



# BACKPACKING EXPERIENCES

## A Type and Form Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper questions the notion of backpacking as a distinct category of tourism by distinguishing between its type- and form-related attributes. The analysis of such differentiation refers to phenomenological typology of tourist experiences and the distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourism. Based on 38 in-depth interviews with Israeli backpackers to various destinations, the study reveals their heterogeneous nature in terms of its type-related aspect. In addition, the study indicates that they comply with most of the conventional form-related attributes. These findings suggest that backpacking should be regarded as a form rather than a type of tourism. **Keywords:** backpacking, tourist experiences, types and forms, Israel. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

**Résumé:** Expériences de voyager sac à dos: une analyse de type et de forme. Cet article examine l'idée de voyager sac à dos comme catégorie distincte de tourisme en faisant la distinction entre ses attributs liés au type et à la forme. L'analyse d'une telle différenciation fait allusion à la typologie phénoménologique des expériences touristiques et à la différence entre le tourisme institutionnalisé et non-institutionnalisé. En se basant sur 38 interviews en profondeur avec des randonneurs israéliens à différentes destinations, la recherche révèle la nature hétérogène de l'activité sur le plan des aspects liés au type. En plus, l'étude indique que les randonneurs se conforment à la majorité des attributs conventionnels liés à la forme. Ces conclusions suggèrent que les voyages sac à dos devraient être considérés comme une forme de tourisme plutôt qu'un type. **Mots-clés:** voyager sac à dos, expériences touristiques, types et formes, Israël. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of backpacking began when Cohen (1972) differentiated between non-institutionalized tourists and their institutionalized counterparts. The latter comply with the conventional features of mass tourism, while the former, prevalently middle-class young tourists are referred to in the literature by various terms: drifters (Cohen 1972); nomads (Cohen 1973); youthful travelers (Teas 1974); wanderers (Vogt 1976); hitchhikers (Mukerji 1978); tramping youth (Adler

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1985), and long-term budget travelers (Riley 1988). Nevertheless, studies in the last decade tend to address them as backpackers (Loker 1993; Loker-Murphy 1996; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Pearce 1990a). Despite the multiplicity of terms used in the literature, it is agreed that the various non-institutionalized groups constitute a distinct category that differs from institutionalized mass-tourism (Cohen 1972, 1973; Loker 1993; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Pearce 1990a; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976). The current article questions the notion of backpacking as a distinct and homogeneous category, while relying on the analysis of 38 in-depth interviews with Israeli backpackers who visited South and East Asia, Latin America, Africa, and other destinations.

For analytical purposes, this study differentiates between form- and type-related attributes of tourism. The conceptual distinction that this study makes should be seen as an attempt to analyze two different theoretical constructs. 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. Types refer 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.

Although the study offers analytic type and form distinctions, it does not claim that the two are necessarily unrelated in concrete tourism practices. For instance, the tendency of non-institutionalized tourists to avoid conventional facilities might reflect upon both their budget limitations and their self-perception as travelers rather than tourists. However, practices are determined by numerous factors and circumstances and are not necessarily related to exclusive dispositions and moods 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 meanings 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. In light of these assumptions, it is suggested that although form and type-related attributes of tourism are obviously interrelated, they are not necessarily combined, and thus should be examined separately. Nevertheless, a review of the literature reveals that these attributes are used indistinguishably for differentiating between institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourists (Cohen 1972, 1973; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976). In contrast to previous research on the subject, this study differentiates between backpacking as a form characterized by various practices and backpacking as a type identified by a tourist's attitudes and motivations.

Based on in-depth interviews, the study focuses on the type-related attributes of Israeli backpackers, examined in light of Cohen's phenomenological typology of touristic experiences (1979). Although well established as a theoretical framework, this typology has rarely been used for empirical purposes. This paper presents a conceptual

analysis of the typology and utilizes it as an instrument through which Israeli backpackers are empirically examined. Specifically, the backpackers' compliance with Cohen's suggested types is examined while considering both their attitudes toward their own culture and routine living, and the motivations and meaning they assign to the experience. In addition to the analysis of these type-related attributes, the backpackers are examined in terms of their compliance with conventional form-related attributes of non-institutionalized tourism. By relying on the empirical analysis, the study aims to explicitly determine how much backpacking as a form is related to backpacking as a type of tourism. However, conclusions in this regard will be closely related to the theoretical constructs that were chosen as points of reference for type and form-related analyses—that is Cohen's phenomenological typology of tourist experiences (1979) and his distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourism (1972), respectively. It is possible that by using other theoretical points of reference, a similar analysis differentiating type and form-related aspects would lead to different conclusions from those presented in this article. Yet it is important to mention that both Cohen's phenomenological typology of tourist experiences (1979) and his distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourists (1972) are among the most recognized theoretical constructs in the academic literature dealing with typologies. As such, the use of these as points of reference also seems to be appropriate for deconstructing this body of knowledge in the academic study of tourism.

