

Leisure myths and mythmaking.

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Leisure Myths and Mythmaking **Edited by Brett Lashua, Simon Baker and Tryo D. Glover**

Leisure Myths and Mythmaking, edited by Brett Lashua, Simon Baker and Tryo D. Glover, is an insightful collection of essays which address the “absence presence” (p. 2) of myth and mythmaking in leisure studies. Comprising of eight chapters and an introduction, the book highlights the complex relationship between myth and reality, and what myths “do” for places and communities. While making an important contribution to a gap in the literature concerning myth and leisure, the book also contributes more widely to our understanding of the role of myth within placemaking, subcultures, social practice, and tourism development.

The edited collection begins by delineating what a myth is and how myths and mythmaking are positioned in leisure. This is an obvious but important starting point for a term that may become entangled with aspects of folklore, fiction, and stories more broadly. As the authors articulate, “myths perpetuate a popularly held belief that is false or untrue” (p. 2). However, as they go on to discuss, myths also play an important role in meaning-making, and through social relations may become a reified way of understanding our world. The first two papers examine the origin myths of two sports, mountain biking (Cherrington) and ice skating (Thurber). In Cherrington’s chapter, the history of the “Repack Group” and their role in the origin myth of mountain biking is explored. Adopting an Actor Network Perspective, Cherrington highlights how the ‘heroic’ myth surrounding the Repack Group displaces the more complex relationship between human and non-human forces that led to the emergence of the sport over time. Thurber also examines the misunderstanding and misinterpretation that have informed the origin story of ice skating. The romanticised myth of ice skating, Thurber argues, followed a misinterpretation of Old Norse literature which helped to reinforce the social status and masculinity of the sport “elevating skating to an activity suited to a privileged class” (p. 29). Both chapters reinforce notions of myth as a “(re)interpretation of the past “as it really was”” (p. 8) – not unlike those studies that have explored historical re-enactments and their sometimes (re)interpretations of the past (see e.g. Power Conti, 2022; Tschida, 2022; Wyatt, Leask & Barron, 2023).

Chapters three and four explore the relationship between mythmaking and events. Simons invites us into the world of the fantasy event “Elfia” where the social practices of participants are examined. Engagement with the mythical, Simons argues, presents opportunities to create extraordinary experiences for participants at the event and in their everyday lives through performance, expression of competencies and immersion. Contrary to much of the event scholarship, Simons concludes that rather than completely escaping reality, festivals, like Elfia, provide opportunities for the extraordinary to spill over into everyday life, and vice versa (p. 52). In chapter four, Gursoy also considers the role of play and performance in the mythmaking practices of a Turkish Spring Celebration event, Hıdırellez. In contrast to Elfia, the Hıdırellez celebration draws upon local tradition and sacred ritual which are deeply embedded in the community, environment, and seasonality of the area. As Gursoy illustrates through a qualitative approach, the practices and traditions embedded in the event are important for “creating a sense of community”, “social inclusion”

and “cultural identity” (p.65). However, the commodification of the Hidirellez celebration also poses challenges for the authenticity and value of the event for future generations – an issue seen across cultural and heritage tourism, as well as dark tourism (see e.g. Silverman, 2011; Virgili et al., 2018).

In the fifth paper, Harmon examines the popular myth surrounding the emergence of Rock ‘n Roll and Robert Johnson selling his soul to the devil. This chapter offers an insightful discussion of the life and history of Robert Johnson as both a ‘man’ and a ‘myth’, disentangling both while also considering how some of Johnsons’ lifestyle choices may have stoked the myth that grew around him. Underpinning the discussion through the lens of deviant leisure, Harmon then considers the influence of Johnson’s myth on Rock ‘n Roll music and fan communities. Drawing upon Rojek (1999), Harmon concludes that “the dark is just as present, and important, as the light in our lives” (p. 76) arguing that the study of ‘dark’ and ‘deviant’ aspects of leisure is important for understanding identity construction and meaning making. This paper will certainly contribute to the growing literature surrounding the ample themes and topics within dark tourism studies.

