
Kees Bastmeijer*

The central theme of this book is cruise tourism in the Polar Regions. The editors of this book formulate the following central question in the book’s first chapter: “can cruise activities in the polar regions ever be synonymous with environmental and social sustainability?” (p. 7). The question is very relevant in view of the rapid and continuing growth of the polar tourism industry. As correctly stated by the editors on the cover of the book “[t]he industry has moved beyond its infancy and is now entering a mature phase, with increased numbers and types of vessels, more demanding routes, and more regular and predictable patterns of activity”.

The structure of the book fits well to this central theme of sustainability: all three perspectives of the “sustainability triangle” receive substantial attention in the first three parts of the book:

- the market dimension (Part I), with discussions on the polar yacht cruising (Mark B. Orams), nuclear icebreaker cruising in the Arctic (Robert K. Headland), and cruising in the Antarctic (Arthur Asa Berger);
- the human (social) dimension (Part II), with discussions on safety, security and social issues on polar cruises (Ross A. Klein), the relationships between tourists, ethics and sustainability (Valerie Sheppard), and the educational program “students on ice” (Geoff Green);
- the environmental dimension (Part III), with discussions on environmental pollution and reported violations of relevant regulations by cruise lines in the Alaska region (Michael Lück), cruise ship activities in the Canadian Arctic and problems with data collection and monitoring (Emma J. Stewart, Dianne Draper and Jackie Dawson), and the implications of climate change for polar cruise tourism (Machiel Lamers and Bas Amelung).

* Kees Bastmeijer is professor of nature conservation and water law at the Tilburg Law School, Tilburg University, The Netherlands (Email: c.j.bastmeijer@uvt.nl).
Different from what one might expect from this division into separate dimensions, many individual chapters do not take an “one dimensional approach”: while focusing on particular issues and limiting the scope of discussions (e.g., yacht cruising, tourist perspectives, or practices in a particular polar region), most chapters discuss various dimensions of sustainability. A fourth part discusses policy and governance issues. The perspectives of stakeholders on the governance of Antarctic cruise tourism are discussed (Daniela Liggett, Alison McIntosh, Anna Thompson, Bryan Storey and Neil Gilbert), as well as the port readiness planning in the Arctic (with a focus on Newfoundland and Labrador; John S. Hull and Simon Milne) and the sustainability of cruise tourism in Alaska (Greg Ringer). In the final chapter of the book the editors included their concluding remarks (see below).

Most contributions have been written by academics involved in tourism studies. For almost all chapters the use of written sources is comprehensive and a number of chapters report on the outcome of empirical research. In view of the high societal relevance of the book’s central theme, it is also positive that the academic character of the book does not limit the easy readability of the book for policy makers and interested persons who are not experts on polar issues. A few authors are themselves involved in polar cruise tourism. On the one hand this may limit the open and critical attitude that is important in conducting research; on the other hand this involvement and personal experiences ensure that the information that is provided on developments in the polar cruising industry is up to date and comprehensive. This is a strong point of this book: I am not aware of any other book that contains so much information on polar cruise tourism.

The concluding chapter summarizes the main conclusions of all chapters and identifies a number of cross-cutting themes for further research: market change, climate change, monitoring and education. Indeed, the book convincingly shows the importance of these themes for future research on and improved governance of polar cruise tourism and the editors formulate a substantial number of important research questions in this final chapter. Although this is very valuable, the opportunity to answer the central question of the book is not fully used: “can cruise activities in the polar regions ever be synonymous with environmental and social sustainability?” The wording “ever be” makes it difficult to formulate a clear answer to this question; however, the chapters in this book constitute sufficient arguments to conclude that at least currently, the cruising industry in both the Arctic and Antarctic cannot be qualified as “sustainable”. Various authors stress the substantial increase of cruise tourism, while “there appears to be little effort to limit the size and number of ships” (p. 66 and p. 217). Particularly in the Arctic, there are social concerns related to visitor numbers that are sometimes 10 times the number of inhabitants of polar communities (p. 66).