GENERATION Z'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM STUDIES AND CAREERS VS. ITS TOURISM ACTIVITY

Aleksandra GROBELNA[1], Ewa WYSZKOWSKA-WRÓBEL[2], Patrycja KRUPA[3], Paulina MIKUŁA[4]

[1] Gdynia Maritime University, Faculty of Management and Quality Science; a.grobelna@wznj.umg.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1765-6757
[2] Gdynia Maritime University, Faculty of Management and Quality Science; e.wyszkowska-wrobel@wznj.umg.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-9037-1443
[3] Gdynia Maritime University, Faculty of Management and Quality Science; patrycja.krupa510@gmail.com
[4] Gdynia Maritime University, Faculty of Management and Quality Science; paulinamikulaa@wp.pl
* Correspondence author

Purpose: This study provides a closer look at Generation Z as tourists, students, and tomorrow's tourism and hospitality (T&H) practitioners. Specifically, this study proposes new insights into theoretical concepts and empirical evidence by examining T&H students' tourism activity (as representatives of Generation Z) and the way it may affect their attitudes towards their studies as well as their intentions towards working in the T&H industry upon graduation.

Design/methodology/approach: A desk-research method and an online questionnaire were used. Data were collected from students of Higher Educational Institutions in Northern Poland that offered T&H programs.

Findings: This study has identified the main characteristics of Generation Z's tourism activity and has also proven that tourism activity of this study's participants may be a critical factor in determining their positive perception of T&H as their field of study and as a place of their future employment.

Research limitations/implications: The study found that both the recovery and spillover theories may constitute a useful theoretical framework to explain the proposed relationships in a non-occupational setting, such as T&H students. In doing so, the existing knowledge has been developed, and a new insight has been provided. However the results of this research cannot be generalized, thus, future studies with a larger sample of students from other HEIs are recommended.

Practical implications: Findings of this study have several implications for T&H educators and practitioners, particularly those responsible for social media promotion and human resources management. Specifically, it is vital to create short and understandable content that will satisfy Gen Z's need to obtain information quickly through mobile devices to design attractive social media websites of tourist attractions and other tourist entities to create a favorable image and attract Gen Z's attention. Tourism management can take also through an educational system to support students in developing their interests in travel via different university activities. Finally, T&H industry must also redefine its HR policy keeping in mind

characteristics of new entrants from Generation Z to attract and retain young and talented employees within T&H organizations.

Originality/value: This study context fills a cognitive gap and contributes to a better understanding of Generation Z's tourism activity and how it may relate to students' attitudes and behavioral intentions as future professional workforce. Moreover, the current study extends empirical results to the context of T&H students in East-Central Europe, where to the best of Authors' knowledge, a paucity of such research exists.

Keywords: Generation Z, tourism behavior, T&H students, employment aspirations.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the key forms of spending free time (Niemczyk et al., 2019). In recent years, the number of tourist traffic participants has been growing year by year. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily slowed down the growth due to numerous restrictions that significantly prevented free travel around the world. Currently, one can observe a rebirth of tourism (UNWTO, 2022) with an increasing number of countries lifting restrictions and opening up to receiving more and more tourists.

It seems that in the near future people from Generation Z will probably be the main consumers of tourism services, as this generation is becoming an "up-and-coming" segment of the travel industry mass market (Chang et al., 2023, p. 50). In 2019, Generation Z was the most numerous generation on the globe, accounting for 32% of the world's population, i.e. 2.47 billion of the planet's 7.7 billion people, outnumbering both the millennial and the baby boom generations (Spitznagel, 2020). In Poland, in 2018, this generation accounted for 23.4% of the population (8.983 million), and it was also the most represented from among other generations (BB, X, Y) (Sadowski, 2018).

It should be noted that the behaviors and needs of this group differ from the previous generations, and thus Gen Z plan their trips and travel in a characteristic way. Among others, this is due to the fact that Generation Z has never known a world without immediate access to the Internet, free access to information and communication channels. They grew up during the global digital revolution associated with the rapid development of the Internet, the spread of Youtube, Fabcebook and Twitter, as well as eLearning and eCommerce (Caraballo, 2019). They are somehow integrated with social media in everyday life. On a personal level, representatives of Generation Z are looking for immediate acceptance and recognition in social media, because this is where they interact with their peers and maintain relationships and contacts (Nikiel, 2019).

The factors that distinguish Generation Z from the millennial generation include self-awareness, perseverance, a realistic view of life, an innovative state of mind and self-confidence (Merriman, 2015). Among others, the above features make the new generation perceive travel as a tool that can enrich and affect their lives and the search for their own identity. Young tourists are interested in contact with a different reality; they are fascinated by discovering different cultures based on their own taste, and they are used to organizing their own holidays. If they use tour operators' offers, they are very demanding towards offers in the tourism sector (Monaco, 2018).

They live in the times of the so-called fourth industrial revolution, which leads to a transformation of the global market (including tourism). This global evolution and the development of tourism are constantly accompanied by economic, social and political changes. Generation Z, with its needs, mentality and values, is also constantly undergoing transformation (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). Therefore, it is undoubtedly worth following them closely (Świerkosz-Hołysz, 2016), especially because this young part of society still remains not fully diagnosed and is still in the process of creation. Thus, there is a need for continuous research on generations, including Gen Z, in order to effectively respond to their needs and demands (Robinson, Schänzel, 2019).

It is widely recognized that tourism activity may influence one's life (McCabe, Johnson, 2013; Yeh, 2013). Among the many benefits of tourism, the literature mentions rest and regeneration, an impact on well-being, gaining new experience, creating opportunities for learning, personal growth, and development (Li, 2000; McCabe, 2009; McCabe, Johnson, 2013; Gilbert, Abdullah, 2004; Yeh, 2013). Participation in holidays gives people an opportunity to get away from their daily environment, to solve their problems actively, to recover from difficulties, and to face the future more optimistically (McCabe, 2009). Moreover, with an open-minded approach, tourism is an irreplaceable factor of self-education (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism), providing an opportunity to see more of the world, to learn about other cultures, to experience new and different places (Li, 2000) – simply put, travel broadens the mind.

It is empirically proven that tourism involvement defined as "a person's perceived relevance of tourism activities and the motivational state with regard to them" (Havitz, Dimanche, 1990, as cited by Yeh, 2013, p. 215), may influence people's feelings and attitudes in different life domains, including the work domain (Grobelna, 2018). Recognition of positive effects of tourism on tourists as employees is clearly visible. For example, there is extensive empirical evidence in tourism and hospitality (T&H) that tourism involvement may have a positive impact on employees' customer orientation (Grobelna, 2018), service performance (Suhartanto et al., 2018), work engagement and job satisfaction (Yeh, 2013).

At the same time, the positive effects of tourism on tourists as students (non-occupational individuals and Gen Z members) seem to be insufficiently investigated in both theoretical and conceptual work, as well as in empirical research. Specifically, there is a cognitive gap referring

to students' tourism activity and its influence on their attitudes towards their field of study as well as their future career intentions, especially that the literature underlines that although students are not employees, their core activities require their involvement in structured and mandatory activities (e.g. completing assignments or attending classes), which may be regarded as "work" (Zupančič et al., 2023). Thus, if life outside work, such as participation in tourism, may affect employees' work (Grobelna, 2018; Sonnentag, 2003), by analogy, it seems reasonable that T&H students' participation in tourism may also potentially influence their attitudes towards the undertaken studies and their perception of future careers in T&H. Gaining such knowledge is important for several reasons.