### BACKPACKING EXPERIENCES

The differentiation between non-institutionalized and institutionalized tourism as already noted, was originally presented by Cohen (1972). The two categories were further classified into organized-group and individual mass tourists within institutionalized, and into explorers and drifters within non-institutionalized tourism. The term "organized-group mass tourists" refers to the least adventurous kinds whose excursion is entirely planned within the "environmental bubble" provided by the industry. Conversely, the term "drifters" refers to the most spontaneous and unconstrained kinds who tend to avoid commercial facilities in trips that are mostly unplanned. As indicated above, this classification is characterized by an indistinguishable usage of form and type-related attributes.

In terms of form-related attributes, the existing body of research suggests that non-institutionalized tourists tend to travel for long periods, have no rigid plans, and have a vague notion regarding their return (Cohen 1972, 1973, 1982; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976). They are also characterized by budget limitations that determine their tendency for low spending (Riley 1988; Teas 1974). They eat in low-priced restaurants, use public means of transportation, and do not reside in expensive hotels (Cohen 1972, 1973; Loker 1993; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Pearce 1990a; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976). Thus, they have more opportunities than their institutionalized counterparts to initiate

direct encounters with the local population, since they are not confined to institutions operated for the exclusive use of tourists. However, various researchers have also characterized these non-institutionals by their supposedly unique attitudes, such as their tendency to hold anti-establishment or ambivalent views toward their own culture; their quest for adventure, authenticity, and profound experiences; and their self-perception as travelers rather than tourists (Cohen 1972, 1973; Riley 1988; Vogt 1976). In terms suggested in the current study, this set of ideas is referred to as type-related attributes.

Further studies on the subject acknowledge that non-institutionalized is becoming more heterogeneous and less distinct from conventional mass tourism (Cohen 1973; Loker-Murphy 1996; Riley 1988). However, the subsequent line of scholarship in this area does not clearly answer whether the non-institutionalized phenomenon should be defined as a type or a form of tourism. In this context, Cohen himself (1973) was the first to elaborate upon his original notion of drifting by adding three important observations. First, he distinguishes between "inward-oriented" and "outward-oriented" drifters, according to their tendency to interact mainly with counterparts rather than with locals, respectively. Second, he makes the distinction between "full-time" and "part-time" drifters, observing that most non-institutionals are students or junior employees on a prolonged summer vacation rather than timeless drifters. Third, Cohen (1973) emphasizes the nature of drifting as a counter-culture associated with drug consumption and a departure from conventional ways of life.

Following the proposed type and form distinctions, one might notice that Cohen's (1973) two former observations point to the decreasing homogeneity of drifting as a form of tourism. Moreover, his third observation illuminates a type-related feature of drifting. Thus, one may argue that he stresses the notion of drifting as a type rather than a form of tourism (1973). However, Cohen's notion of drifting as a "counterculture" associated with the use of drugs was later challenged by Riley (1988). Unlike Cohen, who stresses a psychological approach, Riley refers to "long-term budget travelers", emphasizing form rather than type-related characteristics. This concept is based on her findings that almost all of them regarded the dearth of money and the abundance of time as the major elements that distinguish them from conventional tourists. However, those she studied also mentioned travel motivations, including sensation seeking, interest in the culture of the host country, and interest in learning and communicating with locals, as elements that distinguish them from conventional tourists (Riley 1988). Yet Riley notices that beside these motives of self-development, the subjects in her study are also motivated by hedonistic considerations. Thus, Riley's awareness of this heterogeneity of motivations might explain the form-related term that she uses in order to depict this category. Nevertheless, despite her own depiction of non-institutionalized tourism mainly as a form, Riley (1988:317) continues to refer to it as a distinct subculture and analyzes it in the context of "types of tourism".

The type and form-related attributes of backpacking are also

addressed indistinguishably in more recent studies, where non-institutionals are usually referred to as backpackers (Loker 1993; Loker-Murphy 1996; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Murphy 2000; Pearce 1990b). For example, with respect to reasons for choosing backpacking as a means of travel, Murphy (2000) addresses form-related aspects, such as length of the trip or its economic cost, without separating them from type-related drives, such as the quest for “real” experiences. In addition, Riley’s tendency to unwittingly endorse the notion of backpacking as a form rather than a type (1988) is also evident in most of the recent studies on backpackers. For instance, the heterogeneous character of backpacking in terms of its type-related aspects is stressed by Loker-Murphy (1996), who identifies four subgroups of backpackers with respect to their motivations: escapers/relaxers, social/excitement-seekers, self-developers, and achievers. Using Pearce’s “Travel Career Ladder” (1988), Loker-Murphy (1996) suggests that while the motivations of the escapers/relaxers address psychological needs of the lowest level, the achievers seek to satisfy psychological needs of the highest level on Pearce’s ladder. While the results of Loker-Murphy’s study might be perceived as a challenge to the notion of backpacking as a distinct type, the tendency of other recent studies to focus mainly on backpackers’ spending patterns, favored accommodations, preferred activities, and patterns of interaction (Loker 1993; Loker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Murphy 2000; Pearce 1990b), could be seen as an unintentional contribution to the conceptualization of the phenomenon in terms of form-related attributes.

