

DOES ROUND-THE-WORLD TRAVELLING EVOKE AN 'ENVIRONMENTAL EYE'?

MAPPING LEISURE MOBILITY AND THE FORMATION OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

Considering the need to address increasingly globalised environmental issues, this paper seeks to investigate the idea that new forms of environmental citizenship operating at a global scale can emerge from leisure mobility. Taking round-the-world travellers and their travel websites as a case study, it maps large scale movements of corporeal and virtual mobility, as well as more local processes of environmental awareness-raising. An 'environmental eye' describes both a source and expression of commitment regarding the environment, which travellers gain whilst 'on the move'. However, as leisure mobility betrays uneven geographies, the social practice performed by the hypermobile elite may lead to asymmetrical formations of global environmental citizenship, dividing the 'environmental eye' between mobile and immobile individuals in both physical and virtual travel spaces.

Keywords

Global environmental citizenship, leisure mobility, round-the-world travel, travel websites

Résumé

Compte tenu de la nécessité de traiter des problématiques environnementales de plus en plus globalisées, cet article explore l'idée que de nouvelles formes de citoyenneté opérant à l'échelle globale peuvent émerger de la mobilité de loisir. En utilisant les voyageurs autour du monde et leurs blogs de voyage comme cas d'étude, les mouvements à grande échelle de la mobilité corporelle et virtuelle sont cartographiés, ainsi que les processus plus locaux de prise de conscience environnementale. Un « œil environnemental » décrit à la fois une source et une expression d'engagement envers l'environnement que les voyageurs gagnent lorsqu'ils sont « en mouvement ». Cependant, la mobilité de loisir laissant transparaître d'inégales géographies, les pratiques sociales entreprises par l'élite hyper-mobile peuvent mener à des asymétries dans la formation de la citoyenneté environnementale, divisant ainsi l'« œil environnemental » entre les individus mobiles et immobiles au sein des deux espaces physiques et virtuels.

Mots-clés

citoyenneté environnementale globale, mobilité de loisir, voyage autour du monde, blog de voyage

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's context of globalisation, it is widely recognised that an increasing number of material and immaterial flows extend beyond the boundaries and beyond the control of nation-states (Urry, 2000b; 2000c). This is especially true for flows related to the environment (e.g. greenhouse gases) (Urry, 1999), but also for flows of people. During the last few decades, air travel has switched from a luxury form of mobility into a contemporary form of hypermobility characterised by the inclusion of new social groups, including the mass movement of long

distance tourists (Burns & Novelli, 2008). Obviously, such cheap high-speed travel is hardly compatible with long-term goals and attempts to achieve environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, it is precisely through the expansion in size and velocity of tourist flows, that knowledge of global risks, under development and environmental degradation became inescapable issues in the public sphere (Rojek, 1998). In this context, is there any sign of a new kind of citizenship emerging, in which people would see themselves as shaping responsibilities regarding global environmental issues and ties with other environments beyond national borders?

In this research, it is suggested that round-the-world travelling can contribute to the formation of new forms of citizenship. However, as traditional assessments regarding the environmental impacts of tourism too often fail to consider the activity within a broader context of mobility, tourism is conceptualised as a form of “leisure-oriented temporary mobility” (Hall *et al.*, 2004) for the purpose of this paper. First, the literature is reviewed in order to evaluate how the social practice of leisure mobility may relate to global citizenship and the environment. Second, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of human geography, round-the-world travellers are taken as a case study in order to investigate how travellers may develop an ‘environmental eye’ during their journey. Finally, the potential role of travellers’ corporeal and virtual mobility in the formation and performance of environmental citizenship is critically assessed.

II. LEISURE MOBILITY, GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE ENVIRONMENT

For the population in developed countries or elites in developing countries, the increased leisure time, combined with burgeoning disposal incomes, enables them to become dedicated worldwide travellers (Reid, 2003). This leads to a new series of social encounters (Suvantola, 2002). The “locales”, i.e. a setting for interaction, in which encounters occur are sometimes termed destinations. This particular type of lifestyle mobility is usually termed ‘tourism’ when it takes place away from the home environment (Hall, 2005a, p. 25). Tourism definitions (e.g. World Tourism Organisation definition) generally make a clear distinction between what constitutes leisure, recreation, and tourism (Coles *et al.*, 2005). Nonetheless, although these distinctions are sometimes necessary, society is not divided into sports players, television viewers, tourists and so on; rather “it is the same people who do all these things” (Parker, 1999, p. 21). Therefore, following the increasing number of academics from tourism studies (Shaw & Williams, 2002; Hall & Page, 2002; 2009; Coles *et al.*, 2005; Burns & Novelli, 2008; Hall, 2005a; Hannman, 2008; Equipe MIT, 2004), this paper views tourism and recreation as part of a wider conceptualization of leisure. Tourism constitutes just one form of “leisure-oriented temporary mobility” (Hall *et al.*, 2004), and is constitutive of that mobility.