Since T&H is perceived as a people-oriented industry (Breen et al., 2004; Haldorai et al., 2019), dependent on top-quality employees (Zagonari, 2009), high staff turnover (Glińska-Neweś, 2020; Sibanyoni et al., 2015; Zagonari, 2009) results in a continual challenge of finding and retaining high-quality staff (El-Houshy, 2014; Song, Chathoth, 2011; Wan et al., 2014). Moreover, tourism education suffers from poorer enrolment combined with the candidates' low levels of aspiration, which leads to their low long-term career engagement in the industry (Ramakrishnan, Macaveiu, 2019). Many T&H graduates do not enter the industry upon graduation (Barron et al., 2007) and perceive tourism jobs as "short-lived professions" (Jiang, Tribe, 2009, p. 7). Thus, unsurprisingly, there are many countries, including Poland, with projected talent deficit trends at the university level (Global Talent Trends…, 2015).

Additionally, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences placed extreme challenges on the already fragile T&H sector raising serious doubts as to its survival (Kaushal, Srivastava, 2021). Staff shortages have been identified as one of the key challenges for travel and tourism on its path to recovery from COVID-19 (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2022; Leung et al., 2021). If future talent supply falls short of talent demand, below-potential growth and foregone investment, higher wage costs, and eroded competitiveness may be its consequences (Understanding Future Talent…, 2021). Moreover, higher workload, lower morale, and less creativity among the current workforce (Global Talent Trends…, 2015) may lead to a deterioration in customer service and standards (Understanding Future Talent…, 2021).

Thus, it is of paramount importance for educators and practitioners to discern T&H students' employment intentions (Grobelna, Marciszewska, 2016; Roney, Öztin, 2007), as based on the premise of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Cameron et al., 2012), understanding their attitudes towards their future careers might predict their future behavior (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2000; Teng, 2008) providing support in winning the war for talents (Wong et al., 2017). Therefore, it is timely to gain a current understanding of the perception of studies and careers from future T&H employees, who are now Generation Z representatives, via a new prism of their tourism activity. Thus the aim of this study is to examine T&H students' tourism activity (as representatives of Generation Z) and the way it may affect their attitudes towards their studies as well as their intentions towards working in the T&H upon graduation.

Despite the increasing focus on Generation Z (Agnes, 2020), including T&H (Chang et al., 2023; Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019; Entina et al., 2021), empirical research explaining the potential consequences of their tourism activities for their studies and employment aspirations within T&H fields seems to be overlooked. Hence this study context fills the cognitive gap and adds to the management literature, particularly within T&H, by shedding new light on a better understanding of Generation Z's attitudes and behaviors both as tourists, T&H students and future qualified T&H workforce. Both the recovery and spillover theories provide a theoretical framework for this study concept.

2. Literature review

Characteristics of Generation Z

Generation is a term describing a group of people born around the same time (Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016). In the sociological sense, the word "generation" refers to a population which differs from other populations not only in age but, above all, in attitudes, views, recognized values, aspirations or lifestyle (Karmolińska-Jagodzik, 2012). The literature underlines that a generation acquires values and a belief system principally during its formative years (Pendergast, 2010). The generational theory seeks to understand and characterize cohorts of people according to their membership in a generation, which is objectively assigned according to the year of birth (Pendergast, 2010). Currently, society can be divided into the following generational groups (Warwas, Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2016; Wiktorowicz, Warwas, 2016):

- generation of traditionalists (Veterans) – born in 1922-1945,
- generation of Baby Boomers – born in 1946-1964,
- generation X – born in 1965-1979,
- generation Y – born in 1980-1989,
- generation Z – born after 1990.

Generations move as a collective through society maintaining their unique generational characteristics (Pendergast, 2010). For example, representatives of generations X and Y tend to lean much more towards what is old and proven, and they are reluctant to change. Generation Z is a complete opposite; for them changes are not a major problem. They perfectly find themselves in new and unusual situations. They are curious about the world and the ever-changing reality. Comfort and satisfaction come first for them. The new generations are generations of ideas and changes (Lechowicz, Pikuła, 2013).

Generation Z, is also called as Gen Z, post-millennials (Niemczyk et al., 2020) or Gen Zers (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). So far, it has been noticed that people from this generation are characterized by extraordinary openness, self-confidence, independence and high self-esteem.

Highly developed tolerance at every level plays a particularly important role in their lives (EY Polska, 2022). These are assertive people who care about the so-called work–life balance and living in accordance with their own values. For Gen Zers work is not an end in itself, but a means to functioning independently and pursuing their passions. They do not get attached to one workplace, and it is easy for them to change it (Bebłot, 2023).

On the other hand, they look anxiously to the future. They face many challenges to which their parents could not find solutions, such as the climate crisis, the migration crisis, or social unrest (Broadbent et al., 2017). Representatives of Generation Z are mainly guided by humanistic values, morality and ethical behavior and are more interested in the human impact on the environment than any other generation before. In addition, they are more likely to accept responsibility for the negative effects of climate change, which is manifested in many pro-ecological behaviors, for example, limiting broadly understood consumption (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019).

It is also the first generation that does not know a world without the Internet. Generation Z grew up during the ever-rising popularization of the Internet and the boom of social media. Due to the fact that modern technologies have accompanied them since an early age, the Internet plays an important role in their daily lives. For this formation, it is a natural environment of spending their leisure time – both communicating and looking for information and entertainment (Caraballo, 2019). Therefore, interest in reporting their lives on social media, mainly such as Facebook (Messenger), Instagram, Whatsapp or Snapchat, is a popular phenomenon in their environment (Seitz et al., 2014). Thanks to social media, they have an opportunity to immortalize and share important moments with the world, such as traveling (Chang et al., 2023), which plays an important role in this generation's life in the process of self-development and self-realization (Niemczyk et al., 2020).

Tourism activity of Generation Z and its potential consequences for their study and perception of future work in T&H

Gen Zers are eager to travel, they do not fear leaving their place of residence or getting to know new places; they tend not to put down roots. At the same time, they quite easily succumb to market trends. Due to the dynamically developing means of transport, mainly low-cost airlines, Generation Z is increasingly eager to take a tourist trip. Using online comparison websites available on the market, they search for the most attractive price deals, owing to which they travel even several times a year.

They abandon package tours prepared by travel agencies in favor of independent reservations (Monaco, 2018; Niemczyk et al., 2020). Gen Z are individual tourists who do not need professional preparation. If they use tour operator offers, they focus on buying customized offers. In addition, they are characterized by a lack of loyalty to the seller's brand and by high substitutability and competitiveness in the selection of a tourism product (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). They love a sense of freedom and independence, thus travel is

an indispensable part of their lives. Generation Z are curious about the world and ready for new experiences (Niemczyk et al., 2020).

Due to the fact that the Internet is an indispensable part of Generation Z's lives, they often look to it for inspiration regarding their trips. Influencers play an important role in creating travel needs and indicating new destinations (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). Generation Z are looking for more authentic and personal experiences than visiting typical tourist attractions (Monaco, 2018). They often decide to visit less popular destinations. Interest in culture, history or local cuisine is an important aspect of Generation Z's travel. This is a generation that is also open to broadly understood diversity (Wanagos et al., 2023).

Many persons from this generation also value sharing their travel experiences online, which develops the popularity of social media. In addition to the above-mentioned social media, Gen Zers are very interested in innovative technologies, e.g. mobile applications that facilitate planning a trip and the trip itself (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019), or multimedia exhibitions that inspire them to visit new places (Kugiejko, Kociszewski, 2021).

