GLOBALIZATION, TOURISM AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF IMAGINATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF BACKPACKING

by

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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

Globalization, Tourism and the Commodification of Imagination: An Ethnography of Backpacking

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Abstract

Globalization is the ongoing expansion and development of the capitalist world system, and entails the spread as well as the deepening of commodity relations. People experience globalization differently and play different roles in directing its historical trajectory, depending on the positions they occupy in the landscapes that make up the world system. This thesis ethnographically examines the trips of backpackers visiting British Columbia and how, even though their national identities remain strong, the imaginations that backpackers have of the world and of their positions in it, are increasingly the result of their participation in markets, rather than of their participation in nations. How backpackers imagine the world and their place in it influences the decisions they make about how to live their lives and so influences how they experience and participate in the world system’s development.

Backpackers are mostly middle-class young people who find themselves at a crossroads on their life-paths and who make use of products and services sold by the tourism industry in order to engage in a style of independent travel imbued with an anti-touristic aura. While backpackers come from an array of nation-states, they are also part of the world system’s core and share imagined worlds culturally shaped by their common consumption of trans-national media. Going backpacking provides the people who do it with cultural capital that is useful for having a successful life in the core, where being a successful person is becoming culturally equated with attaining a kind of complex consumerhood.
This work critically draws on Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theory of Global Cultural Economy and Scott Lash and John Urry's (1994) analysis of global capitalism to illustrate globalization's intertwined political, economic and cultural dimensions. Data generated from participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of texts and images is used to illustrate how backpackers come to B.C. on self-directed journeys. Their movements through the landscapes they visit are coordinated as backpackers' individual paths are channelled collectively into a specialized tourist flow through the business and marketing efforts of people working in the backpacker industry who want to capture backpackers' spending power.
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Introduction

“I would encourage any young person to go backpacking. It’s made me think about things in a totally different light, it really has. You know, it’s a great way to travel when you’re young, it really is. It makes you want to do more and it gives you a different perspective, a different outlook on life and different things. It really does, and it also allows you to analyze yourself and to think about yourself” [Liam, a 26-year-old backpacker from Ireland, visiting British Columbia as part of a year-long trip through North America and continental Europe].

Backpackers are young adults who find themselves at a crossroads on their life-paths and who decide to go off travelling in search of fun, adventure and personal development. They engage in a style of independent travel that sometimes involves stopping on route to find temporary employment in order to replenish travel funds. At the same time, backpacking trips are fashioned with the help of commodities supplied by businesses associated with the tourism industry, an industry comprised of many interconnected sub-industries. Backpacking is a kind of tourism, but one imbued with an anti-touristic aura that is pursued by travellers who differentiate themselves from mass tourists. As Bill, a 21-year old backpacker from New Zealand who visited Canada as part of an open-ended trek around the world put it, “backpackers are not the same as camera around the neck, throwing around lots of money in a short period of time tourists” [interview, informant#12; Vancouver, July 24, 2001].

Individually, backpackers go off on long self-directed journeys in order to visit parts of the globe that have come to intrigue them, to meet new and interesting people from foreign lands and to prepare for their futures by learning about their world and
about themselves. While travelling, backpackers accumulate cultural capital that will be useful after their trips are done, when they are trying to find their place in a world and an economy configured by globalization. Collectively, backpackers give shape to the backpacker market, served by a backpacker industry that has emerged within the larger industry, to cater to this group of consumers’ unique characteristics and cravings.

**Globalization**

To talk about globalization near the beginning of the second millennium is to call attention to the growing volume and speed of trans-national flows, the “increasing interconnections – economic, social and cultural – that now exist across national boundaries” (Meethan, 2001: 34). It is easy to get caught up in the hype surrounding the concept of globalization and revere it as evidence of humanity’s progress towards peace, togetherness and widespread prosperity, while forgetting that these same undelivered promises were made by advocates of modernization theory in the 1950s and 60s (Tsing, 2000).

A discursive space opened up for the rhetoric of globalization in the 1990s, amid the celebration of market capitalism’s triumph and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Tsing, 2000). Politically, globalization has come to mean an endorsement of international free trade and the dismantling of protected or public domestic economies as the cure for uneven development and poverty (Chomsky, 1998). There has been a simultaneous influx of visible otherness into Western landscapes, as “cosmopolitan connoisseurs have delighted in the new availability of West African music, Brazilian martial arts, and Thai cuisine” and the Internet delivers exotic images of far away places with a point and click (Tsing, 2000: 332). However, what we are experiencing as
globalization is not something eminently new. It is the continuation of social processes with long histories that have given rise to this latest permutation of our world system (currently, the capitalist world system), with its underlying drive to keep the world economy endlessly growing and consumption endlessly increasing. Globalization is an ongoing project that involves all the people who live within the system, whether they want to be involved or not. Backpackers are both products of globalization and actors whose choices will help shape its future course.

**Backpackers are young people at the core of the world system**

Backpackers come mostly from the middle, upper and affluent working classes, come from an array of nation-states and have diverse backgrounds. However, in this thesis I do not represent backpackers primarily on the basis of their nationalities. Instead, I characterize them as people of the core, because while the people who become backpackers find themselves living in different countries, the way that globalization's historical trajectory has played out so far means that they also occupy the same economic zone of the world system. Consequently, young people of the core are already culturally connected to one another even before they contemplate going off travelling, since they are living along the same communications and transportation networks wiring and linking the core of the world system together.

This thesis is based on fieldwork among backpackers, conducted in three youth hostels in British Columbia during the summer of 2001. Youth hostels are crucial hubs and “gathering places” on the backpacker circuits traversed by these youthful and energetic travellers (Vogt, 1976: 36). Motivated largely by a desire to stretch their budgets when they are on the road, backpackers spend most of their nights staying in
youth hostels. In Australia, arguably the location of the world’s largest and most
developed backpacker industry, the Australia Bureau of Tourism Research (1999) defines
a backpacker simply as a visitor who “stayed for at least one night of their trip in a
backpacker hotel or youth hostel.” In anticipation of the needs and desires of
backpackers and hoping to attract their patronage, hostel operators and their employees
offer relatively inexpensive accommodations, arrange the physical space to facilitate
socializing between guests, make information about travel and local attractions readily
available and craft marketing campaigns to resonate with customers who consider
themselves to be independent travellers.

By focusing the anthropological lens on the trips of backpackers as they make
their way through the landscapes of British Columbia, I aim to ethnographically
demonstrate how backpacking trips are socially organized ventures. These trips are
configured around the culturally articulated wants of young travellers, who are helped in
their individual quests by people working in the backpacker industry. In B.C., these
workers are themselves people of the core.

In the work that follows, I explore two interconnected theoretical issues relating
to the development of subjectivities and worldviews among people living at the core of
the world system. The first is the dynamic relationship between culture, imagination and
agency. Backpacking trips may be escapist episodes in the lives of young people but they
still happen as part of those lives, not outside of them. How backpackers experience their
trips depends largely on the culturally shaped imaginations they bring with them on their
voyages. Backpackers and their imaginations exist and travel as part of the contemporary
flows of globalization and their travel experiences are largely patterned by those flows.
At the same time, backpackers play a big role in determining the course of their individual trips and, as backpackers exercise their agency they influence the trajectories of the global flows within which they move. Backpackers make decisions about where to go, what to do and how to spend their money, decisions inspired by the possibilities they see in their imaginations, imaginations that are constantly transforming in relation to cultural experiences. The transformations that young people’s imaginations undergo when they are backpacking also carry over into their non-travelling lives, where travel experiences may influence the choices they make about how to carve out a living in the global economy, further affecting the trajectories of the global flows they participate in.

Thus, my second theoretical focus is how using the backpacker style of travel helps young people cultivate their imaginings of themselves and their life possibilities. A kind of consumerist personhood is being culturally nurtured in the core and I argue that since backpacking trips are shaped by the commodifying capitalist culture permeating the core of the world system, backpacking perpetuates and reinforces the development of consumption-based identities. Backpacking trips have to be configured around capitalism’s primary symbol and bearer of its cultural code – money – and in order to travel backpackers have to become participants in a market. As a result backpackers continue to participate in the symbolic reproduction of capitalism’s commodifying logic during their travels, just as they do during their non-travelling lives. Backpackers who return home with an infatuation for travel and who want to make travel a significant part of their lifestyles need to pursue livelihoods allowing them high levels of commodity consumption and, in so doing, to pursue livelihoods that help perpetuate the expansion of the world system.
Living a good life at the core is a complicated and frequently anxiety-inducing business that requires us to work out for ourselves what kinds of lives we want to pursue. Engaging in backpacking trips helps young travellers further develop the intricate skills and knowledge needed to thrive as an individual in the core, where personal success and satisfaction is becoming more and more related to attaining a lifestyle that affords high levels of consumer consumption. This consumption is done to fulfil ever-increasing needs and wants, imagined into existence with the help of images and narratives disseminated throughout the core by trans-national media.

Even though he rejects modernist tales of a break from the traditional past, Arjun Appadurai (1996) still detects a historical rupture in the cultural landscapes of the world system. This rupture was unleashed by the dawn of electronic media and mass mobility in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Since then, new kinds of cultural collectivities have been emerging throughout the world system. Some of us no longer live in Anderson's (1983) imagined communities of nationhood that made their appearance during the seventeenth century, but in what Appadurai (1996) calls imagined worlds, constructed out of landscapes that transcend the nation-state.

In the core, new collectivities that stretch across national boundaries are configured around similarities in people's individual lifestyles and participation in the same markets, as we look to markets to deliver the symbolic and material resources we need to forge our identities and live our lives. Backpacking is an example of how young people of the core come together in cultural groups mediated by electronically disseminated images and narratives as they become part of the backpacker market in order to fashion their own unique trips.
Methods

Until recently, Anthropologists have always been people of the core. While often very critical of the ruling social order, anthropologists have worked for the most part from inside universities, which are knowledge-producing institutions that play key roles in making the core function. Traditionally, anthropologists journeyed from the core into the periphery in order to find isolated village field sites, conduct fieldwork and immerse themselves in the study of the other. For three decades now, the assumptions of this paradigm and its underlying ideology have been critiqued and field practices have been changing (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). While fieldwork leading to the production of ethnography remains the hallmark of anthropological research, there is an awareness among anthropologists that what constitutes the field is itself a cultural construction of the discipline (Amit, 2000). Lately, anthropology has started to come home, and rather than jetting off to exotic far-away realms, some anthropologists find field sites down the street from their residences and academies or just over in the next town. My field sites were three youth hostels, two in Vancouver and one in Whistler, all located in the same province (British Columbia) where I moved in order to study at Simon Fraser University and where I lived before, during and after my fieldwork.

Constructing my field

I too am of the core, have been my whole life and do not come to the anthropological study of tourism and tourism experiences as a disinterested outsider. Craving a more enriching post-graduation life than seemed possible if I immediately found my place in the Canadian economy, I spent several years prior to my graduate studies immersed in tourist worlds. I travelled as a tourist (backpacker and otherwise)
through Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Mexico and Guatemala and I worked in the tourism industries of Australia and Mexico, mostly as a scuba diving guide and instructor. On a personal level, my time spent involved in tourism has been quite rewarding, leaving me with incredible memories. It also left me with an uneasy feeling about the kind of world we live in, my role in its construction and the nature of globalization, a feeling that I did not have the language or understanding to fully comprehend and a feeling that led me back to university. This thesis is spawned in part by a desire for a deeper understanding of these experiences.

In the course of my fieldwork, conducted over two and a half months among backpackers who were travelling in British Columbia during the summer of 2001, my informants did more travelling than I did. I accessed the field by bicycle and by bus, spending most of my nights at home, though I also stayed for a week in Whistler and spent two separate overnight stints at Vancouver hostels, one lasting four nights and the other three. Compared to my informants, I was relatively immobile, interacting with a constantly changing cast of backpackers who flowed through the hostels where I conducted my research.

Ethnography

This thesis is based on data generated using ethnographic methods, specifically participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of texts and images. In ethnography the researcher becomes the main research instrument, enters a social reality and in a state of heightened awareness, observes what is going on with an analytical eye, asks the other participants purposeful questions and generates data about that social reality. At its most basic, ethnography means participating in the social world
and reflecting on the process and products of that participation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

Good ethnographic research requires that those of us who engage in it be reflexive, that we are aware of our role in data generation and knowledge production, that we reflect on our biases, our positionality, and our effects on the social worlds we study. We need to recognize that “research is an active process, in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 18). However, overemphasized or poorly used, reflexivity can produce ethnographies that end up being only about researchers and their inner-dramas. Used purposely, reflexivity can help the researcher get a fuller sense of what is going on and fine tune their methods to generate better, more useful data. We might reasonably expect all scientists to be aware of how their research instruments are affecting the quality of the data they generate but their work is not really about the instrument per se. It just so happens that for ethnographers, we are our own research instruments.

Besides reflecting on how I come to the anthropological study of backpackers, this thesis has been researched and written with an awareness that I hold a privileged position in the world system, not only as someone who lives at its core but as a member of the academy. Because of my background in tourism, I also straddle an insider/outsider divide in the study of backpacking and my life is intimately embedded in dynamics of globalization that I am studying. I realize that as an ethnographic researcher it is impossible to stand outside the social world or global processes under investigation. By participating in the social world of backpackers, I generated data and produced knowledge, but I also affected that world, becoming part of the very backpacker travel
experiences I was researching. Many informants took my picture (as I did of them) and it is very likely that pictures of me conducting my research have ended up in the albums of backpackers who have returned to their homes somewhere else in the world and who use them in narrative accounts of their travels. In choosing the language I use to portray backpackers and the world system, I have tried to avoid concealing my own position in the world system or my role in the production of this thesis, without making myself its focus.

**Ethnography and globalization**

At first blush, ethnography, with its commitment to studying the local, can seem as though it does not have much to offer in the study of globalization. However, ethnographers who study other people in "their space and time" can offer unique insights into the lived experience of globalization (Burawoy, 2000: 4). The ethnographic study of backpackers is especially suitable for such an endeavour as tourism is "one of the most obvious forms of globalization" and becoming a tourist is one of the main avenues available to people living at the core of the world system who want to explore the global firsthand (Meethan, 2001: 34). Backpacking trips are undertaken by people who already have global imaginations and who want to directly experience places in the world that they have only previously fantasized about. I chose my field sites with an understanding that the cultural processes taking place in youth hostels extend well beyond the sites themselves and that each site provides only a particular view of the cultural landscapes being investigated (Metcalf, 2001).


**Research techniques and informed consent**

As a participant observer in the youth hostels, I behaved pretty much like a backpacker; hanging out, talking and occasionally going off on excursions and adventures with other travellers into the surrounding landscapes. From these encounters I used judgemental sampling to select backpackers who were asked to participate in discussions with me about their lives and their trips, discussions that ranged from informal conversations to semi-structured interviews. Judgemental sampling involves selecting the most appropriate subjects based on research questions and logistical feasibility (Fetterman, 1998). An effort was made to include as broad a cross-section of backpackers as possible. A total of forty-two backpackers (19 women and 22 men), between the ages of 18 and 40, from twelve countries participated as informants.

I started the semi-structured interviews with a list of questions to use as a guide for stimulating discussion (see appendix I), but I did not rigidly stick to the interview schedule, instead allowing each interview to take its own shape. I attempted to keep the atmosphere as informal as possible to encourage openness and to allow for unexpected information to emerge. Some of these interviews were tape recorded, though for the most part I chose to not impose the awkwardness of a tape recorder on the situation and instead made extensive notes, which I subsequently wrote up in a field journal along with my participant observation notes.

I also had the opportunity to interview eight backpacker industry workers, six of whom worked at youth hostels. Interview subjects working in the industry were selected using the technique of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling involves starting with one person and asking them to put the researcher in contact with other appropriate people.
Twenty-nine backpackers and four industry workers are cited directly in this thesis (see Appendix IV for detailed information about the cited backpackers) and information generated from informal conversations is cited as [conversation] while information generated from semi-structured interviews is cited as [interview].

When meeting people for the first time, I always introduced myself as a researcher, eliciting verbal consent for my participant observation and informal conversations. The decision to rely on verbal consent has to do with the fluid nature of participant observation and a worry that introducing legalistic forms would disturb the laid back, easygoing atmosphere of backpacker gathering places. Backpackers who were asked to participate in formal interviews and people working in the industry were presented with an Information Sheet (see appendix II) and asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (see appendix III). Pseudonyms have been used in this thesis to protect the anonymity of participants.

Backpackers’ travel experiences are partially mediated by the use of texts and images, necessitating the use of textual and imagery analysis. Youth hostels are filled with promotional and informational material, designed to inform guests of the travel possibilities available to them. I paid special attention to the posters and notices placed on the walls of youth hostels and backpackers were asked what materials they used to help make their travel decisions. I acquired (in the case of brochures, pamphlets and guide books) or accessed (in the case of web sites) as much of this material as I could. Industry workers also made many documents available to me, providing valuable information about how the backpacker industry is structured and operates.
Data Analysis

Analysis is "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain the existence of those patterns" (Bernard, 1994: 360). As part of the ethnographic fieldwork, analytic notes were generated alongside my basic fieldnotes. Analysis has been a continual process that began in the field and not something that was left until after all the data was collected. This allowed for the sharing of themes, categories and theories with informants in order to elicit their feedback on accuracy and applicability. This made what Creswell (1994) calls data "reduction and interpretation" easier and more thorough (154). The validity of data was addressed through triangulation among different sources of information and different methods of data generation.

Limitations

A limitation of ethnographic research is that it produces interpretations based on participant observation experiences that cannot be replicated with exactitude. This does not need to undermine its reliability or validity. Besides the use of reflexivity to try and account for researcher positionality and biases, the emphasis on identifying processes that shape social realities makes this research more generalizable. The processes discussed here are not confined to the specific locations of the research and other studies can be carried out in different contexts and using different methods, in order to look for evidence of these processes.

I have attempted to be aware of how I am representing backpackers in this thesis. It would be easy, in a discussion of tourism and the commodifying tendencies of global capitalism, to lapse into a transactionalist portrayal of backpackers as shallow consumers on a shopping expedition for experience, reducing them to members of the species *homo*
who are always trying to maximize their economic self-interest (Metcalf, 2001). This would be very inaccurate and extremely unfair to the travellers that I met during my research, who were pursuing missions of personal (and often profound) importance and who were getting a lot more out their travels than commodified experience. Backpackers are complex people and the point of this thesis is not to cast aspersions on their endeavours (especially since I feel a kindred connection with the pursuits of both backpackers and industry workers) but to illustrate how those of us who live at the core of the world system are incorporated into the capitalist project through our fantasies and our attempts to realize them. We are culturally compelled to pursue our fantasies, including anti-consumerist fantasies, by producing and consuming an increasing amount of commodities.

Finally, it is also important to keep in mind the inherent messiness of real life and thus of ethnographic research, even if that messiness is cleaned up in the presentation of research results as it is here. Ethnography involves the generation of data about social worlds in systematic ways, data that is supposed to capture social meaning without the researcher externally imposing that meaning (Brewer, 2000). At the same time, ethnography is also a way of reflecting on humanity and human nature (Peacock, 2001). In my case, this means using social theory to help make sense of the data. I entered the field with only a basic theoretical framework guiding my inquiry but once the fieldwork was over, data interpretation and theory building happened side by side with each one guiding the other until they fit together in a neat little package. This neatness is somewhat artificial as ethnographic research necessarily entails making choices about where to focus one’s attention and efforts, what information to include in the write-up
and what information to exclude. However, this neatness is also very useful. Cleaning up the chaos in our representations of real life helps us to make better sense of it.

Even though I represent backpackers as a cultural group configured around shared pursuits, practices and symbols, this is not meant to imply that backpackers are homogenous. There is a lot of diversity among backpackers, who not only come from different countries and different backgrounds but who are also at different life-stages and who are pursuing a wide-range of goals. It is important to keep this diversity in mind when reading this thesis, where the commonalities shared by backpackers and their trips are emphasized. In order to help preserve the uniqueness of the twenty-nine individual backpackers cited in this work, I have included a table in Appendix IV with information about each backpacker, their trip and their life plans.

The state of backpacker research

By looking at backpackers in British Columbia and Canada, this study stands in contrast to most of the social science research on backpackers. Even though young travellers have been flocking all over Europe for centuries and today's backpackers are moving through the landscapes of the developed world in large numbers, there is an over-emphasis in the literature on the movements of youth travellers searching meaning, escape and the exotic other in less developed parts of the world (Cohen, 1972, 1973, 1974; Desforges, 1998; Elsrud, 1998, 2001; Hampton, 1998; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002). Backpacking in Australia has also caught the attention of tourism researchers (much of it commissioned by the Australian government, to the envy of many working in the Canadian and British Columbian backpacker industries who are frustrated that Canadian governments have not identified backpackers as a unique market segment) and
Australia is widely acknowledged throughout the tourism industry as having the most
developed backpacker industry in the world (Buchanan, 1997; Loker-Murphy and
Pearce, 1995; Murphy, 2001; Pearce, 1990). There is a lack of literature dealing directly
with backpackers who travel in North America, let alone in Canada or B.C. Meanwhile,
long-time industry workers in B.C. report that they have seen a big surge in the number
of backpackers coming to this province, along with a surge in the number of hostels,
transportation services and other businesses competing for their custom.

Organization

In Chapter One I provide a sketch of the world system’s dynamic and non-linear
historical development, establish backpackers as people living at its core and look at how
personhood is culturally cultivated. The work of Scott Lash and John Urry in Economies
of Sign and Space (1994) is examined to show how the core is dispersed around trans-
national communications and transportation networks and, Arjun Appadurai’s (1996)
theory of Global Cultural Economy is used to illustrate the cultural dimensions of
globalization and explore the relationship between culture, imagination and agency.

The term backpacker is displacing the use of terms like drifter, wanderer or
budget traveller in the tourism studies literature dealing with young budget tourists,
though it is not yet used exclusively. In Chapter Two I use literature from the field of
tourism studies in order to look at the role of tourism in the world system, how travel is a
centuries-old way for young people of the core to find their place in the world system,
and the historical emergence of backpacking as a style of travel and as a kind of tourism.

In Chapters Three and Four I present the experiences of backpackers that I met
during my fieldwork. Chapter Three deals mostly with pre-trip preparations and Chapter
Four focuses on their trips to British Columbia. Backpackers' travel experiences start long before they leave home, even before they come up with the idea to go backpacking. I look at how backpackers come to the decision to go travelling and how they make their choices about how to travel, where to go, and what to do once they get to British Columbia. I focus on the relationships that backpackers have with other backpackers and between backpackers and people who work in the tourism industry, especially workers in the backpacker industry who are purposely involved in the production of cultural materials (such as web pages, flyers, brochures and guidebooks) designed to entice the imaginations of backpackers and influence their decision making. I examine how backpackers (who are on their own individual and independent journeys) move in discernable patterns and how youth hostels are culturally organized social spaces. Hostels are institutions that channel the chaotic flows of backpackers, their imaginations and their spending power through the landscape.

In the final chapter, I conclude this thesis with an examination of how backpacking trips further enculturate backpackers into capitalism's economistic way of life, inspiring them to pursue career paths that will afford them the increasing levels of commodity consumption that are necessary to pursue a lifetime of travel.
Chapter 1: People of the Core

"The social world is accumulated history" – Pierre Bourdieu (1986)

Backpackers live at the core of a world system that in just over 500 years has come to cover virtually the entire planet and encompass the vast majority of its peoples. The increasing trans-national interconnections and flows of people, images, ideas, technology and wealth that characterize contemporary globalization are the result of the entwined economic, political and cultural dynamics that continue to drive the historical development of the world system. The lives of the people living inside the system are wrapped up in these dynamics as they get worked out in our everyday lives and social practices. How we experience these dynamics, how we deal with them and how we contribute to them depend largely on our positions within them.

In this chapter, Arjun Appadurai's (1996) theory of Global Cultural Economy, with its insights culled from Chaos Theory, is used to portray the cultural workings of the world system and its dynamic and non-linear development. I focus on how the logic of commodification\(^1\), which has become instrumental to the world system's growth, gets worked out culturally in the imaginations and lives of the young people who live in the core and who have the choice to participate in backpacker tourism.

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\(^1\) Commodification is a social process where the worth of objects and services is culturally determined by their relative exchange-values (Kopytoff, 1986). Under the capitalist mode of production, this process is intensifying, resulting in more and more social exchanges becoming based on money rather than personal or moral obligations (Hall, 2000).
Chaos Theory

Social scientists like Appadurai (1991, 1996) and Birken (1999) are increasingly invoking the imagery of Chaos Theory (originally developed by mathematicians and physicists in the late 1970s and early 1980s) in their representations of social phenomena:

Chaoticians study complex and unpredictable systems in ways that break with classical (Newtonian) notions of determinism. Fascinated with how slight changes in initial conditions can lead to enormously different outcomes, they are shedding new light on the relationship between stability and change, continuity and discontinuity, social structure and individual action (Birken, 1999: 18).

Insights from Chaos Theory facilitate the depiction of social life as “structured yet unpredictable” where people are shown exercising a free will that is contingent and limited (Gleick, 1987: 3). The world system has been developing along a socially directed trajectory that is the result of historical circumstances that could have played out in other ways (Birken, 1999). Likewise, the future is far from certain as people have yet to work it out and every person who lives or has ever lived within the world system affects its development, even if in only very tiny ways. Still, the initial conditions from which we launch ourselves into the future are those conditions left behind by world history, conditions that limit the possibilities, in part because of the ways that history has shaped our collective imaginations.

