Chapter 6

Backpacker Hostels: Place and Performance

MICHAEL O'REGAN

Introduction

Backpacking, a form of tourism and sub-lifestyle, has often been placed in a very different category to mainstream tourism, a form resting on complex and interdependent infrastructural 'scapes'; producing (and being produced by) its own system of interrelated and increasingly interconnected institutions, transports, guidebooks, routes and symbolic spaces of consumption. This chapter takes a fresh look at the phenomena of 'backpacker hostels'; the network of backpacker-oriented accommodations, historically, discursively, symbolically and materially part of backpackers' lived 'socio-spatial practices'; part of a global system that enables, influences and shapes (and vice-a-versa) backpacker flows. The 'backpacker hostel' has risen symbolically and materially to become a validated and sanctioned portal for entry into this lifestyle, central to its reproduction and development, linking multiple spaces and times together; an important infrastructure and a key building block through which people relate to and associate with backpacking. More importantly, the 'backpacker hostel' is a place specifically for consumption and performance – routed in the discourse of spatial mobility, experience seeking, performance and identity. Celebrated and represented in film, media and literature as the antithesis to the 'International hotel', as the primary time/space experiential setting for a backpacking trip, it has become a key symbol of backpacker travel itself, where individuals perform, narrate stories, sample (or build) an identity, exchange knowledge and interact. As a key mobility system, a significant system of provision and a key consumption junction, this chapter traces the historic, symbolic and material meaning attached to them, emphasizing their role within contemporary backpacking.

Conceptual Framework

We can conceptualize the 'landscapes of tourism' (Shaw & Williams, 2004) or more accurately, the landscapes of mobility as 'vacationscapes' (Gunn, 1989), 'leisurescapes' (Urry, 1990) 'travellerscapes' (Binder, 2004), 'tourismscapes' (Van der Duim, 2007), made up of various flows, which are constituted through a skein of complex, interlocking networks that increase and enable tourism between, within and across different societies (Urry, 2000). Within this framework, Urry (2000: 193) argues that there are 'networks of machines, technologies, organizations, texts and actors that constitute various interconnected nodes along which flows can be relayed'. This includes networks of transport of people by air, sea and road, as well as the wires, cables, satellites, fibre and microwaves that carry phone, email messages, images and money. The '-scapes' suffix signifies transnational distributions of correlated elements, a concept utilized by Appadurai (1990, 1996) to describe global flows, illustrated by the transnational arrangements of people, technology, finance, media and political resources, labelling them, respectively, as ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes. These 'scapes', Appadurai (1990: 296) argues are also 'deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors and provide for the foundation, the spaces and opportunities of ''imagined communities'' (Anderson, 1983)'. Appadurai (1996: 33) extends Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' and argues that these 'scapes' are the building blocks of what he calls 'imagined worlds', that is 'the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe' that constitute new forms of individual and collective expression.

For Bell and Ward (2000: 88) '[t]ourism represents one form of circulation, or temporary population movement', a privileged flow along these 'scapes' that is predominately structured and channeled by 'scapes' along different nodes, reconfiguring the dimensions of time and space (Williams *et al*., 2004). As part of the 'ethnoscapes' or 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live' (Appadurai, 1991: 192), tourists along with other moving groups, such as immigrants, refugees, exiles and guest workers, move around the world as global flows. Tourism is simply one form in a continuum of flows, helping to 'situate tourism in relation to other forms of mobility that are differentiated in their temporality and spatially' (Williams *et al*., 2004: 101). Tourism is deeply structured by scapes – the very existence of

motorways, flight routes, airports, etc., facilitating and channeling movement and are in today's globalizing world 'fundamental to understanding the massing of tourism flows along particular routes' (Shaw & Williams, 2004: 3). Backpacking, as a form of tourism, and a privileged flow (Alneng, 2002) has also been visualized as an imagined world, constituted, constructed and made possible through globalizing 'scapes', a differentiated flow or imagined community that has constructed (and is increasingly offering) its own version of these global scapes; a sub-lifestyle with its own routes, flows and rituals (D'Andrea, 2007).

