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Thinking through tourism

Large-scale tourism in small-scale societies:

Introductory paper

Authors:

Patrick Neveling (Martin-Luther University Halle) neveling@ethnologie.uni-halle.de

Carsten Wergin (University Bremen) wergin@uni-bremen.de

1. Introduction: theorizing scale

The 2006 football world cup was an event the German public had been eagerly awaiting. City councils and federal state governments had invested huge sums for new football stadia. They all wished to be selected as one of the towns where the competition would take place. Expectations were high that the investments would be returned by large supporter crowds staying in the city's hotels, eating out in restaurants, and shopping for gifts and local crafts. Thus, a high-ranking government official's plan to provide foreign tourists with maps highlighting "no-go areas" - towns and villages where the danger of attacks by neo-fascist mobs on foreign visitors was expected to be high - caused an enormous outcry in German newspapers and among politicians from all parties. Should an industrialised and democratic society like Germany not be able to host one of, if not the largest, world-scale sporting event because its visitors would be in danger of harassment and violent attacks? How should regions where neo-fascist grass roots movements had achieved what they called "national-befreite Zonen", "nationally liberated areas", be advertised? Would a campaign launched by the National Organising Committee under the slogan "Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden", "the world as guest among friends", keep the xenophobic voices quiet? To cut a long story short: the world cup passed, and minor eruptions of violence occurred. After the German team had lost against Italy in the semi-finals, pizzerias and ice-cream parlours were attacked by angry mobs in East German towns. In the aftermath, despite these incidents the German government and media started a campaign proclaiming that the public's strong support for "their" team and the massive swaying of the national flag at peaceful street parties attended by tourists from all over the world were signs of a newly discovered 'relaxed nationalism'.

This brief description of debates on hospitality and nationalism revolving around the 2006 World Cup in Germany highlights some of the central issues in 21st century tourism. Tourists are welcome strangers who bring along the willingness to spend money to turn their recreational activities into a most pleasant experience. As such, they are integrated into the larger history and framework of host-stranger relationships. They should be provided with an environment suited perfectly to cater for their needs. These wishes in turn are fulfilled within an economic relationship embedded in the framework of market exchange. But tourists are not only "purveyors of mod-

ern values" (MacCannell 1999: 5), their arrival also encourages self reflection on values persisting in host societies as these societies make efforts to represent themselves as open and cosmopolitan. Tourism thus has a potential to induce change in societies and one of the central features of these changes can be grasped by the notion of scale. German towns and villages tried their best to demonstrate their willingness to integrate foreigners into local social networks. While many succeeded and peacefully entered the large-scale world (cup) society, others failed in the face of well-established local racist boundaries. The latter incidents, thus, are an example of people who turn certain areas into self-chosen small-scale societies with closed and ethnically homogenous networks. The example above, therefore, not only outlines the importance of the economic value dimension in tourism. It also sheds light on the processuality of 'scalar structuration' within social groups.

In contemporary human geography arguments go in favour of a distinction of "scalar structurations of social space (...) from other forms of sociospatial structuration, such as place-making, localization and territorialisation" (Brenner 2001: 603, see also Hall & Page 2002: 6f). The notion of scale applied by us takes this one step further. In today's world the isolation of a community can only be relative as for, what Raymond Firth identified already 60 years back, "even the remote Tikopia is not completely self-contained" (quoted in Berreman 1978: 228). Scalar structurations of social space therefore need to be analysed as based on decision-making processes in relation to local communities, institutions, industries and other types of social organisation. Scalar systems are defined by social structures of a community, region, nation-state up to global markets. Scalar categories therefore are not fixed but used by different actors to organize the ways in which their social spaces are produced. This influences the implementation and regulation of tourist infrastructures on various levels. The term 'scale' carries a plural meaning as it describes "the production of differentiated spatial units (and) their embeddedness and positionalities in relation to a multitude of smaller or larger spatial units" (Brenner 2001: 600). Thus scalar structuration entails processes of spatial positioning in terms of infrastructural connections with the 'outside' world and of social positioning in terms of an open or closed networking policy. These theoretical strands pick up two central features in earlier discussions on