The principal idea behind Chaos Theory, is how a series of phenomena that initially looks chaotic to observers, with no apparent order to them, might actually have a coherent organization to them. When closely examined, unpredictable and seemingly disparate events can turn out to cluster around what mathematicians call strange attractors. An attractor is "a set of points such that all trajectories nearby converge to it" (Tsonis, 1992: 67). When a non-linear system is mathematically represented by an
equation and run through computer graphing software, it produces a series of similar but non-repeating shapes that together form a pattern with a fractal\(^2\) structure that orbit around a strange attractor. It is thought of as strange because it anchors processes that are stable and confined, yet these processes never repeat themselves in exactly the same way. In social systems, symbols that are culturally infused with meaning act as strange attractors, around which human beings (who are inherently social) organize their lives. One of the most dominant and powerful symbols circulating throughout the capitalist world system is money.

**Configuration and dynamic nature of the world system**

The contemporary world system is a dynamic and non-linear social system with a structure that consists of two mutually supporting and interdependent pillars: the global capitalist economy and the international system of states. "It has been a continually (if not continuously) expanding system ... [and] is now coming very close to reaching its geographical limits" while capitalist relations continue to penetrate ever deeper into people's social existences (Sanderson 1999: 181-184). The global economy has the world divided into interconnected economic zones: a wealthy and powerful core, articulated to an impoverished and exploited periphery, bridged by an intermediary semi-periphery. The international system of states has the world's landscapes separated into different nation-states. The nation-state however, does not represent "in any sense a relatively autonomous 'society' that 'develops' over time" (Wallerstein, 1990: 267).

Nationalisms, and the international order of nation-states chaotically emerged as the

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\(^2\) Fractals are fluctuating and non-Euclidean shapes. Now that they are looking for them, scientists are regularly finding these irregular shapes throughout nature. "Fractals are a way of measuring qualities that otherwise have no clear definition: the degree of roughness or brokenness or irregularity" (Sardar and Abrams, 1999: 34).
world system was constructed and each nation-state developed as one sub-component of an integrated system.

Theorists like Wallerstein (1974) and Sanderson (1999) represent the economic zones of the capitalist world-economy as amalgamations of nation-states, placing individual countries on a continuum ranging from high levels of economic development on one end to severe levels of underdevelopment on the other. However, nation-states are not homogenous self-contained social units and social analysts who portray them as the essential units of the world system gloss over the material and social inequalities existing between people living inside a single nation-state as well as their cultural diversity. At the same time, people living in the world system often give shape to cultural groupings that stretch across national boundaries such as diasporas or consumer markets.

The situation that we live in today – where national identities are salient throughout the world system and the nation-state is one of the primary political entities governing over people’s lives – is relatively new. Our current international system of governance presides over a world where in a period of approximately 500 years, more than 10,000 societies have come to be re-organized into approximately 180 nation-states connected by the flows of capitalism (Worsley, 1990). While the world system has largely been structured by wars, missions of conquest and political agreements between powerful and elite actors, its ultimate shape results from the collective actions of everyone who lives within its structures. However, not everyone’s agency within the world system is equally unconstrained or has the same clout.
Rulers of colonial empires ordered the creation and imposition of governance and commercial arrangements, producing a world market with a self-contained division of labour and initiating the controlled trans-societal movement of people and resources, benefiting the core to the material and social detriment of the periphery (Wallerstein, 1990). Subsequent generations of rulers, governments and subjects have worked from these initial conditions to develop the contemporary institutions and infrastructure that channel today’s inequitable flows of globalization. These flows structure not only people’s life possibilities but also the means by which people are able to culturally make sense of and participate in the creation of experiences. They affect how life possibilities are imagined, how social life is organized and how agency is exercised.

The world system is a dynamic system that transforms in non-linear ways. It gets built, developed and maintained as the people who are contained in it, (many of whom, regardless of what zone they occupy, are intelligent, creative, active and assertive) set their cultural imaginations to the problems and challenges of living and making a living as participants in socially organized pursuits. The world system is fuelled by the collective labour and intelligence energy of human beings who live out complicated, chaotic and yet still structured existences within the system.

Robertson (1992) is critical of world systems analysis for focusing so heavily on politics and economics and not enough on “the independent dynamics of global culture” (61). He prefers what he calls a voluntaristic theory, perceptively arguing that one of the effects of globalization has been that societies and the people who make up societies have developed their own images of the global and of globalization. People act based on their understandings of globalization and the possibilities they think the global field holds for
them and so “varying responses to globalization influence that very process, so that its direction and outcome, and hence the shape of the global field itself, are still very much ‘up for grabs’” (62). In this thesis backpackers are represented as people who exercise agency from inside the flows of globalization that are propelling them around the world and in so doing, as people who also influence and help propel those very same flows.

However, most people do not consciously volunteer to take their place in the world system. While some people are seduced by the promise of riches granted to the winners of capitalist competition, others take their positions at the barrel of a gun and many are motivated simply by the necessity of survival. For people raised in the core, capitalism is often just so culturally ambient that while it structures our agency, its ideological presence in our lives is mythically masked. The cultural dynamics of globalization cannot be easily teased out independently of the political or economic. Political and economic systems are also cultural systems, producing ideologically endowed institutions that reflect dominant discourses and values, refracting them out into the surrounding landscapes, influencing people’s imaginations of themselves and their world and affecting how agency is exercised. “Capitalism is an ‘economistic’ culture to begin with… [and] capitalism is itself also a system of values, and money unites ‘diverse people’ into a single, and unequal community” (Forte, 1998: 52).

**Culture**

Culture is the key concept in Anthropology but one without an agreed-upon universal definition. Appadurai (1996) warns against thinking of culture as something similar to a material object. To do so implies the existence of a mental substance belonging to all members of a group and “appears to privilege the sort of sharing,
agreeing and bounding that fly in the face of the facts of unequal knowledge and the differential prestige of lifestyles” (Appadurai, 1996: 12). Culture often provides powerful people with tools of differentiation, so they can cultivate seemingly natural distinctions within a group as well as between groups, legitimizing the ascription of rights and privileges on the basis of culturally defined social factors. Culture informs people of the nature of their personhood and their place in a cosmic and/or social order.

“Reduced to its simplest formula, culture is whatever is socially learned, socially transmitted” (Urban, 2001: 2). Ruth Benedict (1934) theorized that, “culture provides the raw material of which the individual makes his life” (252). Cultural groups anchor their lives around common beliefs, attitudes and symbols, around what Benedict called cultural configurations. Cultures are those “taken-for-granted but powerfully influential understandings and codes that are learned and shared by members of a group” (Peacock, 2001: 7). Culture is created by people. It lives in our common languages and symbols, providing us with the cognitive understandings we use to categorize our worlds and the people in our lives, enabling us to be intelligible to one another, and making it possible for us to make sense of our existence and our experiences.

For Hannerz (1992) “culture resides in a set of meaningful forms” which can be experienced by people through their senses (3). However, culture also resides in the minds of people since, “these overt forms are only rendered meaningful because human minds contain the instruments for their interpretations” (4). He envisions culture as moving like a river, propelled by the continual interaction between externalizations of meaning and the interpretations of those externalizations. New externalizations depend on prior interpretations, which themselves are contingent on previous externalizations:
When you see a river from afar, it may look like a blue (or green, or brown) line across a landscape; something of awesome permanence. But at the same time, “you cannot step in the river twice,” for it is always moving, and only in this way does it achieve its durability. The same way with culture – even as you perceive structure, it is entirely dependent on ongoing process (4).

Culture flows through social worlds, dynamically produced and reproduced as it is carried by people and the things people make, such as material objects, images or uttered words (Urban, 2001). Culture shapes people’s worldviews, through which we interpret our sensations and experiences and through which we create new cultural products. Culture frames and colours the work of our imaginations, structuring how we make decisions about how to exercise our agency. Culture is not static and just as people are shaped by the cultures we live in, so too are cultures shaped by the way people live their lives. Culture and human agency work together in a kind of feedback system. “It is in part a consequence of the cultural flow through a population that a social system is created and recreated. As people make their contribution to that flow, they are themselves being constructed as individuals and social beings” (Hannerz, 1992: 14).

However, not everyone has the power to affect widespread cultural change. “Stratification into powerful and relatively powerless is partly decided by who’s doing the transmitting and who is doing the receiving of information” (Lash and Urry 1994: 28). Those with the power to transmit information have more power to change culture and so are able to influence agency by gaining access to people’s imaginations. Much of the information made available to people living in the core of the world system is designed to inspire a desire to spend money and consume, especially when information is circulated in the form of advertising.
Even when information is not meant to be advertising, it often has as one of its purposes to make the reader aware of consumption opportunities. This is the case with travel guides, like the *Lonely Planet*, which do not promote particular companies or services over others but still assist travellers by helping them to imagine how to best direct their spending in the landscapes they plan to visit (so as to obtain the best possible experiences in exchange.) In the process they help stoke travel fantasies configured around commodity consumption, albeit around commodities whose commodified form is fetishistically hidden.

Money culturally appears to us as the end product of our own individual labour. However, as Marx (1977) pointed out, the exchange process conceals from our awareness that the commodities we buy with money are the embodiment of social relations. Money is a mediator of relations between people who labour independently but who are connected by society into a web of interdependence. As a result of this concealment process, people are inclined to “enter into personal and emotional relations” with the things that are bought but not with the people who produced them (Foley, 1986: 29). Marx referred to this process as fetishism of commodities.

Drawing on Chaos Theory, Appadurai (1996) suggests that we think about the shape of cultural groups as fractal. The people who make up a cultural group are not necessarily contained within national boundaries but are often quite mobile, covering wide swaths of geographical space, connected through trans-national communication and transportation networks. People also regularly belong to more than one cultural group, there is movement between groups, new groups are frequently coming into existence, old groups fade away or are obliterated and everything is in a constant state of change.
Examples of cultural groups include nations, ethnic communities, religious or political movements, academic disciplines, villages, neighbourhoods, families, industries and increasingly (especially in the core), consumer markets.

**Cultural logic of capitalism**

The underlying logic that drives the development of the world system is one of perpetual economic growth driven by capitalist competition for ownership and use of the world's limited resources, whose value becomes symbolically encoded in the tool we use to regulate access to them – money. This human invention we call money is the "focal point of modern world culture" and people have invested a lot meaning and power into their tool (Weatherford, 1997: 11). Money is a potent symbol around which cultural groups at the core of the capitalist world system are configured and the meaning that people have invested in their tool transcends the economic function assigned to it by economists like Daniel Rush Finn (1992), who sees money simply as a store of value and a medium of exchange. Consumers look to money to provide them with its power, so that they can accomplish their hopes and dreams.

People living in the core work out the logic of capitalism in their lives, culturally configuring their hopes and dreams around serving the economy and regularly participating in the transaction rituals that keep money and other commodities circulating (Crump, 1992). "Money and commodities are themselves the bearers of cultural codes. Since money and commodities are entirely bound up in the circulation of capital, it follows that cultural forms are firmly rooted in the daily circulation process of capital" (Harvey, 1989: 299).  

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In the core, there is a cultural emphasis on “newness,” “progress” and “growth” that keeps people working more, consuming more and ratcheting up the flow volumes (Slater, 1997; Urban, 2001). Capitalism “requires as one of its mechanisms a collective orientation towards consumption” and an insatiable appetite among people of the core for ever increasing amounts of goods and services, imagined as necessary for achieving their needs and desires (Wallerstein, 1990: 38). A commodifying cultural code permeates the core of the world system, fusing with the multitude of cultural practices and worldviews pursued and held by the people who occupy it. As a result, capitalist values are consciously and unconsciously reflected in the decisions that people of the core make as we live our lives and participate in the construction and maintenance of the world system’s dynamic structure.

**The contemporary core**

Appadurai’s (1996) theory is in part a response to Wallerstein’s model of the world system. “The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)” (32). Wallerstein’s model uses Euclidean metaphors to represent the zones, as well as the movement of people, goods, wealth and ideas that move between them. This gives the appearance of regular shapes, hard boundaries and orderly movement. It is a model that is “inadequately quirky to come to terms with what Scott Lash and John Urry have called disorganized capitalism” (Appadurai, 1996: 33).

Disorganized capitalism is how Lash and Urry (1987, 1994) describe the contemporary post-fordist, post-modern, political economy and they temporally place the
start of capitalism's transformation from organized to disorganized in the last half of the twentieth century. Disorganized capitalism is somewhat of a misnomer however. Lash and Urry point out that the global political economy is still regulated, even though the power of economic governance is being transferred away from national governments and over to international market mechanisms. The deepening of capitalist relations is still an organized effort, but one that is based on the principle of flexible and reflexive accumulation. It also involves processes of wealth production and capital circulation that are fragmented across national boundaries.

To understand the global political economy in this way does not mean that the concepts of core and periphery need to be discarded however. They continue to be useful for demonstrating the unequal relationships between people living in different economic zones, relationships that are concealed from people living in the core as we pursue our individual projects. By keeping the concepts of core and periphery, while abandoning the Euclidean metaphors used to represent them, we can better illustrate the chaotic, yet organized, nature of people's lives inside the fluctuating, overlapping, interconnected and yet still distinguishable, zones of the world system.

In Lash and Urry's (1994) view, both the core and the periphery are now dispersed over much vaster geographical space than they ever were in the past. The core is not confined to the West or North, but extends into the South and East. So-called First World countries have ghettos with Third World living conditions, while so-called Third World countries have affluent enclaves that function as hubs of global information and wealth circuits. The scattering of the core has been accomplished through the building of computerized international transportation and communication networks, with their ever-
increasing speeds of movement and transmission. "The new core is clustered around information, communications and the advanced producer services, as well as other services, such as telecommunications, airlines and important parts of tourism and leisure," in whatever country they may be located (Lash and Urry, 1994: 17). The people who are part of the core are for the most part also quite mobile, making the demarcation of its shape difficult. It is fractal.

Government officials in the midst of a neo-liberal revival have facilitated the core’s dispersion by deregulating their economies, abandoning strategies adopted after World War II to dampen capitalism’s crisis-inducing tendencies. This gives capitalists more freedom to direct the flows of capital, unimpeded by national boundaries or regulations. Government officials are also turning many of their responsibilities for coordinating society over to markets, imagining markets to be the best “means of social coordination that secures both freedom and progress” (Slater, 1997: 37).

In markets, rights and obligations flow from people’s roles as buyers and sellers, rather than as citizens or people. Under conditions of neo-liberalism, the model of consumer choice is promoted as the best method for allocating and obtaining the social resources (both symbolic and material) necessary for constructing and maintaining human existence (Slater, 1997). These structural changes affect the way people of the core culturally understand and organize their lives as the attainment of personhood becomes equated with a complex kind of consumerhood.

A kind of personhood that is being culturally encouraged among the social beings living in the core is of “an individualized subject who experiences his [sic] life projects as originating within himself” and who is self-directing and self-regulating (Friedman,
The cultural ideal is of someone who is an "active self-motivated individual, accepting responsibility for its own fate, keen to identify clearly its aims and desires, to remove barriers to its fulfilment, to monitor its success in realizing them" (Keat and Abercrombie 1991: 11). In the core, we are expected to conceive of an individual lifestyle in our imaginations and then reflexively construct it by participating in markets. "Whole areas of lifestyle and consumer choice are freed up and individuals are forced to decide, to take risks, to bear responsibilities, to be actively involved in the construction of their own identities for themselves, to be enterprising consumers" (Lash and Urry 1994: 61).

We must reflect on our place in the world, on who we want to be, what our values are and how we want to live our lives and then enter markets, where we are supposed to compete with one another in our attempts to construct our identities and realize our dreams. Yet our imagining of ourselves as individuals is collectively mediated partially through our common consumption of electronically disseminated media and in the process we become culturally connected to other individuals pursuing similar lifestyle choices.

A society of buyers also needs to be a society of sellers. To be a consumer requires money and if someone does not inherit enough money to fund his or her lifestyle, something must be sold to acquire it. What most of us in the core have to sell is our labour power and we must sell it to employers or contractors who are reflexive consumers of labour. We must conceptualize in our imaginations what is desired by those to whom we seek to sell our labour and to package and present ourselves in ways that we think they will find attractive. We market ourselves as products, attempting to
distinguish ourselves from the other products against whom we are competing in a labour market.

Once employed, be it in the public sector, private sector or even in the not-for-profit sector or through self-employment, we frequently put our imaginations to work creating, packaging and marketing commodities to sell to a market of consumers. These might be traditional commodities like clothing or cars but can also include (among other things) services, research, information, transportation, accommodations and tourist experiences. “Enterprising producers and consumers are mutual conditions for neoliberalism: producers, private or public, are enterprising only if they are competing for consumers’ custom” (Slater, 1997: 38).

As we participate in markets in order to realize ourselves as individuals, we further commodify the experience of living:

We have to produce and ‘sell’ an identity to various social markets in order to have intimate relationships, social standing, jobs and careers ... the resources – both material and symbolic – through which we produce and sustain identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities through which we construct appearances and organize leisure time and social encounters (Slater, 1997: 85).

For all this emphasis on consumption, it is important to keep in mind that consumption is usually not about consumption in and of itself. Buying, selling and consuming are symbolically laden activities that are done to achieve culturally articulated desires or needs. The sign-values of commodities helps to veil their commodity form (Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994). Their consumption culturally stimulates our imaginations in ways so that consumption is experienced simply as living, surviving and sometimes as thriving.
Imagination

Human imaginations are at the heart of social life and at the centre of Appadurai’s (1996) theory of Global Cultural Economy. It is in our imaginations that we interpret reality and are inspired to agency, influencing and propelling the flows of globalization, even as we are influenced and propelled by those very same flows:

The imagination – expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths and stories – has always been part of the repertoire, in some culturally organized way, of every society. But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of “possible” lives than they ever did before… That is, fantasy is now a social practice; it enters in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies… For the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with the images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media (Appadurai, 1991: 197-199).

Workers in the cultural industries are set to work cultivating and harvesting the terrain of imagination as they compete for the hearts, minds and wallets of consumers. It is in the media-soaked imaginations of would-be backpackers that travel fantasies begin to percolate, often brewing for a long time before concrete plans are made. It is in the imaginations of business people and entrepreneurs where the ideas to set up companies and organizations catering to independent-minded budget travellers germinate. “Ordinary people have begun to deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives” (Appadurai 1996: 5).

For those of us who are part of the core, the imagining of the world and its opportunities is assisted by our interactions with images, ideas and sounds delivered through the internet, television, films, videos, movies, music, radio as well as from more old fashioned sources like books, magazines and newspapers. Imaginations are also shaped by our state-mandated educations. Direct face-to-face relationships remain
extremely important but they too are partially mediated by our electronically influenced perceptions of reality.

**From imagined communities to imagined worlds**

As the lives of some people living in the world system transcend the nation-state, so too do their worldviews. Anderson (1983) introduced the concept of imagined communities to describe a nation as "an imagined political community" (15). A collective sense of communion ties the members of a nation to one another on the basis of an imagined primordial ethnicity, even among people who will never physically encounter one another. The models and concepts with which to think about the possibilities of nationhood were propelled throughout the landscapes of the world system by the products of print capitalism starting in the seventeenth century. It was only during the late nineteenth century that European powers managed to impose the system of states on all of the world’s territory and it was not until 1918 that the United States government became the first in the world to make “being a nation-state the basic criterion of political legitimacy and the basic condition” of its dealings with other governments (Hirst, 2002; Navari, 1981: 14).

Ideas expressed in print spread through word-of-mouth discussions between people who shared a common vernacular language, assisting in the recognition of “their commonality as a ‘people’ – their imagining of themselves as a community” and facilitating the linguistic bounding of landscapes (Urban, 2001: 20). Each nation was conceived of as "a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history,” a clearly delineated community existing in relation to other distinct communities (Anderson, 1983: 31).
Today, people often live not just in imagined communities, but in what Appadurai (1996) calls imagined worlds. Nations can exist in their members' collective imagination, even when there is no corresponding state and when there is a corresponding state, people living elsewhere (diasporas) may still be imagined to be part of the nation. As well, the rhetoric of globalization disseminated by trans-national media companies is stimulating people to think about the global.

Contemporary young people who are raised and educated as part of the prosperous core, often grow up imagining a world with global horizons, and even members of the core who stay in one place their whole lives are participants in global flows. Backpackers are examples of people with global imaginations who are constructing global identities as they culturally connect with people across national boundaries, sharing imagined worlds with people pursuing similar lifestyles. They see their life possibilities existing on a field that extends well beyond their own nation, into a much wider world. They make use of the backpacking industry to go off travelling and explore the world and they make their way through the world based on how they perceive it, how they imagine it to be. Their travel imaginations and perceptions are shaped in part by their use of backpacker web sites, niche advertising aimed at students and young people, travel guides for independent minded travellers like the *Lonely Planet* series (Lonely Planet, 2001) and by their other dealings with the tourism industry.

**Global cultural economy**

Appadurai (1996) argues that the story of globalization should not be the story of cultural homogenization even if people are becoming culturally connected through the consumption of the same products disseminated by trans-national media. Because
producers of cultural products can only control the transmission of information, they cannot be sure how that information will be perceived or used. They cannot control the reception or incorporation of that information into people’s lives. People interpret what they see and hear from their own perspectives, making sense of it through their cultural worldviews, often in ways that cannot be anticipated by the transmitters. The result is more cultural syncretism than homogenization. The global spread of media images and narratives also influences how those who directly experience oppression fashion their acts of resistance:

Terrorists modeling themselves on Rambo-like figures ... housewives reading romances and soap operas as part of their efforts to construct their own lives, Muslim family gatherings listening to speeches by Islamic leaders on cassette tape; domestic servants in India taking package tours to Kashmir: these are all examples of the active way in which media are appropriated by people throughout the world (Appadurai, 1996: 7).

Appadurai’s (1996) imagined worlds are constructed by people out of five landscapes, each one representing a dimension of global cultural flow: “(a) ethnoscapes, (b) mediascapes, (c) techoscapes, (d) financesapes, and (e) ideoscapes” (33). The “scapes” correspond to flows of people, media images, sounds and words, technology, money and ideas. He calls them landscapes to draw attention to how social actors (as individuals and as part of collectivities) perceive and interpret them differently, depending on their relative positions within the landscapes. The flows intersect to varying degrees and move in relations of disjuncture. “The paths or vectors taken by these kind of things have different speeds, axes, points of origin and termination, and varied relationships to institutional structures in different regions, nations, or societies” (Appadurai, 2000: 5).
The relations of disjunction between the flows “produce fundamental problems of livelihood, equity, suffering, justice, and governance” (ibid.). The landscapes are arranged so that some people's imagined worlds are structured as prisons while other people are able to imagine a world full of dreams and possibilities. Besides their social positions, how social actors perceive and interpret the flowing landscapes depends on their needs, desires, and worldviews, as well as less tangible characteristics such as individual creative genius.

Appadurai's landscapes are also metaphors of flow, like water in a river and he uses them to illustrate their dynamic, ever-changing quality. By combining landscapes and flow into one metaphor, Appadurai wants to illustrate processes that not only are continually moving but also ones that look different and have different effects for different social actors, depending on where they are positioned. This synthesis also draws attention to how imaginations, landscapes and the cultural dynamics that shape both are not separable from one another. After all, the cultural dynamics are worked out by actors who are themselves positioned within and as part of the landscapes and whose imaginations are under the influence of those same cultural dynamics.

However, what is conjured up by representations of flows suffixed with “scapes”, are of landscapes that flow, like rivers. While landscapes are in constant flux, they are not usually perceived to be flowing (though some geologists might disagree) even though they might look different depending on the physical perspective one has when looking at them. A metaphor of flowing landscapes is counter-intuitive, making it harder to use in the production of knowledge about social worlds.
Appadurai’s framework becomes easier to use if we conceive of flow through or in landscapes, rather than as landscapes with flow-like properties. This does not mean that flow and landscapes are necessarily separate or separable, for surely the layout of the landscape helps determine the direction of flow just as flow helps shape the landscape.

The concept of landscapes is very useful for understanding the social organization and experience of space. Cultural geographers use landscape to refer not only to physical places but also to its symbolic meaning for human beings (Norton, 1989). “Landscape denotes the interaction of people and place” (Groth, 1997: 1). It draws our attention not just to the physical terrain but also to the ways that human beings shape or organize the terrain, make sense of it and regulate access to the terrain and the resources it contains. “Landscapes are created by people – through their experience and engagement with the world around them” (Bender, 1993: 1). By interacting with and manipulating physical space, people invest it with culture. Meanwhile, to navigate a landscape requires that we interpret it.

Lofgren (1999) in his history of vacationing remarks how modern-day travellers who visit old sites experience the same physical space differently than did eighteenth century visitors because they experience the landscape through different cultural lenses. “We walk the same grounds but move in a different mindscape” (22). How we are able to experience visited space depends not just on how the landscape has been culturally shaped before our arrival, but also on the culture we bring with us, the learning that enables us to make sense of it.

Distinguishing between flows and landscapes also addresses some of the concerns that Anna Tsing (2000) raises in her critique of theories of globalization and
cultural circulation that make use of flow metaphors. She is concerned with images of people, money and ideas circulating as if everything was just moving freely around the landscapes without showing “how this movement depends on defining tracks and grounds or scales and units of agency” (337). She proposes that we think about creeks along which flows move, so that “we might notice the channel as well as the water moving.” The creeks represent the “social conditions that allow or encourage that flow” (ibid.). We need to take into account differences in power people have to control or direct the flows.

