

Conference report

Stephan Bingemer

Stephan Bingemer is based at the Institute of Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (ITTH), Heilbronn University of Applied Sciences, Heilbronn, Germany.

Tourism Futures Convention 2023: value creation in times of change

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Looking at the world, we are confronted with a multitude of changes (Prayag, 2023). Politically, after the end of the Cold War, we see that trends such as de-globalization and nationalism are re-entering the political arena. New global players, such as China and India, are challenging Western countries' status quo regarding economic growth, leading to a new segmentation of the world. Wars such as the Russo-Ukrainian War (Pandey and Kumar, 2023) or the Israel-Hamas conflict are contrasted by previous times of relative peace. Moreover, we see liberal positions challenged by autocratic regimes. The distribution of wealth is drifting apart in many countries. In the tech domain, digital giants have formed, giving enormous power into the hands of few. And with science calling to anticipate climate change, mankind is confronted with its potential extinction. Not to forget the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shown the world how quickly a system perceived as stable can tip. All of these global changes have a strong influence on the tourism and hospitality agenda. The convention motto "Value Creation in Times of Change" has therefore been well selected. The Tourism Futures Convention 2023 was organized around four sessions, that were carefully chosen.

Session 1: our approach to Tourism Futures needs to be an activist approach

The first session was presented by Ian Yeoman, Professor of Disruption, Innovation and New Phenomena in Hospitality and Tourism at NHL Stenden and Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Tourism Futures. His presentation was organized around gaining foresight and growing an activist spirit as a source of value creation. He demonstrated how Science Fiction predicted events, that have later come true. He formulated a call for more foresight as well as a paradigm shift in explaining Tourism Futures to the tourism and hospitality industry community.

Session 2: creating value through start-ups and tech

The second session was presented by Sven Sterzenbach, Professor of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Tourism, Munich UAS. The session was on creation and innovation in tourism via start-ups and technology. The presentation showed that currently, it is challenging for tourism and hospitality start-ups to get funding.

Session 3: future development of the space construct in tourism and hospitality

The third session, presented by Ph.D. student Kristina Eppele, M.A., Institute of Tourism, Travel and Hospitality, Heilbronn University of Applied Sciences, was on how our perception of space in tourism changes in the real and virtual domain ranging from day-tourism landscapes, via the metaverse, to sustainability aspects.

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Session 4: female top leadership in tourism and hospitality

Christina Kühnl, Professor of Marketing at the University of Stuttgart, presented a session on gender equality, using the example of female top managers in tourism and hospitality. This session was extended with a discussion on diversity in tourism companies.

Each of the sessions was followed by a 30-min discussion with additional participants to further discuss the session topics.

Conclusion of the Tourism Futures Convention 2023

From a futures perspective, the Tourism Futures Convention 2023 has brought to attention some important key messages:

1. *Science Fiction has been a valuable precursor for many real-world developments* (and not academia). Tourism scholars want to impact the tourism and hospitality industry with meaningful contributions. In times of change, this means that academics need to look more into scenarios of the future than into the past. There is not one singular future but there are multiple possible futures. Hence, academics need to make the potential futures and their implications understood by their tourism industry fellows. In other words, to contribute to tourism and hospitality, academics need to apply an activist approach and become vocal about the necessary changes ahead of us.
2. *Every start to creating new value is hard*. In times of raising interest rates, start-ups face hard times justifying risky investments into new business ideas. Especially in Germany, tourism and hospitality start-ups face the situation that the exit funnel is blocked and hence there is a lack of money to finance new ideas at a time when new ideas are urgently needed. Start-ups need to find a balance between blunt honesty and overselling, to win investors. The right mindset is key to achieving the balance between vision and stability.
3. *The way we see space will dramatically need to change*. The construct of space is changing. It is changing in the real world and the virtual world. The mix of real and virtual worlds will bring new challenges that call for a wider definition of space in tourism. In the future, we need to manage to bring together the tourist real and virtual space as well as the living spaces with visitor steering as one important management topic amongst others.
4. *Achieving true equality remains the main challenge*. Tourism and hospitality are full of diversity. However, if we look at female top leaders, tourism has a long way to go to becoming diverse. This is not limited to gender but also to all other means of diversity, be it race, sexual orientation or handicaps. Again, becoming vocal is an important starting point for initiating change.

To sum up, the Tourism Futures Convention 2023 has shown that tourism scholars need to focus on the future and adopt an activist approach. Academia and scientific rigor should play a major role in shaping the future of our industry.

References

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