



Richard Ivan Jobs. *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 360 pp. \$35.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-226-46203-5.

Reviewed by Igor Tchoukarine

Published on H-Travel (July, 2018)

Commissioned by Evan Ward (Brigham Young University)

Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe is an engaging monograph that not only fills an important gap in the historiography of travel and tourism, but will also be of great interest to scholars of European integration, mobility, and youth culture. The title of the book's first chapter, "Youth Mobility and the Making of Europe," encapsulates Richard Ivan Jobs's main argument that backpackers' transnational mobility directly contributed to the "social and cultural integration of Europe" (p. 263). In the author's words, the "postwar transnational practice of youth travel helped to 'Europeanize' Western Europe and Western Europeans through the interpenetration of a circumscribed geographic space that was increasingly seen to stand for Europe as a whole" (p. 57). Here, Jobs is in dialogue with the work of historians such as Wolfram Kaiser and Kiran Klaus Patel, who examine the numerous linkages between European identity, collaborations among Europeans in international organizations, and mobility. However, he brings a distinctive and original focus to the question with his "bottom-up" approach to youth as "historical actors shaping the world in their own right" (p. 258).[1]

In chapter 1, Jobs examines a vast array of initiatives and organizations that aimed to foster youth travel of all kinds and to encourage understanding among European people and nations.

These range from the International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF), founded in 1932, to the so-called Mud Angels, groups of young European volunteers who helped clean up Florence after a devastating flood in 1966. The links between travel and politics took on particular importance for the post-1945 Franco-German rapprochement, as chapter 2, "Journeys of Reconciliation," explains. After the rather inconclusive 1951 youth rally at Loreley in West Germany, Jobs explains, the Franco-German Youth Office (founded in 1963) was more successful at supporting bilateral efforts at promoting travel. Nevertheless, in both cases, the "governments sought to harness the proliferation of international youth travel to serve their national interests of reconciliation and integration through a social and cultural dynamic that rewarded grassroots initiative with intergovernmental support" (p. 61). To support this point, Jobs also examines student foreign exchanges, which often served political objectives—at least on paper. Indeed, Jobs's focus is not limited to the "backpackers" in the book's title; it also encompasses these students, 1970s hippies and their "open-ended drifterism," and others.

Chapter 3, entitled "Youth Movements," focuses on youth mobility in the second half of the 1960s, a moment during which cultural and social protests upended the status quo in Western soci-

eties. Following analyses of the Dutch Provos in Amsterdam and many other protests by young activists, the author focuses on cross-border mobility during the Paris events of 1968—for example, travel by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and other students. At the time, the French state tried to restrain Cohn-Bendit's mobility, as Great Britain did in the case of Tariq Ali. Both student leaders were portrayed as “foreign” and thus dangerous and “undesirable” by the media and many others (including the French Communist Party, which condemned Cohn-Bendit as a German Jew). On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the Prague Spring galvanized youth travel to Czechoslovakia in 1968, as young sympathizers from Europe and beyond (Australia and America, for instance), curious about the Czechoslovak experiment, met in the Bohemian capital. However, the Warsaw Pact military invasion of August 21, 1968, brought an abrupt end to this, and the borders were gradually closed. In the late 1960s, in both East and West, Jobs argues, there was an “emphasis of those in power on ‘foreignness’ and ‘undesirables’ with the stricter application of border controls intended specifically to limit and contain the young” (p. 121). Despite these administrative obstacles, youth traveled in greater numbers, and one unforeseen consequence of “the ease and frequency with which middle-class young people in the 1960s traveled to cities such as Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Paris, and Prague” is that it “created interpersonal solidarities that were crucial to the formation of movements that challenged national demarcations of power” (p. 132). According to Jobs, mobility across Europe and the Iron Curtain generated a “diffuse sense of generational solidarity grounded in lifestyle and antiestablishment attitudes” (p. 131), which in turn created a European community of its own.

Unlike the first three chapters, the fourth, “Continental Drifters,” deals more explicitly with the practice of backpacking in general and its social impact on youth. The time period (1950s-80s) of Jobs's focus is crucial, as youth mobility under-

went significant changes in these years; notably, it was from the mid-1960s to the 1970s that “youth travel in Europe was transformed into the iconic cultural form of backpacking that we understand it to be today” (p. 140). Drawing on travel accounts, essays, guidebooks, films, newspaper articles, and interviews and analyzing how these narratives impacted youth travel, Jobs critically examines transportation, lodging issues, and the social backgrounds of backpackers as well as drug use, sex, gender, and the narrativity of self. “While independent youth travel was gendered male, study abroad, by contrast,” explains Jobs, “had a strong female cast” (p. 182). Yet a normative masculine ethos defined independent youth travel, as is characterized by the lack of published travel accounts by female authors. Understandably, given their numerical and economic importance, Jobs talks about young Americans in Europe, but he also draws examples from the Canadian and Australian contexts and almost always pays attention to the wider implications of his arguments and examples. If at times the chapter's evidence can seem anecdotal, this is the legitimate result of the very nature of the population under study.

The book's last chapter, “East of the Wall, South of the Sea,” focuses on the place of music among youth travelers during the Cold War. While geopolitical realities shaped people's mobility, Jobs also stresses the Iron Curtain's porosity in terms of both cultural influence and physical movements across Western and Eastern Europe (true to the book's global approach, this discussion also includes Europe's peripheries: North Africa, the Near East, and beyond). In this respect, he convincingly underscores the often overlooked importance of “the connection between the cultural exchange of music and the movement of people” (p. 244), even if much has been written on dissidence and music.

While the link with Jobs's argument about Europeanism may appear thinner in this last chap-

ter, the conclusion, entitled “Rights of Passage,” brings Europe back to the fore. Although European programs promoting youth mobility were set in motion only in the 1980s, mobility—with the Erasmus educational exchange program, the Schengen zone, and Brexit (with its consequences for travel and labor)—has come to define, to a certain extent, what Europe represents as a social community. Yet backpacking’s twenty-first-century reality is thoroughly different. “Europe,” Jobs reminds us, “[has] been decentered as the concentrated locale of backpacking, and Europeans [are] no longer the overwhelming majority of backpackers. Thus the European character of backpacking has been diluted, and its association with Europe has weakened” (p. 255).

Richard Ivan Jobs’s book is a tour de force, both methodologically and conceptually. The fact that he worked with documents from “roughly forty archives, libraries, and institutes in eight countries and five languages” (p. 267) is remarkable, but more importantly, Jobs has written a very convincing history of youth mobility and Europeanism from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. His scope in doing so is broad. He skillfully discusses migration, mobility, and border regimes as well as politics, music, social questions, and matters of gender. At the same time, he does not limit himself to Western Europe, but also engages the United States, Central and Southeastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and even the Middle East and Asia.

Note

[1]. Wolfram Kaiser and Kiran Klaus Patel, “Multiple Connections in European Co-operation: International Organizations, Policy Ideas, Practices and Transfers, 1967–92,” *European Review of History: Revue européenne d’histoire* 24, no. 3 (2017): 337–57; and Kiran Klaus Patel, “Where and When Was Europe? Europeanness and Its Relationship to Migration,” *National Identities* 15, no. 1 (2013): 21–32.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-travel>

Citation: Igor Tchoukarine. Review of Jobs, Richard Ivan. *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe*. H-Travel, H-Net Reviews. July, 2018.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=52795>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.