An introduction: food festivals

With the growth and popularity of food tourism, in parallel we have seen the emergence of food-specific events and festivals (Getz, Robinson, Andersson & Vujicic 2014). Events have become an important element of the experience economy; they are often related to improvements to quality of life for communities and regions through their economic and social benefits (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Fields, Albrecht & Meethan 2015). Food festivals provide an opportunity for society to socialise as by their nature, food festivals bring people together. As consumers search for real experiences rather than ‘products’, they seek new meaning and this has led to an increased importance of events and festivals in society (Yeoman, Robertson & Smith 2012). Fundamentally, food festivals and events are a representation of how the experience economy is at the epicentre of the changing nature of the tourism product (Getz et al. 2014). Unlike Italy, France or Spain, who have a strong history of food production and associated food tourism experiences, New Zealand is a country that is not considered a food tourism destination in its own right. Known as the youngest country in the world (Yeoman 2013), it does, however, offer a diversity of experiences and products. As part of the development of its varied experience economy, Wellington on a Plate (WOAP) is New Zealand’s leading food festival. Focussing on utopian ideals, this chapter creates a vision of the future and outlines the actions to create that future. The vision is based on a scenario in Tuscany, La Natura food festival, and this vision assists the reader in considering possible implications for WOAP.

Wellington on a Plate

WOAP began in 2009 with 43 participating restaurants, 30 events and approximately 400 tickets sold. In 2016, this had grown to 148 restaurants, 140 events and 9,070 tickets (Miekle 2017). The festival takes place in Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand. The event began with the realisation that there was a gap in the events calendar. Positively Wellington, the regional tourism organisation responsible for tourism management and destination planning for the city, brainstormed ideas in order to fill the gap and hence the birth of WOAP,
a food festival for the city. From conception to the first event was only six weeks in all. However, the festival has established itself as a significant feature in the Wellington annual events calendar.

WOAP (www.visawoap.com) is held in the last two weeks of August, and it showcases the best of Wellington's food products and experiences. From farm to plate, it is a celebration of food and beverage through festival events, special menu offerings and industry activity. The festival incorporates a number of specially designed products and experiences including specific lunch and dinner menus for the festivals known as Dine Wellington. The festival organizes a best burger competition, featuring special and innovative ideas from participating restaurants. Events range from free public lectures, events for pets, competitions, cookery classes and night markets to a beer festival and much more. Award-winning events have included Rimutaka Prison Gate to Plate with celebrity chef Martin Bosley, who mentors inmates to create a fine dining experience at the local prison, thus taking on a social responsibility dimension. Another example is Dine with Monet, which is a dining experience based on the food found in Monet's paintings. The focus of WOAP is foodie experiences, innovation and excitement. Although the majority of events are focussed in Wellington, they spread into the hinterland as far north as Kapiti and the Wairapa in the East.

The festival is organised by Wellington Culinary Events Trust (WCET) with Sarah Miekle as Chief Executive and Festival Director since inception. The trust is a not-for-profit trust that sets out to work across consumer, industry and partner channels to showcase the very best of the Wellington culinary and hospitality community.

**Research brief**

This chapter portrays one future from a wider scenario planning study about WOAP. The wider study was commissioned by WCET as it wanted to know (and understand) what the festival could look like in the future, the key drivers of change that are impacting on the festival, what an international comparator looks like, and what WOAP's future values and strategic directions might be. WCET wanted to create a range of scenarios that portrayed a set of culinary food festivals set in 2050 based upon different perspectives to stretch their understanding of food festivals. It sought to understand the implications of these scenarios for WOAP. Four scenarios were created as seen in Figure 42.1.

