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YOUTH TRAVELERS AS A GROWING MARKET IN URBAN TOURISM; POTENCIES AND CHALLENGES

Banafsheh M. Farahani

School of Housing, Building & Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia
banafsheh.farahani@gmail.com

Danto Sukmajati

Department of Architecture, Mercu Buana University – Jakarta, Indonesia
dantosukmajati@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Although youth tourism is not a new phenomenon but recently, its rapid growing creates a center of attention for many researchers, marketers, policymakers and other related delegates in tourism industry. Commercial, political and academic interest as well as entertainment in addition to greater freedom, affordability and appreciation of travelling increased the number of young travelers who either travel alone, with family, friends or other accompany. The available facilities and activities plus desire to learn more about other culture, to develop self interest and seeking for entertainment encourage young travelers demand for traveling to urban areas. Increasing the number of youth travelers in urban areas like any other kind of tourism has its own impacts for the host cities which need to be more concerned. The main purpose of this paper is to study these particular tourists travelling pattern as well as potencies and challenges of this growing market in urban areas. The result of the study helps the policy makers to control the negative impacts of this kind of tourism, marketer to promote the destination according to the needs and desires of the segment and service provider to present the service and facilities to satisfy these specific consumers.

Key words: Youth Tourism, Urban Tourism, Market Segment, Potencies and Challenges

INTRODUCTION

“Tourists are poorly explored part of tourism business despite the fact that within a few decades tourism has grown from a marginal to one of the world’s dominant economic sectors” (Egmond, 2007, P.1). Accordingly the youth tourism market in international tourism significantly increase

and is been reported as 20-25 percent of the whole number of international tourism (WTO, in Richards and King, 2003). Youth travelers divide to different groups such as student, backpackers and so forth. Regarding to the division, student college market consider as multibillion- dollar business (Bywate, 1993, Chadee and Cutler. 1996).

Although lately researchers were interested in studying youth tourism in general and youth travelers characteristics and their travel behavior in specific, however there were some reasons behind this lack of concern in this specific area of research. Carr (1998) asserts that unavailability of widely accepted definition of youth travelers as well as consideration of low level spender of this market among other travelers effect the researchers interest. Seekings (1998) and Richards and Wilson (2004) also refer to these reasons why this segment is under-marketing. Regarding to spending matter, Seekings (1998) believes that there is no clear differentiation “between spender transaction and spender per visit” (Seekings, 1998, P. 49). He acknowledge youth travelers higher number of transactions and believes that their expenditure per visit is the same as adult travelers and their longer length of stay shouldn't be ignored in this matter.

This paper aims to have a review on youth tourism by giving different definitions of the term as well as the characters of youth travelers and the benefits of this kind of tourism. Moreover, definition of urban tourism and its nature is provided. How cities and tourism link and relate to each other is the other part of the paper. Youth travelers similar to other kind of tourists have their own characteristics, and their activities as well as service preference consider special within their set. Regarding their age, gender, and income as well as how much experience they have in travelling, they show different traveling behavior. Potencies and challenges are the other parts and the paper will end by some discussion and conclusion.

YOUTH TOURISM

The increasing number of youth travelers, recently make researchers to be interested in this topic. In this regards lots of definitions were provided for youth tourism. Although variety of research have been done in this area but still there is no agreement about the general definition of young tourists (Seekings, 1995) and lack of agreement about the parameters of youth tourism (Richard and Wilson, 2003). In 1991, WTO provides a definition to ease the statistical analysis in research. Accordingly youth tourism defined as as all travels by young people aged between 15-29. In 2002 the study had been done by WTO concern young travelers as less than 25 years old

people. However, Horak and Weber (2000) in order to increase the coherence of the group refer to not more than 26 for youth tourists' age.

