



Book review

Backpacking culture and mobilities: Independent and nomadic travel, M. O'Regan (Ed.). Channel View Publications, Bristol (2023). ISBN:978-1-84541-807-6, 299 pages

Over the last 40 years significant changes have taken place in the world with impact in the tourism industry. The technological development, the emergence and spread of innovations in telecommunications, transports, accommodations, and marketing, and the (re)emergence of public health threats as COVID-19 and the manifestation of natural and anthropic hazards, introduced profound transformations into the way we travel. Backpacker tourism is not an exception.

This form of tourism is traditionally composed by a predominantly young travellers who plan and prepare their own trip with a small daily budget, travelling with backpacks on their backs, looking for direct cultural contact, spontaneity and sometimes with risk, all around the globe. Regarded as the successors of the drifters of the 1960s, backpackers cannot only be seen in the image of their predecessors, often associated with deviant behaviour and where drifting was a symptom and an expression of broader alienating forces. Today backpacking become a more complex phenomenon with backpackers revealing different motivations and behaviours, different psychographic and social characteristics and even some different aspects related to their mobility, as several published studies have revealed.

Following the contributions made by the seminal books on backpacking, published by Channel View Publications in the Tourism and Cultural Changes series, the last one on 2010, Michael O'Regan give us a fresh and critical perspective at current backpacker research including new and interesting studies on backpackers from non-western countries such as China, Indonesia or Iran.

The editor divided the book into four parts. Part 1 outlines ontological approaches and mobile methods on backpacker's research. Chapter 2 focus on a systematic literature review of backpacker research and chapter 3 discusses a particular type of mobile method for backpacker research known as go-along method.

Part 2 is dedicated to international backpacking, namely in the context of a non-western cultures. Chapter 4 analyses the motivations and constraints of Chinese backpackers known as 'Donkey friends' and chapter 5 focus the identity construction of Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe. Chapter 6 is dedicated to the family backpacking with the case of the Israeli families. Chapter 7 explores the rise and decline of Indonesian backpacking in the last decades. Chapter 8 highlight the Iranian female backpackers and the impact of their trips in the surrounding community.

Part 3 studies the backpacker socialization, hostels and learning. Chapter 9 analyses the transformation that comes with backpacking, including the negotiation of identity in the post-journey life. Chapter 10 explores the role of hostel as an important sociocultural space where backpackers perform and experience 'place' in Central America. Chapter

11 contemplates the backpacker lifestyle entrepreneurship with focus on resident perspectives on hedonistic events.

Part 4 is dedicated to concluding thoughts with future directions for backpacking and backpacking research.

In the introduction (chapter one) Michael O'Regan presents the topics discussed in the book and makes a profound reflection on backpackers' institutionalization and backpacking research in the last decades.

In the chapter 2, the author highlights the emergence of disparities and deviations in backpacker research recommending new approaches, mentioning that "people are not simply backpackers because of a hostel stay or a backpack or carrying out a prescribed role" (p.62). He presents and discusses different label extensions, different typologies, taxonomies, clusters, markets and segments of backpackers and without suggesting a proposal for operationalising the backpacker concept that could be used by the scientific community, he claims for more spatial, anthropological and ethnographic analysis of backpackers.

The third chapter deals with the development of new methods that can be used on backpacking and mobilities research. From the field experience conducted by the author, this chapter describes in detail how the process of participant observation complemented with interviews, allows the understanding and interpretation of the experiences lived by the backpackers. The go-along method permits the study of backpacking performance not only in the usual places such as the hostels or enclaves but also on the move, providing knowledge of everyday practices.

In Part 2, dedicated to international backpacking, the fourth chapter explore the motivations and constraints of 'Donkey Friends' - the term by which Chinese backpackers are known. Presenting the differences between Chinese and western backpackers, the authors study the differences in their travel behaviours, characteristics, and constraints in the context of domestic travel, analysing also the negotiation strategies to overcome these constraints. This interesting chapter presents research with a well-designed methodology and ends with the presentation of a set of relevant practical implications for various stakeholders. Chapter 5 presents an interesting analysis of the Chinese outbound backpackers with focus on their identity construction and transformation during their journeys in Europe. Using mobile ethnography, the author found that Chinese cultural influences and values bring new insights to defining or redefine backpacker values. With a limited travel budget and by practicing 'off the beaten track' avoiding Chinese mass tourists, the author conclude that Chinese backpackers also perceive backpacking as a learning journey rather than a self-searching one. In addition, this chapter also explores the Chinese backpackers' attitude towards backpacking as rite of passage, concluding that is a slow and imperceptible process for them. Not being so flexible and risk taking as their western counterparts, Chinese backpackers usually take more control of their trips and are more reluctant to interact with people outside their social group. Chapter 6 addresses the particular topic of Israeli backpacking families. Through ethnographic research the author studies the travel

