 Tradition and Tourism:
Dilemmas in Sustainable Tourism Development
A Case Study from the Ngada Region of Flores, Indonesia.

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Abstrak

‘Partisipasi dari masyarakat setempat’ (local community participation) dan ‘pemerataan pendapatan’ (equity) merupakan dua prinsip utama dalam pembangunan ‘Sustainable Tourism’ (kepariwisataan yang mendasar dan berlangsung terus menerus). Bagaimanapun idealnya kedua konsep tersebut, tetapi dalam prakteknya sering menimbulkan beberapa kontradiksi.

Dengan melalui studi kasus mengenai timbulnya kepariwisataan di kabupaten Ngadha, Flores, NTT, Indonesia, nilai-nilai praktis dari kedua konsep ‘partisipasi masyarakat setempat dan pemerataan pendapatan dibahas dan dipertanyakan.

Studi kasus ini menyoroti bagaimana pariwisata dilihat dari sudut pandang penduduk setempat mempunyai dampak sosial-budaya yang positif. Dengan adanya pariwisata, nilai-nilai tradisi lebih dipelihara dan diperkuat kembali. Dalam hal ini dari bertambahnya rumah-rumah adat, dan diperbaikinya Bhaga dan Ngadu, dan juga oleh sebagian anggota masyarakat sistem pelapisan sosial secara adat diterapkan kembali.


Tulisan ini menekankan bahwa diperlukan pengertian yang luas untuk memahami hubungan antara kekuasaan pada tahap lokal dengan suatu cara yang sesuai dengan kebudayaan setempat yang memberikan pemerataan hasil pendapatan dari pembangunan pariwisata.

Introduction
This paper examines emergent tourism development in a village in the Ngada region of Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timor, Indonesia. It is based on the results of ethnographic research carried out over eight years, between 1984-1996. The author studied the village as an anthropologist, tour operator and in 1996 carried out an initial qualitative survey to ascertain villagers’ attitudes to present and potential future tourism developments. The long-term nature of the researchers’ relationship with the villagers means that this is not a snap shot of a particular place at a particular time, a criticism of many anthropological works in tourism for example see Wilson’s (1993) critique of Greenwood’s work.

The villagers had a positive initial experience of tourism and are keen to use tourism for further economic development. The area is
pation were to agree that we all took such participation to mean either self-mobilisation or the slightly lesser ‘interactive participation’ there would still be unresolved paradoxes both in the terms of local and community.

Just as the term sustainability “is charged with power” (Mowforth and Munt 1998:25) so is the term local, a term inextricably bound up with notions of identity. Local identity is not fixed but “may change in different contexts” (Hitchcock 1995:234). Like ethnonyms we use our identity to communicate cultural differences and fulfil certain political objectives. Tourism has important effects on how identities are articulated (CF Swain 1990, Adams 1990, & Hitchcock 1998).

In the same way that writers on sustainable tourism fail to clarify local and participation very few expand on the notion of community. The word appears dotted throughout tourism literature as if its meaning was unambiguous. The acceptance and emergence of “local” elites has been well aired in the literature which is, in itself, an indication that a community is not a coherent whole as is frequently implied (Joppe 1996). Not only must the meaning of community be distinguished from the meaning of place (Bianchi 1996:8) but it must also be seen as a complex of social relationships that is more than just the local elite, two genders, and several generations. A multitude of different identities and relations exist in any one community and are articulated, or not, at different times and in different situations.

Issues of Equity

According to the most frequently quoted phrase in the Bruntland Report (1987) sustainable development is “development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This incorporates the essential principles of inter-generational and intra-generational equity. Commentators on sustainable tourism have similarly followed suit, for example Tourism Concern (1992:3) maintain that sustainable tourism is “tourism and associated infrastructure that, both now and in the future …accept that these people (local communities) must have an equitable share in the economic benefits of tourism”. Similarly the Pattaya (1993) protocol suggests tourism should be socially responsible, equitable and just.

Tourism is a form of socio-economic development and as such, the wisdom gained from development studies is frequently applicable. As pointed out by Kottak (1990) development projects are successful when they incorporate indigenous cultural practices and social structures and that “participants’ groups are generally most effective when based on traditional social organisation”. However, when the tradition social organisation is not democratic or egalitarian the use of traditional power structures may contribute negatively to equity. The inequalities may not only be of the financial kind but may be elitism of influence and decision-making (Mowforth and Munt 1998). However, as pointed out by Kottak (1990) when social organisation and status are based on decent groups extra power and wealth on one hand may obscure greater communal obligation on the other. Kottak (1990) goes on to point out that high levels of social expertise are required to understand the intricacies of social stratification in some societies. In Nash’s (1996) section on sustainable tourism development he maintains that “the first order of business…. Should be to make an assessment of the power of parties involved.” (1996:131). Likewise Mowforth and Munt (1998:259) suggest “an analysis of power… is essential for the understanding of the dynamics and effects of tourism development” (1998:259).
so few that no tourists were encountered in the 8 days it took to get from east to west. Early ‘drifters’ (Cohen 1972), began to arrive in the late 1980’s and the first tour operator appeared at the end of that decade. Numbers of both backpackers and group tourists have risen considerably since then, with two major loci developing. In the centre of the island lies Mount Keli Mutu, a volcano with three different coloured lakes at its peak. The village at its base, Moni, has seen considerable development. Tourism in Labuhan Bajo, on the western tip of Flores, has expanded rapidly as the gateway to Komodo National Park.