**Future studies and scenario planning**

In future studies, plurality is dominant rather than a singular term to counter the notion of only one future (Dator 2014), the latter having conceptual and political limitations. This pluralism opens the choices of alternatives, stretching our understanding of the future. Thus, pluralism is dominant in the research and frameworks adopted in futures studies. In this context, the method that dominates futures studies is scenario planning (Ringland 2010; Slaughter 2002). Scenario comes from the Latin *scaena* meaning scene and was originally used in the context of the performing arts (Asselt, Klooster, Notten & Smits 2010; Bishop, Hines & Collins 2007), with the term being adopted because of the emphasis on storytelling. Kahn and Wiener (1967, p. 273) defined scenarios as ‘hypothetical sequences of events constructed for the purpose of focusing attention on causal processes and decision points’.
A scenario planning team was created for the WOAP project. The outcome was four scenarios using a $2 \times 2$ matrix framework (Van der Heijden, Bradfield, Burt, Cairns & Wright 2002). This framework approach adopts a perspective shaped by two dominant drivers, accessibility and fluid identity. In Figure 42.1, the vertical axis depicts accessibility, which is about how accessible the festival is for the masses (Lee 2014). On one end of the scale is community (Jepson & Clarke 2015), indicating a festival which is open to everyone. The opposite is exclusivity, which highlights a festival that is catering for only a few select people, focussing on luxury experiences and high-end consumers (Kapferer 2014; Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie 2014). The horizontal axis shows a scale of fluid identity. Fluid identity focusses on forms of tourist behaviour where tourists want individual experiences and novelty rather than specific activities (Yeoman, 2010). On one end of the scale, we have hedonism (Taquet, Quoidbach, de Montjoye, Desseilles & Gross 2016.), which can be defined as a state of luxury and indulgence in the pursuit of pleasure. At the other end, we have bohemianism (Huston, Wadley & Fitzpatrick 2015), which can be described as an alternative setting, focussing on originality and non-conformism.

The four scenarios are named Dr Spock’s Food Festival, Roots, Royal Appetite and La Natura. Dr Spock’s Food Festival is a science fiction future emphasising creativity, quantum leaps and science as a food experience. Roots is a predictive scenario based upon facts and statistical trends with a focus on community, the beach and fresh food. The Royal Appetite scenario is a prognosis scenario focussing on high value and exclusivity in a neo-liberal world. The final scenario, La Natura, creates a vision around tourism as a food paradise. This scenario is the focus of this chapter.

**Utopian futures: creating a vision**

La Natura is a scenario that pictures a future food festival that is focussed on community, well-being and sustainable practice. The purpose of the scenario is to highlight a utopian future, of what a food festival should be. It is constructed within the context of Bergman and colleagues’ (2010) ontological classification of the future and sets out to create a vision or desired state.
Ian Yeoman et al.

The imperfections of Utopia

Utopia is a contentious and contradictory term, with a strong spatial component. It has been described as a perfect, good, happy place (eutopia) or as a ‘no place’ (outopia) that does not exist and may never exist (Brown 2009). Utopias generally represent both a critique and a proposal. Embedded in the context of their contemporary conditions, they entail a critique to current society and an ideal that provides tools to ‘measure’ it, inspiring a quest for the construction of a better alternative (Hedrén & Linnér 2009). Therefore, utopias offer an alternative for a good or at least relatively ‘better’ place; ‘what should or could be’. This better place or situation is often located in the past. Such utopias rely on a certain sense of nostalgia (for childhood, a previous golden age or rural idyll), or it is seen as a state of becoming (Coyle & Fairweather 2005). It has been suggested that to explore the desires and ethical underpinnings of utopias, it is important to look at what aspects of society are being repressed, controlled or erased in proposed utopian alternatives (Levitas 2010). The term utopia has been avoided or even rejected by advocates of alternative ideas of society and places because it is often associated with unrealistic and unachievable ideals, making them appear naive and impossible.

According to Bell (1993), utopias are visions, ideal futures that are credible yet not really attainable. They include elements of fantasy or wishful thinking, and their purpose is about how to make the future possible or creating a pathway to it. This pathway is supported by Asselt et al. (2010) and Veenman (2013), who introduced the category of normative futures studies which favours a single image of a desirable future and the deployment of backcasting methodologies as reason to achieve that desirable future. Included in normative futures studies are critical futures which represent desires, values, cultural assumptions and world views. Thus, utopias are a desired position or are about idealism.

Paradise and Utopia

Tourism is first and foremost an activity about difference and encounter, and its influence in the representation of places and societies is crucial (Yeoman et al. 2015). In geography, the notion of ‘geographical imagination’ refers precisely to the ways in which we represent and imagine the world, places and people, and the increasing role of tourism in shaping these imaginaries has been stressed (Mowforth & Munt 2009). Yeoman et al (2015) argue it would be hard to imagine the tourism without a gaze or image as in a certain context, tourism is a paradise, a place to get away from the everyday. The meaning of paradise is not universal and varies within different cultural or religious contexts. In the Western world, notions of paradise often refer to heaven or to an ideal or perfect place on earth (Chiu 2009). Costa (1998) suggests that it was first used by Homer, and later by other Greek and Roman writers and has been in use since approximately 3,000 years ago. They described paradise as a place of isolation, abundance and difference. Later, the Judeo-Christian tradition linked conceptualisations of heaven and the Garden of Eden to the concept of paradise. During the European Age of Discovery, paradise was related to the exotic and primitive, including the notion of the noble savage. In contemporary times, paradise is commonly understood as heaven outside the earthly domain while also acknowledging that paradise-like places exist on earth.