Considering tourism as leisure mobility is in line with the so called ‘mobility turn’. At the intersection between transport research (including travel) and social research (including tourism), it transcends the dichotomy between these two fields and puts into question the fundamental ‘territorial’ and ‘sedentary’ precepts of twentieth-century social science (Hannam *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006) is

concerned with mapping both the large scale movements of people, objects and information throughout the world; as well as more local processes of daily transportation, and the travel of material things within everyday life (Hannam, 2008). These two main concepts both question the notion of tourism *per se* all mobilities go into “doing tourism” (Sheller & Urry, 2004, p. 1). Therefore, it is becoming progressively meaningful to talk about ‘leisure mobility’ when referring to individuals and their associated lifestyle mobility. Focusing on mobility and its emerging patterns helps in understanding the evolving nature of the relationships between rich and poor regions of the world, as well as and global and local realities (Burns & Novelli, 2008). This becomes particularly true when considering the notion of global citizenship and the way this may address contemporary global environmental challenges.

Global citizenship’ defends the idea that human beings are ‘citizens of the world’ (Dower & Williams, 2002). Whether we are all global citizens or not is at the heart of the debate. For instance, Bowden (2003, p. 355) argued that “to be in position to claim to be a global citizen is a privilege that is reserved for the modern, affluent global *bourgeoisie*”, and to join the liberal-democratic Western world, outsiders are welcome but only if they conform to Western values. Nonetheless, considering the initial philosophical inspiration of global citizenship (i.e. being someone who cares for the world as a whole), the concept is considered here as a meaningful framework for debating issues that need global responses. In addition, citizenship is often highly contested. It is an actively created and negotiated status that is shifted and remodelled in response to large and small processes (Marston & Mitchell, 2006). Therefore, it is the formation of citizenship that must be at the heart of the debate when dealing with issues that operate at a global scale.

Currently, one of the key issues that can potentially lead to the formation of new forms of citizenship at the global level, is the environment. As Newby put it:

“[t]here is an increasing awareness that the environmental challenges we face today are, increasingly, international, global and potentially more life-threatening than in the past. In this sense, each individual’s future is tied, in the title of the Brundtland Report, to ‘Our Common Future’ and we are all, therefore, environmental citizens now” (1996, p. 215).

Derived from the gradual globalisation of concerns of the mid-1980s (Jelin, 2000), the term ‘environmental citizenship’ was first coined in 1990 by Environment Canada. The federal ministry of the environment was encouraging “individuals, communities and organisations to think about the environmental rights and responsibilities we all have as residents of planet Earth” (quoted in MacGregor & Szerszynski, 2003, p. 8). Following this, the idea of a ‘global environment’ has

gradually established itself as a reality. Encompassing the idea of a shared environment, it can be regarded as a causal system that includes ecosystems, weather and climate - a system that makes relational environments possible and forms a distinct object of study (Attfield, 2002). Although sometimes controversial (Jelin, 2000), the global environment constitutes the territory where global obligations clearly arise. For those claiming to be a global citizen, environmental responsibilities constitute the most obvious focus of concern (Attfield, 2002) and environmental risks such as global warming are not an abstraction for them (Urry, 2000a).

The development of such environmental awareness is supported by a defining feature of what Bauman (2000) calls 'liquid modernity', and more specifically by the increased mobility of individuals (at least from the global 'north') in travelling the world for leisure (Desforges *et al.*, 2005). Through the expansion in size and velocity of individual flows, environmental degradation became inescapable issues in the public sphere (Rojek, 1998). In Szerszynski's words: "[o]f course physical travel often involves serious impacts on the environment, but these have to be set against any beneficial changes in ideas or attitudes that it might also engender" (2005, p. 83). Therefore, considering that mobility has also become a key feature in the formation of global environmental citizenship, this research evaluates Szerszynski's (2005) assumption that movements within the world can be both a source and expression of commitments that transcend the local.

Urry (2000b) identified two kinds of travel that leisure mobility incorporates: physical travel, which has become a 'way of life' for many in Western societies; and virtual travel, that is transcending geographic and often social distance through information and communication technology (ICT), such as the Internet. While both physical and virtual mobility represents a creative possibility in the construction of global citizenship, concepts of place and scale are also central to the structures and experiences of citizenship. These geographically inflected concepts are intrinsic to the practical reworking of citizenship and have much to contribute to the development of citizenship theory (Desforges *et al.*, 2005). First, citizenship is formed through engagement with place (Barnett & Low, 2004). Hence, focusing on travellers' behaviour and experiences allows us to understand how these shape people, who in turn, may shape places. Second, citizenship shifts scales and moves away from national affiliations, towards global forms of belonging and responsibility (Molz, 2005). Thus, while citizenship is transgressed by mobile beings, it is also formed through scale configuration and engagement with place (Desforges *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, the concept of topology (Murdoch, 2006) helps to go below the physical aspect of place. Evaluating the relations and the

interactions between these relations enables to highlight processes of spatial emergence which are taking place within travellers' networks.

