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Tourism and Regional Development

Tourism and Regional Development. New Pathways

Maria Giaoutzi and Peter Nijkamp, ASHGATE, Burlington 2006, pp. 311

The aim of this book is to create a socio-economic portrait of tourism as a regional development factor in the wide global context of the contemporary world and to show the increasing role of the information-communication technologies (ICT) in this process. Paraphrasing the authors' expression we can say that the book shows *the magic of tourism* in a very realistic socio-economic perspective with a special focus on the changes connected with lifestyle dynamics and the growing role of technological advancement. It discusses important social issues, i.e. regional development, tourism as its factor and new technologies as its main tool.

The book consists of three parts. Part I "Tourism, Regional Development and Communications Technology" (chapters 2–7) in which the authors elaborate the indicated elements of this triangle. Part II "Methodological Advances in Tourism Research" (chapters 8–12) presents various selected methodological approaches to research and policy analysis regarding tourism. Part III "Policy Strategies on Tourism" (chapters 13–17) is a discussion on selected types and components of policies and various levels of application regarding the tourism sector.

Analyses have been provided through two separate analytical plans. The first plan presents the focus of the debate, which is tourism. On the one hand, we can say that the authors explore the essence and function of tourism within the framework of economic development (tourism as a factor of socio-economic change), while on the other hand, changes in tourist activity are explored (socio-economic factors causing the change in tourism), as a result of the change in spatial behaviour caused by economic prosperity and welfare but also by the

use of modern information and communication technologies. The second plan results from the approach used here which shows the analysed phenomenon in its whole spectrum starting from the traditional role and its past to tourism in its current form and understanding. These two plans of discussion give a good and interesting review of the changing role and shape of tourism.

Contemporary aspects of tourism are the authors' main interest and they consider information-communication technologies (ICT) to be the essential reflection of this contemporariness being in mutual relation with socio-economic factors. In this debate the authors broadly refer to regional policy tools which can play an important role in promoting tourism for regional development as well as promoting regions for tourist development. According to these analyses, the main issue is to find a balance between these two directions of exploration and a structure encouraging such an equilibrium. Viamos (chapter 17), among others, clearly addresses this issue and also tries to examine the relationship between regional development and the tourist product, touching on both perspectives of the analyses. The author elaborates on this relationship which may lead to the establishment of a system which makes the environment an efficient input to the whole development strategy of the regions.

What seems very important in this discussion is that in the challenging statement regarding *tourism's potential*, there are important socio-economic components and indicators. Tourism can generate income, develop job opportunities in less advantaged areas, it is based on indigenous resources and can contribute to their development. A detailed discussion is presented with regard to the possible impact of tourism — considered here as a *double-edged sword*. It may have a positive impact on the balance of payments, employment, gross income and production. It can be seen as an instrument for regional development but a big challenge for organising the well justified protection of resources. However, from the methodological point of view, as the authors rightly underline — due to its complexity the direct impact of tourist development on a national or regional economy are hard to assess (combination and interdependence of tourist products). Other methodological issues are also reflected in these analyses. There is a discussion on the economic impact of tourist expenditures in several selected regions (chapter 8, Leeuwen, Nijkamp and Rietveld) where the authors compare the economic impact of tourist expenditure in various areas, showing in many existing studies the practical use of input-output modelling methods which have been applied to estimate this economic dependency. In chapter 3, Kamman and Strijker take part in a discussion regarding methodology and mark the need to create adequate supplier networks named "reverse network engineering" and combine

a top-down with a bottom-up approach. The top-down part starts with deriving certain concepts from lifestyles and consumer profiles, while the bottom-up aspect of the methodology emphasises the suitability, feasibility and acceptability of developments and/or plans with respect to a particular area.

From the point of view of a sociologist's interest there is also another important point marked by the authors, that is the line between the industrialised and developing world tourism. This line is not to divide but make a bridge between common strength and interests. This dichotomy plays an essential role in creating a framework for tourist products or the tourist market. In chapter 16, Coccosis discusses a wide range of possibilities and perspectives that ICT can be a source for specific areas. It shows two sides of this issue, certain areas can be considered as *small paradises on earth* and a chance to live close to nature, places to dream about and possibly places to escape to in the future. The same areas can be seen as remote and desolate communities of small, closed and backward societies and places with limited opportunities. The use of ICT can make a positive input in broadening this perception. The essence is the gap and difference between the areas.