### *Conceptualizations of Experiences*

The attitudes of tourists toward seminal values in their home society, their motivations for travel, and the meanings they assign to the resulting experiences were referred to previously as type-related attributes. The study of these characteristics was part of earlier attempts to conceptualize the nature of the touristic experience in advanced industrialized societies. In this context, two conceptual approaches dominated the study during its early days. One approach perceives the experience as a leisure activity in which people take “time out” from their daily life, and rest and entertain themselves before returning back to their regular routine with new and restored energy. The “positive” version of this view, the functionalist approach, suggests that this practice is an important component in the well functioning of society (Gross 1961). In contrast, the “negative” version considers the artificial and inauthentic experiences of mass tourism as another sign of cultural retrogression in capitalist societies (Boorstin 1964).

A second approach considers modern tourism a departure from routine life and accepted conventions and as a quest for new, significant experiences. According to Turner and Ash (1975), the distance from their regular environments allows tourists to suspend the power of norms and values that govern their daily lives. Even when this distance is temporary and bounded, it allows them to think about their own lives and societies from a different perspective (Turner 1973). MacCannell

(1973) goes even further and presents tourism as a phenomenon that expresses tourists' discontent with modern, alienated life. They search in foreign countries and cultures for the authenticity they miss in their daily lives, and even if they fail in this quest it should not devalue their efforts and sincerity.

Cohen (1979) solves the debate between these two views of modern tourism by claiming that the experience is not as monolithic as implied by previous writers. Various people embark on journeys for different reasons, and these experiences mean different things for them. In line with this premise, Cohen (1979) developed a typology of five "modes of tourist experiences" that range between the quest for mere pleasure on one end and the search for meaningful experiences on the other. Cohen conceptualizes the search for meanings in terms of the "quest for a center", while stressing the notion of "center" as the zone of sacred moral values that exists in every society (Eliade 1969; Shils 1975; Turner 1973). Accordingly, the five modes of tourist experiences suggested by Cohen are characterized by the meanings assigned by them to both the "center" of their own societies in everyday life and their quest for "centers" of other cultures during their excursions.

Cohen refers to the first type of experience as the "recreational mode" and associates it with entertaining, but shallow activities. This type of experience is compatible with the enjoyable relief provided by various forms of mass entertainment, such as cinema, television, sporting events, etc. In line with the "functionalist" perspective mentioned above (Gross 1961), this type of tourist experience serves the need for "taking a break" from the pressures of daily living in order to restore the strength needed to cope. Since daily living centers on the achievements of "serious" goals to which people are committed to, the recreational activities are considered to be playful and peripheral aspects of the routine day-to-day life. Individuals that engage in this experience type, although stressed by their daily living, are committed to the "center" of their own society. Their journey does not represent a quest for the "center" of the "other".

The second experience type, the "diversionary mode", also involves the pursuit of mere pleasure without any quest for a "center". However, while the recreational mode is associated with those who perceive their daily life as meaningful, the diversionary mode refers to those alienated from the goals and values of their everyday existence. The latter "centerless" people escape from the boredom of routine life by pursuing meaningless pleasure through superficial leisure activities. While the recreational type seeks relaxation, the diversionary type looks for escape. Similar to the "diversionary mode", the three remaining types of experiences are also associated with people alienated from the "center" of their own society in their daily living. Unlike the recreational and the diversionary types of experiences, however, these types involve a search for meaning in the "centers" of other cultures while traveling. Specifically, the third experience type, the "experiential mode", is compatible with MacCannell's notion regarding the quest for authenticity (1973). It involves the modern notion of authenticity as something that exists elsewhere which can be experienced through

traveling. This type of tourist enjoys observing the “authentic life” of “others” without any attempt to be converted or even engaged in their life.

The fourth type of experience, the “experimental mode”, referred to those who do try out the authentic life of “others”, as part of their pursuit for an alternative to the “center” of their own culture. Since they are not yet committed to any of the ways of life that they engage in while traveling, they are as “centerless” as those who engage in the “diversionary” mode of experience. However, unlike the latter, the experimental mode involves a quest for meaning. According to Cohen (1979), this orientation may be found among those who engage in the drifter-like form of tourism (Cohen 1972, 1973).

The fifth type of tourist experience, the “existential mode”, refers to individuals already committed to an “elective center” that is culturally and geographically external to their own society. While these individuals live their daily routine in a “spiritual exile” for practical reasons, their travel to a remote “center” serves their desire to actualize and sustain their spiritual existence. The same spiritual quest could be associated with pilgrims, although their center is part of their mainstream culture at home and is determined from birth rather than individually chosen. Yet Cohen exemplifies this type of experience by describing others, such as the Western tourist who visits an Indian ashram (a shrine) that he/she is committed to, the Zionist Jew who lives in the Diaspora and makes repeated visits to Israel, or the immigrant who wishes to encounter spiritual roots while visiting country of origin.

