

BOOK REVIEW

Cultures of Mass Tourism

*Mike Crang, Pau Obrador Pons & Penny Travlou, editor (2009).
Ashgate*

Extant work on mass tourism has centered on the notion of unreasonable demands of mass tourists on the host community and environment impacts. It has mostly projected hosts as the vulnerable population. Against the stereotype image of the mass tourism phenomena, the editors of 'Mass Tourism' offer a unique and interesting perspective. Social and cultural discourse beyond the mundane and stereotype assertions is offered in a conceptual and exploratory manner. The editors argue that "dominant perspectives on tourism have failed to provide an adequate basis for exploring the cultural dimension of mass tourism" (2009:3). To address this lacuna, their book focuses on the mundane and banal aspects of mass tourism and provides an insight into the some of the key sites of mass tourism such as the villa, the swimming pool, the beach, the island, the resort and the coastal hotel.

The book presents selected pieces of work which focus on mass cultures and cultural implications of mass tourism. Chapter two examines the recent progression of Moroccan mass tourism towards a 'cultural tourism of sorts' and the government's attempt to shrug off the 'mass tourism destination image. The new tourism plan focuses on promoting Morocco as a cultural tourism destination of the Mediterranean. As articulated by the authors, "the aim of this new vision is to create a new culture of hospitality able to accommodate mass arrivals from Europe, new, more sophisticated, expressions of colonial aesthetics and new forms of secure and easy-to-reach Oriental exoticism" (Minca and Borghi 2009:23). The authors examine contents of different promotional material employed to project this image and reflect on the sale of this colonial nostalgia strategy and its applications for contemporary Morocco thereby implying a new cultural turn in Moroccan mass tourism. Crang and Travlou (2009) in chapter three unpack the discourse on how beach and scenery images are produced for mass tourists. Competing and complementary imagery of Corelli's island as a landscape and as a beach



resort, produced by the film of Captain Corelli's Mandolen, the book, and touristic experience on the island, is discussed.

Chapter four titled presents a discourse on the contested practices and imaginations of an island that has received extensive visual representations by film media and tourism promotion images. It presents the way the beach and scenery are unpacked for tourists. The Mediterranean destination depicts plural messages as a result of select film exposure and tourism media. The author maintain that not only do the tourism promotion and "film both refigure the island but also incite a desire to visit or explore the island, they are doing so as part of the ongoing discourse of Greekness, Mediterranean-ness and indeed the nature of holidays." (Crang and Travlou 2009:77). It is argued that meanings and sense of place can be blurred through multiple story narrations. Tourism creates a spectacle and myth of destinations and what is viewed is a landscape is filtered through media and film perspectives. The concept of 'phantasm' is introduced. What is mass tourism is a mediated phenomenon, both from the perspective of mass tourists' disposition and the supplier initiatives.

Pons in Chapter five highlights the significance of coastal hotels and the hotel pool as a tourist experience. The author argues that mass tourism is justified only on the basis of economic principles and continues to be labeled as a corpse providing mundane and banal experiences. The author argues that mass tourism spaces are inhabitable and carry a stigma with them. Research is conducted at two hotel pools to draw attention to "the pressures and pleasures of sociality which inhabit the coastal hotel and reflect on the nature of social relations between people in the highly commodified and fleeting environments of mass tourism" (Pons 2009:92). According to the author, mass tourism environments are capitalist spaces discarded as 'unhomely and vacant' (Pons 2009:94) and this has led to an unprecedented increase in the development of generic landscapes which can be termed as 'uninhabitable spatialities.' The author rather presents a pessimist picture of coastal hotels and labels them as "sites of pure coincidence, a spatial desert, trackless and depthless" (Pons 2009: 94). The ethics of conviviality and mundane forms of hospitality are emphasized. The authors examine the mundane, fleeting, and fun seeking experiences of mass tourism at the Mediterranean using the lens of neo-tribalism which creates fluid, spontaneous and ephemeral gatherings. The example of the hotel pool is used to demonstrate notions of conviviality and hedonism. This is portrayed as promoting negative forms of relaxation, liberation and retreat. Pool, in this context becomes a cultural

laboratory subject to gazing, contrived sociality of landscape, and banal projections of fun.

