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### Changing Cultural Developments along a Tourist Route in Bali

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#### ABSTRACT

One of the most important routes for cultural tourism in Bali connects the seaside tourist town of Sanur to the provincial capital city of Denpasar, continues through the Sukawati Art Market, skirts the village of Mas, site of many studios and workshops, and culminates in Ubud, the historic artistic center of Bali. The city of Ubud is the epicenter of a renowned tradition of painting but it is also a community staggering under the influx of tourists arriving via this route. The roadway from Sanur to Ubud illustrates a range of different types of arts-based heritage tourism, from mass-produced art for beachside tourists in Sanur to several high-end galleries in Ubud. This trajectory of towns and their varied relationships with the arts and tourism illustrate the potentials and pitfalls of arts tourism as a means of development, and this roadway highlights the challenges of crafting sustainable routes for tourists interested in the arts.

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**Keywords:** Tourism, Development, Art, Sustainability, Indonesia

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## **Introduction**

Drawing on the words of people we interviewed and the art they make, collect or market along the Sanur-Ubud tourist route, we consider ways that communities, known for their artistic heritage, can continue to develop both art and tourism. After describing the historical development of this route, we highlight three communities that differently balance the sometimes competing demands of international tourism, local quality of life, and artistic endeavors.

Based on our interviews in the various communities along this route (with artists, museum directors, collectors, community activists, arts entrepreneurs, civil servants, and a member of the local royal family) during the summer of 2010, we present a comparative case study of different communities' approaches to arts-based development, which could provide lessons as well as warnings for Ubud and the more remote artistic villages beyond. Sacrificing long term economic stability for a short term burst of high impact tourism could endanger both artists and art forms.

Ubud, for instance, has been a tourist destination for many decades but has lately become a stop in mass marketed, prepackaged bus tours, which clog the road between Sanur/Denpasar and Ubud and encourage the development of imported or mass produced "junk art" for tourists who are in town just for a day, hardly stopping to eat local food, let alone learn about or purchase locally produced paintings. On the other hand, a distinguished Ubud tradition of painting persists, and notable examples of this art incorporate the artists' commentary on the dilemmas of tourist-based development, as tourists appear in these works snapping photographs of the more traditional landscapes, ceremonies and sites that have long been featured in this school of painting. In a context of rapid tourism-based development, we explore both the threats to and the resilience of the arts and artists in Bali.

### **1. A Cultural Tourism Route**

Well known for its cultural traditions, art and history, Bali has for a long time been one of the most desirable tourist destinations in Southeast Asia. Although a small Hindu island in the vast Muslim Indonesian archipelago (Map 1), it has been promoted as an earthly paradise by successive Indonesian governments and the international tourism industry and has, as a result, experienced dramatic transformations in its society, economy, physical environment, and cultural evolution.



**Map 1:** Bali within the Indonesian archipelago

When Bali was first discovered as a tourist destination, in the beginning of the twentieth century, its artistic and cultural traditions attracted early travelers, which included many artists. These traditions were present as both artifacts (painting, wood and stone sculpture, furniture, masks and costumes, jewelry and temple offerings) and as performances and ceremonies (dancing, music, temple ceremonies, cremations). As tourism expanded and became more accessible to larger numbers of people, some of these cultural expressions, imbued in the everyday life and traditions of the island population, began to lose their original meanings and become part of the tourism spectacle.

Today, two aspects of Balinese culture continue to contribute to its success as a tourism destination -- its vibrant and creative cultural expressions and its commercialized, mass produced cultural imitations. These two artistic modes coexist side by side on the island. But the artists of the first and the producers of the second interface in peculiar ways within the context of the distinctive form of Hinduism practiced on the island. This interface can be observed clearly along one of the major Balinese tourist routes, the road connecting Sanur, on the southern coast of the island, to Ubud, the art and cultural center in the high hills of the interior.

