

Sustainable Tourism in Rural Europe

Approaches to development

Edited by

**Donald V. L. Macleod and
Steven A. Gillespie**



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Contributors

Ausrine Armaitienė is Associate Professor and Head of the Recreation and Tourism Department at Klaipeda University, Lithuania. She is co-author of the books *Rural Tourism* and *Tourism* (in Lithuanian) and Chief Editor of *Lithuanian–English Tourism Glossary*.

Bill Bramwell is Professor of Tourism at Sheffield Hallam University, UK. He co-edits the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, and he has edited books on tourism's relationships with partnerships, sustainability in Europe, rural development, and coastal areas in Southern Europe. His research interests include connections between tourism and environmental politics, governance arrangements, and actor perspectives on political economy.

Catherine Brooks is Research and Futures Executive with Yorkshire Futures, the Regional Intelligence Observatory. She was previously a Researcher at the European Regional Business and Economic Development Unit (ERBEDU), Leeds Metropolitan University, and the Centre for Regional Economic Development (CRED), University of Cumbria.

Lynton J. Bussell is a Senior Lecturer in Economics at Teesside University Business School, Middlesbrough. Prior to taking up this post he worked as a Research Economist at the Northern Development Company. He is currently carrying out research on environmental aspects of tourism within UK National Parks.

Richard W. Butler is Emeritus Professor at Strathclyde University. He has published more than a dozen books on tourism, including *The Tourist Area Life Cycle* (2 vols) (2006) and *Tourism and Indigenous Peoples* (2007) with T. Hinch, and has three books currently in press.

Carl Cater is a Lecturer in tourism at Aberystwyth University, Wales, and his research centres on the experiential turn in tourism and the subsequent growth of special interest sectors. He is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, a qualified pilot, diver, mountain and tropical forest leader, and maintains an interest in both the practice and pursuit of

sustainable outdoor tourism activity. He is co-author (with Erlet Cater) of *Marine Ecotourism: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (CABI, 2007), and is an editorial board member of *Tourism Geographies*, the *Journal of Ecotourism* and *Tourism in Marine Environments*.

Erlet Cater is an Adjunct Associate Professor in Tourism at the University of Otago, New Zealand and Honorary Fellow in the Department of Geography, the University of Reading, UK. She is co-author, with Carl Cater, of *Marine Ecotourism: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (CABI: 2007). She was also co-editor of *Ecotourism: A Sustainable Option?* (1994), an Advisory Editor for both *The Encyclopaedia of Ecotourism* and the *Encyclopaedia of Marine Ecotourism*.

Samantha Chaperon is a Lecturer in Events and Tourism Management at the University of Greenwich, UK. Her recently completed PhD thesis examines responses to the issues that surround tourism development and tourism governance in a core-periphery context, with a case study focus on the Maltese Islands.

Anniken Førde is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Political Science and Community Planning at the University of Tromsø, Norway. Her research fields are gender studies, rural development, innovation and tourism. Among her publications are co-edited books on cross-disciplinarity and rural entrepreneurship.

Steven A. Gillespie is a Lecturer at the University of Glasgow, Dumfries Campus. He teaches in the fields of Environmental Stewardship and Carbon Management. Past research and interests include population ecology of intertidal bivalves, ecological impacts of invasive non-native species and, more recently, ecological attitudes, tourism sustainability and climate change.

Stefan Gössling is a Professor of Tourism Research at Linnaeus University, Kalmar, and Professor of Human Ecology at Lund University, both Sweden. He is also the Research Coordinator of the Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, Western Norway Research Institute.

C. Michael Hall is Professor, Department of Management, University of Canterbury, New Zealand; Docent, Department of Geography, University of Oulu, Finland; and Visiting Professor, Linnaeus University School of Business and Economics, Kalmar, Sweden. Co-editor of *Current Issues in Tourism*, he has published widely on tourism and mobility, gastronomy and environmental history.