It is through this social imagination then, that backpacking is often characterized as a distinct form of tourism, constructed as a more or less integrated set of practices and a role that an individual might embrace, an assertion that has seen them and their practices differentiated from 'mainstream tourists' (Cave *et al*., 2007; Cohen, 1973; Uriely *et al*., 2002; Welk, 2004; Westerhausen & Macbeth, 2003). They are characterized as taking up a different role within, between and across a de-territoralized 'landscape of scapes' – a 'travellerscape' (Binder, 2004), which describes the 'alternative' social arena or field in which backpackers experience their journey across, between and within borders and boundaries. The scape is constructed out of global scapes; anchored to a set of badges of honor, or an ideology; ordered 'according to certain sets of economic, political, ecological or social practices and discourses' (Ek & Hultman, 2008); with each individual backpacker participating and experiencing travel through a larger formation of like-minded individuals because of what such communion offers and represents. Bradt (1995) identified a number of ideological 'badges of honor', which included: travelling on a low budget to meet different people; to be (or to feel) free; to be independent and open-minded; to organize one's journey individually and independently; and travelling as long as possible. Pearce (1990) mapped out a similar ideology that included: a preference for budget accommodation, an emphasis on meeting other travellers, an independently organized and flexible travel schedule, longer rather than very brief holidays and an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities. Welk (2004: 80) believes that these 'badges of honor' are the 'basic symbols with which backpackers construct traveller identities and a sense of community' and 'serve to distinguish the backpacker from the (stereo)typical conventional tourist'. So, this imagined community in many ways constitutes many of the attributes of a lifestyle community, in the way they constitute themselves, their dispositions, their habitus as separate from tourists, as they orientate and embody, however slightly, these badges of honor or performative conventions.

While diverse mobilities come together to enable backpacking to happen, Urry (2007: 272) argues it is necessary to analyze the various systems that distribute people through time-space; given that mobility systems are 'organised around the processes that circulate people, objects and information at various spatial ranges and speeds' with all mobilities entailing 'specific often highly embedded and immobile infrastructures' (Sheller & Urry, 2006: 210). Furthermore, Hannam *et al.* (2006: 3) argue that '[m]obilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial infrastructure and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities' and that no increase in fluidity can happen without extensive systems of immobility. Moreover, non-human objects, machines, times, timetables, sites, desires, systems, bureaucracies, technologies and texts provide 'spaces of anticipation' that enable a journey to be made, for a traveller to plot an itinerary and which 'permit predictable and relatively risk-free repetition of the movement in question' (Urry, 2007: 13). In this context, backpackers perform a particular version of mobility identifiable with the label 'backpacker', even though many who travel this way disassociate from the term as they buy into specific representations of particular spaces, routes, rituals and practices that have historic, economic, social, cultural meaning and significance (Hetherington, 1998). Backpackers' mobility-related performances, activities and practices thus do not exist in a vacuum, but rely on external institutions, infrastructures and systems, which are constructed materially and discursively to appeal to them specifically. Pooley *et al*. (2005: 15) thus argue that 'mobility is more than the mechanism through which mundane tasks are carried out' and '[m]ovement can itself become a performance through which we make statements about ourselves and acquire status'.

Backpackers, whose everyday conventions and practices require them to mobilize themselves spatially, intellectually, ideologically and culturally in new environmental settings, require structure – 'a degree of permanence, of fixity of form and identity' (Hudson, 2005: 17). Backpacker hostels are an important if not integral institutional infrastructure that enables, structures and represents their mobility. While Starr (1999: 377) suggested that studying infrastructure was the study of boring things, it is an important (even if sometimes mundane, unnoticed and embedded) part of people's lives, representing some of the most pervasive and foundational scaffolds of everyday social life. Hostels as 'infrastructure' and 'structure' have become a central point of reference within backpacker practices, providing a community and institutionally sanctioned portal by which means a socio-spatial practice is enacted,

knowledge exchanged, where one's identity can emerge and be validated. While backpacker movement is not fully determined by hostels, it plays a major part within the system of interrelated institutions (transport, communications, roads, airlines) developed to support their mobility, and it remains the primary accommodation infrastructural network and a pre-eminent 'mobility system' for facilitating this global phenomenon. However, like mobility itself, the spread of hostels has been uneven. While some countries operate strict regulatory environments hindering their spread, others restrict foreign involvement and investment (by restricting labor, capital and knowledge mobility). Yet, even in those countries that contain a large, informal, heterogeneous accommodation base (i.e. Thailand, Bolivia, Peru and China), hostels are increasingly established.

