

Adventure and Society

Beames, S., Mackie, C. & Atencio, M. (2019)

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By Chris Loynes

When reading a new book in this field it is always a good sign when it provides new insights and leads to encounters with new ideas and writers. The authors of *Adventure and Society* have achieved this by their transdisciplinary approach, currency and broad knowledge of the relevant fields from non-traditional as well as traditional sources. As a result, this book meets its aim of providing an excellent primer for undergraduate, postgraduate and research students as well as practitioners and academics wishing to further their understanding of adventure through the lens of the social sciences. It is already on the reading lists of my modules and the desks of my research students.

The chapters take turns at explaining adventure through the lens of the current concerns in society with an eye to the historical context and global perspectives. Whilst it does suggest lines of enquiry for those interested in the idea of adventure in other societies, the book's main focus is adventure education, recreation and tourism in modern western society which, the authors suggest, is where these practices first emerged. Arguably, globalisation, a strong theme running through the book, has ensured that few places have not been touched by the western version of this concept.

All the chapters are written with clarity. They offer a nuanced, current and well-articulated examination of adventure through the relevant social and cultural theories associated with each theme. Opening chapters set the scene, explore the concept of adventure, and set this within contemporary society. The following chapters take broad themes. I found the chapters on Technology and Social Media, Equalities and Sustainability of particular value. It was helpful to have the recent literature on identity and social media applied to the outdoor setting. In the chapter on equalities, I appreciated the clarity of the definitions emphasising the difference between sex and gender and the application of this to emerging contexts such as transgender participation. The discussion on sustainability from an environmental, economic and social perspective was also mature and offered a call to arms given the seriousness of global environmental impacts. Examples drawn from the field, some of which run through several chapters, make it easy to imagine how to apply the ideas to practice and highlight key issues and concerns.

The authors acknowledge that many of the themes are interrelated. With this in mind it was disappointing to find a very thin index in which some key concepts and terms were not included.

Any book on such a broad topic makes choices about what to include or exclude. Likewise, books collating current thought on an emerging area of enquiry can highlight (by their omissions) writing and research on topics that has yet to be done.

Given the modern and western take on adventure, and the recognition by the authors of the global spread of many practices, I missed a fuller analysis of the contribution that neo-colonial and transcultural theories make in the understanding of the movement and transformation of adventure between cultures and societies and the ethical issues this can raise. The (mis)appropriation of another culture's practices has an impact on the culture of origin, the activity and any changes in practice or meaning as it is transformed by the relocation, and on the landscape and culture of the destination. These impacts can reflect wider power relations and trends in society. They also provide ways in which diverse cultures come together, more of an internationalist than a globalisation agenda perhaps.

The authors focus on educational and tourism forms of adventure to, in my view, the detriment of recreational approaches (one of the words missing from the index). This is exacerbated by a focus in the text on what it is adventurers are escaping from, rather than what they might be escaping to. *Adventure and Society* explores adventures as episodic interventions set amongst an everyday life of home and work. However, for some adventurers, home and work become episodic interventions in a life of meaning and purpose structured around adventure. Some regard this as an infantilization of the adult whilst others interpret it as a rejection of mainstream society.

This has led to significant gaps concerning, for example, the role of adventure in the relationship between the individual and the community (as opposed to society) touched on in chapter three but not developed further. For example, in the chapter on identity, more time might have been spent discussing the role of adventure in personal transformation from youth to adult. This is a major declared role of adventure for young people as they separate from society in order to allow a fledgling adult identity to emerge. They then return to the community a step further on in their maturation; a process importantly acknowledged by peers, families and communities alike awaiting the return. The part played by adventure landscapes and adventure communities in forming temporary spaces for the performance of new and emerging identities and early experiences of agency and responsibility are lost in a narrative perhaps overly focussed on individualism and adventure spaces as unrelated to wider trends in society.

There is also a growing and valuable literature on the role played by these temporary outdoor communities in enabling progressive trends in society to be acknowledged explored and supported away from the overt struggle in mainstream society, women's and workers' rights; and gay relationships to name a few.

This makes it difficult to discuss the part played by adventure in society, for example, its role in the development of the citizen, a major agenda of 19th and 20th century adventure recreational and educational initiatives. Likewise, the dialectic between the anarchic narratives of adventure as escape from conformity and the contrasting

institutional celebration of feats of adventure as achievements of and for the State is unexplored. Yet such tensions between adventure and society are captured by significant events such as the first ascent of Everest, the announcement of which was held back so that it could be released on the coronation day of Elizabeth II. Nor are these simply historical aspects of the adventure story. The intention of Scouting and Outward Bound to contribute to the development of people fit to conform as citizens, soldiers and leaders are now resurging as a renewed interest in character building enters the policy rhetoric. This important role played by adventure in society is lost in the structure of the text. A concluding chapter capturing these larger themes would have been a valuable addition.

The book reflects much current literature and rhetoric around adventure by conflating the idea of adventure with 'uncertainty of outcome' and 'risk taking'. The discussion of risk is perhaps limited to some degree by a focus on the distinction between real and perceived risk. Whilst important, the debate over risk in society in general and around adventure activities in particular is also informed by the distinction between objective and subjective risk clearly articulated Mortlock (1984). Perhaps a more nuanced understanding of adventure might have been constructive. Whilst this does reflect the field and recent literature, I would argue that an older literature has not lost its validity. An opportunity has been missed to broaden the concept of adventure to include possibility (Bowles, 1996), curiosity and exploration (Hodgkin, 1985), play (Huizinga, 1949), aesthetics (Drasdo, 1972) and the unfamiliar (Becker, 2008) as motivations with societal relevance.

I value this book for its unequivocal moral position and hopefulness for the positive role that can be played by adventure in society. At least for these academics, adventure has not been an excuse to escape from thinking about or engaging in society. The result is a stimulating and thought-provoking read.

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