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Forking futures

In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them. He creates, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions. Fang, let us say, has a secret; a stranger calls at his door; Fang resolves to kill him. Naturally, there are several possible outcomes: Fang can kill the intruder, the intruder can kill Fang, they both can escape, they both can die, and so forth. In the work of Ts'ui Pên, all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forkings. Sometimes, the paths of this labyrinth converge: for example, you arrive at this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy, in another, my friend. (Jorge Luis Borges, “*The garden of forking paths*”, *Fictions*).

In 2010, when the ETFI research team became operational, we were a small, heterogeneous (or multidisciplinary) team of tourism scholars, geographers and economists that started exploring scenario planning methods. My own research interest had been primarily historical, and I found that the future was not unlike the past; with the documented construction of cause-effect relationships as a common element, the difference was a matter of scope rather than method. To illustrate the need for foresight, we probably all have used the well-known examples of historical anecdotes such as the horse manure crisis or predictions of the future demand for cars or PCs. But what does a scenario perspective mean for our interpretation of historical events?

What comes to mind is the series of “counterfactual history” essays that was popular in the 1990s (Cowley, 1999): what if Hitler would have won the Battle of Britain, if George Washington had not escaped after Long Island, what if Hernán Cortés would have been killed? These intriguing exercises have been rightfully criticised for reducing history to a “kings-and-battles” view of the past (Evans, 2014). But if we respect the major economic and social interests at work, it is still reasonable and useful to raise the question whether foresight might have changed history.

During the cold war, countries avoided war because of the risk of nuclear annihilation. In 1914 conflicting interests still could spark an apparently unstoppable chain of events that ended in death and destruction. Would foresight into the tragedy have led to differently informed decisions? In other words, are these events driven by cynical irresponsibility or is it more like the misjudgement or folly of a truck driver who swerves around the gates of a railroad crossing causing a deadly train crash (Perkins, 2002)? Finally, what do similar insights mean for the events in our world, one century later?

These reflections on what we do and how we think are appropriate when we look back on how our research institute has evolved. It has grown considerably, from six to 26 team members, and so has its multidisciplinary perspective. It works for businesses and destinations, but it never loses sight of the broader picture of global political, environmental, economic, social and technological developments. Thus, we understand the past as something that could have been different and the future as something that can be changed. That makes us especially proud of this journal, the first issue of which was so well received, as our contribution to the academic debate on the future of our industry. Our planning for the next volumes further demonstrates this role ETFI seeks to assume, with special issues – prepared by distinguished guest editors – on The Future of Accessible Tourism and Political Ideas and Developments in Future Tourism.

In 2015, with the ETFI team still heterogeneous and multidisciplinary, but big, and with a surprisingly diverse range of topics covered – from environmental sustainability to the internet of Things, from national tourism strategies to the market changes affecting small sailing schools –, I personally look back on an exciting adventure with a group of friends that has provided new insights to the academic and the professional community. Now that our own futures fork, I say goodbye to this wonderful team, confident that through this journal and other means they will continue to inspire the discussion on the future of tourism, leisure and hospitality.

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In this issue

Research papers

In “A study of students’ travellers values and needs in order to establish futures patterns and insights”, Elena Cavagnaro and Simona Staffieri approach future tourism behaviour from the perspective of the social background and values of student travellers. This analysis sheds light on preferences for sustainable types of tourism and thus gives insight into the future of tourism behaviour in general. The authors conclude that a large part of their respondents are influenced by biospheric values, making sustainable choices into an essential component for more than just a niche market.

Hartman and Zandberg discuss how destinations can plan a positive event legacy in “The future of mega sport events: examining the ‘Dutch Approach’ to legacy planning”. An extensive literature study of the success factors for the legacy of mega sports events is combined in this study with the authors’ findings on the Amsterdam “Sports Axis” project. The “Dutch Approach” to mega events is described as based on consensus and community involvement.

Ian Yeoman *et al.* authors of “2050: New Zealand’s sustainable future”, use a scenario planning approach to analyse sustainable strategies for the future evolution of the country’s tourism, especially in view of some caveats for its environmental credentials. The depicted scenarios are derived from the drivers of “Cultural Identity” and “Environmental”. The article concludes with a series of recommendations for a national sustainable strategy.

Viewpoint and trends

Sam Cole’s study of space tourism originated as material for “A slightly tongue in cheek revision class” on tourism planning, but these ideas can be considered increasingly relevant as space tourism projects are close to becoming a reality. Ian Yeoman makes a crucial contribution to the trend visions included in this issue. In “New Zealand’s future: the potential for knitting tourism”, the example of this intriguing niche – intriguing for the author in unexpected places – is used to show how micro trends may contribute to shaping the future of tourism. In “Trends in family tourism”, Heike Schänzel and Ian Yeoman question the decline of the family but instead argue that family structures have evolved, and hence decision making on holidays in families. The tourist industry requires a better understanding of the “increasing heterogeneity, fluidity and mobility” of families in the future. “Dr Spock’s Food Festival”, by Katherine Findlay and Ian Yeoman, depicts a scenario of how difficulties in the production and distribution of food are addressed in 2050. The narrative illustrates eight socio-cultural trends that will influence tourist behaviour by the middle of this century.

Reviews

This issue contains a number of book and conference reviews either because these meetings or publications directly focus on the future of tourism, or because in their more generic approach they include ideas or findings that become relevant for the future. This year’s EuroCHRIE conference was dedicated to Hospitality and Tourism Futures – obviously more on the former than on the latter – and Graciëlla Karijomedjo summarises the six keynote addresses. Nicole Ferdinand and Janelle Tucker provide a review of the Digital Engagement Conference: A Roadmap for the Future of Festivals. Outdoor Tourism is an example of a tourism trend of growing importance in different destinations; Albert Postma participated in the Tourism Outdoor Conference in Wales.

In book reviews, Nicole Ferdinand comments on *The Future of Events and Festivals* as giving an intriguing insight “beyond immediate concerns such as developing audiences and increasing economic gains”. Brian Hay recommends *Trends in European Tourism Planning and Organisation* as a one-stop shop textbook explaining the “complexities of the political, economic and social structures of Europe”. With *Hospitality Experience: An Introduction to Hospitality Management*, Conrad Lashley reviews an introductory textbook on hospitality management that seeks to introduce students to an industry in evolution.

References

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Perkins, D.N. (2002), "The engine of folly", in Sternberg, R.J. (Ed.), *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid*, Yale University Press, New Haven, NJ and London, pp. 64-85.