An inspection of the Anglophone literature reveals that an increasing, diverse number of studies deals with mobility and its implications for global citizenship *per se* (Szerszynski & Toogood, 2000; Szerszynski *et al.*, 2000; Urry, 1999; Coles, 2008; Simpson, 2004; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Carlson, 2008; Roche, 2002). However, none of them considers leisure practices within the context of mobility. The only 'exception to the rule' within the social science literature at the time of writing is Molz's recent work on round-the-world travellers and global citizenship (2004; 2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2008). Round-the-world travellers are at the intersection between global corporeal mobility and virtual mobility via the high-tech, high-speed realm of global information technology (Molz, 2005). Drawing from Holmes' (2001) idea that contemporary forms of citizenship are deterritorialised, Molz demonstrated how round-the-world see their mobility not just as a right derived from a specific national identity, but also as "an obligation to produce tolerance, interconnectedness and cultural understanding out of encounters with difference" (2005, p. 524).

Nonetheless, Molz did not consider specifically the question of how leisure mobility can relate to the formation of global environmental citizenship. Therefore, this paper addresses the remaining theoretical gap regarding the interpretation of leisure mobility as a way of developing global environmental citizenship. By taking round-the-world travellers as a case study, it investigates whether travellers' physical and virtual mobility embody any source and/or expression of commitment regarding the environment which transcend 'the local'. This main research question suggests two sub-questions. First, to what extent do round-the-world travellers consider their trip to bring about environmental awareness? Second, to what extent do they consider their ability to travel as a means of performing environmental citizenship? In short, does round-the-world travel evoke an 'environmental eye'?

III. MAPPING NEW AND OLD SOCIAL PHYSICS

In their investigations, scholars usually follow sociological approaches such as Urry's (2004) "new social physics". However, the contributions of "old social physics" should not be ignored, i.e. considering both "macro-level quantitative accounts of patterns of human mobility" and "micro-level accounts of individual human behaviour" (Hall, 2005b, p. 95). This research thus considers leisure mobility over the totality of a trip as well as over individuals' perspective. By approaching round-the-world

travellers through their travel websites, it evaluates one of the “real world discourses” (Schattle, 2007, p. 24) pertaining to global environmental citizenship.

A. Sample

This study surveyed a selection of 75 round-the-world travel websites and analysed a sample of 20 websites and web authors in greater depth. The detailed sample was representative of the 75 round-the-world travel websites in terms of age, nationality and gender. It represented thirty four travellers of whom ages were ranged from the early twenties to over sixty years old (70% of respondents were aged between 25 and 35 years old). 14 were females and 20 were males. The majority of travellers were middle class, white, and were nationals of Canada (2), United States of America (11), United Kingdom (14), Ireland (1), Netherlands (1), Germany (1), France (1), Switzerland (1), or Australia (2). As often “whiteness travels well” (Puar, 1994, p. 91), such details about travellers’ nationality is important as it affects traveller’s ability (or right) to engage with mobility.

In this study, round-the-world travellers consulted were mostly backpackers (also called budget travellers) and independent travellers who were travelling around the world for a period varying between a couple of months and a year (e.g. gap year travellers), to as long as five years. Most of the travellers visited one to two countries per month, although some travelled to less than one, and some more than three per month. Such variation of the destination ratio within the sample showed that disparities also emerged amongst the ‘hypermobile elite’ (O’Regan, 2008, p. 124). With a few notable exceptions, these travellers decided to journey around the world in order to take some time away from their studies or career, or after retiring. As Molz stated: “the round-the-world traveller is [...] a mobile, detached *flâneur* who delights in encounters with difference, displays a willingness to risk and a stance of openness toward other cultures” (2006b, p. 5). Considering this, data collection was designed in order to determine the extent to which travellers’ openness to encounter “otherness” (Bennett, 2008, p. 132) created an opportunity for raising their environmental awareness, as well as bringing them to act in favour of the environment.

B. Data collection

According to Molz (2005), in 2003 there were close to 2000 online travelogues catalogued by the major English-language search engines such as Google, Yahoo! and Altavista. These travel websites usually consist of regularly updated journal entries and photographs detailing what travellers experienced on the road. Most of the time websites included detailed information about travellers, their trip, and their itinerary. Sometimes it

contained biographical information, packing lists, and travel advices. For most of the travellers, updating their website was an integral part of their travel experience. Details of their whereabouts and records of their activities and feelings made of online travelogues “experiential and cognitive information” (Richards & Wilson, 2004, p. 7). These were interpreted for the insights it provides about ways in which ‘the environment’ is understood by web authors.

At the intersection between technology and global mobility (Molz, 2008), travel narratives gave travellers the opportunity to produce a reflexive text visible to the online audience (Molz, 2006a). The analysis thus also focused on the ways travellers used ICT to share places of environmental beauty they visited and/or report environmental concerns they observed. Furthermore, attention was also given to determining whether or not interactive travel opens up new spaces for effective environmental debate with geographically dispersed audiences such as friends, family, and other travellers.