This paper is a brief description and documentation of the dual transformations taking place along the Sanur-Ubud tourist route. Along this route, older artistic traditions are still quite present in the interior but begin to fade as we approach the town of Ubud and become weaker and weaker as we descend toward the coast. By the time the route arrives in Sanur, commercialized, mass production dominates the arts scene, a

trend common in other tourist economies as well (Appadurai, 1986, p. 26). The range of art along this route corresponds with the types of tourists that frequent the communities along it, ranging from, in McKercher's typology, incidental to purposeful cultural tourists (McKercher and duCros 2003). In Sanur, accidental arts tourists may happen upon art and even buy art, but they are often in Bali primarily for the beach, surfing, spas or nightclubs. On the other hand, as we move from coastal Sanur toward Ubud, there is increasing sophistication of both artistic products and visitors. Tourists are more likely to be intentional arts tourists, coming as far as Ubud or beyond in order to reach the art or the artists there.

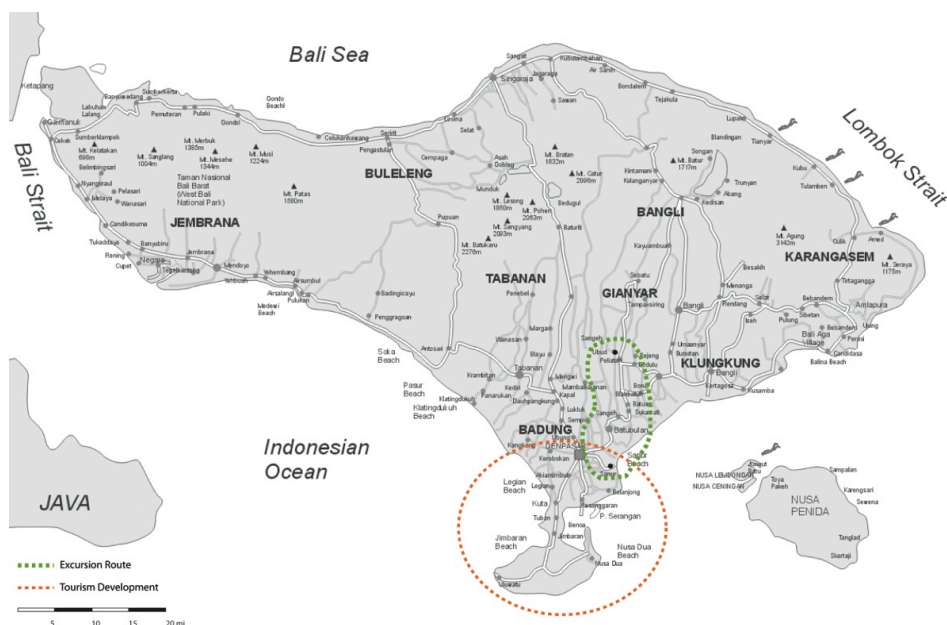
## **2. Tourism in Bali**

The island of Bali was promoted as a tourist destination by the Dutch colonial administration and its Netherland East Indies Company (VOC) very early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the first thirty or so years of the century, the island became a favorite spot for artists and writers, who settled in its towns and villages for extended periods of time (Covarrubias, 1937; Spies & Goris, 1937; de Zooete & Spies, 1938; McPhee 1947). Other visitors followed, but their numbers were small, about 3,000 by the late 1930s according to Picard (1996, pp. 23-25). After the end of the Second World War Indonesia fought a war of independence, and Bali fell into a period of obscurity and abandonment, during which infrastructure was lacking, much of the population lived in extreme poverty, and Muslim reformers of the young Indonesian state pushed for Bali to abandon its Hindu religion and its traditional ways and join the campaign to modernize the country.

However, both the post-independence Sukarno administration and the Suharto regime that followed it after the military coup of 1965 made tourism in Bali one of the cornerstones of their early development programs (Prajogo, 1985). The first five-year development plan of Indonesia established institutional infrastructure to undertake tourism-related development projects, and made Bali the "model" of the new tourism development paradigm. But even as the tourism promotion and infrastructural development of Bali advanced, the emphasis was on economic growth and benefits. These early plans and programs paid no heed to the protection and preservation of the local cultural traditions, norms and customs, or to the consequences of tourism and modernization for Balinese society or art.

