotourist enclaves, working holiday arrangements, volunteer camps and the like) has been raised. Howard (2007) provided the following definition of a BE:

> A sizable area with distinct geographic boundaries, partly patronized by backpacker tourists. It features at least 10 relatively closely spaced and inexpensive accommodating facilities of any size, partly used by backpackers. The archetypical enclave has a definite character, is predominantly tourist-oriented and exclusively caters to drifter tourists. It is self-contained, with all traveler activities there. Price levels are very low. However, specific instances vary in typicality.

[4] Nevertheless, ethnographic descriptions of different individual BEs (however, not always using this concept) can be found in Cohen 2006; Hampton 2013; Howard 2005, 2007; Kravanja 2012a; Lloyd 2006; Malam 2004; Miller 2011; O'Regan 2010; Sörenson 2012; Welk 2010 and other works that I referred to before.

In addition to this somehow restrictive spatial, contextual and structural frame, BEs can be roughly distinguished according to their function. For example, Cohen (2004) differed between urban and rural enclaves, the former being usually a place of arrival, and serve more instrumental purposes of orientation, organising travel, making purchases and the like and the latter representing a destination in itself. Howard (2007), in contrast, made a difference between enclaves along their micro-spatial lines and distinguished between concentrated and dispersed enclaves, the former being more closely packed and the latter scattered over an area sharing space with other tourist and non-tourist businesses. In their local context, they can further vary in many other dimensions such as planned-unplanned, fixed-mobile, permanent-temporary, isolated-integrated with surrounding area, old-new, owned by locals-by foreigners, and permeable-restricted (Howard 2005).

BEs are visited by many diverse groups of people. Among them there are conventional tourists, who often use the same accommodations and services as backpackers (Cohen 2006; Sørensen 2003) and non-tourist groups such as residents, who visit a BE simply to take an amusing walk up and down its main streets and enjoy its international atmosphere or do shopping (Howard 2005). Street vendors (ibid.), beggars, sexual workers, touts and other intermediaries of the informal tourist sector frequent BEs for their own ends (Crick 1994), and travellers also often find opportunity for temporary work in such areas (Clarke 2004; Urry & Larsen 2011).

Further differences that have already spread beyond the established BEs can be seen in Hottola's (2005) metaworlds or places of recovery. On the basis of ethnographic research in India, Hottola (2005) defined five categories of metaspaces where travellers could isolate themselves from India's "demanding" cultural environment: private spaces reserved for travellers (rooms, washrooms), semi-private spaces of restricted access (shared areas in guesthouses and hotels), public spaces of restricted access (expensive restaurants, first-class train carriages, museums, attractions etc.), wilderness areas and spaces of temporary Western domination (fairs, tours, festivals). These spatial realms, therefore, include 'a surprisingly flexible *network* of social spaces and behavioural tactics' (2005: 2, italics added).

However, the distinction between places is not absolute, as 'the effect of the materiality of space cannot wholly determine performance[s] [which either] consolidate and reaffirm, or challenge dominant meanings' (Edensor 2000: 342). As BEs are not only possible to see as distinctive islands, nodes or congregations of backpacker population on well-established backpacker trails (Cohen 2006), but also as an expression of increasingly heterogeneous backpacker spatial practices, behaviour and interactions, some contemporary changes of the latter will be addressed in the following section.

Travel practices and interactions beyond backpacker enclaves

Backpacking is a wide array of practices. Today, it is primarily comprised of milieus with a specific ideology (Westerhausen 2002) and 'accidental communities of memory' (Malkki 1997: 91),[5] which sometimes developed into different affective groups (Bousiou

[5] By 'accidental communities of memory,' Lisa Malkki (1997: 91) refers to 'more biographical, microhistorical, unevenly emerging sense of accidental sharings of memory and transitory experience.'

2008) or dance and spiritual subcultures (D'Andrea 2007). Moreover, 'out of the swirl of global processes new cool places for each new cool generation get produced' (Sheller & Urry 2007: 9). A significant difference of these new ("cool" or "hot") places compared to the old ones is that there are many and that, as such, they do not necessarily last for a long time. Travellers do not only follow the routes promoted through backpacker industry, but often travel to the destinations where they have everything planned in advance, use accommodation alternatives such as the Couchsurfing and Airbnb platforms, visit their friends and relatives (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen 2006), work overseas (Clarke 2004; Sörensson 2012), join different volunteer programs (O'Riley 2006), and more.

The backpacker community has also tremendously changed with the extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICT) (Paris 2010; 2012; Mascheroni 2007; Meethan 2012: 64–6). Paris stated:

> Recent developments in information and communications technology have provided the basis for the backpacker culture to, once more, gain the co-hesiveness without the temporal or spatial constraints of the "backpacker trail" (2010: 40).