Leontidou (chapter 7) elaborates on the impact of ICT expansion on movements and hybridity due to tourism and migration, from the vantage point of the cities, islands and coasts of Mediterranean Europe. The author gives examples comparing between Northern and Southern areas, urbanism in the Mediterranean and anti-urbanism in Anglo-American cultures, which have created different types of tourism and migration, and are at present affected by ICT expansion and a change in consumption patterns, patterns of tourism and migration. The author broadly discusses new opportunities of distance learning, teleworking and communication in general during the digital revolution and shows how they are affecting the countryside and coast.

Another valid point, underlined by the authors — is the importance of the fact that tourism includes private and public involvement and assets, mixed in various combinations, and they locate this in the context of other meaningful components of the new situation of tourism such as the international perspective, ICT, modern telecommunication, telematic and logistic services, high skills and education involved in these services. They even state that logistics and distribution have become more important than production and transportation (of the services). This statement would need to be supported by empirically based arguments.

The authors state that a main challenge of modern regional policy in connection with tourism, is to market the attractiveness of a certain region in such a way as to generate growth in tourist visits and expenditures, through the

use of information-communication technologies. Thus ICT has become one of the competitive tools in regional tourist policy, worth being discussed in even greater detail. Morella (chapter 2) describes the way information technologies have affected how travel is marketed and sold. This chapter discusses precisely the structure of the tourist market and analyses the possible impact on the various stakeholders. It emphasises that a global tourist market has emerged with new opportunities but also new threats for firms in traditional tourist areas. It also discusses policies and strategies conducive to a tourist development process relying on modern ICT applications. Another issue is tourists' destination market in the framework of the global market of tourism (chapter 9, Cracolici and Nijkamp), where the authors examine the case of a province of Italy and the conflicts emerging between e-marketplaces and suppliers of the tourist product (Papakonstantinou, chapter 5). Part III also embraces various policy-related aspects of the tourist sector. Townroe (in chapter 14) focuses on small and medium entrepreneurship – and discusses selected components of the subsidy and financial support system. They indicate the role of training and education as elements of this support, having a very special role to play. Speaking about developing enterprises in this sector special attention is given to the virtual organisations as a new form of business. Giaoutzi and Nijkamp (chapters 4 and 6) elaborate on the creation of this type of services defined by its product-market strategy, network structure, information systems and business communication patterns, that are emerging as a response to increasing competition and to the need for the efficient use of resources. The authors argue that virtual structures and teleworking possibilities imply a greater flexibility for tourism in terms of space, time and structure and enable local communities to compete in international markets. Thus they focus on the potential role of the virtual organisation in local tourist development especially in remote peripheral areas. Giaoutzi and Nijkamp (chapter 6) focus on the potential role of virtual organisation structures in local tourist development, which emphasise the comprehensive tools supporting the local tourist sector affected by ICT. They also elaborate on the contribution of virtual organisations in improving the competitive position of small and medium sized enterprises located in peripheral areas and further explore comprehensive tools based on ICTs, which support local tourist development in peripheral areas. In this respect an important part of the discussion is analysed in the tendency towards developing sustainable tourist-based activities (chapter 11, de Montis, Nijkamp).

From the point of view of rural sociology the voice in this discussion is highly appreciated, regarding ways of improving the management of cultural heritage sites by focusing on new forms of involvement and public participation

based on the elicitation of public preferences (Riganti, Nese and Colombio, chapter 12), on ecotourism issues (Robinson, chapter 15) and discussion on the role of ecoregions for tourist development (Hatzichristos, Giaoutzi, Mourmouris, chapter 10).

Overall, this book is an interesting compilation of articles on many aspects of tourism. We get both the theoretical approach and practical solutions shown by examples of policy tools and specific studies regarding selected areas. Most important from the standpoint of rural sociology, are perhaps the parts referring to sustainable tourism and environment and cultural heritage remarks, income generation strategies — stressing the role of small and medium enterprises. Although the issue of development through tourism is analysed quite thoroughly, there can still be an impression that the social and cultural impact on communities and environmental issues are left open. Similarly, there could be a discussion on the great change of people functioning in the context of the increasing role of ICT, and other issues such as flexibility of the labour market, mobility etc., to show tourism in the framework of other important socio-economic changes.

Although there is not a precise discussion on the path tourism has gone through, the book shows the selected trends marking the tendency and certain stages of the process of changes and their dynamics. We can, however, learn to a meaningful extent that these changes are parallel to the progress in information and communication technologies development. But still we can say that the presented approach shows tourism in a wide spectrum from the traditional, through the methodological to its most modern aspect.

The predictions expressed in this book are that tourism will probably continue to dominate the international scene for many years to come. Seasonality in tourism nowadays has a different dimension and covers different spheres than it did in the past. Tourism is part of the leisure sector which is rapidly gaining economic, social, cultural and environmental consequences and it is increasingly regarded as one of the development vehicles of a region.