The flows are further channelled by institutions that human beings build out of the landscapes that become “institutions of spatial governance and crucially channel the mobility of people, money, goods and information” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 17). As we will see, youth hostels are important institutions that channel the flows of backpackers, their ideas and their spending power.

The landscapes of the world system are bound together and shaped by the culturally encoded flows of people, images, ideas, money and technology that give shape to globalization. Landscapes appear to be naturally organized into nations and nation-states because human beings have culturally constructed them and regulated them in this way. However, as seductive lifestyle opportunities are offered to upper, middle and affluent working class people through consumer markets, markets are vying with nations as wellsprings of core identities.

Summary

Backpackers are young people of the core who come from diverse backgrounds and histories and who have family, national and other group commitments. They live
alongside and are plugged into the same trans-national transportation and communication networks. Thus while backpackers are a culturally diverse group of people, they are also culturally unified by capitalism. They are enculturated to imagine themselves as individuals but when they make the decisions to become backpackers by using the products and services of the backpacker industry, they join a trans-national market-based lifestyle cultural group. This group is configured around commodity consumption and money spending in the pursuit of independent budget travel experience and its collective imagination is shaped by the common consumption of travel-related media and information by its members.

Backpackers travel as part of their lifelong reflexive self-making projects, often to learn about their world and their place in it (including how to find their place in the global economy), as well as to have a good time. The form of travel they choose influences these projects by culturally structuring the imaginative processes by which backpackers make sense of the possibilities available to them, thus structuring how they exercise their agency.

Backpackers individually navigate their way through the landscapes they visit by participating in the backpacker consumer market and by interacting with the backpacker industry, which in British Columbia is made up of workers who themselves are people of the core. Backpacker paths are coordinated by markets and channelled through institutions such as airports and hostels, collectively giving shape to specialized backpacker tourist flows. The flows of backpackers intersect and interact with other flows of people, ideas, commodities, images and money as they transform the landscapes of the world system.
Of primary concern in this thesis is the movement of backpackers through the landscapes of British Columbia, Canada and how people working in the British Columbia backpacker industry try to manage the flows of backpackers as they attempt to keep them growing. Backpackers and the people who serve them both have intricate (and often anxious) cultural relationships with money and the possibilities that they imagine it can deliver (or withhold due to a lack of money). As a result, thoughts about money figure prominently in their decision-making.
Chapter 2: From Grand Tourists to Backpackers –
A History of Young Travellers at the Core of
the World System

“Tourism is best conceptualized as a global process of commodification
and consumption involving flows of people, capital, images and cultures”
– Kevin Meethan (2001)

Travel has historically been an important way of enculturating young people to
take their place at the core of the world system. Young adults living in the core have
been travelling for fun and enlightenment since the sixteenth century and, for over thirty
years now, youthful travellers have been favourite subjects of researchers working in the
field of tourism studies. However, it was only in the early 1990s that the term
backpacker came to be extensively used on a worldwide basis by tourism researchers,
“the tourism industry, participants themselves and host communities to describe
predominantly young, budget tourists on extended vacations or working holidays”
(Murphy, 2001: 50).

This chapter draws on tourism studies literature while looking at how
backpacking has become a lifestyle choice available to young people of the core, so that
those making an individual choice to become a backpacker collectively give shape to
specialized tourist flows. I examine the nature of the tourism industry, the role of tourism
and tourist flows in the development of the world system and I place contemporary
backpacking within a broader history of tourism to show how ‘backpacker’ has come to
be an identity label applied to young budget tourists. It emerged out of competition
between rival youth hostel owners and operators in Australia, who deployed marketing strategies designed to resonate with independent-minded travellers and who sought to influence where and how these travellers directed their spending. These strategies proved to be very successful and have been shared with and noticed by, tourism operators all around the world, including British Columbia. As a result, a global backpacker industry has emerged within the larger tourist industry, configured around offering products and services to a group of consumers that owners, operators and workers in the backpacker industry identify as the backpacker market.

Tourism

Tourist forms of travel are culturally configured around commodity consumption. “Forms refer to visible institutional arrangements and practices by which tourists organize their journey: length of trip, flexibility of the itinerary, visited destinations and attractions, means of transportation and accommodation, contact with locals, and so forth” (Uriely, Yonay and Simchai, 2002: 521).

Lofgren (1999) describes tourism as a mode of consumption “based on the idea of leaving home and work in search of new experiences, pleasures and leisure” that appeared in the nineteenth century (5). However, tourism did not just suddenly appear out of a void. It is a mode of consumption (accompanied of course by modes of production) that came into existence as part of an emergent capitalism’s economistic cultural influences and it took many centuries to develop, starting long before the word tourist became part of the English language during the eighteenth century (Buzard, 1993).

At first the word tourist was a synonym for traveller but by the mid-nineteenth century it became laden with derogatory connotations that it has carried ever since (ibid).
Evelyn Waugh, writing in 1930 declared, "every Englishman abroad, until it is proved to the contrary, likes to consider himself a traveller and not a tourist" (44). The word tourist became a linguistic tool, a label applied by high-class individuals to the masses taking advantage of the fact that travel was becoming easier and more accessible than ever before. It allowed them to think of themselves as authentic travellers, going off in a spirit of rugged exploration, clearly distinguishable in their own imaginations from the hordes of shallow tourists they found themselves forced to share the landscape with.

While tourism has grown to be the world's largest industry and most contemporary people of the core will become tourists many times during their lives, tourist is still a label often shunned by the industry's customers:

Though it is often used in this derogatory sense without great precision, 'tourist' does rest on a rough consensus: it can conjure up in our imaginations a personality profile, a life-style, perhaps a class identification, and a host of scenarios in which 'the tourist' performs some characteristic act. The tourist is a dupe of fashion, following blindly where authentic travellers have gone with open eyes and free spirits (Buzard, 1993:1).

Attempting to differentiate between tourists and travellers is a fundamental aspect of tourism, not something outside or beyond it. "Ferocious denigration of tourists is in part an attempt to convince oneself that one is not a tourist" (Culler, 1988: 156).

Contemporary backpacking is a style of travel undertaken by people who shun this stereotypical view of what it means to be a tourist even though they often recognize that they are participating in a kind of tourism.

Since the end of World War II, tourism has been undergoing an explosive and ongoing boom. "The growth of tourism can be seen as a particular manifestation of the general expansion of leisure in Western Societies," where the core of the world system is
densely concentrated (Wyllie, 2000: 21). According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), a United Nations agency concerned with promoting tourism development around the world, overall international tourism arrivals increased from 25.3 million in 1950 to 625.2 million in 1998 with about 75% of all tourist traffic accounted for by travellers from 20 of the most advanced industrial nation-states (Wyllie, 2000; WTO, 1997: 309). The Federation of International Youth Travel Organizations (FIYTO) estimates that youth travel and tourism is responsible for 20% of the total volume. The tourism boom has been facilitated by a growth in the disposable incomes of people living in the core, an accompanying need for arenas of consumption to dispose of those incomes, the development of marketing technologies, techniques and strategies used to influence spending decisions and the availability of “relatively cheap, safe and swift air transportation” (Lash and Urry, 1994; Slater, 1997; Wyllie, 2000: 24).

Travel and tourism related businesses, organizations and their workforces, comprise the world's largest “industrial complex” pumping massive flows of money, people, ideas, images and other resources through the world system, supporting its structure and contributing to its expansion (Lofgren, 1999: 5). Positioned inside the flows, business people and government officials are inspired to transform and regulate the landscapes they control for the enjoyment of tourists, hoping to increase the flow of money and stimulate economic growth. They see tourism as a supplier of jobs and an injector of foreign capital, imagining tourism to be a key to economic prosperity (which is equated with social prosperity) as they divert resources and energy into the development of tourist infrastructure. According to Tourism British Columbia (2002), a government agency charged with promoting B.C.’s tourism industry, tourism-related
spending accounted for 4.8% of the province's 2000 G.D.P. (compared to 2.1% for Canada as a whole), more than mining, agriculture and fishing but less than forestry. The tourism industry is credited with supplying approximately one in thirteen of the province's jobs.

The global growth of tourism has not been accidental, "but has been actively promoted and supported by major international associations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank" (Wyllie, 2000: 25). These organizations have been instrumental in shaping the global flows of ideas, information and money structuring the tourism industry by being heavily "involved in policy discussions and the formulation of global planning strategies" (ibid).

The contemporary tourism industry consists of "the aggregate of all businesses that directly provide goods or services to facilitate business, pleasure, and leisure activities away from the home environment" and is quite diverse (Smith, 1988: 183). As the tourism industry has expanded, it has become more segmented and differentiated (Lash and Urry, 1994). All kinds of different people, with a wide range of motivations and perspectives, own or work in a variety of tourism-related businesses, offering a hodgepodge of products and services for sale. Many tourist businesses, like restaurants and some accommodation and transportation services, also generate revenue by serving non-tourist customers and so belong to other industries at the same time as they are part of the tourism industry.
Segmentation and differentiation is accomplished largely through the cultivation of niche markets by conducting research in order to demographically identify potential groups of customers (referred to in the industry as markets), theorize about their needs and desires and then fabricate and deploy marketing strategies designed to resonate with those groups. The ultimate aim of marketing strategies is to encourage potential customers to associate the attainment of travel fantasies with consuming specific products and services. People running tourist businesses are aided in their jobs of organizing their businesses and targeting their niche markets by international organizations like the ones mentioned above, by travel and tourism trade associations and by academics working in the field of tourism studies.

FIYTO (Federation of International Youth Travel Organizations) and the International Student Travel Confederation (ITSC) are trade associations whose membership includes organizations and companies that solicit backpacker patronage. FIYTO was founded in 1950 and is itself a member of the WTO. FIYTO membership consists of approximately 450 youth travel-related organizations and businesses located in over 70 countries. ISTC was established in 1949 by university student unions to make travel easily available to students and today it is comprised of over 70 student orientated travel services organizations in more than 100 countries. In 1955 ISTC launched the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) entitling cardholders to a myriad of discounts while travelling. ISICs are very popular among backpackers as many of the special fares and prices offered to students by the tourism industry cannot be obtained without one. ISTC reported that in the year 2001, over 2.5 million ISICs were sold.
These organizations circulate information and research among their members to help them formulate and coordinate their marketing and growth strategies. In 1992 FIYTO and ITSC launched the first annual World Youth and Student Travel Conference, a trade fair and conference where buyers, sellers and suppliers to the backpacker, student and youth travel markets meet, trade and attend knowledge sharing workshops and professional development seminars.

The boundaries of each niche industry or market are not neatly delineated. For example, backpackers are served in part by the overlapping budget travel, youth travel and backpacker industries and many business operators consider their enterprises to belong to all three industries. However, as backpacker becomes the universal label for young budget tourists, the backpacker industry is crystallizing as the primary industry serving the backpacker market.

**Tourism studies**

Since the 1970s the field of tourism studies has exploded within academia, mirroring and contributing to the expansion of the industry. Tourism studies research is used in the production of academic discourses, but it is also referenced by people working in the tourism industry when they are making their business plans and academic tourism research is sometimes funded directly or indirectly by the industry.

Rather than being a discipline unto itself, the field of tourism studies is a field that has been described as interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and "conscious of its youthfulness" (Tribe, 1997: 638). There is a tremendous amount of discussion and cooperation (not to mention competition over funding and venues for publication) between academics in the disciplines of psychology, history, geography, political science,
economics, sociology and anthropology (Dann, 2000). Given the field’s youthfulness, “at a general academic level it remains under-theorized, eclectic and disparate” (Meethan, 2001: 2). Within the field, there is a lot of overlap between the work done by sociologists and that done by anthropologists who “both individually and collectively have made significant contributions towards the understanding of tourism as a global social phenomenon” (Meethan, 2001: 4). It is in the field of tourism studies that most studies of backpackers and their historical predecessors can be found.

**Historical predecessors – The Grand Tour**

Young travellers have historically formed the leading edge of tourism’s commodifying flows. The Grand Tour, a circuit of Western Europe pursued mostly by wealthy young men in pursuit of education and pleasure, “is one of the most celebrated episodes in the history of tourism” (Towner, 1996: 96). The rise and fall of the Grand Tour era roughly mirrors that of the British Empire and its dominance of the core, developing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, reaching its peak during the eighteenth century and petering out by the mid-nineteenth century (Lloyd, 2001; Towner, 1985). Upper class British sons, usually accompanied by a tutor, would occupy:

... the years between university and career with an extended tour of continental Europe, a rite of passage intended to supplement a young man’s formal education and provide him with some experience of the world – a sort of mobile finishing school for young men. For many of these young men ... [grand tours] also provided a socially acceptable form of escape, a way of sowing wild oats, in the parlance of a later time (Withey, 1997: 3).

The number of grand tourists increased as the core expanded and accrued more resources. By the nineteenth century, with imperial power shifting across the Atlantic, these young men were joined by their American brethren while other Europeans,
members of the middle class (who generally did not travel with tutors and who would eventually come to dominate the tour), older travellers and a smattering of women were also able to get into the act (Towner, 1985; Withey, 1997). Over the years, a Grand Tour industry was built up, serving the tour and stimulating its growth, as entrepreneurs offered accommodations, transportation, money exchanging services, tour-guiding services and published guidebooks to aid Grand Tourists in their quest.

Grand Touring was an opportunity to enrich the self by obtaining highly sought-after cultural edification. During the sixteenth century, the social elite of Britain drew inspiration from the Renaissance movement and later on, during the eighteenth century, the imaginations of travellers were stimulated by philosophies of the Enlightenment. The cultural sources of these movements were “geographically located outside the country – in Italy and also later in France” (Towner, 1996: 99). Travel abroad was considered essential for transforming a young man into an educated gentleman and doing so increased his chances at landing a government career. Taking charge of the bureaucracy and apparatuses of the empire and making them function required elites who possessed cultural capital that could be accumulated only through travel. Desforge (1998) shows how travel can provide contemporary backpackers with similar cultural capital, enhancing their ability to market themselves to employers in the global economy.

Tramping

Travel also became a feature of life for many European tradesmen, starting in the early sixteenth century, with the development of the tramping system, a system that Adler (1985) links to contemporary youth travel. Most trade guilds encouraged and funded the practice of sending unemployed and unmarried men along prescribed circuits in search of
work. Jobs and accommodations were found by presenting guild memberships to craft society hostels.

Besides work, the trips also had touristic elements, serving as a kind of Grand Tour for young workingmen in search of personal and cultural enrichment. Adler (1985) argues that as tramping ceased to function as a labour institution at the end of the nineteenth century, it gradually became romanticized by middle class youth who adopted it for exclusively touristic purposes. Today, backpackers will often pick up temporary jobs in order to replenish their travelling funds. This is sometimes done illegally or “under the table” but there are also a limited number of Working Holiday Visas (WHVs) available to travellers from for some of the countries they visit.

By reciprocal agreement, the national governments of Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom issue a limited number of WHVs to each other’s foreign tourists between the ages of 18 and 30. A WHV allows its bearer to enter a country for between six months to two years (depending on the agreement), primarily to travel but also with a legal entitlement to seek casual employment along the way. At any given time, young citizens of the aforementioned countries are in Canada travelling and working, while in exchange, young Canadians are abroad doing the same. “Middle-class interest in tramping has transformed it into a leisure activity, even if the wanderings of young Western tourists may sometimes be indirectly related to the search for employment” (Wyllie, 2000: 17).

Youth hostel movement

John McCulloch (1992) has taken an extensive look at the history of youth hostels, which are the primary accommodation choice of today’s backpackers and serve
as hubs on the circuits traversed by youthful tourists. Youth hostelling started as part of the youth movements that “developed as a reaction against the harsh conditions of urban life in the industrial cities of 19th century Europe” (McCulloch, 1992: 22). Affluent youth took to spending their leisure time exploring and revelling in the splendour of the unspoiled countryside. In 1844, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was founded, followed by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in 1855. These organizations established recreation centres and hostels throughout Britain providing activities and inexpensive accommodations to travelling youth. “Interestingly, these two organizations seem to have been responsible for reviving the word ‘hostel’ to describe their accommodations, the word apparently not having been used in this sense since the 16th century and now, of course a household word in the modern backpackers industry.” (McCulloch, 1992: 23).

At the same time, a series of bush walking, “Homeland and Rambling Cubs” were established throughout Germany and other parts of German-speaking Europe. Their operators constructed walking trails through the mountainous countryside, built temporary hostels and provided members with refreshments and guidebooks. Groups called Wandervolgel (birds of passage) were at the heart of this German youth movement:

These mostly male bourgeois youth groups originated in the pre-World War I era as an alternative to the staid tourism of the middle class. An intense and emotional group-life developed . . . as boys and young men took long hikes in the forests and country-sides singing folk songs, sitting around camp fires, and decrying their parents’ stifling bourgeois existence (Koshar, 2000: 43-44).

McCulloch (1992) argues that institutions and movements such as the YMCA, YWCA, the Wandervogel and to a lesser degree, the Boy Scouts of America (founded in
1908) and the Girl Guides association (founded in 1910) “helped to create the appropriate climate in which the concept of youth hostels and youth travel could germinate” (23).

In 1910 German authorities turned an old castle into the world’s first permanent youth hostel, equipped with a kitchen, a washroom and two dormitories containing wooden bunks. Within a year Germany had 17 hostels and in 1919 the German Youth Hostel Association (YHA) was formed. “YHAs were established in Switzerland in 1924, Poland 1926, England and Wales 1930, New Zealand 1932, USA 1934, Canada 1938, and Australia 1939. Today YHA is the world’s largest accommodation chain” (McCulloch, 1992: 24).

The International Youth Hostelling Federation (IYHF) is the umbrella organization for the autonomous national YHAs, which in turn often serve as umbrella organizations for regional YHAs (as is the case in Canada). During the last half of the 1990s, the IYHF implemented the Hostelling International (HI) brand name and logo to replace the patchwork of logos used in different parts of the world. This was done as part of a global marketing strategy designed to instil brand allegiance in their customers, a strategy signed on to by the YHAs in Canada (HI-C). In B.C., the YHA operates under the brand name Hostelling International – Canada – B.C. Region (HI-C-B.C.) as a non-profit association. While young travellers continue to make up the bulk of Hostelling International’s clientele, HI officials are also trying to capture the business of families and older travellers as well.

**Post World War II non-institutionalized tourists**

The “study of backpacking began when Cohen (1972) differentiated between non-institutionalized tourists and their institutionalized counterparts” (Uriely, Yonay and
Simchai, 2002: 520). Cohen (1974) points out that the category of tourist is fuzzy and vague with no crisp borders between tourist and non-tourist roles and “no sharp transition from membership to non-membership” as trips can have both touristic and non-touristic dimensions to them (528). Cohen’s (1972) typology, the first tourist classification scheme in the social sciences, distinguishes between four categories of tourists on the basis of their affiliation with “the tourist establishment” (169). The organized mass tourist and the individual mass tourist are institutionalized tourist roles, while the explorer and the drifter, “the true rebel of the tourist establishment and the complete opposite of the mass tourist,” are non-institutionalized roles. (177). Each tourist type also refers to “less tangible psychological attributes, such as tourists’ attitudes toward fundamental values of their own society, their motivations for travel, and the meanings they assign to their experiences” (Uriel, Yonay and Simchai 2002: 521).

Cohen (1973) associated drifting with the counter-culture and drug taking of the 1960s, characterizing the drifter as an escapist “child of affluence” (89) whose “escapism is hedonistic and often anarchistic” (93). According to Cohen, drifters travelled for extended periods of time, sought to live and eat like the people they visited and occasionally took on odd jobs while travelling to support themselves. He traced the origins of drifting to several years after the end of World War II when students and other middle class youth began hitchhiking their way through Western Europe. Alderson (1971) identified the appearance a “new” Grand Tour at this time, as modern young travellers made their way around the old circuits and took in many of the same sites that fascinated earlier Grand Tourists.
The introduction of ISICs in 1955 was part of a larger effort to promote travel among students and happened alongside an expansion of the airline industry's capacity and routes, which included the introduction of discounted youth and student airfares. The 1960s and 70s saw young middle and working class Westerners making their way to South and South-East Asia, the Middle East and East Africa (Cohen, 1974). Since then large numbers of young travellers have also been making their way to the South Pacific, especially Australia and New Zealand as well as to the South, Central and North Americas.

While still working with Cohen's typology, Vogt (1976) calls the youth travellers he studied wanderers rather than drifters, out of concern that the drifter label is too derogatory and that the term wanderer better reflects the romanticism of the travellers he defines as adventurous young people, who are mostly students from middle class backgrounds. "Their travel style is in many ways a product of affluent society, and often represents a reaction to it ... they are embarked upon a quest of personal growth – learning about and understanding themselves, other people, and other cultures" (27-28).

In a similar vein, Riley (1988) chooses the term budget traveller to describe a "type of tourist that performs a non-institutionalized role" similar to Cohen's drifter. Like Vogt, she finds the term drifter to have negative connotations, implying a deviance in the traveller and so she calls them budget travellers because this is what she found the travellers calling themselves. Riley represents the average budget traveller as middle-class, college-educated, travelling on an extended holiday with a flexible itinerary and timetable who has arrived at "one of life’s junctures. For example, he or she may have
just completed a college degree or are between jobs” but is not someone who feels alienated from their society (317).

Riley emphasizes how word of mouth and “underground travel guides” like *Lonely Planet* are important sources of information about where to travel and what to do. She concludes that the “most salient feature of long-term travelers is an all-encompassing, at times obsessive focus on budgets: the price of food, lodging, and transportation” (320). Status is derived from living on the road cheaply and finding the best bargains. She calls this “‘playing with identity’ – the middle-class person in the role of ‘budget traveler’” (321). While Riley’s budget travellers occasionally went off on wilderness backpacking treks for one segment of their larger trips, they did not think of themselves primarily as backpackers.

**Backpackers**

Long before budget tourists came to be known as backpackers, backpacking was associated with wilderness hiking and camping. A 1976 guide called *Backpacking* describes backpacking as journeying into the backwoods “free of the technological society” (Styles, 1976: 8). It requires the carrying of backpacks containing a tent, sleeping bags, clothes and all the supplies one needs to survive in the wild without being able to rely on “trains, planes, hotels, restaurants or any of the usual tourist conveniences” (ibid). According to Styles (1976) backpacking started with European trappers and explorers who “‘backpacked’ their way into the untamed wilderness” and backpackers “naturally journey where there are no roads or sign-posts” and so have to be able to find their own way (8).
It was in Australia where the term backpacker was first used to describe budget travellers touring around with their possessions in a backpack (Pearce, 1990). As in many countries, the Australian YHA was the only provider of hostel style accommodations for over 40 years and did not do market research or actively try to build up the business (McCulloch, 1992). The operators of these not-for-profit hostels took a laissez faire approach, offering inexpensive but bare-bones accommodations and services while letting customers find them rather than trying to recruit customers or generate business growth.

In the early 1980s competitors opened up, using ‘backpackers’ in their names. “The word ‘backpackers’ is purely descriptive wishing to target the users through the suggestion of the facilities/operations which are being provided” (McCulloch, 1992: 25). Unlike the YHA hostels, these profit-seeking businesses had no membership requirements, did not require that travellers perform chores during their stay, did not impose curfews, allowed alcohol to be consumed on site and offered a mix of accommodation options. They built smaller dorm rooms with less beds per room and on top of the traditional gender-segregated dorms, many backpacker hostels offered double rooms or mixed-gender dormitories. Many for-profit hostels started offering courtesy transportation from airports, train and bus terminals and had swimming pools on the premises along with inexpensive restaurants and bars. They accepted credit cards and established their hostels in central locations, close to local transport. They actively marketed themselves and were instantly successful. As a result, the YHA lost 50% of its “traditional market” (McCulloch, 1992: 25). YHA operators rebounded by adopting many of the business and marketing practices of their competitors and by introducing
innovations of their own. They built state-of-the-art hostels in central locations with all the amenities offered by their rivals and through alliances with student-orientated travel agencies, some hostels started to feature in-house travel agencies.

Entrepreneurs thought about travellers in different ways than did the non-profit YHA operators. They imagined travellers as customers, as part of a market and as a source of profit. Hostels were imagined by their owners, not as simple way stations providing a night’s respite while out exploring the world, but as important sites in and of themselves, memorable locations that could be made into an integral part of the travelling experience. It is common place now for hostel operators, whether they operate for-profit or non-profit hostels, to conduct and use market research to help them conceptualize who their customers are and what their values and desires are, so that they can offer products and services to meet those desires. Marketing strategies are deployed to influence the imaginations of young travellers, so they might equate the fulfilment of their travel fantasies with staying at the right hostel.

With the help of cultural material created for marketing purposes and the efforts of FYTO, ITSC and tourism researchers, backpacker has become the dominant label for young budget travellers. Budget travellers, travelling on self-directed journeys with all of their possessions in their backpacks, have become symbolically linked with the ethos of wilderness explorers. The label conjures up images of a traveller seeking their independence and freedom, of roughing their own way through an untamed world without a guide and directly experiencing it the way it really is. It is a label wrapped in anti-touristic narratives, purposely deployed into landscapes thought to be occupied by the kinds of travellers talked about by Cohen (1972, 1973), Riley (1988) and Vogt
(1976), all of whom preferred to think of themselves as "travellers" rather than "tourists."
It has been a very successful label, resonating with independent minded travellers who are enticed to make use of commodities supplied by the backpacker industry in order to realize their culturally inspired travel fantasies.

