

**Landscape, Tourism, and Meaning – Edited by Daniel C. Knudsen,
Michelle M. Metro-Roland, Anne K. Soper and Charles E. Greer**

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Landscape, Tourism, and Meaning

Daniel C. Knudsen, Michelle M. Metro-Roland, Anne K. Soper and Charles E. Greer (eds), Ashgate Publishing , Burlington and Aldershot , 2008 , xiii + 157 pp , ISBN 978 0 7546 4943 4 (hardback), US\$99.95

The disciplines of Geography and Tourism, while often covering similar territories, seldom coalesce in academic literature; this book is one instance when they do, and mostly, successfully too. Although for me, the opening line of chapter 1 (p. 1) suggested some major misgivings and triggered an array of alarms. The claim reads 'The purpose of this book is to re-theorize tourism'. This grandiose and sweeping opening statement is not indicative of the various narratives that the authors relate and the book does mine the interdisciplinarity between tourism and geography. This mining produces some interesting ideas and theories, which while not necessarily new, are nonetheless thought-provoking and refreshing. As the preface states, *Landscape, Tourism, and Meaning* is the product of papers presented at the 2004 AAG and the authors all have some affiliation with Indiana University.

Landscape, Tourism, and Meaning is underpinned by discourses of social constructivism and identity and is concerned with readings of and meanings given to landscapes, and in particular, tourism landscapes. Surprisingly, social constructivism as a theoretical approach that informs the research for this book is not discussed. Nonetheless, the twelve contributors have largely addressed the major themes of the book: landscape, tourism and identity. Not unexpectedly, given the number of authors, the chapters vary in degree of relevance and quality.

Chapters 1 and 2 outline the scope and theoretical genealogy of the book which is founded in the field of landscape studies. The authors link tourism studies to this theoretical landscape studies mapping through discourses on symbolic landscapes; a concept familiar to both landscape and tourism disciplines. Although this link is understated and underdeveloped at this point in the book, it is taken up in the case studies where its import becomes clearer and it is revisited in the concluding comments.

Chapters 3 to 10 comprise different case studies and are loosely grouped thematically. Chapters 3 and 4 offer interesting insights into the relationships between landscape, identity and place at different scales (supranational – local). Chapters 5 to 7 take up more noticeably a tourism studies focus and chapters 8 to 10 focus on concepts relating to insider : outsider constructions. The concluding chapter, chapter 11, succinctly summarises each case study. The authors clearly articulate the benefits (in their view) of a theoretical framework that is grounded in landscape studies, and more generally cultural geography, as a means to understand tourism discourses.

I found the narratives of the various case studies the most engaging aspect of the book and the travel bug has definitely bitten. The case studies (all recognised tourist destinations) range in complexity, scale, location and activity and include Strasbourg, The Copper Canyon Region,

Mauritius, Munich, Budapest, a national park in Honduras, the region of Thy in Denmark and petroglyphs in Kazakhstan.

Of particular interest to me is the case study of Munich (chapter 6) by Richard Wolfel. Drawing on the work of Lefebvre, Wolfel (p. 65) takes the view that 'space can be produced by the state for consumption by a tourist'. Through his analysis of post-World War II government reconstruction projects in Munich he demonstrates how tourism is active in the construction of a predetermined and specific national identity.

The other chapter that stood out for me was the story of Celaque National Park in Honduras (chapter 8). Benjamin Timms narrates a story hinged on the relocation of the indigenous people living in the area when it was designated as a National Park. Timms bases his story on concepts of the Human : Nature dichotomy, a dichotomy that he suggests is endemic to American national park policy. To achieve a 'sustainable' landscape and by engaging discourses of 'conservation' and 'nature' the rationale to remove the resident population from the park area was carried through. In his concluding comments, Timms (p. 107) highlights the problems of 'singularly defined' landscapes and he argues that 'Viewing the landscape from the perspective of a complementary parallax¹ of culture and nature addresses the human/nature dichotomy. . . .'. Thus giving a more nuanced and inclusive reading of the landscape that will advance different national park and tourism policies.

A major shortcoming of the book for me is the quality of the images, which are mostly not legible. The black and white photographs are too dark and all detail, and therefore significance, is lost. On one of the maps the text is so small that even with my new and strengthened reading glasses, it remains a series of dots rather than letters. This is a significant failing given the importance of the visual and 'the gaze' to many of the case study narratives.

Another shortcoming, albeit minor, is the lack of sequential summaries of each thematic group of chapters. These would help to give the reader some hint of the relevance and rationale of the chapter groupings and importantly link the case studies back to the themes and aim of the book. As it is, the book is not well 'signposted' and readers are left to construct their own links between the disparate case studies that comprise the individual chapters.

In conclusion, although the images are of poor quality and this book may not be illuminating to many academics immersed in the tourism discipline, it is a timely and welcome contribution for those of us whose research is multidisciplinary and urbanesque. The case studies are interesting and usefully employed to demonstrate the relationships between landscape, identity and tourism; an aim that the book set out to achieve. In the conclusion the authors rightly state (p. 133) that by theorising tourism through a lens of landscape studies the study of tourism is positioned 'squarely within cultural geography'; I hope this book gives others working across the disciplines of tourism and geography the impetus to publish more in this hybrid zone.

NOTE

1 Timms defines parallax as 'the noticeable change in appearance when an object is viewed from different positions' (p. 106).

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