

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Political Ecology and Tourism

Edited by
Sanjay Nepal and Jarkko Saarinen



Political Ecology and Tourism

Political ecology explicitly addresses the relations between the social and the natural, arguing that social and environmental conditions are deeply and inextricably linked. Its emphasis on the material state of nature as the outcome of political processes, as well as the construction and understanding of nature itself as political is greatly relevant to tourism.

Very few tourism scholars have used political ecology as a lens to examine tourism-centric natural resource management issues. This book brings together experts in the field, with a foreword from Piers Blaikie, to provide a global exploration of the application of political ecology to tourism. It addresses the underlying issues of power, ownership, and policies that determine the ways in which tourism development decisions are made and implemented. Furthermore, contributions document the complex array of relationships between tourism stakeholders, including indigenous communities, and multiple scales of potential conflicts and compromises.

This groundbreaking book covers 15 contributions organized around four cross-cutting themes of communities and livelihoods; class, representation, and power; dispossession and displacement; and environmental justice and community empowerment. This book will be of great interest to students and scholars in tourism, geography, anthropology, sociology, environmental studies, and natural resources management.

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Political Ecology and Tourism

**Edited by
Sanjay Nepal and
Jarkko Saarinen**

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Foreword

Piers Blaikie

Political Ecology and Tourism is an exciting book. It opens up and explores what it rightly claims to be a lacuna in political ecology's hectic advances and settlement of new areas of intellectual endeavour. While the recognition of the value of a wide ranging dialogue between earth sciences and social sciences seems in retrospect rather obvious, the scope of this dialogue has taken us by surprise. New journals and courses in political ecology in Anglophone universities (as well as in France and Germany) have multiplied over the past thirty years, but the political ecology of tourism has received the most cursory treatment. Yet, as this book explains so well, the elements of classic political ecology are immediately apparent in the analysis of tourism. They are the unequal costs and benefits associated with environmental change, ongoing inequalities and the power relations that reproduce them, dispossession and displacement of local people, the politics of environmental science and how it understands environmental change and whose knowledge counts and why, all set in the context of globalization – not an unfamiliar list of topics in many other political ecologies.

A volume of this sort which includes a large number of case studies (fifteen here) has to face a challenge – on the one hand to provide a theoretical and methodological framework that is coherent, innovative and relevant to all the case studies and, on the other, not to constrain diversity of subject matter, methods of study and interpretation. The case studies include those located in many parts of the world, including the United States and Canada (e.g. Keul's study of social class and use of the shoreline in Connecticut; [Chapter 5](#)), and in southern Africa (e.g. Lenao and Saarinen's community based natural resource management of game in the Okavango Delta, Botswana; [Chapter 7](#)). There are studies focusing on the sustainability of non-human species for commercial touristic purposes (e.g. valuable fish species for the angling industry in the Bahamas and turtles in Costa Rica; [Chapters 2](#) and [3](#), respectively). There are case studies in which "development" is a stated goal of tourism (Dahal and Nepal's study of the Annapurna Conservation area in Nepal; [Chapter 8](#)) and others where tourism is driven by commercially orientated images of wilderness (Vidon's study in Adirondack Park; [Chapter 6](#)) or the idealized presentation of 'traditional' life (Colucci and Mullett's study of ecotourism in Yucatan, Mexico; [Chapter 9](#)). This diversity presents the editors with a tough task and it is their solution to the

challenge – their theoretical framework – that is one of the main reasons I write this Forward with such pleasure. The framework works well for many reasons. The collection is built upon four foundational and inter-related themes: Communities and Livelihoods (**Part I**); Class, Representation and Power (**Part II**); Dispossession and Displacement (**Part III**); and Environmental Justice and Community Empowerment (**Part IV**). The framework is both classic (I can think of a number of political ecology works that adopt similar approaches) but also innovative and well adapted to the wide range of case studies of tourism in all their diversity. This book empowers readers and encourages them to ask new questions in ways that draw upon its approach. These questions, amongst others that will occur to readers, beckon beyond the horizon of this book. There is no implication here that this volume stopped short of addressing them. Here are two such issues, which I now feel able to explore in more depth having read this work.

The first is the impact of disastrous events upon the political ecology of tourism. The case studies here do not happen to include the political ecology of disasters in their analyses, but there are so many disasters that have (and unfortunately, will) impact tourism. Tourism is both an element in the shaping of pre-disaster social and spatial conditions where disasters occur as well as being profoundly affected by disaster events. Here are some examples: Hurricane Katrina and the city of New Orleans in August 2005, the tsunami which hit the tourist beaches of Thailand and other coasts on 26 December 2004 and, most recently and catastrophically, the earthquakes in Nepal in April 2015 with aftershocks in later months. And there are many more. It is the fate of the tourists which commands almost all the media attention, with assurances that tourism in the disaster area is open for business as usual. Of course, as any critical political ecology will show, it is the most vulnerable workers in tourism who either are killed or injured in greater numbers or who lose their livelihoods (or that essential part linked to tourism). The only silver lining in this dark cloud is the possibility of new beginnings, either away from tourism altogether or to a more sustainable tourism where costs and benefits are more equally shared. This book is most helpful in signposting pitfalls as well as more promising avenues for reconstruction. This brings me to the second issue which this book invites readers to explore further.