the concept of scale: spatial positioning and social networking[1]. Tourism is not only effected by but also has an effect on local networks, conceptions of values and morals, as well as spatial positions. As a case study from a small village in Western Uganda shows, consumption habits and household budgets can be altered through tourism. Furthermore, networks expand via invitations of tourists to visit their home-countries in return (Lepp 2007: 881). Here, small-scale networks characterised by closeness and proximity (Benedict 1966) extend through tourist intervention. The same example shows that, in order to do so, certain tourist expectations have to be met and catered for. Places which for a long time have been integrated into large-scale tourist networks such as Bali (Howe 2005, Yamashita 2003) will portray themselves as small-scale societies who carry features of historical times, which they either long left behind, or might even never have seen, at least in the way they are represented today. One striking example for these latter effects of tourism is the "de-development" of local villages in Luxor, Egypt (Mitchell 1995).

In what follows, we want to extend on these brief theoretical reflections on the interrelationship of social and scalar structurations by focussing on its possible application to concepts and politics of development, political and cultural networks and arenas of production and consumption.

2. Scale in relation to political and cultural networks

In tourist contexts, the historical realities of a local community are continuously being rewritten. Certain cultural forms here are produced only to fulfil certain expectations. This not only describes a top-down relationship of political and economic intervention from above. It also functions vice versa, as local experts and mediators of knowledge read the 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990) and use it in their own right to advertise themselves and their local traditions as unique. *World Music* contexts provide a striking example for these forms of self-orientalisation and other present day enactments of cultural difference and authenticity. A relatively small cultural space such as Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean hereby is turned into a point of reference in, and through

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[1] For a summary of these debates see Berreman 1978. For a strong emphasis on networks see Benedict 1966

which, local musicians become identifiable in larger trans-regional contexts (for this and the concept of self-orientalisation see Wergin 2007a). Musicians make reference to local traditions in order to be recognisable as representatives of a small-scale, 'exotic' cultural background. On a larger scale, this makes them attractive for global audiences in search for something special and unique. But there are also other political and cultural actors involved within the related networks of music production and consumption: political parties, record producers, as well as local families with a strong musical background. Relative to the purposes in and for which musical enactments take place, the meanings of certain local traditions change. In scalar terms, research areas on such inventions of music traditions are sub-fields of a larger 'transmusical context' (Wergin forthcoming) open for multi-sited ethnographic enquiry: music schools, concert halls, record studios, government institutions, up to large-scale music festivals all over the world. Such diverse musical fields and soundscapes intertwine across scalar spheres of local, regional, and global participation. Depending on which interest groups are involved – economical, political, cultural, or all of them – the outcomes of networking processes among these fields differ. Nevertheless, a *World Musician* has to fulfil certain criteria in order to be recognisable as such and gain support from the industry, for example, to travel and promote his/her music on a large-scale basis.

The relevance of such criteria becomes even more apparent in relation to large-scale global environmental policies. Here also, numerous political actors construct particular realities in order to successfully promote their ideas on the ideal preservation of landscape and cultural heritage, often in relation to a Eurocentric perception of the world (Escobar 1992). One example for this is the ongoing transformation of the term nature into environment itself. "Nature is thus made more 'real' when it becomes the 'environment', something that is separate from social and cultural practices and that can be managed to produce discrete, observable and measurable outcomes (Banerjee 2003: 152-53)". This change in terminology changes the applicability of scalar structurations in place, space and society. Related debates in large-scale political and cultural networks thereby heavily influence the work of local actors, which for long have catered for environmental preservation and sustainable development of their small-scale societies, independently. Care and concern for local tra-

ditions and values are then turned into power mechanisms of marketing and control (Wergin 2007b).

3. Scale in relation to arenas of production and consumption

The latter examples show, how environmental heritage preservation and political networks are entangled. Our argument is that inherent power structures can be disentangled analytically via the application of scalar differentiations. Heritage marketed in tourism economies no matter of which kind, thus is "not an effort to know what actually happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes" (Lowenthal 1998: x). Most monuments visited by tourists may indeed by manifestations of the achievements of mankind. But as Egyptian pyramids reflect the technological knowledge of an ancient society and are therefore perceived as one of the seven wonders of the world, they can also be portrayed as one of the most monumental sites for the commemoration of slavery, forced labour and pre-capitalist exploitation (cf. MacCannell 1999).