**Backpacking as a form of institutionalized alternative tourism**

Cohen's classification scheme has been criticized for being built “largely on a priori grounds” without much empirical basis (Burns 1999; Selwyn, 1996: 6). Still, backpackers are largely understood in the tourism studies literature as a type of non-institutionalized tourist, the contemporary descendents of Cohen’s drifters. This is how Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) understood backpackers when they came up with what has become the definitive definition of backpacking; as an alternative type of tourism, in marked contrast to mainstream tourism: “Backpackers are travelers who exhibit a preference for budget accommodation; an emphasis on meeting other people (locals and travelers); an independently organized and flexible travel schedule; longer rather than brief holidays; and an emphasis on informal and participatory recreation activities” (831).

Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002) are critical of studies that represent backpackers primarily as a type of tourist and question whether backpacker should be considered as a distinct and homogeneous category. They argue that much of the research on backpackers conflate types of tourism with forms of tourism and that while the two are related, there needs to be a differentiation between “backpacking as a form characterized by various practices and backpacking as a type identified by a tourist’s attitudes and motivations” (521). Types and forms, they assert, should be considered
separately since the practices used by a tourist may not necessarily be related directly to the moods and dispositions of tourists:

For example, the young who have less money and are less sensitive to a lack of physical amenities may adopt the non-institutionalized form of tourism without holding anti-establishment views or without searching for alternative centers of meaning during their excursion. Similarly, affluent, middle-aged people, who may be harshly critical of the social order of their home society, may feel more comfortable using the institutionalized form (ibid).

The backpackers I got to know during my research are a very diverse group of people. Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002) are certainly right to assert that backpackers cannot be lumped together into a category on the basis of an imagined psychological unity. However, as we will see in Chapters Four and Five, backpackers’ motivations for travelling, as well as the travel possibilities they imagine to be available to them are culturally entwined with the capitalist forms they use to realize those possibilities and so type and form need to be considered in relation to one another, as part of the same cultural package. We need to pay attention to the institutional arrangements and practices used by backpackers and how these culturally influence backpackers’ imaginings of themselves and their trips. A lot of the information fuelling the travel fantasies of backpackers is put into circulation by people working in the very industries supplying the goods and services that backpackers consume in order to transform fantasy into reality. This is why I conceptualize backpacking as a style of travel worked out by the travellers themselves, but one that encompasses both form and type attributes.

It is problematic to try and understand any kind of traveller who uses money and commercial airlines to get around as non-institutionalized. In order to access and move around the landscapes they visit, backpackers must use the institutions and infrastructure
of global capitalism. All travellers from the core, who venture far away from home, make use of commercial transportation networks to access landscapes that have already been drawn into the world system. When they do, they are funneled through institutions regulating the trans-national flows of people, such as airports and customs and immigration checkpoints. At the same time, in order to be able to travel and engage in non-essential consumption requires that a traveller from the core use the institutional power available to them as members of the capitalist world system’s more affluent classes. This power manifests itself in an ability to harness the money used to travel and survive while on the road. Travellers make use of this institutional power even if, as is the case with many backpackers, they experience a materially more marginal existence while travelling than they are used to in their everyday lives, or if they feel compelled to engage in menial wage labour in order to replenish travelling funds while on the road. "The label ‘budget traveler’ is not intended to imply a traveler of a socio-economic background of limited financial resources. It refers to people desirous of extending their travels beyond that of a cyclical holiday and hence, the necessity of living on a budget" (Riley, 1988: 317).

Our use of money ties us to the institutions of the international monetary system that control and manipulate its value. Every time we are involved in a monetary transaction, we participate in the ritual reproduction of the dynamic social structure of the world system. Travellers from the core are carriers of capitalism’s economistic cultural code and move as part of the core, not outside of it, contributing to its fractal fluctuations as we do so. We interpret the landscapes we visit through worldviews culturally shaped by a lifetime of fetishized commodity consumption and people we encounter while
travelling often interpret us (at least in part) as a source of money and therefore as a
source of needed and desired resources.

Both Cohen (1973) and Vogt (1976) note that in the locations visited by non-
institutionalized youth tourists, a parallel tourism infrastructure rapidly emerges, catering
to alternative travellers. Bolstered by guidebooks for independent travellers and the
exchange of word-of-mouth information, networks are established, connecting hostels
and districts where alternative travellers like to congregate. The circuits between these
“gathering places” quickly become well trodden and attract entrepreneurs and workers
who offer products and services specifically aimed at alternative travellers, such as
inexpensive transportation and accommodations, nightclubs, restaurants and coffee shops
(Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Vogt, 1976: 36). Once local business people realize
that budget travellers actually have money to spend, businesses that are already located in
these areas often modify their offerings to attract travellers’ patronage. Together,
travellers and enterprises catering to travellers, make gathering places into consumption
centres where flows of people, money, ideas, images and other commodities intersect.
The collective impulse of the people in these centres is to interact with each other for
their mutual advantage while pumping up the flow volumes.

**Backpacking commodities**

The institutional arrangements and practices underlying backpacking makes it a
kind of tourism that is configured around the consumption of commodities whose sign-
value (produced in large measure by marketing campaigns) imbues them with an anti-
touristic quality. It is an individualistic style of travel, undertaken by people who shun
the stereotypical view of what it means to be a tourist, even though they often recognize
that they are engaging in a kind of tourism. During their trips backpackers directly consume a lot of commodities such as food, other necessities of life and souvenirs during their trips. Indirectly, they also indirectly consume a lot more.

The commodity backpackers most frequently exchange money for is the temporary right to occupy property, be it a seat on a bus, a bed in a hostel or access to a tourist site (Lash and Urry, 1994). The act of exercising these rights connects backpackers to end points on chains of commodities consumed in the process of attracting them to that space, securing the space for them and serving them while they occupy it. For example, backpackers do not directly consume the fossil fuels necessary to power the jets they travel on, but the fuel, as well as the labour power embedded in fuel as it is harnessed, is nonetheless consumed in the processes enabling backpackers to buy air transport. The social organization underlying backpackers' individualistic pursuits is culturally obscured from their view, symbolically hidden in tourist commodities. However, consumption is more than simply making purchases. Even though backpackers are engaging in touristic consumption in order to travel, the acquisition of the necessary commodities (for example, transportation tickets and access to accommodations and sites of interest) happens during chaotic and often very challenging real-life episodes and a lot of hard work goes into transforming what is purchased into experience (Urry, 1995).

Summary

Travel has historically been one of the ways made available to young people living in the core for culturally preparing themselves to take their place in the world system, while over the last two centuries tourism has become a vital component of the
world system’s structure. Backpacking is a style of travel facilitated by the backpacker industry (which is a segment of the tourism industry) that has symbolic connections to the attitudes and pursuits of wilderness backpackers. It has developed into an institution for middle class and affluent working class young people as they try to figure out how to carve out an adult existence in a society that is presented to them as increasingly global.

While commodity consumption is rarely an overt goal of a backpacking trip and in fact backpackers are often far more concerned with spending as little money as possible during their travels, backpackers nonetheless propel themselves through the landscapes they visit by engaging in consumption. At the same time, workers in the backpacker industry concern themselves with attracting more and more backpackers into the landscapes where they work and offer them more and more sign-value laden commodities to consume. This does not mean that backpacker experiences are shallow or that backpacking trips are easy (though many of the services offered for sale to backpackers are expressly designed to make trips easier and eliminate hassles). As we will see in the next two chapters, backpacking trips are often challenging and chaotic endeavours that are often deeply rewarding.
Chapter 3: Going travelling

"The point of travel is to learn something, to change something about you"
- Vanora, a 23-year-old backpacker from Scotland

The backpackers I met in British Columbia during the summer of 2001 were embarked on long journeys in search of adventure, self-development and good times with new friends. As they trekked their way through new and unfamiliar landscapes, many were finding their quests to be unpredictable and challenging affairs, filled with deeply rewarding experiences that they felt would positively change them forever.

While each individual journey is a self-directed and unique enterprise, backpacking trips are collectively molded around the commodifying logic of capitalism. As we have seen, backpackers have to use the institutions of the world system in order to access the landscapes they visit and backpackers make their way through those landscapes by becoming part of the backpacker market and consuming the labour power and other resources embedded in the commodities made available to them.

In the following two chapters I ethnographically present backpacking trips as socially organized, individualistic ventures that are worked out from inside the cultural flows of globalization. I focus on the dynamic relationship between culture, imagination and agency to show how a cultural group of trans-national backpackers, united by similar market-based lifestyles, takes its fractal shape out of those flows. Relationships between backpackers and workers in the backpacker industry are mediated through the production and consumption of backpacker-related commodities. As they help each other with the
business of trying to lead rewarding and meaningful lives, they are involved together in
the dynamic production and reproduction of the capitalism’s economistic cultural code.

The production and consumption of commodities however, is hardly the only thing going on during backpacking trips. In fact, backpackers are usually far more concerned with trying to spend as little money as possible, rather than on trying to consume more and their imaginations are occupied with lots of ideas and images that are far more interesting and satisfying than commodity consumption. The ethos of backpacking demands that backpackers be willing to take care of travel details for themselves, rather than paying to have someone else do it. Therefore, for a commodity to be successful in the backpacker market, it must offer a backpacker something more than just a consumption opportunity. A commodity’s sign value must infuse that commodity with symbolic resources that travellers can use to construct narrative understandings of themselves as independent budget travellers.

Even though a backpacking trip represents a distinct phase in a young person’s life, involving unique experiences that are spatially and temporally separated from their normal existence, a trip does not happen outside a traveller’s regular life, but is an integral part of it. Backpacking trips are ventures that germinate inside backpackers’ imaginations, long before their bodies jet off on fantastical expeditions. In turn, travel experiences inform and influence the decisions backpackers make long after they return home. Just as backpacking trips are intimately weaved into the capitalist project, so too are people of the core’s everyday imaginings of their life possibilities and exercising of their agency.
Backpackers coming to B.C.

The choice to become a backpacker is made mostly by middle class and affluent working class young people living in the industrialized countries of the West, though increasingly well-off young people from other parts of the world (notably Asia and Latin America) are also making the choice. While an exact demographic measurement of where the backpackers visiting Canada or British Columbia come from is impossible (in part because governments in Canada do not collect statistics on backpacker visits), most youth hostels keep track of their guests’ nationalities. This information, when looked at alongside the impressions that backpackers and workers in the backpacker industry provided me during interviews, as well as what I myself saw during my research, suggests that the largest group of backpackers visiting British Columbia (categorized on the basis of nationality) come from other parts of Canada, followed closely by Australia and then the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Japan, Germany and France, though this list is by no means exhaustive.

Backpackers are culturally diverse people with multi-dimensional identities, who come from a wide variety of traditions, backgrounds and life experiences. Their identities have national dimensions, shaped by exposure to different national histories and mythologies. These aspects of identity are sometimes hybrid. A single backpacker may feel an allegiance to multiple nations, as they may hold multiple citizenships, have lived in more than one nation or have family members belonging to different nations. In these cases, one nation may have a stronger hold on a backpacker's imagining of themselves than the other(s), such as their nation of residence. Besides their national affiliations, a
backpacker also has other group attachments at the same time as they have an individualistic sense of self.

Going backpacking is an opportunity to explore a world that has been dreamed and fantasized about, to seek out places and people that have only been read about, heard about, or seen on film, television and the Internet. Backpackers' cartographic imaginations and worldviews have also been influenced by their state-mandated educations, where the world is represented as a series of nation-states, with each one containing distinct people and a distinct culture. Even if someone who becomes a backpacker has lived their whole life in one location, images of different people and opportunities in faraway places, out there beyond their home community, have existed in their imaginations since childhood.

Despite their differences, would-be backpackers are culturally connected to one another even before they contemplate going off travelling, because they all live along the same communications and transportation networks of the core. Young people who become backpackers consume many of the same television shows, films, music, Internet content, magazines, advertising and books. As a result, they feed their imaginations with many of the same stories, images, and encoded imperatives to covet and consume more commodities.

Advertising is routinely built into the landscapes that young people of the core roam while growing up. The marketers who design this advertising see their audiences as markets to be cultivated as they try to captivate young people's imaginations, whether they are at home, at school, walking in the streets or participating in leisure activities. The global distribution of images, discourses and products, provides their consumers with
a common frame of reference for making sense of themselves and the world they live in. Even before going off travelling, backpackers already have similar market-based identities and share imagined worlds mediated by the consumption of capitalistic cultural products.

Living along the same communications networks also means that young people often know and are in regular personal contact with people from all over the world (through Internet chat rooms and message boards, for example) that they have never met in person. Going travelling can be an opportunity to visit some of those people and meet them in the flesh, like it was for Andrew, age 26, from Australia, “my friend, I met her from [sic] the Internet, funnily enough. We just kept in contact for awhile, when I got to Victoria she told me I should come over and visit, so I did, so it didn’t feel at all funny that it was an Internet experience and we hadn’t met each other before, it actually felt quite normal” [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001]. The landscapes that appear in a backpacker’s mind’s eye have global horizons even before he takes off travelling.

**Making the choice to travel**

Going off travelling can appear to be a radical choice, as it did for Leslie, age 20 from Scotland, whose friends and family told her “I was mad, it was a huge thing going away” [interview, informant#25; Vancouver; August 10, 2001]. However, for most backpackers travel is a socially sanctioned activity (even if it is not entirely normal), engaged in by their peers, family members and one that they themselves may have done many times before. “This is my fourth trip in four years. Been to the States and Canada in ’98 and Japan in ’99 and 2000.” This time, Andrew is on a five-and-a-half month trip
covering the U.K., Western Europe and now North America [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

Many backpackers come from families where travel is a normal part of life, be it for immigration, business or holidays. Some backpackers have participated previously in exchange programs as part of their schooling or have friends who went off backpacking and returned with enticing stories of adventure. Aileen, age 27 from Ireland found that, “a lot of people I would have known from college took a year out and went to Australia mostly. My sister lived there for a year and a half and that probably made me think, maybe I should do something, peer pressure almost, the thing you do” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

At the same time, the choice to go off travelling can be used by a backpacker to distinguish their lifestyles from the ones that their friends and peers are choosing. Nathan, age 24, from Australia decided to travel “because all my mates are getting married and having kids and I’m not quite ready to do that myself” [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001]. Travel is a wonderful alternative and Nathan plans to be away from Australia for two years, financing his trip by temporarily stopping along the way to work as a chef.

To take a long trip requires a break in a traveller’s regular life, breaks that often seem to occur as natural gaps in young people’s life trajectories, such as the end of an employment contract, the completion of military or civil obligations or graduating from school (both secondary and post-secondary). Roger, age 18 from England, is travelling Canada because “work and travel during the gap year is the thing to do in the U.K.” [interview, informant#10; Vancouver; July 28, 2001] echoing the findings of Desforges
1998) who defined the British gap year tradition as youth taking a “year out from higher education or time off from flexible ‘McJobs’ and short term contracts” (175). Desforges points out how putting travel experience on a resume can enhance a young person’s employability, especially if they want to work in the cultural industries or in the Non-Governmental Organization sector.

Even as Vanora participates in the gap year, it makes her uncomfortable. “It has become something one feels one has to do at a certain age and there is an expectation to do it. Employers look for it on the resumé. The gap year has become a cliché that people are expected to do.” Vanora fears that with travel having become so normal and expected, it is losing some important qualities. “Some people travel just for the sake of it, so they can say they’ve done this country, done that country. Do they get anything out of it?” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver, August 7, 2001].

Rudolph, and Trent, both aged 21 from Germany, recently finished their mandatory year of civil service. They are seizing the opportunity to dedicate a whole summer to travel. They start university in September and according to Rudolph, “for the next five years, we cannot do a trip like this because of studies and work. We will only have 30 days a year for holiday” [interview, informant#20; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. Similarly, Esther, age 22 from Israel, has just finished her compulsory military service and figures she has reached the backpacker stage of her life, “every Israeli goes backpacking after serving their mandatory army time” [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001].

Sometimes a break has to be purposely created and regular life deliberately disrupted. Aileen and her partner Liam quit their jobs to go off on a yearlong trip before
they take on responsibilities that will inhibit their ability to get away for an extended period of time. “We’re thinking this is the year we’re going to travel, and then when we get home, we buy a house and we do all that kind of stuff. So we’re trying to fit it all in … I would have just stayed in the same rut if I’d stayed at home.” Adds Liam, “I’m going to set up my own company, I have different things I have to put in place, like I have to get certification … the way I see it, do the trip thing and then when I go home do the business thing, that’s how I see it” [interview, informants#27&28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

These young travellers live in social milieus where travel is a valued activity and where the impulse to go off travelling is part of the cultural atmosphere. While their travel imaginations are nurtured by their relationships with friends and family, they are also stimulated by the presence in their home landscapes of travel businesses targeting students or youths and who promote backpacking. Since the late 1960s specialized travel agencies like Student Travel Agency (STA) in Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa and North America and Travel Cuts in Canada have grown from tiny operations into large companies. Both agencies are members of ISTC.

These commercial enterprises have offices on and around university and college campuses, in youth hostels and other locations where young people who might be interested in travel are thought to congregate. Their workers create and distribute magazines and booklets with articles and advertising about the joys of travel, highlighting potential destinations and providing backpacking tips. They run information seminars that teach young people about how to successfully plan and accomplish a backpacking
trip, including recommendations about where and when to go, how to get around and what businesses to patronize.

The travel agencies and other companies seeking backpacker business make extensive use of the Internet to target their audience, disseminate information and extol the virtues of backpacker travel, budget travel and hostelling. “The Internet has really changed how people travel” according to Matthew, who works as an executive in the backpacker and budget travel industries. It has changed the way they communicate with potential customers [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001].

For example, the Hostelling International (HI) web site provides information about the organization, how to become a member and the benefits of membership. The site provides links to national and regional HI (formerly YHA) web sites where potential customers can get information on particular hostels, make reservations and find out what other businesses offer discounts to HI members. The site also emphasizes the prospective rewards to be had by young people who participate in hostel-based travel:

The hostel network enables young people of differing nationalities, cultures and social backgrounds to meet informally, share experiences, learn about themselves, each other and their surroundings. Hostels foster a remarkable international awareness about current events. Hostelling also has a fundamental, but unofficial, role in the development of young people as future employees in a global market. The hostel environment encourages social awareness and the importance of living in a community, plus it develops the kind of self-discipline skills that result from experiencing different situations, having to make individual decisions and learning from them (International Youth Hostel Federation Website).

The Internet is a source of information that can be of help when planning a trip. Accommodation and activity reservations can be made online, transportation tickets can be booked and web sites will often have links to other related sites and information.

Esther is travelling with two other young Israelis who she did not know before they
started travelling together. She found them through an online bulletin board [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001].

The rise of the Internet has not resulted in the demise of travel books. Instead, the Internet has been a growth catalyst for published travel guides and travel literature by creating the opportunity for cross promotion and facilitating the creation of new products and new markets. Series of guidebooks like The Rough Guide (over 200 titles) and Lonely Planet (over 650 titles) as well as more general tip books like The Globetrotter’s Guide – Essential Skills for Budget Travel (Smits and Dolinko, 1998) are aimed at backpackers and other independent-minded travellers. When read prior to a trip, these books help foster expectations of what travel will be like and help build anticipation:

Independent overland travel is about meeting people and doing incredible things while coping with the excitement, strain, boredom, exhilaration and frustration of being on your own so far away from home. It’s about endurance, tolerance and the ability to think on your feet. It’s keeping your cool when you have every right to lose it completely. It’s wondering why in the world you would ever expose yourself to such ridiculous (or amusing) situations and then wondering how you could ever rob yourself of the opportunity not to. Independent overland travel is about independence and movement. It’s not about guided tours, tightly planned itineraries and five-star hotels. It is about finding your way from the airport to the hotel, changing money, locating affordable restaurants with palatable food, seeing the sights and protecting your valuables ... It’s about getting lost and being found, winning and losing, and making it home, happy to have done it once, or ready to rest up, wash your clothes and scrape together enough money to start traveling all over again... It’s one of the most rewarding ways to go. It will require you to push the boundaries of your comfort zones and do things you would never do in a million years. Not because you may want to do them but because if you don’t, nobody else will. And when it’s done you may sit back and marvel at what you have accomplished, having seen and experienced so much on so little (Smits and Dolinko 1998: 16).

One of the more popular travel web sites targeting the backpacker market is the Lonely Planet web site. Lonely Planet is also the most popular guidebook series used by
backpackers. Michelle, age 36, from England likes using *Lonely Planet* because “the Lonely Planet is made up of information from travellers” [interview, informant#23; Vancouver; August 9, 2001] and Vanora finds that “the first chapter of Lonely Planet is useful for learning about the local culture” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. Most of the backpackers I met in British Columbia either carry a *Lonely Planet* guide with them or occasionally use someone else’s copy.

The company was founded in 1972 when Tony and Maureen Wheeler published the first edition of *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring* as a hand stapled booklet (Gluckman, 1999). They were inspired after returning to Australia from their honeymoon trip across Asia, during which they were frustrated by the lack of travel information. In her company profile, Maureen Wheeler describes why they assembled that first edition on their kitchen table, “we were young, and idealistic, curious and excited” (Lonely Planet, 2001: 3). Today, *Asia on a Shoestring* is nicely bound in its tenth edition, while the *Lonely Planet* series covers destinations all around the world. Travellers coming to B.C. can make use of the *Lonely Planet* book covering Canada, or the one specifically about British Columbia, or the one for Vancouver, or the one dealing with the Pacific Northwest. “Although most readers consider Lonely Planet part of the counter-culture, the company that started on a honeymoon tour of Asia has become a major force in the travel industry” (Gluckman, 1999: 54).

Besides the books and the website, Lonely Planet also has its own syndicated television show and operates eKno, a communication system for travellers on the move, offering international phone calls, faxmail, e-mail and voicemail services. The company reported that Lonely Planet products sold over AUS$82 million in 2001, and has had an
annual average growth rate of 24% over the last ten years (Lonely Planet, 2001). The aims of the company as stated in the forward to the British Columbia guide are:

> to help make it possible for adventurous travelers to get out there – explore and better understand the world ... Lonely Planet gathers information for everyone who’s curious about the planet – especially for those who explore it first-hand. Through guidebooks, phrasebooks, activity guides, maps, literature, newsletters, image library, TV series and website, we act as an information exchange for a worldwide community of travelers (Fanselow and Miller, 2001: 9).

“Lonely Planet has become a proven brand name, the ultimate stamp of approval for budget travel,” something that businesses catering to backpackers and budget travellers are keenly aware (Gluckman, 1999: 55). One of the many ways that a community and imagined world of travellers is connected is through the Thorn Tree section of the Lonely Planet website, a message board where travellers trade travel tips and engage in travel related discussions. The site claims over 5,000 posts a day. Geoff, a British Columbia hostel operator regularly checks Thorn Tree to see if people are discussing his hostel and is proud that it is “quite well known. It gets recommended all the time” [interview, informant#4; Vancouver; July 9, 2001]. He also uses the commentary he reads to guide his decisions about how to tailor the products and services his hostel offers and make it a more enticing place to stay.

**Why travel?**

While backpacker imaginations are stimulated by the common consumption of cultural material that aids in the conjuring of travel desires, those desires are still very personal, as are the decisions to go travelling. Many travellers spend a lot of time reflecting on why they travel and what they are seeking, both prior to and during their trips. Leanne, 22 from Ontario is “out to see the world. I want to find my place.
Everyone has a place in the world and it is not necessarily where you are born’

[interview, informant#6; Vancouver; July 16, 2001]. Nathan is travelling “to get some perspective, help me see the big picture,” [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001] while Liam thinks one of the best things about travel is that “you meet all different kinds of people, you get to appreciate different cultures” [interview, informant#27; Vancouver, August 15, 2001]. Travel can be a time of deep reflection and important in what Harvey (2001) refers to as the processes of locating, positioning, individuating, identifying and bounding, “that play a key role in the formation of personal and political subjectivities” (221). These processes direct us in our attempts understand our world, our position in society and who we are, both individually and collectively.

Many backpackers are trying to make sense of themselves and their lives through encounters with different people, different places and different cultures. They are going through major life changes and are making decisions about who they are, what their goals are in life and what makes them happy. Travel is frequently seen as an opportunity to get away from regular life in order to learn and reflect, as it is for Andrew:

The only thing I want to accomplish is get out and see different parts of the world, see how other cultures live ... You know, for myself I guess, self-education and different life experiences, that’s always beneficial. That’s mainly the reason I travel. I think travelling gives you a lot of time to think and think about what’s going on around you, why you’re travelling, other issues such as friends and friendship, employment, what you want to do with yourself, what you want to do with other people, what goals you want to set yourself [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

Travel can also be an escape from the stresses of life at home. Esther is reflexive about why she and other Israelis go backpacking after their army time. “Maybe we backpack to escape the hard reality of Israel which can be tough sometimes and
especially to escape after the army when the hard reality of Israel is most direct ... it is an escape from responsibility or at least a certain type of responsibility” [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001]. Aileen is also taking a break. “Part of the reason we came away was because we were really feeling pressurized work wise, loads of responsibility, stuff like that. It was a chance to get away and not plan” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Erica, age 20 from England decided to travel over the summer because it was a better option than staying home and working a regular summer job like she did last summer. “Last summer was shit. This year is more satisfying, more stories to tell, more exciting photos” [interview, informant#14; Vancouver; July 29, 2001]. Travel was one of a number of choices available to her for the summer before she returns to university in the fall. By choosing travel she will collect lots of cultural capital that will hold her in good stead when she returns to her friends and family. Even though she still felt that she had to work during the summer, having a Working Holiday Visa allows her to both work and travel.