Cohen’s work is important in sensitizing social scientists to the variety of motivations and meanings associated with tourist experiences. However, several related issues regarding his typology need further investigation. First, Cohen (1979:192–193) himself recognizes that the typology ignores individuals who may be attached to more than one spiritual center. They might perceive their routine living at home as meaningful but still search for profound experiences while traveling. The original typology does not cover such an optional mode of experience. Thus, he mentions, although not included in the typology, two additional groups of people (“humanists” and “dualists”) who may be involved with more than one center. He suggests that they might travel in the experiential, or existential, modes without being alienated from their own society’s culture (Figure 1). In this context, the current study aims to provide empirical evidence for the existence of this “humanistic” type of experience within backpacking.

Second, Cohen notes that although the different modes are separated for analytical reasons, individuals might experience more than one mode across their “tourist biography”, or even during a single trip. The notion of multimotive experiences and the attention given to “tourist biographies” are followed by Pearce (1988), who applies a psychological approach toward these issues. Based on Maslow’s analysis of needs, he claims that people might move from satisfying lower level psychological needs to fulfilling higher desires across their “travel career”. While Pearce suggests that individuals might be characterized as multimotive across their travel career, Feifer (1985), who writes

		<b>Tourism Motivations</b>	
		<b>Mere Pleasure</b>	<b>Profound Experiences</b>
<b>Attitudes Toward Daily Life</b>	<b>Alienated</b>	Diversiory	Experiential Experimental Existential
	<b>Meaningful</b>	Recreational	(Humanists) (Dualists/Pluralists)

**Figure 1. Cohen’s Experience Modes: Routine Living and Motivation Attitudes**

about postmodern tourism, characterizes “post-tourists” by their tendency to combine different types of experiences in a single excursion. In this context, the current study aims to provide empirical evidence for the existence of “multitype” backpackers either across their backpacking biography or during a single excursion.

Feifer’s depiction of the “post-tourist” illustrates how Cohen’s notion of the experience as a multicolored phenomenon is further stressed in the postmodern perspective toward tourism and leisure. While Cohen emphasizes that different people engage in different types of experiences and mentions the multitype excursion of a single individual only as a possibility, Feifer refers to the later option as a current tendency. His argument also complies with the attempt of the postmodern perspective to challenge the notion of rigid distinctions between different types of experiences. In this context, Finnegan (1989) presents a similar argument with respect to the association between music consumption (as a form of leisure) and class-related identities. Specifically, she argues that distinctions of class break down because people construct their leisure consumption by taking fragments from various produced goods and forms of leisure and reassemble them as they choose. Both Feifer and Finnegan exemplify another feature of the postmodern approach by challenging the simplistic position that consumption is shaped by production and carried out by passive consumers. Instead, the premise of their arguments stresses the notion of practice, in which reflexive and subjective negotiation of meanings by the human actor

is illuminated (Crouch 1999; Finnegan 1989; Finnegan 1997). In line with these arguments promoted by the postmodern perspective, the current study examines the variety of meanings that Israelis assign to their backpacking experiences.

### *Israeli Backpackers*

During the 80s, young Israelis began to backpack, first to Latin America, and later—following the opening of more countries to the citizens—to South and East Asia as well. Some tend to cover various distant destinations in one long trip, including Southeast Asia, Australia, Latin America, and Africa. Others tend to conduct more than one backpacking trip within a period of a few years. For most of them, the experience is a period of “limbo”: they have just completed a long army service, and they should be making major life decisions regarding their future. By the 90s, this trend assumed such magnitude as to be considered part of the “normal” route Israelis complete after their army service. These backpackers are mostly young secular Jews of middle-class origins who have attended academically oriented high schools. While there is no information about the exact number of people who take such a trip, one study indicates that about 10% of discharged soldiers from each Israeli army cohort spends more than five months traveling in developing countries (Mevorach 1996). Nevertheless, there are also many indications that the significance of this trend is greater than what this statistic shows. There are special stores catering to future backpackers in many cities, many novels use this experience as the basis of their plot, wide media coverage describes and discusses it, and insurance companies offer special plans—to mention just a few indications regarding the extent of this phenomenon.

The findings of this study are based on in-depth interviews with 38 young Israelis, who were 21 to 26 years old at the time they began their trips. Each respondent traveled for at least three months to destinations such as South and East Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, and Africa. In most cases, the interval between the trip and the interview was about 2–3 years, and in no case was it more than 5 years. They were approached through students and other young Israelis who functioned as respondents. Of these, 23 were men and 15 were women; 34 embarked on their trips within a year after their army service had ended; 10 had repeated the backpacking experience in a second or even a third trip. They all had full high school education, and by the time of the interview, most were already obtaining their post-secondary education. The interviews lasted from one and a half to three hours, with most closer to the upper limit. The respondents were asked how they had reached the decision to make their trips, how they had decided when and where to go, what they had done during their trips, where they had slept, eaten, how they had traveled from one location to another, and various other questions regarding their experiences. In addition, they were asked about their motivations, about their feelings during the trip, and its significance in their lives upon their return.