As another example, many postcolonial nation-states today not only commemorate the shameful past of their former colonial rulers. As it is case for the small island nation-state Mauritius, some have also begun to capitalise on their colonial legacy. The landing point of the hundreds of thousands of Indian contract workers imported in the nineteenth century to substitute the freed slaves as cheap labour on the sugar plantations has become an integral part of guided heritage tours. At the same time, the island's plantation history is critically reflected in a museum. The permanent exhibition, situated in a sugar mill shut down during one of the many phases of centralisation, has been given the somewhat cynical title "L'aventure du sucre" – the sugar-adventure. The textile and garment industry – main pillar of the islands economic boom years in the 1980s – also has its own museum. But whereas, in the first case, sugar and its by-products are available in a small shop, the *Floreal Textile Museum* is a minor part of a large complex of factory outlets run by Mauritian garment manufacturers all belonging to the CIEL textile group. Whereas the history of sugar production in the first museum is told with a strong reference to local conditions, the history of textile production is represented on a global scale. References to the origin

of all the fashion items on sale in the building's basement and surrounding area – let alone to the working conditions under which they are manufactured – is marginal to non-existent.

The sector of tourism itself may not be suitable for representation in museums yet. Nevertheless choices of representation and non-representation show how scale matters in the way local relations of production are communicated to tourists. There is strong evidence that the latter are not only customers on the local market. One central feature of 1960s analysis of Mauritian society was its small-scale characteristics (Benedict 1966). Given the spatial proximity and density of social networks in the 1.2 million island nation-state, Mauritius still has strong features of a small-scale society even today (Eriksen 1998). As work environments and relations of production matter significantly in today's Western critical consumer societies (cf. Clean Clothes Campaign 2002) so does the image of 'relative exploitation', which tourists might take home. The above comparison of sugar and garments shows, how locally produced goods are staged in front of or hidden from the tourist's gaze. Tourists as local consumers as well as global image-makers are confronted with object displays either represented small-scale or large-scale. One crucial feature of these presentations is an ambition best described as de-alienating the objects by way of establishing a producer/consumer relation (see Neveling 2007 on the concept of de-alienation). At the same time, relations of production in the economy of tourism itself remain veiled behind the curtains of a paradise island image sold back through a successfully blurred tourist's gaze.

4. Discussion: scale within an anthropology of tourism

On the one hand it can be argued that debates about local development continue to "synthesize, arrange, manage, and direct entire populations and countries based on a unitary system" (Banerjee 2003: 151). In contrast to this, John Bodley recently emphasised the power of small-scale social structures or regional markets as opposed to large-scale global politics and infrastructures (Bodley 2003). The above discussion of 'scale' cannot answer all questions related to this concept. Nevertheless, it highlights the ambiguities of an inherent binary opposition central to it: large-scale is

not always 'the evil', while small-scale is not necessarily the grass-roots' only de-mocracy option. The stubbornness of German villagers opposing themselves to for-eign visitors during the 2006 World Cup stands out as a striking example in which small-scale actions undermine plans for the successful social and moral structuration of a large-scale tourist event. There are further aspects, which are not as easy to handle: What about the definitions of tourist attractions as unique and authentic cultural formations, or World Heritage Sites? Are scalar characteristics of places and communities taken into account in these debates? And if so, to what extent are they used to, for example, represent places as "frozen in time" and thus end up in a per-formative reification of people without history? Who benefits from these perform-ances, if, as Stroma Cole noted, "the majority of villages (…) are passive partici-pants, unpaid actors on a stage, gazed at by an affluent audience" (Cole 2006: 634)? Here, similar to the different political and cultural enactments in *World Music* busi-ness or textile museums, a scalar structuration opens up various levels of under-standing about the involvement of villagers, local governments, state-officials and global industries in these representations. To come to an unfinished ending: Tourism is fundamentally about capital markets and tourists. But it is also about economical and political power relations grounded in historically informed frameworks of unre-solved stranger-host relationships. Tourism, as a product of modern Western society (MacCannell 1999), today is a multi-sited arena, which the whole world actively or passively participates in – members of large- and small-scale societies alike. And an anthropology of tourism taking into account scalar structurations in relation to socio-political structurings of a place and community sheds light onto these complex net-works of spaces, peoples, goods, interests and ideas in a fruitful, "contextually spe-cific [and] yet theoretically self-reflexive" (Brenner 2001: 605) manner.

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