Generation Z travel is also characterized by an ecological approach. Many young people are aware of the impact of tourism on the environment (Bogalecka, Grobelna, 2023) and try to choose more sustainable forms of travel, such as ecological tourism, cycling or trekking.

Generation Z's traveling is also related to education and personal development Many young people travel to gain new experiences and meet new people (Stańczyk, 2021). Thus, unsurprisingly, participation in tourism may affect these individuals' lives. In the case of T&H students as representatives of Generation Z, life outside the university, including their tourism activity, may have a potential impact on how they feel about their studies and future careers in the studied fields (Grobelna, 2022). This may be due to several reasons.

Firstly, it is well known that tourism answers human's cognitive needs via meeting different people, experiencing new places, other cultures, religions, and nations (Przecławski, 1996). It also provides a great opportunity to experience many different service relationships, as T&H belongs to high-contact service industries (Lin, 2007). Such experiential learning through traveling opens eyes to a broader picture of world lives and may be significant for personal growth and development (Li, 2000). This unique, positive experience of tourism may also have learning and motivational potential for T&H students (Generation Z members), who through the lens of their own direct and authentic experiences may enrich their knowledge of the studied field of T&H, which, in turn, may consequently lead to a more favorable perception of T&H as a place of their future careers (c.f. Grobelna, Dolot, 2018; Grobelna, Wyszkowska-Wróbel, 2021).

Secondly, tourism can also be considered as a short break from daily duties (Yeh, 2013). Thus, by analogy, if periods of rest from work may help maintain well-being at work (Sonnentag, 2003), the same can be assumed for students who via a recovery process of participating in tourism may enhance their well-being in the study domain. If recovery processes that occur during vacations and other breaks bring some relief from negative

experiences at work (Sonnentag, 2003), they can also bring students some relief from their study demands, especially that T&H students experience excessive study loads characteristic of most T&H programs which, apart from classroom learning, require extensive practical exposure (Grobelna, Tokarz-Kocik, 2018). Thus, it can be stated that participating in tourism may provide students with a sense of escapism and release from their study tension contributing to their recovery and acquisition of new resources which may influence their approach towards their studies and career aspirations within T&H.

Thirdly, as mentioned above, tourism is an activity most often associated with rest and relaxation (Global Code of Ethics for Tourism), and indeed, leisure is an important facet of young people's lives (Hultsman, Kaufman, 1990). Holiday-making as a form of leisure activity and experience can help individuals to enhance their sense of happiness (Gilbert, Abdullah, 2004). Thus, tourism activity may provide satisfaction, generate positive moods and, consequently, enhance individuals' well-being (Gilbert, Abdullah, 2004). Moreover, satisfaction within a specific life domain, such as leisure, may spill over into other domains (Yeh, 2013). The spillover theory insists that a person's attitudes, emotions, skills, and behaviors in one domain flow into another one and vice versa, as the process can occur in both positive and negative ways (Lee et al., 2021). Therefore, it is assumed that positive experiences in tourism may also have a positive spillover effect on how students feel in other domains, such as their T&H studies and future work within T&H.

Generation Z as a challenge for human resource management in the T&H industry

T&H has been called the "the world's leading employer" (Tribe, Lewis, 2003, p. 67) and labor-intensive industry (Kusluvan, 2003; Sibanyoni et al., 2015; Zopiatis et al., 2014). Being a service-related industry, T&H depends on human workforce (Datta, Jha, 2015), which means that most services are based on human (employee) performance (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2000), and thus the role of personal service in the service delivery process is crucial and irreplaceable (Kusluvan, 2003).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the travel and tourism sector accounted for 1 in 5 new jobs created across the world during 2014-2019, and 10.3% of all jobs overall (334 million). Unfortunately, in 2020, 62 million jobs were lost. In 2021, a rise in the number of jobs was observed to 289.5 million, which means that the sector supported 1 in 11 jobs across the entire economy in 2021 (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2022).

When competitive advantage is attained through people (employees), their motivation to work and their commitment to the industry become of particular importance (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2000). Unfortunately, many T&H organizations around the world have faced a chronic problem of attracting and retaining high-standard employees (Grobelna, Wyszkowska-Wróbel, 2021; Lee 2014; Wan et al., 2014) leading to a shortage of skilled personnel to staff the large and still growing number of T&H businesses (Baltescu, 2016; El-Houshy, 2014; Richardson, 2009; Richardson, Butler, 2012). Moreover, the high rate of

labor turnover (Brown et al., 2015; Choi, 2006; Davidson et al., 2010; Glińska-Neweś et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2019; Kusluvan, 2003; Lu et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2014; Sims, 2003) and post-pandemic shortages of employee (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2022) creates one of the greatest challenges for the industry today.

Thus, Generation Z entering the market is an opportunity for employers to develop their company through the special potential that this generation can offer. Gen Z is not only a breath of freshness and new energy, but also a different, broader look at the company's opportunities. They prefer unconventional solutions and thinking outside the box to provide innovations and creativity so characteristic of gen Z (Chang et al., 2023; Tyszkiewicz). Achieving their goals comes easily to them. It is a generation group saturated with high ambitions and focused on professional success (Ratajczak, Świerkosz-Hołysz, 2014; Świerkosz-Hołysz, 2016).

However, this generation's expectations regarding working conditions significantly differ from the requirements of the older generation (Czubasiewicz, 2020). Generation Z are looking for jobs that will provide them with continuous development and new challenges. They value a good atmosphere, decent remuneration, attractive benefits, job security, as well as professional development opportunities (Dolot, 2017). Therefore, for this generation, the essence is in the constant acquisition of new skills and in job satisfaction (Dolot, 2017; Czubasiewicz, 2020).

Unfortunately, however, young people are not attached to the workplace; they are accustomed to changes and feel fulfilled in them (Jęczmionka-Majchrzak, 2023). No wonder then that they are also particularly prone to change an employer quickly, especially when their expectations are not met and their self-esteem is disturbed (Dolot, 2017; Jęczmionka-Majchrzak, 2023). Moreover, it is important for "Zs" to maintain a work–life balance (Czubasiewicz, 2020) – work is important to them– but not the most important (Jęczmionka-Majchrzak, 2023).

Therefore, considering the above, it can be concluded that meeting the requirements set by the youngest generations may prove to be a considerable challenge for T&H employers, the more so, as the results of previous research show, that T&H students do not believe a career in the TH industry offers them the factors they find important when choosing a career (El-Houshy, 2014; Grobelna, 2017; Richardson, 2009; Richardson, Butler, 2012; Richardson, Thomas 2012). Specifically, studies reveal that students still do not see the industry as an appealing career path (Richardson , Butler, 2012), and their commitment to work in the industry is negatively affected by many aspects, such as social aspects, lack of family life, long working hours and heavy workloads, stressful, exhausting and seasonal (unstable) jobs as well as low remuneration insufficient to lead satisfactory life and poor promotion opportunities and prospects, etc. (Aksu, Köksal, 2005; Mannaa, Abou-Shouk, 2020; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2000; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2003; Richardson, 2009; Tan et al., 2016). These specific job characteristics may result in the industry's failure to recruit and retain qualified T&H graduates

(Gen Z members) who will be discouraged from finding employment within the industry, and instead put their transferable skills to use across other occupations (Kusluvan, 2003).

To sum up, although "Zs" have many common features, it should be remembered that this is a generation with high self-awareness and a different worldview. Therefore, it seems that skillful recognition of their needs and an individualized approach to each person is a recipe for attracting employees from the Z population (Walaszczyk, Mnich, 2020) to ensure that potential employees – current T&H students– do not fail to enter the industry upon graduation.

