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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Book Review: Heritage Tourism Destinations by Maria D Alvarez (et al.)

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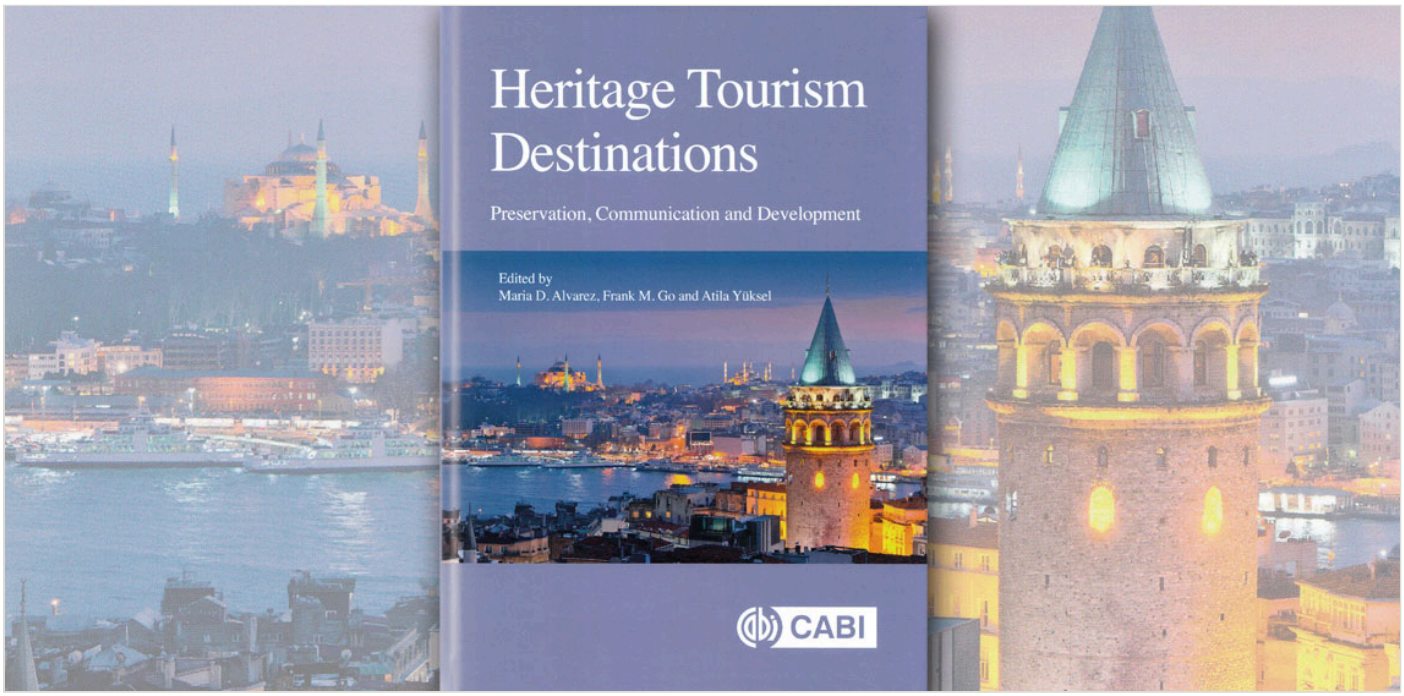

This book is a follow-up from the first Hospitality, Tourism and Heritage International Conference, held in Istanbul, Turkey from the 6th to the-7th November 2014. It is wonderful that these papers were published only two years later. This book's goal is to cross the bridge between theory and conceptual reflections on the one hand and empirical judgements based on fieldwork experience, between the production of heritage tourism attractions and the consumption side of it, the tourists and their backgrounds.

> An important challenge is the different attraction level of the metropolis versus the region. Again, tourist routes can play a role in leading tourists from high population areas to these regions, but there is no magic trick to be successful. Regional attraction can build on heritage elements and in some cases this can lead to great success.

The target is "to learn how geographical destinations (places, routes, regions) and tourism dynamics can 'co-create' heritage values, embedded in a sustainable spectrum of tourist facilities, and induce valuable tourist experiences" (Jansen-Verbeke, XII). Problems include conflicts of interests between different stakeholders, different definitions of heritage and tourism, and top-down versus bottom-up approaches.

"Companies draw on historical resources as a popular marketing tool to make an impact in a competitive world" (Alvarez et al., 2), heritage is "the present-day use of the past" (Timothy & Boyd 2006:2).

Heritage tourism has become increasingly uncertain – one should step away from the traditional production-consumption dichotomy and approach tourism from other perspectives. The private sector, government and higher educational institutions should join forces to better understand heritage tourism and develop new steps, offers and infrastructure in a fast changing world. What is needed is "smart specialisation" (Alvaarez et al, 4).

