

The future of tourism: evolution and future of scenario planning and strategic foresight in tourism with Albert Postma

Stefan Hartman and Albert Postma

Stefan Hartman and Albert Postma are both based at the European Tourism Futures Institute, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Leeuwarden, Netherlands.

Received 25 September 2024
Revised 25 September 2024
Accepted 25 September 2024

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This paper forms part of a special section "10th Anniversary of the *Journal of Tourism Futures*", guest edited by Dr Stefan Hartman, Prof. Albert Postma and Prof. Ian Yeoman.

Abstract

Purpose – As the *Journal of Tourism Futures* celebrates its 10th Anniversary, Dr Stefan Hartman (head of department at the European Tourism Futures Institute, NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences) interviews Prof. Albert Postma, professor of Strategic Foresight and Scenario Planning) about Evolution and Future of Scenario Planning.

Design/methodology/approach – A personal interview held on September 12, 2024.

Findings – Albert Postma highlights the importance of scenario planning and strategic foresight and its evolution. Postma explains how he is taking a leading role in improving the impact of applications of scenario planning and strategic foresight in tourism practice.

Originality/value – The interview provides insights into the directions of scenario planning and strategic foresight applications in tourism practice and promising pathways for future academic contribution to the *Journal of Tourism Futures*.

Keywords Future of tourism, *Journal of Tourism Futures*, Strategic foresight, Scenario planning, Impact, Resilience, Futures literacy

Paper type Viewpoint

Stefan Hartman: Can you introduce yourself and elaborate on your career?

Albert Postma: My name is Albert Postma. I have been a professor of scenario planning since 2010, but I had already been working at our university for a long time in various research-focused roles. The European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) was established in 2010 by our university NHL Stenden, various local and regional governments and the tourism sector to help better anticipate future disruptions and develop resilience. I have been doing this work for almost 15 years now.

Scenario planning has been a core method since the inception of ETFI. Over time, I have developed my skills further, including training at the University of Houston, with Andy Hines and Peter Bishop. Research has always been in the DNA of our Leisure and Tourism Academy at NHL Stenden, so we have always conducted applied research for the industry. When the idea to create an institute focused on the future of tourism came up, the academy immediately aimed to integrate it into education through a professorship. This ensures the connection between applied research and education. My focus is on applied research, academic research and improving the quality of education at our academy.

Stefan Hartman: Why specifically a professorship in scenario planning?

Albert Postma: The founders of the ETFI wanted to include scenario planning as a method from the beginning. Scenario planning is a tool, but it is crucial to understand that tools need to be applied to specific content. When I started, I saw scenario planning as something more than just an

instrument. It is about serving a larger purpose, about building the capacity to become more future-resilient. This was the main shift in thinking, which occurred around four or five years into my tenure.

The position of professor was created in the late 2000s when the tourism industry had been facing setbacks, such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11, foot-and-mouth disease and the financial crisis. These events prompted the sector to initiate an institute. Ian Yeoman, mentioned elsewhere in this journal, was a pioneer in bringing scenario planning to tourism. He helped set up the institute and to include scenario planning. Professor Frank Go, also involved at the time of initiating the ETFI, embraced the idea as well. The aim was to anticipate new circumstances and unexpected events and to help tourism businesses and organization adapt to new developments that could disrupt the sector.

Stefan Hartman: *How has your work evolved during your time at the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI)?*

Albert Postma: Initially, scenario planning was a method for me, a tool that could be applied to any content. However, in various applied science projects, I realized that scenario planning would ideally be in service of a specific long term or strategic issue, such as changing policy, creating a new concept or developing a new vision. This is when I felt that “foresight” would be a better term to describe what we do in our projects. Foresight is the ability to look ahead, and make decisions and plans within the context of the future (Postma et al., 2025).

Scenario planning is an essential component of our work, but it is part of a broader story. It is not a one-off or playful activity. It is a method that serves something greater and is a competence that helps us become more future-resilient. The main shift in my work has been recognizing foresight as a fundamental competency for continuous progress rather. Now, we are looking to a transition again, perhaps even renaming our professorship to better reflect this broader scope.

Stefan Hartman: *How can the impact of scenario planning and foresight be increased for tourism practitioners?*

Albert Postma: This is not easy, it is actually very complex. I have noticed through projects that scenario planning often remains a one-off, not leading to a structural change in how organizations view the future. This presents a significant challenge, especially in our current era, which is filled with uncertainty and new developments.

