Tourism Unbounded:
Mobilities and Border Crossings in Singapore

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Abstract: Tourism is an ‘unbounded’ phenomenon where people, capital and information defy geographic barriers by crossing borders. This paper explores the notion of un-bounding through a case of Singapore tourism. Under a state-engineered scheme of Tourism UnLimited, the country’s tourism economy is de-territorialized under a dual strategy of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ and ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’. Applying the concept of mobility, Singapore’s tripartite role as an exporter of tourism skills and services, a partner to neighbouring countries through collaborative projects, and an importer of tourism ideas and technologies is critically examined. Tourism mobilities are, however, not without frictions, challenges and negative consequences. Regional competition and rivalry, suspicions of Singapore’s expansionist intent and the loss of place identity are some consequences that frustrate the country’s tourism mobilising ambitions.

Keywords: mobilities, borders, globalization, Asia, Singapore

Introduction

Singapore’s tourism has always been predicated on having a role much larger than itself. As an aspiring tourism capital and cultural/entertainment hub of Asia, the country has always rebelled against its geographic size and limited resource endowment. The pursuit of globalization, first begun under the Singapore Tourism Board’s (STB) Tourism UnLimited plan in the mid-1990s, projects a way for the city-state to expand its tourism economy in defiance of its geographic limitations (STB 1996). Buttressed by a two-pronged strategy of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ and ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’, the trans-border mobilities of tourism ideas, investments and technologies are harnessed in Singapore’s quest to be a “tourism capital” (STB 1996).
This study presents a case of tourism unbounded in Singapore. In particular, the achievements and consequences of its Tourism UnLimited policy are explored in two ways. Firstly under ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’, Singapore’s external tourism economy is explored. As an exporter of tourism skills and services (e.g. tourism consultancy and management) and a tourism partner to neighboring countries in conjoined development projects (e.g. with Indonesia and Malaysia), Singapore’s tourism geography is re-configured beyond its national border. Through strategic investments in and partnerships with select countries, spatial borders are loosened in a re-territorialization of tourism space. However, such trans-national endeavors are never without implications. While the Asian hinterland is replete with development opportunities, it is also fraught with political-economic tensions that bedevil mobilizing initiatives.

A second avenue is ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’. Unlike the previous roles of exporter and partner, Singapore functions as an importer of tourism ideas and technologies. To be a world class destination, it draws the best of what other destinations have to offer. Iconic amenities and attractions that characterize worldly sites - mega-museums, conserved waterfronts, casinos etc. - are replicated in and adapted for Singapore. Catapulting Singapore architecturally and aesthetically into the super league of world cities raises its international profile but also surfaces concerns about its local heritage. How Singapore has maintained its place identity and uniqueness in an era of global tourism is thus questioned.

Capital cities are marked by their dense networks of connections - of people, investments, information and ideas - tying places across the globe. As a tourism capital, these networks are evidenced through the dual outflow of investments from Singapore to the Asian region, and inflow of tourism ideas from select sites into the country. While the former is predicated on its alleged exceptionalism and the replication of Singapore-style projects at the transnational level, the latter gives rise to worldly landscapes within national borders. Singapore thus presents a case of tourism un-bounding manifested on two distinct scales (national and trans-national) and giving rise to two distinct spatial outcomes (Singapore in the world, and the world within Singapore).

The concept of mobility is introduced in the next section to foreground the tourism un-bounding phenomenon. Tourism involves multiple mobilities - other than the obvious movement of people, we should also consider the cross-border movement of capital, ideas and policies. These mobilities are
exemplified across the next three sections either as ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ or ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’. Serious note should also be taken of the negative consequences associated with mobilities not just for Singapore but its neighbors and partners. Where possible, primary data is used but readers are also directed to further references to fully appreciate the multifaceted implications of tourism mobilities.

Conceptualizing Tourism Flows in a Mobile World

Mobility is defined as “intricate global and minute flows of information, capital, peoples, and objects within contemporary technological, transportation, and communication changes” (Wong 2006, p. 326). Originally derived from a 14th Century French term mobilite which means movement, portability and quickness of mind and body, the term has been applied to people, ideas, capital, technologies and even pollution and diseases. On the negative, mobilite is also associated with inconstancy, fickleness and a lack of focus (Wong 2006). In the tourism context – movement of travelers, workers, capital, ideas and policies – the dual interpretation is a healthy reminder that tourism processes are multifarious and their impacts can be positive and negative for different people and places.

Sheller and Urry (2006) identify two forms of mobility in tourism: (1) of people, objects and infrastructure such as tourists and industry workers, airplanes, suitcases, data systems and even plants, animals, brands and satellites; and (2) of identities in the form of images, memories, performances, emotions and atmospheres. The former deals with tangible products and persons, and is more widely researched because its processes and outcomes are visible and immediately ‘relevant’. The latter deals with intangibles such as service culture, ambience and aesthetics and is important because of its close association with the former and also because it is the yardstick by which we assess the global reach of tourism. The examples from Singapore deal with both forms of mobility.