A questionnaire was designed for the representative sample of twenty travellers. It was elaborated on the basis of the websites review. For instance, different types of environmental issues were identified within travel website. Following this, surveyed travellers were asked about the place and the type of issues they faced during their trip. Used as a vehicle for “scientific hypothesis testing” (Cloke *et al.*, 2004, p. 131), the questionnaire allowed for obtaining empirical information related to the main study variables (see table 1).

Some limitations emerged from the questionnaires. When asking about ‘citizenship’, some people associated the notion solely with their national affiliation, but did not consider extending it to the global scale or the environment. Also, despite the fact that half of the questions were ‘open’, some people did not develop their responses extensively. In order to counter these limitations, four complementary phone interviews were conducted amongst the sample of twenty people. Ideal for open ended questions, this “sensitive and people-oriented” method (Valentine, 1997, p. 111) permitted in-depth discussion regarding travellers’ experiences and the extent to which it affected their environmental awareness.

While travel websites, questionnaires and interviews were very helpful in providing qualitative information about both virtual and physical travel, a map was drawn to quantitatively frame travellers’ experiences and their associated mobility in time and space. It was elaborated on the basis of an inventory of the countries visited by travellers from the 75 round-the-world websites surveyed generally. As well as providing a macro-level description of round-the-world traveller’s spatialities, travellers’ itin-

Table 1. Study variables

Variables	Definition	Information gathered in the questionnaire and used to measure variables
Physical travel	The more mobile a traveller is, the more geographical areas and their associated environmental issues he or she potentially encounters.	How many countries did you visit? Do you think this affected your environmental awareness?
Virtual travel	Being virtually mobile through ICT such as the Internet allows sharing and reporting of environmental concerns, but also to open debates about environmental issues.	What did you use your travel website for?
Place	Environmental awareness is developed by discovering particular places of the world where environmental issues are witnessed.	Which environmental issues did you face? Can you remember where?
Experience	Environmental awareness is developed through a variety of experiences sought by round-the-world travellers, which determines the way they engage with places and potentially the environment.	What are the experiences that opened your eyes on environmental issues?
Global environmental issues	Round-the-world travel gives the opportunity to gain consciousness of the existence of a shared environment and its associated issues.	Do you think the environmental issues faced during your trip have an impact on where you live at the moment?
Commitment regarding the environment	Travellers' behaviour betrays their commitment for the environment.	Did you take any action to be more 'environmentally friendly' when travelling?
Environmental responsibility	Travelling can change people's responsibilities regarding global environmental issues.	Do you feel responsible for any of the environmental issues witnessed during you trip?

eraries were also considered as “temporal-spatial carriers of traveller experiences” (Wang, 2006, p. 72), that is to say something which is determined by social, political, economical, and cultural parameters (e.g. safety, flight costs, personal interests, cultural diversity). Analysing these aspects of itineraries assisted in unifying the quantitative and qualitative forms of leisure mobility.

IV. DEVELOPING AN 'ENVIRONMENTAL EYE' ON THE MOVE

Results showed that most round-the-world travellers develop their sense of care for the environment during their trip. The 'environmental eye' evoked in travellers is mainly determined by their itineraries (including places visited and travel experiences), and their awareness about the environmental impact of their trip.

Itineraries of round-the-world travellers exhibit their high degree of mobility. Not surprisingly, travellers went to every continent but also visited a wide range of geographical areas, including equatorial rainforests, polar regions, steppes plains, mountain ranges, seas and oceans, coastal zones, and deserts. The map of round-the-world travellers' main global travel routes highlighted three main clusters of destinations (see Map 1): South-East Asia (33.6% of the 75 surveyed round-the-world travellers), Europe (27.3%) and the Western fringe of Latin America (19.7%).

Visiting many places opened travellers' eyes to an important variety of environmental issues. The following table enumerates environmental issues (documented in respondents' travel websites) from the questionnaires and their association with particular locations (see Table 2).

Map 1. Countries visited and routes followed by 75 round-the-world travellers originated from the USA, UK, Europe and Australia between 1999 and 2009



Table 2. Countries where environmental issues were observed by 20 round-the-world travellers between 1999 and 2009 (sorted by order of occurrence)

Environmental issue	Place	Count
Pollution (air and water)	China, India, Thailand, USA, Brunei Vietnam, Russia, Columbia	21
Deforestation	Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil, Guatemala, Honduras, Brunei, China, India, Vietnam, Australia, Canada, USA	20
Wastes (litter)	India, China, Thailand, Kenya, Egypt	12
Global warming	Antarctica, Austria, France, Canada, Chile, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Australia	10
Desertification	Australia, China, Mongolia, Peru, Mauritania	8
Overfishing	Chile, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand	5
Resource depletion	Bolivia, China, India, Canada, USA	5
Ozone hole	Australia, Antarctica, New Zealand	4
Soil erosion	Canada, USA, Bolivia, Guatemala	4
Loss of biodiversity	Costa Rica, Ecuador, Malaysia	3
Coral reef bleaching	Australia, Belize	2

