

Book review

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Channel View Publications
Bristol
2015
xv+189pp.
£24.95 (pbk),
ISBN: 9781845414870; £79.95 (hbk),
ISBN: 9781845414887; £12.00 (eBook),
ISBN: 9781845414900
Review DOI
10.1108/JTF-10-2016-0034

In *Tourism and Oil: Preparing for the Challenge*, Susanne Becken undertakes a highly ambitious, well-anticipated and timely mission: to expose and critically analyze the profound dependence of tourism on fossil fuels. The unholy union of these two industries holds a secret of Polichinelle: tourism based on finite resources cannot grow indefinitely. In this regard, it is particularly astounding that critical discussions on the state of tourism industry beyond the Peak Oil are virtually absent from the mainstream academic and public discourses. Becken fills this gap by offering a scientifically grounded and well-argued insight into the issue. The book aims to provide the much-needed holistic overview of oil use in tourism as well as discuss alternative development avenues in light of decreasing supply of cheap oil. The book is rich in detailed up-to-date information and in-depth analysis, while being relatively concise, making it a manageable read for a vast audience.

Tourism and Oil: Preparing for the Challenge consists of seven logically progressing chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the reader into the context, explaining the problematics behind the current paradigm of tourism development. Becken calls for bringing back into the limelight the uncomfortable topic of resource finiteness, which has vanished from the public debates since the Malthusian predictions and critical economics of the 1970s. This pertains to not only Peak Oil (which is the primary topic of the book) but also other “peaks,” such as climate, water, biodiversity, minerals, globalization and even peak wireless space.

Chapters 2 and 3 provide a detailed account on how exactly tourism is dependent on oil and what the future development expectations are. Here, the reader can find a detailed information on the tourism energy consumption by transportation, accommodation, other tourism activities and destination-based demand. The data are backed by a rich spectrum of sources, including governmental and non-governmental reports, academic publications as well as independent expert estimations. Being an oil-thirsty sector, as Becken calls it, tourism’s relationship with oil is expected to deepen even further as international and domestic transport use continues to expand, spearheaded by the new middle classes in China and beyond. Becken explicitly points out that tourism’s future is almost exclusively envisaged within the perpetual growth paradigm, preventing us from comprehending a different scenario. She emphasizes the need to integrate alternative and often unjustly marginalized approaches into our thinking in order to meet the challenges posed by finiteness of oil and other fossil fuels.

Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to the oil sector itself. An in-depth outlook is given into what oil is as a geological phenomenon and what the current trends are in the oil extracting industry. The theories of Peak Oil are discussed, highlighting not only the issue of resource depletion in general but also growing scarcity of cheap oil in particular.

While production of conventional cheap oil, which revolutionized our economy, has arguably already peaked, increasing attention is drawn to unconventional and more expensive oil resources and extraction techniques. The low-hanging fruit, as Becken argues, has already been picked and the consequences are yet to be fully comprehended. Apart from the physical constraints, this section clearly demonstrates how the global oil production is embedded in a highly politicized and complex socio-economic context, overflowing with vested interests and power games. This further obfuscates our understanding of what the

Tourism and Oil: Preparing for the Challenge

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situation really is, and the lack of reliable data is a major challenge in the field.

Chapter 6 deals with the economic impacts of oil prices on tourism. It becomes clear that a price hike will have a whole cascade of effects on tourism, both direct and indirect, expected and unexpected. Furthermore, tourism will be affected more severely than national economies in general, due to high dependence on transport, demand elasticity and other specifics. Becken suggests that adaptive capacity of a destination will depend on such factors as the type of tourism, cost structure, substitution options available to tourists and remoteness of a destination.

Keeping all the aforementioned in mind, we finally come to Chapter 7, which suggests pathways to post-peak tourism. Here, an overview is given on the possible mitigation measures necessary to address the new reality of oil shortage. This includes focusing on alternative energy sources, increasing efficiency as well as behavior change. While this chapter is rather short and unimpressive in light of the outlined problematics, it is hardly Becken's fault: actions taken within tourism industry (and beyond) to prepare for oil shortage have been quite scarce. Becken concludes that that a systemic change and a strong role of the state will be indispensable in

avoiding shocks and worst-case scenarios, in addition to local grassroots initiatives.

Overall, *Tourism and Oil: Preparing for the Challenge* is a valuable, pertinent and highly urgent contribution to the global debates, revolving around sustainability and tourism. The book refrains from what has been labeled as "alarmist" or "doomsday" speak, commonly associated with these sort of topics, rather relying on available facts and dry scientific interpretations. It is an excellent starting point to make a case for Peak Oil and spark a serious discussion about tourism outside the dominating cornucopian growth paradigm. It remains to be seen whether tourism research and industry will respond in a way to timely meet these major challenges in the Age of Scarcity.

The book is aimed at a general readership, written in an accessible manner, containing explanations for the technical terminology used. It will be a succinct supplementary read for a wide interdisciplinary range of scholars and students engaged in tourism, geography, aviation, sustainability, resilience and related topics.

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