**Pre-trip planning**

While some backpackers make Canada or even B.C. their only destination, most international backpackers come here as part of a multi-destination itinerary. This has been made easier by the introduction of Around the World tickets, offered by the travel agencies specializing in student or youth travel. They allow a traveller, who usually has to be younger than thirty years old and has to present a student card (though many travel agencies will only accept the International Student Identity Card (ISIC)) in order to get the special tickets, to put together an itinerary with multiple flight segments at a large
discount compared to buying individual tickets for each segment. This allows a backpacker to cover multiple countries and continents during one trip. Student tickets also have a lot of flexibility compared to regular fares, often allowing changes to be made to an itinerary after the ticket has been bought and paid for without incurring extra charges. This means that a trip can be embarked on with a minimum of pre-departure organization, leaving lots of room for unplanned adventures to materialize.

Many backpackers like to coordinate as few details as possible before leaving on their trips, preferring to let things unfold as spontaneously as possible during their travels. Like anthropologists heading into the field, many backpackers imagine that trying to prearrange too much prior to arriving someplace will stifle the potential for exciting and enriching possibilities to emerge during a journey. Instead, backpackers like Nathan prefer to take care of only the bare minimum before their departure, such as arranging any necessary immunizations and buying plane tickets, hostel memberships and guide books. “I like to put everything in the hands of fate and go with the flow” [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001]. Leanne is attracted to backpacking for similar reasons. “A backpacker has more flexible plans. A backpacking trip has less structure, there is excitement in not knowing what is going to happen” [interview, informant#6; Vancouver; July 16, 2001]. Vanora meanwhile, did not “make any reservations before I left, even though I told my mother I did” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

**Picking B.C. as a destination**

B.C. is a place where you can stand dwarfed by trees that are among the tallest in Canada. It’s a place where the air is so saturated with moisture that rainbows split apart to reveal extra layers of color. Whether you’re
standing amid the grandeur of the Rockies or on the wind-swept West Coast, you will feel nature’s power here in a way you’ve probably never experienced it before. And there are endless opportunities to enjoy it, from short strolls through ancient forests to multi-day backpack treks, from an afternoon in a sea kayak to a week paddling around far-flung archipelagos. As you might expect, the people drawn to and nurtured by such a place are intensely attuned to the natural world. – Introduction to Lonely Planet British Columbia (Fanselow and Miller, 2001: 13).

Many Canadians like Jacques, age 25 from Quebec spend a summer backpacking in their own country. Jacques considers himself a seasoned traveller, having previously done excursions to Europe and Latin America and he came to the west coast on a five-week trip, “keeping it cool, just out to enjoy life.” He planned on returning to being a full time student and working as a security guard in the fall. He met a lot of fellow Quebecers during his trip. “Vancouver is like the American dream to Quebecers. The Pacific coast.” The attraction is “the mountains, the paysage, the sports that are possible here, hiking, bicycling, water sports, skiing” [interview, informant#15; Vancouver; July 30, 2001]. Having enjoyed the backpacking style of travel on foreign trips, it is the natural choice for a domestic one. For travellers who have already backpacked other parts of the world, travelling their own country can be a nice change, especially if the time and money they have available for travel feels overly constrained.

The attraction to B.C. and Canada for international visitors is largely the same as it is for domestic ones. Bert is 23 years old, from Germany. “I’ve never been to Canada before, but it’s long been a favourite country.” He knew about Canada from, “friends who had been here, TV, books, I’d seen pictures of the Great Lakes and the mountains, I’m really interested in the nature” [interview, informant#13; Vancouver; July 25, 2001]. Images and ideas about B.C. and Canada have shaped travellers’ impressions about what to expect before they arrive here. Of course, there is more to the cultural worldviews of
backpackers and the mindscapes they carry with them on their travels than what has been distilled from the media.

Rudolph, Trent and their two other travelling companions are Christians. Their desire to experience the nature of B.C. is connected to their religious outlooks. Trent wants to experience the power of God. "I want to get close to my faith. Only when you are in nature, are you close to God." Rudolph looks forward to his group’s camping expeditions to Clearwater Lake and the West Coast Trail. "I want to experience how God is working on nature and how God is working on the group. I need to clear my thoughts about life and about relationships" [interview, informants#21&20; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. He is also hoping that he will be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a bear along the way.

Aileen and Liam’s trip started in Toronto, where they stayed for two months, before taking a month-long drive through the United States to Seattle with a car arranged through a drive-away program. From Seattle they took a bus to Vancouver, the starting point for three weeks in B.C.. They plan to fly from Vancouver to continental Europe, where they can take advantage of their E.U. passports to spend six months travelling and working. Liam wanted to come to B.C. because:

... Vancouver, all the sports, skiing, rock climbing, you know the whole western seaboard Rockies and all that man, it’s just outdoor cool, you know, snowboarding ... well I’d been to Canada once before but I’d only been to Toronto and I knew there was a whole bigger scene going on over here and I heard and I knew guys who were going to graduate from college and were going to move over here. Other than that, I hadn’t hear all that much, well I’d read snippets in the papers like you know about crazy guys who get drunk and shoot one another and stuff like that but I knew it was really cool over here, lots of skiing and winter sports and stuff like that [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].
Vanora started her trip in Thailand. Her itinerary included Thailand for two weeks, two weeks in Australia, then two more in New Zealand and one week each in the United States and Canada. Having already done some travelling on her own in the past, "Thailand looked like an adventure, some place really challenging. I thought about going to Malaysia and other parts of Asia as well but my mother and my own sense suggested that other destinations might be more sensible. Thailand looked like it was going to be challenging enough, so other easier destinations made more sense" [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. She thought Thailand would contrast nicely with Australia, the United States and Canada, which she figured would be more set up for travelling and be easier to make her way through on her own. Nathan is also on a multi-country trip that has included stops in New Zealand, Easter Island, Chile, Brazil and Peru before arriving in Vancouver to start travelling through B.C. and Alberta [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001].

Elizabeth, age 20, from Australia is one of those rare international backpackers who will spend their whole trip in Canada. Elizabeth is spending ten months travelling and working in B.C. and Western Canada. She visited Canada before, as a member of a marching band that participated in the Calgary Stampede when she was 13 and she "absolutely loved it here." When she had the desire to travel as a young adult, Canada seemed like a natural choice, "Canada is similar to Australia, I didn’t want to go to the U.K. or the U.S. and I wanted to spend a season in a ski field." She spent from November to mid February in Fernie, a town nestled in the shadows of the Rocky Mountains and indulged in the great skiing and snowboarding. She worked as a housekeeper, doing laundry at a hotel. She spent her last five months in Vancouver doing odd jobs (handing
Steven, age 25 from New Zealand is also attracted to Canada in part because of its similarities to home. "Coming to Canada has been a dream for about five years. I wanted to travel. Australia is too close, I know some people in Canada and the place is green, like home" [interview, informant#18; Vancouver; August 6, 2001]. Canada is different, but not too different and B.C. has incredible landscapes to explore and offers great activities to enjoy.

Finding the "other" in B.C.

Because researchers have focused on backpackers who visit developing or "Third World" countries, it is easy to conceptualize backpackers as Desforges (1998) does, as Westerners in pursuit of Said’s (1978) exotic "Other." While the potential for experiencing otherness is one of the attractions of backpacking, its pursuit is not so straightforward and the other is not objectively fixed and bounded. Finding and identifying the other depends on the person doing the observing, what they are able to see and what counts for them as markers of otherness.

Esther decided to come to North American for her backpacking trip because she wanted to do something different from "typical" Israeli backpackers. "Most Israelis go to South America to go hiking and other things or to the Far East like Thailand to find themselves ... Israelis who go to Latin America either start or end their trip at Carnival in Brazil. Carnival is full of Israelis. This is why I came here, I didn’t want to be surrounded by other Israelis" [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001]. From her vantage point inside the flow of Israeli backpackers, experiencing otherness is
easier in Canada and the United States, countries that are more likely to be culturally similar to Israel but where she feels she will be more able to escape the company of her fellow Israelis, unlike in Brazil.

Otherness is also often a matter of degrees rather than hard distinctions. When travelling, backpackers regularly meet people from all over the world that they never would have met in their home communities. Some of the people turn out to be very similar to themselves and some really different, with a whole range of people in between. A backpacker has encounters with different people who can inspire them to reflect on who they are and on the similarities and differences between themselves and the people they are meeting. Depending on the kind of relations that a backpacker fosters with the people they meet, travel can engender a feeling of connection with some people while simultaneously engendering a sense of disconnection from others. Backpackers’ imagined worlds are changing and expanding through their travel experiences and the people they meet.

Trans-national communities of sentiment take shape as backpackers’ sense of communion stretches across national boundaries. Many travellers are in search of others who are a lot like themselves. Nathan chose to come to Canada in part because “I heard Canadians and Australians are quite similar” [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001]. He is curious to visit a place so far away from home and yet is so similar to Australia. He wants to connect with his cultural cousins and learn about what makes them so similar and about what makes them different.
Are backpackers tourists?

Esther is one of only a handful of the backpackers that I interviewed, who echo the sentiments expressed by budget travellers in Riley’s (1988) study, that concluded, “100% of long-term travellers reject the tourist label” (322). When asked if she is a tourist, Esther replied:

For sure not. Sure, we go to some of the same places tourists do, but only because they are nice places to be. We are not doing many touristy things. Well, we do some touristy things because they are fun but we are more independent, we do not use guides, we do things for ourselves [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001].

After reading the academic literature on backpackers, it surprised me to find that while most backpackers are loathe to imagine themselves as tourists, they recognize their involvement in tourism and like Vanora, acknowledge their roles as a kind of tourist. “I don’t think of myself as a tourist, but I am. You get above your station when backpacking, you say I’m not on holiday, I’m travelling, but when you get down to it, you are a tourist” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

The way Jennifer, age 29 from Australia figures it is that “all backpackers are tourists, because we are travelling around and looking. Backpackers are living a temporary lifestyle that is short lived. We will all go back to another routine” [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001]. However, regardless of whether they can see themselves as tourists or not, almost all of the backpackers I interviewed, like Bob, age 21 from Australia, prefer to think of themselves simply as backpackers or travellers. “A traveller is discovering himself, not just the places being visited. A traveller is exploring, being a tourist is expensive” [conversation, informant#2; Vancouver; July 2, 2001]. The
day-to-day experience of backpacking feels financially constrained, while tourists are seen to travel in luxury.

Meanwhile, even though they are admittedly part of the tourism industry, people working for backpacker businesses in B.C. find it important to distinguish between the customers they serve and tourists. Charlie, who works at a hostel, is very adamant about his loathing of tourists. “Occasionally we get tourists here. I fucking hate tourists.” Charlie thinks of tourists as very shallow people who have no appreciation for the places and people they visit. “Tourists take pictures while travellers take memories. A traveller is doing more that just seeing a place, they are experiencing it” [conversation, informant#31; Whistler; August 27, 2001]. In a similar vein, Chris, who is also a hostel employee and has done extensive travelling around the world of his own, thinks that “tourists experience travel like a television show, they have surface experiences.” They do not reflect much on what they are doing or why and so do not get much out of their travels. In contrast, “backpackers are seekers, they are travelling to enrich their lives and are engaged in personal transformation. Backpackers are involved in ritual. They are trying different routes before deciding how to take on adult responsibilities” [interview, informant#3; Vancouver; July 7, 2001].

“Tourists are more motivated by entertainment” according to Matthew, while most of his customers are likely to be “more interested in experiences, cultures, people and the places that they visit than are tourists” [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; July 6, 2001]. All of these workers and business operators make their living and get job satisfaction by facilitating meaningful travel experiences and they imagine that a meaningful experience is necessarily an anti-touristic one.
Trent contrasts his style of travel with that of other German tourists. "I do not want to be like most Germans on holiday, rich, powerful and who thinks everyone can see what he wants in his eyes" [interview, informant#21; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

Like the workers who serve them, backpackers who recognize themselves as a kind of tourist still think of themselves in contrast to the stereotypical image of what a tourist is. As a result, places, attractions, products or services that are perceived to be too "touristy" are shunned. Backpackers see themselves as independent travellers, making their own decisions and choices about where to go, what to do, where to stay and who to talk to. They feel that they are not using money to insulate themselves from the places they visit and that they are shouldering the responsibilities of organizing their own trips and looking after their own well-being.

Leanne sees a difference between backpackers and other tourists. "A backpacking trip has less structure, there is excitement in not knowing what is going to happen. We are more interested in meeting each other and other people. We want to learn and share" [interview, informant#6; Vancouver; July 16, 2001]. When I asked Aileen and Liam whether there is a difference between backpackers and tourists, Liam's perspective was similar to Leanne's, while Aileen was not so sure whether there is a difference:

Liam: Yes there is a difference, we are backpackers more than tourists I think. A tourist will go somewhere, like a prearranged holiday almost, whereas a backpacker will go to make their own way and find their own direction. A tourist is someone who goes somewhere on a packaged holiday or goes to somewhere just for the sake of going there, with backpackers it's different because you go there and they experience what's going on and you're more in touch with the people than if you were staying in a hotel. You know, you're not being picked up at the airport in a taxi and drove to a hotel. You get the local bus, you meet the local people, you shop in the market you do the regular mainstream stuff, you haven't got the money of a tourist. We are tourists I suppose as such really, but it's a little bit different.
Aileen: I don’t think there’s any difference, we’re visiting, we pass through like everybody else.

Liam: Yeah at the end of the day, you’re right. But, we see it from a different angle I think, no matter what you say we do see it from a different angle.

Aileen: I think you’ve got lots of different kinds of tourists, lots of different angles.

Liam: Backpacking is great because you’ve got lots of choices. You know if you’re staying in a hotel you can’t go down to the kitchen and cook yourself, you can’t make a bowl of soup or a sandwich. You don’t feel as free, there’s a great sense of freedom when you stay in youth hostels. There really is, you can go do your own washing if you want to or you can lie in bed all day if you want to, you can go on a tour, different things are available to you that you wouldn’t do if you were a tourist.

Aileen: You could do all that if you were a tourist [interview, informants#27&28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Organizing money

One thing that all backpackers have to take care of before they leave home is the getting together of their travel funds and figuring out how they will access those funds while on the road. Because of the risk of theft, backpackers do not carry all of their money with them in cash. Money can be carried as traveller’s checks but if a trip involves more than one country, there is the problem of what currency traveller checks to buy. American dollars is the norm because not all currencies are easily convertible in all places and American dollars have a reputation for being accepted everywhere. The problem for non-Americans is that value is lost when other currencies are converted into American travellers checks and value will be lost again when the American money is converted into local currencies. Instead of using traveller’s checks, a backpacker’s money can alternatively be left in their bank account or put on their credit card (credit card companies tend to offer their customers superior exchange rates) and accessed
through bank machines that allow withdrawals using foreign ATM cards, but these machines are not necessarily easy to find outside of urban areas (though this is less of a problem in Canada than elsewhere) and charge a transaction fee.

How to organize and access money are important backpacking skills. Backpackers sometimes gather and organize all their money before the trip begins, while some have their families sporadically send them money on the road and some work for a wage during their trip. Backpackers are able to think very abstractly about money in its diverse symbolic forms (cash, electronic, travellers checks and credit cards) as they deal with multiple currencies, fluctuating exchange rates and figuring out how much cash to keep on hand. Backpackers know it costs money every time they exchange currencies or use a bank machine but if they are carrying lots of cash on hand, then they are more vulnerable should they be robbed. Choosing to hold onto only a little cash at a time means incurring more service charges because they need to exchange or withdraw money more often. Backpackers also know that if they have a lot of local currency left when they leave a country, they will lose money when they convert it into a different currency and that financial institutions will not exchange coins.

Summary

A backpacking trip is undertaken to explore places that travellers are already aware of in their imaginations. They have learned about these places and what they might have to offer through their educations, their inter-personal relationships, their dealings with the tourism industry and from the media. Many people who go off backpacking also feel a need to get away from their regular lives for awhile and travel is
a culturally valued activity and a socially sanctioned escape in the home landscapes of most backpackers.

The backpacker style of travel is chosen over other styles of travel because it is presented as a way to take a trip for an extended period of time while covering lots of ground, is a style that contrasts nicely with stereotypical images of mainstream tourism and because it seems to leave open the possibility for spontaneity. Backpacking is also attractive because of the opportunities for having exciting experiences, meeting foreign people and taking time out for self-reflection. British Columbia is chosen as a destination because of the nature that exists here, the outdoor activities that are possible and because many travellers imagine that B.C. will be culturally different, but not too different, from their home locales. Most backpackers also have a wide variety of personal motives for wanting to travel and for wanting to come to B.C.

One thing all backpackers do have in common, whatever their motives for travel, is that they are in a socio-economic position to become part of a global community of travellers if they so choose. Kyle, age 27 from Australia, sums up why he and his partner are globetrotting for a year. “We’re travelling because we can” [interview, informant#32; Whistler; August 29, 2001]. Even so, many backpackers are practically broke by the time they are done travelling.
Chapter 4: Backpacker Flows in British Columbia

"I want to see the world, see Canada and go broke in the process"
– Steven, a 25-year-old backpacker from New Zealand

Backpackers who come to British Columbia create their own itineraries and cut individual paths through the landscapes they visit. The multitude of backpacker itineraries and paths are coordinated in the backpacker market and the movement of backpackers, their imaginations and their spending power are channelled through youth hostels. These movements collectively give shape to specialized fractal tourist flows.

Vancouver is B.C.'s largest city, the province's financial and cultural centre. It is a major hub on trans-national transportation, communications and commerce networks and is the port of entry into British Columbia's landscapes for most tourists, including most backpackers. Arriving in a new and unfamiliar city, even one as cosmopolitan as Vancouver, can be a disorientating and anxious experience. This experience is exacerbated for people who arrive jetlagged after a trans-continental flight covering multiple time zones or for people who arrive without any reservations or concrete plans, as is frequently the case for independent-minded travellers on a limited budget.

Arriving without plans

As we saw in the previous chapter, backpackers often prefer to not do a lot of planning before arriving at a destination. As Kyle found out however, travelling this way is becoming harder to do. "I prefer to go with the flow of things. I don't like to plan too
much. Learned in San Francisco though that you have to think a couple weeks ahead. Learned the hard way, some planning is necessary, you cannot always just go with the flow” [interview, informant#32; Whistler; August 29, 2001]. The volume of backpackers occupying the flow means that reservations are increasingly necessary, especially during the summer and lessons learned in San Francisco apply equally to Vancouver.

Backpackers on a long trip generally arrive with only a sketch in their minds of what they are doing and with rough ideas of how to accomplish the things they imagine are possible in B.C. A lot of the details are left to be figured out on the fly, such as finding out how to access the sights that are of interest, where the hiking and biking trails are, how to arrange excursions like sea kayaking, what other places might be interesting to stop and visit in between the already known major destinations, how long to stay in each place, what other activities are available and how much of the overall trip will actually be spent in B.C. Even a rough sketch may be subject to abandonment if interesting people are met and the opportunity for a more exciting, previously unimagined adventure presents itself. A hostel is an ideal place to temporarily settle down, store belongings, meet people and spend a few nights while fleshing out travel plans. Perhaps most importantly, staying at a youth hostel is relatively cheap compared to other Vancouver accommodation options, costing approximately CD$20 per night for a bunk in a dormitory or quad.

A backpacker arriving in Vancouver without reservations, hoping to easily find a hostel with a vacancy where she can relax and figure out what to do may be in for a rude awakening. Since 1997, the number of hostel beds available for travellers in Vancouver has expanded approximately 165% (to 1,520 beds) and many operators have plans to
keep expanding. Still, there are nights during the summer when every single hostel bed is occupied and backpackers who have not pre-booked will find themselves in a bind. They can splurge for accommodations that are significantly more expensive such as a motel or even a hotel or they can try their luck at sleeping in a park or trying to hide in the bus or train station.

Geoff runs a Vancouver hostel and has seen a change over time in how backpackers operate. “Ten years ago, most people did not think about making reservations and now you have to, especially in the summer. For some people this has been a problem, they seem to be put off by the need for reservations but for the most part I think backpackers have adapted and accepted this” [interview, informant#4; Vancouver; July 9, 2001]. Yet on summer evenings when his hostel is full, his staff can be kept busy phoning around to other Vancouver hostels, trying to find beds for the steady stream of “turn-aways.” Some nights, it just is not possible. Backpackers like Jennifer find this state of affairs frustrating. “Travelling in the summer is a pain because of the hassles of having to book things ahead of time. You have to plan next week and I hate that” [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001].

Backpackers in B.C. certainly use accommodations other than hostels during their travels. Backpackers I met staying at hostels reported that at times they camped, slept in public places like the beach or stayed at motels or bed and breakfasts. A few even got to sleep in the home of a B.C. resident if, for example their friends or family knew people here, or if they dropped in on a Canadian friend they met travelling elsewhere or who they met online. Some backpackers who stop to take on work for a couple of months manage to get off the backpacker circuit by finding non-touristic accommodations like a
room in a shared accommodation house. Nonetheless, hostels are still the most frequent accommodation choice made by backpackers and many backpackers who take on wage labour will continue to stay at a youth hostel for the duration of their employment, becoming “long-termers.” Other kinds of travellers also stay at hostels but hostel operators are reliant on the backpackers who make up the bulk of their business.

**Hostels as hubs on the backpacker circuit**

While backpackers may travel independently, they move over common physical terrains and through similar mindscapes (Lofgren, 1999). Backpackers cut their own unique paths through the landscapes they visit, inspired by what they carry with them in their imaginations and what they discover in the places they visit. However, as individuals make use of the same pools of accommodations, attractions and participate in the same activities, their paths overlap and their combined movements give shape to discernable flows that form dynamic and fluctuating circuits. As the volume of backpackers who make up the flows increases, the channels along which they move becomes more defined and the need for more organization of the paths that make up the flows also grows. Workers in the backpacker industry assist in the organization and coordination of individual trips by supplying much of the information that backpackers use to formulate their travel desires and plans and by controlling access to the resources (in commodified form) that backpackers come to imagine are necessary in order to attain their desires. Through the use of products and services offered by the backpacker industry, individual imaginations and trips are chaotically coordinated as backpackers organize their trips by becoming buyers in the backpacker market.
Backpackers use hostels as places to momentarily stop while they get their bearings, meet other travellers, sift through information and make decisions about what to do. Hostels make good base camps, sites from which forays into the surrounding landscape can be launched. The hostels where Andrew stays during his travels play a big role in the choices he makes about where to go and what to do. “I mostly do whatever is suggested at the hostel or from signs at the hostel or information leaflets that tell you what’s about town” [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001]. As a result, Andrew regularly finds himself directed towards other businesses.

Being able to gather information while travelling is very important to Liam:

I know I keep saying it but it’s so important, it’s so important to have information. When someone comes into town, into a youth hostel, it’s so important for those people to be able to get information about the local town ... When I get to a hostel, I usually pick up pamphlets, handouts, talk to the receptionist ‘cause there’s always information, like an information desk. You pick up information on what’s good to do, locally that’s good. You ask people [other travellers] as well, that’s how to find out what to do when I get there ... you want to get the most of each city in a minimum amount of time [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

When staying at a hostel, information about what to do can be gleaned by reading posters or notices placed on walls and bulletin boards, promotional pamphlets on display in the lobby or at the information desk, and from talking to staff and other travellers.

Private publications aimed at backpackers who are travelling through British Columbia and Western Canada, like Westcoast Backpackers News (published monthly since June 1999) are distributed in hostels and other locations where backpackers are known to congregate. These free periodicals are filled with articles and advertising that promote hostels, transportation companies, attractions, festivals and special events, outdoor activities and businesses that facilitate those activities (for example paragliding,
skydiving, skiing, surfing, and wilderness trekking) and tours for independent travellers. The companies that put out these publications generate their revenue from advertisers soliciting backpacker business and the articles and advertising generally reinforce each other. Hostels are also good places to take the time to peruse guidebooks or to get information from the Internet.

Information from the Internet not only influences a traveller’s imagination and plans before leaving home but can continue to be important during a trip. Once a traveller is on the road the information can be accessed through the coin-operated Internet kiosks that have become commonplace in youth hostels, at the Internet cafes that are found in most towns and cities or the free computers in public libraries. Printed information and promotional materials will also frequently direct people onto the Internet by including a web address.

Many backpackers are sceptical about the information they get from commercial sources and so tend to trust “word of mouth” information from other travellers much more. Travellers like Bert realize that “it’s all subjective information, especially home pages, they are trying to sell a tour so they tell you their place is the best place in Canada … once you know someone [another traveller] you can trust the information from them because you know what they like and if you will like similar things to them” [interview, informant#13; Vancouver; July 25, 2001].

Like-minded travellers can provide personal recommendations based on experience. Aileen uses the information she gets from talking to other travellers as a way to corroborate what she reads in her guidebook. “I usually do the guidebook bit. I have an idea when I get to some place of what there is to do and then we ask people in hostels,
have you been say, to the aquarium, you know, is it worth going to? We ask different people” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

As positive stories about an attraction circulate through the backpacker circuit, the attraction takes on a cachet and backpackers who have never been there start to imagine that it is a good place to visit. People working in the backpacker industry are conscious of word of mouth and the power it has over the outcome of their competition with each other for backpackers’ allegiance and spending.