From the tourism mobilities literature, three elements are highlighted for special attention. They include: (1) spaces of mobility, (2) power and politics of mobility; and (3) policy mobility. I deal briefly with each and consider their relevance to the tourism un-bounding phenomenon.
The increasing volume of tourist travel today (1,138 million international travelers in 2014) and the diversity of flows (from leisure travel to medical tourism, education and other forms of niche-travel) have inspired discussions on the “forms and spaces of mobility” (Creswell 2010, p. 17). The different ‘forms’ such as flying, auto-mobility (car travel) and backpacking have been researched alongside mobility-inducing ‘spaces’ such as roads, airports, petrol kiosks, hotels and backpacker enclaves (Adey 2004; Gogia 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). One space that has recently garnered attention, and relevant to this study, is the airport. Although a fixed and immobile infrastructure itself, the airport is also a space that organizes and facilitates international mobility – a “place of transmission of people (and objects) into global relationships”, helping in the “shrinkage of the globe and also the transcendence of time and space” (Gottdiener 2001 cited in Sheller and Urry 2006, p. 219). Bringing the world together – tourists, crew, ground staff and national carriers from around the world, as well as food, currency, luggage and goods/products – airports are “a space where people and things flow – where mobility is most active” (Adey 2004, p. 1366).

Airports function as different mobile spaces for different travelers. They serve as “transit space” for those who wish to get quickly from one site to another with as little local interruptions as possible (Kesselring 2006, p. 278). They may also serve as “connectivity spaces” – travel destinations in their own right where people can experience cross-cultural immersions, connecting with other mobile people, products, food, services and currencies. The Singapore example adds to the literature by presenting a third dimension of mobility. Singapore’s Changi Airport is mobile in the sense that the Changi Airport International (CAI) is a global enterprise with an expanding pool of consultancy, construction and management projects around the globe. Over the years, the success of Changi has spawn requests from cities and airports from Brazil, Russia and Fiji, to consult, build, manage, operate their airports, thereby extending and mobilizing the ‘Changi model’ of service and infrastructure across borders (Bok 2014). How the airport has been mobilized and the consequences of this for Singapore and recipient countries are explored in this paper.

Mobility is not without its frictions and the second point to note is the politics and power embedded within. Not every person or product can be mobile (or wishes to be) nor every place open to mobile processes and agents. Mobile
flows can be channeled, forced, impeded and regulated according to those in power. Mobility is “neither a neutral concept nor action” but “tied to relations of power and domination that both produce and shape the forms of mobility that various bodies undertake” (Gogia 2006, p. 360). Indeed, differentiated mobilities are evident when we compare the motivations and experiences of tourists against students who travel for education or migrant workers in search of a new life. For mobile capital too, some investment sites are more attractive than others because of local policies, regulations and costs. Mobility is never free, unconstrained, decontextualized and ahistorical (Bok 2014); instead it is always channeled and “moves along routes and conduits often provided by conduits in space. It does not happen evenly over a continuous space like spilt water flowing over a tabletop…” (Creswell 2010, p. 24).

Similarly, mobile tourism investments are channeled and regulated by developmental states for political-economic agendas. In Singapore, state agencies like the Economic Development Board (EDB) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB), as well as entrepreneurial organizations (ranging from Changi Airport Group to Wildlife Reserves Singapore) exercise strategy in directing investments around the world, as well as filtering flows into the country. Border crossings are selective and reflect priorities and prejudices of social groups in command. For example, the Indonesia Malaysia Singapore Growth Triangle (IMSGT) received the highest level of government endorsement in the 1990s when it was launched as an inter-state economic cooperation project. This paved the way for rapid flows of tourism capital and people across the countries, particularly from Singapore to Indonesia, binding the two territories in joint development programs. However, differentiated mobilities are also evident when we contrast the unimpeded flows of Singaporean visitors and investments into Indonesia with the less fluid flows of Indonesian investments and migrant workers attempting to enter Malaysia and Singapore (see Ford and Lyons 2006 for more information). Mobilities are therefore not automatically mutual in direction, intensity and motivation of flows.

A third element of mobility pertains to the global marketplace of ideas where best practices and successful policies are transmitted across borders. This has been described as a form of ‘policy tourism’ where policy makers cross borders to study ‘success stories’ from around the world, bringing ideas back for reconfiguration and implementation (Ward 2007). Successful cities/sites emerge as model hot spots where the latest ideas are showcased and discussed;
these range from Bilbao’s Guggenheim museum (a success story in urban cultural revitalization) to Curitiba’s environmental sustainability programs (McCain and Ward 2010; Gonzalez 2011). Lessons learnt are transferred and translated in home countries often in mutative ways that lead to new permutations in novel settings (Peck and Theodore 2010).

Because of these cross border adoption and hybridizing, criticisms of place homogeneity are rife. Urban commentators criticize cities/tourist destinations as having a ‘postmodern anywhere’ look (Sorkin 1992), pointing to the ubiquitous festival marketplaces and soulless downtown shopping zones as evidence of an increasingly homogenous tourism geography (Terkenli 2002). The importation of global tourism ideas is evident in Singapore’s Orchard Road as a business improvement district (Mark 2011) and the Singapore River as a pastiche historic waterfront (Chang and Huang 2008). However border crossings in policy tourism are seldom a straightforward case of adoption, replication and acceptance. The “messy realities… on the ‘ground’ level” (Peck and Theodore 2010, p. 170), the particularities of time, place, politics and community often assert themselves through new arrangements and implementations.

To summarize, this paper presents a case of tourism unbounded using the empirical case of Singapore and the concept of mobility. Three dimensions - spaces, power/politics, and policy - serve as useful guides to showcase the processes, challenges and consequences in tourism mobility. Over the next three sections, different dimensions of Singapore’s tourism will be explored under the headings of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ and ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’.