Derek Hall is a Visiting Professor at HAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland, and has a number of visiting positions within the UK. He has been Head of Geography and Tourism at Sunderland University, and Head of the Department of Leisure and Tourism Management and both

Professor of Regional Development at the Scottish Agricultural College. His books include *Tourism in the New Europe: The Challenges and Opportunities of EU Enlargement* (lead editor); *Rural Tourism and Sustainable Business* (lead editor); and *Europe Goes East: EU Enlargement, Diversity and Uncertainty* (lead editor).

Johan Hultman is Associate Professor at the Department of Service Management, Lund University, Sweden. He writes and teaches on issues of nature and environment in tourism from a cultural analysis perspective. He is particularly interested in how nature is transformed into touristic value; how boundaries between nature and society are ordered through tourism and tourist practices; and how lifestyle entrepreneurship balances market rationales with the stewardship of nature.

Eleri Jones is a Professor and Director of Research in Cardiff School of Management at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. Her research is focused on small and medium-sized tourism enterprises and the challenges their strategic approach (or lack of it) pose to destination development. She has co-edited a book entitled *Tourism SMEs, Service Quality, and Destination Competitiveness* with her colleague Dr Claire Haven-Tang.

Stratis Koutsoukos is Deputy Director of the European Regional Business and Economic Development Unit (ERBEDU) and a Senior Lecturer at Leeds Business School. His expertise is on EU policy evaluation, EU Regional Policy and EU Business Studies. His publications include 'The Czech Republic's Structural Funds 2007–13: Critical Issues for Regional Regeneration', in *Urban Regional Management: International Perspectives* (2010).

David Leslie is Reader in Tourism at Glasgow Caledonian University. He has been awarded a Fellowship of the Tourism Society. His ongoing research in tourism has led to many publications. David is recognized for his work on tourism and sustainability, reflected in commissions to research progress in Local Agenda 21 and tourism and environmental performance. His publications include *Tourism Enterprises, Environmental Performance and Sustainable Development: Perspectives on Progress from across the Globe* (2009).

Rory MacLellan is currently a Lecturer in Tourism and is Programme Leader for Postgraduate Tourism Programmes in the School of Marketing, Tourism and Languages at Edinburgh Napier University. His teaching and research interests cluster around tourism and the natural environment, including rural tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, wildlife tourism and niche markets in outdoor activities. He has published on aspects of tourism and public policy and tourism in the Scottish natural environment, including articles on wildlife holidays and

sustainable tourism, and has co-edited a book entitled *Tourism in Scotland* (1998).

Donald V. L. Macleod is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow. He has researched in the Caribbean, the Canary Islands and Scotland and his publications include the books *Tourism, Power and Culture* (2010, co-editor), *Tourism, Globalisation and Cultural Change* (2004), *Niche Tourism in Question* (2003, editor), and *Tourists and Tourism* (1997, co-editor). His research interests include the anthropology of tourism, sustainable tourism development, globalization and cultural change, power, cultural heritage and identity.

Breda McCarthy is a Lecturer in Marketing at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland. She is interested in the strategy formation process, with a particular focus on small to medium-sized enterprises. She is currently conducting case-based research where the focus is on the origins and the nature of networking practices in the arts-tourism sector.

Ramunas Povilanskas is Professor in the Department of Recreation and Tourism, Klaipeda University, Lithuania. His research interests currently focus on sustainability of destination management and application of Actor-Network Theory for seaside tourism analysis. He is author of *Landscape Management on the Curonian Spit: A Cross-border Perspective* (2004) where he analyses different tourism-related conflicts on a coastal territory.

Tom Selwyn is Professorial Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, where he teaches the Anthropology of Tourism at postgraduate and undergraduate levels. Between 2001 and 2006, he directed two TEMPUS projects for the European Commission in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Palestine.

William Suthers has worked at Teesside University for over twenty years, initially as a public sector economist and latterly in the field of leisure, tourism and sport. He has published a number of articles and papers about the impact of local public transport since deregulation in 1986.

