
Book Review

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Tourist Destinations: Structure and Synthesis

by: Douglas Pearce, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Published December 2020

by CABI, Oxfordshire,

UK and Boston, MA, 288 pp

ISBN: 9781789245837

Analysing and understanding tourist destinations has been the aim of numerous papers coming from different disciplines that examine them from various angles. Yet, as Edgar Morin, a famous French philosopher wrote “the disciplinary development of the sciences not only brings the advantages of the division of labour (...) but also the disadvantages of over-specialisation: compartmentalisation and fragmentation of knowledge” (Morin, 1990, pp.16–17, our translation). Research concerning tourist destinations becomes more and more specialised but also more and more fragmented. The aim of this book written by Douglas Pearce, Emeritus Professor in the School of Management (Victoria University of Wellington), is to provide a more integrated approach of tourist destinations by focusing simultaneously on two major themes: the spatial structure and the organisational one. By spatial structure, the author means the arrangements of different tourism phenomena in space. According to him, this spatial structure concerns three dimensions, which are interrelated: physical location, the distribution of products and services, and the spatial interactions among actors.

On the other hand, by organisational structure, the author means how the destinations are composed that is the ways the different actors (private, public, non-profit organisations but also tourists themselves) individually or collectively, produce the destination experienced by the tourists. It is what we could call a kind of systemic analysis. Throughout the book, references are made to theories of geography, industrial economics, management, etc., illustrating the multidisciplinary nature of tourism research. The author also highlights the importance of institutional contexts at different scales. This diversity of concepts and analyses allows Douglas Pearce to produce a global comprehensive study of tourist destinations, their structure and how they function. His work illustrates perfectly the heuristic value provided by an interdisciplinary research.

The book is divided in 10 chapters. The four first chapters (1. Introduction: the spatial and organisational structure of destinations; 2. Perspectives on destinations; 3. Frameworks for tourist destinations; 4. Analysing the structure of destinations) aim to explain what a tourist destination and its structure are. They present the different definitions of destination, the way this concept has evolved in history, and the built framework to analyse the different types of destinations at different scales.

Chapters 5 to 9 (5. Structure of national destinations, 6. Structure of regional destinations, 7. Structure of urban destinations. 8. Structure of coastal resorts and 9. Structure of ski resorts and rural and natural area destinations) focus on different types of destinations at different scales (National, Regional, Local). They are based on a broad set of papers concerning as different destinations as Waitomo caves in a North New Zealand Island, Balneário Camboriú in Brazil, Port Camargue in Languedoc-Roussillon, Freiburg in Germany, the ski resort of Niseko-Hirafu in Japan, Nanto in Taiwan or Paris district, etc.

The theoretic framework is thus, built from numerous empirical examples coming from Oceania but also Europe -and France in particular, North and South America, and Asia. The last chapter (10. Spatial and organisational structure of destinations: a synthesis) provides a very useful synthesis of his analysis. It also presents the various limits of his work, and in particular the reasons of why the conceptualisation he provides, does not allow understanding the functioning of few destinations. He puts forward some elements, such as the temporal dimension of destination development, or the fact that some concepts such as district or cluster are coming from other disciplines. He assumes therefore, that not all the elements characterising these concepts exist in the case of a tourism destination.

The analysis, conceptual and methodological, is based on a broad review of papers written by numerous authors writing in English, Spanish or French. Overall, this is a very exciting book from an analytical point of view, but also because of the quality and diversity of the used bibliography. This very broad and diverse knowledge is for sure one of the richness of this book. It can be useful for numerous researchers and students in tourism studies located in different countries.

Moreover, beyond academic interest, this book can also be useful to policy makers, planners, and firms. The methodological analysis of a destination's structure presented in the book, can indeed allow them to best identify their place, their competitors, and the different stakeholders (Destination Management Organization (DMO), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), private service provider, and so on).

Although stimulating, the book could have deepened the analysis of four points. The first one is the temporal dimension required to a destination's building. Destinations are not static but they evolve over time. Although any analysis is necessarily dated, it could be interesting in an evolutionary way, to analyse the different types of trajectories in building destinations and the possible path-dependencies that occur during this building.

Secondly, the inhabitants' role in each type of destination is not sufficiently taken into account. The inhabitants are fully part of the tourism system. Current researches in tourism show their growing importance, in terms of destination marketing. Inhabitants seem also to be important in terms of destination stability due to possible conflicts with tourists, particularly in situations especially in cities characterised by over-tourism (obviously before the pandemic).

Thirdly, the used categorisation of different destinations (national, regional, local but also urban, ski resort, etc.) can sometimes induce a loss of empirical knowledge concerning their functioning in reality. It seems indeed, that more and more blurred boundaries characterise these different categories.

Finally, it would also be important to integrate the multi-scalar dimensions linked to different contexts that affect the way of how a specific destination functions. Conceptualising a destination by a specific scale (local, regional or national) is a first

step, but these different scales must also be articulated together. The national context influences the functioning of the local one, and the functioning of different local contexts can affect the global operation of a national destination. Following on from the work of Barca et al. (2012), analysing a tourist destination and defining policies for this destination, require a 'place-based' conceptualisation. This conceptualisation will allow integrating simultaneously the spatio-temporal dimensions at different scales that affect how any tourist destination operates.

References

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