Configuring New Tourism Spaces: Bringing Singapore to the World

In 1993, former Prime Minister (PM) Goh Chok Tong outlined an economic plan to usher the country into the 21st century. Called Singapore UnLimited, the goal was to develop a global city through the twin engines of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ and ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’ (EDB 1995). With the launch of Tourism 21 two years later, Tourism UnLimited was the tourism’s industry response to Singapore UnLimited (STB 1996). For Singapore to be a leading tourist destination, business center and gateway to the region, one strategy was to “configure new tourism space” (STB 1996, p.
6). With just over 700 sq. km. and limited capacity to develop further, new spaces have to be configured through regional engagements (e.g. collaboration with neighboring countries), and export/investment opportunities in the region (e.g. tourism investments in and service exports to Asian countries). As part of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’, tourism industry members are encouraged to break free of “traditional geographical boundaries and boldly expand their tourism activities beyond the shores of Singapore” (STB 1996, p. 6).

An example of a newly configured tourism space is the Indonesia Malaysia Singapore Growth Triangle (IMSGT). Began in the early 1990s as a tripartite project in which Singapore’s capital is to be combined with Indonesian and Malaysian land and labor, the IMSGT is aimed at facilitating cross-border regional growth in manufacturing, construction and tourism (Hampton 2010).

In tourism, Singapore’s lack of natural resources (beaches, space for golf and marina developments) is to be supplemented by its partner countries while Singapore offers international access through its airport and seaport. Tourism 21 painted the mutual benefits of development as such: “Collective attractiveness is achieved when countries enhance their attractiveness by complementing and linking their tourism products to that of others in the region. The respective partners benefit and so does the region as a whole” (STB 1996, p. 17).

Singapore’s tourism involvement in the IMSGT has been extensive, particularly in the Indonesian island of Bintan. The 23,000 hectare-large Bintan Beach International Resort (BBIR), for example, is a joint Singapore-Indonesia investment spearheaded by PT Bintan Resort Cakrawala (part of Gallant Venture Ltd., an investment company founded in Singapore in 2003, which has its roots with the Indonesian Salim Group and Bintan Resorts Corporation) (Hampton 2010). Bintan Resorts Corporation is a consortium of Singapore and Indonesian companies including Singapore Technologies and Salim Group. Marketing and management of the resort is handled by Singapore-based subsidiary Bintan Resort Management (Grundy-Warr et al. 1999). In 2008, tourism investments amounted to US$ 800 million and tourist arrivals in 2011 reached 470,470 visitors. In 2014, key visitor markets comprised Singaporeans (30 per cent), the Chinese (16 per cent), Japanese (8 per cent), South Koreans (7 per cent) and Indians (6 per cent) (Horwath HTL 2015).
Singapore’s involvement in the IMSGT has been calibrated to ensure that it does not appear as the dominant partner in the triangle. Indeed, part of the reason for abandoning earlier names like the Singapore Growth Triangle or SIIORI Triangle (acronym drawn from the first two letters of ‘Singapore’, ‘Johor’ and ‘Riau’4) was to downplay Singapore’s economic, ideological and semiotic dominance which might stoke neighborly tension (Sparke et al. 2004, p. 486). Despite this semantic concession, Singapore’s dominance is evident in other ways, an issue that requires constant monitoring if the principle of equal partnership is to be respected. Already, commentators perceive a strong Singapore-bias in Bintan’s tourism environment. Bunnell et al. (2006b, p. 10) described the “‘Singaporeanization’ of the Bintan landscape”, a process in which the BBIR has been “refashioned as part of greater Singapore” with its streetlights, road signs and import of infrastructural facilities like water and electricity supply. Singaporean visitors at the resort enjoy Singaporean and international food, all priced in Singapore dollars, often imagining the resort “as an extension of ‘home’” (Bunnell et al. 2006b, p. 11; see also Ng 2014).5 The architecture of hotels, marinas and residences also spot a pan-Asian resort look, devoid of cultural referents to Bintan and the Riau province, and in some cases even Indonesia (Bunnell et al. 2006b). As a Singaporean tourist remarked, the look and feel “could be ‘anywhere’ and perhaps even ‘in Singapore’” (cited in Ford and Lyon 2006, p. 266; see Lindquist 2010, p. 45 for a comment on the similarity of Batam island’s industrial park to Singapore).

Rather than a site of free flows of people, capital and ideas, the BBIR is heavily marked by aspects of differentiated mobilities and uneven border crossings. As barriers collapse for international tourists and investment capital from Singapore into Indonesia, the same has not been the case for opposing flows. Ford and Lyons (2006, p. 258) observe that Singapore’s influence in IMSGT has led to increased “physical and symbolic barriers to mobility within Indonesia’s national boundaries”. One barrier is in the area of jobs, with most of the tourism jobs in the resorts going to non-Bintanese from Sumatra, Sulawesi, Java and Bali because of their English proficiency and tourism training (ibid., p. 266). It is calculated that only 10 per cent of resort staff at BBIR are from Bintan (Bunnell et al. 2006b, p. 14). Another barrier regards the movement of tourists and workers. As international travelers cross the threshold into the Riau islands with ease, the mobility of Indonesian tourists and workers in the opposite direction is often not as smooth. Many
are quizzed by Singapore immigration officials demanding proof of their economic status and ability to spend in the city-state; in some cases working class Indonesians experience a much longer time passing through immigration because of intense scrutiny and interrogation of their documents (Ford and Lyons 2006; see Lindquist 2010 on workers from Bintan entering Singapore).

