Tourism Development in the French Pacific

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Main questions and Issues

1. Why is the French Pacific looking to develop tourism? The territories do have assets to be commodified.
2. How has tourism been developed to this day and what challenges does it face, including customary land ownership?
3. What is the role of local culture and identity? Are sustainability and indigenisation goals?
4. Future? Need for different images or representations in a postcolonial world
A view of the Pacific
Why develop tourism?

in areas that already have high incomes, especially considering the many negative impacts of tourism?

- The economy’s cultural turn has led to the commodification of items considered valueless until now. Tourism represents one of the facets of this new economy.

- Economic globalisation allows actors/places who were previously very marginal to participate in the global economy.

- It provides jobs (most tasks cannot be mechanised = labour intensive); it can thus diminish out migration
Why develop tourism?

Many people, in spite of the large subsidies from France still practice a subsistence mode of life.
Assets for tourism development
Arts and crafts exist in all of the French territories: Sculpture occurs in New Caledonia and the Marquesas, weaving in the Australs and elsewhere. The shell beading is from Tahiti.
Arts and Crafts

Intricate weaving of pandanus leaf and Kanak sculpture are sought by visitors.

Because of quarantine on fresh flowers, leis are now made with shells.
Polynesian architecture and weaving in Wallis & Futuna
Modern Infrastructure, though electricity generation relies on imported fuel as illustrated by the drums in the back of the unit.
Relics of the Past
Monuments of colonisation

The church, as a spiritual centre, dominates lives in most of the French Pacific, but others also colonised.

They have also become tourist attractions.
Forms of tourism development in the French Pacific

- International investment has few benefits for the local population. We are staying and working in some examples! Who is managing? Who is serving? Will servers become managers?
Immersion in Kanak Culture for P & O cruisers?
The Kanak provincial government agreed to this development as P & O was looking for “exotic” stops. Benefits? For whom? Not for the Kanak. The stop is no longer used.
Some large foreign investors do include local participants.

Kia Ora, a Luxury Resort On Rangiroa, owned by a Japanese investor, it calls on local entrepreneurs to provide activities for its visitors.
Family enterprises
Tourism is growing everywhere in the world, including in the South Pacific, but not in French territories:

In Tahiti, decrease of 6 to 12% per year for the past 3 years
In New Caledonia no increase since 1997
In Wallis & Futuna, numbers too small to mention, in spite of the best intentions:
Déclaration du Président de l'Assemblée Territoriale, Clovis Logologofolau (1986)

Wallis et Futuna: deux noms qui ont fait rêver les philatélistes, deux îles de l'Océan pacifique souvent appelées les "îles préservées".

Nous allons nous ouvrir au tourisme mais nous voulons garder intacte notre identité, notre accueil cordial en restera le plus sur garant. Notre manière de vivre, notre respect du visiteur et nos sites enchanteurs sont les éléments essentiels de notre raison d'espérer en un avenir touristique. Un tourisme que nous désirons dominer et qui ne sera jamais envahissant. Notre lagon, un des plus beaux du monde, sera préservé, notre artisanat sera notre ambassadeur à travers le monde et sera le symbole du goût de notre peuple qui aime le travail bien fait. Wallis et Futuna s'avancent démocratiquement vers le progrès mais veulent garder à jamais la douceur de vivre de ses habitants.

Malo te fagona.
Remoteness, a major problem?
Nickel was the main economic resource but it has transformed the original landscapes.
A consequence of customary land ownership in Wallis and Futuna: housing is started to stake a claim but left unfinished, sometimes for decades, or it is unoccupied because conflicts between family members could not be resolved.
Where in paradise, and how, does one store no longer wanted or useful bulky items deemed originally indispensable? These are right along the main road just by the sea in Futuna.
Fortress Tahiti: un problème esthétique?
Authentic or Hybrid Culture
Does it matter and to whom?

- The Catholic church predominates in New Caledonia and in Wallis & Futuna. It shares French Polynesia with several other churches. They are ubiquitously present.

- Religious tourism in the Pacific is practiced by numerous indigenous communities.
Authentic (primitive? hybrid?) traditions?

How authentically ‘traditional’ is a motorised ferry used because of a legendary monster?
Indigenous tourism development

- How do we showcase cultures that have already been hybridised by colonial irruption(s) without commodifying or distorting them?
- Can we devise meaningfully creative ways of interaction between visitors and visited? How do we construct forms of tourism that provide visitors with their requisite experience to procure visited areas with benefits, including profits?
Sustainable tourism development

Modernist and neo-liberal ‘progressist’ forms of economic growth have been imposed on or implemented in many cases in the past so few benefits have reached the local indigenous population (the Kanak, for example, in New Caledonia). Creating sustainable development requires that the precise location of both costs and benefits be examined so that their distribution is equitable. It requires “indigenisation” of the enterprises, especially in the light of the avowed purpose of such development. This means an awareness of gender, ethnic and class barriers to local entrepreneurship and to investment. It also demands a survey of the ability of residents to cope with the pressures of tourism and with disappointing behaviours of tourists.
Most would not resort to divination to interrogate the future but we need to find forms of tourism that satisfy local stakeholders especially in areas where little damage has already occurred, while meaningful representations attract the desired number of visitors to the shores of the French Pacific Islands.