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Joanna Kowalczyk-Anioł

University of Łódź, Institute of Urban and Tourism Geography

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Joanna Kowalczyk-Anioł
University of Łódź
Institute of Urban and Tourism Geography
proxa2@vp.pl

TOURISM TRENDS AMONG GENERATION Y IN POLAND

Abstract: On the basis of empirical studies and available sources, the author presents tourism as undertaken by young Poles from Generation Y, with reference to demographic, and above all generational changes. She focuses on presenting tourism preferences and typical behaviour. The analysis shows that their behaviour is similar to those observed by Generation Y globally. The similarities are also visible in tourism - new, post-modernist trends, such as gap year and internet couch surfing portals, as forms of independent travel organization, are becoming more and more popular. On the other hand, the consumptionist habits of Generation Y (preferences for comfort and entertainment), as well as an orientation towards family and friends, frequently travelling companions, can also be observed.

Key words: Poles, Generation Y, youth tourism, tourism preferences.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the numerous attempts to interpret contemporary tourism, the questions that are becoming increasingly urgent are those concerning the socio-demographic changes and trends which influence tourist behaviour, or, in a wider sense, free-time activity as a whole. Demographic changes have an effect on many aspects of tourism, mainly the strength and type of tourism demand, as well as the tourism job market (Grimm *et al* 2009). The aim of this article is to show how tourism (tourist preferences) has been changing among Polish young people, over a period of intensive transformation and of generation change in particular. The discussion concerns young Poles from Generation Y. The analysis will include selected aspects of this group's tourism activity, focusing on its tourism preferences alongside new trends in tourism development.

Among the standard determinants of tourism activity, preferences and, consequently, the formation of tourism space, are socio-demographic features. An important variable is age, but many authors point to life cycle stages and generational differences as significant as well (OPPERMAN 1995; KOWALCZYK-ANIOŁ 2007). The dictionary definition might describe a generation as "a group of people (also animals or plants) at approximately the same age" and as "people maturing through similar or the same experience". The idea of interpreting socio-economic problems from a perspective of generation cohorts is not new. In the social sciences it has a long tradition going back to

the 1920's (Mannheim) and is frequently applied in sociology (e.g. the theory of generations, formulated by the American sociologists, HOWE & STRAUSS in 1991), psychology or political science. In recent years, human resources and marketing specialists have also been paying a lot of their attention to these issues. The wide-ranging socio-political debate about on-going global demographic changes increasingly often includes issues of inter-generational relations. It has become essential to look at tourism from this perspective, as well. An interesting and particularly important issue for an understanding of the situation today, is a comparison of the behaviour of individual generations, especially as regards three large groups on today's tourism market. These generations have been given names: the oldest is the Baby Boomer generation, the middle is Generation X, while the youngest - Generation Y¹.

The *Baby Boomer* (BB), X and Y generations (the most important because of their current numbers) have been described by different authors in great detail (e.g. HOWE 2006, MITCHELL 1995). The age ranges are 'theoretical', so the authors refer to slightly different periods concerning the years of birth of members of specific age cohorts. For instance, in his publication in 2005, KOTLER assumed that Generation Y (in the USA - *author's note*) was the product of the good economic times and the internet, and its members born 1978-94. For other authors (e.g. Lawrence), Generation Y consists of Americans born between 1977 and 1999. KOTLER &

ARMSTRONG (2010) present the widest time span for Generation Y (called *Millennials* or *echo boomers* by these authors, or *i-Pod Generation*, *The Net Generation*, *Generation Next* by others) – between 1977 and 2000. The *Millennials* are mostly the baby boomers' children (83 million). While the majority (83%) of the BB generation are white, 45% of Generation Y belong to other races (KOTLER & ARMSTRONG 2010). From the global point of view, Pendergast (2010) assumes that Generation Y members were born over the period 1982-2000, which means that today they are around 10-30 years of age (table 1)².

T a b l e 1. Dates of birth or existing generations according to Pendergast

Date of birth	Generation	Age in 2012
1901-24	GL	88 and above
1925-42	Silent	70-87
1943-60	Baby Boomer	52-69
1961-81	Generation X	31-51
1982-2002	Generation Y	10-30
2003 +	Generation Z	9 and below

S o u r c e: PENDERGAST (2010), supplemented.

It should be remembered that members of every generation present a variety of life styles, life cycle stages and other factors determining human behaviour and needs. For instance, Pendergast (2010) believes that Generation Y can be divided into *Generation Why* – people born in 1982-5, *Millennials (MilGens)* – born in 1985-99, and *iGeneration* – born 1999-2002.