Spatial restrictions of local Bintan residents have also arisen in the BBIR. The Bintan resorts are ringed by fences and entry is confined to securitized gateways where only paying-guests and resort workers carrying employment cards are allowed to pass through (see Ford and Lyons 2006 for a case study of the Lagoi tourist enclave in Bintan). BBIR’s constructions also saw the relocation of 5,000 residents from ten villages in Bintan. Especially affected were farmers and fishermen whose new settlements were located away from sea. Interviews with Bintan residents reveal that the acquisition of indigenous land was “inhumane, inappropriate and involving the use of intimidation, force and violence”; there was also a lack of community-level consultation on compensation and new housing arrangements (Bunnell et al. 2006b, p. 13). This culminated in clashes between displaced residents and authorities in the early 2000s, with local villagers staking out entry points into the resorts and disrupting movements of tourists into/out of the BBIR.

The transnational tourism zone of Indonesia/Singapore is not a “straightforward ‘borderless region’” (Bunnell et al. 2006a, p. 238) but one that is marked by new borders and enclosures on the one hand, and differentiated mobilities for different people on the other hand. The development of gated communities of Singapore and foreign-owned hotels in BBIR, along with issues of social/spatial displacement and discrimination remind us that while policy rhetoric might laud the configured tourism space as an economically-promising borderless zone, the reality as it is perceived and experienced on the ground might be far less sanguine.

**Investing in the Asia-Pacific: Another Case of Bringing Singapore to the World**

A second avenue of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ entails investments in the region. As a small country with a limited domestic market of about 5.5 million residents (at end - 2015), the surrounding Asian region has been strategically viewed as Singapore’s market and resource hinterland. Former PM Goh had suggested a “seven hour flight radius” as a natural catchment
for Singapore businesses (The Straits Times 2001). Not only serving as a market for Singapore products and services, the hinterland also abounds with investment opportunities for Singapore entrepreneurs hoping to invest in the region. In this regard, Tourism UnLimited symbolized strategic shifts in the “paradigm from one of ‘Singapore is too small’ to that of ‘there are no real limits or constraints in this new borderless world’” (STB 1996, p. 16).

Border crossings by hotel businesses are a common phenomenon. Singapore owned companies such as Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, and Millennium Hotels and Resorts have already globalized their operations in the 1990/2000s. Beyond hotels, Tourism 21 also encouraged less conventional enterprises to cross borders. The tourism plan argued that “collective competiveness is achieved…when new tourism ideas and products that have been successfully tested in Singapore are exported and franchised in the Asia Pacific region. The end result is that capabilities of the region as a whole are enhanced. Collectively, the region becomes more competitive” (STB 1996, p. 17).

Broadly defined, the travel industry comprises sectors like hotels, food/beverage, attractions and tour agencies, as well as allied fields in retail, telecommunications, conferences/exhibitions, events management, cruise, sports, transport, arts/entertainment and eco-services. To help companies cross borders, the STB offered incentives (e.g. underwriting costs for regional staff training) and provided information on regional trends and investment opportunities through its Regional Scan publications, so that “local enterprises can move in a synchronized direction to tap new potential markets according to the Tourism Unlimited concept” (STB 1996, p. 37). The STB also scouted for sources of finance for small companies and organized tourism missions/study trips for local businesses to meet prospective overseas partners.

Two novel examples of border crossings are highlighted here. The first is Wildlife Reserves Singapore which manages four of Singapore’s nature attractions – the Zoo, Night Safari, Bird Park and River Safari. The Singapore Zoological Gardens Consultancy Services (SZGCS) started in 1994 as an outgrowth of its core business of zoo operation. Its success in zoo planning, design and management, as well as its pioneering efforts in developing the Night Safari led to many requests for its services worldwide. Until it closed in the mid-2000s, the SZGCS provided consultancy in master planning, financial analysis and market studies, and also on specific issues like animal husbandry,
landscaping, exhibit planning and design, animal collections and even staff training, animal shows and habitat construction. An interview with its former Director Bernard Harrison revealed that the Zoo started its regional business not only in response to Tourism 21 but also to help fledgling nature attractions in the region (Chang 2001, p. 1612). As Harrison noted, regionalization yielded an opportunity for different Asian zoos to share knowledge and best practices in eco-planning (see Chang 2001 for fuller accounts).