In these circumstances, classic or established BEs have integrated into backpackers' multiple networks, which imply the co-presence of *home* and *away* as well as contacts with fellow travellers, perhaps residing in other BEs, or anywhere else. BEs also continue to exist before and after backpackers' trips, as their images, descriptions, and other markers are constantly maintained and drawn upon in the 'ideological system of the backpacker culture' (Paris 2010: 41). As places are related one to another and themselves 'on the move' and 'in play,' they are often 'being remade in order to draw in and capture people on the move' (Sheller & Urry 2004: 1).

Furthermore, there are dozens of blogs and guides that advertise "smart" and cheap travelling. A real challenge for contemporary "cosmopolitan" nomads is how to spend virtually nothing even on expensive destinations. Web sites of the sharing economy and many global and local-specific possibilities for free flights, work overseas, cheap shopping, staying with locals, etc. 'have changed the travel game and made travel more accessible for everyone' (Nomadic Matt 2012). "Travel experts" and bloggers such as for example *Nomadic Matt*[6] or *Adventurous Kate*[7] are much more up to date than guidebooks are. They influence the new generation of travellers and connect them with an active community online.

As backpackers are supposed to be "on the road", but are seen as sticking together in more or less well-established BEs that differ one from another in style, size, layout, local involvement, atmosphere, accessibility and the like, the concept itself seems to overwhelm the actual travel activities. In other words, with changes in travelscapes that allow travellers and other passengers more creativity, connectivity, faster mobility and specialisation in a specific style or theme of travelling, the concept of BEs appear as academic homogenising of diverse groups of travellers, their age, gender, subcultures,

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[6] http://www.nomadicmatt.com. Accessed on 10 October 2016.
[7] http://www.adventurouskate.com. Accessed on 10 October 2016.

nationality, and more (Cohen 2004). Furthermore, travel motivations and experiences in today's contexts of mobility – their imagination, power relations, social and political processes and institutionalisation (Altejevich & Dorne 2004) – are more diverse than BEs as backpackers' distinctive spaces and places can imply.

In the next sections of this article, I will present some insights from backpacking in Sri Lanka. More specifically, I will show how BEs can be seen as a constant process of emergent sociality and not only as an established built environment or structure. As BEs, like other tourist places 'depend in part upon what happens to be practiced within them' (Sheller & Urry 2007: 5), this empirical part will invest the conception of BEs with different kind of intersecting, overlapping and interdependent mobilities (and immobilities) (Urry 2007) that offer to transgress the many dichotomies that have occurred in tourism studies in the last decades and 'cause problems for tourism research' (Mavrič & Urry 2009: 650).[8]

Methodology

The empirical base for this section derives from nine months of intermittent fieldwork in Sri Lanka between 2003 and 2006.[9] In 2003, I went to Sri Lanka to study Buddhist practices, but on seeing and feeling the overwhelming frame of international tourism and the postcolonial nature of it, I gradually changed my interest to tourist spaces. My fieldwork locations were on the south coast of Sri Lanka and in the city of Kandy, located in the midst of the island's hills. In these predominantly Sinhalese linguistic and cultural environments, backpackers, travellers, tourists, volunteers or foreign residents were all treated as "whites" (sinh. *suddha*) (cf. Miller 2011). I was, of course, no exception to this, but in some places, I managed to build a temporary network of friends that somehow pushed me to a slightly different position of a mate (sing. *machang*).[10] My position in and between the groups of domestic and foreign residents and different tourists, nevertheless varied, as also the communities themselves constantly changed.

My basic method was participant observation in several milieus where interaction between tourists and different residents was at the forefront of daily life. I complemented it with occasional semi-structured interviews, the content of which I either recorded or subsequently wrote down from memory. However, the most valuable materials and insights came from those fleeting conversations that were performed instantly while being together, hanging around, walking, socialising, and the like with different subjects of these international/local spaces. Everyday and past events, (life history) stories, gossip, different places' and objects' history, all came from this engagement in everyday life.

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[8] Such dichotomies include, for example, leisure-work, economic-noneconomic, local-global, temporary-permanent, rural-urban, developed-developing, East-West, traditional-modern, centre-periphery, locals-foreigners, hosts-guests, people-places and production-consumption (Mavrič & Urry 2009; Wilson & Richards 2008).

[9] I stayed and travelled at different intensities and speeds in Sri Lanka for two months in 2003, four months in 2004 and three months in 2006.

[10] 'Machang' is a Sinhalese vernacular term, which can be used in many different ways. In general, it means mate, buddy, friend or 'my friend', but is also common filler in small talk among Sinhalese acquaintances and friends.