There have been competing claims to the historical association between modern backpacking and hostelling. While Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1985) argue that the historical antecedents to the modern backpacker hostel can be traced back to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) formed in 1844, most scholars see modern hostelling as having originated in Europe in 1909, when a German teacher, Richard Shirrmann, came up with the idea to take his students on excursions bordering the Rhine using schools along the route as accommodation (Clarke, 2004b). When Cohen (1973) investigated the nascent 'drifter' flows, precursors to today's backpackers, he noted they flowed along parallel geographic lines to tourists, 'institutionalised on a level completely segregated from, but parallel to ordinary mass tourism' (Cohen, 1973: 90). Cohen (1973: 97) noted that drifters sought out these cheap and conveniently located hostels, often called 'freak hotels', which acted simultaneously as lodging, meeting places and eating places, where 'youngsters exchange information, buy and sell their belongings, or smoke pot'. These original drifters, Cohen argued, travelled 'outside the established tourist circuit – both geographically and socially', making use of local opportunities for lodging, eating and travelling. Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1985: 824) noted how these developed into an infrastructure catering specifically to the drifters, comprised of 'inexpensive transportation systems, with low-priced hotels and youth hostels surrounded by psychedelic shops, nightclubs, and coffee houses'. Cohen (1973: 101) noted that 'drifter-establishments' were of low-grade and low-rate services, but still thrived on drifter tourism, but 'the ordinary caterer can expect little benefit from it' and in addition, 'the intrusion of the drifters into the itineraries and facilities used by ordinary tourists could spell a loss for the tourist establishment, since it antagonises the

other tourists, for whom drifters are often anathema'. This led some researchers (Riley, 1988; Aramberri, 1991) to argue that backpackers were not concerned with their amenity surroundings or value-added services; a characteristic that meant that accommodation could be primarily offered by locals (Burns, 1999; Scheyvens, 2002a, 2002b), attracting backpackers in a bottom-up strategy of tourism development (Welk, 2004), where local people (primarily in developing countries) opened up their houses to relatively affluent nomads, forming nodes in a global ethnoscape and, as a consequence, were drawn into the multiple and disparate processes of globalization (Edensor, 2004a).

While the original drifter declined along with counterculture in the mid-1970s, recession and stagnation in the west; the spaces, narrative, memories, sights, sites and values associated with them lived on, revived in the form of backpacking in the mid-1980s. The 'freak hotels' and what they represented to the budget independent travellers were replaced by the backpacker hostel, a change made possible through massive growth in 'alternative guidebooks' and the travel media. These mediascapes, which refer 'to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information' (Inda & Rosaldo, 2008: 53) have further developed the new waves of budget travel and rather than being a marginal part of alternative literature, hostels have been increasingly reconstructed and conveyed through 'backpacker' films like 'Hostel' (2006), TV soap operas like 'Crash Palace' (Richards & Wilson, 2004: 267–268) and reality TV shows like 'Paradise or Bust' as central infrastructural scaffolds within backpacking travel. Strüver (2004: 68) argues that these representations 'might be carried in everyday speech, popular culture and high art, transmitted by TV, music, internet etc.' and lead to backpacking, their practices and consumption patterns being increasingly represented within consumer culture.

While hostels along the original 'hippie trail', such as Pudding Shop in Istanbul or the amir Kabir in Tehran, were famous in themselves made possible through word of mouth, hostels have become increasingly 'absorbed in the network', in which 'no place exists by itself' since its position and meaning are 'defined by flows' (Castells, 1996: 412–413) or more accurately, 'the inexorable speeding up of flow' (Broyard, 1982). This has led to a network infrastructure that is predictable and standardized even if not under single ownership, ensuring the same 'service' or 'product' is expected and 'delivered in more or less the same way across the network' (Urry, 2005: 245). Hostels, given their orientation, strive to tap into these global texts, resources and discourses, to legitimatize their place in backpacker discourses, becoming '(re)entextualized' (Salazar, 2006) or

reproduced, with some becoming better positioned as nodes; recognized within globally mediated texts, for certain performances. Visser (2004: 297), for example, notes that, 'the South African backpacker hostel sector seems to be emulating backpacker hostels in regions such as Australia and New Zealand with ''first world'' building designs, rather than using local materials and designs', rejecting the notion that separate geographic regions develop backpacker accommodations with their own preferred characteristics.