3. Methods

This study was conducted among T&H students from higher educational institutions (HEIs), both public and private, located in the Tricity agglomeration (Pomeranian Voivodeship, Poland). Tricity is perceived as an important academic center of Northern Poland (Grobelna, Marciszewska, 2016; Grobelna, Dolot, 2018), where T&H is crucial for regional economy and contributes to creating a growing number of new workplaces within T&H and the related sectors (Bogalecka, Grobelna, 2023; Grobelna, Tokarz-Kocik, 2018; Marciszewska et al., 2017; Wrona, 2018). The selection of students from the respective HEIs as the study sample was based on convenience and access to students enrolled in T&H courses continuously on educational offer within these T&H and on well-established cooperation/familiarity between researchers and these HEIs. Lecturers of the participating HEIs to whom the study aim was explained and who agreed to cooperate in data collection were contacted for their support in ensuring a reasonable number of responses and data reliability (Kim, Park, 2013)

Data were collected through an online questionnaire created in the Google Forms application and distributed to students via the Microsoft Teams platform. The respondents were requested to open the link sent to them and fill in the questionnaires during their classes, as agreed with the teachers of the participating HEIs. The students were assured of their voluntary participation in this study and of the anonymity and confidentiality of their answers. Moreover, they were also informed that their participation did not constitute a formal part of their study program (Barron et al., 2007). A pilot test had been conducted beforehand to verify a good understanding of the survey instrument, and its appropriateness was confirmed by feedback. Ultimately, 190 usable surveys were obtained. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and Microsoft Excel applications were used to extract the data and results.

4. Results

Respondents' profile

An analysis of the respondents' profile shows that female respondents accounted for the majority (75.8%) of all surveyed students; they were mostly born within the years 2000-2003 (83.2%), so they were mostly between 20 and 23 years old. Much fewer respondents (16.8%) were slightly above 23 years of age. They were mostly full-time students (74.7%) of the first cycle program in Tourism and/or Hospitality (96.8%).

Characteristics of Generation Z tourism activity

4.1.1. The frequency, length, and directions of trips

As regards the frequency of students' tourist trips, almost half of them (49.5%) declared that they travel 2-4 times a year (Table 1), with an average length of stay of 4-6 days (Table 2).

Table 1.
Characteristics of students' trips: the frequency of trips

Question \ Answer	Once a year or less	2-4 times a year	More than 4 times a year
How often do you travel for tourist purposes?	66 34.7%	94 49.5%	30 15.8%

Source: own study.

Table 2.
Characteristics of students' trips: the length of trips

Question \ Answer	1-3 days	4-6 days	More than 6 days
How long does your trip take on average?	60 31.6%	94 49.5%	36 18.9%

Source: own study.

Most students pointed to domestic trips (53.7%). However, a large percentage of the respondents (44.2%) also indicated trips to other European countries (Table 3), although a small percentage (2.1%) of students also made trips to non-European countries.

Table 3.
Characteristics of students' trips: directions of trips

Question \ Answer	I travel all over the country	I travel to European countries	I travel to non-European countries
Where do you usually travel?	102 53.7%	84 44.2%	4 2.1%

Source: own study.

Analyzing the aims, company, and seasons of students' tourist trips, is worth noting that rest (relaxation) and sighting are among the most frequently indicated aims of their trips (84.2% and 74.7%, respectively). Students also marked entertainment (44.2%) and recreational
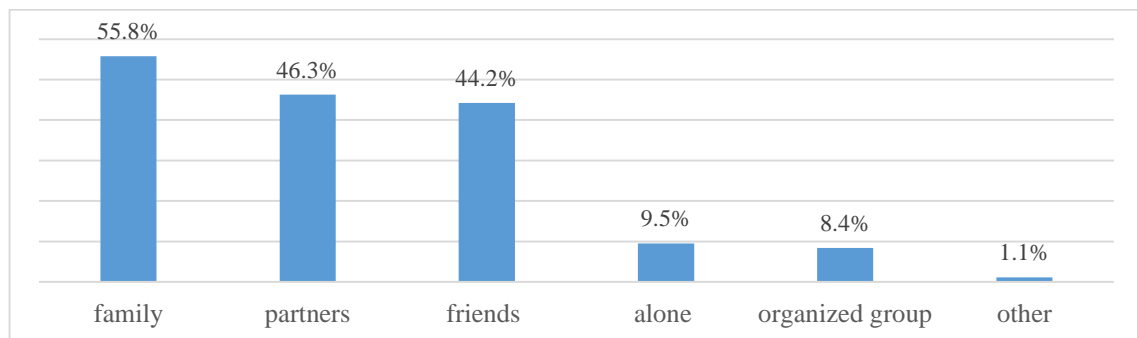
purposes (34.7%) (Fig. 1). Analyzing their company during the trips, respondents pointed to traveling mostly with family (55.8%), partners (46.3%), or friends (44.2%). They rarely traveled alone (9.5%) or in organized groups (8.4%) (Fig. 2).
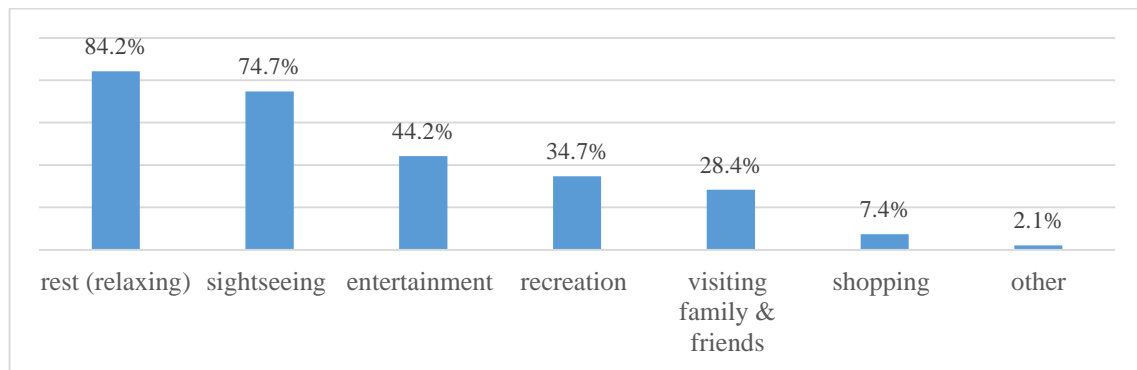
Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

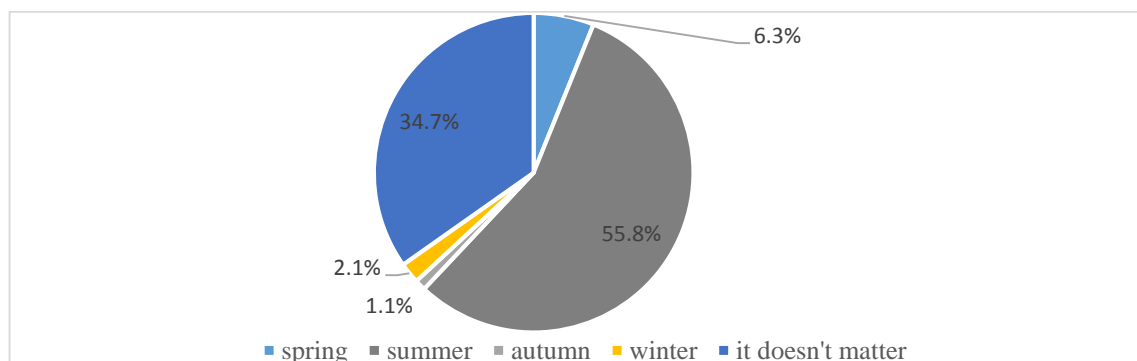**Figure 1.** Characteristics of students' trips: aims of trips.

