

What Hinders the Path to Sustainability? A Study of Barriers To Sustainable Tourism Development in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia

Sonya Graci

Despite international recognition that the tourism industry needs to move towards sustainability, action has been mainly conceptual to date and has not translated into industry wide practice (Pryce 2001). It is therefore important to understand why the move towards sustainability has been relatively limited in the tourism industry in order to determine how this industry can be encouraged to introduce more sustainable practices (Diamantis 1999; Bramwell and Alletorp 2001; Pryce 2001; Dodds 2005).

In order to contribute to this knowledge, a study examining barriers to implementing sustainability initiatives in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia, was undertaken. This study examined an existing paradox in tourism sustainability. Positive attitudes regarding sustainability from the majority of stakeholders were evident; however, sustainability initiatives were still not being implemented.

Research Setting

Gili Trawangan is a small island located amongst the Gili Islands off the coast of Lombok in Indonesia. Gili Trawangan is a sun, sand and sea destination. It is approximately three by two kilometers and low-lying with a small hill to the south, rising to 72 meters above sea level (Hampton 1998). Gili Trawangan is the most developed of all three Gili Islands (the other two islands being the newly developed Gili Air and the mostly undeveloped Gili Meno).

Gili Trawangan has an approximate population of 474 families comprising about 1900 local people (Interview # 1, 2005; Interview # 26, 2005). There are also several expatriates living and working on the island. The majority of land use on the island is for tourism and the remainder is coconut plantation and some small fields of agricultural crops and livestock.

Tourism is the dominant economic activity on the island and more than 80% of the families on Gili Trawangan are employed by tourism in some form (Interview 26, 2005). The main tourism season is June- September with smaller peaks in December, January and February (Interview # 2, 2005; Hampton 1998). Gili Trawangan is not a very

developed tourism destination in terms of mass tourism resorts, infrastructure or services. The main tourists on Gili Trawangan are backpackers as there are currently only two high end resorts and few mid level accommodations on the Island.

Island transportation consists of non-motorized sources such as bicycles and cidomo's (horse drawn traps) and the roads are unsealed dirt tracks. The island has limited fresh water shipped in barrels from the mainland on a daily basis. Only the high end resorts, mid level accommodations and restaurants use the fresh water (personal observation, Interview 10, 2005, Interview 13, 2005, Hampton 1998).

In terms of sustainable tourism, there have been some initiatives implemented prior to this study being conducted. These initiatives however have been faced with a slow implementation, and although developed in theory, have not been entirely adopted in practice. One of the initiatives developed by the dive operators on the island is the Gili Trawangan Eco-trust.

The purpose of this organization, which is head by one of the owners of a dive establishment, is to manage the collection of a dive tax (\$3 US per diver and \$1 US per snorkeller). The dive tax has been used to pay the local fisherman to stop detrimental means of fishing such as bombing and using drag nets (Interview #1, 2005).

The Gili Trawangan Eco-trust has tried on numerous occasions to start initiatives such as the collection of waste and beach clean ups but as the next section will discuss, they have encountered numerous barriers that have halted

any action. This has led to the large frustration on the island as the stakeholders, although motivated, have been faced with a number of barriers that they cannot overcome.

Method

This paper is based upon fieldwork that was conducted in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia over two visits in May-July and October-November 2005.

A multi-method research approach (Sommer and Sommer 1991) was used for this study. In-depth, semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with twenty six business owners and managers (local and western) on the island resulting in a 50 percent response rate.

Snowball sampling was used to obtain the key informant sample. Interviews were also conducted with the previous and current local government. This consisted of three interviews, one with the previous head of the island, one with the current head of the island and one with the deputy head of the current government. The interviews discussed the history of sustainable tourism initiatives on the island, identified barriers to implementing sustainable tourism, strategies to overcome the identified barriers and innovative means to increase the level of sustainability on the island.

Interviews were also conducted with tourists, employees and the local community on the island.

Using a random sampling procedure, a total of 45 informal interviews were conducted. An environmental impact assessment of the island was also carried out to determine the greatest env-



The pier at Gili Trawangan

environmental and social impacts that need to be addressed whilst developing a sustainable tourism strategy.