In 1998, a division called the Creative Design Team was formed within the SZGC comprised of its own staff and associated consultants from fields like lighting, design sound design, exhibit fabrication. Its list of regional projects includes:

- Malacca Zoo (September 1994): to design an animal walk-through exhibit;
- Bintan Wildlife Sanctuary (May 1996): to develop a conceptual plan;
- Surabaya Zoo and Safari Park (December 1995): to develop a Master Plan, marketing and financial analysis (cost: US$ 20 million);
- Phnom Tamao Zoo, Cambodia (July 1996): to develop a concept plan, arose because of specific request from the Cambodian government;
- Praslin Island, Seychelles (August 1997): to develop a Landscape Master Plan to upgrade and beautiful the island;
- Dizzee Animal Kingdom, India (November 1998): to develop a concept and master plan;
- Night time animal experience in Hyderabad, India (August 1999): to undertake a pre-feasibility study;

Honed from ‘live’ experiences and market research, the SZGCS’s recommendations often replicate what has worked well in Singapore. With a cosmopolitan population base and diverse tourism markets, lifestyle concepts are test-bedded in Singapore before being applied elsewhere. Exemplifying the concept of idea mobility, the SZGCS recommended a number of ‘made in Singapore’ concepts for overseas zoos, the most obvious being the ‘Open Zoo’ idea first pioneered in the 1970s.6
Another mobile concept is the ‘world thematic zones’ in which animals, vegetation and habitat design endemic to a particular climatic zone are ‘staged’ as exhibition areas. The Singapore’s Zoo successfully created the ‘Ethiopian Experience’, ‘Rio Orinoco’ zone, and ‘Okavango Delta’ as themed areas. Similarly, the Night Safari has a ‘Fragile Forest’ zone which evokes the habitat of the Asmat people of Irian Jaya. This concept has been replicated in different regional projects. In Hyderabad’s night safari, the SZGCS proposed the ‘Australian Outback’, ‘Amazon’, ‘Masai Mara’ and ‘Eastern Ghats’ zones, each with specific flora and fauna. For Dizzee Animal Kingdom in Chennai, the SZGCS recommended the ‘Massai Village’ and ‘Savanna’ zones, while the Surabaya Zoo was to have an ‘African Savanna’, ‘Asian Woodlands’ and ‘Islands’ zones.

A possible drawback of this form of mobility is the staged-homogeneity of environments. What is unique to Singapore is replicated across Asia, diluting the novelty of its original attraction. While the Singapore Zoo and Night Safari are renowned for their innovation and distinctiveness, they now need to stay ahead of the competition by devising newer attractions and concepts. According to its former Director, careful strategy is therefore needed to decide who to work with (and who not to work with), and how best to leverage on collaborative relations that will draw visitors to the ‘original’ Singapore attractions (cited in Chang 2001). Zoo mobility is therefore a strategic process in which partners are stringently chosen. Consultancy revenues must also be substantial enough to offset the opportunity costs of competition and ‘loss’ of uniqueness. How such opportunity costs are reliably calculated is an obvious challenge.

Like the zoo and night safari, another example of investment mobility is the Singapore airport. ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ entails the export of airport consultancy and policymaking services. In 2014, Singapore’s Changi Airport was the world’s 16th busiest airport handling over 54 million passenger movements and connecting over 100 airlines with 320 cities. Changi Airports International (CAI) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Changi Airport Group (CAG) set up in 2009 to invest and manage airports globally. CAI prides itself on its trademark appeal, cogently summarized as the “Changi Experience”. This experience has been described as “an exceptional combination of operational efficiency and customer delight”, and which has won the airport multiple international awards and accolades over the years (Changi Airport
More than just functionality, the ‘Experience’ is also about “connecting passengers and engaging them, in ways that will enhance their lives” (Changi Airport 2011).

Changi Airport is a Singapore government-owned institution and one of the most ‘awarded’ airports in the world. Care and sensitivity is exercised to ensure that CAI’s investment principles not only expand its investment portfolio but extend the Singapore ‘brand name’ in an appropriate manner (Bok 2014; Woon 2015). CAI’s philosophy is for each overseas airport to be a “vital part of a country’s transport infrastructure” and that its growth potential is healthy and beneficial to Singapore’s aviation development (Changi Airport 2011). CAI’s regional work includes: (a) joint partnerships and investments in other airports; (b) provision of operational management services; and (c) consultancies on airport operations, commercial and retail management, planning and development.

In mid-2011, CAI had a total of 27 overseas projects of which 19 are in Asia. These include investments in four airports in China and India; management of two airports in the Middle-East; and other projects such as upgrading and construction in Brunei and feasibility study for a new terminal for Manila. Outside of Asia, CAI has been particular with select investments including in Italy’s Gemina SpA (the holding company of Aeroporti di Roma, one of Italy’s largest airport operators) as well as management and consultancy work in Brazil, Russia, Rwanda and Fiji. CAI’s goal is to “build a quality portfolio of airport investments worldwide with strong markets and significant development potential” (Changi Airport 2011), with each airport also serving as a “showpiece” reflective of Changi’s “policymaking capabilities” (CAI 2008 cited in Bok 2014, p. 11).

CAI’s expansionist ambition is highly contested. A balance has to be struck between investing in Asian airports while maintaining Singapore’s status as a transport and tourism hub. In Southeast Asia, CAI has strategically avoided investments in rival neighboring airports in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. Indeed, new developments and expansions in Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) and Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport, as well as their own burgeoning investment ambitions pose direct threats to Changi Airport’s global investment and hubbing plans.8 Because Changi and CAI are state-owned, opportunities to engage in regional projects are sometimes limited because
of nationalistic concerns. In many countries, there are obvious reservations regarding foreign involvement and ownership of critical infrastructure such as airports. CAI’s failed partnership with Bharti Enterprises to upgrade Delhi’s airport in 2006 and its protracted partnership with Bengal Aerotropolis Private Limited in the case of Durgapur Aerotropolis in 2008 are examples of the highly fraught and politically-charged process of overseas partnerships and investment (see Bok 2014 for details). In as much as Singapore hopes to diversify its service economy in the region, there exists competition by other countries to either expand their own airport services or resist foreign interventions on nationalistic and protectionist grounds.

