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Lost in Transitions: staging global tourism in local small towns

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

at
Lincoln University
by

R. T. Zonneveld

Lincoln University
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Abstract of a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Landscape Architecture

Lost in Transitions: staging global tourism in local small towns

By Robert Zonneveld

Small towns are a vital part of the travel circuit in New Zealand, and small town travel space is a unique situation where *global* visitors meet the people and lived spaces of the *local* everyday. Connecting small towns to global tourism flows create positive impacts associated with economic development for the town, while negative impacts include a spreading 'global' placelessness. In order to attract and better provide for tourists, and to 'improve' their position in the travel circuit, these towns are making changes to the spatial arrangements of facilities and character of their main streets and public space. As a result, towns are becoming more homogeneous and stylized (gentrified) as global processes affect the reshaping of towns for tourism. This research is an exploration of the design implications and process of developing small towns for tourism. The focus of the study is upon the design of public open space for 'global' tourists, and it is based upon three separate but linked case studies. Each case study looks at a specific town that represents a different category in a simple typology of tourism towns in New Zealand. Grounded in observation and tested with resident and visitor responses, the research explores issues of global travel in a local setting using a performance perspective in design. It particularly focuses upon the way public space in small towns act as "transitional space" where tourists refocus from being global travellers to local visitors. Three key insights are outcomes of this research. First, the performance metaphor provides a new perspective that helped understand space as not only an arrangement of material objects, but also as places of performed activities with social meaning and significance for those performing. Secondly, the lens of the performance metaphor revealed inherent bias in the nature of design process. The third insight is that tourist space is fluid and there is a multiplicity of perceptions and understanding from tourists and local residents. Designers therefore are challenged to balance a range of needs and expectations and provide not only traditional tourism markers and activities, and preserve 'authentic' sites and spaces, but need designs to provide an opportunity for tourist improvisation and innovation where tourists co-create their experiences.

Key words

Tourism, Design, Small towns, Performance Perspective

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