

MANAGING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

By David L. Edgell. Haworth Hospitality Press <<http://www.haworthpress.com>> 2006, xix + 144 (bibliography, index) \$39.95 Pbk. ISBN 0789027712

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This is not an academic text. Its author was once US Under-Secretary of Commerce for tourism, and his insider experience might well have made good reading. But he is now director of a proposed tourism research center at a regional southern US university (East Carolina University) so it is not unfair to assume this is intended as a university text. If so, it is disappointing. Its author is also a consultant, and this book reads as an attempt to promote his past clients, his current employer, and his future business. It does not provide an adequate basis to teach undergraduate university students about sustainable tourism.

For example, the entire bibliography contains 130 references in total, some of which are simply different editions of the same text. Only four are articles in academic tourism journals. A half dozen are 90s tourism textbooks. The rest are self-citations, articles in business magazines, and government and industry reports, many rather dated.

There are several case studies, but without any critical analysis. Most of the text seems to be taken from interpretive or marketing materials. A resort in Missouri with a golf course, fly-fishing dam, and 4 km² cattle paddock is described as “the epitome of sustainable tourism” (p. 37). A mountain resort-residential development that runs writers’ workshops gets praise for “cultural tourism” (p. 69). The entire section headed “Yes, Tourism Impacts Natural Areas” fills less than two pages, and most of this is an extract from a 1999 report by an intergovernmental trade-related organization. No information is provided on actual impacts, even though there are textbooks on this topic dating back 20 years (Edington and Edington, 1986).

Edgell claims to have “developed” the concept of “co-opetition” in 1995 (p. xiv). This apparently means co-operating with minor competitors against major ones. No relation to sustainability is suggested. However, the concept has been familiar to anthropologists and biologists for centuries. Even the term was published previously (Buchen, 1994). There are some interesting snippets, but these are drawn from other studies. These include the Cahokia Mounds, a state historic site in Illinois, “the largest known prehistoric earthen construction in the United States” (p. 79), built between AD 900 and AD 1200. There is also good analysis of positive and negative impacts from the Embera Dura community ecotourism project in Panama, carried out by the US Forest Service.

Much of the material cited is from meetings such as Globe 90 in Vancouver, the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and the Barcelona Universal Forum of the Cultures in 2004. These were valuable events,

but the documents they produced were political, not academic. Similarly, the sustainability surveys of world tourism destinations carried out by *National Geographic* were a novel and intriguing approach, but never intended as an academic exercise.

University programs in tourism, as in most other disciplines, are expected to teach analytic skills. These include: how to carry out a comprehensive review of published information in any given field; how to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources of information; how to identify important information and ignore trivia; and how to synthesize such information to provide an intelligible structure and new insights. This book does not demonstrate any of these skills.

But perhaps, even though its author emphasizes his academic affiliation rather than his consultancy company as his current position, his work is actually intended for government agencies and commercial organizations. In that light, we are surely entitled to considerable cynicism about the future sustainability of the American tourism industry. Perhaps that is the take-home message from this book, even if not the one its author intended.

REFERENCES

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