The findings of this article are also based on observations and informal interviews conducted in some of Israeli backpackers' known meeting places in Thailand, including the Khao-San road in Bangkok, the northern city of Chiang Mai, and the southern island of Ko Pha-Ngan. Two of the researchers also observed meeting places of Israeli backpackers in India and Nepal. More than 50 were approached in stores, restaurants, and guesthouses known as centers for Israeli backpackers. Since the formal interviews provided the best examples and quotes, the data from these observations and informal interviews have not been directly quoted. Yet, these materials were important in examining and validating the conclusions of this study. In addition, the data from the informal interviews and observations corresponded with the data from the formal interviews.

Finally, informal interviews regarding the backpacking phenomenon were also conducted with 15 young Israelis who have not participated in such trips. This category included those who traveled for short periods in Europe and North America and those who have not traveled at all. They were selected in the same fashion as the 38 backpackers in order to sensitize the authors to the unique features of the backpackers. Again, data from these interviews are not explicitly used in this article, but they did serve to strengthen the confidence in the conclusions of this study.

#### *The Heterogeneity of Backpacking as a Tourism Type*

The type-related attributes of the Israeli backpackers were examined, as already noted, in light of Cohen's (1979) phenomenological experiences. Specifically, this analysis attempted to classify each interviewee into one of the modes he suggested, according to a backpacker's motivations and the meanings that she or he assigned to both routine living in the home environment and to the experience on the road. This analysis was based on the interviewees' own statements, which were not always consistent with or supported by the respondent's actual activities. For example, some who expressed their alienation from the center of their own society seemed to be quite attached to it in other parts of the interview. In such cases of ambiguity, the decision regarding which of Cohen's modes the interviewee corresponds with was based on the researchers' impressions from the interview as a whole. Despite these problems of classification, however, the findings suggest that it is possible to find different types of tourists even among the small group of subjects examined in this study. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the same backpacker can display the features of different types in successive trips and, more interestingly, during the same excursion.

Twenty-three interviewees (61% of the sample) stated that they were interested in the "centers" of the foreign cultures visited. The pursuit of profound experiences that involve the study of foreign "centers" was mentioned by many who visited India and spoke about their attraction to "Eastern religions and philosophies". However, none of the backpackers (with the exception of one interviewee who stated that she

would like to return to India for a longer period in order to meditate and practice the “Eastern way of life”) expressed a full commitment to these philosophies, so they could not be classified as “existential” tourists.

*Experimental and Experiential Backpackers.* The interviewees who engaged in the study and practice of Eastern philosophies and meditation techniques are more accurately to be characterized as experimental rather than existential tourists. Their limited commitment to these alternative “centers” was manifested in their accounts about their experiences in local ashrams, where they engaged in religiously oriented meditation courses. Some admitted that they left these courses before they were completed mainly due to inconvenience or lack of interest. Those who claimed that they had meaningful experiences in these courses expressed their fear of possible conversion to the Eastern philosophies. For example, to quote one of the interviewees who took part in several courses,

Although I was fascinated with the Eastern philosophies during the trip, I reached a point where I decided to stop my involvement with these sorts of things. I felt that it is too dangerous for someone whose future life would probably occur in a Western society. These philosophies are part of the East, and that is where they belong.

Five interviewees (13%) expressed similar attitudes toward the foreign “center”, illustrating the experimental type of tourist. Nevertheless, eight interviewees (21%) who expressed their interest in the “centers” of other cultures conform to the experiential type of tourist, who enjoys observing the “authentic life” of “others” without engaging in their lifestyle. The experiential approach toward the Eastern philosophies is illustrated in the following account, by an interviewee who visited some *ashrams* but did not take part in the courses offered there:

When I was in India, I visited several *ashrams* and was really interested in their religious rituals. However, my visits in these *ashrams* were completely different than going to a synagogue ... I did not go to these places in order to pray but to see something different ... to meet the “Other”. I was like a tourist who observes from the outside without any attempt to practice their religion or internalize their philosophies.

The above quoted statements express different levels of estrangement from the interviewees’ own culture and routine in Israeli society, which was usually referred to as the “Western pace of life”, or the “stressful life in Israel”. Since they combined alienation from their own culture with the quest for meaning in “Others”, they can be characterized as experimental or experiential tourists according to their level of interaction in the local “center” while traveling.

