

Book review

Richard Sharpley and David J. Telfer, *Rethinking Tourism and Development* (Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA 2023) 242 pp.

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The Edward Elgar *Rethinking Tourism* series offers a forum through which scholars can reflect on the challenges and contentions facing tourism. *Rethinking Tourism and Development* by Richard Sharpley and David J. Telfer serves as the second of three titles in the series, and takes particularly tourism development as its focus.

Sharpley and Telfer begin in their introductory chapters with a critical deconstruction of the use of tourism as a development tool. Loosely engaging with a Marxist-informed political economy perspective, a critical account of capitalism is presented, before turning to explain how, within the capitalist paradigm, ‘development’ has become a global project led by Global North institutions. The authors identify how the tourism industry itself became intimately connected to this development agenda, in recognition of its unique structure offering things like low entry barriers and minimal infrastructural requirements. According to the authors, such a positioning of tourism became problematic because it has led to an industry obsessed with growth, expressed by increasing tourism numbers and economic income. In consequence, the industry is drawing on global resources faster than any other, contributing significantly to global emissions.

Through this discussion we gain insight into the multiple ways tourism has sought to reinvent itself in more just ways, under the umbrella of ‘sustainable tourism’. Yet, as Sharpley and Telfer note, despite best intentions, the development of alternative forms of tourism have not yet offered an effective way through which the industry can decouple from the capitalistic prioritization of growth. Sharpley and Telfer’s critique of capitalism and growth serves as the impetus that a rethinking of tourism development needs – laying the foundations for the remaining chapters, where a vision of tourism *degrowth* is presented.

The strength of the monograph is presented in Chapters 3–6, where Sharpley and Telfer turn to discuss how tourism might be redefined. Here, important arguments relating to the need to consider tourism development as part of broader ecosystems, rather than as a discrete entity, are detailed. Examples hereby highlight how the problems of tourism development are too often narrowly defined as one-way causal ‘impacts’ examined at the destination level. Within such frameworks, tourism academics and practitioners have broadly sought to respond to impacts individually, at the scale of the destination. Such tinkering, the authors argue, is not enough to counter the global challenges produced by tourism development. What is required is rather a reconceptualization of tourism as part of a broader system, whereby tourism development intersects in multi-scalar ways with society, culture, the environment,

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and the economy. Through such rethinking, the authors share the need to move beyond the conceptualization of tourism as a discrete activity taking place within a bounded destination. How we might begin this reconceptualization through tourism research is, however, largely left to the reader's imagination.

There are a few contradictions throughout the text that leave the reader to wonder whether Sharpley and Telfer's vision of tourism development is really that different to the tourism development currently sought by the development agencies that they critique. For instance, Chapter 6 begins provocatively by offering the reader the first chance to question the extent to which we need to travel. To raise this provocation, Sharpley and Telfer present the analogy of a farmer who was asked why he has not visited a nearby priory, for him to simply respond that he never *needed* to. This allegory is a welcome diversion within the text, which otherwise largely remains a review of current literature. Had the authors engaged more with these broader philosophical provocations, the book's ability to elicit a rethinking of tourism development might have been further strengthened. However, while the tale provides a powerful force through which to reflect on our travel practices, the chapter quickly moves on to suggest that tourists are not actually capable of rethinking their travel practices because the desire to travel is innate and tourists remain consumed by the ability to acquire social status through travel. The paradoxical positioning of the introductory allegory and this conceptualization of the tourist's inability to change behaviour remains overlooked – despite this paradox bringing to question the very possibility of achieving the book's central argument: that is, the rethinking of tourism development through reduced tourist numbers.

This is not the only contradiction presented. While the authors seek, in part, to deconstruct growth-based development narratives by shifting beyond dichotomous thinking, they also often draw on such dualistic thinking in their discussions. This becomes particularly stark in the conclusion of the book, where the authors argue that certain 'undeveloped' [*sic*] countries may need to continue developing tourism to enhance economic prosperity, and thus become 'developed' – a tenet that reinforces capitalist developing vs development binary thinking and runs counter to the very ethos set out in the introductory chapter. These are just two of several contradictions arising throughout the text, which forced me to reflect on the limitations in engaging a broad-brush macro-political economy approach, which has left limited space to unpack the nuance and complexity of the presented arguments.

Overall, though, the monograph's thesis is compelling, timely, and paramount. It does not present novel conceptualizations or new research; nor does it provide detailed insights into any particular area of tourism development. Rather, in relying heavily on reviewing extant literature, the text effectively synthesizes contributions and arguments from across critical tourism studies that highlight the damage produced through the development of tourism, and thus presents a compelling case for rethinking the industry. In doing so, the text provides a valuable foundation for those seeking to understand this area of academic debate. It will likely hold great value for those newer to critical deconstructions of tourism development, such as undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as academics coming from other disciplines or other areas of tourism research.