

Book review

The Tourism Education Futures Initiative. Activating Change in Tourism Education

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I like milk and I like orange juice even better, and yet if I buy a carton of milk and it contains orange juice I am disappointed. If we get advice on what to do with our future, this will normally be a recommendation to behave responsibly, such as a fatherly advice to open a savings account or a teacher urging us to go to college. But if the advice concerns our plural *Futures*, this is an unmistakable allusion to the discipline of studying alternative versions of the future, unavoidably taking into account uncertainties and disruptions. Even though this field of study still goes by different names (Sardar, 2010), the plural is commonly established in literature, in the name of a journal as *Futures*, or of the very *Journal of Tourism Futures*. The TEFI book is not connected to this approach or to its literature; it pertains to the first category of future advice.

To make things worse, this is not a matter of putting different accents, or of adding new perspectives to the field, but simply of doing something else than what probably must have been the initial thought (Jim Dator addressed the first meeting and the University of Hawai'i hosted the second). As the introductory chapter declares: "Modifying tourism education programs to fit a multitude of possible world scenarios, or even a single preferred scenario, was found to be a task fraught with too much specificity and uncertainty. Instead, TEFI participants concluded that whatever

world scenario emerges in the future, certain values would provide the students with the foundation to meet the uncertainties presented by that future" (pp. 2, 19-20). Even if you had good reasons to substitute milk with orange juice, you should have told me.

So, TEFI is an initiative advocating value-based education in tourism, as an optimal preparation for the future challenges of our students' profession. The values TEFI promotes are mutuality, stewardship, knowledge, ethics and professionalism. These values, their incorporation into tourism curricula nor the underlying need for more sustainable business models are under discussion here. But this is a present need, not a future one. In fact, the articles and studies in this volume all discuss current issues for universities and students.

Some of these hardly scratch the descriptive surface of a tourism curriculum. Other contributions are research based, but somewhat sinuous in their reasoning. An example is a chapter that assesses the balanced presence of the three areas of sustainability in four text books on the basis of their table of contents, and, if that was not clear enough, on the physical (sic; p. 157) examination of the chapters; to then jump to a comparison of exam scores to prove the effectiveness of YouTube videos to restore the found imbalance. Finally, some chapters describe interesting teaching experiences but with no other link to the TEFI values than through that of "knowledge," which makes it rather unspecific.

As for the ideological proposition of the book, as probably most people I sympathize with the TEFI values. The book denounces the "neoliberal, business-orientated hegemony" (p. 44) in tourism studies for which value-based education is seen as an alternative. Nevertheless, the belief that endowing managers with more responsible values

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can solve or mitigate social conflict is strongly rooted in neoliberal thinking. The financial world may have illustrated this point. Tourism can undoubtedly have positive impacts – redistribution of wealth, preservation of cultural and natural heritage – and value-based education can underscore that. Tourism also has negative, unsustainable, impacts, related to how the tourism economy is organized rather than simply to a lack of values. In my opinion, the TEFI book insufficiently addresses that.

If we realize that the book discusses here-and-now issues, rather than future developments, we should also be aware of the fact that values are time-inspired. In other words, *Futures* studies show us that a number of new issues are emerging that may drastically change the tourism profession. Therefore our values should evolve to incorporate or reflect future societal concerns, or they will lose their meaning as attitudinal and behavioral guidelines. It will be the responsibility of our current students to continue reflecting on and developing professional values, and it is ours to prepare them for that. This makes the dilemma between “Education about sustainability” vs “Education for sustainability” (p. 100) – as apparently a more passive vs an activist approach – a false one, since we must not only equip our students to understand and act according to our values, but also to rethink them.

As professionals our students will shape the future of tourism, and therefore value-based education can be an essential contribution to a more sustainable development. But one of the core assumptions of *Futures* studies is that we do not control all variables of the future, and therefore that we need to anticipate surprises or disruptions caused by external drivers. This ability to anticipate is precisely what this discipline seeks to develop. Values, while important, cannot substitute the corresponding knowledge and competences. The claim that “certain values would provide the students with the foundation to meet the uncertainties presented by that future” is therefore unsupported.

Except for the introduction and for the editorial closing remarks, the chapters of this book were originally published in the *Journal of Teaching in Travel and Tourism*. That means that the book repeatedly, in its different contributions, explains what the TEFI values are. This repetitive element should have been a challenge for the editors (now it is one for the reader). There is also a repeated insistence on the fact that TEFI was composed of “leading tourism educators” (pp. 31, 117). Maybe we could leave that for the reader to decide. The claim that the attendants to the TEFI conference “were at the top of their careers” (p. 8) could sound equally inappropriate and pretentious, but, well read, ironically seems to discredit the initiative.

This book certainly contains contributions that are highly relevant for those who (at present!) are involved in curriculum innovation. I have been cautious to avoid references to individual contributions since they, although heterogeneous in orientation and quality, have been published in a peer reviewed publication and are therefore of obvious interest for expert readers in the different areas of tourism education. However, not only this heterogeneity, but especially the unjustified reference to a “*Futures*” approach, negatively affect the relevance of the collection as an initiative to advocate value-based tourism education. The community should adapt its name to what it actually does, or incorporate a *Futures* perspective. A more coherent approach to curriculum innovation would also benefit a broader debate. The leading role attributed to TEFI conveys a message of exclusivity; for the reader, this book feels like browsing someone else’s family photo album.

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Reference

Sardar, Z. (2010), “The Namesake: futures; futures studies; futurology; futuristic; foresight – what’s in a name?”, *Futures*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 177-84.