
Book Review

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Attracting Visitors to Ancient Neighbourhoods: Creation and Management of the Tourist-historic City of Plymouth, UK

by: Daniel Barrera-Fernández

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This volume – number 6 in an electronic publishing platform that supports the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) – has evolved from Dr. Daniel Barrera-Fernández's doctoral thesis at the University of Malaga. Its principal focus is an analysis of the preservation of a particular city's historic core and the presentation of its significant heritage assets for the purposes of heritage-based tourism. The author uses, as his case study, the city of Plymouth, UK. This was an interesting choice because in many ways, Plymouth occupies a unique place in the unfolding story of Britain, with important associations with crucial steps in the chronological development of the region of which it is an important part, but also because of the development of its own character through events which stretch back to at least the sixteenth century and the sea battle with the invading Spanish Armada and the exploits of Sir Francis Drake. Events throughout its existence have led to the present stage of its development, combining periods of enterprise and growth with others of complacency and inertia. It is these various machinations, and how the city has adjusted to them, that have attracted the author's interest.

At the outset, Barrera-Fernández nominates his principal focus as being how the city's heritage assets have been managed to respond to the modern pressures of tourism (see pp.12–17). For him, the city of Plymouth has been engaged in an uneven process of transformation. The structure of his original doctoral thesis shines through in the introductory section where he nominates five research questions. Three of these attract particular attention as they address such matters as:

- a frameworks for preserving historic urban quarters and heritage assets
- b models or strategies to take advantage of those frameworks as they are directed towards the development of heritage-based tourism
- c as 'actors and initiatives' which have variously focused on culture, heritage, tourism, urban planning and economic development.

Between the introductory sections, which set the scene and nominate the trajectory of the narrative and the concluding remarks, which present a useful comprehensive summary of the mammoth data and information-rich analysis, the author tests the reader's appetite for studies about cultural heritage-based tourism. His information-base is exceptional. There are pages and pages of micro-detail, expressed variously through maps, photographs, charts and diagrams (with many being the author's own) and, of course, narrative. The sequence of considerations is methodical. Following a brief overview of matters affecting the phenomenon of Europe's historic cities and the interaction between heritage values and recent trends in the use of heritage resources for the purposes of tourism, the author provides a similarly brief commentary about the case study city of Plymouth – its history, governmental arrangements, socio-economic strategies, its planning – and the approach he has taken to the study. In the following two sections, Barrera-Fernández provides a solid commentary on the evolutionary steps taken to preserve the city's historically important districts, places and buildings. This commentary draws on his interpretation of documents which record what he has referred to as stages in the evolution of interest in heritage preservation; these include phases of heritage-inclined urban planning, of urban fabric reconstruction and district regeneration, of strategies for economic development and of engagement in community participation. Complementing that comprehensive overview is a detailed commentary on the prevailing framework of protection of the heritage assets in the city's historic core areas. From that point and absorbing about one-half of the total narrative, it is the tourism dimension of how the heritage assets have been and can be dealt with through prevailing powers of planning and heritage protection that is the focus.

Beginning with a history of the tourism sector of Plymouth, with references to changes in the strategic model as the value of the heritage assets becomes appreciated more widely in the government agencies in the entrepreneurial community and across the community generally, Barrera-Fernández proceeds to reveal some of the 'hard data' about tourism in Plymouth. For example, he reports that, according to sources published in the early years of the decade commencing in 2010, Plymouth attracts about 11 million visitors per year, has an annual income from tourism of about GBP90million, engages a tourism-related workforce of about 3,000 and that tourism and leisure has become the second largest contributor to the city's economy. He nominates the waterfront area, the confluence of the estuaries of two rivers (Tamar and Plym), Plymouth Hoe and the Barbican area as the locations of the principal tourism activity. In addition to descriptions of these principal areas of tourism attraction, the author presents a detailed breakdown of the visitor profiles and their economic impact. Specific mention is made of particular sites and buildings which have associations with important historic events in the city including, for example, Sir Francis Drake and the sea battle with the Spanish Armada, the sailings of the Pilgrim Fathers to the USA, the visits to the city of Charles Darwin and his ship the *Beagle*, the visit of the polar explorer Robert Falcon Scott and periods of residence of such artists and architects as Joshua Reynolds and Patrick Abercrombie. In addition, the occupation of premises by various contingents of the British defence forces (such as the Royal Dockyard, the Royal Naval Hospital and the Royal Marine Barracks) contributes a legacy of more recent heritage assets. The descriptions are very thorough and they become amplified in the special section devoted to tourism in the city's historic core area.

In a specially-developed section, the author addresses what he has referred to as the 'actors and initiatives' which have a focus on culture and heritage, tourism, urban planning, and then on economic development. The particular target of the critique in this section is the exposure of the policies from various agencies and interest groups which, through their various 'regulations, plans, programs, projects and actions', have had an impact on the processes of urban regeneration, of built environment preservation and of tourism development. Each component of this section is accompanied by a complex diagram which purports to reveal the various organisational locations of the responsibilities for developing the heritage-linked tourism product for the city of Plymouth, and each identifies target initiatives and the linkages to those initiatives from across the networks of public and private agencies. These diagrams have been carefully constructed; they are exceptionally detailed and the level of detail demands that each is given serious attention if the message being conveyed can be received, understood and interpreted.

As is not uncommon with the transposition of a thesis, this volume has both strengths and weaknesses. It is an information-full document, with fact after fact and personal interpretations being presented as some of those facts. This is not necessarily unfortunate, except that the constant presentation of what may be only personal opinions (some of which may be second hand) may impede the transferability of the Plymouth experience to other historic cities in Europe and elsewhere. Linking this work more closely to the work of Ashworth and Tunbridge and the theoretical insights and case studies of Jansen-Verbeke might have made the experience of this case study of Plymouth more comparable and transferable. However, in general, the author has produced a work of considerable merit. Despite his best efforts, some criticism can be levelled at the publishers. For example, the lack of a numbering sequence for the chapters and the sections within them, makes it a disorienting presentation; the need for referencing back and forth to ideas and facts expressed at various points in the narrative is frustrated by the publisher's decision to omit such essential signposts. Another criticism could be directed to the format of the reference list; the degrees of repetition of references among the subsections surely suggests that the conventional consolidated style would have been more suitable, although a separate subsection for the Plymouth-specific entries would have been acceptable. Finally, a word for those readers who might be inclined to download a copy; take the trouble to download a full colour version, as the black/grey and white version will present tables, some maps and some charts which are almost undecipherable.

This is a remarkable work and both the author and the readers should be pleased with it. Early comments in the foreword and in the introduction suggest that this study of Plymouth will be set in the big picture of situations of capturing, nurturing and exposing the heritage assets of cities. There is so much detail here about Plymouth that setting it into the bigger picture has been overlooked. What this story does is to draw attention to the ever-changing circumstances of Plymouth without then drawing out the lessons which may be transferable to other cities. So, this intrinsically valuable study actually underachieves. Nevertheless, it is a useful addition to collections of case studies about urban regeneration for the purpose of heritage-based tourism through processes of heritage asset development.