motivations and patterns of Israeli families backpacking in India. Although Israeli society criticizes parents who decide to travel with their children in India, parents found an opportunity to “bring their children to the front and centre of their daily lives” (p.151). The tensions between the child’s well-being and the interests of parents are also examined with the author concluding that there is no freedom from responsibilities and the best interests of the children prevail. Challenging the boundaries of the traditional backpacking culture, this chapter introduces new insights to backpacker research.

The seventh chapter about the rise and decline of Indonesian backpacking drive us to the practices, ideology, and identity of Indonesian backpackers. The author mentions that Indonesian backpacking involves a very wide range of practices with many backpackers preferring to use travel agencies, and varying in terms of travel companionship, in travel duration or in the use of backpack. Chapter 8 is one of the most fascinating and engaging chapters of the book. The Iranian female backpackers are a new and unexplored topic in the backpacking studies. The authors look at the socialization process of Iranian female solo travellers and their travel experiences in an Islamic society revealing four dimensions of change: subjective change, intrapersonal change, interpersonal change, and community change. To female Iranian travelers, backpacking is a process of change “which starts within them, continues through intra- and interpersonal arenas, and results in causing change in the lifestyles of the people interacting with them ...” (p.193). Despite the legal and cultural constraints that women face in Iran it is remarkable how domestic backpacking emerged and developed giving to Iranian women an opportunity to travel alone, to change themselves and to change their surrounding community.

The part 3 of the book is dedicated to backpacker socialization, hotels, and learning. In chapter 9, the authors study how travel experiences from long-term independent travellers continue to shape their identities after the conclusion of their journey. Through interviews, researchers explore the impact of long-term backpacking on their values, behaviours and identities, concluding that they return home worried with consumerism, and facing some difficulties to reconnect with friends and family while they try to find a proper work-life balance. In chapter 10 the author uses a multi-sited fieldwork between 2006 and 2018 to analyse the role of hostels in Central America as a place where backpackers reinforce and extend their travelling ideology. Although backpackers spend a lot of time in hostels, the author mentions that hostelling experiences, such as hanging out with other travellers are also important to them, concluding that what goes on inside hostels is very

important to understand contemporary backpacker ideology. A different approach is given in chapter 11 where the author discusses the social, environmental and economic implications of backpacking business with focus on party tourism in Bocas del Toro, Panama. The author concludes that destination image and development is influenced by events organised by local entrepreneurs. If backpacker lifestyle entrepreneurs suggest that hedonistic events fill a market niche, other residents mention that they are concerned with destination image and with the type of tourism that is encouraged when only a small group of local entrepreneurs’ benefit.

Part 4, devoted to concluding thoughts, is exclusively composed of Chapter 12 where Michael O’Regan performs a profound and critical reflection on the world’s main current issues, presenting a set of future directions for backpacking. The chapter also explores backpacking research, namely potential research pathways and directions. The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the Climate Emergency, the increasing inequalities in housing, race, health, economics and gender, or the democratic institutions crises are some of the issues analysed from the perspective of backpacker tourism that could lead “individuals reposition themselves spatially, temporally and socially through travel and backpacking again” (p.290).

Examining contemporary backpacker culture and mobilities, this book not only presents new contributions to backpacking studies but also provides new directions for future research. Like our society, backpacker tourism has experienced profound changes in the last 40 years, and it is quite remarkable that Michael O’Regan and collaborators have managed to bring so many innovative perspectives on backpacking research. As a minor criticism, I would point at the lack of a chapter with an African perspective of backpacking.

In summary, this book is very timely and covers a wide and relevant range of issues, representing a great contribution for backpacker tourism studies. I would gladly recommend it without any hesitation to tourism students, researchers, and even to practitioners. In my perspective the book can also be useful for stakeholders and policymakers to foster and manage backpacker tourism with a contemporary perspective.

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