In this article, the author focuses on the young today referred to as Generation Y, and on Poland. Considering the particular situation in Poland, where the fall of the socialist system (1989) was a significant turning point, the dates of birth of Polish Ys' should be redefined, and it is commonly accepted that it is between 1980 and 2000. Those concerned were born or were growing up at the time of a political and socio-economic transformation. It is not the only these circumstance that determine the particular character of this group – the global context is equally important, as well as meso-scale changes to the modern family, etc. As a result of the political and economic transformations, Poles have become citizens of Europe and the world – a world dominated by a very expansive, lively and dynamic capitalism, full of controversies and suffering from a serious crisis. Modern capitalism brought to Poland the ideology and culture of consumption, which this younger generation was, in a way, naturally growing into, unaware of the fact that there are alternatives to the apotheosis of a wealthy and pleasurable life. Along with the socio-economic transformation, Poland has become open to phenomena and trends observed in contemporary world which

can be subsumed into two key words: globalization and post-modernity (information, network society – SZAFRANIEC 2011). It is worth stressing that Generation Y is the first Polish generation to display global characteristics. This mainly concerns those living in large cities, brought up with the internet. Different authors mention the 'syndrome' of the global teenager who can be easily recognized because "s/he listens to similar music, wears similar clothes, watches similar TV channels, uses the same computer programs", no matter where – in Warsaw, Tokyo or London (SZAFRANIEC 2011, p. 32).

According to human resource management and marketing reports (e.g. *Generation Y: Realising the potential* 2010), Generation Y is defined by a set of characteristic features. Y's highly value private life (they believe in a work-life balance – *author's note*), expect flexible working hours, the chance to change from full time to part-time, and take a year out. Y's are very familiar with modern technologies (the internet, mobile phones, tablets, i-Pods, etc.), independent and ambitious, prepared for change and innovation. Its members have high self-esteem and become deeply involved in a job which interests them. They are willing to work in a team, tend to be demanding of their employers and have high expectations as regards earnings. At the same time they are unwilling to adhere to standards and follow procedures. Many authors believe that Generation Y, as a new generation of workers entering the market, is a real challenge for employers. According to MOSCARDO & BENCKENDORFF (2010), out of all the characteristics presented by different authors, consensus and general acceptance are only possible in the case of four key features (quoted after DONNISON 2007):

- using digital media, especially for entertainment, socializing and self-expression purposes;
- having a positive attitude to diversity, flexibility, social issues and one's own future;
- being oriented towards family and social groups (community);
- (added by Moscardo & Benckendorff) prolonging adolescence (maturing)³ with a longer period of formal education.

WRZESIEŃ (2007) claims that three characteristics mentioned in American analyses may be regarded as more universal:

- representatives of Generation Y are diversified racially and ethnically;
- they are extremely independent, rooted in their childhood (e.g. broken families, latchkey children) and the technological revolution in which they were growing up;
- as a result of their parents' over-protectiveness, they have a very strong sense of security and optimistically look to the future.

What is the Polish Generation Y like? What are their aspirations and ambitions, expectations from work, etc.? The comparison made by SZAFRANIEC (2012) among 19-year-olds in 1976 and 2007 shows that in Poland the idea of a good life is much more conventional than that in the West, but "(...) aspirations to make life affluent, colourful and interesting are one of the main characteristics of this generation. The core of their values (focusing on family and personal happiness) is undergoing 'entropy'. Not only have many different issues gained the status of important aims in life, but they have acquired a different meaning. Personal happiness does not depend on family alone. At work, good earnings are important, but personal satisfaction and development opportunities are becoming increasingly important as well. Money is not important as such, but it makes the benefits of a consumption-based society available to an individual, and helps him/her to establish a life style which allows self-expression" (p. 108). According to SZAFRANIEC (2011) in comparison with the young from the socialist period, today's "(...) value education, interesting work, big money and an exciting, interesting life much more highly. Other values which are important to them include friendship, the sense of being needed, prestige and respect - today's young are certainly more pro-social and community-wise. It is a more expressive generation, 'greedier' for life. Young Poles expect a lot, but are not too demanding. The foundations of their inner world are, on the one hand, personal and affiliative (happiness, love, friendship, family life), and on the other - work, seen as a condition for a successful life (affluent, pleasurable, interesting) and a source of personal satisfaction" (SZAFRANIEC 2011, p. 61). Such a description of the contemporary young sheds slightly different light on their attitude to work from what is often presented (demonized?) in the media, and at the same time it clearly refers to the global features of Generation Y.

When presenting a general description of the contemporary Polish young, it is worth mentioning issues related to tourism. Are the Y's tourism behaviour and preferences different from those of older generations? What is a Polish tourist from Generation Y like?