Replicating Tourism Spaces: Bringing the World to Singapore

A second dimension to Tourism UnLimited is ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’. While one aspect is to attract international tourism businesses to the country to raise Singapore’s profile as a tourism business center, another aspect is to import ideas and practices from around the world and adapt them to Singapore. At an urban planning conference in 1998, former PM Goh Chok Tong explained that to be in the global league of cities, Singapore needs to “study and match the distinctive features of the best cities in the world, adapting them to suit Singapore’s needs” (cited in The Straits Times 19 January 1998). He identified New York’s entertainment and cultural precincts, and the business districts in London’s Docklands and Paris’ La Defence as benchmarks to follow. At a ‘Model Cities’ conference two years later in 2000, PM Goh further outlined goals for Singapore to be a “cosmopolis” which he defined as “a magnetic hub of people, minds, talents, ideas and knowledge” blessed with a “rich diversity of eastern and western cultures, ... [a] unique blend of new and old, east and west” (Goh 2000, p. 2-3).

Urban planning and tourism development often involve the transference of ideas, knowledge and images across borders. Incorporating the best practices on downtown revitalization, waterfront development and cultural planning from elsewhere are common strategies. Transfer agents such as politicians, government experts, bureaucrats, policy professionals, practitioners and consultants regularly attend international conferences and fact-finding trips to ‘model cities’, bringing back lessons to adapt (McCain and Ward 2010; Kong 2014). In Singapore, two examples in urban tourism are outcomes of such policy transfers: the Orchard Road ‘Business Improvement District’ and
redevelopment of the Singapore River. The consequences of ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’ have been diverse, resulting either in place differentiation (Orchard Road) or place homogenization (the Singapore River).

A ‘Business Improvement District’ (BID) is described as a “public-private partnership in which property and business owners in a defined geographical area... make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing/promotion of their commercial district” (Ward 2007, p. 658). The BID serves as an international model of urban governance and an approach to urban planning and downtown regeneration. First pioneered in Ontario, Canada in the 1960s and popularized by the urban renaissance of New Orleans in the 1970s, the BID model offers an entrepreneurial means of urban governance through the re-drawing of public-private spheres and the development of privatized landscapes in public spaces (Ward 2006, pp. 55). There are an estimated of over 400 BIDs in USA and 54 in Toronto alone (Ward 2007).

Over the years, Orchard Road has been redeveloped with the goal of maintaining its status as Singapore’s leading retail district and tourist attraction. In 2009 with an investment of S$40 million (around US$29 million), the Orchard Road Business Association (ORBA) together with STB undertook a project that involved “studying other famous shopping destinations” and urban BIDs (STB Media Release, 28 April 2009, cited in Mark 2011, p. 34). The ORBA was formed in 1998 with the explicit goal of keeping the shopping strip globally competitive. Comprising 50 stakeholder members, a declared benefit of joining the association is that members can be involved in networking events, overseas visits and “study trips to notable retail destinations around the world and continuing education through seminars delivered by distinguished speakers” (Mark 2011, p. 38). Model districts and associations visited include Chicago’s Greater North Michigan Avenue Association, London’s New West End, as well as New York City’s Times Square Alliance and 5th Avenue BID. Other streets such as London’s Regent Street and Los Angeles’ Rodeo Drive have also been frequently referred to as aspirant models (Mark 2011).

In 2010, the ORBA was invited as one of nine street organizations to participate in the First Beijing Wangfujing International Brand Festival, a conference for policy makers and developers to exchange ideas on city branding, marketing and rejuvenation. Other participating BID teams included London’s Oxford
Policy crossings seldom, however, involve wholesale replication but are highly localized, grounded and territorial processes (McCain and Ward 2010). Rather than direct transfers, imported ideas evolve as they cross borders, serving specific interests and local needs. In her study of Orchard Road, Mark (2011) revealed that local residents and visitors to Orchard Road are unconvinced of the road’s world class status despite the implementation of new policy ideas. Many criticized Orchard Road to be poorly lit and less exciting compared to the flashing neon lights of Shanghai’s Nanjing Lu and New York City’s Times Square. Indeed, flashing building lights are banned in Singapore because of potential traffic hazards; mega-screens with moving images are also limited to select sites in the city. Even the annual Christmas decorations on Orchard Road are limited by the ban on flashing lights. Instead of glitz, glamour and flashing lights, Orchard Road’s 2009 plan for example emphasized trees, plants and landscaping as well as pedestrian connectivity and transport accessibility. This is in line with Singapore’s image as a garden city, an acknowledgement of Orchard Road’s historical past as a plantation district. How ORBA straddles the competing needs of local interests, national regulations, global trends and consumer demands represents an obvious challenge in urban tourism planning.

Like Orchard Road, the redevelopment of Singapore River is the result of remodeling based on foreign lessons. Since the 1970s, one of the most recognizable global urban forms is the redeveloped waterfront pioneered by Baltimore’s Inner Harbor in the 1970s and popularized by London’s Dockland and Sydney’s Darling Harbor in the 1980s. The ‘festival marketplace’ concept involves the redevelopment of defunct industrial-era waterfronts and their conversion into multi-use leisure, retail and residential zones. As early as 1981, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) envisioned the Singapore River to be “a valuable and a unique feature” of the city that can serve “the needs of the local population as well as tourists” (URA 1982, p. 10).