Performing Hostels

Hostels are the most visible, material and symbolic part of backpacking culture, part of the backpacking script, a 'referential framework for the planning of a trip, but also a *script* for how to *perform* and perhaps reconfigure their own identities within the desired setting' (Jansson, 2007: 11; original emphasis). They have become so prevalent that some scholars argue that modern backpacking was born out and is maintained by backpacker hostels (Pearce, 1990; Slaughter, 2004). Wilson *et al.* (2007: 199) assert that Australia 'gained a competitive advantage in the global backpacker market because of its rapid and extensive institutionalisation and commercialisation of backpacker travel'. Backpackers and hostels are thus locked into a 'fluid self-reinforcing system' (Urry, 2005: 239) significant to those who pass through them and produced as a 'network' that enables embodied performances to occur. A backpacker hostel doesn't necessarily have to consist of similar people (age, gender, nationality), but of people sharing the same set of particular values, conventions, patterns of movement, involving intermittent physical face-to-face co-presence at locations on symbolic routes an important part of a network-driven community (Lassen, 2006: 307), even though individuals will not know exactly who will be encountered in these sites of 'informal co-presence' (Boden & Molotch, 1994; Urry, 2003). The decision to stay within these places of co-presence and communal proximity isn't 'incidental', but a conscious and habitual way of encountering and experiencing places and people, the symbolic nature of communal living differentiating backpacking from mass tourists; where 'inhabitants recognized each other, knew what they could or should do, and what relationships they could develop with each other' (Aubert-Gamet & Cova, 1999: 40). A hostel without other backpackers would seem odd given an audience is required to establish yourself, your road status and identity, the presence of others providing the reassurance that you are in the right place and reinforcing a 'commonality of experience that exists

among fellow travellers' (Obenour *et al*., 2006). Westerhausen and MacBeth (2003: 73) note the formation of 'such vibrant meeting places en-route' are a key component in that imagination, of chosen routes and ultimately destination choice, an imagined world that has become real, visible and negotiable (Römhild, 2002).

Rather than being mundane places of pause and transit, hostels enable rich, multilayered and dense interactions (Urry, 2003); shared space becoming an important conduit in the exchange process, whether it is the exchange of ideas, friendships, information and material goods, supporting a range of travel experiences from belonging, companionship, reflection and learning. It is also an environmental setting in which an individual can establish his or her own place, how to organize his or her time and his or her next move. While meeting other travellers may be secondary to meeting 'locals', it is still of significant importance (Obenour *et al*., 2006; Cohen, 1973; Binder, 2004; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1985; Riley, 1988; Murphy, 2001, 2005; Richards, 2007) with many intense interactions forming far more quickly than they would in normal life, but also dissipating quickly (Elsrud, 1998; Riley, 1988; Murphy, 2001; Sørensen, 2003). Westerhausen and Macbeth (2003: 73) argue that 'like magnets in a stream of charged particles', sub-cultural meeting places have emerged. These 'gathering places' (Vogt, 1976: 36) permit backpackers to socialize with each other after traversing 'alien territory', serving to reinforce a communal ethos and contributing to the production of individual and group identities. Hostels have also been cast as a continuously updated travel advisory with relevant trip information, where information is exchanged, people put in contact with local events and available jobs, a place to make friends and organize temporary 'ad-hoc travelling groups to share costs, risks and experiences' (Binder, 2004: 98–100). These shared encounters are the glue of 'social networks and have a socializing effect in terms of mutual understanding, empathy, respect and thus tolerance towards others' (Willis *et al*., 2007).

Hostels in Development

While local accommodation development were 'blueprint beginnings' (Franklin, 2003), Cohen (1982b) noted in the early 1980s that on the beaches of Southern Thailand, where local ownership of accommodation was predominant, restricted access to capital made them vulnerable to being taken over by outside interests. Westerhausen and Macbeth (2003: 72) similarly note how '[t]he existence of flourishing backpacker centres frequently invites a ''hostile takeover'' of local tourism structures by