I supplemented these rather fragmented materials with contents from daily newspapers[11] and regularly read literature in the field. I wrote extensive diaries, and often produced different theses and experimental theories already in the field, as new insights came from ongoing events or sheer serendipity, even if in principle I limited these ever-new hermeneutical circles with a basic interest in the interactions within tourist spaces. On my last fieldwork in 2006, I often used a digital photo camera for communication with my interlocutors; I talked with them about places and individual persons over photos that I took beforehand.

On places of ethnographic engagement

In the first parts of my fieldwork (2003 and 2004), I stayed in a mixed-type family guesthouse, which was more like a small resort that hosted very different kinds of tourists and occasionally organised local weddings. It was positioned on the beach not far away from two meeting spots of backpackers and foreign owners of beach resorts, guesthouses, restaurants, and bars. As I was present in the local area for months, I switched between different groups on the beach and gathered insights through mingling with its either temporary or permanent residents.

The second place that I participated in was a proper beach community that gathered in one of the beach restaurants in another tourist beach village in the south. The vast beach consisted of two centres with corresponding two competitive village communities of predominantly young male residents, waiters with their friends, occasional tuk-tuk taxi drivers and foreign (Western) owners of properties, who usually had formally arranged mixed ownership with local business partners.[12] As I was accommodated at the local partner's home (his mother rented me a room on the so-called "jungle side" opposite the "beach side" of the main coastal road), I naturally belonged to the inner circle of the restaurant's community and participated in all of the ongoing problems (sinh. *prashnayak*) and events that were also part of everyday gossip of that time.

It was not always easy to be positioned in-between the distinguished foreigners and locals of that milieu and talk to everyone, because I soon realised that there was an unbridgeable boundary between the village sociality of the locals and more or less intensive mobility of the foreigners. Manoeuvring between and within these different milieus in otherwise dense, intertwined and often conflicting tourist space sooner or later turned into dealing with power and loyalty that were carried out according to the so-called 'Sri Lankan system', a principle of corruptive sociality that is importantly driven by sentiments of jealousy (sinh. *irisyāva*), shame (*lajja*), and fear of shame (*lajjabaya*) (see Kravanja 2012a: 194–7; Spencer 1990a: 606–7, 1990b: 169–98).

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[11] I regularly read and collected materials from three Sri Lankan English newspapers: Daily Mirror, Daily News, and The Island. In particular, their weekend publications were of great quality and length, with many analytical articles that tackled a wide array of questions about Sri Lankan political, social, religious, and cultural life.

[12] The reason for this predominance of mixed ownership was in a tax policy that obligated only 7 per cent tax on the price of properties if the official owner was a Sri Lankan citizen. The other reason was more of a practical nature, as the local partners were there also while the Western owners were not and could, therefore, also watch and maintain the property during the off-season that stretched between May and October.

My third field site was in Kandy, where I was stationed in a small guesthouse that was very popular among backpackers by "word of mouth". As elsewhere, I was there for at least a month in one piece with occasional trips to the nearby settings and with many returns through the course of the three fieldworks between 2003 and 2006. The travellers kept coming, going, and returning to that place with fresh stories from the island, while I was mainly staying there and interacting with members of the household, their visitors, and acquaintances, which usually gathered downtown about ten minutes walking distance from the guesthouse.

My three ethnographic visits of Sri Lanka differed one from another in several respects. For this article, it is important to note that with each fieldwork I travelled less and rather stayed in one location from where I could study a tourism space as a complex whole. Moreover, given the power of the word of mouth among backpackers (Altejevich & Dorne 2004) as well as suggestions about the visit-worthy places that the local hosts sometimes give to their guests, the locations I chose to reside started to get bigger and stretch to several spots in their micro-areas as well as beyond them, which finally led me to question the borders and boundaries of the concept of BEs according to today's travel practices in general.

On tourism development and diversity of tourist spaces in Sri Lanka

The context of Sri Lankan modern tourism development ever since its beginnings in 1966, when the state of Sri Lanka initiated it with the help of USAID and gave tourism development further impetus with the introduction of the *laissez-faire* economy in 1977 is well documented (see Crick 1994). The island's tourism was, like in many small island states that massively gained independence after the Second World War, intrinsically linked with Western colonial and orientalist discourses that have been perpetuated through contemporary notions of tourism development and tourist marketing until today (Kravanja 2012a, 2012b; Tucker & Akama 2009).

