

Book review

Ebejer, J. (2021). *Tourism in European Cities: The Visitor Experience of Architecture, Urban Spaces and City Attractions*. Rowman & Littlefield. ISBN: 978-1-5381-6054-1 (Hardback), 978-1-5381-6055-8 (eBook).

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Click [here](#) for home page of <Tourism in European Cities> website.

This book emanates from a distinctive context in place and time. Its author has been a leading protagonist in Malta's efforts to develop urban cultural tourism during the past twenty years, and he brings fresh perspectives to the subject – perspectives which are distinctly European and variously innovative, yet also influenced where appropriate by the Maltese experience.

An interesting aspect of this background is the Maltese ability to bring a fluent English perspective on the European city at a time when Britain's own engagement with Europe is equivocal. This book moreover presents lucid arguments, not invariably the case from contemporary British/anglophone academic authors.

The text is well referenced throughout, and is furthermore often seasoned with original thought, primarily of direct European relevance. This appears for example with reference to the tourism impact of intra-European growth in air, rail and road connectivity; and to the growth of 'VFR'-related tourism within Europe as its many internal migrants receive visitors.

Befitting the author's career background, the book addresses both academic and practitioner needs in its field. Following an introduction, and discussions of place marketing and changing

tourism dynamics, its content focuses on tourism resources, with particular reference to the urban built environment. Following resources, it turns to a series of issues mostly relating to the built environment; issues which are broadly familiar but are here enriched by original material, from architectural and planning perspectives in particular.

The various tourism resource categories of attractions and support facilities are systematically considered in turn, with reference as appropriate to the effect of evolving market taste upon the overall tourism product. Initial consideration of the location of tourism/leisure districts within the city leads on to a classification of tourism attractions, in terms of primary, secondary or tertiary; and of their indispensable support facilities, most obviously accommodation and provisioning.

Beyond these resource issues, however, the book brings an architect's expertise to the pedestrian experience of buildings and urban spaces, probing beyond the traditional conception of tourist 'gaze'. The chapter on walking collates extensive referencing with the author's research to produce an innovative, multifaceted, understanding of the value of walking to the subtleties and surprises which should enrich the tourist experience; moreover it goes on to show

how digitally revolutionised photography interfaces with walking in various ways. This leads the discussion naturally to meaning and sense of place, with which the tourist ‘gaze’ is correctly judged to involve a multisensory and individualised interaction between place and visitor.

Complementary following chapters examine the all-encompassing and increasingly iconic role of architecture, modern as well as historic, in urban tourism. The book relates extensively to existing work on the tourist-historic city, and discusses European World Heritage. However, it deals also with contemporary tourism resources; landmark modern architecture is conspicuous among them, as well as constituting a key resource in inter-urban competition more generally. There is of course no clear age divide between new and old: all landmark architecture is becoming historic, and all is certainly of potential relevance to current notions of heritage.

Before its straightforward summary conclusion, the book considers events tourism and also the covid pandemic (discussed below). The tourism importance of events and their legacies has been well documented, but here there is particular reference to the European Capitals of Culture, among the most recent of which is Valletta, Malta, the equivocal legacy of which is authoritatively considered.

An overall strength of the book is its attention to recent tourism developments, from a European perspective, some of which are noted above. Among these is the impact of digitally proliferating photography on the individual appreciation of pedestrian space. On quite another plane, the impact of short breaks on tourism patterns and behaviours is considered; in this the author’s perspective is particularly useful in light of Malta’s recent experience of this form of tourism, which contrasts strongly with its traditional package-holiday industry.

Notwithstanding a Maltese background, the book is faithful to its title by systematic point-by-point discussion of matters of general pertinence to European tourism, with wideranging exemplification and some 28 more fully developed case illustrations from across Europe. These are mainly on a thematic basis, case studies

appropriate to each theme being developed chapter by chapter as appropriate. Many of them are original, reflecting both extensive fieldwork by the author and referenced secondary sources. Most relate to larger cities; but less-familiar examples include Billund, Denmark, illustrating the symbiosis between low-cost air access and development of tourism attractions; and Suomenlinna fortress, a World Heritage tourism/recreational resource of Helsinki. There is a reasonable European balance; however a quarter of the cases are (well informed) UK examples. Just two are Maltese.

Such a book published in 2021 cannot but address the covid-19 pandemic which has ravaged the tourism industry more than any other component of the global economy – and unexpectedly replaced ‘overtourism’ with ‘undertourism’ in current academic discourse. Herein lie both a distinctive strength and inevitable limitation of the book. Its predecessors could not predict the impact of a pandemic, but here we find a year’s experience of it put to good use in a series of perceptive observations on likely outcomes for tourism, for example its more diffuse – thus safer – geographical spread to better utilise outlying urban resources. All of these observations make prudent allowance for uncertainty. Seven months later (October 2021), tourism is indeed reviving, but ongoing impacts of the pandemic upon it are still unpredictably dependent upon both the medical trajectory and diverse, even capricious, policy responses by different tourist-generating and tourist-receiving jurisdictions. We cannot yet clearly see ultimate post-covid outcomes for European tourism.

That said, and considering its other merits, this book stands as an invaluable pioneer effort to consider the path from covid to a subsequent sustainable future for tourism in European cities – a future fairly seen as more sustainable by virtue of having both survived the scourge and having used its enforced pause to reconsider urban tourism’s preexisting deficiencies.