outside operators and competing tourism sectors'. More recently, Brenner and Fricke (2007: 225–226) looked at backpacker development in Zipolite, Mexico, and found that 'developer-tourists' who expressly enter the market to build backpacker infrastructure have access to investment capital and business acumen, and so have a head start compared to the local population, gaining control over and dominating the backpacker market segment. While backpacking was traditionally seen as the first stage of tourism area life cycle (Brenner & Fricke, 2007), given the (perceived) market potential of 'thick flows' coupled with a global relaxation of foreign ownership rules, free movement of labor, objects, finance, technology, information, people, knowledge and capital; (tourist) developers, transnational companies and investment firms have the necessary capital, in-house (or hired) expertise and knowledge that is often beyond the reach of local entrepreneurs. Traditionally, while locals who were geographically tied to a locality entered to serve this market, outside firms and entrepreneurs, not surprisingly, followed this privileged flow, 'cherry picking' high-demand, low-risk and low-cost areas to try and maximize profits (Graham, 2004: 17). Clarke (2004b) found that individual capitalist involvement in Sydney's hostels acted 'in their own immediate self-interest', with the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games bringing multinational accommodation providers into the backpacker accommodation sector, a development that has seen both Accor and Starwood Hotel groups enter the market. According to Peel and Steen (2007: 1065), despite 'growing backpacker numbers, the continuing strength of local economic conditions, a booming property market and pressure to upgrade safety standards, the future of small independent hostels remains uncertain'. While economic interests penetrated and changed the original non-routinized and non-institutionalized character of drifter tourism in the early 1970s (Cohen, 1973: 95) leading to 'fixed travelling patterns, established routines and a system of tourist facilities and services catering specifically to the youthful mass-tourist' practice-specific economic infrastructure have now become embedded within this sub-lifestyle, as backpacker trajectories have become mapped.

The flow of backpackers has attracted an increasing amount of transnational investment both for profit making (Peel & Steen, 2006) and as part of local and national government strategies (Prideaux & Coghlan, 2006a). For destinations that are increasingly in competition in seeking to attract mobile capital or people (Hall, 2005a), the intimate relationship between hostel infrastructure and mobility in drawing international tourists to a region has attracted private investors and state funding. For example, a 2008 Suffolk University study found

Hostelling International-Boston's 32,800 annual guests pumped about $12.5 million into the local economy (Rivers *et al.*, 2008), while Clarke (2005: 315–316) notes how Sydney's Central YHA 570 bed hostel, which has its own travel agency, bar, convenience store, cafe, swimming pool etc., was politically welcome because of backpacker consumption in the environs of the hostel and because they are 'young, healthy, attractive'. Scheyvens (2002b: 157) meanwhile notes how 'the development of backpacker enclaves has transformed some run-down, crime-ridden parts of cities', given that backpacker are characterized as being young, fit, healthy, single, affluent and primarily but not exclusively white. In 2007, a public-private partnership with Hostelling International was announced as a centerpiece to revitalize downtown Winnipeg (Canada). HI regional director, Dylan Rutherford, said the area 'wasn't attracting the best crowd' – a case of public funding in serving a predominately non-local market. But backpackers are the 'right kind of transnationals' (Clarke, 2005); part of a vibrant cultural scene mix along with other previously marginal groups, a mix that attracts the 'creative class' (Florida, 2005), which in turn attracts capital. The ability of backpackers and the infrastructure that facilitates them to gentrify areas has also been noted in red light districts from Yogyakarta (Indonesia) to Sydney Kings (Scheyyens, 2002b; Visser, 2004; Howard, 2007), while pushing out marginal locals (homeless, drug users/dealers, the mentally ill). Increasingly, local, regional and national governments, through deliberate spatial strategies, are now seeking backpackers through the establishment of hostels, because of the capital they possess and also as a source of labor. Given that many backpackers would not visit a region without having the option of a hostel, the development of hostels are attractive both for filling seasonal labor vacancies as well as adding vibrancy to central business districts, which are normally devoid of night-time residents.

Australia, which has been short of labor for unskilled jobs, has traditionally not sought to fill such shortages with individuals from their near neighbors such as the Pacific Islands, but with individuals from countries thousands of miles away, facilitated by deregulation in transportation and communication systems. This type of working and holiday making is enabled by the federal government's 'Working Holiday Scheme' (Clarke, 2004a), which favors a very specific types of mobility – young, vibrant, cosmopolitan worker-backpackers (Williams & Hall, 2002), whom employers value given their enthusiasm and their mobility (Allon *et al.*, 2008), their search for an 'Australianism' (Morris, 2006) and encounters with the 'real Australia', making them a vital source of labor for seasonal harvest work and capital mobility. These 'harvest networks'

often require up to 20,000 workers, the crop-to-crop mobility requiring hostel accommodation to attract and house them as long as the harvest producers require them. Hostel infrastructure along these routes play a vital function in this process by serving as the focal point for growers to source workers and post job information. These hostels act as agents, placing signs outside their establishments and advertising in backpacker magazines seeking harvest workers. According to Rural Skills Australia, farmers ring backpacker hostels requesting a specific number of workers, which the hostel will try to provide, with some hostels also supplying their own transport to farms, while others serve as pick-up points for buses that may be provided by farmers, harvest project contractors or local councils. The demand for these 'idealized mobile subjects' (Richardson & Jensen, 2008: 219) is increasingly important for places, highlighting the role of hostels in putting a place on the map, with local issues becoming 'more tightly and mutually intertwined with national and global concerns' (Edensor, 2004a: 11).