Findings and Discussion

A number of barriers were documented in this research.

Five themes outlining the main barriers to implementing sustainable tourism initiatives were identified.

These five themes consist of:

- (1) inadequate resources particularly funds and information;
- (2) lack of momentum from business owners
- (3) island culture and the isolation of sustainability issues from all other business aspects of the destination/organization
- (4) government bureaucracy and corruption; and
- (5) physical attributes such as infrastructure impediments.

Theme One:

Inadequate Resources

Despite the enthusiasm from a number of business owners on the island, sustainable tourism initiatives continuously faced a number of barriers. The first theme identified was related to the barriers associated with inadequate resources such as high costs, lack of information, skills, knowledge, expertise, time and the reluctance to acquire assistance from outside consultants. It was these particular barriers that were identified as the most significant and often experi-

enced. Several of the key informants indicated that despite the numerous ideas for initiatives (i.e., payments to fisherman to stop illegal fishing), without adequate resources many of these plans fail.

For example, the Gili Eco-trust attempted to implement a waste management collection system including the building of a landfill with areas to separate and organize recyclables. Due to inadequate resources such as the lack of information, skills, expertise and the reluctance to acquire assistance from outside consultants, the landfill development failed.

What resulted was an open dump pit and no real collection system of waste in general let alone sorted at source. The walls built around the landfill were stolen piece by piece by deviant locals and an open area of hazardous and non hazardous waste resulted in breeding rodents and leachate in the water stream (Interview #2, 2005; Interview #17, 2005; Interview #25, 2005).

A number of business owners and the current local government identified this as the most prominent barrier because without proper systems in place the environment will degrade even further. The problem remains the ability to implement those systems with the necessary funds and knowledge to be feasible.

Theme Two:

Lack of Momentum from Business Owners

The second theme was related to the

lack of momentum to take action regarding sustainability initiatives by business owners (accommodations, dive operators, restaurants and bars). There was a common belief by a number of business owners that current practices were inadequate, however, there was a lack of momentum to move forward and implement sustainable initiatives.

Despite the concern that the environment on the island was in dismay, several business owners did not want to take responsibility for managing the implementation of the initiatives especially when it involved time and funding. It was evident that several of the business owners on the island had numerous complaints about the management of the environment yet it was difficult to rally up support in terms of volunteer time to manage the systems on the island. For example, only one business owner in conjunction with the local government managed the eco-tax funds to pay the fisherman, a practice that was not looked upon favourably as a sustainable solution by many of the business owners, however no other solutions were put forth. In addition, it was this one person that managed a number of the complaints on the island because they had a great working relationship with the local people, government and other businesses. However, it is impossible for one person to organize and maintain the development of initiatives on the island and despite the numerous ideas and enthusiasm from the other business owners, there has been a slow implementation of ideas relating to sustainability. This was evident with the organization of a beach clean up team that was funded by the Eco-Tax collected by the Gili Trawangan Eco-trust.

The beach clean up team was an idea that was supported by all businesses in the Eco-trust however without any management of the team it quickly disintegrated. As the beach clean up team did not receive any direction or motivation on how to proceed with the clean-up on a regular basis, it quickly ceased (Interview #19, 2005).

Theme Three:

Island Culture

The third theme was related to the corporate culture of the island. Corporate

culture is comprised of the attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values of an organization. An organization, and in this case a destination, has a corporate culture that has its own behavioral quirks and interactions which can affect the development and implementation of programs and projects. Isolation of environmental issues from other aspects of the organization or destination, an incompatibility with the current corporate culture of the organization and/or destination, and the bureaucracy that exists within each organization as well as inter organizational are barriers that have affected the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives in Gili Trawangan. In Gili Trawangan, the corporate culture is one where employees and the local community are resistant to change despite the identified benefits associated with sustainable tourism initiatives (such as reducing health problems that have occurred from the lack of garbage collection and standing sewage that breeds disease such as dengue fever in the community). Several of the local children have asthma due to the local community burning garbage (including hazardous materials and plastics) (Interview #11, 2005). It is due to the lack of education regarding the benefits of sustainable tourism initiatives that the local people are not willing to participate. This results in unsuccessful attempts at developing initiatives such as a waste management system. This is also evident with illegal fishing as locals will continue to bomb and use nets to fish despite the payments to many of the local fisherman. In one instance, a local person caught a nurse shark with the intent to sell to a Chinese customer, despite the policy that bans the catching and selling of sharks (personal observation, October 2005).