Source: own study.

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 2. Characteristics of students' trips: the company during trips.

Source: own study.

More than half of the investigated students (55.8%) indicated that they traveled mostly during the summer; however, for one-third of them (34.7%), the season does not matter in taking such trips (Fig. 3).

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 3. Characteristics of students' trips: the season of trips.
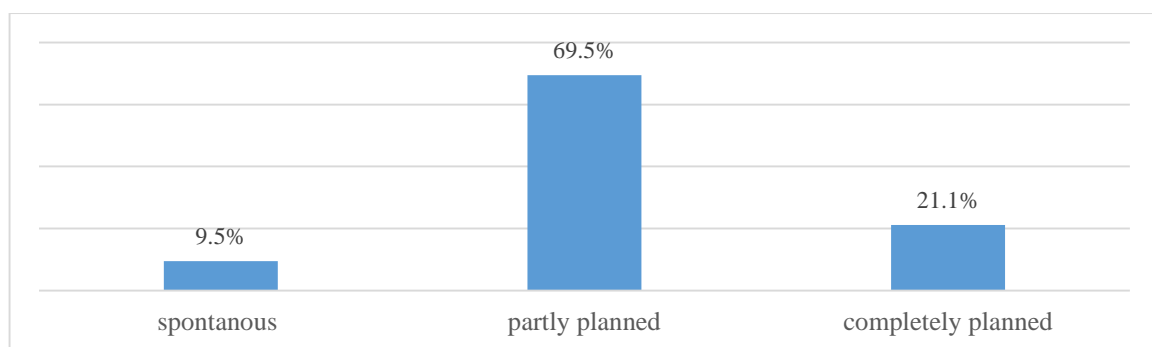
Source: own study.

4.1.2. Planning, organizing, and reporting tourist trips: the critical role of social media

Given the form of organization of the trip (Table 4), students mostly (83.1%) declared that they definitely or rather booked individual tourist services, such as transportation, hotel, insurance services, etc. Thus, unsurprisingly, the majority of them (69.5%) partly plan their tourist trips, whereas one in five students (21.1%) completely plans her/his trips (from A to Z). Only 9.5% of the Generation Z respondents described their trips as spontaneous (Fig. 4). Answering the question of how long before the departure they start to organize their trips, half of these respondents (50.5%) indicated more than 30 days in advance. 27.4% of students indicated the period of 30–15 days before it, whereas the remaining ones (22.1%) declared that they planned their trips 14 and even fewer days before the departure.

Table 4.

Forms of trips organization

Question \ Answer	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no
Do you book individual tourist services by yourself (transport, hotel, insurance, etc.) while organizing your tourist trips?	92 48.4%	66 34.7%	18 9.5%	14 7.4%	- -

Source: own study.

Figure 4. Character of trip planning.

Source: own study.

What really matters for the overwhelming number of respondents (93.7%) while organizing a trip is its price (Table 5). Moreover, apart from the price, young people also pay great attention to service employees. For more than half of the respondents (52.6%) that aspect was definitely or rather important (Table 6). Therefore, these findings revealed that students primarily look for affordable offers and pay attention to service relations.

Table 5.

The importance of trip prices for Generation Z travelers

Question \ Answer	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no
Do you usually look for attractively priced offers while organizing your tourist trip?	126 66.3%	52 27.4%	10 5.3%	2 1.1%	- -

Source: own study.

Table 6.
Characteristics of students' trips: the frequency of trips

| Question \ Answer	Definitely important	Rather important	Neither important nor unimportant	Rather unimportant	Definitely unimportant
How important a role do tourist service employees play during your trips?	24 12.6%	76 40.0%	64 33.7%	18 9.5%	8 4.2%

Source: own study.

The question of whether social media (SM) play an important role in plannig students' tourist trips was answered positively by more than half of the respondents (53.7%) (Tab. 7), with an indication of mostly Instagram (IG) (62.1%), Tik-Tok (30.5%) and Facebook (FB) (22.1%) (Fig. 5). They scroll SM for a variety of information, mostly to read opinions/comments about particular tourist destinations (68.4%), to see movies/pictures (52.6%) and to receive information relating to tourist attractions (51.6%) (Fig. 6).

Table 7.
Planning tourist trips: the importance of social media

| Question: \ Answer	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no
Do social media (SM) play an important role in planning your tourist trips?	40 21.1%	62 32.6%	48 25.3%	32 16.8%	8 4.2%

Source: own study.
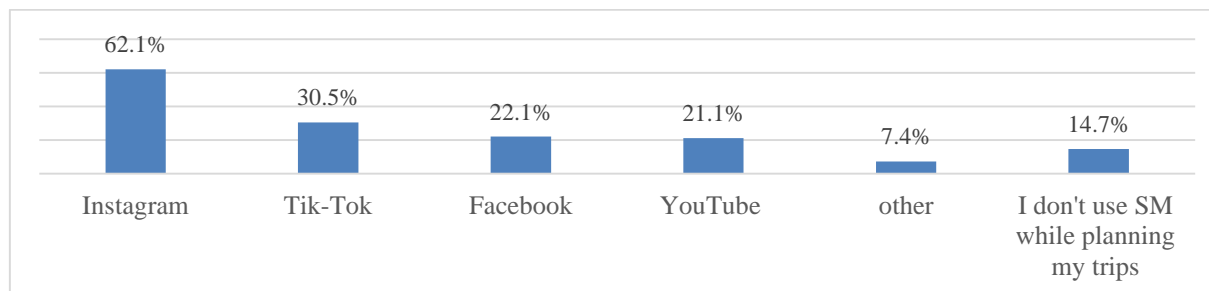
Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 5. Planning tourist trips: types of SM as a source of tourist information.
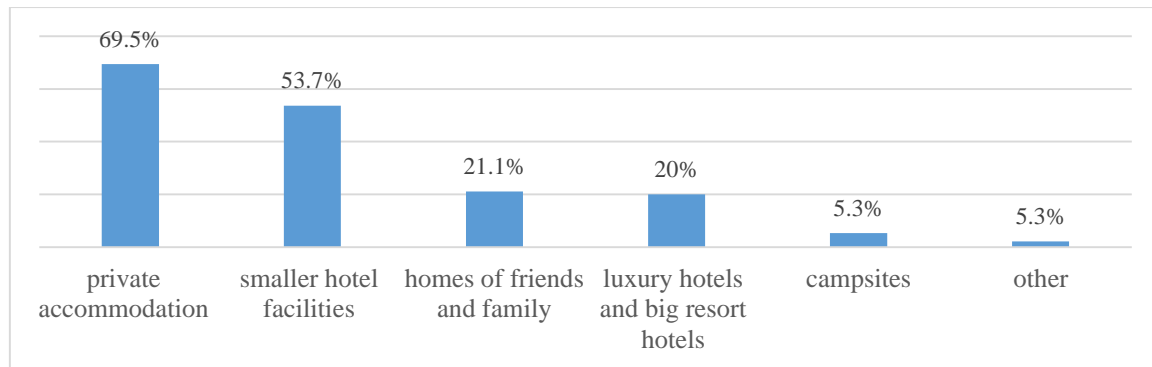
Source: own study.
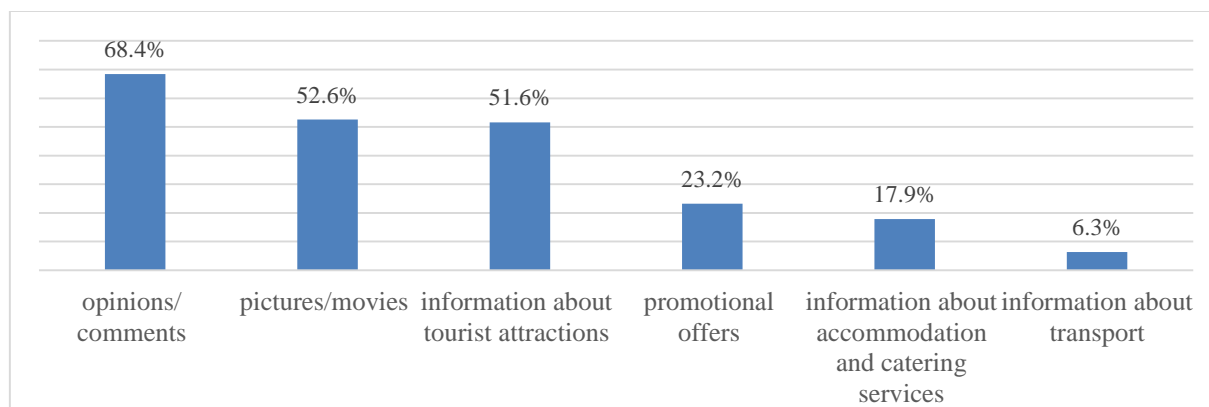
Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 6. Types of information looked for in SM while planning tourist trips.

