

Creative tourism in Bali's rural communities

Introduction

My expectations from the “Island of the gods” were high when I first arrived in Bali for the field research project of the Tourism Destination Management Master Program in 2015. Thus, I was disappointed I was when I realized that Bali, or at least the area in the South around Seminyak, was not the island paradise I imagined. Instead of palm trees, white sandy beaches, lush green rice fields and friendly locals I found foreign-owned designer boutiques, villas inhabited by westerners, overpriced restaurants, dirty beaches, and streets full of crazy motorbike drivers and annoying taxis. Bali's tourism industry has undergone a serious makeover. Over the last decades, tourist numbers increased considerably and cultural tourism transformed into mass tourism. While this development has brought welfare, it also led to a vulnerable economy, over-dependent on tourism, an unequal distribution of income, pollution, commoditization of culture, waste problems, and water scarcity.

I did not give up that easily and started searching for the Bali I had anticipated. Only a few kilometers further north, in the rural areas, I found the island paradise I had imagined: pretty villages with traditional houses, rice paddies and temples at every corner, a relaxed atmosphere, warungs [small local restaurants] serving local food, and very welcoming and warm villagers. I realized how different the two worlds of mass tourism in the South and rural local life in the rest of Bali were. I was determined to contribute to the development of a more culturally and socially responsible form of tourism. Thus, I returned to Bali two months later to write my thesis (Blapp, 2015) in cooperation with the Community-Based Tourism Association Bali (CoBTA).

The CoBTA develops tourism in rural areas, with the goal to improve the welfare of the inhabitants. The organization recommends villages to engage in creative tourism, to differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive community-based tourism (CBT) market. CBT aims to involve local communities in tourism development (Hall, 1996), to maximize the benefits for locals (Tolkach et al., 2013), and bring tourists closer to villagers (Butcher, 2003). However, success has been rare and achievements small (Tolkach & King, 2015). Creative tourism is an even more (inter)active successor of cultural tourism (Fernandes, 2011). The evolution from cultural to creative tourism includes a shift from passive to active consumption and from static, tangible heritage to living, intangible culture (Richards, 2011). Thus, instead of just looking at physical heritage like temples, creative tourists seek to engage actively with the culture of destinations (Richards, 2008; Voss, 2004). They wish to ‘live and feel like the locals’ (Ivanova, 2013;

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CTN, 2014) and to have meaningful interactions with the hosts (Richards, 2011). Creative tourism offers the opportunity to participate in a broad array of activities connected to the destination in fields such as music, visual arts, drama, sports, gastronomy, spiritual activities, languages, art-workshops or writing. Interactions between hosts and guests that develop creative potential and new skills are experienced by tourists as well as locals as meaningful.

Creative tourism and community-based tourism have overlapping attributes which complement each other in theory. Both concepts incorporate destination-internal resources, meaningful interaction between hosts and guests, and preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Furthermore, creative tourism seems to provide solutions to three problems of community-based tourism: lack of financial resources, loss of cultural identity and unequal power relations between hosts and guests. These theoretical synergies suggest that creative tourism may lead to tourism which is profitable in the long run, with a socially and culturally responsible outlook. In spite of the advantages which creative tourism seems to bring to communities, it was noted earlier that it could lead to commoditization. Particularly when basing products on the everyday life of locals, there is a fine line between creative tourism resulting in either diversification or serial reproduction. Hence, careful planning is necessary and knowledge required on how to develop creative products in villages without commoditizing the everyday life of locals. However, research of creative tourism has mainly focused on cities in developed countries. Research about creative tourism in rural areas is lacking. My thesis is built on the theoretical overlap between creative tourism and CBT and examined the current offer and future potential of creative tourism in five Balinese villages. I evaluated whether creative tourism is a suitable strategy for rural communities, by elaborating advantages, disadvantages and requirements of a possible merger of creative tourism and CBT. From a practical point of view the objective was to give advice on how to develop creative tourism in a way that is profitably in the long run and with a socially and culturally responsible outlook.