David Watkins trained as a science policy analyst. He is a Professor at Southampton Solent University. His books include *The Survival of the Small Firm: Entrepreneurship and the Economics of Survival* and *The Working Partnership: SMEs and Biodiversity*. He was founding editor of the *International Small Business Journal*.

Preface

On the 22nd of May 2008 an international conference entitled 'Rural 2008' was organized by the Centre for Research into Regional Development (CRRED); it was hosted by the University of Glasgow and the University of the West of Scotland at the Crichton Campus in Dumfries, Scotland. The conference brought together experts on aspects of European regional development with a focus on rural issues. The idea for this book was developed from one specific panel at the conference: 'Rural regional development: sustainable tourism'; eight of the eighteen chapters in this book are based upon conference papers. Other contributors to the book were personally invited because of their renowned expertise in relevant subject areas, and as editors we would like to thank all the contributors for their sterling efforts in completing the work.

We must also gratefully acknowledge the European Regional Development Fund who match-funded the CRRED project with guidance provided by the South of Scotland European Partnership, enabling the conference to take place. Additionally, we thank the Dumfries-based staff at the University of Glasgow and the University of the West of Scotland for helping to support CRRED.

Donald V. L. Macleod and Steven A. Gillespie

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Introduction

Donald V. L. Macleod

This book deals with sustainable tourism in many ways: it addresses theoretical aspects and gives case studies; it utilizes methods from different academic disciplines; it looks at activities from differing perspectives relative to officialdom; it is a multi-disciplinary collection which embraces holistic analysis, context-driven understandings, conceptual critiques, political complexities as well as practical solutions. The regional focus of the book is Europe, in particular the rural parts, an area of great variety, and one which has often experienced tourism in different forms over many centuries; as an indicator of the region's continuing importance, it accounted for around just over half of all worldwide international tourist arrivals in 2008 (UNWTO 2009).

Certainly the specific sites discussed are unique, yet they all reveal experiences which can be relevant not only to other parts of Europe, but also to many places worldwide. Case studies offer contemporary examinations of key issues, with a critical eye, as well as a practical, realistic assessment. Rural Europe, because of its experience of tourism, and its modern infrastructure, but nevertheless occasionally fragile and sensitive composition, offers an excellent object of analysis from which to contemplate situations elsewhere in the world. For these and other reasons, this book makes a crucial and original new contribution to the literature on sustainable tourism.

The importance of rural destinations in regard to tourism sustainability partly relates to the visible and physical vulnerability of the rural environment, the flora, fauna and landscape of the countryside, together with small communities, often peripheral, which may be cultural enclaves with weak political representation. The countryside, as part of the rural setting, has historically been a popular destination for tourists in Europe, and so not only is there a strong association between many diverse hotspots and rural areas, but there is also a substantial history and experience on which to reflect and draw conclusions. Tourism academics have looked at rural areas (e.g. Gössling and Hultman 2006; Hall *et al.* 2003; Roberts and Hall 2001) and also focused on Europe as a region (e.g. Bramwell 2004; Hall *et al.* 2006; Priestley *et al.* 1996; Thomas and Augustyn 2006; Voase 2001) but

no book on sustainable tourism dedicated to rural Europe as a whole has yet been published.

A broad, inclusive approach is taken in this book towards the concept 'rural' which is usually defined in terms of population density and size of settlement; for example, the England and Wales Countryside Agency definition excludes settlements with over 10,000 inhabitants. In Scotland, they define rural locations by population density and exclude local authorities of more than 100 persons per km sq; in Norway and Denmark, they only recognize agglomerations of fewer than 200 inhabitants as rural (Roberts and Hall 2001: 11). Other defining characteristics may include land use and economy, such as agriculture and forestry. Traditional social structures are also often associated with rural areas (Lane 1994; see Roberts and Hall 2001, for a detailed discussion of the term 'rural'). The chapters in this book illustrate the variety of situations that the notion of 'rural' embraces while indirectly disclosing commonalities.