Source: own study.

Analyzing accommodation and transport services chosen by Generation Z (Fig. 7), it is worth noting that respondents mainly preferred private accommodation (rooms, apartments, holiday homes) (69.5%) and smaller hotel facilities (53.7%).
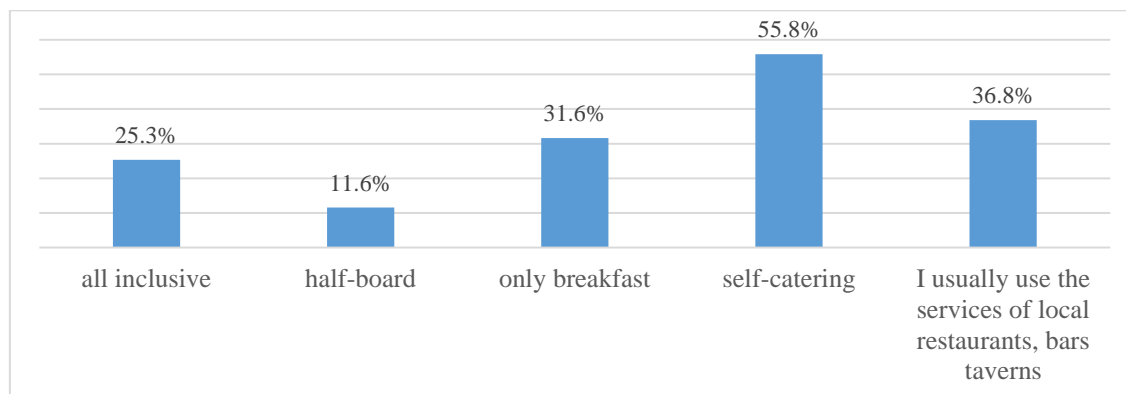

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

**Figure 7.** Preferred accommodation.

Source: own study.

Moreover, given the form of catering (Fig. 8), students mostly prefer self-catering (55.8%); however, they also indicated visiting local restaurants, bars, taverns (36.8%), which may have a positive impact on the destination's tourist market. Regarding transportation services, although the plane is the most preferred means of their transport (62.1%), they also indicated traveling by car (53.7%) and by train (52.6%) (Fig. 9).

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

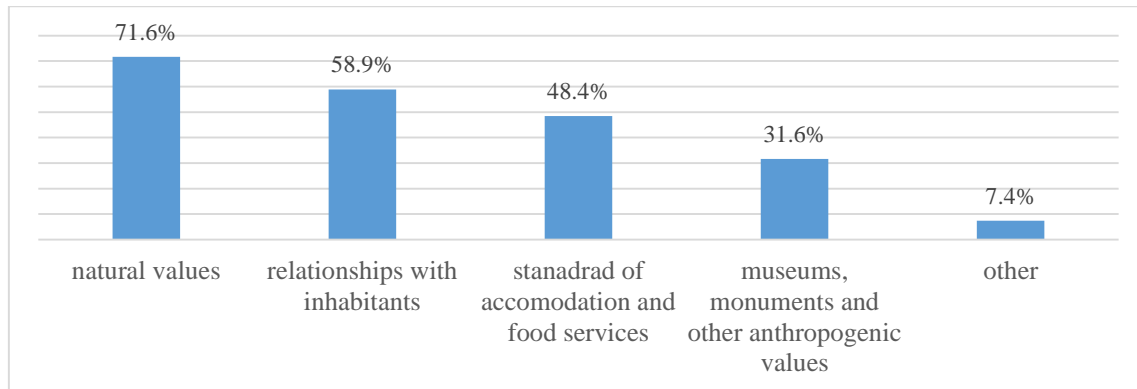**Figure 8.** Preferred catering.

Source: own study.
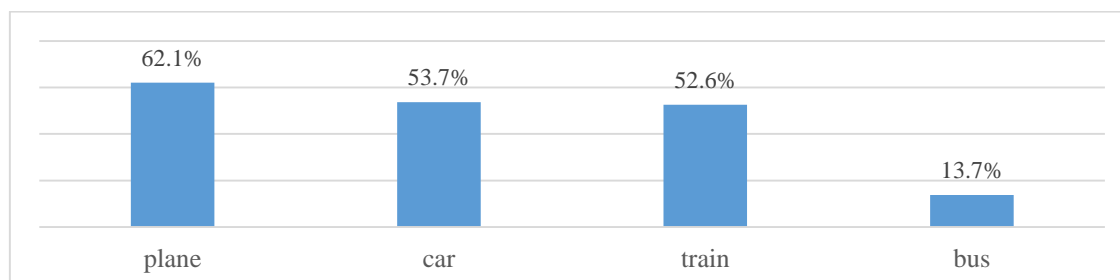
Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 9. Preferred means of transport.

Source: own study.

Finally, while asking young respondents what has the greatest impact on their impressions from their tourist trips (Fig. 10), Generation Z mainly pointed to natural values (71.6%) and relationships with inhabitants of the visited destinations (58.9%). Thus, it can be said that for the young generation direct contact with nature and with people may create the unique tourist experience of their travels.

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question.

Figure 10. Factors influencing the unique experience of participation in tourism from the Generation perspective.
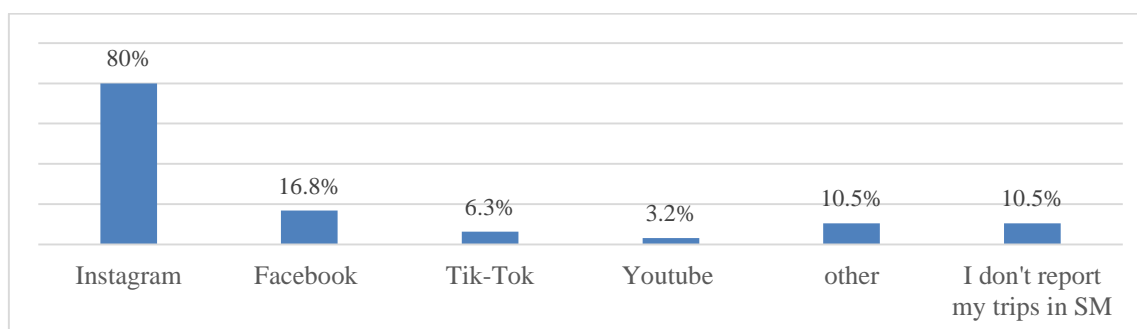
Source: own study.