At the beginning of the 1980s, the early traveller scene in beach villages of the southern and western Sri Lanka was already firmly set up. For example, in Unawatuna, a presently popular beach village in the south, more than half of the houses did not possess electricity and drinking water. Three quarters of them only had two rooms (Ratnapala 1999: 62–8) and yet 'almost in every house in the village there was a tourist living' (ibid.: 68). In accordance with the identity policy of Sinhala Buddhist morality that has dominated the state since its independence in 1948 (Obeyesekere 1977), these "hippie" tourists were believed to spoil Sri Lankans. In his worried account about tourism's negative impact, Ratnapala (1999) elaborated how the hippies have brought the practices of nudity to the beaches, prostitution, drugs, commodification of Buddhist temples, begging for money, etc. Finally, he stated:

> Tourism is a real factor that one has to live with. Today, there is no escape
> from it. In whichever remote part of the island you are, whether in, near
> or away from a tourist resort, you are "in" tourism. You cannot escape its

effects. Directly or indirectly it touches you because tourism has become part of the society. In the villages in or near tourist resorts the people are economically "chained" to it (Ratnapala 1999: 139).

This was perhaps true in southern, western and central parts of the island with the predominantly Sinhalese population. However, the East and the North could not even be incorporated into the state's tourism development programmes until the end of the 26-year ethnic war, of which main issue was 'emancipation of Northern and Eastern parts of the island in the aftermath of nationalist measures of the Sinhalese nationalist government' (Kravanja 2012b: 112) in May 2009. The new tourism development programmes for investments in tourist facilities and infrastructures, which included northern and eastern parts could only be implemented after that (ibid.). Even if the backpacker ethos led the way before these processes took place (the *Lonely Planet* guidebook still somehow incorporated, however ambiguously, the north and the east into its narrative during the war) (see Kravanja 2012c), these areas were visited only by rare adventurers.[13]

Sri Lanka's international tourism arrivals indeed stagnated at between 400,000 and 500,000 tourists per year as a consequence of the war (1983–2009). Bursts of political violence of Sri Lankan youth between 1987 and 1989 and the consequences of the tsunami that struck in 2004 further added to intermittent sharp drops of arrivals, but in general, the tourist sector was not targeted specifically by the war. Even if the whole country has substantially suffered economically, the conflict was mainly concentrated in its Northern and Eastern provinces, while in the South and the West, the tourists were, so to say, lying on the beach (Buultjens, Ratnayake & Gnanapala 2016). In its post-conflict period from May 2009 on (end of the war), international visitation began to grow rapidly, exceeded 1 million for the first time in its history in 2012 and, despite the predicted 2.5 million in 2016, had managed to reach over 1.5 million by September of that year (Monthly Statistical Bulletins 2016).

Even if one could assume that backpacking is (or should be) a separate story of Sri Lankan tourism, today it is only partly so. Not only that categories such as backpackers or budget travellers are impossible to include in tourism statistics because the identification with it is just too unpredictable and indeed the category itself too loose, but also Sri Lankan hosts do not distinguish between tourists along these lines. They categorise and stereotype foreign visitors according to their nationality instead (see Crick 1994), which is also reflected in the basic organisation of difference in coastal tourist areas; restaurant's management and individual dishes are advertised along national lines (e.g. "English management", "Original Deutsche Küche", "Italian Pasta", "Dutch Filter Coffee", etc.).

Informal tourist sector and beach life

Backpackers are, similarly to other tourists, frequently approached by various touts or informal tourist workers, especially if they are newcomers in town or village, not to mention if they appear with their luggage or backpack. Touts usually target tourists in different

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[13] A notable exception to this was Arugam Bay on the east coast. Its surf breaks have attracted a steady stream of international surfers, who in general were forerunners of hippie travellers also on Southeast Asian and Indonesian beaches, especially in the 1960s and 1970s (see Maguire and Ritter 2014).

"neutral" public areas in front of major sights, popular pubs, and shops, around stations and markets and on the main and heavily frequented streets and crossroads in the cities.

The sight of touts strategically positioned on frequented spots and occasionally approaching foreign passers-by can be seen anywhere in non-Western countries where the informal sector significantly complements small-scale tourist business. In Sri Lanka, the informal tourist sector is vast, diverse, highly competitive, and it has not changed much since the 1980s, when Malcolm Crick did his fieldwork on the streets of Kandy and published its results in a comprehensive ethnography of Sri Lankan tourism a decade later (1994).[14]

