

Albert Postma

“The future ain’t what it used to be”

While I am writing this editorial it is mid-December. In the Northeast of the USA it is 27°C, the North of England is suffering from frequent floodings, and the Alps are completely green, except for a few glaciers. The oil prices have been decreasing for some time now. The fast economic growth in China seems to have come to an end. Terrorist attacks cause death and destruction. Migrants from the Middle East are spreading across Europe. December, unavoidably a moment to reflect on the developments we are going through.

If we look ahead, we will be confronted with the consequences of the UN Global Climate Treaty (European Commission, 2015) and with the possible outcomes of the peace negotiations about the situation in Syria that will be held from January 2016 (UN News Centre, 2015). A continued strong increase of the world population is anticipated by the World Economic Forum (2015), with a population explosion in Central Africa. Most of the developed world is expected to experience solid growth of the economy after recovery of the financial crisis, with the big cities as the major powerhouses (Oxford Economics, 2015). PWC (2015) expects a further development of the sharing economy because of the colliding of several megatrends: technological breakthroughs, resource scarcity, rapid urbanization and demographic shifts. Gartner (2015) foresees a dramatic rise of smart machines and autonomous devices that will affect business practice and consumer behavior. ANVR and Cap Gemini (2015) argue that the traveler of 2025 will highly value personal advice during all phases of the customer journey to boost the ultimate holiday experience.

With many of these and other developments that are relevant for tourism, it remains unclear to what direction they will unfold and what the possible consequences for tourism could be. Futures Studies and Scenario Planning offer a valuable approach to frame such uncertainties and to transfer them into action with which governments and businesses can prepare for what might come. So, with an increasing level of complexity and uncertainty in today’s world it might not come as a surprise that the interest for the approach of futures studies and scenario planning is increasing, which is nicely illustrated by for example *Het Financiële Dagblad* (2015).

The European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI), established in 2010 at the instigation of representatives of the leisure and tourism industry, has completed a range of scenario studies for the leisure and tourism industry during the past six years. For example for the events industry, for visitor attractions, for the water sports business, for tourist regions, for travel businesses, for city centers, for the accommodation business, for the integration of coastal defense and recreation, for the camping and caravanning business, for municipalities and for the hospitality industry. Currently the ETFI is cooperating with the Dutch national Centre of Expertise in Leisure, Tourism and Hospitality in a major project on the pressure of tourism on major city centers across Europe.

In the highly competitive market of tourism journals, ETFI decided to establish a tourism journal with a specific focus on the future. With this journal ETFI wants to create a platform and a knowledge base for scholars, practitioners and students by providing research articles, viewpoint papers, trend articles and reviews of books and conferences with regard to futures thinking.

The current issue includes four research articles, three viewpoint papers, one trend paper and two book reviews.

Research articles

In her paper “Can Tourism Confidence Index improve tourism demand forecasts” Croce explores the link between consumer confidence and economic decisions. She investigates benefits in short-term forecast accuracy that can be achieved by integrating the UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index with statistical forecasts.

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Oskam examines the development of AirBnB and its implications for both the conventional accommodation sector and the local community in “Airbnb: the future of networked hospitality business”. Oskam discusses how AirBnB’s appeal has inspired the accommodation industry with new concepts and cross-overs, and how local governments find themselves confronted with several issues that call for action.

In “Past, present and future of tourist tracking”, Thimm asserts that visualizing movement patterns is useful for the design of tourism offers and products, for tourism planning and for forecasting tourism flows. She sketches the development of tourist tracking and tourist tracking software and illustrates how movement patterns of visitors at Lake Constance in Germany were visualized by combining three methods: GPS-loggers, survey and a tracking app.

In the fourth research paper Nalmpantis adds to the central theme of accessibility of the special issue of the *Journal of Tourism* (Issue 1.3, 2015). He discusses the successful implementation of the MEDRA project to show how accessible tourism was used for tourism development in the regions of Drama in Greece and Mersin in Turkey. The author claims that the project approach could be useful for other regions in the Eastern Mediterranean with similar characteristics.

Viewpoints and trend papers

De Visser-Amundsen shares her views on the trend of polarization in consumer choices and behavior in “‘Chill or thrill’: the impact of the ‘polarity paradox’ on hospitality”. She discusses how this paradox induces a new approach to market segmentation and product offering, and challenges tourism and hospitality businesses to balance utopian white, chilling and fairy tale like experiences with dystopian, thrilling and dark experiences to create meaning and transformational experiences.

In her viewpoint paper “Accessible tourism: the golden key in the future for the specialized travel agencies”, Baran underlines the need for accessible tourism. She presents ideas about what specialized travel agencies could do to make Turkey more attractive to tourists with disabilities.

“Planning an accessible expo 2020 within Dubai’s 5 star hotel industry from legal and ethical perspectives” is a paper in which Morris shares her views on accessibility laws in the UAE and specifically in Dubai. In anticipation of the EXPO 2020, she argues that a revised yet viable and comprehensive regulatory scheme is needed, and she presents some ideas of how this could be accomplished.

Futurist Yeoman addresses the change in food and tourism and claims food tourism to be one of the major representations of today’s tourism. He identifies and discusses five driving forces that will shape the discourses of food tourism during the years to come.

Book reviews

This issue contains two book reviews. Schänzel comments on “Foodies and Food Tourism”. With regard to the future perspective she states that the authors highlight pointers and trends, acknowledge the increasing pressure on finite resources and discuss the need for food production and food tourism to adapt to changes in environmental factors, for example changes in food preferences and climate change. Oskam reviews “Futurevision. Scenarios for the world in 2040”, which is presented by the authors as “the new classic”. The authors present four scenarios about the moral consequences of disruptions in people’s lives and how they were constructed, and transformational strategies to anticipate them.

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Further reading

Winkeljohann, N. (2015), *Colliding Megatrends: The Sharing Economy*, PWC, Frankfurt.