

KEY CHALLENGES FOR RURAL DESTINATIONS TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF GENERATION Z TRAVELLERS

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Abstract

Generation Z travellers, who typically do not yet have their own income, constitute the youngest group of tourism demand, who are often ignored by destination management organizations or tourism service providers. However, they play a key role in shaping consumer demand and act as drivers of developments in destinations. Generation Z is almost redefining what it means to travel - their unique needs and specific destination preferences can set the future direction of tourism development.

All of these findings provide a basis for conducting primary data collection by involving the members of the generation in a questionnaire survey in order to learn about the relationship of the Hungarian respondents (N=212 people) with IT, their travel habits, the method of financing their trips, and their communication preferences. Based on the results obtained, the characteristics of the future demand for rural destinations, expectations and preferences for the range of expected services and experiences emerge. All of this helps in shaping the future direction of tourism development in rural destinations.

Keywords: *Generation Z, travel habits, rural destination*

JEL: *D91, L83, R19*

Introduction

Understanding the generations is playing a crucial role nowadays in the process of examining potential customers and/or travellers, as more diversity now existing between the generations than ever before. New infocommunication technologies, higher connectivity, and changing values have transformed the way of travel organisation and distribution, in parallel the developments of social networks.

A key factor for prosperous tourism industry is the capability to identify and handle the change and interactions across a wide range of impacting determinants (Dwyer et al, 2009, Imbeah et al, 2020, Juma et al, 2020). Numerous factors should be considered in the macroenvironment to describe all the variables affecting the market; however, demographic changes impact directly the volume and structure of the demand and thereby labour market (e.g., number and qualification of employees) (Grimm, 2009). As a result, demography is a key driver for the tourism demand in the upcoming years (Yeoman– Schanzel–Smith, 2013). Understanding demographic trends provide the capability of explaining ongoing changes both on the demand and supply side of the tourism market (Dwyer et al, 2009). According to Moscardo et al (2011) the future expansion of travel industry highly relies upon how well the professionals understand the social and demographic changes and trends influencing the travel behaviour. If tourism service providers and tourism destination management organisations make decisions in tourism supply without matching them to the changing

consumer needs, they will suffer from "strategic drift", a phenomenon, which appear when a market actor's strategy steadily moves apart from the forces in the external environment by apparent steps of the management (Dwyer et al, 2009, Juma et al 2022a, Juma et al 2022b).

The current global travel and tourism market can be characterised by multi-generations (Glover, 2010). This is a consequence of tourism marketing efforts as tourism products are highly targeted to the special needs of specific demographic groups to make them more tempting to the customers. Schewe and Meredith (2006) identified the greater diversity in lifestyle and customer behaviour in the present consumer groups than in case of the previous generations. Almost the spectrum of 15-75 years can be found on the travel market as active, decision-maker participants of trips, covering four generations of people.

The theory of generations

A generation is often defined as a group of people born at the same time and going through life together. By most definitions, each generation interval is approximately 20 years. Twenty years represents the average time between births, or the beginning of the next generation. The 20-year interval also represents the division of life expectancy of approximately 80 years into four distinct stages: adolescence, adulthood, middle age, and aging (Strauss–Howe, 1991). According to Schewe and Meredith (2006), cohorts are not the same as generations. Each generation is defined by its year of birth, but a cohort can be as long or short as the external event that defines it.

Generations move together from one stage of life to the next. Generations are exposed to shared experiences, life experiences and shared values. According to Strauss and Howe (1991), he has three factors that can more accurately determine generation than age. However, these factors are age-related. They are therefore linked to cohort experiences: (i) perceived affiliation, (ii) shared beliefs and behaviours, and (iii) shared places/situations in history.

Strauss and Howe (1991) conducted an extensive study of US demographics and used the following subdivisions to identify various generational groups: Silent generation born between 1925 and 1942. Baby boomers, born between 1943 and 1960. Generation X or 13th generation, from 1961 he was born in 1981. Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z born between 1982 and 2003. The shift is often identified in the year of 1994. It is the most recent one after 2004, and the author does not name it. This generation is later called Generation Alpha. The above time intervals may vary between publications and those skilled in the art do not agree on a universally accepted general term.