The beaches are, however, different from the cities. First, given the relative vastness and empty space, beach enclaves are sharply delineated from the surrounding neutral territory. Second, popular backpacker beaches are usually tied to villages that stretch along the main southern coast road. In popular cities like Kandy and Colombo, touts and other intermediaries occupy strategic places and work in relative proximity with one another, whereas in beach villages, strategic places are less important than competences for mingling with Westerners. In most beach bars and restaurants, not only touts, but any locally unknown Sri Lankans are not welcome.[15] An example of such informal professionals and rather ambiguous intermediaries that operate on and around the beaches are the so-called "beach boys", who come from respective villages and often find themselves on the scene as sexual workers (Kravanja 2012a; Miller 2011).
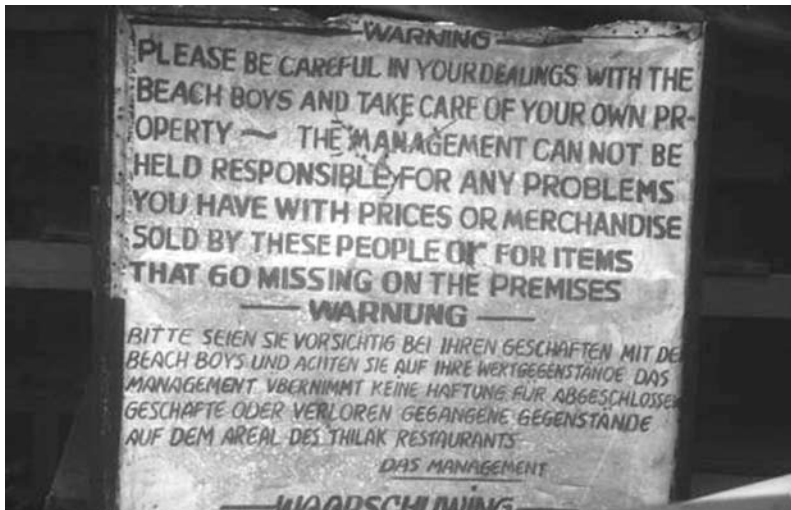

Figure 1: Warning against beach boys in front of one of the beach bars, South coast of Sri Lanka 2004, photo by the author

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[14] Crick conducted his six-month fieldwork in 1982 among different operators of the informal tourist sector. Even then the tourists felt Sri Lankan touts to be 'the most annoying they had met anywhere in Asia' (Crick 1994: 192; see also Hottola 2004: 450, 459).

[15] The same also holds true for beachfront guesthouses in some Sri Lankan villages, where domestic tourists are explicitly not allowed to stay; the 'only for foreigners' notices are added to numerous roadside advertisements.

For accommodation touts, the only significant strategic places in beach villages are bus stands on the main coast road where newcomers usually arrive. Even there, however, touts are in fact not necessary, as the owners of rooms and guesthouses rather do the job themselves. However, the owners do have serious competition in tuk-tuk drivers, who sometimes succeed in catching newcomers and taking them to a guesthouse, where they ask for a small commission from the owner.[16]

In Kandy, I had frequently been present when a traveller tried to explain to a local resident that he or she is "more like a budget traveller", who does not seek for organised tours or special offers but rather tries to find his or her own ways. It was, paradoxically, the lack of proper BEs that constantly put backpackers into a position of "sheer tourists" or, as stated above, *suddhas* (whites). As the professional touts and informal guides are only the surface of otherwise diverse interactions that arise within tourist spaces, the next section will address other situations that add to the dynamics of the backpacker experience of Sri Lanka.

Situational and temporary backpacker enclaves in Sri Lanka

During my fieldwork, I frequently re-met different travellers either on different parts of the island or because many of them often returned to the places they had stayed before. One of the reasons for these re-meetings was the existence of Sri Lankan "backpacker trail" of conventional itineraries that include major historical sites, the hill country with the cultural capital of Kandy, and the coastal area in southwestern and southern Sri Lanka.

However, as there were actually few proper backpacker centres in Sri Lanka, backpackers used very diverse sorts of non-expensive accommodation in different parts of the island. On the south beaches, for example, such thematic places included beach bars, restaurants and small resorts that were equipped with reggae (but not hippie) symbols, some of them with large mattresses, comfortable chairs and appropriate music in the background in the daytime. In the evenings, backpacking and holidaying groups and individual travellers did, however, not seem to stick to their little bubbles, but rather mingled and interacted with bartenders and their friends that were regularly coming to the international atmosphere of these bars.

The question of who all of these interchanging guests, holiday makers, backpackers or "real travellers" were would be relevant only if I wanted to confirm (or not) that such bubbles that emerged along the Sri Lankan south coast and elsewhere in tourist Sri Lanka are indeed what BEs stand for: 'hideaways' (Rough Guide 2009), 'metaworlds' (Hottola 2005) and 'spaces of suspension' (Wilson & Richards 2008). However, there is another question that seems more relevant than this: how and to what degree these "guests" and other participants were involved in the affairs of these spaces and places? For apart from the categories, such as tourist-backpacker-traveller that perhaps would serve foremost the managerial and market-based approaches to studying tourism (Wilson & Richards

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[16] The commissions are well-known all over the south and southeast Asia. The locals as well as travellers normally try to avoid them, but as the ways of avoiding a commission are numerous and ever more sophisticated (see Edensor 1998), the avoidance of them can sometimes lead to serious and lasting conflicts, which are a hard burden for many in Sinhalese Sri Lanka (see Spencer 1990b).