Over the years, redevelopment plans have referenced many world-class waterfronts. The URA’s Development Guide Plan for the Singapore River, for example, cited Paris’ Seine and San Antonio’s Paseo del Rio as having successful mixed-use functions and attractive landscaping (URA 1992). In 2004, the URA highlighted waterfronts that Singapore “can learn from and
be inspired by” including Barcelona’s Port Vell, Melbourne’s Docklands, Sydney’s Circular Quay and Darling Harbour, and Brisbane’s Southbank (Chang and Huang 2008, p. 236). The waterfronts’ public spaces, artworks, transport access and interactive environments were praised as noteworthy examples.

Foreign models and consultancies – but particularly Western – inspired the Singapore River’s redevelopment. Clarke Quay’s mid-2000s transformation, for example, was guided by a UK-based architectural firm whose quest was a “total transformation of the area’s ambience, activity and appearance” (Alsop Architects 2006). As part of its “total” transformation, the historic brick facades of Clarke Quay’s warehouses were camouflaged by neon-colored decorative panes and weather-proofing contraptions, giving the area a futuristic, other-worldly look. World-famous ‘imported’ entertainment brands such as London’s Ministry of Sound and Paris’ Crazy Horse cabaret (both of which have since closed) were introduced to inject a sense of ‘the Other’. The retail scene also favored foreign over local aesthetics and images. Central, a new shopping mall at Clarke Quay (which opened in 2007) specializes in Japanese and Korean food outlets. Rather than historic and Singaporean, Clarke Quay’s dominant appeal/aesthetics is alien, futuristic and foreign.

State planners are at pains to point out that while urban changes are inevitable, creative place making must be locally relevant and reflect the interests of its people (Kingsbury 2007). In arts and culture, for example, much attention has been paid to ensure that local works by Singaporean sculptures are installed as part of the Singapore River Interpretive Centre. As a counterpoint to the modernistic works of Botero, Dali and Moore that grace the corporate spaces of financial institutions at the waterfront, the works by local artists such as Chong Fah Cheong, Chern Lian Shan and Malcolm Koh feature ‘local common folks’ such as coolies, chettiers (money-changers), traders, fishermen and young children (Chang 2008).

Despite these local concessions, foreign visitors to the waterfront often feel that the place is ‘too worldly’ and ‘not Singaporean enough’, whereas Singaporeans seem to have embraced the changes. ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’ is thus received differently by different people – as a sign of having attained international standards by the locals, and as a signifier of the loss
of historical and cultural identity in the eyes of tourists (Chang and Huang 2011). For tourists, ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’ presents a problem because a slice of Singapore history and culture has been sacrificed. A tourist interviewee expressed the view of many others when he said:

\[\text{It is very important for tourists like us to experience this place differently from other places. There is really no point seeing the same things. The government should sustain the culture along the Singapore River.... I won’t want to go to a place too touristy. (Visitor from South Africa; cited in Chang and Huang 2011, p. 2096)}\]

Similarly a visitor from Spain described the waterfront as having “fake streets” reminiscent of theme parks like Disneyland and Universal Studios, upbeat and colorful but lacking a distinct Singaporean atmosphere and identity (see Chang and Huang 2011 for more accounts).

In contrast, many younger Singaporeans perceive the landscape change as indicative of progress and a positive sign of globalization. Bearing in mind that much of the waterfront before its 1990/2000s transformation was dominated by warehouses and low-income residences, its redevelopment as a commercial landscape has ‘opened’ the area to a wider cross section of society. ‘Bringing the World to the Singapore River’ is thus an effective way of reclaiming the once inaccessible environment for a common good and greater purpose. Many Singaporeans applaud rather than abhor the transformation, with a typical view being:

\[\text{Actually I think it’s a real good thing they are making all these changes. In other countries, they are all doing the same thing to their waterfront places. Major cities with rivers are transforming those areas into sites of leisure and dining. Not at all a sense of pity for us because previously the area was just empty warehouses, right? So I think it’s a really good thing that we have progressed and turned the area into some place productive. (Singaporean visitor to Clarke Quay)}\]

Transformations are inevitable in dynamic tourism environments, and the development of new policies and activities are perceived as a way for places to keep-up with the times.
The latest round of change is noteworthy as a new management organization called Singapore River One took on the marketing of and events-coordination at the waterfront in 2012. In a telling press article titled ‘Crossing oceans to bring new life to a river’, the executive director was introduced as a person who had never been to Asia before and who had been “fed by his research in the Singapore River online and examples of riverfronts in San Antonio in Texas and Providence in Rhode Island...” (The Straits Times 2012, p. B16). Based in Chicago, Ty Tabing was hired for his leadership of the Chicago Loop Alliance, which saw the renaissance of the downtown Loop with new retail activities and events. As landscape changes continue to unfold, how Singapore tries to maintains its local identity (or not) as it embraces worldly/Western practices and ideas will be a process worth documenting not only at the waterfront but also in other tourism environments.

