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# A Review of “Tourism and the Anthropocene”

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### BOOK REVIEW

[Tourism and the Anthropocene](#), edited by M. Gren and E. H. Huijbens, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, 204 pp., £90 (hardback), ISBN 9781138814578

This book is a highly relevant and timely publication critically scrutinizing the role of tourism in the new era of the Anthropocene. The editors Martin Gren and Edward H. Huijbens bring together a wide range of scholars to elucidate the implications of the Anthropocene for tourism, aiming to reshape theoretical and empirical underpinnings of tourism research. The book consists of three parts: Part I places tourism in the context of the Anthropocene, Part II explores the issues of global sustainability and environmental ethics, while Part III suggests ways in which tourists can adopt Earth-centric sensibility and behavior.

Anthropocene, a powerful term signifying a new geological epoch in the history of the Earth in which humans have become a geo(logical)-force of its own kind, is evoked to call for an urgent recognition of the global implications of our destructive operations, among which is tourism. Anthropocene gives rise to the Anthropos, or humans who push the Earth-system into an ever-increasing uncertainty and unpredictability, eventually risking their own survival as a species. Tourists, who in this context are the subspecies of the Anthropos, are the humans on the move, affecting and being affected by the Anthropocene in their own ways.

Part I of this book dispels any doubt that tourism is tightly entangled in the earthly processes, while having its significant contribution to such alarming global trends as the climate change (Chapter 2) or the unprecedented scale of biodiversity loss (Chapter 4). The challenges come with the wickedness of these problems, inherent in the very nature of tourism operations, such as the fundamental dependence on transportation powered by fossil fuels. The contributing authors are nevertheless very upfront and clear in conveying the message that tourism needs to change and that the change is not going to come easy, in many cases requiring a radical departure from the habitual ways of thinking and doing.

The principles of sustainability and environmental ethics which could be adopted by tourism to mitigate its detrimental impacts on Earth-system (discussed in Part II) may include questioning the age-old dichotomies between nature and society and focusing on the profound recognition of their deep interconnectedness through the Actor-Network Theory, building on the principles of improvising, valuing and caring (Chapter 5). An interesting ethical approach of life-value onto-axiology, elicited to demarcate between the good and the bad, and consequently, the good and the bad tourism, is discussed in Chapter 7.

The practical ways of engaging in tourism within the Anthropocene are deliberated in Part III. Examples of small-scale sustainable tourism, anchored in local place ethics, practices and heritage are presented in Chapter 8. This additionally emphasizes the importance of tourism studies of the Anthropocene to fully embrace the fundamental advantages of social science research, such as the focus on human experience as well as the analysis of power relations, avoiding humanity-level abstractions and blanket statements (Chapter 9).

This brings us to one of the most important critical questions when dealing with any ambitious and all-encompassing concepts, i.e. who exactly is the Anthropos that is causing these irreversible transformations of the planet Earth in this age of Great Acceleration? The concerns of obscuring, de-politicizing, naturalizing and glossing over the social and economic inequalities that are inherent in the 'human race' are luckily explicitly addressed in the frames of this book. The contributing authors, and particularly the chapters by the editors themselves (Chapters 1, 10, and 11) are undoubtedly aware of the undeniable reality that Anthropocene is largely inflicted by a disproportionately small fraction of humanity and chronologically coincides with the advance of capitalism (the term Capitalocene can even be met).

Even though the book aspires to have a global focus theoretically, one cannot but notice that the case studies from which the book draws its empirical strength are primarily Nordic (Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Scotland, save for one example from Spain). Whether accidental or not, this focus is nevertheless rather relevant in light of the discussions of the Anthropocene. On the one hand, the Nordic region already witnesses the vivid effects of the climate change, while, on the other hand, it hosts some of the most affluent societies with high ecological footprint, contributing to this change. The rationale of this geographical choice is, however, not elaborated explicitly (but can, perhaps, be explained by the background of the editors). Higher diversity of case studies could be beneficial for illustrating the variety of facets of the Anthropocene.

The book ends with ponderings on whether tourism, as we know it, has a place in the Anthropocene at all. Three possible future tourism development trajectories are outlined: noncarbon tourism, stay-home tourism and stewardship tourism. There is no doubt that in light of the modern tourism development tendencies, these three non-mutually exclusive options might come across as radical and utopian. This, however, does not make this book an anti-tourism manifesto of sorts. On the contrary, the urgency of the Anthropocene might help opening up qualitatively new ways of 'geo-ethically informed geo-hospitality' (p. 197) where respecting the boundaries of the Earth-system becomes central, enhanced by the transformative power of travel experiences. It remains to be seen, however, whether Anthropocene lives up to its powerful analytical potential without deteriorating into to yet another buzzword.

Overall, this book is a valuable, pertinent and thought-provoking contribution to the body of tourism research literature, signifying the growing theoretical maturity of this field. The book will be interesting to not only tourism and geography researchers but also a wide interdisciplinary range of scholars and students engaged in anthropology, political ecology, environmental ethics and justice, sustainability and more.

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