The scenario: La Natura

The landscape around Tuscany gives a food lover hope and vision for fresh, local and authentic cuisine. Surprisingly, the region itself has become one of the leading culinary delights on the organic food-tourism.
trail and is acknowledged as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) gastronomy festival in 2050. This is the best food festival in the world. The festivalgoer is demanding, will search out for the best ingredients, is concerned about the environment and advocates sustainable practices. Authenticity, community and provenance are key words. The food festival offers a range of exotic, innovative and exciting events for the foodie to the service of more basic humble dishes that represent the history of the region. The festival has a strong sense of pride with community, with political and industry support. The festival advocates a balance between nature and human, emphasising the role food can play in communities. Health and well-being are important ingredients in shaping the human capital elements during the festival. It runs for two weeks offering diversity of products and experiences, from educational courses on food and wine to expensive dining experiences with celebrity chefs. Prices and access range from free to the exclusive.

Drivers

La Natura is a utopian scenario with the central proposition of how to create a food paradise and vision. Drivers are the key trends or propositions that are shaping the scenario’s story.

Driver 1: increased knowledge and education

Society is more knowledgeable and better educated (Muller 2015). This has been fuelled by expanding technologies that make information freely accessible (Yeoman 2012). In Italy, the proportion of students who are expected to graduate from university has increased remarkably from 19 per cent in 2000 to 36 per cent in 2016, and the upward trend will continue in the future (OECD 2017). In the similar vein, Yeoman (2008) suggested that affluent countries are expecting to see an increase in graduate-level qualified employees. The rising level of education enables consumers to be better informed about their health issues, and as a result, they are willing to make important and life-extending changes in lifestyle (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Backer, Robertson & Smith 2014).

Driver 2: health and wellness

In line with disposable income growth, consumers have become more concerned about what they are eating, and they tend to seek food that is local, organic and produced in a sustainable manner (Yeoman 2012). According the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO 2012), food is playing a greater role in destination image and, as part of that image, it is portrayed local and with a provenance. This food is seen as pure and untainted, suggesting health benefits and a natural lifestyle. With ageing populations, tourists will seek out new ways to extend their years and slow down the ageing process; thus healthy food, exercise, Eastern medicines, yoga and herbal remedies will play a greater part in the future (Yeoman et al. 2015).

Driver 3: scarcity of resources

Peak oil is an example of scarcity of resources. Peak oil will lead to uncertainty in the future over the availability of oil. The issues of the scarcity of resources can be related to the growth in world tourism and population. As the world’s population grows and economies become more industrialised, non-renewable energy sources will become scarcer and more costly (Yeoman 2012). Currently, tourism is dependent on the availability of oil and is
comparatively oil-intensive. While forecasts for future tourism growth are optimistic, there is also increasing evidence about the imminence of a peak oil production and the economic effects that this would cause (Yeoman 2012). According to Yeoman (2012), population estimates suggest that world population will reach 9.1 billion in 2050. As a result, the challenge of growing competition for resources is likely to be met by more efficient exploitation of existing resources.

**Driver 4: social demographic changes**

An aging population will see more individuals having time to attend festivals. This living longer means we celebrate occasions more often, whether it is birthdays or events (Yeoman et al. 2014). According to the United Nations (UN 2015), Italy’s old-age dependency ratio is the highest in Europe. For every 100 working-age Italians there are 32.7 elderly Italians to care for. There are approximately 150 over-65s for every 100 people under 14. It is predicted this will rise to 263 elders for every 100 young people by 2050. Increasing aging population implies a growing demand for food and services catering to the elderly who seek to remain fit and active (Yeoman 2008).

**Driver 5: awareness of food knowledge**

Due to issues such as climate change and greater education, people are more aware of what they are eating. Thus the future tourist will be more sophisticated, be aware and demanding. According to Yeoman (2008), the scale of communication and immediacy of knowledge will become a more global phenomena. Combined, the higher quality, variety and new experiences will dominate tourist food consumption (Yeoman et al. 2015).

