

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Stories of Practice: Tourism Policy and Planning**

*Diane Dredge & John Jenkins, editor (2011). Ashgate Publishers*

This book is an engaging read. It is composed of edited papers, each describing a case study involving some aspect of tourism policy and planning. The papers raise a large number of issues that arose during case study work. For this review I asked the question: How do these analyses guide future policy development and tourism planning?

The book appears to assume that tourism policy and planning is separate from the larger field of policy making and planning. The fields of transportation, urban, and environmental planning are seldom mentioned. In Chapter 2 the editors suggest that tourism planning and policy draws from many disciplines, which is reasonable. Oddly, the field of planning is left off the list of those disciplines. This concept is further illustrated when only two of author biographies explicitly mention a formal educational background in planning. Additionally, planning theories are seldom mentioned, such as that rational comprehensive model, the transactive model, or adaptive management. This, I feel, is an accurate description of the entire tourism policy and planning literature. It has developed largely disconnected from that of the other major planning fields.

Several authors use the bogeyman of neoliberalization to justify planning decisions. However, there is inconsistency in the definition of the term amongst authors. For example, Shone states that neoliberal means “rolling back the central state (p. 167)” and transferring power to local government. However, he then points out that the local government owns and manages a major tourism destination, the Hanmer Hotsprings in New Zealand. The profit earned from this activity is used elsewhere in the municipality. This does not seem to me to be an example of what I know as neoliberal development. If those hotsprings were sold to private, profit making companies, it might be an example. Hall and Wilson describe the excessive power of a sport lobby, in this case rugby in New Zealand, to influence municipal and university decision-making as being



an example of neoliberal ideas in action. Contrastingly, Clarke and Raffay provide a fascinating example of the development of a destination management organization in a city in Hungary. This society is still in the throes of developing a private sector, after years of centralized planning under communism. It seems to me that the movement from communism to a free market economy could have termed a neoliberal activity, but the authors do not see fit to use this concept to describe the situation.

Many papers concentrate on the role of local people in tourism planning. This role varies from central to marginal. The general assumption is that a local community is more valued and should have more influence than other stakeholder groups. Grybovych, Hafermann and Mazzoni describe a successful effort of community involvement in tourism development planning for the small town of Ucluelet on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. They describe a powerful local community lobby that is able to reject the first developer's proposal. The second developer agreed not to "sell any single-family dwelling lots to the general public, until it has been made exclusively available to Ucluelet residents (p. 93)". They do not comment that such a citizen-imposed policy is probably illegal under Canadian law. This problem with this prejudicial policy might be further highlighted if the phrase describing local residents was replaced by phrases such as Roman Catholics, Immigrant Women, or Chinese-Canadians. This tale inadvertently tells the tale of local power gone mad.

The power of existing local interests can make the introduction of larger societal concerns problematic. Wegner and Macbeth describe how local tour operators in a the Shark Bay World Heritage Site in Western Australia are so entrenched in their selfish economic interests that they use personal intimidation techniques against park management staff who are entrusted with the larger societal interest of environmental conservation in a national park. This paper also outlines the excessive power of one local group, in this case making conservation management challenging.

The case studies seldom mention Non-Government Organizations and their roles. The papers also do not mention private sector competition, with two or more companies battling for market share. The conflicts discussed tend to be between governments and private citizens.

The papers imply that there is tourism potential everywhere, even in areas of considerable poverty, civil unrest and environmental destruction. The paper by Dutra, Haworth and Taboada leads this reader to conclude that maybe East Timor is poor place of tourism.

The papers seldom describe that legal situation surrounding the tourism plans. The papers imply that the law is of little importance and all concern should be placed on government policy. I find this is a common perception by those trained in Geography, as many of the authors are.

Only two of the papers describe planning efforts by those who had central planning roles. Vargas Sanchez and Dredge describe a branding effort tied to place identity in the Andalucía region of Spain. This is a refreshing paper that describes a planning effort that worked. Hull and Huijbens describe participatory planning for tourism in a rural area of Iceland. This paper appears to use a rational-comprehensive planning model, but it only describes the development of a plan as its implementation has yet to happen. The plan appears to be solid, but most plans look good before the vagaries of implementation. However, most of the papers were written by outside observers, who imply that they resent being in a position of little power.

What did I learn on policy and planning from reading the book?

1. Tourism planning ultimately deals with creating experiences for travellers, but a huge number of institutional and cultural barriers create deflections from achieving this goal.
2. Tourism is frequently used by governments to counter economic declines in other sectors, such as agriculture (New Zealand), banking (Iceland), manufacturing (Spain), and fishing (East Timor). It appears to fulfil this goal.
3. Tourism planning is very expensive in time and money due to the complexity of participatory efforts at all levels, including all local villages.
4. Tourism planning involves conflict resolution. The book typically describes conflict between some level of government and local people, but other stakeholder conflicts can occur.
5. Tourism planning is value based. The values are highly contested and it is the role of planning authorities to speak for the weak against the powerful.
6. Tourism planning must involve tourism marketing concepts.
7. The hosts and guests approach should continue to underpin planning. Both the supply and the demand aspects must be considered in all policies.

This book raises more problems than solutions. In most cases, the reader is left to decide what planning processes should be used when a similar situation arises in the future. As a result, it is not suitable for novice tourism planners, such as undergraduate students. It is much better

suited for those with abundant training and experience who have the ability to discern value from the case studies.

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