Travelling in the purpose of studying, business and visiting friends as well as back packing were also consider as youth tourism in different studies. Richard and Wilson (2003) referred to the growth of this market and provide reasons why studying this market seize the attention of lots of researchers. They assert that youth travelers:

- Can build bridges between people and cultures.
- Generally has a greater propensity to travel than other segments (ATI, 1995), as their high degree of mobility is a major factor on which youth tourism is based (Horak & Weber, 2000).
- Can often develop prototypes for the new tourist by setting trends
- Can create new attractions and help to establish whole new destinations (Horak & Weber, 2000).
- Can spend longer periods travelling than other tourists, spreading their economic contribution further in terms of both time and space.
- Tend to concentrate their spending within local communities, resulting in lower leakage factors.
- (In the case of students, despite their relatively low incomes) can have proportionally high levels of discretionary income, a great propensity to save money for travel and free time to spend on leisure pursuits, including travel" (Rechard and Wilson, 2003, P.9).

Presenting another view, Nash et al. (2006) relate the definition of youth travelers to backpackers. There are considerable problems associated with defining exactly what or who a backpacker actually is, because backpackers are not easily distinguished economically or demographically. A variety of terms have been used by authors to describe a backpacker. They have established the following characteristics associated with backpackers that have similar characteristics with youth travelers:

- A preference for budget accommodation.
- An emphasis on meeting other travelers.
- An independently organized and flexible travel schedule.
- Aged between 20 to 24
- Longer rather than brief holidays.
- An emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities.

Office of the Minister for Children (2007) had a research in titled “National Recreation Policy for Young People”. For their purpose the definition of recreation was provided as ‘comprising all positive activities in which a person may choose to take part that will make his or her leisure time more interesting, more enjoyable and personally satisfying’ (adapted from Laidlaw Foundation, 2001 in Office of the Minister for Children (2007, P. 3). Driver (1992) refers to the benefit of recreation as: physiological benefits, psycho-physiological benefits, psychological benefits, social/cultural benefits, environmental benefits, and economic benefits.

Regarding to the length of stay of youth travelers in Canada D’ Anjou (2004) and Richards and King (2003) find an average of over 60 days. Local people get the benefit out of youth travelers visiting their place since they like to buy local made merchandise (D’ Anjou, 2004 and Seeking, 1998). Reisinger and Movondo (2002) believe that young travelers will be the future tourists as they will have flexible income therefore they can easily spend for their upcoming trips.

Young travelers also play an important role in tourism development, as far as they consider as the earliest visitors of the place, they can perform a significant role in development of the place and make it ready for other tourist to visit. Moreover, being satisfy with the visited place will make them a potential future market (Seekings, 1998). In addition, they can act as an indirect promoter and do the marketing for the place (words of mouth).

URBAN TOURISM

According to Ashworth (2006), cities were the origin of most tourists and the destination of many. He mentioned that touch of the tourism industry was centered in cities even if rural attractions were part of the holiday package and the aggregate economic and social impacts of tourism were higher in urban than in rural areas. Milgram (1970) mentioned that cities have great appeal because of their variety, eventfulness, possibility of choice, and the stimulation of an intense atmosphere that many individuals find a desirable background to their lives. Further, he mentioned that three personal factors could affect an individual’s response to a city are:

- A person’s impression of a particular city will depend upon his or her standard of comparison.
- The perception of a city was affected by the status of the perceiver. A tourist, a newcomer to the city, an old-timer, and someone who is returning to the city after a long absence all may have different perceptions of the city.

- Finally, a person comes to a city with preconceived ideas and expectations about it. Even though these preconceptions may not be accurate, they contribute to the impression of the city.

