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Imagining Collaborative Tourism Futures

Janne Liburd and Deborah Edwards

“The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but it is too low and we reach it”

(Attributed to Michelangelo (1475-1564), cited in Robinson & Aronica, 2009: 260).

The journey of *Collaboration for Sustainable Tourism Development* has aimed high by keeping heads in the clouds and feet on the ground, to visit critical and optimistic possibilities for what sustainable tourism development was, is, and may become. This chapter gives substance to the potential of collaboration for sustainable tourism development by indicating the significance of imagination. Envisaging tourism futures implies that tourism researchers, students, practitioners, policy makers – all stakeholders – engender other kinds of relationships, interactions and conversations to imagine what could be. It is a feasible process of *designing with* as an ethical, ongoing involvement of others through a respect for their ways of being in the world, their sense of values and aspirations for better tourism futures in a better world. In this chapter, we do so by leveraging the variations of interpretation represented in the making of this book and the previous fourteen chapters. This book encompasses philosophical, conceptual and empirical research to expose conditions, empirical circumstances and underpinning values. The contributions meet in the application of the concept of collaboration to uncover what sustainable tourism development was, and presently is, and signposts how unknown futures can be imagined.

Imagining collaborative tourism futures is predicated on epistemological and mutually shared responsibilities. These obligations cannot alone be captured by academics engaged in a persistent quest for knowledge, critical dialogue and thinking tourism into the future. Responsibilities are intimately connected to a holistic understanding of collaborative engagements with the wider world in shaping desirable futures. Imaginations of collaborative tourism futures are a response to current limitations of sustainable tourism development, where we charter the contours of tourism futures to tackle wider societal problems.

Striving for a future orientation for sustainable tourism development is indicative of a proactive attitude. We seek to actively influence future developments, as opposed to being grounded in the past, or simply reacting to external pressures. Mindful that “dreams require optimism and a sense that one’s hopes can be fulfilled” (Rifkin, 2005: 348), our imaginations are not castles-in-the-air ideas, but strive towards improvement based on reality and a care for the world. In 1793, Kant argued that “an idea is nothing other than the concept of a perfection which has not as yet been experienced” ([1793] 1963: 12). It may be seen as feasible, as our attempts of perfection rest on what lies behind and in current sustainable tourism development practices and conceptualisations to expose its “being-possible” (Heidegger, 1998: 183). The empirical positioning based on the previous chapters furthermore serves to ensure that the imaginative considerations are not out of touch with the world but that an ‘in-touch’ with the world is established. They help provide a corrective against potentially harmful imaginations of tourism, by indicating not only the power of the imagination, but assuming a position of intellectual responsibility for actual and future practice. Sensitive to the possibilities on these terms, we address tourism collaboration by not merely thinking tourism into the future but also look to advance desirable futures. Our endeavour towards desirable futures rests on Kant’s (1793) moral philosophy of doing good and bringing about gradual improvement in the world. Kant’s quadruple key tasks of education (discipline, culture, civilisation, and moralisation) in their original terms denote a commitment to a future world ethic, which Aristotle articulated as ‘other-regarding’.

To maintain empirical grounding, the practicality of imagining the being-possible of tourism futures is gleaned from examples of this volume and philosophically based on Liburd’s (2013) professorial dissertation about the being of the university. Collectively, the contributions to this volume highlight both issues and opportunities for research, education and practice in sustainable tourism development, including enhancing adaptability to respond to and engage change with others. We strive to identify “the forces and resources within the present that are capable of transforming it for the better in the future, so as to provide a significant dynamic for action in the here and now” (Halpin, 2003: 58).

Future practices and research efforts in sustainable tourism development should entail developing a shared cognition, effective agency, and trust in individuals, businesses and organisations engaged in collaboration with and across different dimensions, including the state, with communities, and other forms and norms of knowledge (Liburd, 2012). A complex, anthropological sense of exchange and reciprocity can feasibly be worked into ideas for further reflection on the way in which collaboration actually brings into being the persons and resources.