Sustainable tourism has been the subject of much discussion in recent years largely following from the major debates on the concept of sustainable development boosted during the 1980s by the Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*) produced by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987; see France 1997, for discussion). There have since been numerous articles and books, as well as dedicated journals (such as the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*) dealing with the topic (Bramwell *et al.* 1998; France 1997; Gössling *et al.* 2008; Hind and Mitchell 2004; Ioannides *et al.* 2001; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Weaver 2006). Definitions have largely been in agreement regarding resource protection, varying in emphasis on environment, economy and culture, for example, Weaver gives the following generalizing, embracing definition:

Sustainable tourism may be regarded most basically as the application of the sustainable development idea to the tourism sector – that is, tourism development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, or, in concert with Budowski's (1976) 'symbiosis' scenario, tourism that wisely uses and conserves resources in order to maintain their long-term viability. Essentially, sustainable tourism involves the minimization of negative impacts and the maximization of positive impacts.

(Weaver 2006: 10)

In contrast to the above, the following definition places a stronger emphasis on economic success:

Sustainable tourism is tourism that is developed and maintained in a manner, and at such a scale, that it remains economically viable over an indefinite period and does not undermine the physical and human environment that sustains and nurtures it. It needs to be economically

sustainable, because if tourism is not profitable then it is a moot question to ask whether it is environmentally sustainable – tourism that is unprofitable and unviable will simply cease to exist.

(Ham and Weiler 2002: 36)

A different view is taken by Hardy, Beeton and Pearson in an article exploring the development of the concept 'sustainable tourism' in historical depth and with regard to the idea of sustainable development. They emphasize the relative lack of focus on the community impacted upon by tourism, and in their conclusion state:

When sustainable tourism has been applied to the industry, more emphasis has often been given to tourism's effects upon the environment and economy, rather than to factors related to its effect on communities. This is ironic given that the definition in *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987) defined sustainable development largely in terms of a process whereby local communities' subjective needs should be met. Based upon this, it is proposed here that future conceptualisations of sustainable tourism must address the local community to the same extent as the economy and the environment. This may be achieved through processes such as stakeholder involvement.

(Hardy *et al.* 2002: 491)

Hunter (2003) is prepared to accept a variety of definitions within a paradigm similar to sustainable development; while Telfer and Sharpley (2008) link sustainable tourism development closely to sustainable development. Many scholars argue that sustainable tourism may be an ideal only to be strived for and never achieved (cf. Swarbrooke 1999; Ioannides *et al.* 2001). Nevertheless, the idea of sustainable tourism is crucial and of great importance to the industry as well as to the academic community. There is therefore a problem, both for academics and for those who plan, manage and run tourism destinations, in that sustainable tourism is apparently unachievable, elusive, and subject to a myriad of often unforeseen influences. Furthermore, there are always conflicting interests on site at the destination to deal with, as well as competition over resources, to say nothing of the numerous uncontrollable externalities such as economic disasters and climate change. And so, the academic and manager must struggle with the conceptual model of sustainable tourism, and most importantly, understand or be aware of the practical reality on the ground as it appears at the tourist destination.

While recognizing that the concept of 'development' is itself problematic (cf. Britton 1989; Croll and Parkin 1992; Sharpley and Telfer 2002), this book concentrates on the drive to develop sustainable tourism within a region regarded as part of the 'developed' world (despite having pockets of relative depravation). An abstract definition proposed by Sharpley (2002: 23) describes an appropriate approach: 'In short, development can be

thought of as a philosophy, a process, the outcome or product of that process, and a plan guiding the process towards desired objectives.' Understandably, this collection does not claim to offer the solution to all problems related to sustainable tourism development in rural Europe, and by extension the world, but it does offer lessons to be learned from actual destinations as examined and contemplated by world-renowned experts. It gives detailed case studies, cutting edge analyses and well-informed opinions of problems and successes.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into three parts: Part I: Key themes and issues; Part II: The state and development; and Part III: The local community and development. This division enables the focus to begin with a broad, primarily theoretical overview of central themes and issues, thereby setting the scene for the following two parts which are based on case studies. Parts II and III are divided in such a way as to give emphasis to the differing political influences and arrangements of tourism development, often referred to as 'top-down' and 'bottom-up', thereby locating the different actors and their roles in tourism, illustrating how such processes take place and the relevance of official and unofficial bodies, the local community and other stakeholders such as tourists.