Typical traits of Generation Z

Generation Z is one of the youngest generations growing today and will rule the world for decades to come. Whereas previous generations were born with little digital exposure and were often exposed to push media (radio and TV), Generation Z grew up in a digital universe where the Internet was as convenient as plug and play (Feiertag–Berge, 2008, Tütüncov et al, 2019). Born in an age of technological diversification, Generation Z has been familiar with the internet and his social networking websites since he was introduced by his parents at an early age. They are highly encouraged and encouraged by their parents to immerse themselves in the world of technology from an early age. Generation Z can function in both the real and virtual worlds, making it easy to retrieve and review the information they need (McCrinkle, 2018). It is also quicker to share information with

others. The communication process between them takes place continuously using various communication devices and social media. Active social media users have many contacts and engage in day-to-day relationships primarily through these channels (face-to-face meetings are important, but maintaining online contact is just as important) (Csobanka, 2016). Gen Z uses a variety of mobile devices to comment on reality, surroundings and living conditions, to express opinions and attitudes on Twitter, blogs and internet forums, to post photos (Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat) and movies (YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat). Facebook can be used for all the above activities. Generation Z not only consume content on the Internet, they also create and control it (Hardey, 2011).

Globalization will play an important role for Generation Z. According to Sparks & Honey (2015), Generation Z members are the most global and multicultural generation born and raised in an age of internationalism, gender equality and climate change awareness. Social responsibility, social advocacy, and concern for the common good therefore play a very important role in the altruistic behaviour of Generation Z members. More than any previous generation, Generation Z are aware of global issues and are determined to change the world for the better.

Financially conservative and pragmatic when it comes to focusing on a secure career. Representatives of this generation want to build a brilliant professional career quickly and without effort. They find it difficult to achieve their vision of sustainable professional development in small steps (Hardey, 2011). These are people who are not only looking for work in the immediate vicinity, but are looking for work all over the world, as they are characterized by mobility and foreign language proficiency. They do not care about stability at work. They change jobs easily, want versatility, and want to get away from it all.

Key characteristics of Generation Z in the tourism market

A number of studies have been conducted internationally to identify key Generation Z travel patterns. One study conducted in 2018 by online travel agency Expedia surveyed 1,000 U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 65 to gain cross-generational insights into the demand side of the travel industry (Expedia, 2018). However, as the sample describes a generation living in the United States, the key results can be used as a starting point for further consideration and primary research on the Hungarian market.

Generation Z travellers are looking for adventure experiences to explore and try new things as it also stated by the ETC report (2020). Like all generations, they attach great importance to reviews when choosing a hotel; moreover, they prefer to stay at hotels over Airbnb and vacation rentals (Egolf, 2018). Generation Z has had Wi-Fi since childhood and often choose hotels based on free internet access. For convenience, half of the respondents visit an online travel agency website to book transportation and accommodation services. We see the parent sponsorship phenomenon as travellers prefer to experience new destinations with their peers and often travel with their parents. Generation Z and Millennials are most influenced by social media posts when making travel purchase decisions. More than a third of them choose their travel destinations based specifically on social media posts as also reported by Egolf (2018).

Hungarian respondents included in a survey conducted by Kökény–Jászberényi (2022) in 2021 took leisure trips several times a year. Nearly 80% of them also visit more distant destinations abroad, as many of them already have a regular income. A particular characteristic of many people is researching accommodations, attractions, local transportation, and dining options before travelling. Most of them also travel with their families and care deeply about the opinions of their family and friends, whom they consider to be the most reliable sources of information. This will most

influence their travel decisions. Additionally, their decisions are heavily influenced by social networking sites, review sites, individual websites, and other Internet sites. The most popular travel motive is to visit the city. Although the majority prefer individually organized trips to trips organized by travel agencies, 60% of them have already travelled through a travel agency. Most people consider the price of the service and look for discount offers.

A comparative analysis of the Metropolitan University (2019) researchers reached similar conclusions. A large portion of the age group (55%) travelled during the study period, primarily for vacation and recreational purposes. The second most common reason for travel was to visit cities (19%). This is probably due to cheap flights providing cheap and quick access to major European cities and the growing demand for travel. In the sample surveyed, 2-night trips were the most popular (35%), followed by stays of 4-7 nights, but the percentage of people who prefer longer trips, even 2 weeks is only 5%. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed travel three or more times a year, so unlike previous generations, this age group is more likely to opt for a short vacation rather than saving one long trip a year. Young people usually travel with their partner or family. The vast majority of respondents are not at all loyal to the accommodations they have already tried. All of this could be consistent with Gen Z's common trait of being more concerned with products than brands.

