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Noonan evaluates the impacts of heritage policies as they relate to landmark preservation in Chicago, Illinois, during the 1990s. The editors conclude the final chapter in this book with their thoughts on the future of cultural heritage and local sustainability.

Regarding criticisms of the book, there was an issue with readability with some of the chapters, as a couple of chapters that were so poorly edited that it is extremely difficult to understand the points the author(s) were trying to make. However, this possibly could have been because of translation issues from Italian to English. As well, there was a lack of consistency regarding the quality and depth of references within each chapter. While some chapters were well referenced, others could have been much better referenced with literature pertinent to their focus. In fact, one chapter had no references at all! In addition, the introduction and conclusion were not well written and did not introduce or close the book well.

However, the first section of the book and many of the applied case studies would be well worth a read for tourism developers, local government officials, and scholars interested in sustainability issues related to cultural heritage.

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The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism
Edited by Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone
Channel View Publications, Bristol, UK, 2009
Pp. 275; Price: £29.95 (Pbk); ISBN: 978-1-84541-114-5

This book, as one of over forty publications in the ten year old Aspects of Tourism Series is intended, like them, 'to provide readers with the latest thinking on tourism worldwide and to push back the frontiers of knowledge' (p. ii) on an increasingly important and growing form of tourism known as "dark tourism", or what its editors in a subconscious hat-tipping acknowledgement of this reviewer's monograph on the topic (Dann 1998) flatteringly refer to as its "darker side". Sharpley and Stone are well-equipped to carry out their self-imposed mandate of extending the theoretical and pragmatic base of this complex subject since they are colleagues in the only UK department to boast a research centre dedicated entirely to dark tourism with its own much visited and rapidly expanding, Facebook-linked website (http://www.dark-tourism.org.uk). With Stone as the creator of this electronic Aladdin's cave in 2005 and Sharpley's long-standing pedagogical ability to communicate even the most opaque of theoretical ideas to others, they make a formidable team. Indeed, their separate and collaborative presence accounts for as many as eight of the volume's thirteen chapters. Of course, the duo are not the first to tackle this topic, as they readily acknowledge in their citations and comprehensive list of mainly Anglophone references (only three references in a twenty-two page listing are to works in French (Caillois 1950), German (Schelsky 1965) and Polish (Tanas 2008), but that over-representation in the literature may reflect the unexplained, apparent domination of the sub-field by English speaking scholars.

The book itself, like all Gaul, is divided into three parts: those respectively dealing with theories and concepts, management implications, and practice. In the first section, and as early as page 6, we come across the following sentence: 'To date the academic literature remains eclectic and theoretically fragile and consequently understanding the phenomenon of dark tourism remains limited.' This mantra is repeated many times and in various ways throughout the text until we come to the conclusion where, on page 250, it is stated in so many words that understanding remains limited, more research is required, more questions are raised than answers provided, etc.

Does this mean that all the book's intervening attempts at explanation are fruitless and that the editors and their contributors are doing themselves a disservice? Hardly! There is, for example, an interesting difference of views between those authors who stress the need for and analysis of motivation (Sharpley, Stone and Seaton) and those who, like Walter from the University of Bath's Centre for Death and Society, argue that, 'individual motivation explains only a minority of visits to dark tourism sites...the activity comes first; the motivation may follow later' (p. 54). For the latter, it is 'more illuminating...to focus on relationships, functions and consequences' rather than motives (p. 40). After all, he maintains, much of dark tourism is serendipitous. Persons like himself tend to stumble across such sites without necessarily making a conscious decision to visit them. For their part, the majority of the contributors counter-argue that even dark tourism can be understood within the well-tested "push/ pull" model of touristic demand (pp. 35, 142). There are also useful discussions about self-reflexivity and the taboo of death in a secular society, though no one, it seems, is prepared to tackle the issue from the perspective of a surrounding media-saturated environment that needlessly and obsessively insists on giving an individual's age for every associated news item or that cannot bring itself to openly admit that societies, like the UK, that 'do not do God' and which privatize death, are at a distinct disadvantage from Continental European countries with a much longer tradition of Catholic Christianity that treats death as a
community celebration of a stage in a journey towards the after-life rather than something to be dealt with clandestinely by a sanitized and self-appropriated divine medical establishment. At the same time, secular substitutes for genuinely sacred memorials are constantly recycled, as for instance in the constant bombardment of political propaganda favouring participation in Iraq and Afghanistan, and endless footage of the good people of Wooton Bassett turning out every time a plane lands from the theatre of war bearing the corpses of those who have senselessly died for their country, despite the fact that the majority of the population is decidedly against such military adventures in their country, despite the fact that the majority of the population is decidedly against such military adventures in the Third World that are better suited to a by-gone imperial age than the present. There is a further fascinating allusion to the process of individualization (rather than individualism) (p. 62) which, according to Stone, is linked to the important issue of morality that hitherto has been treated over-descriptively as a type of “mourning sickness” (p. 57).