The arts and culture received more attention in 1970-71, when the government of Indonesia commissioned a French consultant to create a master plan for the tourist-based development of Bali (SCETO 1971). The plan identified Nusa Dua (circled in red on Map 2), an area on the south coast of the island, centered on a remote and arid peninsula with little settlement activity and no agriculture, to become the location of the concentrated large-scale tourism developments proposed (hotels, spas, entertainment establishments, etc.). Two other coastal area settlements, Kuta and Sanur, were to be developed with infrastructure and hotels.

The idea behind these proposals was to bring alternative development to coastal areas in Bali that were seen as less productive and to shelter the inland Balinese society and its traditional settlements, communities and ways of life from the mass invasions of international tourists. To bring together the visitors and the local Balinese, on the other hand, the plan proposed ways to visit a number of important tourist destinations on the island and means by which the visitors could get a taste of the cultural heritage of Bali. To that end, Excursion Routes were established that connected the coastal tourist establishments and facilities to the areas of the island where significant destinations and cultural events were located. Among these routes, the most important was the corridor connecting the beach resort village of Sanur to the hill town and Bali cultural capital of Ubud (circled in green on Map 2).



**Map 2:** Bali's concentrated tourist infrastructure circled in red. Tourist route circled in green.

### 3. The Cultural Excursion Route from Sanur to Ubud

Along this route, a number of villages and towns already existed, and most of them were well known for their own unique cultural expressions, ceremonies, skills and talents, and the production of visual and performing art. Hundreds of artists, craftsmen and scholars lived in these communities, where the early interaction of these creative people with the artists and scholars visiting from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s had already produced significant syncretism in the traditional forms of Balinese cultural expression (such as new materials and techniques of painting, new subjects for carving and sculpture, new harmonies for music, and new movements for dance). To take advantage of the trade brought about by the visitors, these communities increasingly catered to tourists, and commercialization of local arts and crafts as well as of performances and ceremonies became a major part of the local economies. As these

places became tourist markets, some of their more traditionalist residents and artists and performers who wanted to maintain the “purity” of the traditional culture and heritage, gradually withdrew farther into the interior of the island. Thus, over the past thirty years, many of the communities along the route connecting Sanur to Ubud have been transformed, as commercialization permeates the communities, and the people most concerned about preserving and carrying on the traditions and culture of the island retreat. The closer one gets to the coast and the major tourist concentrations, the more commercialization dominates the physical landscape, the social norms and behavior, and the artistic expressions in these communities.

Field research the authors conducted in select communities along this route over a period of two months in the summer of 2010 produced a wealth of data describing, and to a certain degree quantifying, this transformation of the communities, and the reactions of the local population, artists, activists and local government operatives to the growing tourist demand for inexpensive things “Balinese.” Drawing from our seventy interviews on the arts and economic development in Indonesia (both in Bali and Yogyakarta), below we outline some of the key findings of our extensive interviews in Bali and conclude with a first assessment of the implications of tourism for the communities, cultures and creativity of people living along the tourist route, with a focus on the communities of Sanur, Mas and Ubud (Map 3).



Map 3: Sanur-Ubud tourist route

#### 4. Sanur

A small fishing village until the early 1960s, Sanur then became a major seaside resort community, primarily attracting lower-income, mass tourists. The village historically had been an important cultural center dominated by the *brahmanas* (the Hindu priestly caste, known in Sanur for their scholarly and spiritual accomplishments) and upheld both religious and artistic traditions. But during the government's Bali tourism promotion in the 1960s, the immense Bali Beach Hotel was built in Sanur, and the island's international airport was expanded just a few kilometers away (Smith, 2001, p. 277; Cole, 2008, p. 25; Vickers, 2012, pp. 252-255).

Sanur became the first stop for the large numbers of lower- and middle-income tourists flooding the island since then. Its visitors are attracted there mostly by the beautiful beaches, the fun and inexpensive entertainment, and the widely available, mass produced arts and crafts displayed in its stores and stalls. Many of the items sold there are not even made in Bali but, rather, are imports from other parts of Indonesia and a number of surrounding countries, especially China. While some products copy traditional forms (such as machine-made batik and wood carvings), others are not even imitations of Balinese artistic or cultural artifacts (such as Christmas ornaments).