*Humanistic Backpackers.* Seven interviewees (18%) who searched for profound experiences that involved observing or participating in foreign “centers” expressed attitudes that conform to the “humanistic” mode of experience. As already noted, the humanistic mode was not

included in Cohen's original typology. This type includes those who may seek meaningful experiences in the centers of other cultures without being alienated from their own. This is exemplified in the following account, by an interviewee who referred to the visit in India as the most meaningful part of the backpacking experience:

As one who spent some time in several *ashrams* and practiced yoga and other meditation techniques, I agree with those who say that India is the "land of the search for spiritual happiness" ... I also think that Buddhism and Hinduism are more advanced religions than Judaism since they open a way to the inner self. However, I would not replace my Jewish religion and Israeli culture with these religions. Judaism and the Israeli culture are the sources of my identity and the framework from which I intend to build my future family life. At the same time, I would like to use some elements of the Eastern philosophies and meditation techniques in the future for my spiritual well being.

*Diversionary and Recreational Backpackers.* The group of interviewees also included 15 backpackers (39%) who stated that they were mainly interested in pleasure-related activities. While two of them comply with the category of multitype backpackers described below, the rest correspond to Cohen's recreational or diversionary types. In terms of motivations, their backpacking experience mainly involved the pursuit of mere pleasure without a quest for meaningful experiences or a particular interest in the "Other's center". The lack of interest, and in some cases even lack of respect, that these backpackers expressed toward these local "centers" is illustrated in their responses. For example, according to an interviewee asked about her experiences with the host population and culture,

What I had in mind was mainly beaches, islands, and *stalbet* [Hebrew slang for the complete relaxation of doing nothing] ... I was not one of those who acted as if they were part of the local environment. The attempt of many travelers to engage in Eastern philosophies and meditation techniques was artificial and sometimes even pathetic. When I was in Varanasi, I saw a European backpacker who jumped into the water of the Ganges exactly where the Indians throw the ashes of the burned bodies. As she was diving into the water someone threw a bag of ashes on her. This was really gross. But more than that, the whole situation seemed to me extremely ridiculous ... so I just sat there on a boat and started to laugh.

The interviewee's cynical attitude toward those who attempted to engage in the local cultures was also manifested in her accounts regarding an encounter with her own culture during the trip. While referring to her attendance in the celebration of the "Passover Seder" dinner that the Hassidic Chabad movement organizes each year for Israeli backpackers in Katmandu, she stated:

I was in Katmandu during the Passover holiday, and when I heard that the Seder celebration includes a great meal for \$4, I said why not ... It turned out to be fun ... we smoked dope, ate lots of food, and took good photos of the Rabbi who sang there.

The estrangement of this interviewee from her own culture was also manifested in her accounts regarding the link between everyday life in Israel and the growing popularity of backpacking the youth:

Backpacking serves the need to stay away from all these unnecessary wars like the Lebanon War, which influenced many Israelis in a way similar to how the Vietnam War affected the hippies and other young Americans during the 60s. ... I am sure that in terms of politics, most of the backpackers are doves. Backpacking is part of a counter subculture that expresses fatigue from wars and a desire for a peaceful and normal life.

This view, which express an estrangement from both her own culture and the "Other's center", corresponds to Cohen's diversionary type. Four interviewees (11%) comply with this type of experience. Nevertheless, 9 (24%) who did not express any particular interest in the local culture were also not alienated from their own. While mentioning the importance of taking a break from their course of life in the home society, their future plans, which usually included academic studies and career objectives, revealed their commitment to the goals and values of their own culture. These interviewees, whose experiences combine the quest for fun abroad without alienation from the everyday life and culture of their own society, corresponded to Cohen's recreational type of tourist.

*Multitype Backpackers.* One may think that the above plurality of types among backpackers reflects the multitude of personalities, which is, of course, part of the explanation. However, the interviews also indicate that the same person might evince the attributes of different types of tourism. Specifically, 4 interviewees conform to more than one of Cohen's modes of experiences and are referred to as multitype backpackers. This phenomenon is especially evident in the case of "serial backpackers" who pursue another backpacking trip (or more) sometime after their first experience. In such cases, he/she might shift to another type due to the impact of the first experience or due to "return culture shock" that characterizes the post-experience of long-term trips (Riley 1988). Specifically, the difficulties of readjustment to routine living in the home society that these interviewees experienced upon return from an excursion functioned as a push motivation for their next trip. It appears that they have different motivations than they did during their previous backpacking experience, or in terms of this study, they shift into a different type of tourism. For example, one of the interviewees who returned to Southeast Asia about a year and a half after his first excursion explained:

My first trip was kind of a break from the usual path of life in Israel. I had just been released from the army and had plans to study computer sciences in the next academic year. My expectations from the trip were to have fun and "clear my head" for a few months .... The first two weeks back in Israel after the first trip were great. I met friends and relatives and waited to start my first year in the university. However, as time passed by, I started to feel that I didn't belong to this place. I could not stand the stressful atmosphere ... the way people drive

here, the way they try to cut in front of you when you stand in a line for the theater ... you know, the small things. I also found computer sciences to be too difficult and too boring ... I quit school after one semester and started to work at odd jobs. After a few months of feeling the same emptiness, I decided to save money for a second trip. I did not have any particular plans or desires except to get out of here. I guess I missed the lifestyle of doing nothing without feeling guilty about it.

