

book review

Rural tourism development: Localism and cultural change

E. Wanda George, Heather Mair, and Donald G. Reid

This book, authored by three Canadian scientists, presents a critical examination of the dynamic ties between tourism and culture based on the results of the theoretical and practical research the authors themselves have conducted. It links the changes at local, rural community level to the structural considerations of globalization, and allows for a more comprehensive and theoretically deeper consideration of the potentials of rural tourism development.

The book comprises 14 sections. The first section contains the introduction, table of contents, and description of the research topics. The second section gives a brief overview of the political economy of rural development in Canada over the past thirty years. The following three sections elaborate the four extensive studies that include Canadian cases only: Lunenburg in Nova Scotia, Port Stanley in Ontario, Vulcan in Alberta, and Canso in Nova Scotia. Although the research encompasses carefully selected regions, Canadian rural communities, it reflects circumstances that can generally be found in other similar regions worldwide. The authors discuss three important facts: 1) the physical changes to the rural landscape; 2) the participation of the community in rural tourism development, and 3) the necessity of planning in the rural environment. The seventh section summarizes all four abovementioned studies and presents their results. The eighth section discusses the complex role of tourism in rural tourism, while the ninth discusses the changes brought about by tourism, primarily of the rural landscape, including gentrification and re-branding of rural areas. In the tenth section, the authors analyze the role of tourism policy, as well as the way it influences rural tourism development, whereas the eleventh section discusses the importance of the community's participation in tourism planning and development. The twelfth section focuses on the sustainability concept and its application in rural communities and rural tourism. In the thirteenth section, the authors take a holistic approach to discussing the theoretical precepts of the studied topic and the experiences gained in the research, as well as explain the importance of reliable planning. In the fourteenth and concluding section the authors summarize the results of their study and critical considerations, identifying a novel understanding of tourism in rural areas, as well as propose the policy by which to advance tourism and rural development.

The book deals with four key topics: 1) tourism in the globalized world; 2) cultural changes and commodification of the rural community; 3) the importance of resisting (commodification),

and 4) rural appeal. Although they are resisting globalization, many rural areas are increasingly turning to tourism in the hope of sustaining their economy. Further, the authors highlight that, today, culture is being highly commodified by tourism, i.e. culture is being transformed into a commodity purely for commercial exchange. Once the culture of a local, rural community becomes a predominant tourism product, numerous changes take place in not only the community's structure and economy, but also its culture. The outcome is that the local culture loses its original connotation and changes into something radically different – it becomes “self-consuming” – a result of globalization. The growing demand in rural tourism is a result, among other, of increasing “nostalgia” and “escapism” that have enhanced the appeal of rural experiences. The rural experience should reconnect the tourists with their past, the simpler way of life or their “roots”, while in fact it is an escape from the monotonous, burdensome daily routine. The authors go on to conclude that the rising rural tourism demand is a form of escapism – an escape from globalization.

The authors “moved” the discussion to the local level also, focusing on tourism as an instrument for development, and investigating the challenges and possibilities of rural development. Thus, they present the results as to where and how tourism is integrated into local development, as well as the opportunities that are present, but also those that are not present in the essential, community-controlled development. Further, the authors explain how the forces of economic, social, cultural, environmental and political change have influenced the redefining of rural regions in Canada, which is applicable on the global level as well. The results presented in this book reveal the ways in which tourism is positioned as the local response to political and economic changes within the community, while the community itself is rapidly changing. Additionally, these results are indicators of a completely new understanding and provocative consideration of tourism development in rural areas, especially when manifested as the local response to the far-reaching effects of globalization. One key conclusion is that engaging in tourism will not necessarily bring about the economic salvation of a particular (rural) area, but also that in these challenging and turbulent times the communities recognize and need tourism as a means of self-sustenance.

The presented research, comprehensive analyses, critical considerations, ideas about the role and significance of tourism in (rural) communities, suggestions and guidelines for practice, make this book a valuable scientific contribution, inspirational and helpful not only to professionals, but also to those interested in the topics involved.

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