Methodology

The thesis is based on an ethnographic approach, which enabled me to understand and describe the social worlds

of the Balinese villages (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I studied locals and tourists to understand how products are developed and implemented. Data were gathered over four weeks, whereby participant observation in five different villages resulted in over 150 pages of computer-written field notes. Additionally, I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with 14 experts and did interviews with 15 tourist groups, totaling 43 participants. I analyzed data with a qualitative content analysis, using a three-step approach suggested by Charmaz (2014): open coding, focused coding and theoretical synthesis.

Findings and discussion

The analysis reveals four core themes of creative tourism: The everyday life of locals in tourist activities, sharing the everyday life with tourists, meaningful interactions between hosts and guests, and cultural learning experiences for hosts and guests. Based on several positive and negative synergies between creative tourism and CBT, the thesis shows that in sum, creative tourism is a promising concept for villages if certain requirements are fulfilled. The findings partly confirm and extend the theoretical synergies between the two concepts. In total, five positive and one negative synergy between the two concepts are conveyed. Positive synergies mean that the merger of creative tourism and CBT creates an enhanced combined effect while negative synergies stand for a negative combined effect. The positive synergies are intangibility of creative tourism at low financial resources, more enthusiasm of locals to share their culture through creative tourism, preserving cultural heritage through creative learning experiences, more equal power distribution between hosts and guests through creative tourism and creative tourism involving locals without English knowledge. The negative synergy is that intangibility challenges the differentiation and marketing of villages.

Genuine interest in cultural exchange should be the main motivation of tourists and locals to engage in community-based creative tourism. To satisfy this interest a high level of interaction between hosts and guests, a high level of everyday life in the tourism product, and a low level of adaptation of this everyday life are necessary. This implies that locals should be willing to share their everyday life to a certain extent. The more these criteria are met, the more meaningful is the cultural learning experience and the better the genuine interest in cultural exchange for both tourists and hosts. This requires destinations to design their products more spontaneously. Tourism should not become the new everyday life of locals. Instead, their everyday life is the 'tourist attraction' in which guests can be integrated without major adaptations. Tourists need to be flexible, culturally conscious, and interested in participating and interacting.

These insights provide several practical implications for destination managers in Balinese villages and external supporting organizations, but also for villages in other destinations. In terms of destination development, it is recommended to first check, using a list of criteria, whether the vision of the villagers and their resources match the characteristics of community-based creative tourism. Furthermore, the number of tourists per day should be limit-

ed and incomes and jobs in the creative industries should be fostered, instead of fulltime jobs in tourism. In terms of marketing it is suggested to clearly define the target market and to understand its expectations. There should be more focus on free independent travelers, e-commerce and online marketing. Moreover, differentiation could be achieved by emphasizing interaction and local people in the promotion content. For product development the thesis offers an idea catalogue of cultural capital, to be used for creative activities. Specific advice is given on how to develop activities, homestays, eating, and transportation options. Furthermore, it is recommended to not only create packages but offer and price all items individually. External support is recommended for marketing and facilitating interaction between hosts and guests. For the former, umbrella marketing, to promote Bali as a creative tourism destination, and training about online marketing tools are suggested. For the latter, knowledge sharing of Balinese culture as well as training about creative tourism, focusing on the local's role of teacher instead of servant, is advised.

For the visited villages, marketing is the biggest challenge and the highest priority. The villages were all 'ready' to welcome tourists, offering numerous homestays and different activities. However, in some villages there were hardly any tourists and the villagers did not know how to attract them. Other villages had many day tourists but could not prompt them to stay overnight. Whenever I asked members of the tourism committees if they have any questions to me, they generally asked: "Can you tell us how we can get more tourists?" One of the most important causes of this problem is that the destination managers' budget and possibilities in the individual villages are very limited. Therefore, umbrella organizations like the CoBTA are needed to market Bali as a creative tourism destination. Possibilities are to set up a homepage featuring all creative tourism villages, to apply as a Creative Tourism Network member, and to cooperate with the Bali and Indonesian Tourism Board to strengthen the creative tourism brand of Bali.