Therefore, this interviewee, whose first excursion complied with the recreational type of experience, engaged in a second trip that corresponded to the diversionary type. In addition, among the interviewees were "serial" ones who started their "backpacking biography" as recreational or experiential tourists and were subsequently swept into the experimental type.

The tendency of a single backpacker to express various motivations and meanings was also manifested by an interviewee who corresponded to more than one of Cohen's types of tourist experiences during a single excursion in which he visited both America and Southeast Asia:

I saw this trip as a "once in a lifetime" kind of opportunity to experience everything that such a trip can offer. When I was in South America, I traveled like an adventurer who wishes to reach the most remote destinations and do the most challenging trails. When I arrived in Thailand, I needed to rest and went straight to the islands. I spent three weeks in Ko Pha-Ngan doing almost nothing except smoking dope and lying under the sun with other Israelis that I met there. After three weeks, I went to a meditation course in a Buddhist shrine that is also located in the south of Thailand. My ability to enjoy different kind of experiences was also evident in India. I was fascinated by the sense of spirituality in Varanasi, and I had a great time in Goa, where moonlight parties with lots of drugs was the main attraction.

This account indicates that the length of the backpacking trip combined with the variety of the visited destinations and attractions facilitate a multitype experience within a single excursion.

The overall findings reveal the heterogeneous nature of backpacking in terms of its type-related aspect. Nevertheless, this study also indicates that although the backpackers differ in their orientation and attitudes, they do share a common identity which is based on the form-related practices of backpacking.

### *Backpacking as a Form of Tourism*

The decision to study only those who spent at least three months in Third World countries already limited the form of tourism in line with Cohen's non-institutionalized tourists (1972). Given the duration of the trips, all of the interviewees had to curb spending by staying at inexpensive accommodations, eating in low-priced restaurants, and traveling by public means of transportation that are used mainly by the local population. In addition, all of the interviewees had no rigid plans and had only a vague notion on when they would return. Mostly, their length of travel spanned between three and eighteen months,

adjusting to very flexible plans that were changed according to circumstances, such as new information and new travel companions. While spending most of their time in inexpensive “Third World” countries, many also visited nearby affluent countries, such as Australia, Japan, or the United States, where they engaged in occasional short-term employment in order to prolong their travel.

The similarity among interviewees in these form-related aspects is not surprising. It is explained by the choice of targeted population. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that form-related practices shared by backpackers also function as major elements of their discourse and ideology, through which self-differentiation from the image of the conventional mass tourist is highly valued. Specifically, the backpackers develop attitudes that approve of and respect those who fully comply with the form-related attributes, which signify their identity. In this context, status is gained by those who have already traveled for long periods of time, have no itinerary barriers, maximize “best value” purchasing, and depart from the beaten track in the visited areas. On the contrary, those who deviate from these norms are considered “fake” or “not serious”. An interesting indication of this approach is that many tend to downplay the parts of their trip during which they did not follow these form-related codes of the backpacking ideology. This pattern of behavior was clearly illustrated in the interviewees’ accounts regarding visits to popular attractions. In this context, almost all emphasized their attempts to avoid destinations that are “too touristy”. At the same time, the interviews revealed that most of them visited popular attractions or attended events that are usually crowded with institutionalized tourists, such as the Grand Palace in Bangkok, the Taj Mahal in Agra, or the Carnival in Rio. Since they were clearly aware that these components of their trip violated the “backpacking code of behavior”, they de-emphasized these exposures and exalted their visits to “non-touristy” villages, markets, and countryside sites as the pinnacle of their trip. In addition, some interviewees stressed that their trips to the popular attractions were circumstantial rather than intended or planned. For example, one of the interviewees who visited the Grand Palace in Bangkok said that:

It was one of these days that I just wandered around in the Kao San Road without any specific purpose. Then, I met two guys who took me to the Grand Palace, which was not one of the sites that I planned to visit in Bangkok. To be honest ... the only reason that I went with these guys was because I was interested in one of them.

The interviewees’ tendency to play down their visits to popular places was also manifested in their accounts regarding their behavior while visiting them. Some stated that unlike most tourists, they did not photograph these sites. Others marked their experiences in such attractions as insignificant by stressing their lack of interest in them or even by exposing their lack of knowledge about them. For example, an interviewee who visited the city of Kanchanaburi in Thailand, where the Khwae River Bridge is the main attraction, stated:

I did not travel to Kanchanaburi to see the Khwae River Bridge. On one of the days that I spent there, I decided to go for a morning walk. While crossing one of the bridges over the river, someone standing there told me that this is the famous Khwae River Bridge. There were several bridges crossing the river, and I am not sure whether I reached the right one.