Figure 2: Evening partying and mingling of personnel and their local friends with foreign guests in one of the beach bars, South coast of Sri Lanka, 2006, photo by the author

2008), the question of the power of participants in these milieus leads to the question of the social construction of contemporary BEs.

Connected individuals, who were more or less regularly present there and had the power to intermediate between different milieus as well as between different groups within them were more "static" figures than conventional backpacking and travelling passengers. These figures were not only domestic residents, such as personnel with their friends, tuk-tuk drivers, bosses with family members, neighbours, etc., but also numerous foreign owners and interested buyers of guesthouses, restaurants and bars, temporary foreign workers of these milieus and, last but not least, travellers that had remained in the villages for several months or even over a year. These individuals have created their own little worlds, predominantly for themselves (and not for sheer business) and for their circles of either local or international visiting friends.

It is through these figures that the guests of guesthouses and bars found information, tips, comfort, feelings of security, were introduced to other local acquaintances, and more. Their role as "cultural brokers" was based on first-hand knowledge about the country and the locality. This knowledge was acquired in a similar way as that of travellers, but it was advanced. Travellers trusted them, simply because they were, the same as them, Western foreigners.

Moreover, they were also tightly connected with local powers, either through sheer friendship[17] or through business arrangements (see note 12). Concerning the latter, the local co-owners and managers gained not only economic improvement with these bonds but also a new social status within their communities, which put them into the arena of beach life. These bonds presented the way of how it is done not only for the young generation of new entrepreneurs but also for old families, who had had their properties on the beach well before Westerners got involved with their share.[18]

In addition to these, into beach life integrated foreign individuals, who together with local owners and stakeholders created tourist milieus, some travellers have been naturally more competent than others. For example, Eric[19] was a reggae DJ from Austria with rich previous experience from Jamaica, where he had infiltrated in local reggae scenes before he found himself on holiday in Sri Lanka. On entering the beach scene, he immediately became a local "star" and soon moved with a group of predominantly local young men to a house on the jungle side, where these young men gathered in private. The word of mouth spread fast and a temporary "centre" for gathering started to form spontaneously. Different visitors were coming and leaving, and some of them stayed there for the rest of their holiday. The "commune" lasted as long as Eric was around (a month)

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[17] Friendship between men in Sri Lanka is more demanding than in the West. It is a much stronger bond that, apart from loyalty, brings everyday availability. Western passengers often slip into it with somebody, without knowing about this tightness, which is invested with feelings of jealousy (sinh. *irisiyāva*), and constant testing of faithfulness (Kravanja 2012a).

[18] For example, in a family beach resort, where I resided during my first fieldworks in 2003 and 2004, they had five bungalows (kabanas) on their courtyard. Four of them were owned by different Western regular guests and "family friends", who used the kabanas for free when they came there for holiday. When these owners were away, the family could of course rent the kabanas to other guests.

[19] In order not to expose my interlocutors and friends from the field, I changed their names.

and the memory of the tremendous time they had spent together was recounted among the members of the beach community time and time again.

In their search for alternatives, travellers were of course very different from one another, as the levels of their mastery of "good travelling" were obviously the result of their travel careers. Travellers liked to share and test individual alternatives with each other, but apart from this, they were often invited to different settings and homes by the local residents. Moreover, such invitations could also relate to the whole groups of travellers, when they occasionally met with local groups of young men.

On one such occasion, a group of members of the Sri Lankan national rugby team invited a group of backpackers for a visit to one of the villages in the hills about 10 km from Kandy. They had met at a private party in Kandy on the previous evening, as a random group of backpackers asked a group of tuk-tuk drivers to take them somewhere where they could buy some marijuana (*ganja*). As it was the time of Sri Lankan New Year, the rugby team were willing to spend the next day with this group of travellers in a weekend house in the countryside, which was owned by the family of one of these young men.

Similarly, a son-in-law of the owner of the guesthouse where I conducted my fieldwork in Kandy (mentioned above) invited a group of us to join him and his friends to see a house that he bought in the country, not far away from Kandy. He intended to move there with his young family that year, as they otherwise "temporarily" lived in the guesthouse of his mother-in-law. We spend the whole day there as one group (with accompanying tuk-tuk drivers), shared food & drink and endlessly joked.

While these groupings can be seen as extensions of guesthouse BEs to other settings with accompanying local boys, they happened due to *specific interactions* with the local groups, which were not only (or not at all) part of the "traditional Sri Lankan hospitality", but rather a sign of generational changes in Sri Lankan society that took tourism not only as an economic necessity (the aspect that, for example, Ratnapala (1999) considered as a generator of (negative) social impact of tourism) but as a cultural fact of Sri Lankan destinations, as a cultural island within the island.