Even though financial resources and know-how of marketing in the villages is limited there are some tools which can be used, particularly in the field of e-commerce and online marketing. Booking platforms such as i-like local or homestay.com are free to use and target tourists which are interested in creative tourism. Online marketing through Facebook or TripAdvisor can also be implemented with limited resources. The feasibility of applying such tools was shown by some recent developments. After my field research, one village has started to use 'i-like local'. Another village created a new facebook page which is updated at least weekly. On this page, interaction takes place between the villagers, visitors and interested, potential new visitors. These initiatives indicate a positive prospect for a more culturally and socially responsible form of tourism.

Response to Manuela Blapp

The BALI Community Based Tourism Association (Bali CoBTA) was established 2010 with support from the Minister of Culture and Tourism, the Bali Provincial Tourism Authority and independent contributors (Tourism stakeholders of Bali). Bali CoBTA is a non-profit and non-governmental organization. It promotes responsible and sustainable community-based tourism (CBT) and offers support for the transformation of CBT villages (“Desa Wisata” in Bahasa Indonesia) into ‘*Creative Tourism Villages*’, by establishing a cooperation relationship between interested villages and related stakeholders. These stakeholders include e.g. government tourism authorities, travel agencies, CSR doers, hoteliers, academics (domestic and overseas), and journalists. We always welcome those that are able to assist and facilitate the research and development of “Creative Tourism” by providing volunteers for HR management, training to village residents and by improving the utilization of existing facilities.

In “Creative Tourism Villages” tourists are given a unique opportunity to engage in and experience local culture and community life, while communities earn an additional income and preserve and showcase their environment, culture and heritage.

The thesis of Manuela Blapp is built on the theoretical overlap between creative tourism and CBT and examines the current offer and future potential of creative tourism in the five Balinese Villages. It is an innovative and inspirational piece of research. It shows that creative tourism is a suitable strategy for rural communities and elaborates on advantages, disadvantages and requirements for a merger of creative tourism and CBT. This provides valuable direction for the future activities of Bali CoBTA. The ethnographic approach, that enabled the researcher to understand and describe the social worlds of the Balinese Villages, and the qualitative content analysis, were most valuable in arriving at relevant and practical conclusions and recommendations.

To implement these recommendations there are important questions that remain to be answered, such as how to convince locals to share their everyday life (to a certain extent). The more they are willing to do this, the more meaningful is the cultural learning experience and the better can be the genuine interest in cultural exchange satisfied for both tourists and hosts. Furthermore, it needs to be safeguarded that the number of tourists per day does not surpass the carrying capacity of the villages and that incomes and jobs in the creative industries are fostered. Finally, target markets need to be defined, with realistic expectations, and new products should be developed based e.g. on a catalogue of cultural capital.

CoBTA has the spirit to use this thesis to make a fundamental contribution to the development of Creative Tour-

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ism. A problem, however, is that it does not have funds and ability to manage and maintain the needs, do the marketing activities, and follow up implementation and activities related to the development of CT Villages. Therefore, CoBTA is urgently looking for an expansion of its staff, to materialize the actions as recommended by Manuela Blapp. Since each Village is unique we are looking for a person who is able to identify and propose recommendations about the four core themes of creative tourism (that the analysis reveals) that are authentic and original for each village, including:

- The everyday life of locals in tourism products,
- Sharing the everyday life with tourists,
- Meaningful interactions between hosts and guests, &
- Cultural learning experiences for hosts and guests.

CoBTA is also open to other researchers, that can provide guidance for the development of Creative Tourism Villages, in a way that is profitable in the long run and takes a socially and culturally responsible outlook. Furthermore, CoBTA would like to cooperate with (international) knowledge institutes to further develop the knowledge about Creative Tourism or CBT in Bali. CoBTA is already participating in the STARS Project (Sustainable Tourism Agent in Rural Society) This project was initiated by Erasmus Plus, and is co-funded by the EU countries. The project aims to empower youth in a rural society to get involved in the development of tourism. The goal is to empower youth to earn an income from tourism by, for example, promoting hiking activities whereby the youth will act as the guide.