Environmental degradation was encountered in both urban and natural environments. The issues considered as most important were those which had a direct impact on travellers, but also those which could be observed *de facto*. In the first case, some travellers experienced breathing and visual difficulties because of air pollution in big cities. In Bangkok, some were affected by seeing people in the street wearing masks. Travellers also reported waste-related issues which occurred mainly in East and South-East Asia (especially in India). Many spoke of rubbish thrown out of windows and along the streets, which made the cities they were visiting “un sanitary” (Matt, 2009). In the second case, some travellers admitted experiencing the “emotional impact” (Adrian, 2009) of flying over the Amazon or the Borneo rainforest and seeing the destruction of large portions of the forests. Finally, a few travellers claimed that ‘witnessing’ dramatic changes in ice coverage made global warming more clear to them. Ludovic (2009) for instance, explained in the interview how going to Antarctica and staying with scientists allowed him to observe and learn about the impacts of climate change.

When asking respondents about the extent to which these issues affect their present lives, round-the-world travellers did not see any direct effect other than a general global warming. This environmental concern was often associated with deforestation as logging diminishes the planet’s capacity to absorb carbon dioxide, and, arguably, has an impact on temperatures and climate patterns.

Additionally, those living in coastal areas were aware that climate change might lead to the submersion of their cities.

Although all respondents thought themselves to be sensitive to environmental issues before they left, they considered their travel experience as the most significant way in which their environmental awareness was raised, beyond high school and university education. As stated by an American traveller:

Derek (2009): “It is difficult for many of us to understand the problem when you live in a fairly clean environment ... If people experienced the environmental problems firsthand ... they could better understand the massive problems out there”.

Hence, travellers’ previous environmental consciousness was reinforced during their journey, but this varied greatly, depending on the individual’s experiences and way of travelling.

Respondents found that both talking with locals along with tourist activities were significant in raising their environmental awareness. On the one hand, travellers reported that meeting local people directly reliant on their local environment (land, crops, water), made them more aware of the issues faced. For those travellers engaged in ‘slow travel’ such as hitchhiking or travelling by local transportations (trains or buses), their situation allowed them to get closer to local realities. On the other hand, other travellers claimed that being involved in tour-

ism activities was rewarding. These included guided wildlife viewing tours. Reading travel books was also considered useful by travellers as it gave them more detailed information on the background and causes of local environmental issues.

Most round-the-world travellers were well aware of the environmental impact of their trip. They could link their

own daily actions with environmental issues. Surveyed respondents detailed an important number of actions they took on the way to be more ‘environmentally friendly’ (see Table 3). Although some claimed they struggled enough to save money to travel, and so refused to restrict their plans for any “environmental cause” (Wes, 2009), some simply stated that backpacking was “the most environmentally friendly way of travelling” (Rosie, 2009).

Table 3. Summary of respondents’¹ attitudes in order to travel more ‘environmentally friendly’ (questionnaire extract June 2009)

Transportation	Marie: “...[W]e walked when possible (avoided taxis).” Ludovic: “Hitchhiking (people go from A to B anyway).” Iain: “I intended to not to fly too often (only between continents) and used local transportation wherever possible.”
Accommodation	Adrian: “We didn’t stay at large, polluting resorts” Marie: “...[We] adjusted thermostats when possible to conserve energy” Iain: “Stayed in basic hotels with none of the usual services, so no towels being supplied and washed everyday, no airconditioning etc.”
Food and Goods	Marie: “...[We] used backpacks to carry food (rather than shopping bags)” Matt: “We tried to eat locally produced foods to keep down food miles” Travis: “...I looked for environmentally friendly travel goods
Wastes	Annemieke: “We refilled plastic water bottles” Otto: “I made sure my waste was disposed of in a proper fashion”
Tourist activities	Annemieke: “We tried to find shops and nature/wildlife watching tours that had a good reputation vis-à-vis environmental consciousness”

¹ Respondents’ names are pseudonyms in order to preserve their privacy

Opinions were divergent about travellers’ responsibilities regarding the environmental issues faced during their trip. On the one hand, some travellers did not feel they had any responsibility regarding the local problems they were witnessing as they felt the solution to these problems was out of their sphere of influence. Also, they considered that global environmental issues should be dealt with to a greater extent by international organisations. On the other hand, as members of industrialized countries “enjoying the comforts of a modern society” (Rosie, 2009), most travellers felt responsible in a general way. Flying over thousands of kilometres during their journey made them responsible for global issues such as global warming. In this regard, some travellers did radically change their behaviour. One did a round-the-world trip hitchhiking in five years, and two others by train for one year. Their journey reinforced their environmental awareness and convictions, and led two of them to conduct environmental lectures at schools and universities around-the-world.