Interestingly, when asked whether young people report their experiences from tourist trips on social media (in the forms of posts, photos, videos, etc.), most of them (67.4%) admitted that they definitely or rather often did so during their trips (Tab. 8), most frequently on IG (80%) (Fig. 11).

Table 8.

Reporting tourist trips in SM

Question / Answer	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no
Do you often report your experiences from tourist trips on social media?	50 26.3%	78 41.1%	20 10.5%	24 12.6%	18 9.5%

Source: own study.

Note: Responses do not sum up to 100% as this was a multiple-choice question**.**

Figure 11. Reporting tourist trips: types of SM.

Source: own study.

Additionally, Spearman's rank correlation revealed that students for whom SM play an important role in planning their tourist trips significantly more often than others use them in reporting their tourist experiences (rs = 0.312, p = 0.002).

4.1.3. Tourism activity and its relationships with Gen Z's perception of their studies and future careers within T&H

The question whether tourism activity might increase students' interest in their study within T&H and whether it might also increase their employment aspirations in the industry upon graduation was also an interesting issue (Tab. 9). Most of the students agreed that their tourism activity increased interest in their study and strengthened their willingness to work in T&H (67.4% and 68.4% respectively). Additionally, nearly 70% of this study respondents declared that they would plan their future employment within T&H fields.

Table 9.
Tourist activity, education, and employment aspirations of Generation Z respondents

Answer Question	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Neither yes nor no	Rather no	Definitely no	Total
Does your tourist activity increase your interest in T&H studies?	68 35.8%	60 31.6%	40 21.1%	10 5.3%	12 6.3%	190 100%
Does your tourist activity strengthen your willingness to work in Tourism and Hospitality?	70 36.8%	60 31.6%	36 18.9%	10 5.3%	14 7.4%	190 100%
Would you plan your future career within tourism and hospitality industry upon graduation?	46 24.2%	86 45.3%	30 15.8%	12 6.3%	16 8.4%	190 100%

Source: own study.

Additionally, Spearman's rank correlation showed that students who declared that their tourism activity increased both their interest in T&H studies and willingness to work in T&H statistically more often than others planned their future employment upon graduation within T&H fields (rs = 0.400, p < 0.001; rs = 0.641, p < 0.001, respectively).

5. Discussion

This study provides a closer look at Generation Z as T&H students, tourists, and tomorrow's practitioners. On the one hand, this generation creates an important and still growing market segment for the travel industry (Chang et al., 2023). On the other hand, it creates new entries into the T&H labor market (Bebłot, 2023; Tyszkiewicz) that is still facing a high employee turnover (Brown et al., 2015), leading to reducing the organizations' performance and threatening its long-term competitiveness (Özbağ et al., 2014). Thus, this study answered a call for more research to better understand the new generation (Gen Z) as travelers (Chang et al., 2023) and for more research on what may have an impact on students' approach towards their future careers within T&H (Erdinc, 2012) simultaneously seeking an answer to the question about how to reduce students' turnover intentions towards their future employment within the industry (Brown et al., 2015).

Specifically, this paper focuses on T&H students as representatives of Generation Z and future qualified employees and contributes to a better understanding of their tourism activity and its relationship with students' attitudes and behavioral intentions towards T&H as a field of their study and as a place of their future career. The current study extends empirical results to the context of T&H students in East-Central Europe, where to the best of Authors' knowledge, there is a paucity of such research.

The results of this study reveal that most respondents travel several times a year, taking mainly domestic trips, usually lasting 4-6 days. They most often go on their tourist trip with family, partner or friends; they rarely travel alone. The characteristics of these trips also correspond with findings of previous studies (c.f. Wieczorek, 2020). Moreover, the examined students also declared that their tourism activity was the most frequently associated with rest/relaxation and sightseeing, which gives an opportunity to experience new places and cultures (Wieczorek, 2020).

More than half of the surveyed students indicated that they mainly travelled in the summer, although it is also worth emphasizing that for more than a third of them the time of year did not matter much, which may be due to the fact that they operate on a limited budget and may be sensitive to price, which is of particular importance to them. This corresponds with previous findings which identified economic conditions as one of the obstacles for students to start their tourism activity. Thus, a low price is one of the determinants for choosing a particular tourist destination (Wieczorek, 2020). At the same time, it is worth emphasizing a result of this research that the price is not the only aspect that students pay attention to when planning and implementing their tourist trips. Service is also of great importance to the respondents, as for more than half of them it plays an important role in the implementation of their tourist trips. T&H services are primarily supplied through labor, and service delivery with a human touch strictly affects customers' experiences and satisfaction (Choi, 2006).

In addition, students mostly declared booking individual travel services, such as transport, hotel or insurance services on their own, which was also confirmed in previous studies (Monaco, 2018). At the same time, they most often organize their tourist trips in advance.

When planning and implementing their tourist trips, they are also eager to use social media, which has a direct impact on their travel behaviors and decisions (Chang et al., 2023). As reported in previous studies (e.g. Xiang et al., 2015), social media and different forms of online communications significantly affect the young generation's travel planning (Chang et al., 2023). It is worth noting that Generation Z is the first one to have been using mobile devices since a very young age; therefore, social media have been an indispensable part of their social life (Chang et al., 2023). They take into account opinions posted on the Internet by other travelers, watch photos and videos of selected destinations and get information about tourist attractions. These opinions and recommendations on social media are a valuable source of information for planning the trip and for the decision-making process (Chang et al., 2023).

In addition, the widespread availability of mobile devices and social media services allow young tourists not only to search for information but also to update and share their own travel experiences as indicated in previous studies (Chang et al., 2023). The possibilities offered by technologies provide young people with convenient tools for communicating (Kugiejko, Kociszewski, 2021) and reporting their experiences (Kasperczak, 2018). This is also confirmed by this research, showing that the surveyed students are also eager to report their stays and share their tourist experiences and emotions in social media, which is very important for young people (Niemczyk et al., 2020). Moreover, young people may also seek acceptance and admiration from others in this way (Nikiel, 2019).

As regards the form of accommodation, the investigated students mainly prefer private accommodation (rooms, apartments, holiday homes) and smaller hotel facilities. In terms of the range of catering services, they most often choose self-catering options, although it is worth emphasizing that they also quite often declare visiting local restaurants, bars and taverns. As to transport services, the respondents of this study most often prefer air travel in their trips, but quite often also choose a car, which is also confirmed in the literature on the subject and in previous research (Niemczyk et al., 2020; Wieczorek, 2020).

Of particular importance in shaping satisfactory travel experiences for Generation Z are the natural values of the visited destinations and relations with local residents, which can also confirm that, despite stereotypes, Gen Z establish relationships very easily, especially with those who are important to them (Jęczmionka-Majchrzak, 2023). This also supports the view that young people are fascinated by contact with different realities and cultures and perceive their participation in tourism as a way of enriching their lives (Monaco, 2018). One can say that traveling becomes an important stimulus for Generation Z for self-development (Kugiejko, Kociszewski, 2021). Youth is a time of gaining new experiences, "finding one's own identity" or building relationships (Kugiejko, Kociszewski, 2021).