“Respecting creativity”

Response to Manuela Blapp

The thesis of Manuela Blapp is embedded in creative tourism. Contemporary case studies in sustainable tourism (ST) are calling for the importance of new forms of addressing sustainability in tourism (Moscardo 2015). Is creative tourism such a new form or is it merely a marketing concept welcomed by policy makers (Richards & Marques, 2012)? Moscardo pointed out, that tourism is still an economically driven concept with major failures (Moscardo, 2015). Which benefits could come from creative tourism for sustainability and community development when language is action (Bodiford & Camargo-Borges, 2104) and the term creativity would be fully respected and not generally defined as a novel combination of old ideas (Boden, 1994)?

Most people relate creativity to art. So it is not surprising, that the offers in “creative tourism” are art-related events and entertainment. Tourists are invited to visit art exhibitions, concerts or workshops with, for example, an expert who teaches them how to make bouquets of flowers. It is possible to choose between experts who teach us or to be entertained by such artistic events. Art goes further, however.

Art is not reduced to a pre-existing state. Art is free. The process of aesthetic autonomy changes the perspective. It is no longer a mirror of God’s creation or an illustration of religious truth. Art does not have to serve somebody, neither to specific authorities nor to specific systems or

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organizations. Art questions our ordinary understanding and shows its interpretation while art itself is an interpretation (Jacoby, 2004). Art is related to beauty and aesthetic. Aesthetic is derived from the word *aisthesis*, which means “with the senses” —a perception by the senses—in modern Greek. In ancient Greek it means “to breathe.” Beauty can take our breath away. Beauty affects us and touches us. Perceiving and sensing is an active and dynamic process, an active participation and not a passive position. Beuys said “everyone is an artist.” An art-oriented process within the discipline of the arts offers tourists and hosts an active part in an aesthetic and creative process. An aesthetic process opens up new experiences, despite the colour of our skin, our educational background, economical power or academic degree.

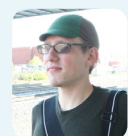
In this interpretation, creative tourism turns to its origins of creativity, art and aesthetics. It can become a community based activity that offers a “play-space” to co-create new meanings and new experiences (Kriz, 2002; Gergen & Gergen, 2004), for Balinese villagers as well as for West-erners.

“Smart growth or sweet dreams?”

Response to Manuela Blapp

Since the 1960’s tourism has been written about, from the host perspective, as the imperiled goose that lays the golden egg. From the Golden Hordes to the Irridex and Butler’s Tourism Area Life Cycle, the process described by Manuela Blapp in her disappointment with southern Bali is easily recognizable in early theories of destination development. Hundreds of papers written since then have advanced the same rather pessimistic outlook. Human nature is fundamentally greedy and bad, this literature alleges, and whether it’s local power brokers hungry for income or tourists hungry for social recognition, the golden goose is bound for the chopping block. Soon, a flood of tourists

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is bound to alter the attraction of local culture until it is no longer unique or attractive.

Though there is a lot of evidence supporting this view of

tourism—and of humanity—I find it somewhat cynical and limited in usefulness. If tourism works badly in Southern Bali, where does it work well? That is a true gap in our knowledge. It is commendable that Manuela Blapp sought to address this gap in a practical and realistic way. The optimistic starting point and pragmatic recommendations represent a welcome original attitude toward issues of tourism (over)development that are typically researched just for the sake of lamenting what went wrong. The findings make it bluntly clear what went wrong—too many tourists came. To do it right, the recommendations say, there must be fewer tourists, and therefore also less tourism income. A more diverse economy is required. While bearing bad news for tourism investors and perhaps disappointing some locals, these recommendations are supported not just by the evidence collected, but by common sense.

The question raised by the findings, however, is how this situation may develop over time. Suppose one of the villages studied arrives at the recommended scenario: it is economically diverse, with agrarian and artisan jobs as well as a handful of part-time tourism jobs; a small but steady stream of loyal tourists interested in local culture are inexpensively attracted through social media and spend at least a few nights per visit. Then what? It is wrong to assume that either the local culture or tourists' culture will remain static. As tastes and priorities change both in hosts and guests, under what leadership and principles should the situation evolve?

Social science is probably ill-equipped to address such difficult questions, but it is certainly impossible based on an ethnography of a few months. Recurring panel research that follows selected communities and individuals over years and decades may offer some insights. This expensive sort of research is, thankfully, beginning to appear in the tourism field, though not in the domain of destination management.

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