Travel websites were also used as a mediator to encourage people to travel responsibly in relation to the environment. For instance, some web authors detailed a series of actions travellers should take in order to preserve the environment they are visiting, such as keeping their trash until they find a proper location for it. Amongst the web authors, more than the half claimed they used their travel website to show places of environmental beauty they visited and to reflect on their travels. A quarter of them stated using their blog to share environmental concerns. However, none of these engaged in any specific environmental debate with the online audience.

V. THE FORMATION OF GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

Considering the ‘environmental eye’ round-the-world travellers may develop whilst ‘on the move’, this section examines how leisure mobility embodies both sources

and expressions of commitment regarding the environment. Besides, it critically assesses the extent to which this commitment can be considered as an opportunity for the formation of global environmental citizenship.

A. Leisure mobility as a source for global environmental citizenship

Round-the-world travel can potentially be a source of commitment regarding the environment. Itineraries, places visited, travel experiences and the way of travelling are central to this. While the social practice of circumnavigating the globe is often considered by its proponents as an environmental awareness-raising journey, some limitations remain within both physical and virtual travel performed by travellers.

1. Physical travel

The potential of round-the-world travellers to relate to the environment lies in three of their main characteristics: their nationality and access to financial resources, their initial will for large scale travel, and their openness towards "otherness" (Bennett, 2008, p. 132). First, surveyed round-the-world travellers all felt that their country of origin facilitated their access to destinations. Coming from a rich country helps in obtaining visas, but also to afford transportation. Second, travellers' global mobility brings them to visit a great variety of geographical environments including some of the most remote places of the Earth such as Antarctica or the Pacific Islands. Subsequently, this gives them the opportunity to encounter a great range of potential issues. Third, travellers seek to expand their space of reflexivity (Oakes & Minca, 2004) and wander along their itineraries in search of "the most culture contact possible on the other" (Vogt, 1976, p. 27). Such behaviour fosters host-visitor or immobile-mobile interactions and thus 'genuine' immersions into the local reality.

However, what supports such experiences is predefined for most travellers by socio-cultural, economical, and political conditions which, in the end, make their journey a subjective experience. The analysis of itineraries highlighted that the movement of round-the-world travellers at the global scale tends to follow a general pattern, and their rest have the tendency to concentrate in the same locations of Europe, South-East Asia and the Western fringe of Latin America. Countries visited by round-the-world travellers generally reflected the distribution of international tourism. Between 1999 and June 2009, on average, Asia received one third of international tourist arrivals, Latin America and the Caribbean one tenth, and Africa one fiftieth (WTO, 2004; 2009), which is in line with figures from the survey. Unattractive and unsafe regions are cautiously avoided most of the time. Africa represents the biggest gap in Western travellers'

itineraries and is usually bypassed for its political unrest and poverty.

Similarities of round-the-world travellers' itineraries reflect Wang's "Logos-modernity" (2006, p. 75) which is the overarching rationalization in contemporary societies. This means that despite their initial will to get rid of itineraries sold by travel agencies as a package tour, 'independent' travellers systematically find themselves involved in an alternative form of commoditization (by buying guidebooks and other travel materials for instance, which is a commoditization of the knowledge of potential itineraries). They therefore cannot escape the itineraries hidden in contemporary institutionalised systems which organise their routes through networks of schedules, traffic lines and prices, booking systems of transportation and hospitality. This travel paradox is betrayed by the uneven geography of leisure mobility, which in turn, affects travellers' environmental awareness.

The uneven geography of leisure mobility may affect travellers' environmental awareness in two different ways. First, travellers' global mobility is restricted to a limited number of mainstream travel routes. This separates them from places where important environmental issues prevail. For instance, only one of the 75 surveyed travellers visited the Aral Sea on the border with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the world's fourth largest inland water body which has dramatically shrunk in recent years due to an increased extraction of river water for growing cotton (Harris, 2004; Pickering & Owen, 1997). Nonetheless, despite some environmental issues being scarce and remaining localised, some are widespread and global, and can potentially affect the 'wandering' round-the-world traveller in another part of his or her trip. In the case of global warming, this becomes evident as respondents claimed having 'witnessed' climate change by observing ice sheets melting in West Antarctica, glaciers melting in Canada and France, as well as sea level change in Fiji. As far as these phenomena are true, climate change constitutes a real opportunity for raising travellers' environmental awareness throughout the world.

Second, the uneven geography of leisure mobility can be a limiting factor in raising travellers' environmental awareness as it also betrays "backpacker enclaves" (Cohen, 2004, p. 43). As independent travellers seek a relaxed, tolerant and socially permissive atmosphere (Westerhausen & MacBeth, 2003), they tend to concentrate in places where there is a congregation of predominantly young people with time on their hands looking for fun. This leads to the formation of enclosed spaces demarcating themselves not just spatially but also socially with the host culture (Richards & Wilson, 2004). This fact could be noted within travel websites

where writings and pictures described encounters made with international travellers during activities such as the annual Full Moon Party in Koh Phangan (southern Thailand) created by the very presence of backpackers. This illustrates how round-the-world travel experiences can enclose travellers in a bubble, in that very few of them meet local people in non-commercial settings. This unfortunately hampers any potential environmental awareness-raising through interactions with locals. However, is 'drifting' but ending up 'following the crowds' necessarily negative for round-the-world travellers in terms of environmental-awareness raising?