**Implications for WCET and WOAP**

Having examined the drivers of change in the future scenario for La Natura, it is now useful to consider how similar drivers may be relevant to WAOP in the future, and what actions may be needed to ensure the positive development of the festival under this scenario.

**Advocating organic and healthy food**

In the world where people are more affluent and well educated, the demand for health and wellness is obvious. La Natura highlights the drivers and directions for the future. In this sense, one noticeable implication for WCET is to work more collaboratively with key stakeholders, especially producers, to offer more healthy, authentic and local produce so that it can add more value to exotic and unique dining experience they offer to their clients.

**Creating a vision of a food paradise**

La Natura is a vision scenario, a perfect place where people want to be. Thus, under this scenario, WCET has to ensure that WAOP represents a mystery, a paradise and something that people desire. It needs to be attractive with a clear value system that advocates authenticity, provenance and community. At the same time, it needs to offer a variety of access points, maintaining an illusion of desire and excitement. WOAP has to be a food tourist’s dream festival.
Utopian futures

Growing number of responsible businesses

La Natura stimulates interest in healthy and organic food. This scenario also illustrates to society and industry that demand for such food is increasing. Thus, WOAP needs a supplier and stakeholder system that advocates sustainable choices, practices, a focus on community and championing food in a responsible way.

Encouraging more organic farming practices

La Natura goes beyond the tourism industry by recognising the holistic nature of the food supply chain from farm to fork. In such a scenario, WOAP and WCET are partners with local suppliers, producers and farmers advocating organic practices.

Creating a polarised society driven by exclusivity

However, there is a risk with this utopian future: it should be recognised that an organic and provenance approach to food might be seen as a luxury for the rich and elite in society, thus alienating those in the lower socio-economic classes. WOAP doesn’t want to be seen as a product for foodies and posh people. This dark side would create a polarised society (Yeoman et al. 2014) where only the top class would have access to such festival.

Concluding thoughts: learning points for a future strategy

The purpose of investigating La Natura was to create an action plan in order to create the future that scenario portrays. Considering the elements of the scenario and the drivers of change, the actions required from WOAP and WCET are as follows.

Action 1: create a food story and champion the cause

New Zealand most certainly has a food story, although this is the youngest country on earth, and its food culture is still evolving. It is about embracing its *turangawaewae*, New Zealand’s place in the world and about having confidence in New Zealand itself. WOAP needs to present that story from a tourism perspective. The story must embrace the values, characteristics and actions that are seamless from farm to fork. It should be built around the themes of sustainable practice, provenance, excitement and an advocacy for the right path.

Action 2: vision

A strong vision needs to be created for the WOAC, highlighting the world-class culinary experiences in Wellington that push out gastronomic boundaries. WOAP should be recognised as the festival that delivers the most original and innovative culinary event in the Oceania region so that it becomes a global benchmark.

Action 3: be accessible

Food should be accessible, not exclusive, so that all New Zealanders can be proud of its food and beverage products and service showcased at WOAP. They should be celebrated, supported and consumed with pride.
**Action 4: values**

WOAP should draw out the values portrayed in La Natura such as authenticity, anchoring the community, excellent collaboration and innovation. The experiences delivered should be authentic, genuine and real. This will ensure that they are talked about well after the festival. Food and beverage products and experiences are best shared, laying the foundations for a stronger and more connected community. Experiencing excellence in terms of the products, services and experience should be the norm for WOAP festivalgoers. The festival should be a collaboration of a wide variety of the people to deliver the WOAP experiences. Finally, the festival should aim to be innovation, making the food tourist wonder and dream.

**Action 5: be a winner**

Wellington should aim to achieve UNESCO gastronomy city status in the near future.

**Conclusion**

*La Natura* highlights the key trends shaped around health consciousness and at the same time, suggests that consumers are willing to pay more for food that is healthy, sustainable and local. This is a scenario about partnership in which WOAP becomes a gateway for responsible suppliers; thus those wanting to participate in WOAP would need to have similar values. The risk in this scenario is that a festival is created for the liberal, educated and informed in society, which alienates vast majority of locals. The knowledge gained from the use of this scenario should help WOAP establish itself as a sustainable food festival and a desirable food tourist experience. Overall, in the context of the scenario La Natura food festival, this chapter has explored a vision of the future of WOAP festival and has outlined a series of realistic actions to create that future. For the wider festivals community, the chapter demonstrates how communities and organisations can use scenario planning to create a direction, understand risk and create a debate about the future.

**References**


Utopian futures