The impact of mass tourism on Sanur includes the commercialization of its crafts and ceremonies and the exodus of many artists. The *brahmanas* and artists who lived and worked there have left for more remote and serene parts of Bali, and performances are primarily produced for tourists rather than local residents. According to several of our interview respondents, there is little economic or social incentive for them to stay in Sanur. There is little demand either for quality cultural performances or for quality art products, as the Sanur visitors have neither the appreciation for their art nor the propensity to spend money on it.

At the same time, the behavior and life styles of the visitors, who consider themselves free to act as they please away from their own homes and social restraints, have chased away the most traditional Balinese who treasure their Balinese heritage, norms of behavior, and the meaning and spirituality of their artistic products, performances and ceremonies. Most of the major stores and entertainment venues are owned and controlled by non-Balinese, due in large part to a lack of government programs to support local business and craftsmen. It is characteristic of this transformation of the local cultural scene that in the early 1990s there were one hundred and twenty workshops in the area between Sanur and Kuta producing silver jewelry, but only five of them remain in this area today, and these are able to stay in business primarily because of export orders from other countries.

## 5. Mas

Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Hindu aristocratic priest caste of *brahmanas* has practiced woodcarving in Mas, using local woods and the traditional *Wayang* style to depict, almost exclusively, scenes from the ancient Hindu epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* for use in temple ceremonies (Oey, 1990, pp. 120-21; Covarrubias, 1937, pp. 160-61). Woodcarving in Mas was a family tradition, with the craft being transferred from father to son within the village's families. But since the 1930s, when tourism began to increase in Bali, both the styles and the themes of carving in Mas began to evolve and transform themselves, becoming less traditional and more inclined towards non-religious subjects, such as people, animals and landscapes. This evolution was the result of both a desire of the local artists and craftsmen to experiment with new ways of artistic expression, and an interest in taking advantage of the tourist-driven demand for cultural products. Mas thus gradually became a market of wood sculpture, woodcarvings, and wood-based crafts. The surge in demand for these products and tough competition among the woodcarvers resulted in copying of art pieces, imitations of the artistic expressions of the most talented carvers by commercial producers, the lowering of prices, and the decreasing quality of the woodcarvings.

In the 1970s and 1980s Mas was a mandatory stopover for tourists traveling on the Sanur-Ubud route in order to visit the woodcarving workshops, galleries, and inexpensive craft shops in the village. Some of these workshops combined mass-production of woodcarvings (by small armies of young men and women sitting on the floor producing woodcarvings with simple traditional tools) with lavish galleries, where high-end, exquisitely sculpted pieces of art sold at high prices. Some of the more recognized artists continued to work in their own studios, where discriminating visitors and art collectors came to see and buy original and extraordinary works of art. Thus, Mas became a diverse bazaar of art, mostly but not exclusively woodcarvings, in which the entire range of art quality, sophistication and prices could be encountered.

In a series of interviews we conducted in the village with fourteen persons (two mask makers, three gallery owners, three wood workshop owners employing ten to twenty craftsmen and women each, four local government officials and two tourist guides) we learned that by the 2000s the social structure, cultural heritage and economy of the village had been dramatically impacted by the influx of tourists. Socially, Mas had attracted many residents and employees from outside the village, thus altering the traditional "compound" structure of the village society. The population increased, and the wood workshops began to resemble factories more than family-based art studios.

The large numbers of tourists visiting Mas and their increasing demands for inexpensive crafts gradually caused declines in the woodcarving quality in the village. Commercialism forced the quick production of artifacts, with little or no attention to detail and quality, as well as the mass production of inexpensive crafts of indifferent artistic quality for export. Competition from the commercial workshops, staffed inexpensively by people with little talent or training, forced some accomplished artists



to reduce the time they spent on their art pieces, resulting in art quality decline. The historical reputation of the village as a major center of wood sculpture still attracts some serious art buyers and creates an incentive for some talented artists to stay and work there, but today many of them live and work outside the village, in more remote locations away from the commercial marketplace. As a result, the broader area around Mas today represents a mix of large-scale cultural commercialization based on woodcarving, combined with high quality art sold to informed buyers at internationally competitive prices.