Matthew knows that “word of mouth is extremely important” and his thinking about word of mouth heavily influences his business strategy:

It’s better than any marketing plan. There’s a sharing of experiences. It’s like buying a car, if you see your neighbour has a certain kind of car and he tells you how good it is, that is more valuable than what a salesman tells you … it is a goal to put people on the street who have good things to say about their experiences with us [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001].

This mindset combined with a focus on economic growth inspires hostel operators to continually up the ante in terms of the amenities they offer and to put effort and resources into shaping the social atmosphere of their hostels.

Not all hostels are created equal and some backpackers arrive to find a hovel compared to what they saw on the Internet. Toby, age 21 from the United States found that “the first hostel I stayed at [location deleted] was kind of shady with people smoking crack.” He was relieved to find a vacancy the next day at another hostel [interview, informant#30; Vancouver; August 23, 2001]. Not everyone is so lucky. At Geoff’s hostel, “this guy was staying at [name deleted, same hostel as above] and came in every morning looking to see if a bed was available, he wanted to switch so badly. After about six days, we finally found him a spot” [interview, informant#4; Vancouver; July 9, 2003].
There is a wide range of motivations behind the decisions of hostel and other business operators to run travel companies and organizations. At one end of the spectrum, a few seem to be in it simply to make a quick buck, without too much concern for what they deliver to their customers. At the other end are operators who are genuinely concerned about their customers and who try to deliver products and services that provide good value and that help them get the most out of their travels. At the same time running a business provides operators with the economic and cultural capital that they need to establish themselves in the social landscapes where they live.

For many owners, operators, managers and workers, the decision to work in the backpacker or budget travel industry is consciously made because they want to lead a meaningful and important life not dictated solely by how much money they make. Often they have travelled extensively themselves and found their experiences to be enriching. They identify with being a traveller, they like being in the company of travellers and want to help them fulfill their travel missions. This is the case for Matthew and many of the people he works with. "I really feel that our staff really appreciates our customers and tries to know them as human beings, not just because this is their job" [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001].

Being an employee in the backpacker industry often means making less money than might be made elsewhere (though there appears to be a potential for significant profits to be made by successful entrepreneurs) and a lot of the workers in the industry are recent college or university graduates who are young and enthusiastic. During the summer, their ranks swell with student employees as the volume of commerce conducted in the backpacker circuit grows as the number of backpackers who join the circuit also
grows. With plenty of positive youthful energy around, the work environments within the
backpacker industry can be lots of fun.

Even for operators and owners concerned with the well-being of their customers,
their decisions and actions are largely determined by the expansive logic of capitalism.
Success in business (and thus both the economic and cultural capital derived from
running a business) is measured in terms of the economic growth that results from
competing in a market over customer dollars and affections. If revenues go down from
year to year or even if revenues are stagnant, then a business is perceived to be
unsuccessful. This is true for hostels and other businesses in the backpacker industry.
For Matthew, “competition is a good thing because it forces us to improve. We are
friendly with some of the competition and in the end we need each other” [interview,
interview#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001]. They need one another, so they can push each
other to grow their businesses. “We are always looking to increase the number of beds”
[interview, informant#1; Vancouver; July 6, 2001].

Imagining themselves to be in competition with other companies offering similar
products and services compels operators, owners and workers to be constantly thinking of
ways to make their products and services more enticing. They work to continually
expand their businesses and organizations, to regularly create new commodified products
and services, to persistently increase their customer base and to actively try and influence
how their customers spend money while trying to make sure that their customers have a
good time. Matthew works to “put people out on the street who have good things to say
about their experiences with us” [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001].
The competing networks of hostels are trying to build their brands. The goal is to imbue a network of hostels with an identity, and to have that identity symbolized in a logo, so that a traveller will associate a specific brand of hostel with having rewarding travel experiences. The strategy is implemented in marketing campaigns, in the spatial organization of hostels themselves and in the products and services made available at hostels. It is a strategy that is effective, because for backpackers who live in landscapes awash in logos and brand names, relating to brands is a normal part of life.

The level of amenities available at hostels has been steadily increasing since the 1990s and many hostel operators try to position their businesses as attractions in and of themselves and not simply as a safe places to sleep. It is common for hostels, especially in Victoria and Vancouver, to advertise that they are located in heritage buildings or to proudly proclaim that a new hostel has been purposely built with the needs and desires of travellers in mind.

Samesun Hostel Network promotes its new Kelowna hostel by telling people in their promotional materials to “Get off in Kelowna! Our brand new custom-built hostel is right across from the beach and is loaded with every possible amenity.” The Samesun website lists the following amenities that hostel staff make available in Kelowna: “Air-conditioning, private rooms with bathrooms, entertainment areas, pool tables, BBQ area, kitchen & laundry, travel planning resources, Internet kiosks and more ... Daily activities including pub crawls, bike tours, houseboating & more!” The competing Hostelling International network now has a three-star rating system for classifying their hostels and affiliates according to amenity levels, similar to the ratings systems used by hotel chains.
A few hostels, like the ones found in Kamloops and on Salt Spring Island, have developed themes or motifs, helping to inject a little otherworldly fantasy into the sleep time of guests. HI Kamloops is in a renovated courthouse with intact judges’ benches and jury boxes where guests and staff occasionally hold mock trials. The Salt Spring Hostel offers two sleep-in tree houses and three 14-foot tepees at its Forest Retreat.

Matthew sees himself as reacting to customer demand, “we listen to the customers and respond by providing what is demanded, more amenities, nicer places to stay” [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; July 6, 2001]. Hostel staff regularly take note of what customers tell them in conversation and sometimes they ask guests to fill out customer surveys. Geoff thinks today’s hostel guests are more demanding that in previous generations, “some people who were hostelling in the ‘60s and ‘70s are still involved but lots of new young people are getting into it. Today the expectation of hostels is higher than it was before” [interview, informant#4; Vancouver; July 9, 2001].

People who work for or run travel businesses have set their imaginations to thinking about how to influence the experiences of their customers. It is important that customers leave feeling good about the attractions they visit and the places they stay. Businesses attempt to eliminate unpleasantness associated with travel, so that a traveller has predominately good memories about where they visit and the companies they use. Companies and organizations in the throes of competition are continually seeking to offer increased value to their customers. As a result, they take care of more and more of the details of travel, making things easier for their customers.

Backpackers I spoke with about the increase in businesses and organizations serving backpackers were largely ambivalent about the infrastructure springing up around
them to provide for their wants. There is a tension between wanting more convenience and worrying about things getting too touristy. Many backpackers can compare what they experience in Canada and B.C. to other places they have visited. Michelle has previously been to Asia, Thailand, Indonesia, Greece, Jamaica, Israel and Australia. She thinks that in Canada, “it is easier here but there is lots of room for improvement for travellers, especially transport. Mind you, I wouldn’t want to see it too set up for travellers, if it’s too easy then what would you get out of it?” [interview, informant#23; Vancouver; August 9, 2001]. Vanora would hate for Canada to be like the east coast of Australia. “The east coast of Australia is so set up for backpacking, but it can be too much. The party, party, party is so emphasized. Not that I object to partying but it can be too much. Some hostels and bars can be in your face. It feels too much like a package holiday” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

Hostels and other businesses in the backpacker industry try and direct their customers between them. Hostel walls are filled with posters touting allied hostels in other locations (which are usually part of the same network). The web pages of companies in the backpacker industry include links to the homepages of other backpacker-related businesses. Occasionally a hostel will get a visit from representatives of other travel companies, who hold parties and information sessions for the staff to let them know about that company’s services. The aim is to influence the recommendations staff make to hostel guests. Sometimes hostel owners or their employees can make commissions for referring customers to other businesses. Even when commissions are not exchanged, alliances exist between many of the hostels, transportation companies, operators of attractions and activities, local merchants and restaurants.
While backpackers often try to seek out places and activities that are more off the beaten track and less "touristy" they are often interested in and directed towards many of British Columbia's popular tourist sites like the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology, Stanley Park, the Vancouver Aquarium, the Buchart gardens on Vancouver Island and the Whistler-Blackcomb ski resort (which offers activities year-round beyond skiing and snowboarding.) The paths that backpackers follow are largely dependent on the information that they absorb into their imaginations and a lot of that information is also used by other kinds of travellers, including mass tourists. At the same time, backpackers make use of a lot of information that is not readily accessible to other kinds of travellers or tourists, as the backpacker market has been identified as a separate niche travel market. Many businesses target only backpackers or budget travellers and others create marketing materials specifically for a backpacker audience.

What the flood of information made available by people in the tourism and travel industry does is define the range of options that travellers are aware of. As backpackers sift through the information, they go off and check out some of the places and attractions. When backpackers like a place or an attraction, positive word of mouth gets generated, inspiring others to check it out as well, generating more word of mouth until backpackers start getting upset that the place is getting overrun with other travellers and it starts to lose its cachet or develops a reputation for being "too touristy." One of the oft-noted ironic dilemmas of using of using a popular guidebook written for independent travellers like the Lonely Planet is that travellers find themselves going places that are inundated with other independent travellers.
While a backpacker charts her own path through the landscape, industry-provided information and advertising, corroborated by word of mouth, highlights paths that others have taken and encourage her to traipse across already covered territory. The motivations of people in the backpacker industry are twofold, to help travellers with their trips but also to direct the flows of money that accompanies backpackers as they spend their way through the landscape. The defining tracks that the flows of backpackers follow are carved through the landscape by the flows of information and the spending power of backpackers themselves. Guidebooks, the Internet, pamphlets, posters, other publications and staff recommendations work together and are reinforced by backpacker word of mouth to hermeneutically define the semi-permeable, ever fluctuating dynamic backpacker circuit. At the same time they help delineate the borders of backpackers' imagined travel worlds.

**Problems with reservations**

Most backpackers want to leave their trips open for spontaneous possibilities and so do not want to cement the path of their explorations too far in advance. Jennifer likes to “make on-the-minute decisions. I like talking to people and hooking up with people, taking it as it comes. The best thing about travelling is that you have no responsibilities, so you can do as you please” [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001].

Especially in the summer, the large volume of backpackers visiting British Columbia, with their desires directed towards the same places and activities, impedes the ability of individual backpackers to be spontaneous and not just with finding hostel vacancies. The quantity of backpackers and other travellers simultaneously occupying the same landscapes makes advance planning and reservations necessary if a backpacker
wants to ensure that she is able to get everything he wants to do accomplished.

Otherwise, he may find that he has to plan his trip around what other travellers are doing.

Bert really wants to do a guided whale watching and kayaking camping expedition from Quadra Island. The tour is very popular and when Bert phoned the company, he found out that the earliest he will be able to do it is in two weeks. "I would like to do the Quadra Island tour earlier but this is not possible. I might end up spending fourteen days in the region right now because I am held up. Maybe I will go to the Rockies first and then book the tour for when I return. I have to return anyway because my flight to Australia is from Los Angeles." When I ask if waiting for a tour goes against his travel philosophy, Bert replies "I'm not much interested in tours even though the Quadra Island trip is a tour. So, in a way you're right. It might be the same thing but it's not a trip that I'm capable of on my own" [interview, informant#13; Vancouver; July 25, 2001]. As the volume of independent travellers increases, so too does the need to manage their flow.

**Hostels as social hubs**

Besides the relatively lower accommodation costs, the big attraction of youth hostels is the possibility of meeting other travellers, getting to know them, trading travel stories, getting first-hand advice about where to go and what to do and finding potential travelling companions. Even a traveller like Andrew, who feels that travelling solo is an important aspect of his trip, finds himself seeking out the company and perspectives of other travellers:

I think being in hostels gives you an opportunity to meet a lot more people, learn about different people's experiences, where they'd been and even find out about countries where they'd been which you'd never been
to or even considered going to, finding out what they're like, what these people have done. You meet some interesting characters travelling around ... I have been to places where some of the hostels are fairly quiet and people don't talk or mix much, which is a bit of a let down sometimes. Being in a communal environment tends not to be in the spirit of things not to talk to people ... I've been in places where I've been maybe in a hotel for a couple of days or something, it's totally different, you're by yourself and there's not that communication factor going on. So I definitely prefer to be travelling with someone or be in an environment where you can meet people and go see things together or stuff like that or make new friends as I have done ... I like meeting up with other travellers at hostels, they might suggest what they're doing for the day and I might tag along if that's something I want to see, go see that with them [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

Travelling is a social activity, even for backpackers travelling on their own. Even a solo traveller regularly meets other travellers along the circuit, in hostels, on buses, trains and planes or on the side of the road somewhere and most solo travellers will spend at least a couple of legs of their journey in the company of companions they meet along the way. The potential for meeting and getting to know people from around the world and from different cultures is a big part of what makes staying at youth hostels attractive for many backpackers. Jennifer stays at hostels for the social atmosphere. “Great groups form, you make good friends and have a real community. There are backpackers from everywhere” [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001].

Acting as social hubs is a historical function for youth hostels. They are seemingly natural gathering places for like-minded adventurers and many hostel operators recognize this function. Matthew feels that his customers “are interested in culture and the people they meet, which is why they stay at hostels. Relationship-building occurs more at the hostel level then at say, the hotel one. The hostelling experience is about getting to know people, getting to see and know a place and generating good memories” [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001]. Most
backpackers agree. One of Jacques’s goals during his trip is “to meet lots of people from all over the world. This is the main reason I stay at hostels” [interview, informant#15; Vancouver; July 30, 2001].

Elizabeth has found during her year away that “travel is still the travelling world, it is only one aspect of the world. You meet mainly other travellers” [interview, informant#26; Vancouver; August 10, 2001]. Aileen figures that “most of the people I’m meeting are people I meet in hostels” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001] as does Kathy, age 19 from Ireland. “I’m meeting mainly other backpackers in different hostels” [interview, informant#24; Vancouver; August 9, 2001]. While many backpackers meet and even make friends with locals, all of the travellers I spoke to about who they get to know and spend time with, reported that the people they get acquainted with are mostly other travellers. As a result Nathan is finding that “my e-mail list is growing as I meet people” [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001].

Operators have identified the reputations of their hostels as good places to socialize and meet travellers to be a factor in determining who wins the competition for backpacker affections and spending. Matthew’s understanding is that “people in the youth tourism business are beginning to realize that what is important to people in hostels is the social dynamic. Good experiences are in who you meet and in discovering places” [interview, informant#1; Vancouver; June 27, 2001]. A lot of effort goes into organizing the areas of hostels where travellers can gather and hang out with one another. Social spaces frequently found in youth hostels include: common rooms with comfortable chairs and couches, big kitchens where travellers can store food and prepare meals, games rooms, television rooms, laundry rooms, Internet kiosk areas, libraries that operate as
book exchanges and lobbies. Most hostels also have message and poster boards, to help travellers communicate with one another and post notices if they are looking for travelling companions or if they are looking to buy or sell vehicles, camping equipment and other travelling accessories. Some hostels also operate on-site restaurants and bars, giving travellers a ready-made arena for partying and socializing amongst themselves.

Hostels can also offer a sense of security. Access inside is generally restricted to staff, guests and authorized visitors and hostels usually have lockers or storage areas for securing belongings, providing guests with some physical security. Hostels can also provide social and cultural security. Going off on a self-directed quest, away from home and in a distant land can be scary as well as exciting. Backpackers staying at youth hostels find themselves sleeping, cooking, eating and maintaining themselves in the company of people pursuing similar missions and experiences. Workers (or in the case of Hostelling International, local volunteers) will often organize events like pub-crawls or guided tours that bring travellers together to participate in a common activity. Backpackers staying at youth hostels share intimate quarters with people they are connected to by a common cultural purpose.

In this atmosphere many backpackers feel more emboldened than normal and will readily seek communion with strangers. Liam reflects on how he met me and another guy we spent an evening with:

That’s the thing about a hostel, you feel safe. Let me put it to you another way. I met you last night, first time in my life, and another guy and I never met him before either. Last night we went out for a drink, would that have happened if we hadn’t been in the hostel? I don’t think so. That’s the point, you have a sense of security when you go to a hostel, you’re all in kind of a common cause, you’re all budget, economy travellers. You know what I’m saying to you, like? You’re all travelling and you have different stories and you can tell a guy I’ve been there and
he can tell you he’s been there, we can work out what’s good, what’s bad. It’s great, it’s brilliant, it really is [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

**Relationships on the road**

Some travellers find a relief in knowing that the people they meet are judging them with fresh eyes. The people a backpacker meets during her travels will know her only by what she presents of herself during the short period of time they cross paths. During their trips, backpackers can unburden themselves of their home identities and take social chances that do not risk those identities. Jennifer describes the travelling life as she has come to see it:

You are in a different world travelling. You can be whatever you want to be. People are more accepting and will accept you even if they would not have talked to you at home. You talk to people you never would have at home. Everyone seems really cool. People don’t really care about your life story. Those that you associate with now are not the same people you would back home. When you go home, you go on, it is another part of life [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001].

Many people expressed a fear of losing the inertia of their journey. Travellers sometimes get “stuck” in one place and people who stop to work seem particularly prone to this affliction. Many hostels have guests who are de-facto residents, checked in for one month, two months or longer, unable or unmotivated to get going again (though some hostels, especially ones that are consistently full, have limits on the number of consecutive nights a guest can stay.)

For the most part, backpackers like Vanora are regularly on the move. “The longest I stay in any one place is about a week” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. Travellers are continually flowing in and out of hostels but there is still a day-to-day stability in the social mix and cultural dynamic of a hostel as travellers
continually come and go and peoples’ stays overlap with one another. Guest rosters are not overhauled every day, yet the cast of backpackers staying at a hostel is constantly in flux and a complete turnover of guests happens regularly. During two months of participant observation at one hostel, the pool of travellers I was meeting and hanging out with went through several permutations and the people present at the end of my fieldwork were almost entirely different from those that were there when I started.

However, at some point in their trips, most backpackers will find themselves in need of a break from the stress and disorder that comes from constant uprooting and moving around. As a result, they end up picking places to stop and stay for a prolonged period of time. Andrew pauses at “what I like to call chill-out places, where you’re not looking at historical buildings, you’re not running around looking at all these different places but you’re just there and you appreciate your environment or the situation you’re in or the place you’re in” [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

For most backpackers, having a good time and meeting new people are important aspects of their trips. For many this means spending time going to bars and pubs and partying with people they meet in the youth hostels. Most nights in a Vancouver hostel, especially during the summer, someone who wants to party has an easy time finding people to have fun with. Having a good time can also mean indulging in seemingly decadent activities, like spending days lying on the beach reading books or taking in a movie on a weekday afternoon. A backpacking trip after all, is still a kind of holiday, even if it involves hard work.

As a result of always being in motion, travellers are regularly moving in and out of each other’s lives and while relationships between travellers can be very intense, they
can also be very fleeting. On the road, relationships often burn hot and then flame out.

Vanora describes the nature of her travelling friendships:

Because you know you have a short period of time you make friends faster and everything happens faster. You can make best friends quickly. At first it was sad to leave people, but you get used to it. At first there was a lot of swapping e-mails but then you get more realistic about staying in touch as time goes on. I’ll probably manage to stay in touch with a few people [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

When asked about friendships and relationships with people she has met travelling, Elizabeth offers that she “read a quote somewhere that travelling relationships start in the middle and get to the end quickly. It’s true. There’s no real basis for them to get tumultuous and explode.” However, while her travelling relationships have not been tumultuous and have at times been quite rewarding, relationships without history can only go so deep, something it took her some time to figure out:

When first travelling you trust people quickly, like the girls at home but I learned you can’t trust them like people at home. Loyalties between people are not really defined. You don’t know anything about each other. There is not the trust as with people at home where you know them and you know their family. There is always a barrier because total trust is hard to find. Even if at the time you feel you know the person really well, after a bit of time, once you’re away, you realize you really don’t know them well.

Elizabeth has learned to quickly assess the people she meets, “You learn to cultivate your instincts about people from first impressions” [interview, informant#26; Vancouver; August 10, 2001].

**Learning from other travellers**

Hostels are places where travellers can trade travel stories, tips and lessons. Backpackers like Leanne, who are new to travel, can look to veterans who have been at it longer for guidance. “People who have travelled for awhile seem more knowledgeable
and more mature" [interview, informant#6; Vancouver; July 16, 2001]. Backpackers spend a lot of time when they are in each other's company – be it in a hostel, walking around a town or sitting down and having a drink – talking about their travels, about where they have been, what they have enjoyed and what they have not enjoyed. They offer each other recommendations about what is good to do and give each other tips about how to accomplish unusual and exciting experiences.

By hanging out with travellers from around the world, backpackers have the opportunity to learn about countries they have never visited, to share their own cultures and to teach each other about their homes. Liam has learned a lot about Australia during his trip to Canada from talking to Australian travellers and his interest in visiting Australia has been piqued:

It has been a great trip, we’ve learned quite a lot from it. Even if you think you haven’t learned, you have learned because you’ve met all kinds of people. It also gives you a good insight about what other countries are like. We’ve stayed in a lot of hostels and we’ve met a lot of people from Australia, just to pick one particular country. During most of our trip we’ve met people from all different parts of Australia and they had all different opinions about their own country and where was good and where’s expensive. Like Sydney, we know is a bit expensive and a rat race and everybody goes there because it’s big and corporate and all that and other parts of Australia are more laid back [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Sally, age 22, from Australia carries a jar of Vegemite with her, a distinctly Australian delicacy that she likes to persuade people she meets to try. Most non-Australians are apparently reluctant as yeast spread is not instinctively attractive to them and they cannot really relate to the affection that Sally has for the stuff. She also finds herself dispelling stereotypes other travellers have about Australians, “people always comment on g’day and Fosters [beer] and I have to tell them, no one says it, no one drinks it” [interview, informant#7; Vancouver; July 17, 2001]. Nathan (who is also from
Australia) has come to decide that, "Steve Irwin [the Crocodile Hunter] is giving Australians a bad name. He is an embarrassment." Nathan finds that travellers who have watched Crocodile Hunter on television have a warped impression of Nathan's home [interview, informant#8; Vancouver; July 17, 2001].

Similarly, Aileen finds that some people she meets travelling have:

... strange ideas about Ireland. We met this one guy from California, he was a teacher, he asked about the constitution, 'do you have a constitution in Ireland?' It's weird, these are educated people we've met. He was a teacher, he could speak Spanish and English, he didn't know anything about Ireland. He thought we were still under British rule, I couldn't believe it. It's interesting in a way because it makes you realize really we're very insignificant [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

When backpackers meet each other, they usually quickly establish what everyone's name is, what country everybody is from and social groups form around common languages but not so much around common ethnicities. In B.C. hostels, English is the dominant language and a lot of travellers come from countries that are former British colonies. They find themselves in contact with people who turn out to be culturally similar to them at the same time as they are culturally distinct. Exploring these similarities and differences is often the spark that gives rise to travelling relationships. People from non-Western countries where English is not the primary language, but who speak English at least semi-fluently will often hang out with groups of English speakers. However those who do not speak English (for example, Spanish, German or Japanese) will tend to stick with other travellers who speak the same language.

Since backpackers are all part of the consumerist lifestyle culture emanating from the core of the world system, it is not surprising that backpackers spend a lot of time talking with each other about this central facet of their lives. For example, travellers
frequently engage in discussions about the films and television shows they watch (sometimes this includes talking about the commercials), the music they listen to and the books they read. Other popular topics of conversation include the different kinds of beer found throughout the world and the different ways that it is served in different places, the differences between restaurants like McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken in different countries (beer is served at fast food restaurants in parts of Europe) and what brand names (Stella Artois, Coke, the GAP, etc.) are available where.

Some people develop a hyper-awareness of their national identities while travelling. At the same time as people are intrigued and enriched by meeting culturally similar people, some backpackers find it upsetting when people incorrectly guess their country of origin. This is especially true when a backpacker's national identity includes a fear and resistance of cultural assimilation. It can be frustrating for many Canadians to be mistaken for Americans, for New Zealanders to be mistaken for Australians and for Irish, Scottish or Welsh people to be mistaken for English. Laird, age 22 from Scotland and a long-termer staying in Vancouver while he works for a few months in an architect’s office (he is carrying a Working Holiday Visa), has taken to putting up a Scottish flag in his dorm, “I’m tired of being mistaken for a pom [slang for English]” [conversation, informant#22; Vancouver; August 8, 2001].

Meeting people from the same country

While most backpackers seek out people of different cultures, cultural security is often found in the companionship of travellers from one’s own country. Vanora finds that “there is a comfort in hearing the Scottish accent” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. To someone immersed in a travel world, it can seem like
Canada and British Columbia is overrun by backpackers. On a sunny July day when I am sitting by the beach and talking with a group of backpackers, Bill jokingly remarks that "half of Australia and New Zealand are here," as Jennifer who is sitting beside him nods her head in agreement and Roger adds, "so is half the U.K." [conversation, informants# 12,11&10; Vancouver; July 23, 2001].

Backpackers, even if they prefer to hang out with people of different nationalities, find themselves meeting compatriots and enjoying the coincidence. Erica "met some Brits outside a Safeway who live only an hour away from me. I don't like hanging out with people from the UK but it's neat to meet people halfway around the world who are from the same city" [interview, informant#14; Vancouver; July 29, 2001]. Backpackers keep running into other travellers as the nature of their trips have them covering similar ground and the familiarity makes the world seem like a small place.

Some backpackers purposely seek out people from their own parts of the world. Brigit, age 24 from Denmark has sewn a flag from her home country onto her backpack, as many backpackers do. She figures that "Scandinavians have the flags so we can identify each other." She likes to compare the countries she is visiting on her trip (Canada and the United States) to home. "Being away from Denmark makes me feel good about being from there" [conversation, informant#9; Vancouver; July 20, 2001].

