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At Your Leisure

Increased regional tourism and sustainable development have recently become goals for planning in parts of Germany.[1] This volume represents an attempt to combine these often divergent goals in theory and practice. This collection of essays brings together perspectives from seven academic disciplines (transportation planning, transportation science, landscape planning, sociology, political science, psychology and history) and practice-oriented institutional actors from the areas of tourism, transportation and nature conservation (p. 285). The authors encourage readers to think about leisure time not just as individual fulfillment, but as the development of social, spatial and communicative relationships with environmental consequences and economic potential. The content will appeal most, in part or whole, to those interested in comparative leisure studies, sustainable development, regional urban planning and transportation planning.

The book stems from a three-year comparative study ending in early 2003, which was funded by the German Ministry for Research as part of a program focused on new concepts for *Freizeitverkehr* (pp. 8-9). Research for the project took place in three regional spaces: Berlin-Usedom, Berlin-Schorfheide and Zurich-Engadin. The

authors take a three-part approach. In part 1, the essays describe and define disciplinary perspectives and key concepts. In part 2, essays present the results of three case studies. Special attention is given to the relationships between historical development, social context and effects on and implications for transportation (pp. 8-9). The authors focus on understanding macro-, meso- and micro-level influences. In other words, they try to reveal the importance of environmental, historical, institutional, group and individual influences on leisure choices and transportation preferences. Finally, in part 3, the essays reflect on the process of cooperation within the study and make policy suggestions.

Despite the many contributors and variety of disciplinary perspectives, this book is well written and clearly organized. The language employed facilitates interdisciplinary communication by avoiding specialized jargon, while developing a common vocabulary. There are, however, two caveats to be mentioned. First, abbreviations are employed frequently throughout the essays. Many of these are explained within the text, but sometimes not until pages after their initial use. A list of abbreviations at the beginning or end of the book would have been of great assistance. Secondly, while a strength of the book

is its use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the authors were a little uneven in explaining variable construction and helping their readers interpret findings. Given their desire to reach a broad audience, this is an important point. Nevertheless, readers familiar with multivariate analysis will not have difficulties interpreting their findings.

At the heart of the research agenda and policy recommendations are two key concepts: spaces of contrast (*Kontrasträume*) and spatial partnerships (*Raumpartnerschaften*). Unlike sister cities, which establish relationships between two cities based on similarity, spatial partnerships are relationships characterized by complementary differences that connect territorial units (like a city and a recreational landscape) (p. 21). Spaces of contrast are based on the “contrast hypothesis,” which proposes that “leisure behavior is the search for spatial-temporal contrasts” (p.72). As Barbara Hinding explains: “We assume that in leisure time such preferred experiences will be sought that are neglected in everyday experience [*Alltag*]” (p. 72; also p. 186). For many city dwellers in Berlin, this behavior translates into the search for peace and quiet, schedule autonomy, variety and spontaneity, and the desire to experience or investigate someplace or something new (pp. 73-75). In terms of place or destination, this search connects the city of Berlin with the country and coast of Usedom, the biosphere reserve Schorfheide and the region of Wandlitz to the north and east. For Zurich, connections to the mountain and valley region Engadin/Münstertal located south and east of the city provide a Swiss case of contrast that follows its own pattern and provides its own distinct challenges.

Contrast spaces are not new (even if they have changed in character over time) as the historical reviews case studies make clear. Additionally, such relationships are not unique to Germany. In Pittsburgh, where I currently live, a contrast relationship exists between the city and the Ohiopyle/Laurel Highlands region about two hours away (by car). In the Central Valley of California where I grew up, such relationships existed between valley cities and the Sierra Nevadas as well as towns on the Central Coast. What is new, though, is the attempt to recognize such relationships and then cultivate them in such a way that growth chances and sustainable development can be encouraged and planned.

The idea of spatial partnerships emerges from spaces of contrast. Such partnerships result from a conscious recognition and encouragement of relationships based

on contrast. The authors distinguish between informal or individual and formal or institutional partnerships. Both are defined by spaces that share complementary contrasts and become formally or informally connected through tourist relationships (repeat tourism as individuals or groups) and/or institutional relationships (cooperation between economic, political and/or social institutions in both spaces). More concretely, informal spatial partnerships are visible when individuals or groups repeatedly visit the same location for leisure or if they own and regularly use a vacation apartment or camping place in such a location (p. 30). Institutional spatial partnerships exist when two places are joined through “regular, long-term and measurable processes of personal, material and mental exchange with at least a minimal level of institutionalization” (p. 31). As the authors point out, this is a new concept for the professions of spatial, regional and landscape planning (p. 31).

The motivations shared by the authors for studying and developing policy recommendations for spatial partnerships are twofold: encouraging economic growth through tourism in economically weak areas outside of Berlin and Zurich and establishing sustainable leisure practices. Improving public transportation is a primary focus that connects these goals. The intentions are both ambitious and represent a value system that is not market driven. Study participants attempted to combine economic, environmental and social goals. This basis of sustainable development as laid out by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 is a position the authors adopt (p. 34). Unfortunately, aside from the mention of the Brundtland definition, no chapter situates the work of the authors within debates and existing literature on sustainable tourism. This approach would have been helpful and made clear distinctions between *Urlaub*, *Kurzurlaub* and *Freizeit* (vacation, short-term getaways and leisure time).[2] The implied focus of the essays seems to be primarily *Kurzurlaub*, but this definition is never made explicit or explained within a framework of sustainable development.

Achieving sustainable tourism requires cooperation among unequal partners and potentially conflicting interests. Several authors address inequality and conflict in their discussions. One of the book’s contributions is to show through empirical data and concrete examples that barriers to sustainable development involve a combination of economic (the pursuit of profit, market competition), infrastructural (challenges for public transportation systems) and social factors. Some of the most interesting essays, from a sociological perspective, reveal how

underlying social tensions shape the process of development and cooperation (part 3). The case studies of Berlin-Usedom and Berlin-Schorfheide are particularly insightful for the light they shed on challenges for cooperation in the context of a reunified Germany (see especially chapter 3.4). Several additional underlying tensions run throughout the book, each of which could be developed as a specific focus: German-Polish tensions in the context of EU expansion; city-country or coast-country; differing expectations of locals and tourists.

The question of how to turn these often conflicting or competing relationships into productive, profitable, but sustainable ones haunts the essays in part 3. The authors recognize that challenges and questions have been identified, but concrete answers remain elusive and experimental (p. 301). But, even if the authors cannot yet provide us with answers or models, they do share their experiences and empirical evidence, revealing some of the hurdles that need to be overcome, if leisure activities are to become more environmentally friendly. Thus, the book

is a useful resource for groups and institutions interested in developing sustainable policies. An English translation would certainly contribute to American discussions of sustainable development.

Notes

[1]. The case with which I am most familiar is based on my own dissertation work. The recent IBA Emscher Park (1989-99) in the Ruhr District also tried to develop tourist infrastructure within a sustainable development framework.

[2]. Leisure is, however, clearly defined at the beginning of the book (p. 25). The authors explain that they employ a “negative” definition of leisure as an activity that cannot be categorized as related to employment, shopping or education. This definition was adopted because it can be operationalized for transportation planning. Leisure travel is distinguished from trips to work, education, stores or business trips.

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