Issues of familiarity associated with mass tourism are discussed in Chapter six. Highly desired quotidian rituals define the daily life such as having drinks and conversations together, thereby conveying a sense of the familiar. The beach is encountered as a familiar place, thereby implying acceptance of a number of activities and ways of seeing, smelling, touching, listening, and moving around deemed to be appropriate, natural, on that beach such as visiting the beach every morning at around the same time, walking in a certain manner, looking at the sea and people in specific way etc. (Caletrio 2009:117). The author further introduce the concept of 'elective belonging' and argue that "attachment to a place is not derived from a familiarity with a face-to-face community but from a relational sense of place, a capability to assess a place in relation to others and fit one's biography within its social, economic, and cultural dynamics" (2009:121). Resorts are thereby projected as 'complex entities.'

Chapters seven and eight focus two distinct tourist segments: residential tourists and youth tourists. Chapter seven examines the behavior, disposition and experience of British migrants in Spain. It presents an interesting insight into the mindset of this category of visitors. A double edged relationship with Spain is "circumscribed by the fact that for them Spain symbolizes holiday and escape but they insist they are not tourists themselves" (O'Reilly 2009: 130). At the same time, "they declare a love of Spain while reminding each other that they are guests here" (2009:130). Costa del Sol residential tourism is both "co-created and co-creating" in the sense that the "second home owners joined by retirees, bar and restaurant owners and other needed to provide services, and as time passes, younger immigrants join" (O'Reilly 2009: 135). The settled tourists further facilitate migration of others and this is a never ending cycle of interaction with the Mediterranean landscape and modification of it and the self. Many times, these residential tourists play the role of hosts but continue to carry the feeling that they are guests themselves, thereby balancing their experience act. Chapter 8 focuses on the mobility of another category of mass tourists- the youth tourists and examines why they travel. Concepts of liminality and hedonism are examined to explain what motivates youth tourists to travel to unattractive crowded places. Knox places them in the 'serious tourist' category in their pursuit of popular cultural tourism. They carry the familiar and exotic with them such as garage music and clubbing while at the same time

demanding a taste of him by demanding authentic British foodstuffs in Greece.

Today mass tourism has now branched out in multiple directions. It has created a serious form of youth leisure, a cultural setting and a place for hedonic fun such as swimming and sunbathing. The editors conclude by emphasizing that mass tourism has its own story to tell from historical and spatial perspectives. They argue that “mass tourism in the Mediterranean is not a free floating phenomenon that is imposed on the destination but is closely tied to the place and the landscape where it occurs” (Pons, Crang and Tralou 2009: 169). The book proposes a situated thinking approach to understand how tourist activity is grounded within a social and geographical environment in the Mediterranean.

In summary, this book facilitates a dialogue between the culture of mass tourists, the visited landscape and its suppliers. It is both thoughtful and thought provoking and will benefit the graduate and scholarly audience. The presentation is of high quality although at some stages, content in some chapters is repeated and fails to grasp attention. A more pronounced case study-based discourse might have addressed this issue. In sum, the authors’ contribution in moving beyond the popular discourse and myth of mass tourism is noteworthy. Some of the notions set forth by this volume can be extended through future scholarship by first dispelling the notion of banality and hedonism sought by mass tourists. Mass tourists are not homogeneous although they comprise of large numbers of people who move in a short space of time to places of leisure interest. Just because all happen to be at one place at the same time and present a crowded image facilitated by ease of access and carefully crafted distribution and promotional strategies of international or national operators, does not mean that their activities are banal or they seek the mundane.

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