Richards and Wilson argued that "the most important source of information 'on the road' is fellow backpackers" and enclaves are "quintessential refuelling stations" (2004, p. 261) where travellers can accommodate with modern facilities (take a hot shower, buy an imported beer and use the Internet) and meet fellow travellers. This fact was acknowledged by questionnaire respondents who considered sharing experiences with their peers the second most important way of raising their environmental awareness. Visitor-visitor or mobile-mobile interactions can thus be very rewarding. That said, travellers' hypermobility tends to shield them from the host society but also from their fellow travellers as the number of destinations increases but the time spent at each destination decreases. Some of the surveyed travellers visited more than four countries a month for instance. Such fast "mobile consumerism" (Wang, 2006, p. 72) decreases the quality of encounters in these increasingly deterritorialized locales, and hampers the possibility for in-depth exchanges of ideas either with mobile or with immobile individuals about potential environmental issues.

2. *Virtual travel*

Virtual travel such as through the Internet also constitutes a source of commitment regarding the environment for the online audience. Travel websites containing environment-related information creates an opportunity for raising one's environmental awareness. However, travel website narratives are neither neutral, nor evenly accessible.

First, travel website narratives are rarely neutral which may bias the online audience's perception about the environment observed 'out there'. Most travellers content themselves with simply describing the places of environmental beauty they visited, sometimes depicting them as vacant, pristine places that are waiting to be enjoyed. This leaves the reader with the idea of a safe, accessible environment that has to be consumed as a travelling experience. This bias regarding the interpretation of a place highlights the significant subjectivity of virtual leisure mobility which in turns affects the environmental awareness-raising of the online audience.

Second, those who have access to virtual travel are usually people from developing countries. Most networked computers are concentrated in North America and Europe in contrast with developing countries which clearly suffer from the "digital divide" (Brashow *et al.*, 2005) as they have limited access to financial resources and ICT networks (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Such uneven geography of access to virtual leisure mobility highlights the fact that virtual travel and the process of raising environmental awareness remain oriented towards a select audience of Westerners. Compared to 'backpackers enclaves', this restricts round-the-world travellers into virtual enclaves this time.

B. Leisure mobility as an expression of global environmental citizenship

Leisure mobility embodies a variety of forms of commitment regarding the environment. These are expressed through environmental actions undertaken by travellers during their journey and within their online spaces. As results showed, these vary depending on travellers' responsibilities regarding the environmental 'common good' and awareness of potential environmental risks. This actually reaffirms Molz's (2005) assertion that round-the-world travellers enact citizenship along an axis of risks, rights and responsibilities. Among the hazards faced by round-the-world travellers, respondents included shared environmental risks such as global warming. Travellers also claim the right to be mobile and to 'consume' other places and environments. In return for such entitlements, they acknowledge being subject to certain duties; including an obligation to travel in a sustainable manner, to act in the interest of the society they were visiting, and for some, to spread awareness about the environmental state of the world. On the basis of these three parameters two main forms of environmental citizenship operating in travel spaces of leisure mobility can be identified.

Within physical travel spaces, there are, on the one hand, the *non-committed citizens*. These are the majority of round-the-world travellers who present a sense of environmental awareness and responsibilities but only take limited actions in favour of the environment. They see transport (including planes) as essential for travelling great distances. They acknowledge environmental responsibility, but are only 'willing' to use alternative modes of transports. The actions taken on the way reflect a Western approach to environmental protection, and are limited in scope as these well-intentioned travellers do not take particularly restrictive actions that would compromise their freedom to travel. Within their interactions with locals, these travellers do not reflect any specific engagement for "multicultural or multi-faith approaches" (Smith & Pangsapa, 2008, p. 263) to environmental actions.

At the extremity of this category lie travellers who do not have any particular environmental awareness and sometimes no sense of responsibility at all. They will never change their travel behaviour for 'the cause'. On the contrary, they feel that the important efforts to raise money, and the risks they have taken before leaving (by quitting their jobs for instance) give them the right to enjoy their trip and simply have fun. They do not see the need to care about the environment and "try to change things on the way" (Wes, 2009). Such travel behaviour tends to lead to what Wang calls "consumer citizenship" (2006, p. 72), i.e. a democratized right to consume extraordinary experiences that are accessible to travel, which do not consider the potential environmental impacts of travel *per se*.