Ashworth (2006) argued that the relationship between cities and tourism is asymmetrical. He mentioned that cities are important to tourism but this does not automatically imply that tourism is important to cities. Moreover, tourism is highly selective and cities are only very rarely locked into an inevitable tourism development. Tourism may need the varied resources of the city but this does not imply that the city needs tourism. In the same way, tourism is only one of a number of activities that occur in the city, the youth tourism is only one tourism resource among many in the touristy city. According to Ashworth and Tunbridge (1990), three characteristics of tourism in the city are:

- The tourism activities of cities exist within a wider regional and national tourism context, whether in terms of organizational structures, visitor place-images, spatial patterns of visitor behavior, or distributions of tourism resources. The urban central place occupies a pivotal position within the functional networks in the wider regional hinterland.
- Moreover, an extent contradictorily, cities exist within functional networks with each other regardless of, and separate from, their regional or national context. This is particularly marked in tourism where a mixture of inter-urban co-operation and competition can create various sorts of national and international tourism circuits.
- Tourism in cities was dominated by variety, in two senses. The variety of facilities offer to visitors, and thus the variety of types of holiday experience, is in itself one of the main attractions of cities. Equally, these facilities were rarely produced for, or used exclusively by, tourist but are shared by many different types of user: in short, the multifunctional city serves the multi-motivated user.

Urban area and life style (especially in developing countries) are encountering a number of environmental and social problems such as garbage crisis, lack of green areas, drugs among the young, rising crime rate, conflicts over resource management and weak communities. These problems are effects. Major causes behind them are city development policy, city planning, efficiency of urban government, and the strength of urban communities (Patanakan and Kodokoro, 2005), which tourism activities are part of it.

Urban tourism is about how to sell the city - marketing the city. It is to to maximize the urban potencies and reduces the threats and weakness. Its use has been accelerated in an attempt by cities to position themselves strongly in the fierce competitive arena for finite and increasingly mobile resources, whether investment capital, relocation of companies, visitors and residents (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). City marketing has been employed in most cases as a response to certain economic, political and social changes in cities and their operational environment (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990). It should be pointed out that city marketing does have the intrinsic characteristic that it is very difficult to distinguish between the various groups of city users. Unlike commercial companies, a city is not in a position to exclude groups of users, for reasons of social justice, political balance or future security and sustainability (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006).

YOUTH TRAVELERS; ACTIVITIES AND PREFERENCES

Considering the travelling characteristics of each market makes the industry to be more familiar with their market and keep the market segment sustainable. In this regards, studying the youth travelers behavior and preference is needed regarding to importance of this travelers set. The culture exploration as the main motivation factors influence youth travelers' decision making. Excitement, knowledge incensement as well as meeting new people and place are the other important factors motivating young travelers to travel.

Dividing them in three groups Richards and Wilson (2003) believes that 'backpackers' as the first group are experience seeker and enjoy communicating with other travelers while the second group which called 'travelers' prefer to be socialized with friends and relatives. The third group considering as 'tourists', prefer more relaxation while travelling. Regarding to the age matter, young travelers under 26 put socialization and excitement as their priority since older ones wish to be alone and too much experiences are not their main concern. They consider long trips, as 'once in a life opportunity' which they like to put all their time, money and energy to make it happen and enjoy it up to the maximum level (Richards and Wilson, 2003).

Sources of Information

Most of backpackers who are youth travelers rely on marketing messages as a basis for their holiday decisions and therefore they buy the product without seeing it and this implies a high level of trust in the delivery of the product. Information mediated by the press, television and radio did not feature as important in the planning of them and travel agents also play a minimal role (Nash

et al., 2006). The Internet, guidebooks, and word of mouth are considered to be of primary importance in backpacker decision making (Westerhausen & Macbeth, 2003; Keeley, 2001; Robson, 2000; Highlands and Islands Enterprise 2000; Nash et al., 2006).

