

Book review

Responsible Tourism: Using Tourism for Sustainable Development

Edited by Harold Goodwin
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For the past decades, the notion of Responsible Tourism has tried to find its own place in the daily practice of the industry with questionable success. Harold Goodwin's book successfully approaches this significant movement within the tourism sector and specifically its role as a tool for sustainable development. The book sets the scene for this pro-active movement stating that, as repeatedly happens with any theoretical articulation that aims to be applied, the real challenge is still in the implementation of policies. Since tourism is changing at a global level, altered forms of consumerism that call for authenticity and the quality of experiences are determining the behavior of the holidaymakers in most unpredictable ways. The impacts therefore become remarkably visible and require that the involved stakeholders recognize the question of responsibility related to the impacts they create. Combining his experiences, academic work and a plethora of industry examples, the book is a must-read fundament for all involved in the industry and those who seek ways to realize a reversal in the sector.

The book is divided into two parts, with a total of seven chapters. The first part ("Why responsible tourism?") addresses the question on why Responsible Tourism is needed and how it responds to an evolutionary comprehension of the impacts of tourism. The second part of the book ("Responsible Tourism in practice") identifies and analyses the three aspects of sustainable development: social, environmental and economic responsibility. The focus of this part is mainly applied and per definition contributes to the current debate of the relevancy of the tools to be implemented.

After a historical overview of the growth of sustainability, Goodwin makes a necessary distinction between Responsible and Sustainable Tourism. This contrast is not trivial, as it limits not only the sphere of action

of the book but also the necessity of establishing useful and commonly accepted definitions, which make this book accessible not only to the expert but also to the unfamiliar reader who is looking for solid guidance. As an example of this, Goodwin establishes three main questions to be answered unmistakably "when individuals, businesses or governments assert that they are engaging in Responsible Tourism," setting us in the particular case of the responsible practitioner. Additionally, the first part stresses the main conception of responsibility as key factor to provoke a change within the industry and as catalyzer for the linkages created within the value chain. If one of the aims of Responsible Tourism is to strengthen those based in reciprocity, the concept of responsibility should be observed as the alchemical ingredient that brings all actors together. As the authors' states "Responsible Tourism is about taking responsibility for making tourism better." And this is, as relentlessly stated in this book, a conjoined effort. This part also focuses in the concept of authenticity, as a trend that creates new ways of consumption and therefore might aggravate the negative impacts. Goodwin also concentrates on the destination as being either beneficiary or victim of the tourism activity. Relevant terms inevitably adhered to the topic, such as economic development, social inclusion and cultural and natural heritage, are tackled in order to address the failures of the market. The focus throughout the book is on local communities so that tourism creates "better places to live in" which makes the call for a Responsible Tourism movement a paramount one.

Furthermore, the relevance of the concept of responsibility is unmistakable through Goodwin's work and it is placed in a cultural context that makes the local flavor of addressing responsibility issues a vital one. This idea could have been more elaborated on, though, in light of the future of tourism, since not only security and safety issues but also immigration and respect for the "other" become of significant importance in the current global and drifting circumstances.

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Although Responsible Tourism refrains from being defined, it perhaps therefore remains abstract in its conception and unclear in its application.

The second part marks a distinction regarding the idea of critical consumerism, establishing as well that “consumers’ identities are not entirely globalized or homogenous,” and consequently the understandings of responsibility are as unlimited as issues are. Uncountable and highly illustrative examples underline the importance of paying attention to concrete cases. This part also manifests the imbalance between the guest and the host, since the guest, not the private sector, hardly makes contributions to the maintenance of public assets.

This recent edition of “Responsible tourism” tackles major issues that have emerged since the first edition in 2011, from new forms of tourism to global security issues. The book insists in the statement that Responsible Tourism is a plausible activity. This reality must acknowledge the challenge of implementation, and inevitably the consequences of disintermediation in the industry. As Goodwin states, “the tourism sector needs to be judged not by demand but by its effectiveness in providing livelihoods, contributing to the local economy and the net benefits to destinations.” This all raises the critical question on the merits of certification schemes in the tourism industry, in what way do these schemes contribute to the increase

of positive impacts or the efforts to minimize negative impacts.

The book ends with a reflection of the journey that this work admits to be. The last chapter is also a sharp vision into the ethics of responsibility and states concrete actions to be taken in the immediate future. These actions, simple and feasible, encourage the intrinsic philosophy that responsibility must be taken individually promoting a global interest, challenging the largely accepted “tragedy of the commons.” The authors end with an outlook to the future by a compendium of good practices that invite consumers, practitioners and readers to push forward the Responsible Tourism movement. Perhaps, the most important one is to resist the commodification of tourism and asking ourselves the question: what is it for? Or to summarize what Goodwin states: “the future will be what we make it.”

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