

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

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Volume 34, Issue 1, pp. 187-191

DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v34i1.715

www.frontiersjournal.org



John J. Bodinger De Uriarte and Michael A. Di Giovine, editors. Study Abroad and the Quest for an Anti-Tourism Experience. Lexington Books, 2021. 364 pages.

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Abstract

Study Abroad and the Quest for an Anti-Tourism Experience is a welcome addition to literatures on tourism, higher education, and social and economic sustainability. It considers the relationship between study abroad and tourism, and examines how study abroad is affected by its position within the neoliberal university system. Study abroad is approached as a form of mobility that has some commonalities with tourism, yet is itself also a form of anti-tourism by virtue of its emphasis on ethical engagement. Although most of the contributions are by anthropologists, the book is resolutely interdisciplinary. Chapters are data-rich and theoretically sophisticated; many offer practical insights that will be useful to university international officers as well as faculty who lead study abroad programs themselves. The volume will also appeal to scholars in the field of tourism, in particular those with an interest in the emerging subfield of the anthropology of study abroad.

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Accepted date: 19 April 2022

Abstract in Italian

Il volume collettaneo *Study Abroad and the Quest for an Anti-Tourism Experience* offre un apporto significativo all'avanzamento delle ricerche su temi quali il turismo, l'istruzione universitaria e la sostenibilità in campo sociale ed economico. I contributi pongono al centro la relazione fra il turismo e i programmi di mobilità studentesca internazionale (*short-term study abroad*), analizzando in che misura essi risultino condizionati dal sistema universitario neoliberista. I programmi di studio all'estero sono considerati un tipo di mobilità internazionale che presenta alcune affinità con il turismo; allo stesso tempo, tuttavia, possono caratterizzarsi anche come forma di "anti-turismo" laddove favoriscano l'impegno etico verso la comunità ospitante. Sebbene la maggior parte dei saggi inclusi siano opera di antropologi, il volume si colloca decisamente in una prospettiva interdisciplinare. Ciascuna ricerca risulta ben fondata su evidenze e modelli teorici raffinati; alcuni contributi indicano suggerimenti concreti tanto ai funzionari che si occupano di formazione terziaria internazionale quanto ai docenti che gestiscono in proprio questi programmi. L'opera è di sicuro interesse, inoltre, per gli studiosi di scienze turistiche, soprattutto per chi conduce ricerche nella disciplina emergente dell'antropologia dei programmi di studio all'estero a breve termine.

Keywords:

Study abroad, Education abroad, Tourism

Study Abroad and the Quest for an Anti-Tourism Experience is an edited collection that makes theoretically and pedagogically significant contributions to literatures on tourism, higher education, and sustainability. It commences with a question: "How can we think productively about tourism — especially student tourism — within the contexts of study-abroad programs?" (1). The volume provides answers that speak to the interests of practitioners and researchers. Many contributors are anthropologists; however, chapters by scholars of literature, social work, and ethnomusicology are also included. Their essays present original research results on study abroad-related topics as well as personal views based upon experience as program coordinators or leaders.

The volume is premised on the supposition — clarified in the editors' robust introductory essay — that it is timely to reflect upon how study abroad functions both as a component of the neoliberal university system and as a variable in global tourist trends. Greer and Schweitzer, in their chapter "Two Weeks to Global Citizenship? The Problems, Paradoxes, and Successes of

Running a Short-Term Travel Course,” remind readers that “The belief that study-abroad programs are somehow compromised by a link with consumer-based tourism overlooks the glaring fact that participation in capitalist practice is not something one chooses to opt into or out of — it is always/already present” (70). Contributors reject the argument that study abroad and tourism are unrelated activities, and propose nuanced approaches better to understand that relationship. Study abroad/away is treated as a form of mobility that converges with and diverges from other varieties of cross-border movement. Editors and chapter authors draw upon diverse theoretical approaches to make their points, including from works by Fredrik Barth, Edward Bruner, Erving Goffman, Noel Salazar, Victor Turner, John Urry, and others. They explore various dimensions of how student engagement with host cultures (including volunteerism and service-learning) figures on a spectrum that connects traditional tourism and “anti-tourism.” Study abroad is thus treated both as a kind of tourism and as a kind of ethical response to tourism that is itself a form of anti-tourism.