The region under consideration, Ngada, lies sandwiched between these two natural attractions. For any itinerary, it is likely that a cultural attraction will serve the aspirations of the tourists and provide a balance between nature and culture during their journey (Cole1997). Also the journey time and road conditions between Moni and Labuhan Bajo mean that a stop between them is almost inevitable, even for those on a whistle stop tour. As the villages of Ngada are ‘unspoilt’, with their traditional architecture, not only of the houses but the entire villages intact, providing a feeling of being ‘enclosed in antiquity’, they are likely to act as a magnet for cultural stops.

As the author has detailed in previous works (Cole 1996; 1997) the early backpackers to the village were not met with euphoria as suggested by Doxey’s model (1975) but rather the villagers were perplexed and upset by their initial contact with western tourists. (The ambivalent position of Europeans and their connections with ideas about headhunting has been reported in neighbouring societies, (CF Forth 1991 and Erb1991). The first tour groups were taken to the village in 1989 by the author, an anthropologist who took responsibility to ensure the guests behaved according to the accepted norms of the village. This early tourism conferred two important benefits to the villagers: voluntary contributions from tourists were collected and used to fund bringing water from a spring to the village. The musical traditions of the village became acknowledged by outsiders giving the villagers opportunities to travel and play at regional, national and international events. These shared benefits have meant that the villagers’ initial experience of tourism was positive. This has helped the villagers’ confidence to use tourism for further development.

In 1996, the author returned to the village to undertake a qualitative survey of the villagers ideas and attitudes towards tourism. The research clearly showed that: The villagers sincerely appreciate tourists visiting their village. Less than 5% of those surveyed mentioned economic benefits as reasons for enjoying tourists visiting their village. Rather, their reasons were the exchange of ideas with people from far afield, increased pride of their cultural heritage (bangga adat istiadat dikenal oleh orang luar), the feeling that many friends brings good luck (banyak teman, banyak rejeki), and the wish for their culture to be known to the world. Increased visitation was considered a good thing as pride increased proportionately.

The villagers at present have a very positive attitude to tourism, believing that tourism is strengthening cultural values (“mentebalkan adat istiadat”) and that the children in the village will have the importance of village custom reconfirmed by seeing tourists come from afar to see it. So far evidence would suggest that the villagers are right: the bhaga and ngadu in the village are well maintained and renovated. More traditional houses have been built, although ten years ago the trend was for younger people to move away and into more conventional dwellings that were promoted by the church and state as healthier (rumah sehat).

The villagers believe that there reverence
and therefore should have power to make important decisions. Many other members of the village, from different clans and across the strata, believe that as the village is now (and has been for over 60 years) occupied communally, and the decisions should be reached more democratically.

Preliminary findings would suggest that for some members of the village, rank is antiquated and against the national ideology and thus play down its role. Tourism has had an important role in strengthening traditional values in relation to clan, the bhaga and ngadu (Cole 1997). By some members of the village the importance of tradition is being extended to rank as the re-emergence of such traditional power structure would clearly serve this group’s interests.

Tradition is not an objective bounded entity but a social construction (Wood 1993), a creation in present time, a symbolic process with which to articulate power. However, understanding tradition as such a dynamic construct it would seem very hard to heed the advice of Kottak (1990), that projects will be more effective if based on traditional social organisation. If tradition were constantly changing which part would the social organisation be based on? In this case it seems that the system of rank has re-emerged or been re-created as a traditional form of social organisation. What is traditional, it would seem, is negotiable; or at least for these villagers what part of tradition that should be retained is a matter for debate. It would be hard to base a project on traditional social organisation when this is such a dynamic and fluid construct.

Wilson (1996) raises the question “should traditional authorities always be maintained in power in the interests of sustainability?” Not only do we have to ask what we mean by “traditional” authorities, but we also need to confront the dilemma of whether to impose Western views of democracy and equity, or whether to work within existing power structures. As pointed out by Harrison and Price (1996) to argue that tradition should be respected and simultaneously to encourage participation is simply contradictory in some non-egalitarian societies.

It would appear that unresolved contradictions exist between the desire for equity (a Western ideological construct) which may be socially and culturally inappropriate or working within existing power structures with the potential for this to lead to a widening of the gap between those in the community that have and those that do not (Smith 1993); and the creation of local elites (Mowforth and Munt 1998) which can lead to a decline in mutual dependence and reciprocity (Greenwood 1972) and a deterioration of community as traditional obligations to the community become weaker (Kadir H Din 1997), increased inequality between families and groups (Berger 1996). Under such circumstances tourism can not be considered socially sustainable which according to Mowforth and Munt (1998) is when a community can absorb tourism without the creation of social disharmony.

Conclusions

This case study from a peripheral island in the Indonesia archipelago has illustrated how difficult it is to apply the central tenets of sustainable tourism development. In this study tourism is still in its emergent phase. The villagers have had an initial positive experience of tourism and are keen to develop tourism further. Tourism is perceived by the villagers to be reinforcing traditional cultural values with reference to a number of areas of social organisation. Traditional houses are regaining popularity; the bhaga and ngadu representing clan ancestors are well maintained; and rank, an aspect of their social organisation that
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