Furthermore, most of the young Sri Lankans that I met between the years of 2003 and 2006 had experience with travelling abroad (India, USA, Canada, European countries), usually combined their travels with visiting friends and relatives, had worked or had applications in proceeding to work abroad (the Gulf, Europe), or at least knew someone who did or will go to work somewhere (on this topic see also Gamburd 2002).

The 'accidental communities' (Malkki 1997: 91) that emerged out of this hospitality of local young men were significantly influenced by these experiences and seemed, together with the willingness of backpackers to "just do it", normalised for both sides. Finally, this mutual interest in doing something together also stretched beyond the frames of Sri Lankan tourist spaces and BEs and implied features of what today's hosts and guests of the globally connected world know as the "sharing economy" (e.g. couchsurfing, in the case of accommodation).

For even if the above mentioned "static" individuals and keen travellers could crucially influence backpackers' moves in Sri Lanka, they always easily caught up one with another, either in BEs or on the move through Sri Lankan public spaces. As these

knots of the constantly changing networks of travellers also attracted local groups for different non-economic reasons, the bubbles also emerged in completely out-of-tourism context, which will be exemplified by the following case.

I joined a French traveller, Simon, and two German travellers, Adelle and Ema, that headed from Kandy to one of the administrative centres in the South, eight hours by train. On arrival, Simon took us to a renovated house not far away from a large empty beach on the outskirts of the town. The one-storey house had been damaged by tsunamis in 2004 and consequently repaired/reconstructed into a two-storey house with the support money from Switzerland. The ground floor was intended for tourism accommodation facilities, but the oldest son of the family, Samith, who earned substantial money with tuna fishing, used it as a meeting point of his co-workers (a group of young high sea fishermen) and their friends.

Figure 3: A group of fishermen relaxing after a working day in the open seas at their "meeting centre"; South coast of Sri Lanka 2006, photo by the author

Simon had met these men two weeks before, through a connection with Renée, who had been living in that town for two years already and was integrated into the group, knew everybody on the town's streets and everybody knew him as well. He was, similar to the above presented DJ Eric, the star of the town, one of the wildest figures around, ready to do anything crazy and silly, and everybody loved him, loudly called his name,

waved and greeted him when he passed the evening streets, etc.

It was not clear whose guests we were, Renée's, the fishermen's, Samith's or the family's that lived up the floor. We agreed among ourselves to voluntarily contribute some money "for accommodation" to Samith's mother, who daily headed to the local market with her bicycle and sold vegetables to provide for the rest of the family, as her husband was a useless drunkard, and Samith did not contribute much.

Different from youths in tourist beach milieus only 7 km from there, this group adopted an entirely laid back attitude towards foreigners; they did not mind about "service" and money and acted spontaneously in the same way as they would probably have done if we were not there. Later, from out of nowhere Simon's brother appeared with his girlfriend; Reneé disappeared for a couple of days to the mountains in the outskirts, and Manju, who worked as a dancer in one of the hotels some 10 km away, joined the group. Movements of individuals and intermingling within the group were, in short, unpredictable, dynamic and non-binding, but at the same time basically communal; in the evenings everybody usually gathered at Samith's place and many also randomly slept there.

As the milieu was embedded neither in top-down tourism development and tourist marketing nor in the basic relations between "hosts and guests" within travellers' beaches and their respective villages, it was neither a guesthouse or BE nor a proper local home. A big difference between life on the upper floor and the ground floor of the house was constantly pushed to the side. Also, the fact that the post-tsunami reconstruction of the house was made in accordance with a large-scale tourism development agenda of the country was not reflected, when Samith was asked about how he imagines the future of the place. There were many such ambiguities around, but the group seemed to cope with them without worries and often jokingly.

The examples I have shown above point to a specific kind of BE-like milieus, which emerged as temporary places of being together and present diverse degrees of detour from the sheer tourism context in Sri Lanka. What makes them interesting for the current discussion of BEs is that they qualified simultaneously as a kind of advanced know-how of backpacking in Sri Lanka and as a way of hospitality that the local youth adopted in its attempts to cope with backpacker tourism development.

Conclusion

There are three major reasons that made me rethink the phenomena that are defined by the concept of BEs. First, I believe that the concept itself can be more useful for understanding today's backpacker experience if we are able to think about it in a more deterritorialised way than the sheer network of established BEs might suggest. If BEs themselves present spaces of suspension between different worlds (Wilson & Richards 2008), then the mobility paradigm as a way of thinking further advances the attempts to exceed the dichotomies between static and dynamic dimensions of contemporary travelling (hosts-guests, route-destination, physical-virtual, home-away, work-leisure, authentic-artificial, etc.).

