



Foresight in designing sun-beach destinations



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H I G H L I G H T S

- Foresight brings together key agents of change in order to develop future visions.
- Mass demand will experience a growing environmental consciousness.
- Tourism value chain will no longer be driven by demand, but by motivational centers.
- Airports will become more efficient, engaging and environmentally responsible.
- This method is user-friendly for decision makers and manageable for technicians.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Article history:

Received 29 October 2012

Accepted 14 September 2013

Keywords:

Futures studies
Foresight
Vision design
Strategic planning
Destination design

A B S T R A C T

Foresight tools have been less used than forecasting methods by tourism planners because they seem to provide little added value to the planning process. To overcome this biased perception, this paper shows the potential of foresight for dealing with tourism development issues burdened by complexity and uncertainty, as well as its capability to bring down analysis from global challenges to local and spatial implications. A model framework is presented to incorporate foresight studies into the process of planning and designing tourist destinations. The model facilitates a gradual transition from a narrative vision to the spatial design of a future destination. Stakeholders play a very important role in the proposed model, being involved throughout the process in identifying future trends, formulating visions and helping to design urban patterns. In order to facilitate stakeholders' involvement, various analytical and design tools are used to envision the future development of tourist destinations.

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1. Introduction

Although future prediction has been a long-standing quest, future studies have a mere half-century of existence as a recognized field of scientific knowledge. Since ancient times, people have been uneasy when faced with uncertainty, and have tried to anticipate their future by different means, from priestly prophesy to rational thinking by scientists. It was not until the 1950's and 60's that a formal body of knowledge known as Future Studies began to be assembled with a view to providing researchers with a new set of tools.

Different methods have been used to classify future studies (Armstrong, 2001; Jantsch, 1967; UNIDO, 2005), but most practitioners tend to make a broad categorization between quantitative

and qualitative methods. In this respect, a basic distinction is made between forecasting and foresight.

- **Forecasting** visualizes the future as a unique, linear, evolutionary process based upon past experiences. The predicted future is clearly deterministic. Forecasts are mainly nurtured by quantitative tools.
- **Foresight** contemplates the future shaped by complex, uncertain and multiple visions. The future is open and not predetermined. Foresight mostly employs qualitative tools.

The use of foresight studies is now spreading, and they are becoming a decisive part of many planning exercises, especially in technology, business, environment and energy related areas (European Commission, 2009). This trend is due to fast, unpredictable changes in society, markets, technology and science. This dynamic and sometimes turbulent environment puts enormous pressure on rational planning systems, many of which have been designed to simulate highly stable and predictable functional systems, while foresight methods have fewer technical constraints and

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are more adaptable to environmental changes (Abott, 2005; Fernández Güell & Redondo, 2012).

Obviously, tourism planning has not been oblivious to the need to foresee the future and limit uncertainty. Since its inception in the middle of the 20th century, tourism planning has made many projections and anticipated trends in order to improve the design of destinations for the benefit of visitors, investors and local residents. Nevertheless, when it comes to planning and designing destinations, tourism planners have preferred to use quantitative tools to project visitor numbers, revenue and economic impact rather than apply qualitative tools (Goodwin, 2008; Song & Li, 2008). Even tourism researchers seldom combine quantitative and qualitative tools in an integrated framework (Davies, 2003).

In our view, several arguments support the application of foresight to tourism planning. First of all, the complex, heterogeneous nature of tourism components (Darbellay & Stock, 2012) makes forecasting rather difficult. Second, global trends that play as drivers of tourism change force planners to anticipate changes in visitors' behavior, technological innovations and competitors' initiatives (Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman, & Scott, 2009). Third, the increasingly unstable nature of the tourism context justifies the use of foresight tools to foresee the future (Butler, 2009). Fourth, a natural symbiosis between foresight and spatial planning helps to make a tourism plan more holistic and imaginative (Cole, 2001). All of the above seem to be plausible reasons for applying foresight to traditional planning processes.

Despite its apparent benefits, foresight is either simply ignored or perceived as an irrelevant set of tools that provide little added value to spatial planning processes (Myers & Kitsuse, 2000; Wachs, 2001). On the one hand, most foresight exercises by social scientists are usually based in general narratives that are intellectually stimulating but rarely of much help to tourism planners for their actual design decisions. On the other hand, when looking at the future, physical planners tend to focus on forecasting tools, disregarding most foresight methods as frivolous exercises that simply provide imprecise visions. Finally, most foresight exercises are too expensive as to be afforded by medium-size municipalities.