To enhance the impact, we should move away from project-based work and instead form long-term relationships. We should view companies and organizations not as clients but as partners. At the ETFI, we have been working toward this for some time. The goal is to guide them through an evolution process, where foresight and scenario planning become a learned skill, a competence or even a cultural change within organizations.

This evolution process is nicely described in the book by Lindgren and Bandhold (2009), which outlines a growth model for future-proofing. At the highest level of evolution a business of organization becomes a “shaper”, with a constant eye on new future signals they continually adapt to anticipated developments in the environment. Their ambition is to direct the future in a preferred way and, if needed, to restructure their organization accordingly. This is not about trying to fight and solve emergent issues, but about anticipating future scenarios.

In the next few years, we aim to broaden our scope and focus more on creating impact by means of our futures education and our projects. This also ties into the “Inner Development Goals” (IDGs) of our students. We are ambitious, but we believe it is important in the current time frame. We call our new professorship plan “Futures of Hope”. If we want to bring about change in the sector in a structural way, it starts with the generations we are educating. We train the tourism professionals of the future.

Stefan Hartman: *What role do academic journals such as the Journal of Tourism Futures play in your work and applied research?*

Albert Postma: One of the pillars of a professorship at a University of Applied Sciences is knowledge development, which involves academic research and sharing the findings of our work with a broad audience. The challenge lies in how you disseminate that knowledge, what communication medium you use. A journal such as ours (the ETFI initiated the *Journal of Tourism Futures* in 2014 in collaboration with Emerald publishers) has primarily been an important channel for the academic world but perhaps less so for the tourism business sector.

To address this, we have decided to introduce a new type of contribution that allows for translating applied research from our projects with the business sector into technical articles for the journal. The hope is to broaden the audience from purely academic to include those in the business world and government as well. This approach also helps lower-tier organizations understand how others have tackled similar challenges and uncertainties.

Writing journal articles (e.g. [Yeoman et al., 2016](#)), book chapters (e.g. [Postma et al., 2025](#)) or even entire books (e.g. [Postma et al., 2025](#)) truly helps to develop your own thoughts further. I see it as a way to digest what you have done. Academic output is useful in education as well, to ensure that what you teach is grounded in science. This distinguishes us from consultancy firms. We always look for grounding in science, doing things for a reason because it is proven effective and published. The journal also serves to scientifically validate the development of scenario planning and foresight.

Stefan Hartman: *If you were to think freely about the future of the Journal of Tourism Futures, what topics would you hope to see published?*

Albert Postma: We need to keep distinguishing ourselves from other scientific journals in the tourism domain. Our unique value lies in writing about developments that not everyone is aware of yet but are emerging.

An example of this is when we started in 2010–11 [Kurzweil's \(2005\)](#) “singularity” concept was gaining traction. It was not well understood by the public at the time, but we have been using it in our classes and presentations. Fast forward to November 2022, artificial intelligence (AI) suddenly broke through, still taking many people by surprise. The singularity concept is about the merging of humans and machines, taking mankind into a new era of “post-humans.” With AI developments, we are making significant steps toward this new world, even if it sometimes scares us.

I think we could have seen this coming if we had listened to futurists such as Kurzweil. Other topics that we should address are related to travel behavior and mobility. The way we travel currently is not sustainable in the future. I appreciate the Dutch Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (ANVR) for showing the ambition to become the most sustainable travel organization by 2050 ([ANVR, 2024](#)). This may be an early indication of a shift toward adopting similar visions and missions industry-wide.

This relates to emerging changes in air travel. We know there are new developments, such as electric planes with (heavy) batteries and new sustainable airline fuels (SAF). For long distances, flying might remain crucial, but for distances up to 1,000 or 1,500 kilometers, we might need to go for alternatives, such as an improved very fast train network or even a hyperloop in Europe. The signs for change are there.

Stefan Hartman: *Is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?*

Albert Postma: Futures thinking or “futures literacy” as its also called, is an essential competency, also recognized by UNESCO. It is crucial for the personal development of basically everyone, not just professionals. If you view futures literacy too much as the ability to use certain tools, it becomes something which can easily be replaced when it is no longer trendy. But I believe futures literacy goes deeper than that, it goes, or should go, to the core of people’s values and society.

You need to keep an eye on the future structurally, continuously feeding society with new insights. Scenario planning is a method, but the realization of futures literacy is another matter. It is a basic competency, much like literacy itself. It is about understanding our position in time. That is why the term “literacy” fits so well.

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Corresponding author

Stefan Hartman can be contacted at: stefan.hartman@nhlstenden.com

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