

# Book review

**Jim Butcher and Peter Smith**  
***Contemporary Geographies of Leisure, Tourism and Mobility***  
**Routledge**  
**Abington**  
**2015**  
**147pp.**  
**ISBN-0415749018**  
**Review DOI**  
**10.1108/JTF-12-2015-0054**

**An overall commentary about the content of book**

The content of the book *Volunteer Tourism* is current and relevant in today's tourism discussion about, citizenship, development and cosmopolitanism. The authors provide a vocabulary not only for tourism scholars but also for people interested in mobility and morality. The book frames volunteer tourism as an expression of a diminished political subjectivity while at the same time recognizing the importance of volunteering, celebrating travel and affirming humanitarianism. The authors have delivered a work which contributes greatly to a comprehensive critical understanding of the volunteer tourism phenomenon. The book evokes a discussion among my colleagues and made me reflect about volunteer tourism and tourism in general. Through themes they portray volunteer tourism as a search for meaning in a globalized world with a global citizenship.

Accordingly the authors volunteer tourism is indicative of the growth of lifestyle strategies intended to exhibit care and responsibility toward others less fortunate, strategies aligned closely with developing one's ethical identity and sense of global responsibility (p. 3).

This thought-provoking book draws on developmental, political and sociological theory and is essential reading for students, researchers and academics interested in the phenomenon of volunteer tourism.

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

The book does not provide finished views, but rather perspectives for future thinking and

research in the area of volunteer tourism, and ethical consumption in general. This is a very welcome contribution to the complex field of tourism futures. Personally, I enjoyed the approach the authors take, considering volunteer tourism as a reaction toward an over-formalized global society and lack of community, with a consequent desire to reconnect with other people on a more authentic base (p. 42).

**What are the central arguments or proposition of the book?**

The conclusions of the book provide a number of themes which skillfully describe the controversies of the subject. In the conclusions they also pose the central argument of the book. The argument is that the authors are not looking to discuss whether volunteer tourism is good or bad or how to make it more ethical (p. 133) but they rather set out to comment on: "what the advent of the worthy gap year project and volunteer tourism as a significant rite of passage of aspirant, socially conscious people tells us about the politics of our day" (p. 133).

The authors provide themes in which they see volunteer tourism as an expression of a diminished political subjectivity while at the same time recognizing the importance of volunteering, celebrating travel and affirming humanitarianism. The themes which the authors employ to make the argument are as follows:

Development: the authors are skeptical about the contributions of volunteer tourism toward development of the South. They indicate that small differences made to societies can never even meet the alternative possibilities had the money paid by the tourists simply given to host communities to use as they fit (p. 134). Through the work of Escobar they also question what type of development volunteer tourism provides: "[Volunteer tourism] presents development in any way transformative of an existing way of life as complicit in a pernicious 'neoliberalism' or 'western' origin" (Escobar, 2011). A form of Coca-colonialism.

**Volunteer Tourism: The Lifestyle Politics of International Development**

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Travel: the theme of travel allows the authors to discuss the virtues of travel. They are positive regarding accounts of life-changing experiences, unforgettable encounters and perceived freedom. However, they also sound a critical note:

It is also true that the accounts of volunteer tourists' experiences often exhibit an independence of spirit that means these experiences are more open ended than the non-governmental organizations and volunteer tour companies may have envisaged (p. 135).

Humanitarianism: through the theme of humanitarianism the authors come to their main argument, which is the emptying of the public sphere and the exhaustion of political ideology as context for volunteer tourism (p. 136). Through this context they portray volunteer tourism as a search for meaning in a globalized world with a global citizenship. A relevant term they use in this respect is "neopopulism" which refers to rhetorical emphasis on the people rather than the state or big business.

Citizenship: the term of citizenship places volunteer tourism in the context of global citizenship. This is a particular way of being in the world. When looking at the marketing of volunteer tourism projects, the marketing of the projects promote a global citizenship and prioritize particular ways of looking at the world as universally good, "ethical" aims. (p. 137). This is related to the globalization of popular culture.

Solidarity: alongside humanitarianism is a desire for solidarity in a world that is globally connected but according to the authors this feels morally disaggregated, volunteer tourism taps into this reservoir and bases itself on liberal hope (p. 139).

Politics: the authors claim that people interested in reviving a public sphere and political debate worthy of the issues of the day

should move beyond the discussion to make volunteer tourism more ethical, more aware or even more political. Rather, these people should enter the political debate on development – open and free from moralizing. Volunteer tourism is according to the authors clearly not the platform that evokes changes.

Would you recommend purchase, yes or no and reasons why?

I would definitely recommend reading this book. It is a strong argument for re-thinking global developments and tourism discussions. It also offers insight into a wide range of contemporary literature in the fields of tourism, anthropology and developments.

Key selling point of the book is that the authors connect tourism with a range of global themes such as the North/South relationship, development, civilization, popular culture, globalizations and modernity. A rather underdeveloped aspect of the book are the interactive experiences between hosts and guests which they acknowledge can be transformative in nature but are rather neglected in the "global picture."

#### **Alexander Grit**

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#### **Reference**

Escobar, A. (2011), *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press.

#### **Further reading**

Butcher, J. and Smith, P. (2015), *Volunteer Tourism: The Lifestyle Politics of International Development*, Routledge.