

Conference report

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Tomorrow's Urban Travel, a new conversation about urban tourism

Copenhagen, Denmark, October 9, 2018.

Tomorrow's Urban Travel Conference was hosted by Wonderful Copenhagen, the official tourism organization for Copenhagen, Denmark. The day conference held in the alternative, but very central, meat-packing district of Copenhagen, drew more than 400 delegates from ten countries. Although the majority of delegates were from Scandinavian countries the entire proceedings were held in English.

The conference theme was a question set in the future. "How will the tourism industry develop in the years to come" asks Mikkel Aaro-Hansen, the CEO of Wonderful Copenhagen. The 2018 theme focused on Localhood: what part do locals play in addressing the challenges of the travel industry and how can tourism benefit from local engagement?

The day was split into two parts: a morning session in the form of keynote speakers and panel discussions and an afternoon session in the form of two parallel workshops. Networking was facilitated throughout the day via the MC, networking pod spaces over coffee breaks and lunch and small round table seating during the workshops.

The first keynote speaker of the day was the leading tourism futurologist; Dr Ian Yeoman with "The Future of Tourism." "You need to prepare for the future that you want, not the future that may come" advises Dr Yeoman. He suggests that whilst the main drivers of why people go on holiday may not change (beach, nature, romance and urban breaks) we do need to consider how the mega-drivers of change will affect travel in the future. These include globalization, shifts in global power, affluence and inequality, technological singularity, demography, climate change and scarcity of resources, mobility and human behavior. Using a number of emerging trends Dr Yeoman created four scenarios to help gain insight into the future of tourism. These scenarios were based on trends such as:

- growth of the super-rich and gated communities;
- the disparity of urban living;
- technological impact on the labor market;
- "Pop-radical" – consumers interest in and devotion to global causes; and
- the escape from modernity and seeking of authentic experiences.

These fed into four scenarios named after movies that represent much of the story line of each scenario. *Crazy Rich Asians* represents the apartheid travel scenario, where the luxury and high value tourist get to have very different experiences than the less affluent. But at what cost? *Pleasantville* represents the holiday in paradise, this can be both boring as too perfected or playful. *Westworld* was a scenario that spoke to the role that technology will play in the future of tourism and the scenario *Children of Men* spoken to the role of family and family togetherness.

A panel discussion followed with panelists discussing what Tomorrow's Urban Travel would mean from a local perspective. "What would tourism look like if we only built for locals?" was a thought provoking question.

Megan Eplar Wood's (Harvard University) keynote topic was Local: the key to the challenge of overtourism. "Localhood as a concept will help citizens weigh in as to how well tourism is working

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for them” says Wood. She cautions that in the future we need to calculate the benefits of tourism to include the cost to common pool resources. Tourism has an invisible burden with costs that are often carried by the most vulnerable of communities, these need to be factored into the true cost of tourism to ensure there is an overall net positive. For example, are the costs of increased policing, rubbish removal, water usage etc. all calculated for each extra tourist arriving for an island holiday? If the tourist does not pay for this, then effectively the local citizens are paying through their tax allocations.

After a networking tea break, Jeppe Boel, Senior Marketing Manager of Carlsberg, spoke about: the Value of Localhood in Branding. Using the Danish beer brand as a case study, Boel highlighted how storytelling that is firmly rooted in localhood had benefits for the Carlsberg brand. Will the hyperlocal story be the differentiating factor for your brand in future?

What areas of the travel and tourism business will change due to artificial intelligence (AI) asks Anita Schjoll Brede of Iris.ai? All of it, she answers. Her keynote, AI Today and Tomorrow, highlighted the changing role that AI will play in future travel. Whilst localhood implies a small set of data availability (and AI requires large amounts of data) AI will still impact localhood and travel. AI will be able to localize and personalize individual request, will aid in synthesizing data and help travelers make right the choice for them, AI will assist with customer service and ultimately chatbots will be personal. She reminded the audience that AI will only improve and the current capabilities are “the worst it will ever be.”

The last keynote of the day was by Oliver Cardon of Accorlocal: how hotels are tapping into the local Community. Will hotels be the community space of the future? Hotels can provide extra living space in dense cities. Aside from police stations and hospitals, hotels are possibly the only other space in a city that is open 24 h. Accorlocal wanted to pilot turning hotels into local hubs, thus giving locals ownership of a traditional tourist space and truly bringing localhood into their offering. Cardon generously shared both successes and failures of this pilot project. Large parts of hotels are not used efficiently 24/7; e.g. boardrooms as yoga studios on the weekend. Hotel gyms open to public membership and locals using the hotel lobby as coLab work spaces may all be changes that we see in the future.

The afternoon sessions were in the form of workshops and each delegate had the opportunity to choose two sessions from a wide list of topics. Workshops took place over round tables ensuring that delegates could network. Topics included:

- the museum of tomorrow: local experience and a global scale;
- innovation through co-creation: how to add value from a local user perspective;
- using the force for good: making the data work for both you and your customer;
- the meeting industry at its best: what do we do when we do really well?; and
- theater: playing the city.

Museums of tomorrow highlighted the need for new stories. Museums traditionally are relatively historical, we need to create museums of tomorrow to help citizens engage with and think about the future. Facilitators Alexandre Fernandes and Michael Edson highlighted that visitors rarely love what is in a museum, i.e., the artifacts on display, but love the experience of the museum. Museums often have a mandate to raise awareness in the belief (hope?) that this will result in action ... but who builds the bridge between the two? Is the role that museums of the future can play?

Innovation through co-creation asked delegates to flip the script of localhood – take your localhood with you. The new power lies in storytelling and in the diversity and inclusiveness of idea. For this co-creation is required. Co-creation of ideas has the benefit of improving knowledge systems, managing stakeholder expectations, dealing with resistance to change and increasing democracy in the workplace. But getting participation rather than polarization around a problem is difficult. This can be overcome through understanding the role that divergence of the problem (widely explore all options, get ideas thick and fast) vs convergence of the problem (narrowing into execution and solution mode) play. Co-creation = participation + play. How will we use this to think about the future?

Whilst the Tomorrows Urban Tourism Conference delegates were primarily from a tourism and not a futures background, the conference topic and speakers all were very futures focused and the foresight thread was evident throughout the day. This conference, held annually, provided a useful futures lens on the tourism industry and will be of interest to foresight practitioners and tourism professionals alike.

Reference

Tomorrow's Urban Travel Conference, available at: www.visitcopenhagen.com/wonderful-copenhagen/copenhagen/conference-information (accessed October 29, 2018).