Hostels in Enclaves

This chapter is not suggesting that the hostel network is at the cusp of being colonized by corporate giants, investment firms and profit entrepreneurs who, as agents of globalization, are offering a rich lifestyle for a 'relatively' cheap price, akin to the glocalized Starbucks network. It does, however, suggest that hostels, as an important consumption junction and a spatial setting for many practices that may dominate a backpackers daily activities, are taking on many of the characteristics of what Edensor (2000: 328) calls 'enclavic space', offering travellers a bit-part in a theatrical play. To encapsulate consumers, they create synergies with everyday activities (touring, nightlife, laundry, internet access); with particular consumption practices acting as 'binding agents' (Thrift, 2000) that give travellers enough autonomy so that they are seen and feel they are socially constructing, not socially constructed (Thrift, 1996), which reconfirms (genuine or illusory) individual autonomy (Bauman, 2001). Paraphrasing Edensor's (2004b) 'motorscape', hostels contain the comfort of a spatially coherent identity, connecting places together in an increasingly enclavic-scape across differing local contexts with a familiar architectural style, containing familiar comforts such as wi-fi internet, English-speaking staff, security, live music, sociality, privacy – features that have become so common place and familiar within hostels, that they are now only noticeable when missing.

Creating a space for performance, also means restricting the mobility of others seen as economically marginal, immobile or disruptive, which usually manifests itself by refusing entry to locals even as paying guests (Hutnyk, 1996; Visser, 2003), meaning there is relatively little contact between backpackers and 'locals' (Obenour *et al*., 2006; Huxley, 2007). Different bodies are separated out, transforming the travelling body in a series of processing categories, leading to spatial and racial segregation that excludes certain groups (stag parties, rugby groups, school groups) and ethnicities, which has recently seen Aboriginals in Australia, Israelis in India and even English tourists in Wales excluded from certain hostels. This exclusion extends to any individual or group who 'could' disrupt the enactment or performance of a backpacker's lifestyle or undermine the commercial activities of the hostel, while 'the other' act as staff 'performing' local culture. The ability of an actor to participate in the network is determined by whether they are seen as contributing to the goals of the network, denying entry to those who are unable or unwilling to perform supporting roles in the network. This also extends to individuals or groups that 'refuse to comply with the roles expected', those individuals who 'truly disrupt the stage and the normative enactions performed on it' (Edensor, 2000: 331), leading to their exclusion and alienation from the surrounding environment as hostels welcome similar people on a reciprocal basis throughout the world. Hostel owners will argue that this is their business, catering to international tourists, and that they have a duty of care to guard against intercultural misunderstandings by serving as a 'buffer against culture confusion' (Hottola, 2005: 5) on such issues as personal space, privacy, gender and sexuality. Hostels have become progressively more closed to the immobile (increasingly, hostels have maximum stay lengths), the non-paying or those considered economically insignificant. Surveillance, CCTV cameras, flow management systems, security guards and swipe cards help hostels offer 'assisted' and emplaced predictability and reliability – frictionless and seamless mobility through smooth corridors on the hostel network – a type of encapsulation, where the space is stage-managed, 'a strategy for maintaining spatial and imaginary boundaries' (Jansson, 2007: 9), an encapsulated spell that allows for an 'imagined' community to take hold, but 'in order not to break the spell, people are obliged to act in an appropriate manner – to play the right game' (Jansson, 2007). These hostel performances mean the boundaries of Self are not brought into question (Sibley, 2001), as hostels mediate between the backpacker and otherness, between edge and risk or any intrusion

that might produce anxiety, while the individual backpackers themselves, if threatened by others, can also retreat to private rooms.