Material and method

To learn about the travel habits of Generation Z in Hungary, we investigated using research questions, but due to the nature of the study, no specific hypotheses could be formulated. The purpose of the primary research was to obtain answers to the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the use of information and communication technology by sample generation?
- What communication channels do respondents use?
- What travel habits and preferences do respondents have?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the results obtained regarding the tourism potential of rural areas?

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires to collect individual opinions. Structurally, the questionnaire consists of one general and four main thematic sections: travel habits, travel preferences, financial background, and communication channels. The final section asks questions about the sociodemographic aspects of respondents. Survey questions are presented in the form of closed and semi-closed questions.

The purpose of the pilot study was to refine the question and implement a test version to check the clarity and understandability of the question wording. The pilot survey sample consisted of 31 respondents. Johanson and Brooks (2010) suggest that 30 representative participants are a reasonable minimum recommendation for conducting a pilot study for exploratory purposes.

The primary target group for this study are members of Generation Z born between 1995 and 2009. These generational age lines correspond to the taxonomy developed by McCrindle and Wolfinger (2008). Data collection was performed using the Google Forms web survey management software.

An active phase of research and data collection was organized for the period from 1 to 31 October 2021. We received a total of 424 responses. After data collection, correlations between indi-

vidual variables were examined and identified using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The relationship between sociodemographic parameters, attitudes and other personality factors and behavioural patterns in tourism was tested. Therefore, the correlations found helped determine which factors most influenced travel behaviour.

Analysis of the collected data and creation of some figures was done with the help of Excel and SPSS programmes.

Results

Sample characteristics

Because the study generation spanned 15 years, we split the respondents into five age groups to facilitate handling and improve correlation results (Table 1). Women are slightly more represented in the sample (56%), but women are generally more willing to respond and participate in surveys. By place of residence, residents of cities with a population of less than 30,000 make up 33% of the sample; however, the lowest proportion of residents of the capital city also represent 20% of the sample of 424 people. Within the generation, the largest proportion are those born between 1998-2000 and 2001-2003 (28.5%; 29.5%).

**Table 1. Distribution of the sample in terms of age and place of origin
(number of respondents)**

		1995- 1997	1998- 2000	2001- 2003	2004- 2006	2007- 2009
age	Male	26	56	58	33	13
	Female	38	65	67	45	23
place of origin	Budapest	11	30	25	13	7
	City (population over 30,000)	9	31	32	20	8
	Town (population under 30,000)	29	41	42	18	9
	Village	15	19	26	27	12

Source: Based on study results compiled by the authors, 2022

68% of respondents have an independent income, while the rest earn their living with pocket money received from their parents. 22% supplemented their parent's contribution with student work and, surprisingly, 8% of respondents earn extra income through gambling. There is a strong relationship between self-employment and age groups between 1995-1997 and 1998-2000 (Pearson's $r = 0.86$).

The use of IT technology

It was measured how many people live their lifestyle in a household and how many smart devices can be found in one household. Turns out there are 3.18 people living together on average, and an average household has about 7.84, which is 8 smart devices, so on average there are 2.5 smart devices for each person in a household. The most common devices are mobile phones, laptops

and smart watches. In terms of digital services, the extent to which they can live without the Internet is rated on a decavalent Likert scale. 12% of respondents are only willing to live without internet - even for a longer period of time, 84% of these respondents are women. This is important feedback, for example, regarding openness to slow food movement. 53% of respondents receive data traffic with their phone subscription (78% of Budapest residents), while 41% receive it as an additional service. Only 6% use the Internet when free access is available (all of these respondents live in rural villages).

The average daily time of Internet use in the entire sample was 4.2 hours, significantly higher for those born between 2007-2009 (7.8 hours) and those living in the capital (6.9 hours). A rather extreme value appears in the case of boys born in 2007-2009 in Budapest, the value of four respondents reached 9.3 hours. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents rate how much they agree with the statement that "*Digital tools do not serve as a supplement to daily life but are an integral part of our lives.*" On a decavalent Likert scale, the average level of agreement was 7.2, 56% of respondents gave a value of 10, mainly those born between 2004-2006 and 2007-2009. The percentage of men also agreeing with this statement is higher (mean 8.1).