Part I Key themes and issues

This section is devoted to discussion of major themes and issues within tourism studies and related disciplines and begins with a discussion by Richard Butler in Chapter 1 on sustainable tourism and its relationship with the changing rural scene in Europe. He considers the definitions of 'sustainable tourism' and 'rural', acknowledging their complexity and variety while pointing out that coastal areas form an important part of the rural landscape, especially in terms of tourism activity. He also emphasizes the North-South divide in Europe between the colder and warmer parts of the continent which to a large degree have determined tourist behaviour, ranging from walking to sunbathing, and where the volume of visitors seeking sunshine directly impacts on natural resources, demonstrating the relevance of scale and types of tourism to sustainability.

Second homes have become popular in rural destinations and Butler explores the various positive and negative impacts they have on the local community, particularly in economic terms and regarding the utilization of resources. This issue has similarities with the growing trend for retirement to tourism destinations often by ex-tourists, which also places pressure on resources. Perhaps the most pertinent aspect of rural tourism in recent times for sustainability is the dramatic changes noted by Butler, including the increase in number of tourists due to mobility, wealth, and leisure time

available, and the increase in types of activity, often involving machinery and the necessary infrastructural and facility development attending them, for example, ski-mobiles, jet-skiing on water, mountain-biking, and off-road driving. These changes bring a new type of activity and impact to rural locations, which Butler considers are often used as a playground for urbanites, and he sees them as causing a serious challenge to sustainability, including the traditional rural way of life. Butler has drawn our attention to the contemporary reality of tourism in rural areas, its lack of sustainability in many cases, and the growth of such tourism, which leads to the realization that there needs to be a renewed effort to understand and deal with the problems that may arise.

In Chapter 2, Michael Hall, Johan Hultman and Stefan Gössling treat mobility as a central concept and concern when considering tourism, locality and sustainable rural development. They contemplate changes in the rural economy which encourage agricultural diversification to include tourism, noting the importance of countryside capital, and above all they stress how mobility, in terms of access and actual travel methods, is a crucial component when considering development and climate change. The complex relationship between rural regions and urban centres is acknowledged and linkages, as well as aspects of social capital, are noted as highly relevant. They argue that the growing stress on a low carbon economy and the potential of slow mobility means that short-travel tourism in rural regions could be key to successful future developments.

David Leslie, in Chapter 3, examines sustainable tourism policy in rural Europe as implemented by the European Union (EU). He shows how tourism is currently on the EU agenda, whereas it was only marginal in earlier times prior to the 1990s. Tourism is recognized as important for the economy and jobs, and EU policy emphasizes enterprise and ecological efficiency. Tourism development has been heavily influenced by environmental policy, and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy has clear implications for tourism in areas such as transportation, conservation and management. Broadly, tourism is seen as a tool for socio-economic development and the EU Agenda for a Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism (2007) is discussed, as is the emphasis on small-scale locally managed, socially responsible tourism.

The issue of ecotourism in the wider rural context is dealt with by Erlet and Carl Cater in Chapter 4, who argue that a holistic approach should be developed recognizing complexities and interrelationships involving activities in and components of rural areas. They use the concept of spread effects and backwash effects resulting from rural ecotourism, and stress that ecotourism must be set in context regarding other economic activities, as well as global events such as climate change. Local communities should be involved in helping to define problems, where an adaptive management which adjusts to evolving situations is necessary to effect sustainable transition. This major 'meta-problem', they suggest, needs a trans-disciplinary approach.