The justifications supplied by interviewees for attending popular attractions suggests that form-related attributes, even when violated, function as codes of behavior that signify the backpacker's identity as the opposite of the image of the conventional mass tourist.

## CONCLUSION

The data examined in this study exposes the heterogeneous nature of backpacking in terms of its type-related aspects. At the same time, the data reveals the interviewees' commitment to the form-related attributes associated with backpacking. Thus, this study questioned the notion of backpacking as a distinct category of tourism by differentiating between its type and form-related attributes. Based on 38 in-depth interviews with Israeli backpackers, the empirical analysis of the type-related attributes yielded three relevant insights. First, the analysis revealed that different meanings are assigned to the backpacking style. Specifically, different Israeli backpackers conformed to different types of tourist experiences suggested by Cohen (1979). Some visualized their trips as a period of recreation, while others sought new experiences to expand their knowledge and to explore their own psyches. Although a few were very critical of Israeli society and expressed serious doubts about belonging to that society, most, while critical of various aspects of Israeli culture, had no doubts regarding their commitment to that culture. Second, the findings indicate that tourists can be simultaneously attracted to both their own and the host society. Some interviewees were intrigued by their experiences in the host countries and felt that their lives were thus enriched without feeling estranged from Israeli society and culture. This finding corresponded to the humanistic type of experience that was mentioned by Cohen but not included in his explicit typology.

Third, and most interestingly, the analysis revealed that some participants corresponded to more than one type of experience across their "backpacking biography" or even during a single trip. This finding provides empirical support for the idea that individuals' motivations might change across time (Cohen 1979; Pearce 1988). In this context, it should be stressed that the different experience types presented in this study do not represent lower or higher levels in a "backpacker's career ladder". Thus, Cohen's concept of a "tourist biography" seems to be more appropriate to the findings of this study than Pearce's notion of a "tourist career". In addition, it is suggested that the multitype backpackers portrayed in this study comply with Feifer's (1985) characterization of the "posttourist" as one who enjoys different types of experiences during her/his excursion. Accordingly, it is argued that the findings regarding the type-related attributes support a postmod-

ernist approach, which stresses both the active role of the human actor as a consumer of tourism and the diverse nature of contemporary touristic experiences. This finding also supports the main argument of this study, which challenges the notion of backpacking as a distinct type of tourism by illuminating its heterogeneous nature in terms of motivations and the meanings associated with it.

This study, notwithstanding, suggests that backpacking might still be differentiated from institutionalized tourism in terms of its form-related attributes. These include length of excursion, flexibility of itinerary, and the tendency toward low spending that determines the destinations and means of transportation and accommodations preferred by this tourism submarket. Moreover, the findings suggest that the interviewees' self-identity as backpackers relies mainly on compliance with these form-related practices rather than with type-related aspects, such as motivations.

The commitment by Israeli backpackers to the form-related ideology also supports the argument that contemporary backpacking should be regarded as a form rather than a type of tourism. As mentioned previously, however, this conclusion is related to the way in which these two concepts were constructed and utilized as analytical tools in this study. In this context, while the analysis of types corresponded to Cohen's (1979) multitype categorization, the form-related analysis referred only to his two analytical constructs: institutionalized and non-institutionalized tourism (1972). It is possible that a further classification into subforms of non-institutionalized tourism would point to more homogeneous groups of backpackers in terms of their type-related attributes. For example, those who pursue the main centers of backpacker tourism in Asia might differ from others who prefer more "off the beaten track" locations in terms of their motivations and the meanings they derive from travel. Thus, the relations between types and forms should be further reconsidered in analytical terms and examined with respect to backpackers of other nationalities and locations. Yet, it should also be noted that since these are two theoretical constructs, they do not necessarily completely cover the complexity and variety of actual backpacking. Thus, one may always expect to find individuals who do not comply with any form or type, regardless of how these two concepts were constructed.

Future research on backpacker tourism might also be concerned with social and economic implications of this study. For example, local resident attitudes toward backpackers could be related to their differences in terms of their approach toward local religions or other cultural "centers". In this respect, it is possible that some Third World destinations are visited mostly by recreational and diversionary backpackers whose ignorance and lack of interest in local "centers" might be accompanied by disrespectful behavior. Here, backpackers are likely to be considered undesirable by local residents. Their heterogeneity that this study stresses could also be further investigated from a marketing point of view. In this context, future segmentation of this market could associate the different types of backpackers with a range of tourism products and services.

Finally, it is argued that the findings presented in this paper are enough to place doubt on the implicit inclination to couple together indistinguishably external practices and internal meanings and to assume that tourists who behave similarly also share the same motivations and meanings. Based on the findings, this study calls for a much more cautious approach in this regard. Indeed forms of tourism and leisure cannot be independent of cognitive and psychological aspects, but they should not be conceived as being determined by them. Thus, it is also possible that tourists in organized tours—the apparent polar opposite of backpacking—join such tours for extremely diverse reasons and derive from them very different kinds of satisfaction. ■

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