Hostels are becoming increasingly adept at providing and organizing scripts, interconnecting with specialized transport companies and other backpacker operators through 'backpacker conferences', web-portals like hostelworld.com and specific hostel management forums (www.hostel-management.com) to manage a stage on which interaction will be carried out, modifying and manipulating spatial practices, tapping into global flows; helping create a scape that ensures travellers never feel lost, immobile or isolated no matter where they happen to be. Mobilizing shared activities and mutual aid systems that were traditionally tied to hostels, such as shared meals, kitchens, notice boards, wash rooms and communal chores become problematic in this co-production, as hostels, through accident and design, give new spatial meaning for more affluent mobilities. Many collective, shared practices and rituals that were once enabled by hostels are now withdrawn, no longer supported or inscribed within structures and are replaced by more individualized activities aimed at instant gratification, with less attention paid to activities that help self-organization or benefit a collective culture. Thus, the elevation of private space and commercial activities mean individuals can pursue their own interests, the '[e]xpectations of backpacker/hostel accommodation appear to be changing from the communal, cheap, ''just a bed'' option that it once was believed to be... something more in line with the accommodation experience of the mainstream tourist' (Cave *et al*., 2007: 245). While the décor and layout of a hostel lobby once meant creating a very different experience from that encountered at a five star hotel, increasingly individuals are coming to expect very tangible and physical evidence of a servicescape (Bitner, 1992), whether it be internet access that works, to a level of service and performance from the 'management' and staff.

Hostels in Play

Even though performances are increasingly prescriptive, individual travellers are active rather than just passive performers, producers as much as consumers. Jamal and Hill (2002: 100) note how tourists (as well as entrepreneurs and locals) can 'interpret for themselves and resist the ideological or hegemonic meanings being imparted by the industry or destination/attraction managers' and have the agency not to be co-opted 'to exercise performative freedom and resistance to being normalised into the dominant discourses' by escaping the institutions and

structures that try and channel them (Sheller, 2001). Thus, backpackers will express themselves by fulfilling or occupying a consumptive role different from that of other tourists, positioning themselves in opposition to those 'conventional' tourists (Wilson & Richards, 2004: 123). Bruner (1991: 247 cited in Shaffer, 2004: 142) argues that this is often difficult given that 'once the tourist infrastructure is in place, the traveller can hardly avoid the well-trodden path of the tourists'. While Judd (2003: 34) argues that even when a tourist leaves his or her enclave to indulge in the unpredictable adventures of the flâneur, there is a 'limited range of options and choices available to them'. Yet, travellers will contest what is 'appropriate' activity in a given setting, engaging and engage in 'tactical revolts' and 'actively resist conformist performances' (Hannam, 2006: 244), not only sometimes arranging accommodation outside the network, but living outside the network geographically, materially and socially (Elsrud, 1998), committing themselves to the sub-lifestyle values by approaching the 'local' in a different manner (Loker, 1993; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002a, 2000b), evolving means and representation that they believe represents their social world more accurately than that which the industry can offer or impose.

Consumption might thus also be enacted through less privileged spaces, such as in heterogeneous spaces located to serve passing trade and the local population, accommodation that co-exists 'with local small businesses, shops, street vendors, public and private institutions, and domestic housing' (Edensor, 1998: 53), which may 'provide stages where transitional identities may be performed alongside the everyday enactions of residents, passers-by and workers' (Edensor, 2001: 64). These spaces are not connected to the global tourism industry to the same extent as enclavic space and do not (or may not have the abiity) to package and perform particular kinds of authenticity for backpacker consumption. These alternative spaces suggest or give the traveller (even if it is illusionary) the notion of serendipity, where a local place provides a convincing backdrop to identity creation. The traveller can perform when practicing language, for example, removing themselves linguistically and culturally while utilizing bargaining skills to find ego enhancement from getting 'best value' (Riley, 1988). Heterogeneous accommodation exists as rich and varied 'soundcapes' and 'smellscapes' (Edensor, 1998: 62) amongst the local shops, schools, hairdressers, markets, flats, residents, suburbs, street vendors and restaurants. In this context, Crawshaw and Urry (1997) similarly note the idea of a flaneur 'attracted to the city's dark corners, to chance encounters to confront the unexpected, to engage in a kind of counter-tourism that

involves a poetic confrontation with the ''dark corners'' occupied by the dispossessed and marginal of a town or city, and to experience supposedly ''real'' ''authentic'' life uncluttered by the dominant visual/tourist images of that place'.