Communication channels

Respondents reflected on which apps and services they use in their daily life, when travelling, and which apps they use both. There were no significant differences between the responses, meaning that when travelling, they behaved the same as in everyday life. The Facebook and Messenger apps appeared as platforms used by all respondents (Viber is mentioned only in 34% of responses). In the case of Instagram, 72% of respondents use it on weekdays and significantly less (68%) when travelling.

Google services are used by many respondents (63%, of which 65% are women), including Google Search, Google Maps, Google Translate, Google Travel. Accommodation booking sites like booking.com or szallas.hu are not used in daily life, only for tourism (48%). The results are not surprising, and it also indicates that the sample is more likely to just participate in the trip than organize it. Tripadvisor.com is also the only option used to find information while travelling, used by 38% of respondents, the majority of which are residents of the capital and women.

In the list of preferences for channels used to choose accommodation, the opinions of peers are still valid for the sample (41%), followed by accommodation portals (34%), while 17% booked using a travel agent. Based on advertising, only 5% of respondents booked accommodation and 3% by other means. Opinions of friends are more important for people living in smaller cities and towns, especially for those born between 1998 and 2000. Opinions can also appear in the form of online reviews.

Regarding restaurant selection, the responses showed a significant deviation. The largest percentage of respondents use Google Search to find places to eat in the area, and 82% only use the app to find restaurants during their travels. Order food (Foodpanda, Wolt) also appeared in 46% of responses, an app that downloaders love to use both on weekdays and during travel. Tripadvisor is a resource for restaurant selection that was only available to 33% of study participants and used only during their travels. 46 respondents prepare their own food during the week or when they are travelling and therefore do not need restaurant services (78% of them are rural women).

Respondents also used Google Search to find shopping opportunities, 85% chose it, while 26 asked locals for directions. Finding events was not an issue for respondents: 39% said they did not need to search because they were travelling for a specific event, 31% said that a Google Search

provided sufficient information, while 16% of respondents sought help from family and friends. Only 14% of respondents questioned local residents, although many events have only local promotion, very little information is available on the Internet.

Travel habits and preferences of the respondents

Respondents were also asked with whom they usually travel. 45% travel with family - this confirms what has been experienced in the US - while 43% of respondents usually travel with friends and/or partner, 5% with colleagues and only 7% travel alone. In their case, experience means that during travel they get to know and make friends with strangers, whom they then follow on social media platforms.

The most important factors for destination selection were examined with a question in which the order of importance should be established between the elements of tourism supply elements and infrastructure compiled by Gonda (2016). Factors to prioritise are as follows: tourism attractions, transportation and other infrastructure, accommodation, food and beverage, entertainment, safety and hygiene, cultural services and prices. In ranking list, price takes first place, followed by accommodation options with a small margin. The provision of cultural programmes and entertainment opportunities was also of great importance to respondents, with the same rating value. The needs for food and beverage, tourism attractions, and ultimately safety and hygiene seem less important. According to the results obtained, respondents are very price sensitive - this may even stem from this generation's low independent income - while their propensity to take risks is high, hygienic and safety is not taken into account when choosing a destination. It should be pointed out that the existence of known attraction is not important to them either, i.e., even rural areas with few tourist attractions can appeal to Generation Z.

The next set of questions checks interest for matching keywords. In terms of experience and comfort, 82% of the opinions support the experience, confirming the common characteristics of the generation. Experience compared in the case of security, the experience is 98% more attractive than security, verifying the results obtained in the previous question. When it comes to photos/videos vs. tangible memories, generational characteristics are once again confirmed, with the vast majority of respondents (83%) favouring digital content. While photo/video is a record of the experience, experience compared to photo/video comparisons, the experience is preferred by 82% (as in the first pairwise comparison). There was no major difference in the respondents' opinion between living in the moment and sharing the moment: 99% consider living in the moment more important. Among active recreation options compared to passive rest, 67% of respondents preferred the active form, an important finding for rural service providers.

Answers to the multi-valued question about the use of transport show that the preferred means of transport is the car (64% of the mentions), followed by the bus and the train with the same response rate each other (43 and 41%). 32% of respondents mentioned flying, and some of the answers also focused on hitchhiking, biking, and walking. These activities can also be helpful to get to an attraction when staying in the countryside.