In the final three chapters, the book focuses on myths, placemaking and storytelling. Rich (Chapter 6) draws on fieldwork across three different communities and ice hockey events in Canada. By focusing on rural communities, Rich considers how practices associated with the carnivalesque including subversion, renewal, profanity, and collective laughter contribute to mythmaking during rural sport events. Rural communities, Rich argues, are uniquely positioned to engage with these practices in a way that urban communities may find hard to achieve. While providing opportunities for meaning making and regeneration, Rich also considers the misunderstandings about rurality that may emerge in these contexts. In Chapter Seven, Calvi and Hover consider storytelling and mythmaking in tourist destinations. They draw upon two storytelling/placemaking projects: the first- *Becoming Vincent*, a project about Vincent van Gogh, and the second- *Crossroads*, a heritage project about WWII. The authors provide insight into the story construction and delivery of the two projects reflecting on how the different storytelling tools adopted helped to transform two different narratives into myths for tourism purposes. Adapting these tools based on the types of stories being told, and the communities involved, helped to provide a “lens through which to see better inside it and reflect on the universal values of life represented in myth itself” (p.103). The final chapter by Moran and Berbarry provides a critical perspective on “revitalized” urban spaces unpacking the myth associated with ‘positive’ placemaking practices. Through a close examination of the case of Goudies Lane in Ontario, Canada, the authors argue that “placemaking often engages in settler colonial practices that ignore opportunities for re-Indigenization of urban spaces” (p. 107), thus benefiting settler communities and often displacing Indigenous and under-represented peoples. This paper offers a significant contribution to decolonization studies as Moran and Berbarry conclude by suggesting that a different way of thinking about placemaking as “*simultaneous unmaking*” (p. 117) in practice and scholarship may help to increase awareness of settler colonialisation and gentrification, and inevitably help to dispel the ‘myth’ of placemaking as positive urban revitalization.

In its totality this book makes a compelling case for the value of myth in contemporary society. Through an exploration of myth and mythmaking in the leisure industries the editors contribute to several pertinent issues in existing and emerging academic scholarship. Firstly,

it addresses a gap and builds upon limited research that recognises the relationship between leisure studies and myth (such as, Rojek, 2005; Stewart, 1999). This is important because as several of the authors in this Issue recognise (Chapter 3, 4, 5 and 6), mythmaking and the social practices associated with myth may hold value and importance for communities. As such, these studies contribute to a wider body of research recognising the value of stories, folklore, and tradition in maintaining cultural identity, belongingness, and social cohesion (such as Amoamo, 2011; Bird, 2002; Roque, 2022). However, as other scholars have discerned, the commodification, reification, and reinterpretation of stories (Devine, 2017; Hunter and Ironside, 2023; Lőrincz, 2021), may also generate misunderstandings and misrepresentation for people and place. Papers presented by Cherrington, Thurber, and Rich offer a focused contribution towards our understanding of these issues in the context of mythmaking practices in leisure. Additionally, the final chapters in this book offer perspectives into the role of myth and placemaking. Thus, they contribute to our understanding of mythmaking as a tool for placemaking and challenge our preconceptions of placemaking as positive rejuvenation.

Leisure Myths and Mythmaking makes an important contribution to knowledge in several areas. The introduction proposes that this issue will address “what myths do”. Through the lens of leisure, the editors and authors go some way in achieving this and implicate further interesting questions. How can the value of mythmaking be utilised sensitively and authentically in a contemporary world? Do some forms of leisure rely on myth and mythmaking to be ‘successful’? And how should we reflect, as scholars, on the myths we are perpetuating in leisure studies and beyond? A significant strength of this book is the scope of case studies drawn upon which include events, music, sport, and tourism. This provides enjoyable reading and will undoubtedly increase the readership of this text for those with varying leisure interests. The range of methodological approaches presented also offers a useful insight into the possibilities for analysing myth and mythmaking in leisure. The book would benefit from some concluding remarks from the editors. As the text is published from a Special Issue feature in *Leisure Sciences* this may have been beyond the scope of what was possible for publication. However, it does feel like there is an opportunity missed to identify cross-cutting themes and reflect on areas for further research and development. Furthermore, while the geographical spread of the book is good, there is an opportunity to represent a wider global perspective. Despite these observations, *Leisure Myths and Mythmaking* offers a valuable contribution to academic scholarship in leisure studies and beyond. The chapters in isolation, and the book, will prove useful reading for students and researchers. Hopefully, this book will provide a springboard to address the “absent presence” of myth and mythmaking in leisure scholarship.

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