However, the cumulative debate moves up a notch in part 2 when the ever imaginative and intellectually challenging Seaton, one of the pioneers in the sub-field, contextualizes the management of ‘thana(to)tourism’ (his Greek prefixed preference to “dark tourism”) within the context of a revisited concept of alterity. Here, he says, it is crucial to recognize that purposeful otherness (a theme so familiar to tourism researchers and disciples of Edward Said), is more of a two-way process that also includes cultural products and physical space to the point where the supreme otherness of death comes to distinguish thanatourism from all remaining forms of tourism, thus uniquely rendering it both universal and mysterious (pp. 83–84). He also supplies some original theoretical insights on polysemic sites, as well as the much-needed, nuanced distinction between origins and beginnings (pp. 88–90). Additionally, in this section there is a chapter by Sharpley and Stone on representing the macabre with all the dangers that it entails of lapsing into either melancholic or nostalgic kitsch. Wight, too, from a happy mix of an industry/academia standpoint, tackles the question of contested national tragedies with specific reference to Grutas Park (a.k.a. Stalin World) in Lithuania and how it is portrayed on the Internet. Indeed, and apart from Beech, who later examines travel blogs as a rich source of consumer imagery, they are the only two contributors to focus on that medium of the language of tourism which has effectively replaced the guidebook and brochure. Even so, it is a pity that the book had gone to press by the time that the quasi-sacred sign bearing the ironic message Arbeit macht frei had been stolen from the Gates of Auschwitz on December 21, 2009, together with the electronic outrage that it produced. Finally, the section on management implications has a chapter by Sharpley in which he analyses dark tourism as political ideology with special reference to sites of atrocity that include Cambodia, Gallipoli, the House of Terror in Budapest and Slavery Tourism.

The third section commences with a look at the lighter side of dark tourism (Stone’s typological jeu de mots), along with “dark fun factories” in various tourism-oriented dungeons in London, Edinburgh, York, Amsterdam and Hamburg. This section on the practice of dark tourism also includes a chapter on battlefield tourism by Baldwin and Sharpley as well as a worthwhile discussion on the differences between remembrance (sacred) and understanding (secular), although with significant omissions of Iraq and Afghanistan and a rather over-the-top reference (p. 191) to Bushaway’s (1993) ideological likening of soldiers’ experiences to the crucifixion of Christ (surely a distortion of the ideas of war and peace). That is followed by a contribution from Beech on his by now well-established specialist area of genocide tourism which receives a worldwide treatment from cases in Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and sites of Holocaust. Rice is then brought in to provide an account of US slavery tourism within the ambit of dark tourism with special reference to the Wye plantation and the moving autobiographical account of Frederick Douglass (pp. 228–231). Here the emphasis is on the collective amnesia of that country which he labels “social forgetting” (p. 229), and that could with a touch of irony be extended to the contemporary scene. After all, if the furniture of a plantation house can merit thirty-one times greater description than the subjugated slaves who built it (p. 229), what hope is there for the future?