The questions of ‘So what?’ and ‘What can be done and by whom?’ are difficult and are not easily resolved after the pyrotechnics of critique have exposed the injustices of tourism and other social-environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation and over-fishing of the oceans. I will attempt to answer those questions by asking two more in return. The first is ‘Is it my role as an academic to be “useful”?’ The second is ‘What right do I have to assume a role of expert or interlocutor in negotiations between interested parties in the management of tourism?’ The case studies in this book visit (with ironic inverted commas!) some of the policy recommendations such as ‘inclusion of local resource users’, ‘flexibility’ – in terms of budgets, time horizons and project planning – and ‘innovation’ in institutional frameworks, degrees of discretion and the freedom for local people to make decisions for and by themselves. However, the tone of most of the case studies is universally critical. There are exceptions where

judgements over the justice of tourism regarding costs and benefits are more equivocal. For example, Dahal and Nepal's study of the integrated conservation and development projects in Nepal (see [Chapter 8](#)), Gray, Campbell and Meeker's chapter on volunteer conservation of turtles in Costa Rica (see [Chapter 3](#)) and Lenao and Saarinen's study of community based natural resource management in Botswana (see [Chapter 7](#)) all describe some beneficial outcomes, albeit offset in terms of justice by the familiar processes of the reproduction of inequality. My own experience as a researcher and consultant in these locations supports most of the authors' overall critiques but I found that there have also been some remarkable negotiations between local resource users and outside institutions (e.g. NGO's) with beneficial outcomes for local people – and not only for elites and senior males.

However, a political ecology of tourism is multi-scalar, as this book points out, and therefore action to give justice in tourism a better chance will also be multi-scalar. Naomi Klein's book *This Changes Everything* addresses what is to be done in response to a much greater and wider issue than tourism – that of climate change. She suggests a wide variety of possible points of pressure and leverage and these occur at the local level, where the extractive activities such as mining, fracking and oil spillage occur; at the national level, where deals with global corporations, environmental controls and guarantees (or the lack of them) are effected; and at the global scale such as international agreements and campaigns to sell investments in extractive industries. On a smaller scale and in a smaller policy environment, to encourage tourism to move towards a more just and sustainable future, multi-scalar policies and activism in a wide variety of arenas can be pursued. This book invites the reader to action and provides many of the political tools to do so.

So, this is an excellent book. It informs and stimulates the reader, pointing towards the future.

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Abbreviations

AAG	Association of American Geographers
ACA	Annapurna Conservation Area
ACAP	Annapurna Conservation Area Project
ACN	Nicaraguan Academy of Sciences
ANB	Alaska Native Brotherhood
ANC	Alaska Native Corporation
ANCSA	Alaska Native Corporation Settlement Act
ANS	Alaska Native Sisterhood
APA	Adirondack Park Agency
ASLMP	Adirondack State Land Master Plan
B&B	bed and breakfast
BBI	Bahamian bonefishing industry
BFFIA	Bahamas Fly Fishing Industry Association
BNT	Bahamas National Trust
BSCA	Bahamas Sport Fishing Conservation Association
BTT	Bonefish and Tarpon Trust
CAMC	Conservation Area Management Committee
CBET	community-based ecotourism
CBNRM	community-based natural resources management
CBO	community-based organization
CCI	Caribbean Challenge Initiative
CCI	Independent Peasant Central
CDF	Community Development Fund
CFC	Cape Fox Corporation
CGA	Adirondack Common Ground Alliance
CHA	controlled hunting area
COB	College of the Bahamas
DEC	Department of Environmental Conservation
DSA	daily subsistence allowance
ERM	environmental resources management
FCF	Fisheries Conservation Foundation
GDP	gross domestic product
GNH	gross national happiness

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HKND	Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development Investment Company
ICDP	Integrated Conservation and Development Project
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	international non-governmental organizations
ISA	ideological state apparatus
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MAS	Mul Ama Samuha (Main Mothers' Group)
MGR	Moremi Game Reserve
MINAE	Ministry of Environment and Energy
MPA	marine protected area
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-governmental organization
NRED	Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division
NTNC	National Trust for Nature Conservation
OD	Okavango Delta
ODMP	Okavango Delta Management Program
PA	protected area
PRODETUR	Programa de Desenvolvimento do Turismo
PROMUSAG	Program of the Woman in the Agrarian Sector
PRONicaragua	Official Investment and Export Promotion Agency of Nicaragua
RGoB	The Royal Government of Bhutan
SIDS	small island developing states
SPRC	Sun Peaks Resort Corporation
SSEE	sustainable social-environmental enterprise
SWS	Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary
TCB	Tourism Council of Bhutan
UCI	Indigenous Peasants Union
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
VACCIA	vulnerability assessment of ecosystem services for climate change impacts and adaptation
VDC	Village Development Committee
WAS	Ward Ama Samuha (Ward-level Mothers' Group)
WMA	wildlife management area
WTO	World Trade Organization

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