Backpackers are also deploying technologies by using social networking hospitality sites like bewelcome.org and couchsurfing.com, creating new forms of 'meetingness' (Urry, 2003); appropriated and lived as part of everyday travel experience, creating 'empathetic sociality' (Maffesoli, 1996: 11), overtaking the power exerted by institutions while creating new tactical media and responses in the face of massification. However, not all backpackers have the access, skills, competences, motivation and knowledge to move beyond the hostel network into heterogeneous space or other networks. Edensor (2000: 331) argues that most will acknowledge, accept and even welcome the controlled nature of enclavic spaces and adapt performances accordingly, 'prepared to trade self-expression for the benefits of consistency, reliability, and comfort' (Edensor, 2000: 331). For many backpackers, hostels are a reliable and habitual means to avoid the messy mobilities that one finds in heterogeneous spaces.

Conclusion

The global processes enabled by technological developments in transport and communications combined with a wider 'appreciation' of independent travel has created and extended powerful (and affluent) thick flows that criss-cross the globe. This has embedded an increasingly interconnected, interdependent and mapped 'travellerscape', which includes a material and symbolic hostel network that serves as a 'mobility nexus' (Normark, 2006) – a place of identity making and identity habit (Jenkins, 1996), a distinct social space and a visible part of a sub-lifestyle. The hostel network is a symbolic space that connects places across time/space as well a material space that connects an 'imagined community' together through a shared movement of bodies, ideas, assumptions, stories and knowledge. Hostels are thus a key infrastructure scaffold, deeply embedded within backpacker travel arrangements; an infrastructure that supports backpacker mobility in a routinized manner. It is this global spread and habitualization that has led observers to suggest that these meeting places both represent a crucial component for destination choice for this form of tourism (Westerhausen & Macbeth, 2003), but also highlights its increasing institutionalization. Increasingly, hostels link together and with the media, transport, the state – offering a very consumption-driven community and forms of sociality, even if

they only fleetingly represent familiarity and recognition, a shield of emotional protection, and a substitute for insecurity and unpredictability within the informal unorganized sector (Bell, 2005).

Backpacker hostels continue to reproduce and sustain themselves given they are an infrastructure considered as a foundational scaffold of everyday travel life – the primary form of accommodation associated with independent backpacker travel, symbolically, materially and discursively, providing an increasing level of predictability, safety and security. However, this is primarily achieved through exclusion, segregation and marginalization rather than by enabling any sort of 'local' contact or even low prices as they reterritorialize 'a sense of place' through theming and 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1999: 92). Hostels have developed immensely complex 'participatory' programs to provide backpackers with consumption opportunities that are socially authentic, providing a stage for performances that tends to exclude those that do not want to or cannot participate, a strategy that increasingly mediates between the individual traveller and the 'outside world' whether it is for food, nightlife, laundry or internet access – a process that is welcomed by many. This process has led to a certain amount of de-individualization or reduced autonomy, a continual cumulative process whereby backpacking is captured and made safe for individuals, but only for those affluent enough to participate and willing to give up some individual agency for a 'controlled edge' (Hannigan, 2007: 73); a safe adventure and experimentation with identity that offers escape from everyday routines. Hostels then are safe ground for the individualizing and reconfirmation of self through encounters with familiar others but freedom and interaction is increasingly expected and purchased rather than earned as individuals interact 'lightly' without too much riding on the outcome (Hudson, 2005), escaping if boundaries of self are brought into question. While hostels increasingly become interconnected and interdependent through transport, informational and communications innovations, the scape by taking on a more enclavic nature might clash with individuals' imaginary embodiment in the world. Tactical responses, such as the use of heterogeneous accommodations and the use of the 'Technologies of the Self' such as hospitality exchange sites mean individual backpackers given the motivation, competence, access, skills and tools can reposition themselves along with others to coordinate their tactical movement through space on the 'promise of affection, conservation, a sense of new beginnings' (Turkle, 2008: 125). It may be that a new disjuncture is been created as individuals in coordination with others seek greater control of their self-image, as they set out to 'win

space' that may be experienced as personalized, authentic, capital intensive and identity-enhancing. The question remains as to whether these creative and adaptive tactical responses and the creation of distinctly new social spaces can transform the global-local processes that have made hostels a key infrastructural system, acting as a preparatory step for geographically dispersed individuals to create new forms of alternative travel styles from below.