It is this last forward-looking theme written by the editors that constitutes a final brief chapter. Here, inter alia, they reflect on the mixed reactions of their tourism students on being taken round the Body World exhibition being staged in Manchester before asking the question once more, ‘what is the attraction of death and disaster?’ (p. 249 emphasis in original), and concluding: ‘There are no simple definitions of dark tourism, no simple answers to many of the questions that surround it, and no quick solutions to the challenges or dilemmas inherent in the development and promotion of dark sites’ (p. 250). Here, not only has the wheel turned full circle, but more importantly one needs to ask whether the various typologies and insights on offer actually constitute theory and whether there is a methodological lag between their articulation and empirical verification. Such is the principal challenge of this important book.

References


Nature-based Tourism, Environment and Land Management
Edited by Ralf Buckley, David Weaver and Catherine Pickering
CABI Publishing, Oxfordshire, UK, 2003

Nature-based tourism, Environment and Land Management, originally published in 2003, addresses a broad area of tourism and environmental management for an equally broad audience. As the by-line on the back cover reads ‘this book will be an essential resource for tourism students, as well as researchers and industry practitioners’.

The book is a compilation of a series of papers addressing a broad range of topics, a series of snapshots summarizing issues related to nature-based tourism. It poses some interesting topics for consideration and addresses some perennial issues that remain relevant over time. These include the issue of private versus public ownership of conservation reserves (Chapter 4), liability of park managers for visitor injuries (Chapter 6), and the general environmental management issues around balancing development, nature conservation and tourism activities.

Interestingly, while this new paperback edition was released in 2008, the content has not been updated since its original appearance as a hard cover edition in 2003. This is evident in the references cited being primarily published in the 1990s, meaning more recent literature that could contribute significantly to key topics is left out. The fact that the content has not been updated also becomes obvious when authors discuss current data using sources published in 1999 and include the early 1990s when discussing the last ten years. While this affects the relevance of the book to a degree, the book still provides an overview of nature-based tourism related issues that students may find useful.

However, the lack of currency becomes evident in the obvious absence of certain issues. In addition, changed circumstances mean certain assertions in the book may not be entirely accurate when taken out of the 2003 context. The frequent, mostly unsupported claims of the unstoppable, rapid and inevitable growth of nature-based tourism throughout the book have proven to be less than accurate. Post 2003 events such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, the rapid increase in fossil fuel prices from 2007, and the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 have all taken a toll on tourism to varying degrees, including nature-based tourism (Hughes and Carlsen 2007; UNTWO 2008).

Chapter 8 looks at the economic returns of nature-based recreation versus forestry, adding to the large number of contingent valuation studies of nature-based tourism and parks in Australia (Hughes and Carlsen 2008). While the author presents a comprehensive analysis and an excellent example of the travel cost method, the statement that ‘apart from entrance fees... the use of these parks and the consequent values placed on the recreational experience are not transacted in the market place and a direct valuation of revenues ... is not possible (p 65)’ highlights quite a knowledge gap in the book in terms of economic valuations of nature-based tourism. Since 2003, a series of studies have demonstrated the effective valuation of national parks based on direct visitor spend in the ‘gateway’ towns within the region where the park is located (Carlsen and Wood 2004; Tremblay 2007; Tremblay and Carson 2007). These studies focused on what visitors spend within the park region rather than in the park itself (where there are few spending opportunities). A portion of the transactions are attributed to the respective park based on importance of the park to the visit and the number of different park and non-park related activities visitors conduct in a region. These present significant ‘transactions in the market place’ based on primary data collected from visitors and have been accepted by state treasuries as a reliable method of valuing natural areas for tourism. This is to the extent that the WA Department of Environment and Conservation had a funding boost of $30 million based on the results of the work by Carlsen and Wood (2004).

A further obvious omission from the book is a detailed discussion around the issue of climate change and its impacts on natural environments and the tourism that relies on such areas. This issue would perhaps deserve a chapter of its own, given the plethora of publications on the topic since 2004 (for example, Becken 2005; Conrady and Bakan 2008; Forsyth 2008; Gossling and Hall 2006; Hall and Higham 2005; Hamilton and Tol 2007; Nicholls 2004 and so on). Interestingly, Chapter 3 discusses world trends and challenges without any mention of climate change. Rather, the author tends to focus on arrivals data, development of sustainable destinations and economics.