On the other hand, there are the *committed citizens*. These are travellers with strong environmental awareness and sense of responsibility, who are ready to significantly change their travel behaviour. They use alternative modes of travel, and view public transport such as trains positively. However, in some cases, very strong environmental awareness may lead to some forms of 'ecological redemption', where travellers feel they have the duty to engage in slow, sometimes dangerous travel such as hitchhiking to keep their carbon footprint low. Others will promote forms of what scholars such as Nelson (2003, p. 65) have called "environmental colonialism". For instance, one of the respondent's recommendations was to teach locals how to sort garbage, but no waste collection scheme existed in the area. By advocating recommendations diverted from Western societies' daily actions of 'good' environmental citizenship, without being context-specific, travellers miss the opportunity to bring about lasting changes.

Within virtual travel spaces, environmentally committed travellers also express their environmental citizenship. They use their website as they feel they have the duty to share environmental issues observed along the way with the online audience. However, none of the 75 surveyed websites presented any form of engagement in substantial debates on environmental issues. As web users usually enter these spaces following a logic of invited and interpersonal surveillance (Molz, 2006a), they interact with travellers to tell them where to go and what to do, but do not necessarily care about distant environmental issues occurring far from their home.

C. Asymmetrical topologies of environmental citizenship formation

Uneven geography of both physical and virtual leisure mobility betrays the asymmetrical topology of global environmental citizenship. Indeed, the process of citizenship formation and its spatial emergence are constituted by heterogeneous sets of relations. Within

physical spaces, round-the-world travellers engage in both host-visitor and host-host interactions. Encounters are important as they actually foster the environmental awareness-raising process of the 'wanderer' round-the-world traveller. Within virtual spaces, environmentally-committed travellers share their environmental concerns with the online audience which, in turn develops its environmental awareness.

Nonetheless, these two sets of relations form networks which present asymmetrical topologies due to uneven access to financial resources necessary to cover the cost of physical and virtual travel. On the one hand, mobile individuals have almost unlimited access to all these spaces and can easily raise their environmental awareness. On the other hand, immobile individuals can neither travel physically to discover other environments and their potential associated issues; nor travel virtually to interact with the online audience and acknowledge the existence of particular environmental degradations.

Such a configuration of global environmental citizenship formation may lead to differentiated conceptions of the 'global environment' and its associated risks, dividing the 'environmental eye' between developing and developed countries. In this regard, this study reaffirms Bowden's (2003, p. 360) critique of global citizenship. Claiming to be a global citizen is a privilege reserved for the 'mobility rich' which too often ignores non-Western values.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on bridging the gap within the exploration of the role played by leisure mobility in the formation of a frequently contested global environmental citizenship. Drawing upon empirical material from research on round-the-world travellers and their travel websites, it generated support for the idea that new forms of environmental citizenship operating at a global scale can emerge from physical and virtual travel.

Round-the-world travel embodies both a source and expression of commitment regarding the environment, which evokes an 'environmental-eye' in travellers whilst circumnavigating the globe. First, round-the-world travellers consider their trip to bring about environmental awareness as they witness 'first hand' environmental degradation. The environmental issues observed are diverse and widespread in many different geographical areas of the world, including both natural and urban environments. Many travellers use ICT such as the Internet in order to share their travel experiences to the online audience. In turn, this constitutes a source of commitment for virtual travellers. "Locales" (Hall, 2005a, p. 25) are central to the formation of environmental citizenship,

because raising environmental awareness is bound to specific places and the people encountered.

Second, round-the-world travel enables the hypermobile elite to perform various forms of environmental citizenship during their journey. Most of them are entitled to be mobile but in return recognise being subject to certain duties, including travelling in an environmentally friendly manner. Environmental citizenship is performed through a variety of environmental actions ranging from recycling for 'uncommitted' citizens, to avoid flying for 'committed' citizens. By significantly changing their travel behaviour, travellers expand their commitment beyond 'the local'. However, the environmental citizenship enacted by round-the-world travellers mostly reflects a Westernized approach to environmental protection, and thus fails to recognise the potentialities of a multicultural approach to environmental actions, often necessary in complex, frequently contested environments such as those encountered in developing countries.

In this context, asymmetrical formations of global environmental citizenship may emerge. The uneven access to financial resources necessary to cover the costs of leisure mobility keeps travellers in both physical and virtual enclaves where host-visitor interactions are limited. Such uneven geography of leisure mobility leads to heterogeneous sets of relations, dividing the 'environmental eye' between mobile and immobile individuals.

Finally, the author still favourably considers addressing the nature, possibilities and limits of global environmental citizenship as a way to promote sustainability. Subsequently, more discussion is encouraged regarding the sometimes conflicting interests of long-distance tourists and environmental activists by demonstrating how travel and tourism can bring about more beneficial and lasting changes in ideas and attitudes vis-à-vis environmental protection. Particularly, the depth of the 'environmental eye' should be investigated further. Comparisons between travellers' environmental awareness before and after their trip through face-to-face interviews would allow appreciating even better the benefits of leisure mobility on environmental-raising. Looking at "historical mobilities" (Cresswell, 2010, p. 17) would help to evaluate the changes of travellers' perception of the environment throughout their life.

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