Interestingly, the results of this study revealed that participation in tourism may increase young people's interest in their T&H studies and strengthen their willingness to work in T&H upon graduation. Simultaneously, those students more often than others claim that they would plan their future careers within the T&H industry. Understanding students' career intentions is an important issue both in predicting whether they will work in the T&H in the future (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2003) and in attracting and retaining them for the T&H industry in which availability of well-educated and engaged employees creates a competitive advantage of each operating enterprise (Kachniewska, Para, 2014).

Finally, it is worth underlining that although there are numerous previous studies that investigate factors influencing students' attitudes and their behavioral intentions towards their future work within T&H (e.g. Baltescu, 2016; El-Houshy, 2014; Erdic, 2012; Kusluvan, Kusluvan, 2003; Lu, Adler, 2009; Ramakrishnan, Macaveiu, 2019; Sibanyoini et al. 2015; Tribe, Lewis, 2003; Wan et al., 2014), such as willingness to study tourism (Roney, Öztin, 2007), work experience (Grobelna, Tokarz-Kocik, 2018; Roney, Öztin, 2007), industrial

training (Chen, et al., 2011; Chen, Shen, 2012; Datta, Jha, 2015; Grobelna, 2016; Kim, Park, 2013; Koc et al., 2014; Kusluvan et al., 2003; Wang et al., 2014), participation in culture (Grobelna, Wyszkowska-Wróbel, 2021), social and family background (Grobelna, Marciszewska, 2016), and personality (Teng, 2008), this study is among the first, if not the first one, to address a large research gap, by investigating whether tourism activity of T&H students may also play an important role influencing students' interests in their studies and intentions toward their careers within T&H.

The current study found that both the recovery and spillover theories may constitute a useful theoretical framework to explain the proposed relationships in a non-occupational setting, such as T&H students. In doing so, the existing knowledge has been developed, and a new insight has been provided.

Findings of this study may also have several implications for T&H stakeholders, especially T&H educators and practitioners, particularly those responsible for social media promotion and human resources management.

As for tourist entities, this research also shows the group of students (Gen Z) as a segment of tourism activity with their behaviors and characteristic preferences. This helps create tourism offers for a particular target group. Therefore, one should remember that Generation Z representatives integrate their daily lives with social media; hence communication via social media is crucial for this generation, also in tourism, as this results from the spread and availability of modern technologies on the tourism market (Urbańczyk, 2019). Thus, it is vital for retailers of tourist services to create short and understandable content that will satisfy Gen Z's need to obtain information quickly (Nikiel, 2019; Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). Well-designed social media websites of tourist attractions and other tourist entities should create a favorable image and attract Gen Z's attention.

Simultaneously, one should remember that the fact that members of Generation Z mainly use mobile devices is an important aspect of communication with them. They spend much less time watching TV, listening to the radio and reading printed publications, and less often use desktop computers. As a result, Gen Z consumers are also less open to advertising on these platforms. Therefore, tourism industry practitioners should share their message primarily through mobile devices (Southgate, 2017).

To sum up the above: the development of the global tourism market and the activities of T&H entrepreneurs should largely focus on the synthesis of modern digital technologies and social communication (Entina et al., 2021).

As for educators, it is worth remembering that, to meet the needs of Generation Z, tourism management can take place, among others, through an educational system (at different levels) (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019). In the context of this study, the following recommendations for supporting students in developing their interests in travel and possible future work in the T&H industry may be presented:

- creating scientific groups, clubs and other student organizations related to tourism. These groups can organize their own trips, meetings and events that maintain interest in tourism and promote activity in this respect;
- organizing lectures and guest presentations to which experts from the tourism industry or travelers will be invited to share their experiences and inspire students to travel themselves or run their own business in the T&H industry;
- organizing educational trips by universities, both at home and abroad. These trips could include such activities as sightseeing, participation in cultural festivals, or trips to areas of natural value. This type of experience can stimulate students to learn about new places and cultures. Trips could be realized with financial support from the university, at preferential affordable prices;
- dual education – a possibility to conduct part of the classes in cooperation with tourism market entities;
- organizing courses at the university to acquire competences in the field of tourist traffic, e.g. courses for tour guides, group escorts, leisure time animators;
- scholarships which could also include financial support for tourist trips. Students could apply for this type of support based on academic achievements, social activity or other criteria set out by the university;
- research grants – if students implement research projects related to tourism, universities may award grants to finance their trips and costs related to field research;
- sponsorship and cooperation with tourism market entities. Universities can establish cooperation with organizations from the T&H industry that could sponsor specific trips or educational programs of the university;
- international exchange programs that allow students to travel and study abroad;
- volunteering – universities could organize volunteering projects in various places, both locally and abroad (e.g. in areas of natural value requiring support in nature conservation).

Looking more broadly at the problem of supporting academic youth in the field of travel, taking into account global trends in the growing participation of young people in tourism, there is an urgent need to include funds for co-financing domestic trips for young people in the budget of the state and the local government (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019).

As regards T&H managers/employers, demand for travel and jobs starts to grow, and sufficient labor force is needed to fill the available vacancies and enable the sector to recover (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact, 2022). Due to the values held by Generation Z representatives, future employers should consider what to do to ensure that the employment conditions correspond to these values and needs. The results of previous studies indicate that a proper person–organization match increases the cognitive and emotional trust (Leung et al., 2021). Thus, it is also important to implement well-thought-out recruitment procedures to

ensure the right skills in the right job positions. It is especially important that the service experience in T&H comes from a direct interaction between the customer and employees; hence employees' adequate attitudes and behaviors, visible to the customer, are important for ensuring customer loyalty (Giacomel, Raveleau, 2020). Therefore, the issue of attracting and retaining well qualified and highly committed employees should be of high priority for the management (Glińska-Neweś et al., 2020), and the T&H industry must redefine its HR policy keeping in mind characteristics of young and qualified new entrants from Generation Z. If management follows current trends without any prejudices and falsely imposed stereotypes (Jęmionka-Majchrzak, 2023), particularly in understanding Gen Z needs, then these young employees' talents are more likely to emerge and flourish within T&H organizations.

6. Summary

This study proposes new insights into theoretical concepts and empirical evidence by examining students' tourism activity (as representatives of Generation Z) and the way it may affect their attitudes towards their studies as well as their intentions towards working in the tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry upon graduation. In this study, both a desk-research method and an online questionnaire were used. Data were collected from students of Higher Educational Institutions in Northern Poland that offered T&H programs. This study has identified the main characteristics of Generation Z's tourism activity and proved that it may be a critical factor in determining their positive perception of T&H as their field of study and as a place of future employment.

The results of this research cannot be generalized, as the respondents came only from chosen HEIs and thus do not reflect a much larger world of higher education in Poland. Thus, future studies with a larger sample of T&H students from other HEIs located in different geographical regions are recommended. Regardless of that, findings of this study can constitute a basis for discussion and serve as a starting point for future extended research on Generation Z.

From this study results, researchers and practitioners can gain some information about how Generation Z (today's T&H students) travel and whether their tourism activity may potentially affect their attitudes or behavioral intentions towards their study and their future careers within T&H.

Future studies may take various directions. Given the fact that generational cohort members will also differ from one another (Jęczmionka-Majchrzak, 2023) in terms of such aspects as culture, place of residence, gender, social class, personality, etc. (Moscardo, Bencendorff, 2010), it could be interesting to include these variables in future studies to provide a much more detailed picture of Gen Z. Specifically, a study comparing Generation Z representatives in two perspectives: as travelers and as future employees of the T&H industry coming from different

backgrounds, nations or cultures would be an interesting area to explore. This could be extremely valuable especially for companies that develop and operate at an international level as sellers of travel services and as employers (Dimitriou, AbouElgheit, 2019).

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