Second, my fieldwork experience in Sri Lanka showed me that even if the island does not have large and famous BEs, it is positioned in backpackers' imagination

as a destination in itself, where diversity is stressed as a specific feature that makes it worth visiting. In practice, this means that Sri Lanka attracts, among many other tourists, those backpackers who perhaps avoid the '*backpacking* superhighway' (Welk 2004: 88, emphasis added), but not necessarily conventional tourism destinations, yet they temporarily gather and create situational spaces that are similar to BEs; enclosed spaces predominantly occupied by backpackers, but lead by various locally integrated foreigners and their local partners.

Third, either as extensions of the latter or as an outcome of interactions with local youths in Sri Lankan public spaces, temporary or situational BE-like spaces with a predominance of local groups constantly emerged. Furthermore, such mixed places that were made outside the walls of guesthouses and beach bars in different shapes and occurrences were part and parcel of the backpacker experience of Sri Lanka.[20] In this respect, the guesthouses that served backpackers as 'home away from home' (Westerhausen 2002: 69) were for many just a transit zone; they searched for, and often found, "the real thing" elsewhere.

Explorations of what one can or cannot do in Sri Lanka were importantly tested through interactions with "local friends" and among the travellers within the BEs, but what the travellers experienced outdoors when they met with different groups of local boys willing to have fun with whatever group of foreigners on so-to-say neutral territories, was far more important for their travel identity than simply residing in the established centres with other travellers and local and foreign entrepreneurs.

What makes these spaces different from classic BEs is their improvisatory nature, as they can emerge virtually anywhere, also on unplanned physical locations that can only later be marked as a distinctive place in a backpacker group's discourse, which frequently finds its word of mouth either on the spot or online through social networks and blogs. In reality, these temporary and situational BEs could not possibly to emerge to such extent without growing mobility and travel infrastructures worldwide that have to do with much more than sheer "tourism". Even if they can be perceived as nothing more than glimpses of destinations among backpackers as well as among their so-called "hosts", they significantly add to the shaping of contemporary backpacker and indeed also domestic youth experience.

The limitations of the concept of BEs concerning their scope can, therefore, be seen in backpackers' "emic" imaginations about individual destinations, which are spread and disseminated through different channels and in different directions. Namely, whole countries or regions, such as Southeast Asia, India, the Caribbean and Japan or separate islands, such as Java, Bali, Koh Samui and Sri Lanka are considered as distinctive culturally significant regions of travel-worthy (or not) destinations. In this particular geography, where paradise, heritage, city, as well as devastation and apocalyptic images, compete one with another in travellers' imagination and on the emerging global stage in

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[20] For a contemporary example, see a contribution by the already mentioned Nomadic Matt, who shared his experience of Sri Lankan people with his readers/travellers on his blog. The short story is titled Sri Lankans: Making a stranger feel like a family (available on: http://www.nomadicmatt.com/travel-blogs/sri-lanka-thoughts, accessed on 15 October 2016).

general (see Sheller & Urry 2007), it is likely that the conception of BEs should be about both, their transnational locality and their local contexts. For if BEs refer to physical places and occasional attractive events (festivals, exhibitions, sport competitions, etc.), many of them are now emerging *ad hoc* and temporarily, but, as the article has shown, not entirely unpredictably – they are celebrated as unforgettable events of communal gathering by both, backpackers and domestic youths.

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Povzetek

V literaturi o nahrbtnikarskem turizmu se je pojem nahrbtnikarskih enklav uveljavil kot pomemben tip turističnega prostora za razumevanje popotniške izkušnje nahrbtnikarjev. Pojem se nanaša na specifična območja, ki se razlikujejo od okolice in so priljubljena destinacija nahrbtnikarjev, ki v takih območjih reproducirajo svoje specifične miljeje. Toda popotniki pogosto najdejo "svoje mesto" tudi skozi raznolika omrežja in posrednike med prebivalci destinacij, bodisi v turističnih ali neturističnih prostorih. V članku bom procese ustvarjanja alternativnih, nahrbnikarskim enklavam podobnih prostorov obravnaval na etnografskem primeru Šrilanke, kjer sem svoje terensko delo o potovalnih praksah in turističnih prostorih nahrbnikarjev ter domačih kot tudi tujih prebivalcev opravljal med leti 2003 in 2006. V teoretskem delu članka bom ponovno premislil koncepcijo nahrbnikarskih enklav in njihovo vlogo v današnjem mednarodnem nahrbnikarskem turizmu in popotništvu.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: nahrbnikarske enklave, mobilnost, popotniške prakse, ustvarjanje prostorov, Šrilanka

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