Accommodation and Length of Stay

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (2000) and Nash et al. (2006) found that youth travelers are the most significant source market for hostels in the Highlands and Islands, accounting for 60–70% of all holidaymakers using hostels. Seekings (1998) suggests that hostels and backpacker hotels are the preferred accommodation for youth travelers and backpackers. The main reasons relate to price and location. The advantages associated with membership are more relevant than consideration of comfort such as good bathroom facilities, good bunk facilities, and consideration of safety (Nash et al., 2006 and Firth and Hing, 1999). Furthermore, the average length of stay is 8.9 nights, while the norm for visitors in general is 6.9 nights (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2000). International backpackers are likely to be less constrained by the time of the year because of the possibility that they may have extended travel periods (Nash et al., 2006). According to Nash et al. (2006) most of them are member of the Youth Hostel Association. Ryan and Mohsin (2001) suggest that older respondents (over 30) were more demanding about what they wanted from their accommodation.

Places to visit

Among European countries, UK contains the highest number of youth outbound travelers. Reisinger and Movondo (2002) refer to USA as the first destination for young travelers; however, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (NAFSA, 2003) try to attract young travelers in term of education tourism and compete with USA and increase the number of this type of tourists arrival (Son and Pearce, 2005). Other countries such as Korea also promote education tourism to attract more travelers to visit the country (Shanka and Musca, 1998). Gender consideration, females like to visit Western Europe, Middle East as well as central/Southern Africa, whereas males choose Eastern Europe, North, Central and South America, China/Japan and Southeast Asia to visit (Richards and Wilson, 2003). Regarding to their experience the expert ones are visiting more 'challenging' areas such as South America, China/Japan and Indian Sub-Continent, while amateur ones prefer westernized areas of Europe and North America (Richards and Wilson, 2003).

Activities to Engage

Richards and Wilson (2003) find that the most popular activities among young travelers, is visiting historical site and monuments follow by walking and trekking as well as other leisure activities such as going to cafes/restaurant plus shopping. Small group travels to study or learn a language however, still the number is considerable. Although they divided the youth travelers in three groups but all groups engage in almost the same activities as backpackers take part. Hanging out is the main anxiety for young travelers. Females participate more on walking/trekking activities as well as cultural events while male prefer activities more into sports and adrenaline experiences (Richards and Wilson, 2003). Although they have low budget but as far as they are highly motivated to explore different places they stay in cheap accommodation and use public transportation when it is needed (Horak and Weber, 2000). In this regards Shipways's (2000) found the youth travelers transportation preference (in his study in UK youth Hostels) as express coaches follows by trains, since hired car and airplane are less used transportation by youth travelers.

POTENCIES AND CHALLENGES

Potencies

In the pressure of competition in tourism industry, youth tourism is a neglected potency that has not been maximized for destinations (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2002). According to Sellars (1998), tourism, fun, and young people are terms that are easily interrelated in today's consumer society. Today, youth cultural activities being based on leisure and having strong elements of play, enjoyment and entertainment (Fornas, et al., 1995; McRobbie, 1994). Fulfilling the trend of location being a more minor attraction, while activities (such as party and dancing) available are predominant. Today's youth are very much oriented towards having fun. According to Reimer (1995), Interest in pleasure is stronger for the majority of youth than interest in more serious activities. Having fewer commitments due to later marriages and residing with their parents until their mid-twenties or later, and the fact that more are going on to higher education (Office for National Statistics, 1978 and 1997), hence more free time during peak holiday periods, they are consequently a prime market to capture. For example, 60% of young people taking a holiday with the tour operator live at home with parents. The average age of people taking these holidays is 22, but the ages range mainly from 18 to 26 (Club 18-30, 1995).

