

# Book review

## The Future: A Very Short Introduction

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This is a remarkable book, a useful guide to the future, a revision guide to the future and a reminder of what future studies are all about. Most importantly, the definitions, development, theories and challenges of future studies remind us of the inadequacies or infancy of future studies in tourism. Reflecting upon my research, I can see by comparing my writings (Page and Yeoman, 2007; Yeoman, 2012a, b; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2014, 2018) with Gidley's (2017) writings that we have a long way to go. Tourism futures may be applying scenario planning, but it is not contributing to the theories and development of tourism futures. We seem to be entangled in a focus on methodology and adaptation of that method without standing back and seeing what we are doing and contributing to evolution of our domain. In particular, the importance of the book raises the issue "is tourism future embroiled in tokenism" in that we have not embraced or engaged with Dator's (2009) *Alternative Futures* in a deep and meaningful way. I read a lot of scenarios, I do not see how scenarios have applied the epistemology of plurality. We seem to be caught up in a world of prediction, rationality and continued growth. It is about scenarios that are politically acceptable rather than demonstrating collapse or transformation as Dator (1971) advocates and Gidley (2017) reminds us of.

*The Future: A Very Short Introduction* is brief, can be read in an afternoon and should be on every futurist or student of the future desk as a reminder of what future studies is. The book is structured into six chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, so, eight chapters in reality. The introduction discusses that for thousands of years society struggled to predict, control, manage or understand the future. We read the stars, wrote utopias, visited soothsayers and used crystal balls.

Even today, it seems everyone has an opinion about the future but does not really understand how (nor trust) experts who make predictions. Whereas history is accepted, and the world has many professors of history, the future is uncharted and lacks professors of the future. The word "futures" comes from the Latin "futura/futurus" meaning "going to be, yet to be", from the verb *esse*: to be. It also appears in the Old French term as *futur*: "future, to come".

Chapter 1 is an historical account of the future. Its beginnings and origins to modern day. The future relates to time and interwoven with the evolution of human consciousness. It was the cultural historians and consciousness researchers that provided the evidence that Charles Darwin's biological theories are not the entire story of evolution. It was the writers of Hegel, Wolfgang and Schelling amongst others who advocated time as a human consciousness moment. An awareness of change and happenings. Gidley takes us through the evolution of the future from prophets, Di Vinci, Renaissance, science, enlightenment, the dark side, science fiction and early mathematical forecasting to peace creating in modern times.

Chapter 2 moves us into the realm of multiple futures and plurality. It was Wendell Bell (1993) who took us beyond positivism advocating Social Scientists Kuhn, Popper, Habermas and critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. When future studies were emerging as an academic field, major changes were occurring in the way scientific research was conceived and practised. This shift paved the way for pluralism to shine. Social scientists developed and worked with a diverse range of qualitative methods, better suited to social sciences than quantitative methods. It was Academics like Slaughter (2002) and Voros (2008) who developed processes, methods and tools advocating plurality.

Chapter 3 discusses the evolution of futures studies and scholarship. Here we move into critical studies, which is fundamentally about

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asking hard questions. It is about challenging the status quo using value judgments about impending futures and considers the changes that might forestall an undesirable outcome. Gidley (2017) nicely frames the evolution and typology of future approaches from empirical, critical, cultural, participatory and integral highlighting the contributions of Masini (2006, 1989), Inayatullah (1995), Dator (2009) and Hideg (2002).

Chapter 4 discusses the trivia and misunderstandings of the future, as no discussion about the futures and futurology is without flying cars and robots despite the substantial body of literature about how futurists engage with real world issues. What we have are misconceptions in the media, business, government and the public. This is because of the nature of topic as it is trans-disciplinary. Some futurists advocate one method as a grand theory that will change the world. Thus, future studies create academic siloism rather than knowledge and circulation.

Chapter 5 is about position and focus. Should the future be how we deal with human futures? Whole high-tech futures are of interest to some, many future scholars are focussed on the potential social, cultural and environmental impacts of rapid unprecedented change. Human-centred futures is humanitarian, philosophical and ecological whereas technological futures are dehumanising, scientific and atomistic. Then there is the transhumanist, a cybernetic view of intelligence, half human—half robot.

Chapter 6 focusses on the global challenges that futurists engage with. The challenges from near to far are called the crisis of crises. They range from socio-cultural, geo-political and environmental domains. The books conclusion is commendable, as Gidley (2017) has covered the breadth and depth of the future.

This is a must read for everyone whether you are a trainee aspiring futurist or a fully qualified one with a PhD.

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