BOOK REVIEWS

Mass tourism in a small world edited by David Harrison and Richard Sharpley, Boston, CABI, 2017, +251 pp., £85 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-78064-854-5

The book Mass tourism in a small world has a suave title edited by two known tourism scholars, David Harrison and Richard Sharpley. Mass tourism is the crux of the problem, much has been talked about the subject and quite a lot has been published about the good and bad of mass tourism in research journals, book chapters and dailies, let alone the social media. Even a man in the street likes to indulge in this gossip. The editors believe that all modern tourism is mass tourism, leading to mass-consumption and mass production that affects the resilience of ecosystem. Given the finite resources of our planet, tourism growth cannot be endless. Already our planet bears the burden of 7.3 billion people. There is a dire need of parsimonious use of resources.

Mass tourism is a challenge to sustainability. Unfortunately, tourism is the game of numbers – more the merrier – seems to be the gospel of touristic development. The authors repeatedly lay stress on the concept of resourcism that has to be disciplined according to the need of the biosphere. A huge gathering of people in large number is always annoying, and this happened with tourism.

The advent of railways around mid-nineteenth century ushered in an era of mass mobility. What began as cheap package tourism gave birth to mammoth mass tourism that threatens sustainability and disturbs environmental security. The editors discuss boom and bust of tourism syndrome and the quest for the alternative forms of tourism that are benign and beneficent for humankind. They even suggest an ‘ideal type of mass tourism’ that sounds like a mirage. With the rise of capitalism, technology, modernity and the emergence of middle-class tourism developed in leaps and bounds.

The last quarter of the twentieth century was the best of the time and the worst of the time of tourism. The hectic quest for an alternative form of tourism established two milestones (ecotourism and sustainable development) that need some explanation. The Mexican architect Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin came out with a startling concept of ecological tourism (ecotourism) with a main emphasis on conservation of natural and cultural resources, but this proved a utopia. The concept was widely hailed all over the world. Tourism scholars cried out ‘Eureka’ like Archimedes as though they found some alternative to the mainstream tourism. Almost simultaneously, the World Commission on Environment Development (WCED) (1987) put forth its report Our Common Future which prescribed a unique process of development known as Sustainable Development (SD). The core message was how to reconcile human activities with the prime laws of nature. SD encouraged localism where the community was at the centre, respecting ‘triple bottom line’. The concept was intergenerational in nature, that means the present generation while consuming resources should conserve them for the need of future generation. Equity, justice, austerity and ethics were its important tenets. Both the models could not be delivered except that ecotourism perpetuated the concept of ‘small is beautiful’and gave rise to many niche tourism, some of which got partial success. The grassroots tourism experiences created with the initiative of the local community were laudable ideas for the Third World environment but it could not survive without external support. In many cases, promising destinations were hijacked by capitalist forces and the destination mingled into the mainstream. Thus ecotourism fell prey to the culture of greed. In the fair name of ecotourism, nature was sold. This is a sad story of tourism. Theoretically, it was a superb philosophy of authentic development, but it was too good to be translated on the ground. The precious little that was performed was much less than the expectations of tourism-makers. Quite many opine to abandon SD altogether, there were a few who questioned the possibility of making mass tourism sustainable. Nevertheless, efforts are on in creative thinking and some filtered results can serve as a model in good practice. But such examples are few and far between. People are aware that mass tourism means mass consumption of goods and services. For the ever-growing human population, mass tourism will expand geometrically. Here is the rub!

Mass tourism in a small world tells the story of tourism in what has already been said but not so wholesomely or systematically. The book opens with this never-ending debate. Both the editors have already published ‘for and against’ on mass tourism in different journals and books, including the journal Tourism Recreation Research without arriving at any tangible results. This story has been organised in five sections, made up in 20 chapters. Of them, section one (introduction) introduces the complexity of the theme with theoretical approach. Chapters are devoted to moralisation of mass tourism, political economy, environment, theoretical approach, sustainability, dynamics of development and transport. There is an effort to conceive some ideal type of mass tourism, having attributes such as, concern about the triple bottom line. These features shall have conformity to ideal types (p. 7). Such ideas are not new, practicality of these factors has always been doubted and misgiven. Weaver imagines how sustainability can be knitted with
the odds of mass tourism. Bricker describes what crowd tourism can do in the US national parks.