Keeley (2001) suggests that although it is recognised that tourism has the opportunity to benefit from youth tourists, little is known about the size and commercial value of this market. Despite a

fairly rapid expansion in the provision of budget accommodation, youth travelers who most of them categorized as backpacker tends not to benefit from public sector support and current research does not reflect the potential benefits associated with backpacker tourism and backpacker travel patterns. These should be the subjects for further investigation (Keeley, 2001; Robson, 2000; Seekings, 1998; Scheyvens, 2002; Elliott, 1997). There are many advantages in targeting the youth/backpacker market and which are outlined by Keeley (2001):

- They travel year round
- They travel country-wide
- They use public transport
- They stay for long periods of time
- They are likely to return to a destination at later stages in their lives
- They only tend to carry essentials with them and will therefore spend on local businesses

Keeley (1995) suggests that hostels are the preferred option for youth and backpackers but they tend to vary enormously in quality. In Scotland there has been some data collected by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (2000) on hostels in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and some by VisitScotland (1999) on the hostel market. It is noted that there has been a large increase in provision from 29 independent hostels in 1990 to 151 in 1999.

Challenges

As mentioned above, tourism becomes one of the trigger factors of some urban problems. A tourism destination is more depend on the presence of tourists which influence the growths of economic and changes the social and cultural features among main factors in a tourism destination. However, on the other side tourism also create negative impact on tourism industry and its environment. As told by Travis (1982), 'tourism can destroy tourism', that tourism as a user of resources, by negative activities of the stakeholders including tourists, can be a resource destroyer, and through destroying the resources, which give rise to it, make the resource-based tourism short-lived.

Researchers have evaluated the impact of tourism on conflict between economy and culture. Economical impact is considered positive if there is some raise on national incomes, personal income and tourism industry creates new job for the society. The social-culture impact becomes negative if there is some degradation on religious and social values. Tourists, especially youth travelers who came from western countries bring in free-sex, drugs, and another negative

western cultures as a new locals life style. Over the last four to five decades societies have witnessed the youth of the day emerge from the suppression of their forefathers and create their own fun. Drugs have played a part in some of this fun--1960s cannabis, trips and mushrooms; 1970s LSD; 1980s cocaine and the emergence of Ecstasy; 1990s Ecstasy and the continuing popularity of cannabis. Drugs can be associated with a form of escapism.

Ioannides (1995) find that some authors describe tourism as '*whorism*', the sector that promotes undesirable lifestyle. The presence of tourists indirectly brings negative impact on the economic factor. The phenomena of mass tourism (where the number of tourists are become the main factor) bringing tourism to the cheap quality of mass production which followed the commercialization of local art. Therefore, the price to be paid by the locals to increase their quality of life is the changing of their way of life as a dilemma.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Role of Media

Today's young people are very much a part of the consumer society and are highly influenced by the media, while remaining astute consumers (Sellars, 1998). As a target audience, young people often have high disposable incomes and a considerable amount of leisure time. Young people are highly influenced by the media, having access to a variety of forms such as TV, newspapers, radio, and specially internet. Indeed, Thornton (1995), claims that: various media are integral to youth's social and ideological formation. In this regards media can be used as a device to educate youth travelers to respect local's cultural values as well as control their fun activities to some limits, although they are in the age of high experience seeking and full of energy.

Toward A Responsible Youth Tourism

Responsible tourism implies a proactive approach by tourism industry partners to develop market and manage the tourism industry in a responsible manner to create a competitive advantage. Responsible tourism implies tourism industry responsibility to the environment through the promotion of balanced and sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism in urban areas means responsibility of local government and business to involve the local communities that are in close proximity to the tourism plant and attractions through the development of meaningful economic linkages. It implies the responsibility to respect, invest in, develop local cultures, and protect them from over-commercialization and over-exploitation. It also implies the responsibility of local communities to become actively involved in the tourism industry, to practice sustainable

development and to ensure the safety and security of the visitors. Responsibility to visitors through ensuring their safety, security and health is another consequence of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism also implies the responsibility of both employers and employees in the tourism industry both to each other as well as to the customer. Generally, the improvement of living quality does not mean only infrastructure. But the appropriate participation by the residents the improvement to living quality should be carried out, especially, in community level (Patanakan and Kodokoro, 2005). To be concluded, both guest and host should be responsible. Creating these responsibilities make both groups happy and satisfy and sustainability of the tourism in the area will be guaranteed.

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