

Book review

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Main aspects about book content

The content of the book *Transformative Travel in a Mobile World* follows the authors ten-year longitudinal study of travel perceptions. To summarise, the premise is an investigation of how traveller mobility through a lifetime of journeys influences the individual's outlook and behaviours both during and post-travel. The book continues by investigating how these experiences evolve and develop over the duration of travel experiences of the individual.

The publisher defines the research as a "unique longitudinal study of travel perceptions". This premise is true as the research is specific to the author. The book is structured as a series of case studies, interjected by the author's interpretation and personal experience. It is clearly articulated by the author that there are two key conceptual issues represented in the study. First, the concept of "transformation" which is a definition and concept that the author has developed over the decade long study presented in the book. The conceptual lens adopted is one of an individual's personal development and change through the experiences and exposure to knowledge, values and thinking, the individual is exposed to. The second concept is that of travel, which is in one sense, the physical act of leaving ones place of residence and transporting to another but also the role that the journey provides in exposure and influence new environments have on the outlook and development of the individual.

This publication is a thought-provoking approach to the sociological and psychological possibilities of individual transformation

through travel. As such, it would address the requirements of anthropological tourism researchers, students and academics interested in the aspect of the personal development through travel experience.

What contribution does this book make to our understanding of the future of tourism?

With the central tenant of the book being an understanding of the development of human nature influenced by the experience of travel, there is no direct contribution to our understanding of the future. It should be noted, however, that the research that underpins the publication is based on a long-term longitudinal study which continues beyond the presented publication.

The documentation of experiences and subsequent impact on individuals, therefore, provides the futurologist an array of variables to apply to forecasts and scenarios based on the adage that "an understanding of the past is the gateway to our formation of the future". This is a welcome addition to the body of work relating to the emotional understanding of the impact of travel. The contribution to tourism futures will be harnessing that growing understanding and applying that knowledge to the future systems that are being developed.

What are the central arguments or proposition of the book?

The volume is presented in six chapters, supported by five case studies or "participant stories" of travel and transformation. The author challenges the "old paradigm" of our existing understanding of travel and transformation. The book presents the authors theory that transformation and travel should be represented by examining the "types of changes physical travel can deliver" and classifying the elements that lead to the change. Existing thought on transformation and travel, the author suggests tended to take an "overly rationalistic and positivist perspective" through the investigation of specific effects of particular forms of travel, i.e. backpacking,

Transformative Travel in a Mobile World

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pilgrimages, nature-based recreation upon certain groups (such as gender or age).

The work, therefore, expands on the topic area by considering the transformations that are experienced by the individual “before”, “during” and “after” a physical travel experience.

Addressing other neglected elements of this area of research, the author looks deeper into the “sensual and embodied nature” of the travel experience to develop a deeper understanding of travel and transformation.

As mentioned, the book disaggregates the travel experience in to “before”, “during” and “after” phases which it is claimed to have an influence on the transformational property the journey delivers to the individual. The authors use of quotation marks for this central premise is due to the acceptance that the distinctions are imperfect and from a mobility’s perspective “we are always travelling” either physically, communicatively, technologically, imaginatively or other and the travel experience does not end on the travellers return to their origin “ but becomes entwined in their life course”.

Key to the understanding of the paradigm are the “participant stories” or case studies drawn from a diverse range of interviewees from young volunteer project co-ordinator visiting Thailand to the military engineer addressing active service in the Middle East to returning to similar regions of the world later in life as a leisure traveller. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee over the ten years of the current study has allowed multiple trips over multiple life stages of the same individuals to be recorded and contribute to how experience, expectation, purpose of trip and reflection has shaped the lives of the individuals and supported the premise the research has developed.

The author states that no “formal conclusion” is presented in the book. The reasons are clear that the research is ongoing, experiences and transformation is continual. To quote the author:

[...] to write one would be an attempt to bring closure to a notion that is unbounded, can be viewed differently from multiple perspectives and is continually evolving.

The author does provide a brief afterward which reflects on the nature of travel and transformation in the modern, mobile world. The reflective point being the considerations the research has presented to date and the framing considerations of future work.

Is this a recommended purchase and why?

My initial impression of the book were mixed in terms of approaching what is a clear relationship between the researcher and the interviewees. On reflection, however, I concluded this was a refreshing approach to understanding the effect of travel on the human experience in what is an increasingly mobile world. While on one aspect, the challenging of the status quo on the historical viewpoint on the topic opens the subject to comment, scrutiny and expansion, it was the comparable profile of the case studies which I felt limited the study. The profile of the sample was biased towards the independent traveller “clan” journeying to exotic locations which it could be challenged are open to life affirming and transformative experiences. While this may be addressed in future studies, how does the premise apply to the package holiday, domestic travel or visiting friends and relatives which are increasingly more diverse through diaspora, increased disposable income and relatively lower cost transport to distant locations. Each of these types of travel will have a transformational effect albeit one that could potentially be sanitised (e.g. the gated resorts restricting visitors experience of the “real” destination).

I would recommend this book for its challenge of existing thought on the transformational aspects of travel. The case studies and themes derived are a valued contribution to the expansion of knowledge in this area. While this specific and almost unique approach presented in the book is focussed on a narrow profile of traveller type, the potential to examine other groups is clearly offered within the research framework.

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