

Book review

Jim Dator: A Noticer in Time. Selected work, 1967-2018

Edited by Jim Dator
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In writing book reviews for this and other journals, I have said in the past that particular books have been very important. So at the risk of being repetitive, let me say again that this book by Jim Dator is very important. Indeed, I would go so far as to say it is, in a sense, seminal in terms of its content. That is because this book comprises, for the most part, key writings over a 41-year period by Dator who is arguably one of the founders of future studies. Indeed, Dator describes his role as the person “[...] who discovered? – invented? – created? futures studies.” (Dator, 2019, p. 7). As such, the book touches on virtually all key elements of future studies, as they have developed in the past half century. Again, to quote Dator:

While not every aspect of futures studies as I have learned, taught, and applied it for more than 50 years is captured in these essays, I believe most of the essence of the field as I understand it is described and illustrated here. (Dator, 2019, p. 7)

The challenge in reviewing a book like this is that for the most part, there is not much that is new in the contents. Dator provides a two-page introduction to the book, but the remainder of this huge book – it is 471 pages in length and contains 39 chapters – comprises papers which Jim presented and published from 1996 through to 2019. If you are a futurist or future thinking person, which is likely given that you are reading this review in this journal, it

is likely that you have already read and probably used much of what is contained in this book. However, if you are like me, revisiting Jim’s work will be as relevant and exciting now as it was in the first place. And again, if you are like me, you will likely find content in the book that you might not have read or heard before, and that is real value added.

The book is appropriately structured around three parts: Part I – Future Studies; Part II – Evolving Futures; and Part III – Futures of Governance. If Part III is surprising in its focus, that is because as tourism academics, we tend to think of everything we look at through the prism of the tourism sector. However, we need to remember that Jim Dator is, first and foremost, a political scientist. As such, his particular interests in future studies have, in part, focused on his discipline. That focus is addressed in significant detail in Part III. However, as Jim states in his introduction to Part III:

My MA and PhD academic degrees are in political science, and I have been affiliated with political science departments from my first full-time teaching position to my last. I became interested in political science because its gaze is broad: it allowed me to follow my interests wherever they went compared to most other academic disciplines that required narrow fixation – “digging the same hole deeper”, as Edward de Bono used to say. (Dator, 2019, p. 321)

It is this broad vision that has allowed Jim to become such an important thinker in the field of future studies. And it is this broad vision that allows his insights and prescience, focused

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so often on what he broadly refers to as “governance” to be so applicable to a range of disciplines including our discipline of tourism. I commend Part III to you, both for its relevance to future studies but also to the current state of governance throughout the world and the challenges it poses in varying degrees to tourism.

Let me close this review by referring to a startling and frightening conclusion which Jim reaches in the most current of the writings in this book, namely, Chapter 38 titled “One Trump and II Duce Wild”:

[...] governmental deadlock is neither new nor a mistake. It is a built-in feature of US government. It is a consequence of what is called a “presidentialist” system, and almost every presidentialist system in the world, except that of the US, has ended up a dictatorship. This is because there is no routine way to get rid of an unpopular president in midterm. In contrast, parliamentary systems such as those found in England and many other countries (which have no separately-elected president, but instead have a prime minister who comes from the

legislature and can be removed by the legislature) are far less like to end up in deadlock relieved by dictatorship. It is only a matter of time before the US becomes a dictatorship. And now maybe that time. (Dator, 2019, p. 456)

This chapter and much of Part III may not seem directly relevant to tourism at first glance. However, that is not the case. Tourism as a discipline and as a commercial activity is so broadly intertwined with what goes on in the world that the impact of governance cannot be viewed in isolation from future studies focusing on tourism. The current state of unrest in the world simply underscores this conclusion.

For reasons given above and for many more, this book is a “must have” for the personal library of any tourism academic and indeed anyone involved with tourism. I commend it to you without reservation.

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