However, the gradual relocation of many artists and the domination of the commercial workshops have gradually downgraded the reputation and the attractiveness of Mas in the eyes of visitors. Today Mas is no longer an essential stopover on the Sanur-to-Ubud route. A number of workshops have closed, and the employment they provided has declined over the last ten years. A number of young people, who were trained as woodcarvers, have left the village in search of employment elsewhere. The local economy increasingly relies on foreign exports of inexpensive woodcrafts rather than sales to domestic or international tourists. Distinctive items associated with Mas, such as ceremonial masks, are rarely purchased in Mas any more, as their cheap imitations are found in Sanur and their better variations are available in the larger cultural markets of Ubud.

## 6. Ubud

Ubud is no longer the remote, “end of the road” village experienced by the earliest international tourists in Bali. Recently featured in the Julia Roberts film *Eat Pray Love*, Ubud has become a busy, congested tourist destination. This town nevertheless continues to be the cultural capital at the heart of Bali and a highlight of the Sanur-Ubud route. For centuries it has been a major center of artistic and cultural creativity, with many magnificent temples and significant ancient monuments, and a long tradition of painting, music, dancing, and temple performances and ceremonies. Because of these attractions, its remote location, and its natural beauty, it was the natural destination and choice of residence for many of the early European artists and thinkers who came to Bali lured by images of serenity, spirituality, beauty and culture, and who stayed and lived there for long periods of time.

By the 1930s, Ubud contained a thriving European colony, the residents of which exerted great influence on the development and the westernization of the local artists living in the region and beyond. The presence of these Europeans, and the fame they attached to Ubud as their preferred place of residence, attracted ever-larger numbers of visitors to the hill town. By the 1970s, Ubud had evolved into the undisputed cultural center of Bali, with many well-known painters, musicians, dancers and art leaders living there. The town boasted the highest concentration of art galleries and several major museums containing domestic and international art (Lueras & Lloyd, 1987, p. 94). The

important artistic activities and products of the town made it an attractive stopping place for art lovers and collectors, and Ubud thrived as a true cultural capital up until the early 2000s. The political upheavals that followed the fall of the dictator Suharto in 1998, and the Bali bombings of 2002, caused a dramatic drop in the number of tourists coming to Bali, and affected Ubud as well for a period. The town however recovered faster than the rest of Bali and today continues to be the major cultural destination on the island.

Despite the steady stream of visitors coming to Ubud, and the large sums of money generated by their purchases, Ubud in the past ten years has gradually begun to imitate the more commercialized places of Sanur and Mas, and troves of small stores selling tourist “junk” can be found in every street and square. The human and auto congestion created daily by the large numbers of tourists, have pushed many of the artists to move their studios and workshops to smaller villages outside of Ubud. As a result, each passing year finds Ubud with a larger quantity of low price/low quality merchandise and with fewer high-end galleries, artists’ studios, and significant visual and performing events. While the balance between the cultural and the commercial even today favors quality cultural expressions, it may only be a question of time before that balance is upturned and Ubud replicates the experience of other Balinese towns and cities, such as Sanur and Mas.

Culturally, Ubud continues to be a significant focal point for Balinese art. Its museums are of world class in both physical setting and facilities and in terms of the quality and richness of their collections. Its art galleries display excellent art and have an international following of collectors. Large numbers of young artists are attracted to it, partly because of the reputation of its art masters, and partly because of the vast art market there, that offers them the opportunity to sell their art and become known through gallery and art store exposure. The town has an intensive cultural life, with ceremonies and performances staged daily, and with elaborate ceremonies such as cremations occurring periodically. (At the time of our fieldwork there, in the summer of 2010, we counted four different clusters of local cremations being organized around Ubud. These clusters allow multiple cremations by different families, in an effort to reduce the enormous cost to individual families for the preparation of the ceremony). In comparing it to the other two stops on our Route, we can clearly identify it as an important location for the preservation and display of some of the best aspects and examples of the Balinese arts, traditions, religion and culture.