Conclusion: Tourism Beyond, Without and Within Borders

Tourism unbounded involves the movement of people, capital and ideas into and out of a country. To harness these transnational flows, a dual strategy of ‘Bringing Singapore to the World’ and ‘Bringing the World to Singapore’ was proposed as part of STB’s Tourism UnLimited plan of creating a tourism capital (STB 1996). This paper has discussed the processes, outcomes and consequences of this strategy. While the motivations behind the mobility turn are varied – to overcome size constraints, broaden Singapore’s investment base, and to be a world-class city – the collective outcome has been the configuration of tourism geography beyond, without and also within national borders.

*Beyond* and *without* borders, tourism networks have been created through regional collaborative projects such as the IMSGT as well as overseas investments in airport and amenity development. Transcending its ‘720 sq. km national space’ to a ‘7-hour flight radius hinterland’, tourism regionalization has allowed Singapore to deepen and widen its tourism development profile in the Asia-Pacific. *Within* borders, Singapore’s tourism product has embraced ideas and practices from other cities/sites in order to stay internationally competitive and attractive. Concepts on BID development and waterfront enhancement have been applied to Orchard Road and the Singapore River, transforming local landscapes in different ways and to differing outcomes and public responses. As policies cross borders, they evolve and mutate to take
on different forms in new contexts. As we have seen, not all the socio-spatial outcomes are equally endorsed by tourists and locals.

The mobility concept was introduced to capture the multitudinous tourism flows. In tourism, it is not just people, objects and infrastructure that cross borders but also images, ideas and innovations. While the former deals with tangibles, the latter includes intangible mobilities that have been neglected in tourism research but no less significant in contemporary globalization. The case of Singapore’s Tourism UnLimited documents both forms of mobility. It is argued that mobilities are never totally unconstrained but reflect the politics and power relations embedded in the process. In Singapore, it is crucial therefore not only to acknowledge the mobility process but also to understand why and how mobilities occur (as part of a nationalist agenda of overcoming size constraints and broadening investment opportunities, for example) as well as the contestations that attend it (both in foreign and local contexts). The unbounding and de-territorialization of tourism is a highly fraught process underscoring the complexities of mobilities and its variable consequences for Singapore and neighboring countries.

Singapore offers a case of strong state involvement in tourism. While stakeholders and private sector agents were involved, the Tourism UnLimited policy was principally a program spearheaded by the STB in conjunction with the EDB’s vision of Singapore UnLimited. The consequences of the plan, as highlighted in this study, suggest that local-level consumers (e.g. tourists) and communities (e.g. villagers in Bintan) are often unwitting and unwilling recipients. Whether a more consultative, bottom-up approach in planning would have mitigated the negative outcomes is worth considering. In the early 2010s as the STB embarked on a new tourism agenda called Tourism Compass 2020, the importance of consultation was emphasized. In a feedback platform called ‘Tourism and Me, A Dialogue of Ideas’, net users (locals and tourists alike) were encouraged to upload comments and suggestions on what they would like to see implemented in Singapore. This ‘dialogue’ marks a radical change in policy making, ushering a new avenue in ideas generation. As a network-state plugged into the mobile flows of tourism, information, labor and capital, Singapore’s engagement with Asia, and also increasingly its residents and tourists, is expected to intensify. More than ever, the need to harness mobilities (people, investments and ideas) is a tourism endeavor to be undertaken.
Notes

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1. At 718.3 sq. km., Singapore is the smallest country in Southeast Asia after Brunei at 5,770 sq. km. The largest is Indonesia at 1,904,567 sq. km. Other countries of comparable size to Singapore include Micronesia and Tonga.

2. Changi Airport is a Singapore government owned entity, as is the Changi Airport Group and its international policymaking arm of Changi Airports International. Wildlife Reserves Singapore is a commercial enterprise that runs four key nature attractions in Singapore including the Singapore Zoo.

3. Bintan island is about 55 minutes away from Singapore by catamaran ferry, the usual mode of transport for visitors from Singapore. Bintan is part of the Riau Islands province of Indonesia (see footnote 4). At over 60,000 sq. km., the island is about 83 times the physical size of Singapore.

4. The Riau Islands province includes the three principal islands of Bintan, Batam and Karimun, as well as the islands of Bulun and Kundur, and some 3,200 smaller islands. The capital of the province is Tanjong Pinang on Bintan island.

5. In May 2011, a bill was passed in the Indonesian Parliament requiring all financial transactions in Indonesia to be made in *rupiah*, the Indonesian currency. However, it was only as recently as September 2014 that hotels in Bintan stopped accepting Singapore and American dollars (Ng 2014).

6. Instead of being confined to cages, the ‘open zoo’ replicates the natural surroundings of animal habitats thereby creating a ‘free/natural’ look that is not only attractive to visitors but hopefully conducive to the animals as well.

7. CAG’s stake in Gemina SpA is the largest investment by the group and Changi is the first Asian operator to have a major stake in a European airport. In May 2013, three years after acquiring 8 per cent of Gemina SpA stake, CAI sold its share.
8. In the 2010s, many Asian airports have also entered the ‘operations’ sector. Apart from CAI, the most aggressive operators include Malaysia Airport Holdings (MAHB), Incheon International Airport (Korea), and Indian airport operators GMR and GVK. These operators have investment and operational stakes in airports in the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Russia (Bates 2015).

9. The 3.5 kilometer stretch of the Singapore River comprises three quays: Boat, Clarke and Robertson Quays. Land uses at Boat and Clarke Quays are mainly food/beverage and retail, while Robertson Quay comprises residences and offices, and select food/beverage amenities.

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