

Book review

Routledge Handbook for Creative Futures

***Edited by Gabrielle Donnelly and
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When I first started to review this book, I had to educate myself as to exactly what “creative futures” are. In all my reading about tourism futures, this was a term which I had not come across before. And while that might be a reflection on my lack of intellectual development, none of my tourism colleagues knew of the term either. So, while this introduction may be superfluous or redundant, it may also be the most appropriate starting point from which to assess the value and relevance of this book for tourism researchers and teachers. Thankfully, the editors have structured the book in a way that makes it relatively straightforward for readers to understand what “creative futures” are, at least the way the editors and several of their contributors define the phenomena.

Secondary research into the term suggests that until recently, it has focused to a large degree on the arts and the protection of creativity within that sector of our life. But there are a growing number of initiatives, both formal and informal, that take a different view of creativity as it applies to the future and this book reflects that movement. This view, while recognizing the seemingly overwhelming challenges which we face – politically, economically, atmospherically and physically – believes that a brighter and better future can exist if we as a race choose to embrace, both individually and collectively, a creative more positive vision of the future based, in part, on what this book offers the reader.

To this end, the editors have assembled an impressive collection of contributors

who offer perspectives and advice on how to view a more desirable future than the scenarios that currently dominate popular thinking – those “doom and gloom” predictions that seem rationale and logical but which, the editors and the contributors argue, are not inevitable. As the editors put it so succinctly:

The volume seeks to find a sweet spot somewhere between despair and naïve optimism, neither shying away from the massive socio-environmental planetary challenges faced at this time nor offering simplistic feel-good solutions (p. 3)

It is this hopeful yet grounded sensible approach which resonates throughout the book that makes it valuable. And while it would be an exaggeration to suggest that all readers will embrace all that is discussed and recommended in the book, the wide and diverse range of topics and perspectives means that for most of us interested in the future, we will at the very least find some nuggets of creative thinking about the future that we can adopt and use in our work and our thinking. I will conclude this review later with a specific “real life” example to support this contention.

The editors have included in the book, contributions from 52 diverse thinkers who the editors describe as:

... well-known, well-established, and emerging scholars, practitioners, and scholar-practitioners – a mix of Indigenous, Black, Asian, White/Caucasian contributors, including women, men, trans people, those early in their careers and those in their legacy years, living in places such as Kenya, India, US, Canada, and Switzerland, among many others (p. 3)

And not only are the contributors a hugely diverse group of thinkers but their individual contributions are also diverse in their format, style and objectives. Not surprisingly, with such a diverse group of

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contributors, it is not really feasible in a review such as this to synopsise the chapters—all 37 of them—but the structure of the book helps to guide readers to those collections of contributions which might seem to be relevant.

The book is divided into five parts:

1. Part 1 titled “Context for creative futures” includes chapters which tend to take a broad view of the challenges likely to impact the future and to begin to map out approaches for dealing with them and the future in positive creative ways.
2. The chapters in Part 2 titled “New orientations and reframings for creative futures” begin to focus in on approaches with more detail and more specificity on those challenges.
3. In Part 3 titled “Reckoning with the past and present for creative futures”, the contributors identify and broach head on the past injustices and disparities in our development which need to be addressed in order to achieve a more positive future.
4. Possibly of more value to tourism researchers and the largest part with 11 chapters, Part 4 titled “Frameworks, approaches, and applications for creative futures” begins to map out tangible frameworks and theory designed to bring applicable tools to future studies including “... scenario planning, universal basic income, the role of art in transformation, and equitable and ecological civilization frameworks, among other.”
5. Finally, Part 5 titled “Personal, relational and collaborative practices for creative futures” concludes the discussion by examining “... the contribution of personal, relational, and collaborative practices...” which in a diverse and multi-faceted way closes the loop on creative futures.

Now to the question – is this book relevant and useful or possibly just of interest to scholars, students and

practitioners of tourism and hospitality? It is almost certain to be of interest to anyone who thinks and worries about the future. With such a diverse content, some will find parts of the book not helpful or interesting but as I have stated previously, it is hard to imagine that in all of this thinking and discussion, a reader will not find anything of help or interest. And I will venture an opinion that it is more valuable because it provides content that can be applied to and enlighten the thinking and writing of tourism scholars.

In the course of reading the book, your reviewer came across the contribution of Dr. Jennifer Gidley who in addition to teaching at the University of Technology Sydney is also “... a psychologist, educator, and futures researcher ... and the Former President of the World Futures Studies Federation” Dr. Gidley presented her “Grand Global Futures Challenges/ Alternatives” model which I then used to support a presentation which I made to an educational conference earlier this year. Specifically, I used Dr. Gidley’s model to make the argument that AI, rather than only being an existential threat to education and scholarly activity, could be viewed in positive, helpful ways to support learning and discovery. And as the relatively recent and vociferous debate about AI in our sector rages, positive interpretations are beginning to become more dominant. This is, I submit, a clear example of how this book can be relevant and helpful to not only tourism studies but most other functional areas that can and should be looking to the future.

A final test of relevance which might be only applicable to me is this. Would I have my institution’s library acquire the book for the use of students and faculty. The answer is a resounding “yes”. But in addition, would I actually purchase the book myself? Again, the answer is a resounding “yes”. Surely, this is the ultimate positive assessment of a book.

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