Therefore, assuming that there is a need for reinforcing foresight approaches into spatial planning processes, the challenge brought up in this paper is how to incorporate foresight tools specifically into the process of planning tourism destinations. To achieve this goal, a conceptual framework is presented hereby in which planners and tourism stakeholders alike can make friendly use of foresight tools at a reasonable cost.

2. Foresight contributions to the planning process

Foresight is a relatively new field of study. It initially arose to make provisions for the future in science and technology, but nowadays it is increasingly used in territorial issues such as climate change, urban development and transport systems. When applied to territorial issues, foresight may be defined as a systematic, participatory, future intelligence gathering and vision-building process aimed at making present-day decisions and mobilizing joint action in the territorial realm (Fernández Güell, 2006; Gavigan & Scapolo, 2001). In other words, foresight brings together key agents of change and sources of knowledge in order to develop strategic visions and anticipatory intelligence in a given territory.

Foresight can thus contribute five essential aspects to territorial planning processes (FOREN, 2001):

1) **Anticipation.** Foresight is a structured way to anticipate and project long-term social, economic and technological developments and needs.

- 2) **Vision.** Foresight provides a guiding strategic vision with a shared sense of social commitment about a certain issue.
- 3) **Action.** Foresight develops and implements strategic visions through detailed action plans, which enable contemporary actions to face the future successfully.
- 4) **Participation.** Foresight intensively incorporates interactive and participatory methods that foster debate and analysis with a wide variety of stakeholders.
- 5) **Networking.** Foresight forges new social networks for the exchange of ideas, experiences and specific knowledge.

In contrast to traditional planning processes, which tend to have a limited sectoral scope, foresight gradually builds up an integrated vision of the possible future through participatory methods. Foresight is thus complementary to the established planning processes, feeding into them new elements and values, empowering local stakeholders and providing legitimacy to territorial strategies.

There is a synergy between foresight and strategic planning (Fernández Güell, 2011). The need to think about the future and formulate long-term visions makes strategic planning a perfect application for foresight tools, while the need for stakeholder collaboration in strategic plans is well matched to the participation and networking attributes of foresight processes.

Foresight practitioners have a wide variety of well-documented methods and tools at their disposal (Armstrong, 2001; EFP, 2012; UNIDO, 2005). Standard, well-tested foresight methods such as Delphi, scenario design, trend analysis and visioning, which are now widely and successfully used in almost every field of knowledge, and newly developed techniques such as Four Quadrants (Slaughter, 1999) and Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 2004) are gradually making their way into the field.

The rapid acceptance of foresight methods in a wide-array of knowledge fields has contributed to a thorough assessment of their benefits and disadvantages (European Commission-JCR-IPTS, 2005; FOREN, 2001; Georghiou, Cassingena, Keenan, Miles, & Popper, 2008).

Foresight can provide many tangible **benefits** for tourism planning. Firstly, it systematizes the debate about future prospects for tourism development amongst a wide variety of stakeholders by building up plausible, coherent future visions. Secondly, it helps to formulate viable, innovative tourism strategies that can reconcile the viewpoints of a wide range of stakeholders. Thirdly, it forms expert networks to exchange and disseminate knowledge deriving from the foresight exercises amongst stakeholders and political decision-makers.

Foresight may, however, also have **disadvantages** for tourism planning. In the first place, foresight cannot tackle or resolve all the social, economic, environmental and political problems of a given tourism destination. Secondly, foresight cannot impose consensus where there are deep disagreements between stakeholders. Thirdly, foresight is not a quick remedy for urgent problems because it requires long analyses and expert networks that do not produce immediate results. Finally, foresight requires policies that may be difficult to implement in emerging public institutions with little real power.

3. The elusive presence of foresight in tourism planning

A recent search was undertaken in internet to detect and assess tourism foresight exercises carried out by relevant organizations involved in tourism research and planning. This search was completed with a literature review of major foresight and tourism scientific journals. Findings were grouped in two geographical levels: international and national.

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