

Book Review

**Reviewed by Julian Philipp
and Julia Schiemann**

Email: julian.phil91@gmail.com

Email: julia.schiemann97@gmail.com

Handbook on Tourism and Rural Community Development

by: Heather Mair (Editor)

Published 2023

by Edward Elgar Limited, Cheltenham, UK, 441 pp.

ISBN: 978-0-367-46967-2

Tourism with its cross-sectoral, inter-disciplinary and socio-economic nature is traditionally closely linked to regional development. Given its vast economic impacts, it is a vital development tool for rural communities in particular. However, global challenges around digitalisation, urbanisation, sustainability or income require destinations to adapt. The recent COVID-19 pandemic in particular has underlined the high vulnerability of the tourism sector, as it were small and rural communities and those depending on tourism expenditure that were hit hardest. Accordingly, it is crucial to review the linkages between tourism and rural development critically, and illustrate possible future development paths.

In this context, the *Handbook on Tourism and Rural Community Development* critically reflects on the diverse relationship between the tourism industry and rural community development. The book combines diverse theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives and techniques provided by researchers and scholars from over 10 countries on four continents, guaranteeing a high adaptability and practical relevance of the publication. The intellectual discussions cover various topics such as decolonisation, transformation, regeneration, gender, heritage, climate change, resilience, ethics, sustainability, events, or entrepreneurship, therefore providing knowledge, insights and up-to-date considerations for researchers, students and practitioners in various fields. Dallen J. Timothy and Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, both recognised and respected experts in tourism academia, call the handbook an “essential reading for anyone concerned with rural development and tourism”, showing “ways in which tourism can be better shaped for positive rural community futures”. The book consists of five parts with a total of 30 chapters. The first chapter is a vast introduction by the editor that sets tourism and rural development in the context of the challenging times of the post-COVID-19 era and provides a good overview of the book and its various chapters. It highlights the growing relevance of these topics, considering the higher vulnerability of rural communities shown by the uneven impacts of the virus, which are then again caused by social division and inequality.

The first part is the shortest of the five parts of the book and includes three chapters that build conceptual foundations on rural communities, rural tourism, and rural development, and therefore ensure that all readers regardless of their field of work or study have the same basic understanding. The chapters are primarily descriptive, as they mainly refer to existing knowledge and concepts on the topics mentioned above. However, they also incorporate modern challenges and developments. The first chapter calls for a rethinking of communities, as they are often dependent on tourism, but also affected by tourism, and thus very vulnerable to changes, developments or crises in tourism. The second chapter refers to the increasing dynamics and changes that today's world is confronted with. The third chapter highlights the role of leadership, participation, and governance for sustainable development.

The second part of the book is called "Epistemological Foundations, Paradigms, and Worldviews" and shares critical and insight-led approaches to methodologies, concepts, and practices in tourism. The first two chapters focus on timely adaptations of established tourism research routines and methods in particular, highlighting the role of emotions, history, and relationships. These explanations are enriched by short case studies to illustrate the use of different methodological approaches in different settings. The other chapters of this part follow this "call for paradigm adaptations" by taking into account decoloniality and social impacts, as well as critical or even anti-tourism perspectives. Hereby, they build on contemporary attempts to avoid prejudiced or patronising research, development or management attitudes.

The third part of the book is called "Key Conceptualisations" and consists of eight chapters describing key terms that are becoming increasingly important in the context of rural tourism: gender, food, heritage, climate change, resilience, degrowth, functionality, and regeneration. The focus of this part is to bring contemporary and mid- to long-term challenges of tourism development in general, in line with diverse approaches around contemporary issues and developments (the key terms listed before) that are critical to rural development; on the one hand, they have often been neglected in rural areas – compared to urbanised ones, for example –, while on the other hand, they may be keys for a sustainable and resilient development of rural areas. Each of the respective chapters includes practical examples that may help to overcome these issues, such as female inclusion, farmers markets, or heritage trails.

Part four of the book presents "Processes and Practices". Concepts and ideas discussed in these chapters are, for example, appreciation, governance, or knowledge transfer, which are essential to ensure a holistic and integrated future development of tourism, not only in rural areas. Accordingly, the chapters in this part encompass a mixture of practical examples, theoretical models, and recommendations for actions, without neglecting limitations, challenges, and risks. In a not too utopian way, paths towards broader societal and economic goals, such as a reduced capitalism, are presented in a practical and adoptable way. In a concluding chapter, the role of academics is briefly described, contributing to the oftentimes still lacking knowledge transfer between academia and practice.

The last part of the book, part five, is named "Emerging Matters and New Directions" and highlights some recent developments and trends that allowed for some regions to redevelop their tourism strategies and achieve a more sustainable and resilient tourism development. This part of the book is divided into two segments: the first includes chapters based on literature reviews, while the second is based on empirical research, featuring even some innovative techniques, such as a workshop with narrative analysis.

The diverse subjects include a wide range of topics – from the interdependence of urban and rural areas as evidenced by events, to the ethical considerations of animal welfare in rural tourism – that are completed by actionable recommendations for reform. It also considers the impact that the migration of Europeans and nomadic workers has on less populated regions. While the focus is mainly on developed countries, as Spain, Sweden or Canada, the last part also includes studies about the developing countries Tibet and Tasmania. This last part also brings up social entrepreneurship, a timely topic that gains academic and practical interest in a variety of contexts.

Overall, the *Handbook on Tourism and Rural Community Development* can be of particular interest to researchers, practitioners and students interested in the political, economic, societal and cultural challenges, trends and developments in the context of rural tourism and community development, although many of the issues included in the book can be easily applied to broader contexts, making it an interesting read for researchers, practitioners and students outside the rural context, as well. The book mainly features authors with an academic and “Western” background, but a few authors with more practical professions, or from other regions of the world, are included too. Considering the high relevance of developing countries in this context, more contributions and case studies from these regions would allow for an even stronger understanding and adaptability of this topic. Yet, the various backgrounds of the authors – working in over 10 countries on four continents – ensures a neutral and critical debate of tourism and rural community development, and therefore a high quality and adaptability of the content to various contexts, situations, and locations. The chapters use a good mixture of recent and more established sources, making sure that concepts and previous works are included to provide the best possible understanding and solutions.

The book is written in a well understandable way, providing theoretical and practical contributions from well-known international tourism and rural development researchers that address a multitude of topics within the quite vast relationship of tourism and rural community development – a diversity and complexity that inhabitants or visitors can often not grasp. Therefore, the book is a great fit for all those interested in:

- a the interrelatedness of tourism and rural community development
- b the applicability of contemporary global trends and developments to a tourism and rural community context, or
- c a general understanding of the role of global issues such as sustainability, gender or climate change in geographical contexts.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the authors and editor did very well to achieve the book’s goal – namely, assembling a comprehensive up-to-date work on the relationship between tourism and rural community development, and providing examples and inspirations concerning the role of tourism in future paths of rural community development.