Among the type of accommodation preference (multi-value question), apartments and guesthouses were mentioned most frequently (46%), followed by 4- to 5-star hotels (43%). In this case, there is a strong negative association between responses and independent income (Cramer's $v=0.81$), so young people can stay in luxury hotels through their parents. Three-star hotels received 32% of mentions, while one- to two-star hotels received 24% of feedbacks. Neither boarding

houses nor camps are attractive solutions for the surveyed, at only 13% and 10% respectively. The results reveal a weak Gen Z rural housing supply.

The primary travel motive survey was conducted by entering the three most typical of the stated travel purposes. Responses were graded taking into account all grades. In relation to gender, the main motives for travel are city visits, nature walks, hiking and recreation (Figure 1).

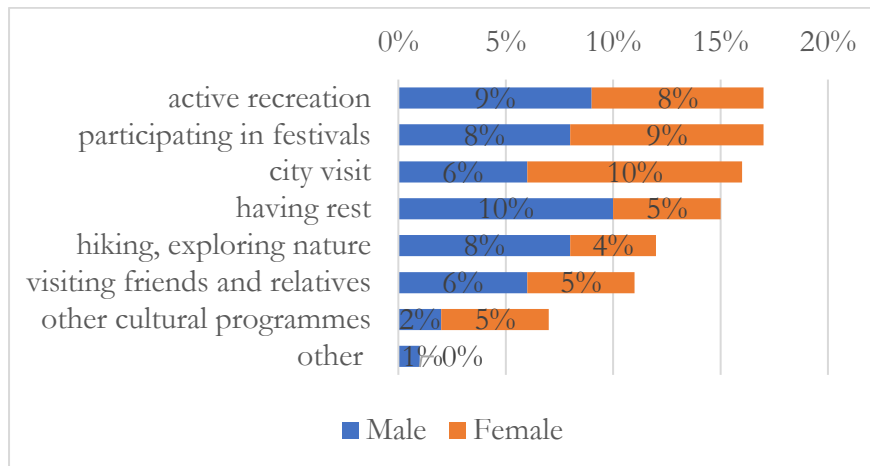


Figure 1. Primary motivations for travel in terms of gender

Source: Based on study results compiled by the authors, 2022

Regarding the above motives, there is no significant difference between the purpose of domestic travel and the purpose of international travel in the sample.

The final question of the travel behaviour study section, as an open-ended question, sought answers on how to persuade members of the generation to travel more. We agree that we can be more engaging, and we also feel the need for more unique and exclusive experiences and more discounts and offers dedicated to members of this generation.

Implications and recommendations

The results obtained are very similar to those of studies conducted in the United States. Whether this similarity occurs in relation to intergenerational similarity or to globalization can be viewed as an important finding. Well-known and described generational traits can also be found in the studied samples. This is a solid starting point for tourism service providers to get to know their guests in advance.

The use of social media for tourism and the role of social media in choosing travel destinations has profoundly changed the tourism industry. Their travel experiences are instantly shared on Facebook and Instagram. Thus, the experience is not just a moment for the traveller, it is lived not only by them, but also by friends, acquaintances and even complete strangers. For Generation Z, social media is key to getting information before travelling, such as choosing a destination or finding attractions in a destination area. Young users trust the opinions of their community to greatly influence their travel decisions.

Based on the results obtained, elements of rural tourism can be made attractive to members of Generation Z if they are experience-oriented and delivered to target groups through the communication channels that generations use. Urbanized youth may also be attracted to the country's

different lifestyles, and the wide range of nature-related services, local cultures and local events can also be well utilized in the design of package of services. For example, engaging visitors in local activities, cooking, crafts, and discovery experiences through geocaching can create experiences.

To attract Generation Z as much as possible, we recommend targeting their practical approach and price sensitivity through a wide range of discounts. Developing a national loyalty program and making discounts available on certain social media activities would be attractive to them. Sweepstakes always have an exciting effect on members of a generation. They are happy to participate.

Generation Z is closely related to IT and various communication channels. Therefore, it is suggested to take advantage of these opportunities to reach the generation members. For example, leverage Instagram's new role to provide interactive points of reference, web-based information (using QR codes or local apps).

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