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### World heritage, tourism and identity

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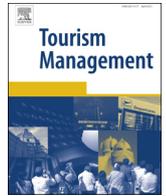
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## Book review

**World heritage, tourism and identity: inscription and co-production**, L. Bourdeau, M. Gravari-Barbas, M. Robinson (Eds.). Ashgate, Farnham (2015). 290pp., (Hbk.), £65 ISBN 9781409470595

Some books cannot other than provoke the insistent question, why were they written, let alone why would they ever be read? To put it another way, what is the purpose of this sort of book, which is all too easy to put together as such an edited bundle, although here there is little evidence of editing having taken place? Three justifications would seem to be needed for such a book. An important topic needs to be explored in a depth, which cannot be handled in the article or essay format. Secondly, a variety of cases, approaches or disciplinary viewpoints should be brought to bear in an ordered way upon an argument allowing depth, comparison and contrast. Thirdly, the book is a repository of information, notably cases, on an original topic in a single accessible place. This book fails at each of these hurdles and in doing so does a disservice to readers and above all writers.

The argument here is the actual or potential relationship of world heritage sites (their creators, managers and users) and tourism. This has been an important, if hardly novel idea over a number of decades through which ideas on the relationship have vacillated. The inherent problem is that tourism is not the stated purpose of the designation and often does not appear as any sort of justification. It is at best an afterthought and at worst an unfortunate concealment of more commendable values. The optimistic position is that tourism can be made to pay for the satisfaction of more worthy motives. The pessimistic position is that tourism is the perpetual enemy to be excluded where possible and where not controlled. The word 'identity' in the title seems to be being used as an antithesis of tourism. Tourism is for outsiders; identity is for insiders, although the point is weakly developed and largely ignored. Contributors here tend to take one view or the other – or on more than one occasion no view at all confining themselves to extolling the self-evident potential wonders of a site.

The structure of the book appears simple. The editors have written a predictable introduction about tourism as threat and tourism as welcome development tool and listed something of what is to come. The conclusion has been left to some useful reflective musings by Brantom and in between are 14 substantive chapters. These appear to have no discernible ordering. National cases, local cases, specific arguments, techniques of analysis are randomly interspersed with more polemic pieces. There seems to be no direction or order to the argument at all.

A major flaw is that the chapters are far too short (around 8–9 total text pages) as there seems to be an attempt to cram in as many chapters as possible. The result is a chronic failure to develop the points. There are too many short cases in which authors have only space to introduce the often exoticism of the case and are

unable to develop the argument or even explain the relevance of the exoticism. The problem is compounded by a repetition of the opening paragraphs. Each contributor seems compelled to begin once again at the beginning with 30% of space often just repeating UNESCO conventions or restating already stated general issues. The referencing is also repetitive. All this should have been edited out and space created for more depth and comparisons between cases.

Canada, Japan and Mexico are presented as national cases for no stated reason. The Canada case tries to introduce the idea of brand without describing what this might be. The Japan case looks at various local identities and the Mexico case presents 'some experiences ...', which could be, and is, almost anything. There are a number of urban case studies but none have the space to develop any substantial ideas. Some Chinese cities are described and local people are happy, or not, with the policy being pursued. A chapter on central Java, especially Yogyakarta, explains some of the history, anthropology and monumental sites but little of the tourism (all in 8pp). Zanzibar stone town is allowed 9 text pages to explain the history, path to designation, rise of tourism, nature of the residential function, physical dilapidation and any possible solutions. Aleppo and Acre are classed as 'world heritage cities', however that may be defined and an attempt is made to contrast the management plans. This could have been interesting if there was much of Aleppo now left standing and if the unique Acre situation of Christian heritage, in a Muslim town being presented by a Jewish state was explored but lack of space no doubt prevented this. There is a half-hearted attempt to describe the 'silk road' as a potential linear case, although without the tourism statistics to justify the choice or predict any futures. Two incongruous peripheral British cases are included. There is a broad based discussion of the 'ethics' of Orkney Island landscapes although more usually it is the 'economics' that dominates and the argument is too far ranging to lead anywhere in particular. Even more incongruously the 'Giants Causeway', Northern Ireland, appears for no particular reason and is subject to a 'let's ask some visitors about something or other' questionnaire, which reveals nothing unexpected while missing the important point about Northern Ireland protestant identities.

Such cases are interspersed with studies of sources or techniques. These include media (what some papers have said about world heritage sites!), some old Portuguese maps of west Africa (a 9pp contribution to colonial history) and most bizarrely photography (11 people took pictures at Machu Picchu of, predictably, the ruins - if they had taken pictures of each other it would have been more disturbing.).

There is certainly a variety of topic but at the expense of any depth and indeed credence. 'There has been no previous research into the value and meaning of intangible practices of dismantling/demolition/relocation/recycle/reuse of churches' [p199]. I cannot think of a topic that has had more written on it over the past 30 years than this. All credence is thus lost.

A reader is left asking who is it for? Substantive arguments on both heritage tourism and on world heritage sites have been much better advanced elsewhere, where there was more space and indeed expertise available. As an attempt at global coverage, it is randomly episodic and inevitably generally quite superficial. The larger the number of editors, the less they seem to do their job of focussing the contributions, ordering the argument and removing duplication. Perhaps each is leaving it to the others.

Readers are likely to find it a lucky dip depending upon their interest but the writers deserve much better than this.

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