

Is tourism futures a theoretical proposition? Why do not you join the debate

What is theory? As an academic you are often ridiculed if your paper lacks a theoretical contribution. It is an automatic sign of rejection that your paper has not contributed to theory in many of the big academic journals (Hambrick, 2007). It is not represented as a theoretical framework; it is not worth it some would say. Maybe we have gone overboard with theory for the sake of it and have lost the connection between theory and practice. As authors, we are not saying abandon theory, but take a closer look at the connection between theory and practice. Every paper cannot realistically contribute or claim theoretical development. There is an argument about the degree of contribution, whether significant or miniscule.

Future studies research is dominated by a commitment to research methods almost as an end in itself, according to Karlsen *et al.* (2010), there has been a general failure to examine and explicate the relationship between the futures theory and method. Qualitative and quantitative methods however pertain to theory differently in terms of the ontological and epistemic assumptions that guide the application of the approaches. There is a dichotomy: we cannot speak about a theory of the future as a foundation for scientific inference in this field.

As thinking about the future is an illusion, it cannot be scientific (Gabriel, 2014), thus how can it have scientific basis? This is the argument put forward by Moriarty (2012) on many futurists and scenario planners' writings. Moriarty argues that scenario planning in particular, is a method without a theory. Piirainen and Gonzalez (2015) also argue that the link between theory, scientific knowledge and futures studies is relatively weak. Based on the practices of numerous scenario planners and futurists, other researchers argue that scenario planning, which is the predominant futures research method in the literature, is a fog and art (Asselt *et al.*, 2010).

According to Cole and Victoria (2009), it is rare to find a national or regional tourism plan, book or academic article about the future of tourism which does not reference UN World Tourism Organisation forecasts; thus, they have become the main arbiter of the future. This is an industry which, in 1950, represented 25m international arrivals and is forecast to reach 1.8bn in 2030. But the future of tourism has to be more than an economic forecast as extrapolated forecasts can often be misleading, ambiguous and debatable. As Cole and Victoria (2009, p. 242) state, "If tourism is to contribute to cross-cultural understandings and new social innovations, then the field probably draws the adventurous utopian attention of futurists."

With the above in mind, the *Journal of Tourism Futures* aims to address the balance between theory and practice and build the theoretical base of tourism futures. The journal sets out to achieve the following:

- to inspire the tourism industry and academic community about the future of tourism;
- the dissemination and formulation of the body of knowledge called tourism futures to practitioners, educators, researchers and students;
- to provide an international forum for a wide range of practical, theoretical and applied research within the field of tourism futures;
- to represent a multi-disciplinary set of views on key and emerging issues in tourism futures;
- to include a cross-section of methodologies and viewpoints on research, including quantitative and qualitative approaches, case studies, and empirical and theoretical studies;

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- to encourage greater understanding and linkage between the fields of study related to tourism futures; and
- to publish new and original ideas.

Volume 4.2 starts with a new editorial board. It is made up of individuals passionate about the future, whether full professors, practitioners, junior academics or PhD students. We only know that the future of tourism can be influenced and shaped by those that contribute to this journal. If you would like to be one of those, please consider a submission of an article, whether it is a research, viewpoint or trends paper to <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jtf>.

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