The term anti-tourism may evoke images of mass protests sometimes characterized as “anti-tourist.” The editors clarify that “... this book focuses on anti-tourism forms of visitation that are conceived of as an antidote to tourism, especially within the frame of study abroad” (15). In the chapter “Between Tourism and Anti-Tourism: The Ethical Implications of Study Abroad,” Di Giovine suggests, for example, that anti-tourism “...is not a movement as much as it is a historically situated set of ethical forms of visitation ... [that] has been around for a long time ...” (283). With forethought and planning, study abroad, “as part tourism, and part ethical response to tourism,” can “craft a more just engagement” with others (316).

The editors underscore that this is not a “how-to” or “best practices” book (3). Nevertheless, individual chapters present data and offer insights that will be helpful to practitioners. Ascione, in “Teaching and Learning Food and Sustainability in Italy: Betwixt and Beyond Touristic Consumption,” discusses how her experience of teaching U.S. students led her to reflect upon cross-cultural teaching styles and her own classroom practice (235). Some authors comment frankly upon frustrations – both on the part of students and their hosts – that arise from very different preparations and expectations regarding individual and program goals. An example is Coffman and Prazak’s discussion of “some of the problems that can emerge in well-intentioned volunteer projects

abroad” (60) in “‘Doing Good’ and Doing it Quickly in East African Study Abroad Programs.”

Study abroad program leaders wear many hats. Study abroad offices also serve many constituencies. Individuals who advocate for study abroad at their universities must navigate the requirements of safety and risk offices, respond to institutional mandates to produce global citizens (sometimes minus benchmarks), attempt to ensure that participants will be physically comfortable and psychologically at ease, respond to parents’ concerns and earn positive program evaluations, all while trying to craft a “transformative experience.” Barkin addresses some specific challenges in his chapter “The Imperative of Access in Short-term Study Abroad: Provider Agencies, Liminality, and the Mediation of Cultural Difference.” He suggests that some study abroad service providers “pathologize disconnection” (119) from home while prioritizing “safety and comfort in the affective sense,” even as such efforts put at risk the likelihood of students achieving an “experiential engagement” with cultural diversity (135).

Among the book’s strengths is its persuasive case for how the practice of ethnographic field research assists students in engaging with diversity. For example, Greer and Schweitzer in their aforementioned chapter discuss the challenge of assessing students’ ethnographic work. Some chapters are less precise regarding how ethnographic research techniques were taught and what specifically students were asked to do in the field. Thorough discussions of these points are always welcome, however, because the particulars of ethnographic methods are often more familiar to anthropologists than some others.

While not intended as a criticism, given the influence that service providers increasingly exert on the form and content of study abroad experiences, it would have been interesting to have included a chapter by an individual active in the industry to have captured a different point of view. Too, given the visibility that this volume will garner among anthropologists drawn to the promise inherent in the nascent subfield of the anthropology of study abroad, readers might have benefitted from greater discussion by the editors regarding ways in which that subfield could be nurtured and how the work of scholars and practitioners within it could achieve the greatest impact.

This volume is highly recommended for international education professionals and faculty program leaders. Paired readings of selected chapters

followed by group discussion would be a worthwhile activity in international offices that seek to reimagine the future of study abroad in ways that enhance students' understandings of ethical responsibility, promote deeper engagement with diversity, and contribute to social and economic sustainability. As Bodinger De Uriarte aptly points out, "... the [COVID] pandemic does provide an opportunity for some structural and delivery rethinking" (334). Material presented in the book will also interest scholars in tourism studies and in the anthropology of education.

Author Biography

Anne Schiller, George Mason University, is a professor of anthropology. The results of her fieldwork on social change in Florence are the subject of her most recent books, *Merchants in the City of Art: Work, Identity, and Social Change in a Florentine Neighborhood* (University of Toronto Press 2016), and *Commercianti a Firenze. Identità e Cambiamento nel Quartiere di San Lorenzo* (Carocci editore 2016). Her current ethnographic project, based in Lecce, concerns the role of informal social groups in building multinational social networks and increasing intercultural understanding.