

Identity, Hybridity and Representation in the Independent Traveller 'Scene'

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Recent studies of backpacker travel have begun to subdivide the 'scene', following many earlier studies on the collective motivations and behaviour of backpackers as a growing niche market. As a contribution to this developing emic approach, a semi-qualitative study of the social construction of backpacking is drawn upon in this paper.

Different representations of backpacker identities were evaluated using Q methodology, in which 'construct' statements were employed; derived from a range of qualitative and quantitative material and reflecting both commonly-held assumptions / stereotypes about backpacking as well as more formally researched ideas. Representations were elicited from travellers in two contrasting urban backpacker 'enclaves' in Thailand / Australia, who were also asked how they would identify their own style of travel.

A factor analysis of the 'scored' constructs revealed a tendency to adopt multiple and flexible hybrid identities within the scene, framing the definition of 'backpacking' as a highly dynamic field of discourse. The scene appears to be 'bonded' not just by conventional 'tourist angst', but by increasingly negative reactions from travellers and tourists – a form of 'backpacker angst'. The concept of 'suspension' is proposed for evaluating the self-identities of backpackers against their actual travel practices.