

**Mundt, J.W. (2014) Thomas Cook: Pionier des Tourismus.
Konstanz: UVK Medien Verlagsgesellschaft,
ISBN 9783867644969, 222 pages.**

Reviewed by *Harald Pechlaner*¹

Received: 22/10/2014

¹ Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt, Chair of Tourism and Center for Entrepreneurship, Pater-Philipp-Jeningen-Platz 2, 85071 Eichstaett, Germany, Phone: +49 8421 93 1185, Fax: +49 8421 93 2185, Email: harald.pechlaner@ku-eichstaett.de

© 2015 Varna University of Management. All rights reserved

Citation Mundt, J.W. (2014) Thomas Cook: Pionier des Tourismus. Konstanz: UVK Medien Verlagsgesellschaft, ISBN 9783867644969, 222 pages, Reviewed by *Harald Pechlaner*, *European Journal of Tourism Research* 10, pp. 145-147

Let me begin by saying that *Thomas Cook: Pionier des Tourismus* is worth reading for numerous reasons. Interesting biographies, in contrast to less interesting ones, give a comprehensive description of the life of a person while making the phases and episodes in that person's life central to the storytelling, thereby making it easier for the reader to draw conclusions about the time in which a person lived, thus making it possible for the reader to understand that person's thoughts and actions in context. By focusing on Thomas Cook, Jörn W. Mundt has written a thought-provoking biography which shows diverse facets of entrepreneurship and tourism. It is no exaggeration to call Cook, a man who left his mark on travel and travel arrangements more than anyone else, a pioneer of tourism. In addition to detailing Thomas Cook's life, this book also shows what makes a pioneer a pioneer: it is a person who remains faithful to an idea, constantly striving to carry out that idea, while still being able to handle setbacks and create a global organization for "new" tourism step-by-step.

Thomas Cook must have been a fascinating person. He came from a poor family, and in light of the plight of the working class in Victorian England, two aspects helped shape Cook's later life. His maternal grandfather was a Baptist preacher in the English town of Melbourne, Derbyshire. Thomas, who had little schooling himself initially attended the Methodist Sunday school before changing to that of the Baptists, whose belief includes that only those who do good deeds will be saved. This basic principle was central to Cook's entire life; indeed, this belief was so fundamental to his being that he even tailored his own and his business practices to this basic principle of doing good deeds. And when Jörn W. Mundt criticizes that Cook's entrepreneurial undertakings could be typified as corporate social responsibility today "because even today nobody really knows what that really means" (p. 136), then I interpret this to mean that Cook became a businessman in order to fulfill his religious and social ideals, whereas the debated concepts today of corporate social responsibility do not even come close to

Cook's high ideal, never mind that numerous businesses develop CSR strategies merely to put a positive spin on their business's social activities. However, the fundamental difference is that the businesses employing such CSR strategies were not established for the express purpose of fulfilling these social objectives. Thomas Cook's company, on the other hand, may well have been the prototype of a social corporation, at least as long as Thomas Cook himself led the company. One of the reasons why this biography is worth reading is that it shows the differences between Thomas and his son and successor John Mason: Whereas Thomas Cook was charitable in all areas of life, John Mason made a point to clearly separate business and personal affairs, an outlook which necessarily and obviously also led to conflicts in the company and resulting (bad) decisions. Jörn W. Mundt manages to make this biography a must-read for everyone who desires to learn more about the prerequisites for practicing good business.

The second aspect that greatly influenced Thomas Cook's thoughts and actions from a young age is related to the economic situation of the time in which he lived: war, economic crises, unemployment, and hunger plagued the lives of those living in the first half of the nineteenth century. This detrimental situation contributed to the fact that alcoholism was a grave problem in some areas, a fact which Thomas Cook learned early on in life since he was confronted with it at work. Cook must have realized that people were not able to have fun and socialize, but rather had to take a trip by drinking, although on such trips "they never left their actual location in the real world" (p. 27). Cook joined the then growing Temperance Movement and became an avid supporter of the Temperance Society, an activity accompanied by entrepreneurial activities such as printing and publishing. And thus, beginning with his original job as a traveling preacher, Thomas Cook gradually developed a model for trips at low prices, combined with the notion of taking people out of their hopeless situations for a few hours as an alternative to drinking alcohol. Thus were born "trips against alcoholism."

Mundt does an impressive job using source materials to show how, during the expansion of the railway system in England – in the Victorian era there were still a multitude of rail companies that were rarely integrated with one another – Cook laid the groundwork for inclusive individual travel because gradually travellers were offered integrated tickets, additional services, and day trips. Mundt believes this "closing of a service gap" demonstrates the real innovative importance of Thomas Cook, whereby Mundt maintains upfront in the biography that Cook can by no means be deemed the inventor of package vacation tours. However, as Mundt points out, this is – and this is where the quality of the book can be seen – also not a necessary characteristic of a successful businessman: Cook neither invented traveller's checks nor vouchers, nor even group trips; he did, however, integrate all of these elements into his "business model," and, acting on his religious and societal beliefs, he created the basis for a globally operating company, which could only withstand the test of time because his son secured the continued expansion of the business by having a clear economic goal in mind. The difficulty of Thomas' inability to relax his hold on the company and his son John Mason's recurring habit to turn his back on his father, thus resulting in family conflict, is laid out in the chapter entitled "Unternehmer mit und ohne Klauen: der Familienkonflikt im Hause Cook" (Businessmen with and without bite: the Cook family conflict).

Jörn W. Mundt's book is so well written because he combines history, tourism, and entrepreneurship when outlining who Thomas Cook was, thus creating more than a mere biography of the man. As early as the introductory chapter Mundt emphasizes that history is more than just memory and that "by linking diverse sources" objectification results; while Mundt draws the reader's attention to the impressive alphabetical list of sources on the home page of the UVK publishing house, the breadth of sources is underscored in the chapter entitled "Anmerkungen" (remarks), which is an interesting read in and of itself. One feature that is atypical yet enticing is the

timeline of Thomas Cook's life and its comparison to historical events. Jörn W. Mundt also incorporates tourism criticism from Cook's time, thereby opening a window to present-day problems and viewpoints on tourism development.

This book is a must-read for everyone conducting research on and / or working in tourism and / or for everyone who is already familiar with the tourism industry, but simply wants to understand the tourism industry

(better) or to place their own experiences in the context of tourism. This book should also be required reading for courses on entrepreneurship because this "fascinating biography of entrepreneurship" clearly shows that entrepreneurship can also be a calling.

Prof. Dr. Harald Pechlaner
Chair of Tourism and Center for
Entrepreneurship
Catholic University of Eichstaett-Ingolstadt