Getting off the circuit and meeting locals

An attraction of travel for many backpackers is the opportunity to meet "locals," people who actually live in the places they visit. There is a strong interest among foreign backpackers in meeting and getting to know Canadians. However, the everyday world of most British Columbians does not overlap with the travel worlds of visiting backpackers
unless they work for enterprises that serve the backpacker market. Still, one of the advantages of travelling in Canada, rather than in say, Thailand, is that there are likely to be Canadian backpackers staying at youth hostels. This way, foreign backpackers come to find friends and companions among travelling Canadians. The landscapes of their travelling world become more genuinely Canadian as they culturally experience Canada in part through these relationships. However, the Canadians met in hostels are not really locals as they too are visiting travellers and may actually be from far away. Vancouver youth hostels have a lot of guests from Quebec and Ontario but some have rules against letting people who live in Vancouver check-in. The world as experienced through hostel-based travel is still a travelling world.

Some backpackers, like Roger, come to Vancouver or British Columbia with referrals; a friend or family member has arranged for them to call on someone they know. This gives them an entrée, allowing them to bridge more local landscapes into the mosaic of their travelling world. “I came to Vancouver on my sister’s recommendation, she has friends here who she stayed with last year. I met my sister’s friends and so I met tons of local people and I have a local girlfriend now” [interview, informant#10; Vancouver; July 28, 2001]. He also continues to spend many nights at a hostel and continues to hang out with other travellers and goes off on excursions with them to other parts of BC and Western Canada. Complete immersion in the social worlds of the locals that Roger knows is not possible because of the difference in the nature and purpose of their existences in British Columbia.

Most relationships between backpackers and local residents are configured around commercial transactions. Backpackers are regularly introduced to workers at hostels, at
sites and attractions or in stores, bars and restaurants. Since many of the workers who work in the backpacker industry do so because they like travellers, they can be quite happy to chat with their customers and engage in reciprocal cultural sharing. Workers in places like bars and restaurants are sometimes intrigued by foreigners who frequent their establishments and so will shower them with attention that they do not normally give to other patrons. However, most of these relationships still happen in the travelling world, within the confines of travel and tourism institutions. When I ask Andrew if he got to know many locals during his travels, he replied:

Not get to know them very much, but say if they’re at a bar, or people working at a bar or maybe a shop or something, they might recognize you or say hello to you each time, or you might get a bit of a conversation going with them and they get a bit friendly since you’re a traveller and they know that and you’re visiting their city and they like the idea of entertaining you a bit more maybe. I met this woman in Vegas, she was actually working at a shop at the Stratosphere, I went and bought a shirt there. I got to speaking with her and went out the next night with her and her boyfriend for a few clnnks [drunk] [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

Since backpackers go out to clubs, beaches, theatres and other public places where locals also go, outgoing travellers are sometimes able to approach people and spontaneously strike up conversations. Liam has devised a strategy to make this easier. He reads local newspapers, because “if you go into a bar, you want to know what’s going on because you can’t get into conversation if you don’t know what’s going on around you. You can, but you look stupid, you feel stupid” [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001]. Not all backpackers are as extroverted as Liam is or are as able to overcome their inhibitions.

In time, it becomes apparent to many backpackers as it did to Jennifer, that to really get to know Canadians on their own turf and in their everyday lives, they have to
get off of the backpacker circuit. “You really need an apartment and a job to meet locals. You meet those you have something in common with. You meet travellers because you are travelling. Locals are in their own routines and do not have much to do with you” [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001].

Getting a job seems like a ready-made way to get into local landscapes and meet residents and possessing a Working Holiday Visa does make this easier to some degree. However, because the main purpose for most WHV holders is to travel, with work a secondary focus taken on primarily to augment travel funds, a traveller’s commitment to an employer is usually quite tenuous. Since there is no shortage of casual labour in B.C., many employers shun traveller employees. This is not the case with many tourism operators, who have become adept at making use of the WHV labour pool.

A lot of businesses, including hostels (typically for cleaning or front desk staff) will purposely hire backpackers on a short-term basis. By working in the industry that serves them, backpackers can make some travel money without leaving the circuit. For businesses, the monetary cost of wages can be reduced by offering other benefits that backpackers need in lieu of pay, such as accommodations. Working on the circuit also means that backpackers still get to be around other travellers while they work.

Whistler is a world-renowned ski resort town and an extremely popular destination with all kinds of tourists including backpackers. Lots of backpackers on WHVs find work at the ski lifts, hotels, restaurants and shops in town. *Lonely Planet British Columbia* even includes tips for finding work at the Whistler-Blackcomb resorts (Fanselow and Miller, 2001). One of the reasons Terry, age 25 from Australia, came to Canada was to get temporary work in Whistler in order to fund his travels. “I heard from
other Australians that Canada is good and that 80% of workers at Whistler are Australian” [conversation, informant#5; Vancouver; July 11, 2001]. While the proportion of Australians is probably an exaggeration, travellers to Whistler are hired en masse and live in their own enclaves. Backpackers who get work in the tourism industry and continue to live with other travellers stay rooted in a travelling world.

A minority stream of backpackers manages to get away from circuits with flows that consist mainly of other travellers. These backpackers temporarily settle down and find accommodations away from youth hostels and other gathering places, often trying to make use of shared accommodation housing with local college or university students. They also try to get hired in workplaces that do not regularly make use of WHV labour. This can mean convincing reluctant employers that they will be serious about a job and not treat it as a vacation activity. With a mailing address, phone number and social insurance number, a few backpackers with working holiday visas can temporarily become quasi-residents.

Still, as long as backpackers continue to imagine that some day in the foreseeable future they will move on, conversion into a local is never complete. They continue to inhabit a travelling world but as the trajectory of their paths diverge into landscapes populated by residents of B.C., the imagined worlds of these backpackers become more closely connected to the imagined worlds of some B.C. residents. When backpacker-workers leave their jobs and return to the travel and hostel networks with their stories, these temporary resident workers become conduits for inside information about local life. They become intermediaries between the landscapes where they temporarily lived and worked and the landscapes of the backpacker circuit. The first-hand information they
convey to other travellers influences their experiences and impressions that other travellers have of B.C. as well.

**Staying in touch with home**

Before the 1990s, the ability of a budget traveller to remain in contact with people over large geographic distances was restricted by the limits of postcards, letters and the occasional, usually very expensive, long-distance phone call. Today, with access to e-mail, the Internet, and a myriad of competing long-distance phone services marketed at travellers (including the Lonely Planet's eKeno), backpackers do not need to become disconnected from their home landscapes or stop participating in their home relationships and social networks. Friends and family spread around the world can now actively participate in a backpacker's trip and continue to be part of their imagined world. In turn, backpackers can be virtual participants in faraway social dramas.

Having the ability to stay in touch is a welcome situation for many backpackers like Vanora. “I do not like to be out of touch with what’s going on in the UK, so I ask my parents when I phone them about what is going on. I’ve been e-mailing people at home and staying on top of things that way” [interview, informant#19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001]. For Liam, staying in touch with family is also important. “We’ve got brothers and sisters who are at home and we’re still quite a young family, is what I’m saying to you like, so you miss your brother or sister if you don’t see them for awhile and you’re concerned about how they’re doing” [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Others find the ability to be plugged in to home more problematic. Esther regularly exchanges e-mails with people at home but “I am running away, not just from
Israel but also from friends and family. Life is on hold for a little while. I have four months of having fun, doing what I want.” Her friends and family e-mail her if something significant happens but she has had to ask people not tell her everything that goes on, as Israel is a tumultuous country and she had her fill of grief while she was in the army. “People get shot all the time in Israel, so they don’t need to tell me just that someone was shot, unless of course it’s someone I know” [interview, informant#16; Vancouver; August 1, 2001].

E-mail is becoming the most prevalent way that backpackers communicate with people who are not accompanying them on their trip. “That’s the big thing, letter writing’s out the window because e-mail’s so convenient and so fast,” Liam told me. Aileen finds that “we probably use the Internet about twice a week, maybe three times if we’re feeling kind of lonely” [interview, informants#27&28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001]. Kyle’s use of the Internet and e-mail is limited mainly by time and cost. “There’s never enough time for e-mail. We try and use only free Internet access like in public libraries. It can be too expensive otherwise” [interview, informant#32; Whistler, August 29, 2001].

The use of Internet services while travelling can add significant expenses to the budget of a backpacking trip. Coin-operated Internet kiosks have become very common amenities found in Canadian hostels and are widely used by backpackers. The cost of using these kiosks is usually around $1 for ten minutes ($6 an hour). Writing e-mails to lots of different friends can easily cost a traveller a couple of hours a session. In order to minimize the time and money spent on e-mail, many backpackers have taken to sending bulk e-mails, sending the same travel report to multiple recipients. Many backpackers try
to find less expensive ways of using the Internet, either by finding cheaper Internet cafés or by making use of public institutions like libraries that offer free Internet access, though these alternatives are generally restricted to major urban centres like Vancouver. Andrew explains his use of the Internet use while travelling:

I use MSN messenger, I’ve used that a couple of times to speak to my parents back home, it’s a cheap phone call or to friends that happen to be online at the time, and if I go to an Internet café and they have ICQs on there, I load that up just in case anyone back home’s on but basically [the Internet is] just to check the e-mails and send out a little travel report to people and tell ‘em what I’m doing, where I am and what I’m seeing and where I’m heading next. Everyone gets the same one but the boys [adult male friends] might get an extra one [interview, informant #29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001].

Besides e-mail, some backpackers will make use of ICQ, MSN messenger or other Internet chat services in order to “talk” with people online. One of the hostels I did research at had a web cam and I once saw a backpacker holding up a sign and putting on a show for an audience located far away. How people communicate while backpacking has significantly changed since the early 1990s and the Internet is at the forefront of this. People use it to gather information and to stay in touch, both with people back home and with those they meet during their travels. The Internet allows backpackers to go away without completely leaving and allows friends and family to participate vicariously in travel without going away.

Getting around

Backpackers necessarily make extensive use of overland transportation networks. Regularly scheduled buses and trains are frequently made use of and backpackers can often get student or youth fare discounts or make use of special promotional passes for longer term travel. Some backpackers will rent a vehicle for stretches of their trips,
though this can be expensive and there are age restrictions on who can rent (in B.C., the minimum age to rent is usually 21 or 25, depending on the agency.) Becoming a driver for a drive-away service (which arrange for vehicles to be delivered between cities, usually over long distances) is a cheaper alternative but one that imposes additional route and time restrictions. Buying a used vehicle can be an attractive transportation option, one that represents the ultimate in travel freedom and flexibility but one that also entails making a large financial outlay and the taking on of maintenance and insurance expenses. However, a backpacker can usually sell his vehicle to another traveller once he is done with it, recouping some of his costs.

An increasingly popular way of getting around backpacker circuits is the use of special backpacker buses. The success of services like Kiwi-Experience and Oz-Experience in the backpacking meccas of New Zealand and Australia has inspired operators in other backpacker markets like Canada to start similar services. The Moose Travel Network, which in 2001 merged with its competitor Bigfoot, runs buses along a circuit of western Canada, connecting Vancouver, Whistler, Kamloops, Valemount, Jasper, Lake Louise, Banff, Revelstoke, Vernon, Kelowna and Penticton. According to the company's promotional pamphlets,

Moose Travel Network was created to give independent travellers, and backpackers an alternative way of exploring, experiencing and seeing Canada ... We pick our passengers up and drop them off right at the door of their accommodation choice. They don't waste time at bus stations and train stations trying to find their accommodation ... Passengers have the opportunity to meet and travel with other independent travellers and backpackers ... Unlike other services our network is designed by backpackers for backpackers. In other words we take them off "the beaten path". We take passengers places and show them things they wouldn't ordinarily get to see or experience ... We negotiate deals on attractions and activities for passengers in order to help them save money and travel longer ... We believe it is important for passengers to obtain a truly
Canadian perspective while in Canada. Therefore, it is our philosophy that only drivers and guides native to Canada are qualified enough to help them explore and experience it (Moose Travel Network, 2001).

The Moose Travel Network logo incorporates a maple leaf alongside the company name and features a cartoon drawing of a small bus with a moose hanging out the front windshield as if it was the driver, with a multi-coloured series of smiling faces (three female and three male) protruding out the side windows. The character occupying the back of the bus is also holding a hockey stick out his window. The logo capitalizes on popular stereotypes of Canada and the advertising copy assures travellers that by using the bus service they will be getting a “truly Canadian perspective.” It repeatedly emphasizes how the customers who contract the company to facilitate their journeying, are independent travellers who “get off the beaten path.” This promotional material also informs potential customers that they “should be adventurous, independent, backpacker-orientated, and familiar with youth hostels.” This is a clear example of a business in the backpacker industry creating commodities whose use helps travellers fashion their travel experiences. Through the use of marketing techniques, the commodities are imbued with sign-values designed to help backpackers symbolically understand themselves as independent travellers who unlike regular tourists, penetrate deep into Canadian culture. Known as “Mooserun” among backpackers, the buses have become so popular that during July 2001, backpackers who decided they were interested in travelling by Moose but who had not pre-booked before arriving in B.C., found that the passes were sold out for the next month.

Using a backpacker bus provides a traveller with instant travel companions and a driver who may not be a stereotypical tour guide but who is nonetheless a travel
facilitator employed in the tourism industry. In the hostels where I did my research, people travelling on the same bus (and who were going to the same places, spending lots of time with each other and sharing many of the same experiences) tended to keep each other’s company off the bus as well, forming noticeable, though not necessarily exclusionary groups in the hostels.

The company’s West Pass provides its customers with jump-on, jump-off service, meaning passengers can stay with the same bus for the whole excursion and do a quick 10-day tour of the circuit or they can stopover anywhere along the route, make side-trips and extend their tour as long as like (passes are valid from May to October.) The company is allied with many of the hostels and other businesses running attractions or activities along the traversed circuit. Drivers provide hostel-to-hostel transport and take care of booking their passengers into youth hostels along the circuit, negating the need for travellers to make their own reservations. Many hostels also provide special activities just for their Mooserun guests. At places where the buses stop, passengers are directed towards allied commercial operators (who might offer, for example, white-water rafting, sea kayaking, bungy jumping or horseback riding.) While passengers are also provided with low or no-cost options and are free to plan their own activities independently of those offered through their driver, services like the ones offered by backpacker buses and their drivers, help to direct the flow of backpackers travelling through the landscapes of Western Canada and frames passengers’ imagining of what those landscapes have to offer.
Money

Elizabeth, like most backpackers, finds money to be a powerful determinant of her trip. "I'm always broke, so what to do is dictated by money" [interview, informant#26; Vancouver; August 10, 2001]. Money has a powerful hold on travelling imaginations. Spending money is something that backpackers absolutely have to do in order to pursue their travel desires and sustain themselves while on the road. Backpackers thinking about money colours they imagine the possibilities of their trips. Money is a regular source of anxiety and a frequent topic of conversation.

When I ask backpackers if there are things they do not like about travelling, they often tell me about how they feel restricted by money. Erica finds that "I always have money on the back of my mind" [interview, informant#14; Vancouver; July 29, 2001]. Jennifer figures that "the main problem for backpackers is running out of money. This is the main reason most people go home" [interview, informant#11; Vancouver; July 24, 2001]. Money is also prominent in Aileen's reflections on what backpacking means for her:

Freedom. I know it's a real cliché to say that but that's what it is, it's no responsibility. Freedom and then money in that priority, like that's what's on my mind when I'm travelling. Having little money, having to watch what you're spending all the time in order to achieve, maybe it isn't really freedom you know? It's freedom at a price, freedom from some things, but not from others [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Even though money is a central feature of their lives back home as well, when backpackers travel they spend it more often and in different ways than they are used to. As a result, they are more immediately conscious of it. When travelling, accommodations are generally paid for one, two or three nights at a time. Backpackers
are constantly on the move and so are regularly paying out for transportation. While store-bought food is regularly prepared in the communal hostel kitchens, groceries are not bought in bulk and most backpackers still eat out more often while travelling than they are used to at home, making food purchases events that happen multiple times a day. On top of all these expenses, which must be paid just to make travel possible, are the costs associated with attractions and activities.

Money also looms large in the imaginations of people in the tourism industry as they try to come up with plans for continually increasing their revenue flow. Within the larger tourism industry, backpackers are losing their stereotypical image as cheap and economically insignificant travellers (Scheyvens, 2002). Despite the fact that backpackers try and economize during their travels, a backpacking trip can still be quite expensive and backpackers collectively direct a lot of money through the landscapes they visit. The Australian Tourism Commission (2001) reports that, “because they stay for long periods, backpackers are high-spending visitors despite relatively low average daily expenditures.” The commission found that in 2000, backpackers collectively spent AUS$1.9 billion (approximately CD$1.7 billion) during their visits to Australia and that on average, individual backpackers stayed in Australia for seventy nights and spent AUS$4,483 (approximately CD$3969) over that time, more than double the averages for all travellers visiting Australia.

Canadian governments are not similarly monitoring the economic significance of backpackers who travel here, much to the dismay of many in the backpacker industry. However, some businesses have done their own research and the results suggest backpackers here are likewise moving significant amounts of money through Canada’s
economy. What backpackers themselves report also suggests that while backpackers may be travelling on the cheap, their trips are still quite expensive. Liam calculates that “it costs a lot money for Aileen and I to travel, about [$14,000] each for 6 months” [interview, informant#27; August 15, 2001]. Rudolph and Trent figure to spend around $2,000 each during their month in Canada [interview, informants#20&21; August 7, 2001] while Andrew is spending similar amounts. In four and a half months, “I figure I’ve dropped around [$11,000]” [interview, informant#29; August 20, 2001]. (All figures adjusted into Canadian dollars.)

It is not only people in the backpacker industry that are taking notice of backpackers or are trying to attract their spending power. So are people in other tourism businesses, like ski resorts, which normally target luxury tourists who have lots of disposable income to spend in one place. Operators of ski resorts, who up until recently did not target budget travellers at all, are making alliances with businesses in the backpacker industry, in order to offer backpackers discount lift pass and equipment rental packages. Not only does this increase their immediate sales, but they realize that young backpackers are likely to have the travel bug for the rest of their lives and make travel and tourism an important part of their lifestyle. Backpackers who visit Whistler today, staying at a youth hostel while watching their pennies, will get a glimpse of the opulence indulged in by more well-heeled tourists. When they go back home, some may be inspired by their trip to pursue a lucrative career so that they can return to Whistler one day with more leisure dollars to dispense.
Transformations

Eventually backpackers return home. “I’m more independent” is a frequent response to the question, “how is travel changing you?” After months of living out of their backpacks and dealing with the chaos and uncertainty of life on the road, many backpackers end their trips feeling like they have been transformed and are returning home with more confidence. Elizabeth has toughened up. “I learned to stand up for myself. I know I can be on my own anywhere and survive” [interview, informant#26; Vancouver; August 10, 2001]. Many backpackers feel that they are better able to deal with the uncertainties, stresses and choices facing them in the new phase of life awaiting them at home. Aileen learned “a pretty important lesson, that you have to take control, you need to be more in charge, where you’re going, do it for yourself, no one else is going to do it for you” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

Tasha, age 22 from Australia is finding that her travels “make the world seem smaller. It opens your eyes to things. America, Canada and Australia have similar cultures.” Having travelled over vast distances, visiting lots of different places and meeting so many diverse people, many travellers return home feeling like they have developed a new, wider perspective on themselves and their place in the world. Tasha feels she is better able to deal with people than she was before her trip. “I’m learning how to interact with different people. I have more confidence to meet new people and get out of my comfort zone” [interview, informant#33; Whistler; August 29, 2001].

Travel also affords people plenty of time to reflect on life and what they want to do with it. One of the great things that Liam has found during his voyage is “you put things more in place and you sit back and you can look at how your life was before and
you can see where you’re making the mistakes.” As a result he has decided that, “I’m going to go back to school and get a better education” [interview, informant#27; Vancouver; August 15, 2001]. Aileen has also made important career decisions while travelling:

I’m going to change my job, not what I do professionally but I’m going to move. I normally play it safe, I’m very cautious. Before I went away I ended up being the head of the department, in a temporary position but it was a position I didn’t want and it kind of lasted a year. This trip has kind of made me realize what I do want work wise and I just decided that I’m going to change jobs and I wouldn’t have done that, I would have just stayed in the same rut if I’d stayed at home [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001].

A successful trip can put a warm and vibrant glow on the future coming over the horizon of a backpacker’s imagined world.

Travel can also be addictive. A backpacking trip can lay the foundation for a lifetime habit. Andrew is sure that “this definitely won’t be my last trip. You know, going and seeing some places, only gets you thinking about what you want to do and see next” [interview, informant#29; Vancouver; August 20, 2001]. Aileen’s trip “definitely makes me want to travel more” [interview, informant#28; Vancouver; August 15, 2001]. The only problem is the cost. As Chantelle, age 22 from Quebec puts it, “travelling makes you want to travel more but you need a lot of money” [interview, informant#17; Vancouver; August 6, 2001].

Summary

When travelling, backpackers occupy landscapes overlapping those occupied by local residents, as well as landscapes occupied by other kinds of tourists, but the imagined world and physical terrain that backpackers inhabit when they are travelling
constitutes a distinct backpacker world. Many of the landscapes that backpackers inhabit while travelling have been purposely shaped (often by people who are themselves ex-backpackers) to make them more enticing for travellers, so that they deliver the independent budget travel experiences that backpackers are seeking. Meanwhile, the relationships that backpackers have with local residents are generally configured around commercial transactions and while they often have friendly relations with locals, backpackers have their most involved relationships with their fellow travellers.

Youth hostels are key locations in the travelling worlds of backpackers, serving as crucial hubs on the circuits they traverse during their journeys. The people who operate youth hostels in B.C. know this and are applying business and marketing strategies to the development of their enterprises. They are doing so because they are aware of what has happened in backpacker markets in other parts of the world and they see this as the best way to supply what they believe the market here is demanding; because their sense of what constitutes success is connected to stimulating economic growth (for the benefit of their organizations as well as for their own personal monetary gains); and because they imagine that the best way to help backpackers accomplish their dreams is to offer them more new and improved goods and services to buy. As a result, hostels have been transformed from simple way-stations into elaborate commercial and information centres with amenity levels rivalling those found in many small hotels. Operators and workers have also made alliances with other businesses, so that backpackers who stay at youth hostels are directed towards other backpacker-related enterprises eager for their custom.

A lot of the effort that goes into designing attractions and services (as well as the accompanying promotional materials) for the backpacker market goes towards trying to
generate positive word of mouth and encouraging brand identification. Through experience and research, people working in the backpacker industry know that one of the main joys of a backpacking trip is sharing travel stories with other travellers and so they know that their commercial success (and hence their personal success) is dependent on the circulation of positive word of mouth associated with their offerings. Their aim is to have backpackers associate the use of specific brands with being independent travellers who go out and have non-touristic experiences of Canada.

Money has a powerful hold on the imaginations of backpackers, just as it does for people working in the backpacker industry. Monetary concerns are forefront in the minds of backpackers while they are on the road, guiding their decisions about where to go and what to do. Backpackers are generally travelling on tight budgets and often feel that they are always on the verge of going broke, yet their trips are not cheap. They tend to spend less money per day than other tourists, but over the course of a whole trip they can spend quite a bit more than do other kinds of travellers who travel for shorter periods of time but in greater luxury than backpackers do. Backpackers move lots of money through the Canadian economy and the infrastructure built up by the backpacker industry has been constructed in part to try and direct these monetary flows and contain them. One consequence of this however, is that the infrastructure also directs and contains the flow of backpackers themselves.

Backpackers seem a little conflicted in their thinking about how built-up the backpacker industry is getting in B.C. On the one hand, backpackers like using a lot of the products and services that are made available to them because using them makes life easier. On the other hand, a lot of backpackers do not want their travels to become too
easy, since facing the uncertainties and challenges of travel on their own is often one of the reasons for leaving home in the first place.

Most backpackers also do not want their travels to become too “touristy.” While most backpackers like the company of other like-minded travellers, the sheer volume of backpackers visiting B.C. makes reservations increasingly necessary. Many backpackers find this annoying and antithetical to their travelling philosophies. At the same time, when you find yourself surrounded by people doing a lot of the same things as you are, it makes it harder to maintain the self-understanding that you are not a tourist. As it is, a lot of backpackers have resigned themselves to the notion that they are indeed tourists, though they still insist on distinguishing themselves from those stereotypical other tourists. “I’m a tourist, but not a tour – tourist” is how Steven put it [interview, informant#18; Vancouver; August 6, 2001]. Steven and other backpackers see the trips of regular mass tourists as quite shallow and think of their own style of travel as one that is qualitatively superior, even if they are unavoidably still participating in a kind of tourism.

