

Supranational Governance of Tourism: Aid, Trade and Power Relations between the European Union and the South Pacific Island States

Daniela Schilcher – Graduated 2007

Abstract

This thesis examined the role of supranational organisations (SOs) in the governance of tourism in a North-South context. Focusing on the issue area of development cooperation, this thesis investigated the question of how and why SOs got involved in tourism in developing countries, and more specifically, in small island developing states. Such involvement may occur either directly through aid funded projects or indirectly through international trade regimes that impact on tourism in the aid recipient countries. The thesis adopted a case study approach focussing on the European Union's (EU's) involvement in the governance of tourism in South Pacific island states. Grounded in a history of colonialism, the EU has been involved in the 'development' of the South Pacific for more than three decades, which allowed to track changes in development philosophy over time. Focusing on the concept of power, the case was assessed in a multi-scalar manner, analysing the EU's involvement from the global down to the local level. Never before has an entire multi-level polity been assessed in one coherent case study, incorporating actors situated at all levels and ranging from supranational organisations to national governments, businesses, communities, and individuals.

The methods employed in this thesis included interviews, participant observation, document analysis (policy documents and newspapers), and subsequently critical discourse analysis. The latter served to highlight the so-called 'third face of power' (Lukes 1974), which is closely related to the concept of ideological hegemony. Interviews were conducted in Fiji and Samoa with officials of the South Pacific Delegations of the EU, officials of tourism authorities, NGOs, tourism operators and community members. Elite interviews in Brussels were conducted with officials of the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Under all scales and 'faces' of power the EU was found to be the dominant actor, while the issue of self-interest appeared to play a key role. At a macro-level, the EU clearly dominated in most overt decision-making situations during negotiations on aid and trade agreements. As concerned the inclusion of tourism in the agreements, the relative importance of the sector was clearly dependent on the European Commission's prevailing attitude on 'tourism and development' at any point in time. At a meso- and micro-level, the EU's influence was less obvious yet nonetheless existent, for example through funding rules and the use of European consultants. Indirect influence also occurred at the national level. In particular the substitution of a preferential trade regime with a free trade agreement (the Economic Partnership Agreements), which is currently being negotiated between the EU and the Pacific Islands, is likely to have a significant impact on the economic importance of tourism, as well as public policy in the South Pacific. In a mini case study of Samoa, it was found that the resulting changes in tourism policy would have a significant impact 'on the ground', in particular with regard to rates of local ownership and control.

Overall, power relations were found to be highly unequal and self-determination and empowerment have largely not been achieved. However, more research is needed to examine the ability to generalise the findings to other geographic regions or other types of SOs. The key contribution of this thesis in the theoretical realm constitutes its bridging of agency and structure within multi-level governance, which may be conceived as a 'third way' to either dependency theory-influenced studies (global/structure) or community approaches (local/agency).