TOURISM ANALYSIS

BOOK REVIEW

*Slow tourism: experiences and mobilities*

Simone Fullagar, Kevin Markwell and Erica Wilson (Eds.) (Bristol, Buffalo, Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2012, 233 pp., Paperback, £29.95, $ 49.95 ISBN 978 1 84541 280 7)

Originating in the Italian Slow Cities (CittàSlow) and the slow movements of the 1980s and 1990s, ‘slow travel’ is a tourist type in its own right. Admittedly, it has occupied a less prominent place in contemporary tourist theory, probably because of its association or mergers with disparate sub-fields as those environmental sustainability, native food production and consumption and global respect for ethnic diversity. The present volume, edited by Simone Fullagar (Griffith University, Queensland, Australia), Kevin Markwell (Southern Cross University, NSW, Australia) and Erica Wilson (Southern Cross University, NSW), brings together a series of contributions on this as yet unexplored area of mobilities theory and practice. Coming from the fields of tourism, leisure and cultural studies, tourism management and eco-humanities, the 17 contributors debate a range of relevant themes, including lifestyle mobilities and practices, travel ethics, leisure time and cultural and environmental sustainability. The focus on slowness as a philosophy of life, a mode ‘being in the world’ and investigating it, frames a balanced analysis of theory and empiry.

The book is divided into four parts, with each chapter debating empirical or conceptual angles of slow tourism and travel. The first part (‘Positioning slow tourism’) focuses on questions of temporality and its experience. Via major theories of time, Christopher Howard (chapter one) and Kevin Moore (chapter 2) provide a critical exposition of ‘slowness’ in relation to the pursuit of well-being, definitions of good life and the desire for travel as a form of secular pilgrimage. Stephen and Michael Wearing and Matthew McDonald (chapter 4) consider clashes and collaborations between the commodification of ecotourism and its potential to generate connections between hosts and guests while also providing pleasurable tourist experiences.

The second part of the book (‘Slow food and sustainable tourism’) examines the emergence of slow food tourism and its relationship to eco-gastronomy and sustainable development. Michael Hall (chapter 5) outlines the development of slow food movement and its turbulent relationship with sustainable tourism. Fabio Parasecoli and Paulo de Abreu e Lima (chapter 6) look at the specific context of the Brazilian town of Paraty and debate a collaborative
sustainable programme of local producers, restaurateurs and media professionals. Margo Lipman and Laurie Murphy (chapter seven) consider the development of WOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms) in Australia and its contribution to sustainable food production and eco-travel.

The third part (‘Slow Mobilities’) expands on examples of slow tourism and other adjacent mobilities. Simone Fullagar (chapter eight) presents an ethnography of Australian women’s experiences of cycling in an annual tour as what she terms ‘alternative hedonism’, a transformative experience of the journey in the natural world. Marg Tiyce and Erica Wilson (chapter nine) also employ ethnographic methods to examine experiences of long-term travellers who define themselves as ‘wanderers’ in search of deeper connections with the visiting landscapes and people. Michael O’Ryan (chapter ten) presents European hitch-hiking competitions as examples of a tension between slow tourist mobility and the desire for competition. Reflecting on environmental and structural connectivities, Julia Fallon (chapter eleven) considers the history of canal development and relevant mobilities in England as a form of tourism.

The final part of the book (‘Slow Tourism Places’) is thematically organised around issues relating to the Slow Cities movement. Suzanne de la Barre (chapter twelve) highlights the use of slow travel values in marketing place and indigeneity in the northern Canadian context. Meiko Murayama and Gavin Parker (chapter thirteen) show how Japanese tourism authorities have included slow travel in rural areas into their regeneration strategy, thus reinforcing regional divides. Dawn Gibson, Stephen Pratt and Apisalome Movono (chapter fourteen) present the Fijian ‘Tribewanted’ Internet project on Vorovoro as an initiative combining the promotion of local values with fast digital technologies, producing along the way a virtual tourist community that transcends the immediacy of time-space constraints. Esther Croenendaal (chapter fifteen) debates how Dutch entrepreneurs of lifestyle tourism partake in slow tourism as a wider socio-political movement promoting cultural creativity and respect for the environment with their move to France. Finally Sagar Singh (chapter sixteen) connects traditional, historical and modern forms and conceptions of slow tourism such as pilgrimage and yoga as a lifestyle while also spelling out Western misconceptions of Eastern knowledge regimes and culture in globalised markets.
The collection introduces ‘slow tourism’ as a conceptual tool in need of better interdisciplinary definition. Most chapters challenge or expand on the meanings of the original movement, tapping on other neighbouring sub-fields (e.g. ecology) or generating controversial links with other fields (e.g. social movements). The authors attempt to create a more coherent philosophical background for tourism theory, which focuses on the idea of time as a social activity and a global epistemology. Although the volume aspires to go beyond the Anglo-American scholarship (see Markwell, Fullagar and Wilson, 2012, p. 132), the vast majority of the chapters do not transcend the European foundations of modern and postmodern theory: with the exception of Singh (who focuses on Eastern philosophy and religion) Heidegger, Honoré and other prominent continental thinkers inform most of the scholarly discourse on the uses of technology and the prominence of the visual. Technology and vision have been at the heart of new and old cosmopolitan discourses in the headquarters of Western social theory (Nederveen Pieterse, 2006; Urry and Szerszynski, 2006). However, there is also need for a more culturally situated framework to complement such abstract endeavours. The present volume moves in this direction because it considers the slow movement in alternative conceptual (lifestyles, cosmologies) intersectional (gender, ethnicity) contexts. Without providing definitive answers, it questions the conservative nature of such initiatives and whether tourism mobilities and any ensuing cultural hybridities are ‘remedies’ or just new forms of imperialist enterprise.

REFERENCES

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