Theme Four:

Government Corruption

The fourth theme identified was related to government. Government corruption is a significant barrier in this destination (as in many developing nations). The provincial and national governments have consistently collected taxes from the island without any investment in infrastructure or development of policy. In addition, the previous local government accepted bribes to build in un-

authorized areas (such as beach front) which has caused several environmental and social problems such as erosion of the coastline, sedimentation in the ocean and barring access to a public resource.

In 1998, the provincial government of Western Nusa Dua developed the Gili Mantra Marine National Park Strategy. In Indonesia, marine park strategies have been highly successful in destinations such as Komodo National Park. The marine park strategy, which was developed as a policy, was never implemented in practice. Locals and westerners, in addition to the local government, were all unaware of such a strategy. It was the Gili Trawangan Eco-trust that implemented initiatives to curb illegal fishing to protect and generate the coral reefs.

On the local level, corruption has occurred through the random pricing structure that government appointed businesses charge in terms of waste collection. Expatriate businesses are charged an enormously inflated rate over local businesses despite the success and size of the business. In addition, expatriate business charges for collection continue to be based on personal relationships so that one expatriate business owner can pay up to triple for the same services (Personal Observation, 2005; Interview #2, 2005; Interview #17)

The disparity of policies on the island is dependant upon personal relationships, bribes and government corruption. This has led to frustration on the island especially in terms of volunteering time and money to implement sustainable tourism initiatives. Many initiatives are funded independently and several stakeholders feel powerless to oppose the current structure for fear of making their own lives difficult and negatively affecting their business (Interview #14, 2005; Interview #11, 2005).

Theme Five:

Infrastructure

Physical attributes such as infrastructure was the last theme identified. Working within the current infrastructure of the island, as well as physical attributes such as the location and age of facilities are common barriers faced in a destination. This barrier was also closely linked to the first theme of inadequate resources as

there was no possibility for purchasing new technologies on the island.

Gili Trawangan currently ships in barrels of fresh water on a daily basis to the island. Structures such as a sewage treatment plants (sewage is currently either disposed of in homemade septic tanks or open pits on the side of the road in the village) cannot be built as salt water will degrade the infrastructure.

In addition, technology continues to be a barrier. Even if initiatives such as solar power or a sewage treatment plant were installed it would be difficult to fix or adjust technologies due to the remoteness of the island. In addition, space is an issue on the island as many businesses would like to install composters to dispose of their own organic waste but do not have the room available (Interview # 1, 2005; Interview #2, 2005; Interview #6, 2005).

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

The interviews identified strategies and innovative initiatives to overcome the stated barriers. Several of the interviewees suggested ways to overcome barriers and move toward sustainability based on past experiences and initiatives undertaken on other Asian islands. This contributed to the development of a sustainable tourism strategy for the island of Gili Trawangan.

The strategy incorporated alternatives such as composting, employing financial mechanisms such as tourist taxes and developing a multi-stakeholder island committee to oversee the development and implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives. In addition, extensive consultation with the local community and all stakeholders on the island will be conducted to ensure that there is buy-in and motivation to implement the initiatives. The strategy, through the use of an island committee, will provide accountability to stakeholders on the island in hope of reducing corruption. The strategy was widely accepted by the local government and businesses and is currently undergoing public consultation with the local community to begin implementation.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide a further understanding of the factors that

affect the implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives in a regional context. This paper provides further evidence to what hinders sustainability in island destinations, particularly within the developing world context. As demonstrated, despite efforts from a number of local businesses, barriers to sustainable tourism implementation exist in Gili Trawangan, Indonesia.

Recommendations for a number of strategies to overcome the identified barriers are in the process of being implemented. These strategies can be applied to other island destinations in a regional context to overcome the identified barriers to sustainable tourism development in island destinations.

