

Book review

Critical terms in futures studies

*Edited by Heike Paul
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In March 2020, one topic that circulated in the worldwide news and dominated the global table talk is the outbreak and exponential spread of COVID-19 and the unpredictability of its further “development”. To date, “knowledge” about the virus is shallow, and no algorithm based on existing “data” was able to find the much needed cure to prevent further “death”. “Time” becomes the most important currency, yet “democracies” are challenged in making a “decision” and “planning” for the future. As “ignorance” is prevailing in some nations, it became apparent that pandemic preparedness through “prevention” was lacking and resilience is questioned. “Hope” and “optimism” remain and encourage to “time travel” into a “utopian” world, start “dreaming” and “imagining” how life after the global pandemic and the COVID-19 crisis might look like. This sounds more like the storyline of a “science fiction” movie, and as you are reading this review, the situation might have changed substantially already. Maybe some “magic” happened which highlights the role of “temporality”. Similarly, if I had read the following quote from Melley in chapter 41 (“Security”) four weeks ago, I might have not understood it in the same way as I do today, as it reflects the current situation of the global society perfectly: “Security is purchased at the cost of anxiety” (p. 268).

The example above demonstrates the actuality of 20 of the 50 critical terms that are introduced in the edited book *Critical Terms in Futures Studies* by Heike Paul. Fifty international scholars

across disciplines share in 50 chapters the essential and multi-disciplinary vocabulary that is needed for critical tourism studies. In identifying the roots and origins of the respective terms and discussing their ontological and epistemological meanings, references are given to some of the most influential philosophers, sociologists, theologians and writers of the past centuries, such as Aristotle, Baudrillard, Foucault, Freud, Kant or Nietzsche. In offering historical perspectives, scholars highlight the relevance of looking into the past to approximate and understand the future. In many instances, the book also demonstrates its topicality as current global-political and sociological developments such as the Fridays for Future movement or the Donald Trump era are discoursed. Although some of the terms might have been anticipated in such a collection of future relevant terminology, such as “artificial intelligence” or “fictionality”, others might come as a surprise as relatively ordinary everyday terms such as “archive” and “calendar” might not have been expected. Cross-references to other chapters and terms are given throughout the book, which indicates the interconnectedness of the terms, such as “singularity” and “transhumanism” or “ignorance” and “knowledge”.

Although all 50 terms are of relevance to tourism and readers of this edited collection will be inspired by how to make appropriate and effective use of these essential terminologies, I would like to highlight four critical terms with reference to tourism futures: “Anthropocene”, “Neoliberalism”, “Sustainability” and “Imagination”. In Chapter 4, Marak notes that

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Anthropocene remains a contested concept whose actual starting point is unclear. However, she highlights the role of human activity that has “crossed a threshold” and has become a “geological force” (p. 19). Despite tourism’s decisive role as a driver of economic prosperity, its share of 8% of global greenhouse emissions in 2018 making it also one of the contributors of human-induced impacts, and the sustainability of the industry is constantly challenged. Marak also addresses critiques that have evolved around the term and mentions Moore’s concept of Capitalocene as an often overlooked yet driving force of human-induced impact. This capitalist world ecology is also reflected in the rationales of neo-liberalist politics and the addiction to growth. In Chapter 32, Heberle describes neo-liberalism as “the dismantling of the public sphere and increasing reliance on the corporate model and private wealth for public well-being” (p. 205). The author uses the example of sharing economy to demonstrate how basically everything can be monetised, from personal possessions to time and establishes clear links to the tourism industry. This monetisation and institutionalisation of public and private goods is also critically evaluated by Adloff in Chapter 45 (“Sustainability”). The author describes three different futures of sustainability, namely, (ecological) modernisation, (socioecological) transformation and control. Hereby, he challenges the idea of green economy as simply being a renewal of the capitalist economic model adapted to changed conditions. Adloff asks for more imagination that supports the understanding of uncertainties and translates into blueprints for actions. Similarly, Spengler (Chapter 26 “Imagination”) concludes that “what the future will look like depends to a large extent on the stories we tell, the images we circulate, the connections we allow for, and the social practices

we embrace” (p. 168). The example of the relationships among the four critical terms with reference to tourism clearly demonstrates the relevance of fully understanding this terminology for futures studies in the field of tourism, hospitality and events.

I can warmly recommend this edited collection to anyone who is interested in the future – given our own temporality and as the example at the beginning of this review illustrates, which should really be everybody. Particularly valuable, in my view, is the etymological discussion of some of these frequently applied but sometimes misconceived or misused terms. The thorough discussions on different ontological and epistemological viewpoints, such as in chapter 46 (“Temporality”) can be extremely valuable for graduate students or early career scholars that are trying to identify their own worldview and paradigm. Although I understand the idea of the alphabetical dictionary-style structure, this structure does not make the book a bedtime reading, as it misses coherence and clear transitions among the individual chapters. Some chapters comment on the dominance and imposition of Western perspectives on philosophical, theological, sociological and generally the etymological underpinnings of some of the terms; however, despite the multi-disciplinarity of authors, the vast majority of them are used at German or US universities, which might purport that not only the past but also the future will be heavily driven by the global North. In a future edition of such important collection, I would like to see more decolonised perspectives with more chapters like “Afro-Pessimism” or gendered approaches such as “Queer Futurity” which also acknowledge generational changes.

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Sabrina Seeler is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in experience-based tourism at Nord University Business School (Bodø, Norway) and is part of the research group for Marketing, Management and Innovation of Experiences. Being a critical realist

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