



Mundt, J. W. (2011) *Tourism and Sustainable Development: Reconsidering a Concept of Vague Policies*. Berlin: ESV Erich Schmidt Verlag. ISBN 978-3-503-13041-2, 205 pp.

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This book provides a good addition to the growing body of literature on sustainability and its application to tourism. In the context of the book, the term 'sustainability' refers to the 'original' concept, which "denotes an equilibrium of the use of natural resources and their replenishment" (p.8). As the author, Jörn W. Mundt, puts it, "...this book strongly advocates the application of the original concept of sustainability. In particular, the 'three pillar approach' of sustainability that emerged from the 1992 United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro is being challenged. Instead, the original concept is to be applied to both the use of energy and the associated greenhouse gas emissions by tourism in the light of environmental economics" (p.161).

The book is divided into 9 chapters. The first chapter introduces the relationship between sustainability, development, and tourism, and establishes the tone of passionate criticism for the rest of the book. Chapter 2 presents a review of the origin of the concept of sustainability and attempts to untangle the terminological confusion by distinguishing between the 'original' concept and its 'modern' understanding. While Mundt makes a reference

to the most often cited literature sources, he also draws heavily on evidence from the German and Swiss context, which characterises the whole text. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the significant, but relatively less published, issue in the 'sustainability debate' - the role of the weak state in the least developed countries. The author re-visits the cultural specifics, 'pillarisation of society', rent seeking-oriented economies and inefficient public administrations in the Third World countries to support his claims that "[b]efore attaining some sort of 'sustainability', the most important task in these countries would be to create both societal and political stability, which are a prerequisite for any kind of sustainable development" (p.62). A further emphasis is placed on the significance of the 'property rules' and the legal framework for doing business. It is suggested that the concept of 'sustainability', as designed from a Western perspective, is not and cannot be universally applicable even if generously supported by 'development aid' from 'irresponsible donors', as evident from the efforts to develop the 'poor tourism'. Chapter 4 draws attention to the contradictions in the 'three pillar' approach of sustainability with a particular focus on 'social

responsibility'. Not surprisingly, Mundt comes to the conclusion that "the modern concept of sustainability has been completely overloaded to the extent that it has become impractical and impossible to achieve" (p.89). In the words of the author, "[t]his chapter ... is a plea for a more accurate utilisation of terms and for the end of the wish-wash and twaddle that may be of use for soap-box speeches and preaching sermons but not for serious attempts to shape sustainable means and ways of living on this planet" (ibid.). Chapter 5 claims to provide an 'excursus' into the issues of social responsibility and non-governmental organisations. The examples selected aim to demonstrate that " 'corporate social responsibility' is something rather different from 'sustainability' " (p.94) The chapter, however, could have benefited from a more balanced analysis.

Chapter 6 introduces environmental aspects by focusing on climate change, thus linking the general sustainability debate to tourism and the contribution of the sector to global warming (Chapter 7). In Mundt's words, "[t]ourism is probably the most visible symbol of both globalisation and pollution" (p.111). The author admits that it is almost impossible to identify who exactly is the polluter, and, hence, the evidence employed is limited to the air passenger transport. Chapter 8 provides a hurried review of some of the most popular issues in the context of 'sustainable tourism', such as 'culture', 'local communities', the EU approach to regional development, the role of the different players in the tourism industry, measuring the environmental implication of tourism, and state intervention, among others. In view of the title of the book, 'Tourism and Sustainable Development', these issues could have received more attention and in-depth examination. The last chapter argues that 'sustainable tourism' is only achievable within the context of an overall sustainable economy

and implementation of 'sustainability' at national, regional, and local levels. Finally, it looks at the 'Taylorisation' of Academia and warns that the 'quest' for sustainable tourism "often seems to be led by the system-induced professional interests of academic tourism researchers, lecturers and teachers than by critical analyses" (p.165).

The book only partially delivers what it claims to do – this is not a critique of the 'original' concept, but an interdisciplinary critique of the 'modern' concept of sustainability with a consistent focus on tourism evident only in two of the chapters, not counting the introductory and the final ones. Therefore, it is less about 'tourism', and more about sustainable development and 'reconsidering a concept of vague policies'.

This forceful and informative text occasionally becomes somewhat dense, and accessibility often seems to have been sacrificed for academic rigour. Despite the reiteration of the main themes, the structure of the book is confusing at certain points, which, along with the frequent use of strong statements, affects the overall accessibility.

The contribution of the book is not in saying something fundamentally and conceptually new, rather, it is in the different perspective adopted, the author's interpretation of documentary sources, and the emphasis on some issues which have received relatively less attention from the academic community. In addition, the author makes a wide reference to political, social and environmental studies, and provides examples from different temporal and spatial settings, thus broadening the 'sustainability' platform and placing tourism in a wider context. The supporting evidence is drawn from academic publications and up-to-date policy papers. This makes the book an appropriate reference source and an interesting read for tourism researchers and professionals.