References

Anguera, N., S. Ayuso, et al. (2000). *Implementation of EMS's in Seasonal Hotels. Assuring Sustainability. ISO 14000 Case Studies and Practical Experiences*. R. Hillary. Sheffield, Greenleaf Publishing: 162-171.

Bramwell, B. and L. Alletorp (2001). "Attitudes in the Danish Tourism Industry to the Roles of Business and Government in Sustainable Tourism." *International Journal of Tourism research* 3: 91-103.

Budeanu, A. (1999). *A Tour To Sustainability. A discussion on Tour Operators Possibilities for Promoting Sustainable Tourism*. International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics. Lund, Sweden, Lund University: 84.

Cheyne, J. and S. Barnett (2001). "The Greening of Accommodation. Stakeholder Perspectives of Environmental Programmes in New Zealand Hotels and Luxury Lodges." *Journal of Corporate Citizenship Spring*.

Diamantis, D. (1999). "Green Strategies for Tourism Worldwide." *Travel and Tourism Analyst* 4: 89-112.

Dodds, R. (2003). *Developing New Markets for Traditional Destinations: Is Sustainable Tourism Policy a Successful Option for Creating New Markets?* London, University of Surrey: 10.

Dodds, R. (2005). *Barriers to the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism Policy in Destinations*. School of Management, Surrey, University of Surrey. PhD: 300.

Hampton, M. P. (1998). "Backpacker Tourism and Economic Development" *Annals of Tourism Research* 25(3): 639-660.

Hunter, C. (2002). "Sustainable Tourism and the Touristic Ecological Footprint." *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 4: 7-20.

Mastny, L. (2002). *Redirecting International Tourism. State of the World 2002*. L. Starke. New York, W.W. Norton and Company: 101-126.

Murphy, P. E. (1998). *Tourism and Sustainable Development*. Global Tourism. W. F. Theobald. Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Pryce, A. (2001). "Sustainability in the Hotel Industry." *Travel and Tourism Analyst* 6: 3-23.

Sommer, B. and R. Sommer (1991). *A Practical Guide to Behavioural Research. Tools and Techniques*. New York, Oxford University Press Inc.

Stipanuk, D. M. (1996). "The U.S. Lodging Industry and the Environment: An historical view." *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 37(5): 39-49.

Theobald, W. F. (1998). *Foreward. Global Tourism*. W. F. Theobald. Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann. second edition.

Dr. Sonya Graci [sgraci@ryerson.ca] is an Assistant Professor at the Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Ryerson University, Toronto, and the Director of Accommodating Green, an environmental consulting organization that works with organizations to integrate sustainability in business operations.

She specialises in sustainable tourism, corporate sustainability and environmental management.

Schriftenreihe der APSA

<http://www.pacific-news.de/pazifikforum.php>

Pacific Forum

Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Pazifische Studien

Michael Waibel / Rolf Jordan / Helmut Schneider (Hg.)

Krisenregion Südostasien

Alte Konflikte und neue Kriege



Waibel, M. / Jordan, R. / Schneider, H. (HG.) (2006): **Krisenregion Südostasien - Alte Konflikte und neue Kriege**. Schriftenreihe PAZIFIK FORUM der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Pazifische Studien e.V.; Band 11, Horlemann Verlag. Bad Honnef 2006. 169 S. ISBN 3-89502-217-9. 14,90 Euro.

Am Beispiel gewaltsamer Konflikte in Südthailand, Aceh, Birma (Myanmar), den Südphilippinen, Kambodscha, Osttimor und dem pazifischen Inselstaat Salomonen diskutiert der Band die vielfältigen ökonomisch begründeten Interessenkonflikte als Grundstruktur gewaltsamer Auseinandersetzungen in der Region und zeigt dabei die strukturellen Beziehungen zwischen ‚alten‘ Konfliktlinien und ‚neuen‘ Kriegen im pazifischen Raum auf. Im Zentrum steht dabei die Frage, ob und inwiefern aktuelle Konflikte in dieser Region unter dem Gesichtspunkt ‚neuer Kriege‘ betrachtet werden können.

Mit Beiträgen von Shane Barter, Volker Böge, Ea Meng Try, Andrea Fleschenberg, Rolf Jordan, Alfred Oehlers, Helmut Schneider, Michael Waibel und Patrick Ziegenhain.