By most accounts, the travellers who visit B.C. using a backpacker style of travel are having a fantastic time while they are here. The backpackers that I met during my research reported that they found their trips to be deeply rewarding experiences. They were finding lots of excitement and their lives were taking a few unexpected twists and turns. Some had scares and frustrations along the way, but these rarely detracted from the overall satisfaction that backpackers had for their endeavours. No one I met told me that they were having a terrible time or that they were really eager to get home, despite occasional bouts of homesickness.
Backpackers often end up finding that it is those unexpected moments that cannot be planned, where things seem to be going wrong and they have to think on their feet, that provide them with their most rewarding travel experiences and life-lessons. Most of the backpackers that I got to know left B.C. and returned home happy and with renewed focus and motivation. They felt better prepared to tackle the educations and careers they imagined would allow them to pursue the lifestyles they crave, lifestyles that now include making travel a regular habit.
Conclusions

"Culture and personality are not so easily distinguishable ... the very definition of who the person is, is cultural" – James L. Peacock (2001)

Backpacking trips provide their participants with opportunities to cultivate their global imaginations, reflect on themselves and their place in the world and to develop as individuals through encounters with different people and places. Engaging in long self-directed journeys through foreign landscapes can also provide backpackers with important cultural skills, knowledge and experiences that will benefit them as they try to carve out a successful existence in the global economy. For social scientists, studying backpackers and backpacking trips is a good way to look at the changing nature of personhood among the people who become backpackers.

Consumerism has become a normal, culturally engrained way of life among people living in the core of the world system. This is reflected in our cultural pursuits, even pursuits that we might imagine to be non-consumerist or even anti-consumerist. This does not mean however, that backpackers are culturally homogenous or that being a consumer is all there is to being a person of the core.

I call backpackers people of the core because they live in the same economic zone of the world system. There is a lot of diversity among people of the core, whose worldviews are shaped by a myriad of national, religious, ethnic, family and other affiliations and the people who become backpackers reflect this diversity. At the same
time the core is also a cultural zone whose inhabitants are connected by trans-national communications and transportations networks. Backpackers and other people of the core share imagined worlds that are created through the consumption of many of the same cultural products (film, television shows, Internet content, etc.) and through the pursuit of similar experiences and lifestyles. However, the backpackers and people working in the backpacker industry that I met during my research tended to also be very reflexive individuals, putting a lot of thought into the decisions they make about how to live their lives.

**Focusing on the economic**

There is a danger of focusing so tightly on the economic dimensions of human existence that other very important dimensions get left in the shadows. The theoretical focus of this thesis means that a lot of backpackers’ stories about their unexpected and exciting adventures, relationships and life-lessons are being left out. This is unfortunate because it is the events spawning these kinds of stories (such as becoming intimately involved with another backpacker and having this change the whole course of a trip) that turn backpacking trips into powerful and meaningful personal experiences that generate inspirational memories. However, the decision to concentrate on how the economic dimensions of globalization are culturally entwined with the pursuits of backpackers was made because capitalist demands for never-ending wealth production and increased consumption creates pressure to make globalization and economic growth the collective projects of everyone who lives inside the world system. Meanwhile, how our individual pursuits are culturally wrapped often masks the collective nature of our projects from us,
as well as the ways that our lives – including our imagining of our life possibilities – are weaved into vast social webs.

Changes in how material resources are produced and distributed also changes the production and distribution of the symbolic resources that people use to imagine their life possibilities and so affects the ways that people are able to direct their agency. The lives that we are able to conjure up in our imaginations are connected to the ways available to us for materially pursuing them. This has implications not only for how we materially support ourselves but also for the way that we are able to culturally develop understandings of our world and who we are. “The interrelationship of culture and the economic is not … a one-way street but a continuous reciprocal interaction and feedback loop” (Jameson, 1991: xiv).

The current neo-liberal inspired restructuring of the global political economy is trying to make markets the primary social mechanism for regulating the production and distribution of all resources. In the core zone (whose occupants are material beneficiaries of globalization), growing the economy is being promoted as the best way to pursue freedom, progress and meaningful and rewarding lifestyles. For people of the core, this means a cultural focus on belonging to and developing markets (like the backpacker market for example), in the hopes that doing so will earn us the ability to construct fantastic individual existences.

**Personhood in the core**

While capitalism is not imposing a cultural homogeneity throughout the core, it is imposing what Lash and Urry (1993), following Habermas, call the poetic function of culture or what Urban (2001) refers to as metaculture, “that is, culture about culture” that
directs how culture is produced (3). As people's material lives become dependent on capitalist markets, a universalizing logic guides people's participation in the production and reproduction of culture, attempting to ensure that people's diverse existences are configured around the production and consumption of commodities. As Dean MacCannell (1976) notes in his seminal book *The Tourist*, "the commodity has become integral with culture" (21). This logic is transmitted along the communication networks of the world system:

Narratives and music in popular culture typically operate through such a poetic function. ... This poetic discourse is perhaps sinister by comparison with cognitive or moral discourse. In both of the latter people have the right to reject statements. The former however affects us on a bodily level, without us having that right of acceptance or rejection. It creates the very least mediated universals through which people from now many nations communicate. Globalized popular culture, functioning as poetic discourse, thus becomes everybody's 'elementary forms of religious life.' It imparts form to an unreflected, relatively immediate and internationalized habitus (Lash and Urry, 1994: 29).

The development of individually constructed identities is being culturally nurtured among people of the core as the information circulating along communications networks provides "a structural basis for today's reflexive individuals" (Lash and Urry, 1994: 6). The promise held out by global consumer culture is that wonderful lifestyles can be lived, it's just a matter of making the right individual choices so that we can afford the commodities necessary to realize our dreams. Success is equated with having a meaningful and rewarding consumer lifestyle, and being a successful person at the core means in large measure having to be a sophisticated consumer who is well travelled.

The world system's historical trajectory as it is currently directed, appears to be to have all human needs and wants met in the market and only in the market, from food, clothing and shelter to recreation and amusement. "In time, not only the material and
service needs but even the emotional patterns of life are channelled through the market” (Braverman, 1974: 277). As we move towards this situation, market ideology presents markets as the best way to achieve equality, freedom and widespread prosperity (Slater, 1997). We are not encouraged to see how markets are humanly constructed mechanisms of social organization and control (Jameson, 1991).

**Money, commodities and sign values**

Money is extremely important in the lives of the young people who become backpackers and in the lives of the people who cater to them. Life fantasies become wrapped up with fantasies about money and the possibilities we imagine will come to fruition when we spend money. Being a savvy and creative shopper is an essential life skill among people of the core and being a good money manager is an important aspect of what it culturally means to be an independent person. Money after all, is needed to buy the elements required for accomplishing a decent lifestyle and being a successful individual, elements whose existences are brought into awareness by media circulated images and narratives.

Sign value is an increasingly important component of the commodities produced in the post-modern economy (Lash and Urry, 1994). Sign value provides consumers with symbolic resources that they can use to put together cognitive understandings of their experiences and their lives. “What is being sold is not just the direct use of a commodity, but its symbolic significance as a particular ingredient of a cohesive lifestyle” (Lash and Urry, 1994: 656). The backpacker industry supplies travellers from the core with commodities that are emblematic of an independent style of travel. The value of these commodities comes from the quality of the experiences they promise (MacCannell,
What we fetishize when we go backpacking is the experience of being an independent traveller and in the process most of the social organization underlying our individualized styles of travel is obscured from view.

Young people of the core have been regular participants in a variety of markets for most of their lives. This participation starts in early childhood as vicarious consumers attached to their parents or guardians and increases as they get older, when they start making their own purchases. The need for money sends them into labour markets to sell their labour power, which often means being put to work serving customers or trying to attract their patronage. Many people of the core spend their work time marketing to each other, imbuing their commodities with increased sign values and conceptualizing groups of people as markets of potential customers to be served in return for their money. They direct their imaginations to the tasks of reflecting on who their customers are and what their needs and desires are, so they can craft the image portrayed by their commodities to make them resonate more deeply. However, the motives that send people of the core into markets are often much more than just economic ones.

The people who become backpackers either find or place themselves at a juncture in their lives. They feel a need to explore their world, connect with new and interesting people, have a good time and reflect on what they are doing. Those who go off backpacking live in cultural milieus where travel is largely celebrated and most backpackers find that their friends and family are quite supportive (and often envious) of their endeavours. Some people experience social pressure, exerted by friends, relatives and marketers to go travelling or feel that their lives will be incomplete if they do not go off on an extended voyage before settling down to a career and starting a family. Would-
be backpackers also live in media-saturated landscapes and their imaginations have been stimulated with images and narratives of other places, other people and other cultures and they have been targeted as potential markets for travel related products and services.

**Returning home**

Backpackers frequently find their trips to be challenging affairs as they are regularly on the move, stretching the available money to see and do as much as possible, taking care of lots of logistics and being constantly inundated with new sensations and unfamiliar scenes. Many backpackers return home after being away for an extended period of time (usually at least a month, though most go away for at least two or three months and some travel for more that two years) with a deep sense of personal satisfaction and accomplishment. Backpackers told me they had grown as people, become more independent, made great new foreign friends, learned a lot about themselves and about their world and were better equipped to tackle the future than they were before they went travelling. The experiences backpackers have while travelling influences the choices they make about what kinds of careers and lifestyles to pursue and may even make them more attractive as potential employees. Backpacking experience often looks good on a resumé as evidence of global and cross-cultural experience.

Backpackers continue to participate in the reproduction of capitalism's economistic cultural during their trips, even though they often feel materially constrained. Because backpackers travel on a tight budget that always seems to be on the verge of running out, sometimes making wage work on route a necessity, it is easy for backpackers to imagine themselves as people who are relatively poor. This is accentuated because from their positions in travelling landscapes, backpackers can
compare their style of travel with that of many of the more well-heeled tourists who frequent some of the same locations as backpackers do, like Whistler, B.C.

A desire to travel often becomes habitual and many backpackers report that they intend to keep travel as an important feature of their lifestyles and that it is an activity they hope to regularly indulge throughout the rest of their lives. A desire for more travel unavoidably translates into a desire for more money. Even if backpackers do not covet a change in their travelling style, their trips make them aware that travel is expensive and that if they do travel in the future, their travel expenses will come on top of expenses they do not yet have to be responsible for, like mortgages, car payments or children. As a result many backpackers will be inspired to pursue careers that will provide them with more access to money, allowing them to consume more, though not necessarily for the sake of consumption in and of itself.

**Tourists and tourism**

Backpackers come very close to embodying Dean MacCannell’s (1976) portrayal of “the tourist” as a modern individual searching for wholeness to their life and who is travelling in search of a more “profound appreciation of culture and society” (10). I was surprised to find that most of the backpackers I interviewed also recognized themselves as a kind of tourist. They nevertheless still shunned the stereotypical image of what it means to be a tourist and were looking to go further and do more than is possible on a regular holiday. An image of the stereotypical tourist is also prominent in the imaginations of the people working in the backpacker industry, who tend to work in the backpacker industry rather than other segments of the tourism industry because they identify with non-tourist travel and because they themselves have an aversion to stereotypical tourists. As a result,
they design their products and services to resonate with independent-minded travellers. However, because they live in capitalist societies, are participants in capitalist culture and are working in capitalist enterprises, their work is shaped by the logic of commodification and a need for economic growth and so they try to get travellers to covet and use more products and services that facilitate their travels, not less.

The cultural imperatives of capitalism compels us to constantly create new desires, to have all our needs and wants be met in the market and for all our pursuits to fuel economic growth and increase commodity production and consumption – whether we crave getting rich or if we simply crave helping young backpackers fulfill their dreams of being independent travellers while making a decent living. In order to secure an income, workers in the backpacker industry make use of marketing techniques and strategies like branding and customer surveys in order to create a host of new products and services that attract an increased flow of consumers into their landscapes. In this way, backpacker businesses operate in much the same way as do other businesses that generate their revenues by offering young consumers goods and services designed to enhance their lifestyles.

People working in the backpacker industry create gathering places for young nomads while developing a separate infrastructure that serves independent travellers. In their efforts to help backpackers get outside the "tourist bubble" sealing mass tourists off from the reality of the places they visit, workers in the backpacker industry end up institutionalizing alternative (and less garish) tourist circuits patronized by independent-minded travellers (Judd, 1999: 36).
This state of affairs is not restricted to British Columbia. As we saw in chapter four, Vanora (echoing sentiments expressed by many other travellers as well) found the backpacker circuit along the east coast of Australia to be a little too built-up for her liking. Vanora was also a little disappointed to find that Thailand (a destination she chose because she thought travelling there would be a challenge) also has a well-developed backpacker industry. “Thailand was easier than I thought it was going to be. It was really set up for backpackers, easy to get about, lots of guesthouses and easy to meet people … who were mainly other travellers” [Interview, informant# 19; Vancouver; August 7, 2001].

Popular anti-touristic discourses tend to associate being a tourist with the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, implying that what makes someone a tourist is mostly their state-of-mind. Missing from these discourses is concern with the structural aspects of what it means to be a tourist. A large part of what makes relationships with other people and experiences in other places touristic ones is that they are commodified relationships and experiences that are configured around consumption practices. People working in the backpacker industry are thus caught in one of the paradoxes of existing in a capitalist system. The ways culturally available to them for earning their living by helping young people have anti-touristic experiences involves the commodification of non-tourist travel. In the process, not only are the material resources necessary for travel commodified, but so too are the symbolic resources that backpackers use to develop their understanding of themselves and their world.
Appendix I
Research Questions

Sample A

The following questions were used as a guide for conducting interviews with backpackers:

1. Tell me about yourself?
   a. How old
   b. Where from
   c. Travelling alone or with others
   d. Do you work? Are you a student?
   e. Do you have to go home at a particular time?

2. Do you have any specific reasons for travelling? Are there any goals for this trip?

3. How long have you been travelling?

4. Where have you been so far?

5. What do you have planned for the rest of the trip?

6. What inspired you to come to B.C.?

7. How do you decide what to do?

8. How do you find out about what to do?

9. Do you like to plan far ahead?

10. Have you had any problems finding places to stay or being able to do the things you want to do?

11. Who have you been meeting?

12. Who do you spend your time with?

13. How do you meet them?

14. Where do you stay?

15. Have you made use of the Internet? Do you make use of it now?

16. What are your impressions of your travels so far?
17. What have you liked so far?

18. What have you not liked?

19. What was your favourite place?
   a. Why?
   b. Did you know anything about the place before you went there?

20. Are you learning anything on your travels?

21. Do you think travel is changing you or how you see the world?

22. What is the best thing that has happened so far?

23. What is the worst thing that has happened so far?

24. Are you a tourist?

Sample B

The following questions were used as a guide for conducting interviews with hostel workers, operators and owners.

1. What is the purpose of the youth hostel?

2. How does the hostel operate?

3. What services are offered?

4. Who are your customers?

5. Where do they come from?

6. What are they looking for?

7. Are your customers tourists?

8. How do the people who stay here decide on an itinerary?

9. Do you make recommendations to your customers about things to do and see in Vancouver and BC?

10. What do you recommend? Why?

11. Do you make any bookings for your customers?
12. Do you get commissions for making bookings or recommendations?

13. How do your customers find out about you?

14. How do you get listed in guidebooks?

15. Do you operate a web site? If yes, what do you use it for?

16. Do you take reservations? How?

17. Do you use e-mail in your business? How?

18. Have you noticed any patterns in the behaviour of different travellers?

19. Have you noticed any types or categories of travellers?

20. Do your customers socialize with each other?

21. What kind of relationships do you have with the people who stay here?

22. Do you ever get to know any of them well?

23. What do you think people get out of staying at hostels?

24. What do people get out of travelling?

25. Do you think travelling changes people's perspective of the world?
Appendix II

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Being conducted by Adrian Nieoczym - Masters of Arts Candidate
Department of Sociology/Anthropology
Simon Fraser University - Burnaby, BC
E-mail: ainieocz@sfu.ca

This sheet has been written to let you know a little about the research I am trying to conduct and what you will be getting involved with should you agree to participate. I am looking at the culture of backpacking in order to find out if backpackers should be thought of as being tourists or as different kinds of travellers, perhaps as pilgrims, adventurers or quest seekers. I am also looking to see what relationships there are between backpacking and globalization. I am doing this research to generate the data from which I will write my Masters thesis, which is a requirement for me to complete my Masters of Arts in Anthropology degree.

I am interested what perspectives backpackers have on the world, how travel experiences shape those perspectives and what kind of social networks and communities, backpackers participate in. To find out I need to look at what backpackers do, how backpackers decide what to do, how backpackers experience what they do, the kinds of information and knowledge backpackers make use of, where that information and knowledge comes from, how it is disseminated and the ways that backpackers interact with other people.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask me. If you have any concerns or complaints you can contact Ellen Gee – Chair of the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, (604) 291-3144 gee@sfu.ca or Marilyn Gates – Associate Professor and Senior Supervisor, Thesis Research Committee – (604) 291-3767 gates@sfu.ca

Thank you for you consideration,
Sincerely Yours,

Adrian Nieoczym
Appendix III

INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this research project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent permitted by law. Knowledge of your identity is not required. You will not be required to write your name or any other identifying information on the research materials. Materials will be held in a secure location and will be destroyed after the completion of the study. However, it is possible that, as a result of legal action, the researcher may be required to divulge information obtained in the course of this research to a court or other legal body.

Having been asked by Adrian Nieoczym of the Sociology/Anthropology Department of Simon Fraser University to participate in a research project, I have read the procedures specified in the document.

I understand the procedures to be used in this project and the personal risks to me in taking part.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this project at any time.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the project with the researcher named above or with Ellen Gee, Chair of the Sociology/Anthropology Department of Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, (604) 291-3144 gee@sfu.ca or Marilyn Gates – Associate Professor and Senior Supervisor, Thesis Research Committee – (604) 291-3767 gates@sfu.ca

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting:

Mickey Naisby - Graduate Program Secretary
Department of Sociology/Anthropology
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC
Phone: (604) 291-3518
I have been informed that the research material will be held confidential by the Principal Investigator.

I understand that my supervisor or employer may require me to obtain his or her permission prior to my participation in a study such as this.

I agree to participate by (please initial those options that apply):

Allowing Adrian Nieoczym to be a participant-observer in my activities 

Being Interviewed 

Being interviewed and having interview tape-recorded 

Having my picture taken 

Having pictures of me published in the finished thesis 

as described in the project information sheet, during the time period: 

in the province of British Columbia, CANADA.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time by informing Adrian Nieoczym of my desire to do so.

NAME (please type or print legibly): 

ADDRESS: 

SIGNATURE: WITNESS: 

DATE: 

ONCE SIGNED, A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND A SUBJECT FEEDBACK FORM SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO THE SUBJECT.
## Appendix IV
### Cited Interviews

| Informant#1 | Pseudonym: Matthew  
Executive in the backpacker industry |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Informant#2 | Pseudonym: Bob  
21 year-old male from Australia  
Interviewed after travelling for 1 month, planning to travel for 8 months. This was his first backpacking trip. He made his way to B.C. from Toronto. He planned to visit the U.S., England (where he hoped to find some temporary employment), continental Europe, India, Nepal and Thailand. He was taking a break after 2 years in a pharmacy program, which he planned to return to after travelling. |
| Informant#3 | Pseudonym: Chris  
Hostel employee |
| Informant#4 | Pseudonym: Geoff  
Hostel manager |
| Informant#5 | Pseudonym: Terry  
25-year-old male from Australia  
Interviewed after travelling for 2 months, planning to travel for 1 to 2 years. This was his second backpacking trip. He was travelling with a friend and came to B.C. after a month in Thailand and a week in London, England. He was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and was planning to find work at a ski resort in Whistler. |
| Informant#6 | Pseudonym: Leanne  
22-year-old female from Canada (Ontario)  
Interviewed after travelling for 3 weeks. Planning to travel for 2 month. This was her first backpacking trip. She was travelling on her own. She quit her job as a Xerox sales representative in order to travel. She was planning to return home afterwards and hoped to get a new job (or the old one if they would have her back), save some money and then travel Europe with her boyfriend until she got the travel bug out of her system. |
| Informant#7 | Pseudonym: Sally  
22-year-old female from Australia  
Interviewed after travelling for 4 weeks. She was originally planning to travel for 2 months but was considering extending her trip to 6 months. This was her second backpacking trip. She came over by herself but was constantly travelling with people she met in hostels along the way. She was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and was considering trying to find work in Whistler. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant#8</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Nathan 24-year-old male from Australia</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 6 months. Planning on travelling for 2+ years. Travelling on his own. This was his first backpacking trip. He quit his job as a chef in order to travel. He was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and had worked for three months as a chef in Lake Louise (Banff), Alberta. He planned to return to Lake Louise in the winter of 2002 after travelling Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#9</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Brigit 24-year-old female from Denmark</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for one month. Planning to travel for 2 1/2 months in the U.S. and Canada. This was her second backpacking trip. Travelling on her own. She recently graduated from university and was planning to return to Denmark and find marketing work.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#10</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Roger 18-year-old male from England</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 months. Planning to travel for 3 months. Was on his gap-year and travelling after working most of the year in England as a waiter. Travelling on his own. Was planning to start university in September 2001 to study business.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#11</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Jennifer 29-year-old female from Australia</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed on the second-last day of a 10 months long trip. This was her third backpacking trip. She travelled throughout the U.S. and Canada on this trip. She quit her job as a registered health nurse in order to travel and was planning on finding a new job in the same field when she returned home.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#12</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Bill 21-year-old male from New Zealand.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 9 months. Planning to travel for 2 years. This was his first backpacking trip. Travelling on his own. He is a carpenter by trade. He was carrying a Working Holiday Visa. Spent the whole 9 months in Canada but was planning to go to the U.S. for 3 months and then to England where he hoped to stop for a little while and find work.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#13</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Bert 23-year-old male from Germany</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 weeks. Planning to travel for 2 1/2 months. Travelling on his own. This was his second backpacking trip. He was on summer holidays from his studies to become a mechanical engineer. He planned to visit Canada, Australia and Bali.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#14</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Erica 20-year-old female from England</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 months. Planning to travel for 4 months. Travelling with another woman (Leslie) she met on the plane from England. She was a student on her summer holidays. She was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and had been working for six weeks as a housekeeper at the Lake Louise Resort in Banff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant#15</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Jacques</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant#16</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Esther</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant#17</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Chantelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant#18</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Steven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant#19</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Vanora</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant#20</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Rudolph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant#21</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Trent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informant#22</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Laird</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 months. Planning to travel for 6 months. This was his first backpacking trip. He was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and had spent the previous month working in an Architects office, the career he hoped to pursue when he returned home.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#23</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Michelle</th>
<th>36-year-old female from England.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3 months. Planning to travel for another 2 weeks. This was her sixth backpacking trip. She has spent her life working odd jobs and short-term contracts.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#24</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Kathy</th>
<th>19-year-old female from Ireland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 months. Planning to travel for 3 months. This was her first backpacking trip. She is carrying a Working Holiday Visa and worked for a month at a Pizza restaurant. She was a university student on a summer break.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#25</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Leslie</th>
<th>20-year-old female from Scotland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 2 months. Planning to travel for 4 months. Travelling with another woman (Erica) she met on the plane from England. This was her first backpacking trip. She was a student on her summer holidays. She was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and had been working for six weeks as a housekeeper at the Lake Louise Resort in Banff.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#26</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Elizabeth</th>
<th>20-year-old female from Australia</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed on the last day of a ten-month trip. This was her first backpacking trip. She was travelling on her own. She was carrying a Working Holiday Visa and spent the whole ten months in Western Canada, taking on a series of service industry jobs. She was taking a break after two years of university and was planning to return home and start her third year.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#27</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Liam</th>
<th>26-year-old male from Ireland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3 months. Planning to travel for a year. This was his first backpacking trip. He was travelling with his partner Aileen. They spent 2 months in Ontario, then got a drive-away car and spent a month driving to B.C. via the U.S. They planned to go to continental Europe in another month to travel and work for the rest of the year. He quit his job as a plumber in order to travel. He was planning to go to school and then start his own plumbing business after returning home.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#28</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Aileen</th>
<th>27-year-old female from Ireland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3 months. Planning to travel for a year. This was her first backpacking trip. She was travelling with her partner Liam. She quit her job as a in business administration in order to travel. She was planning to find another job in the same field when she returned home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informant#29</td>
<td>Pseudonym: Andrew</td>
<td>26-year-old male from Australia</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 4½ months. Planning to travel for 5½ months. This was his third backpacking trip. He spent two month in London working, then travelled continental Europe for two months before going to the U.S. and then up to Canada. He took a break from his job as an assistant accountant for a manufacturing firm, a job he was planning to return to.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#30</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Toby</th>
<th>21-year-old male from the U.S.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3 weeks. Planning to travel for a month. This was his second backpacking trip. He was a business student taking a summer break in B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#31</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Charlie</th>
<th>Hostel employee</th>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#32</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Kyle</th>
<th>27-year-old male from Australia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3½ months. Planning to travel for 1½ to 2 years. This was his second backpacking trip. He was travelling with his partner Tasha. They got work at a summer camp in the U.S. for two months at the beginning of their trip. They were spending a month travelling B.C. then where planning to go to New York for a week before flying to England for 2 months and then a year of travel and work on continental Europe. He quit his job in advertising in order to travel and planned to return to the field after he returns home.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Informant#33</th>
<th>Pseudonym: Tasha</th>
<th>22-year-old female from Australia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewed after travelling for 3½ months. Planning to travel for 1½ to 2 years. This was her first backpacking trip. She was travelling with her partner Kyle. She recently graduated with an arts degree and was unsure about what kind of career she would pursue.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix V
Ethics Approval Letter

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

July 18, 2001

Mr. Adrian Nieczym
Graduate Student
Sociology and Anthropology
Simon Fraser University

Dear Mr. Nieczym:

Re: Ethnography of Backpacking

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the University Research Ethics Review Committee. This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the University Research Ethics Review Committee. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jarjes R.P. Ogloff, Chair
University Research Ethics Review Committee

c: M. Gates, Supervisor

/bjr
Bibliography