Having discussed the prime problems associated with mass tourism, the editors take up case studies, for example, Section 4 covering Bulgaria, Tunisia, Mallorca and the Caribbean. While the majority of authors found fault with mass tourism, no veritable solution could be established. Aremberri (Chapter 2) and Butcher (Chapter 3) assert that mass tourism is going to stay because it generates economic benefits and creates employment opportunities in the host nation and above all it plays a vital role in democratising travel.

Mass tourism cannot be conveniently passed by. There are destinations that have declared a moratorium on further development; the case of Barcelona has been the foremost in limiting the growth of tourism although the destination has prepared an SD plan. One of the distinctive features of mass tourism is its uninterrupted growth since the mid-nineteenth century, and in its wake many touristic cities have reached (or reaching) the ‘tipping point’ and they need ‘conscious tourism’ approach. Weaver, however, gives them a name ‘enlightened mass tourism’ (Chapter 6). He cites the example of Mediterranean and Caribbean societies that have grown up with tourism.

The last chapter looks towards future trends of mass tourism, though admittedly we can foresee only the shallow future; the deep future is incognito and unknowable. Looking back into the past, we have seen that the growth of mass tourism is constant, breaking the one billion barrier in 2012 whereas 2016 inbounds numbered 1186 million (UNWTO, 2016). This trend is not going to slow down. Surprisingly, the Asia and Pacific region now attracts 24% of international arrivals and 33% receipts. China is emerging as a giant and soon it will sit at the top. Some important emerging trends are: further rise of the middle class, demographic changes, increase in VFRs, the emergence of the growing senior market, and time-rich 3rd age group. Growth in urban tourism will be booming; regeneration of over-built cities would be an imperative; new destination will grow.

Many tourism cities will come up on the frontline of mass tourism. New forms of tourism will appear on the scene such as ‘stag weekends’. With the rapid growth of human population and advanced technology, spread of tourism is bound to happen. If the ‘industrial model’ of tourism continued, there is danger of global tourism swelling up; further growth of tourism may prove disastrous. The editors suggest a ‘conscious approach’ to tourism development which shall adopt an environmental ethic against anthropogenic ethic.

Having read the book one may ask where do we go from here! More of mass tourism? Or ‘conscious tourism’ is the remedy, what technology or newly acquired knowledge can help us in disciplining mass factor. I would have preferred an exclusive case study of mountain tourism from the European Alps or the Himalaya as they are fragile zone with the booming resorts of high places.

All in all, the book comes as a felt-need and covers a vast range of topics, particularly how to manage the crowd with sustainable tools. This is a brave effort to publish a book on such a challenging theme; well-documented with simple prose. It can easily be prescribed as a textbook for tourism graduates and researchers.

References

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The beckoning horizon, making sense of tourism series no. 1, by Alan Machin, Halifax, UK, Westwood Start, 2016, xvi+395 pp., US$ 26.89 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-9954924-0-0

How often do we live amidst the clutter of buildings, unable to see through the concrete and brick-and-mortar of economic life, and get a whiff of the social and personal lives lived there that go into the making of history? This book is one of the most interesting books on history that I have ever read, that evinces more than a twinge of regret in readers at not having lived through their own lives lit up with such clarity and enthusiasm for a phenomenon that people have taken for granted: tourism. From descriptions of martial anecdotal evidence culled from books; to knowledge of museums that tell you more than just military history or, as author Alan Machin says, the dark shadows around articles and objects that tell us of hard-lived lives and long working hours during the Industrial Revolution that send a shiver down your spine; to urban regeneration of such (now) scenic towns as Swansea in UK, this book gives you enough reasons to buy the book rather than borrow it from a library.

The author rightly points out that as recently as 1986 (going by timescales of history), the US National Geographic society showed old ‘American towns’ as only those of post-colonial USA, beginning ‘with the Jamestown colony’ and ending with ‘Freedom’s capital’, Washington, DC. Machin finds issue with attitudes such as Daniel Boorstin’s view of the National Geographic book, Visiting Our Past, ‘as “the archaeology of democracy”’. ‘How democratic was it to shut out thousands of years of Native American history?’ asks Machin (p. 19). He rightly points out that the