In parallel with all this cultural activity and evolution, the town has had great opportunities for economic growth. The large concentration of artists and art galleries and institutions has created high demand for land and buildings. Similarly, the demand for accommodations among the high-end visitors coming to Ubud has helped sprout many four and five star hotels, as well as a number of high luxury, “boutique” hotels and bed-and-breakfasts catering to them. Landowners have become wealthy from these transactions, which gradually transform large segments of the magnificent terraces of wet rice surrounding Ubud into residential and commercial lots and

developments. Construction, workshops and small business all contribute to the generation of local employment. While the jobs created by-and-large are not high-paying, they nevertheless are able to support a large emerging class of employees and small entrepreneurs who are educated, speak foreign languages, use the Internet, make domestic and international commercial deals, and provide the facilities and services that tend to attract more visitors to the town. As an economy, Ubud has for over thirty years and up to the present day been the most prosperous place in Bali, and its prosperity is the direct result of its cultural assets, its cultural significance and reputation, and the concentration of artists and creative individuals in one location.

### Conclusion: Cultural perseverance and commercialization



**Map 4:** Changing cultural characteristics along a tourist route in Bali

The Sanur-Ubud tourist route is a microcosm of the changing artistic practices and tourist trends in Bali. The benefits of “slow” tourism, by which tourists spend time and learn about the places they visit, is a particularly important goal for places that emphasize arts and heritage tourism. Slow tourism has both cultural and economic benefits for local artists and related businesses, as tourists spend not just time but also money in the communities and learn more about the locality, form a connection and perhaps even return.

For instance, some of the more “purposeful” arts tourists who reach Ubud stay for a while and take classes on Indonesian textiles or painting. Ubud’s Threads of Life textile shop and foundation slows tourists down by offering an educational gallery as well as

study tours to some of the cooperatives where their textiles are made, including two in East Bali (interview with I Made Rai Artha (Lolet), Co-founder and director of Threads of Life Gallery, Ubud, July 27, 2010). In contrast, package tour operators send day-trippers into Ubud on buses, many of which park on the local soccer field. These tourists hurriedly purchase trinkets and leave without enriching the local economy by purchasing dinner or lodging.

If they buy art at all, such “incidental” arts tourists may buy pictures produced in “painting factories,” in which Balinese painters make three paintings a day in the style of famous painters for low wages (interview with Rio Helmi, photographer and gallery owner, at his studio in Ubud, July 19, 2010). Slow tourists are much more likely to support slow art. Renowned painter I Wayan Bendi’s paintings, which combine modern and traditional motifs with Ubud-style techniques, take more than three months to complete. A close look at his intricate canvasses reveals tourists and surfers amidst dancers dramatizing Hindu epics. Bendi also teaches other painters, who come to study under him (interview with I Wayan Bendi, painter, at his studio in Gianyar, July 22, 2010).

Incidental arts tourists are increasingly dominant as one approaches the other end of the route, coastal Sanur, and such tourists have little time to slow down for art. The Sanur Arts Festival organizers make an effort to put art in the path of “incidental” arts tourists, who have come primarily for the beaches and related recreation. Although international visitors may come to Bali for nonartistic reasons, the festival draws them with its location at the beach, on and around the grounds of the grand Bali Beach Hotel (the historic hotel from the government’s early tourist development and modernization plans in the 1960s). By including sports, food, and popular music, the festival can entice tourists and locals to also view dance performances and booths displaying the work of visual artists (interview with Tommy Trisdiarto, organizer of the Sanur Arts Festival, Sanur, July 21, 2010).

The sustainability of this tourist route depends not just on attention to time (slow tourism) but also to place (art and artists maintaining connections to specific communities). In terms of time, the benefit for local artists of slow, purposeful arts tourism means that cultivating this approach should be a priority for these communities. Tourists traversing the route should have opportunities to stop, learn about and purchase art along the way; ideally this would even convert some incidental arts tourists into purposeful ones. In terms of place, the distinctive art forms of particular communities along this route, such as the woodcarvings of Mas, should be nurtured and promoted. This will draw purposeful arts tourists, who will continue to come to these communities for their arts and heritage, even if the more fickle incidental arts tourists are drawn elsewhere for a beach holiday if they can find a better deal. Who is materially and artistically enriched by the production of art? In the context of Bali’s tourist economy, this is a question that needs more attention and one that we have begun to explore in our case studies along a cultural tourism route.

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