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Tourismus und ländlicher Raum – Innovative Strategien und Instrumente für die Zukunftsgestaltung. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 331 pages, ISBN: 978-3-503-19560-5

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European countries have been experiencing continuous urbanization and urban consolidation within the past decades with an average level of urbanization of 78% among the EU member states (World Bank, 2021). However, while urban lifestyles are pursued, people seek alternative spaces outside of the city to escape the hectic everyday life. In addition, consumer trends like authenticity, sustainability and localism have triggered the desire for regional (micro-) adventures and nature recreation in the leisure time. These trends are mirrored in the growing demand for tourism in rural areas which has gained new momentum due to the Covid-19 travel restrictions and regulations. Firstly, local recreation remained for a long time the only viable option for short escapes; secondly, urban areas and crowds were avoided and regional spaces that allow for social distancing preferred. Already prior to the outbreak and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic has tourism been understood as a promising industry to provide alternative income and livelihoods in economically underdeveloped, rural areas and regional development plans were implemented (i.e., Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, 2020). However, the monumental growth in demand accelerated by the pandemic was not anticipated. This brings new opportunities as well as challenges that need to be considered to maintain a sustainable development of tourism in rural areas.

The future of tourism in rural areas was also the conference topic of the 23rd annual meeting of the “*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Tourismuswissenschaft (DGT)*” (German community for tourism research) in 2019. The conference was held in Deggendorf (Germany) with around 120 conference attendees. In early 2021, the conference proceedings were published in an edited book with the title “*Tourismus und ländlicher Raum – Innovative Strategien und Instrumente für die Zukunftsgestaltung*” (Tourism and rural areas – innovative strategies and instruments for the future). In 22 chapters, 41 Germanspeaking experts discuss different aspects and types of rural tourism, such as hiking (chapter 6, Eilzer, Harms & Eisenstein), mountain-biking (chapter 7, Sand), health and wellness (chapter 8, Scherle, Pillmayer & Herntrei; chapter 20, Borkmann & Steinhauser), film tourism (chapter 12, Pillmayer, Frank & Scherle) wine experiences (chapter 15, Rüdiger & Hanf; chapter 16, Bitsch, Rüdiger & Hanf), gastronomic and culinary experiences (chapter 13, Bähre, Els, Fergen & Treu; chapter 14, Olbrich) or forest experiences (chapter 9, Mandelartz & Oven-Krockhaus). Authors also elaborate on different development options, such as social innovation (chapter 3, Wirth & Bandi-Tanner), digital customer journey (chapter 10, Brysch & Stengel), digital business ideas (chapter 19, Steinhauser & Borkmann), financial models for rural development (chapter 21, Herle & Hausy) or the usage of big data in regional tourism (chapter 22, Bosio, Nadegger, Schegg & Fux). Several chapters put specific stakeholders into the research focus, such as digital natives to understand their expectations and perceptions of tourism offers in a regional context (chapter 18, Zech & Wittmann-Wurzer) or the local population to determine their awareness and tourism acceptance in general (chapter 2, Eisenstein & Schmücker; chapter 5, Ragaller & Klein) or their perceptions towards specific projects (chapter 17, Wolff). Thereby, authors use a variety of case studies to illustrate the issues discussed and shed light on the opportunities and challenges through a practical perspective. The edited book did not aim for a coherent storyline, instead it gave individual authors the chance to exemplify tourism development in rural areas through a specific lens. Nevertheless, readers of this book can take several general messages home: Although the cases demonstrate that individual and specific development approaches are needed due to different regional conditions and requirements, challenges such as insufficient transport connections and mobility or labor shortage are almost omnipresent in rural areas. Furthermore, authors draw attention to the arising conflicts of use that often require more responsible and balanced political decisions. Throughout the book it becomes evident that rural tourism can take two forms: Either regions are confronted with too little tourism activities or they experience tendencies of overtourism. While the first requires appropriate strategies that encourage, promote and strengthen regional tourism development to bring economic and social benefits to the residents and the region (e.g., employment), the second requires

strategies to ensure that residents remain satisfied with tourism development in their region. For example, in chapter two, Eisenstein und Schmücker introduce a new tool to measure the tourism acceptance of residents. Based on a representative sample of Germans between 14 and 74 years, the authors conclude that a nation-wide overtourism problem is not evidenced. However, the authors further emphasize that perceived negative effects, such as price increases through tourism, should not be underestimated. While the majority of chapters concentrates on cases from Germany, Switzerland or Austria, Kagermaier, Amzil and Elfasskaoui take the reader on a journey to Morocco to discuss pitfalls and missed chances of new governance approaches despite hopes of decentralization and democratization provoked by the Arab Spring. This case demonstrates the role of government and politics in regional tourism development and stimulates the reader to critically reflect on some taken for granted approaches in Central Europe.

The edited book not only provides a potpourri of cases, it is also a showcase of different research methods and approaches to study rural tourism. Alongside conceptual and theoretical chapters, authors derived empirical findings and results through qualitative interviews, quantitative (online) surveys as well as experiments. Given that several chapters are based on primary research conducted as part of study programs at different universities across Germany and in cooperation with practical partners, the edited book can encourage research students to carry out their own empirical projects. The smartness of the authors to avoid using too technical language without comprising on losing academic integrity paired with excellent readability of the comparably short chapters qualify the book to enter bookshelves of interested tourism practitioners outside of academia as well. In addition, the practical implications and recommendations that are provided throughout the book not only underpin the importance of tourism research to improve and advance tourism development, they also help to overcome the often-criticized “academic ivory tower”. Although most research presented in this book was conducted prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the relevance of the topic is more important than ever and the edited book very timely. The increasing demand for micro-adventures and regional tourism amid the pandemic is associated with a growing need for reliable research – thus, it is only a pity that the book is limited to the German-speaking audience.

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