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FORECASTING FOR MUSEUMS

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Abstract:	This document is a hypertext exploring the world of forecasting for museums
Keywords:	Forecast, Cone of Plausibility, foresight, prediction



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Aim and objectives

This document introduces basic knowledge of forecasting for cultural institutions

Learning outcomes

After studying this resource learners will be able to:

- Identify the difference between prediction and foresight

Keywords

A set of keywords that provide the main terms used in the Forecast, Cone of Plausibility, foresight, prediction



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1. Introduction

What will happen to museums when digital technology shows its full potential? What features will the museum of the future have? How will it seize the opportunities offered by digital innovation? What competencies does this industry need to keep museums relevant from the twentieth century to the present?

The liquefaction of hierarchies and social functions leads museums to open up; they are no longer closed systems as they used to be in the twentieth-century, but parts of wide systems of scientific, cultural, and territorial relationships. Users are no longer just consumers of cultural products, but they are becoming active subjects of content production and conveyance. The museum of the future either will be a collective work or will not exist. It will be developed and co-created with the larger communities, which will support it and share decisions on it. In this transition, digital innovation provides the infrastructure that multiplies the opportunities for exchange, accessibility and participation. Museums have begun a long process through which they are adjusting themselves to these new dynamics, in favor of more horizontal systems and new communication languages. At one time, these cultural institutions used to display objects. Today, they connect the multiplicity of ideas and the knowledge that different peoples have developed based on these same objects. The task that museums are now expected to carry out, on-site and on-line, is sharing,



inside and outside, collections and various contents generated by artifacts¹

To understand what role the digital driver is playing we can learn the techniques that are typical for forecasting. This text will show the importance of forecasting as well as the difference between foresight and prediction. A way of visualizing forecasting will be explored, namely the cone of plausibility.

2. The importance of forecasting

Why is foresight important? In *Tomorrow in the Golden State, museums and the future of California. A Guide for Forecasting and Planning*, Elizabeth Merritt and Garry Golden say²:

Without someone playing the important role of futurist, we risk being mired in the present. Our planning is often focused on short term challenges and immediate needs. We have a tendency, when looking at only a short time frame, to defend old assumptions and choose narrow measures of success. We tinker with the edges of what we already do well rather than risking innovation. It's all too easy, when faced with the need to change, to become paralyzed by fear, uncertainty, doubt and outright denial.

¹ Sturabotti, D., Surace, R. 2018, p.4

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Merritt E., Golden G., (2010), p. 7.



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Futures-thinking breaks through this logjam by freeing peoples' imaginations. It fosters a start-up mindset where anything is possible, people are willing to question assumptions, think broadly of how to measure success, discover or create new needs and try lots of things, knowing that many of them will fail

2.1. Foresight vs. prediction

Foresight and prediction involve different approaches: prediction is what you think will happen in the future or which particular future is most likely to occur, whereas foresight involves imagining many plausible futures and identifying useful actions that can be taken in the present. To refer back to Merritt and Golden's article, they tell us that:

- 'Futurists accomplish this in three fundamental ways, by:
- Identifying and monitoring change, tracking the flow of trends, events and emerging issues
- Imagining different futures and testing new assumptions through forecasting and scenario building
- Communicating and responding to change'³.

Forecasting, therefore, involves foresight of the future, starting by studying the present (what we know) and recognising that things get increasingly uncertain as we move forward in time. The farther

3 Merritt E., Golden G. (2010), p. 7 - 8.

we look forward from the present moment, the more things have the potential to change.

2.2. Cone of plausibility

We quote further from Elizabeth Merritt and Garry Golden⁴:

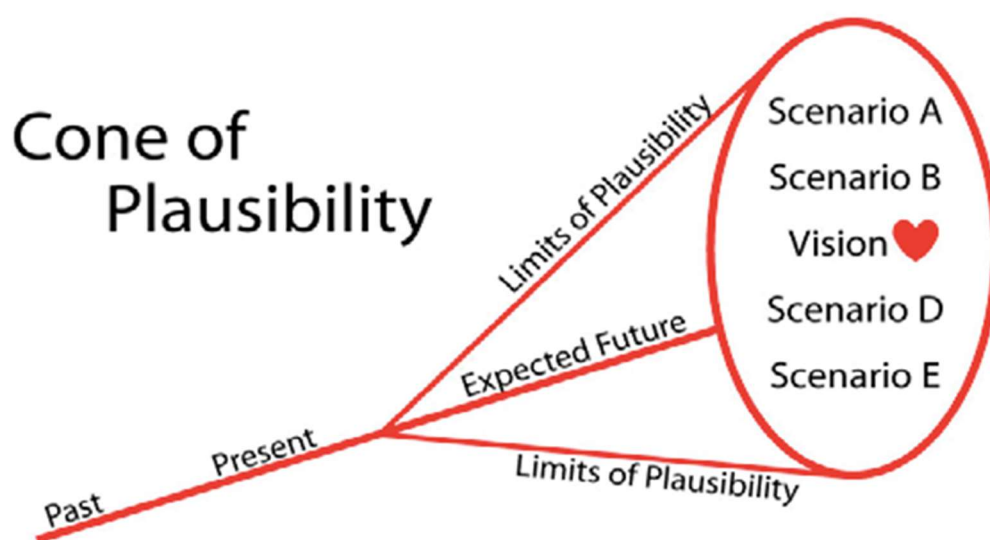
'A way to imagine potential futures is to visualizse a cone radiating out from the present (figure below). This "cone of plausibility" defines futures that might reasonably occur. The edges of the cone are defined by the limits of plausibility. Functional teleportation within the next fifty years is probably a non-starter, for example. However, 3-D printers that recreate objects from digital data already exist, and could become the functional equivalent of teleportation for objects in the near future. Immortality is probably not on the cards, but extension of healthy lifespan by ten or twenty years might well be.

Dead center in the cone of plausibility is the expected future. This is how the future would look if business proceeds as usual. Things may change gradually, but only in the direction we have come to expect.

Contrary to what common sense would suggest, the expected future is highly unlikely. It's far more probable that some force will cause us to veer off course and land elsewhere in the cone, somewhere between the expected future and the limits of plausibility.

4 Merritt E., Golden G. (2010), p. 8.

This is the realm of foresight: what are these possible futures? What factors would bring any given one into being and how can we spot those factors early on? Where in the cone is our preferred future, the one we consciously choose, and how do we make it our destination?



What futures fall into the "cone of plausibility"? Read the insights of Elizabeth Merritt, Founding director of the Center for the Future of Museums, American Alliance of Museums, in one article posted in her personal blog [here](#).

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<https://themuseumofthefuture.com/>

4. Glossary

Prediction: What you think will happen in the future or which particular future is most likely to occur.

Foresight: Involves imagining many plausible futures and identifying useful actions that can be taken in the present.