Conservation, revitalisation and community development

This first part of the book examines key issues of heritage tourism, such as conversation and preservation. Most heritage resources are non-renewable but opening these to tourism brings an influx of money. Too much wear by intensive tourism, however, would damage the site beyond repair. City tourism is a perfect example of the balance between traditional values and modern lifestyles.

An important challenge of heritage tourism is the ability to reconstruct a certain past in the present using interpretation (Nuryanti 1996). Many urban, as well as regional, regeneration processes are top-down processes by design, leading to a conflict between the political elite and residents. The engagement of the local community is vital in order to ensure sustainability and long-term preservation of heritage sites. A long-term strategy, even with emphasis on tourism, needs to include a preservation chapter as well as remembering to include the residents.

Product development and communication

The second part of the book discusses the development of heritage tourism destinations as tourism products. Again the emphasis is on developing a good balance between fulfilling the

needs and interests of tourists as well as residents of historic centres. The tourist experience must have added value but, simultaneously, the conservation of the site must be ensured. Hospitality partnerships should bring the most relevant stakeholders together, setting up a mix of goals and a mutual strategy.

Product development and communication can be analysed in the following issues.

1. The first of the issues, the meaning of identity, refers to the chance to create distinctiveness through a destination's brand identity. Some tourists seek reality, others seek a sense of illusion – proper branding serves both groups on the inauthentic / authentic scale. Collective action by the stakeholders of a destination is required to make the experience and the memories more explicit and strong. This includes an interpretation framework and routes that have meaning et cetera. One can, for example, think about the Roman Limes in Northwest Europe, where stakeholders create a common framework for storytelling within the format of the hosting partnership.
2. The second issue is relationships and vision. Tourism is an agent of change, which affects relationships between insiders and outsiders, and between inhabitants and tourists/investors. New visions like the decentralised approach of www.couchsurfing.org require more investigation, especially on how they build interest communities.
3. The following issue is the heterogeneity of heritage demand. While some tourists look into sensation or variation, others aim to avoid these. Like there is no one single target group called tourists anymore, there is also not one single offer: the market structure too has diversified. For example, do people come to Greece for culture? Sun? Food? This heterogeneity in demand and offer is a huge challenge for research into heritage tourism destinations: identifying trends seems like searching for a needle in a haystack. However, well-structured studies will be able to do so, leading to a common framework for interpretation.
4. The final issue - market dynamics and societal change - discusses issues such as the influence of social media on the heritage tourist destination's imagination (Chapter 6 in this volume). There is an immense shift from top-down offers to bottom-up influence through social media in diverse and dynamic ways.

Planning and institutionalisation

The final part (and second half) of this volume introduces both theoretical perspectives on governance, and stakeholder collaboration within the contexts of museums, archaeological sites and historical destinations with a focus on planning, governance models and institutional perspectives. In theory, the relation between heritage sites and the tourism chain is clear. In practice however, these relationships are more complex. Another issue is that quality management in the tourism sector is underdeveloped in many regions, partly due to

the presence of many and diverse local, family run, small and medium businesses. Integration and cooperation is immensely important. UNESCO World Heritage Sites are required to abide by the UNESCO rules for preservation as top priority. This does not render tourist use of these sites impossible: it is just a matter of both partners being accountable to the interests of the different stakeholders. EXARC member Kernave in Lithuania is a good example where preservation and tourism go hand in hand at a World Heritage Site.

An important challenge is the different attraction level of the metropolis versus the region. Again, tourist routes can play a role in leading tourists from high population areas to these regions, but there is no magic trick to be successful. Regional attraction can build on heritage elements and in some cases this can lead to great success. European funding has led to many archaeological / historical attractions in the countryside based on the belief that these would strengthen regional economy; partly they do, although it is not always a success.

Marketing is not just an important tool to attract more visitors; it is mainly a tool to build a relationship with the public and the local population. It is a people's interest first tool.

Conclusions

The authors of this volume present many ideas of great value to the heritage tourism sector and archaeological open-air museums. These museums need to speak tourism language alongside their own specialty, and need to develop the story of their site in cooperation with regional and national tourism professionals so their museum gets sold without selling out one's own assets and remaining underfunded. We need to learn to understand the tourism industry in the same way they should make an effort to understand us.

Also, our museums should invest in their relationship with their local and regional population. With their silent support, we stand much stronger, when they see us as destinations around the corner, our museums will be better rooted in local society and when the discussion about our museum arises, we will never stand alone because we are part of the region.

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