## Iconic architecture in tourism: (how) does it work?

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Can we assume that iconic architecture serves as a guide to national or local cultures? Advertisements for the Sinalei Reef Resort & Spa, for instance, typically mention not only its location in a “lush landscape”, but also its fusion of “authentic” Samoan architecture. Reviewers on TripAdvisor comment on national character and culture, hospitality and friendliness of staff, activities, room fit-out and Wi-Fi connections – but very rarely mention authentic architecture. Does this lack of discussion mean a lack of awareness?

Walter Benjamin believed that architecture is experienced “in a state of distraction” (1969: 239). Buildings, “man's companions since primeval times” (ibid), are perhaps too familiar to warrant much discussion but that does not necessarily mean that ‘traditional’ architecture’s iconicity is not effective. Sinalei resort, built to the wishes and concept of its Samoan owners, certainly plays to overseas tourists’ imaginaries, encouraging them to “escape to paradise”. Its iconic buildings provide an atmospheric or affective background. The architecture and the dances performed on Fia Fia night are of one piece with a way of life and a way of thinking. Even if users of authentic Samoan architecture may not consciously register its contribution to the “South Pacific Island Paradise” they enjoy, iconicity is still at work (Alexander, Bartmanski, & Giesen, 2012). What matters are not sender-to-receiver processes but con-stellations of aesthetic, social and cultural effects, re-contextualised at the resort to “be given fresh meanings, while retaining, to a certain degree, their original function” (Condevaux, 2011: 288). Iconicity, here, relies both on the “displacement of form” and “the persistence of the sense of belonging attached to it” (Refiti, 2015: 5). Tourist and local worlds, while occupying very different positions on various scales, overlap at Sinalei. Likewise, in Aotearoa, re-affirming manaakitanga (hospitality), which embodies reciprocal obligations of hosts and visitors, protects and promotes cultural values-centred tourism development (Wikitera, 2006). Of course, Fia Fia night shows and Māori hangi shows are performed for tourists. Yet the performers will not only feel encouraged by their lay audience’s enthusiasm; they simultaneously perform for an appreciative and educated audience of fellow performers and local visitors. Equally, in the construction, maintenance and adornment of the iconic fale at the resort, there is a real somewhere close to the fake. The major fictions and architectural archetypes used in the production of iconicity for tourists interface with what Samoans hold dear as fa’aSamoa, and Māori as Māoritanga, and the production of iconic architecture to attract tourists has a different, and perhaps more powerful, life for locals. Even if decontextualized, the beauty of their iconic fale asserts the value of Samoan culture for staff working at the resort. The paper compares iconicity’s effects and affects at tourism sites in Samoa, Aotearoa, Germany, and the US to question and rethink built environments constructed *for* and *by* tourism.

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