Having observed the growing interest in the tourism differences of specific generations, researched mainly in America, Australia and Britain (HUANG Y.-C. & PETRICK 2010, MOSCARDO & BENCKENDORFF 2010, RICHARDS 2007, etc.), the author analysed a representative sample of adult Poles. The results enabled her to show the special character of the tourism of Poles from Generation Y in comparison to older generations. The research (a questionnaire survey) included 2200 people, 540 of whom belonged to Generation Y. The survey was run among a randomly chosen group of respondents at their place of residence, by trained

questioners from CBOS (a polling agency). The study was financed through a research grant from the University of Łódź (WNG UŁ).

The questions concerned three aspects:

- methods of organizing a tourism trip,
- travelling companions,
- holiday recreation preferences.

The respondents were not asked to describe one particular trip, but their general tourism habits.

2. GENERATION Y AND THE ORGANIZATION OF TOURISM TRIPS

As regards types of travel organization, 36% of the Polish respondents from Generation Y stated that they chose organized trips, and 41% made bookings through the internet - table 2. Nearly 8% used internet couch surfing⁴ networks, such as *Hospitality Club* or *Couchsurfing*, which are becoming increasingly popular.

T a b l e 2. Types of travel organization preferred by the generations studied (multiple choice option) - in percentages

Preferences	Older generations	Generation Y	Total
I choose organized trips	28.0	36.2	30.0
I make reservations on the internet	17.0	41.0	22.4
I travel with my family	66.4	57.7	64.3
I travel with friends	37.9	69.8	45.5
I travel alone	11.2	6.7	10.2
I use an internet couch surfing system	3.4	7.7	4.4
Gap year	0.8	4.0	1.6
Senior travel	4.5	2.9	4.1

S o u r c e: author's research.

T a b l e 3. Age structure of *CouchSurfing* portal users in 2011

Age (years)	Total		Poles	
	number	%	number	%
18-24	1,176,583	36.9	36,141	52.1
25-29	1,042,563	32.7	22,259	32.1
30-34	481,901	15.1	6,553	9.4
35-39	201,852	6.3	2,280	3.3
40-49	167,333	5.3	1,448	2.1
50-59	71,365	2.2	494	0.7
60-69	24,152	0.8	101	0.1
70-79	3,266	0.1	8	
80-89	592		5	

S o u r c e: author based on KOWALCZYK-ANIOŁ (2011).

In order to appreciate the scale of the phenomenon, it is worth comparing two figures - in 2011, over 71,000 Poles were members of *Couchsurfing* - an internet couch surfing club (table 3 - every second

person of which was 18-24, and every third was 25-29 – together they made up 84% of the group). A smaller number – 62,500 (there is no information on division into age groups) belonged to PTTK (based on a PTTK report on the state of the organization and policy activity in 2011).

Membership of internet couch surfing clubs is typical of the urban young (fig. 1), mostly using English, who not only take advantage of free accommodation at foreign club-members' homes, but also

gladly offer their own homes or other forms of hospitality (e.g. invitations to coffee, tea, showing them around their city – more in KOWALCZYK-ANIOL 2011). The author believes that internet couch surfing clubs, as a form of travel organization, and the taking of a gap year, are the distinguishing features of contemporary tourism for the Polish young, especially among students, and increases in importance every year. Both activities have one important feature in common – searching for authentic contact, understood as meeting another person and a different culture (fig. 2).

Gap year travel mentioned earlier (other expressions: *year off*, *time out*, *year out*, rarely *sabbatical*), i.e. journeys often to remote places, lasting for about one year, made before higher education, after graduating from university or before starting work, are a global trend in young people's tourism (e.g. FARACIK 2011). This phenomenon, which appeared in the 1960's in Great Britain, has become increasingly widespread and popular, especially in West European countries, like the UK (it is estimated that in 2003, about 250,000 people aged 18-25 declared a one-year break from education), as well as other developed countries, like the United States, Canada, Japan or Australia. The main reasons why students take a year off include the desire to travel, for training, or working for money or voluntarily. On the other hand, the advantages of such long trips, often to far away places, include gaining experience, self-confidence and self-awareness, and consequently choosing one's own career, aims and style of living. Gap year travel is often combined with voluntary work, which has been widely discussed in academic circles in recent years (e.g. TOMAZOS & BUTLER 2012, WEARING 2001, LYONS *et al.*, 2011, BENSON, ed. 2011), focusing not only on the motivations (which could be altruistic, ethical or utilitarian – e.g. learning or improving a foreign language, gaining new experience or having an adventure) and benefits, but also on a critical assessment of the influence of neo-liberalism on this form of activity (LYONS *et al.*, 2011). However, for a young person, travel of this type is certainly the best way to discover the world and oneself⁵. In the studied group, gap year journeys were made by 4% of the respondents from Generation Y, while it was less than 2% of the total (table 1). Gap year experience is more common among university students.

With regard to other forms of travel organization, slightly less than 3% of the Y's approached accompanied older people (e.g. their grandparents) during trips of the 'senior travel' type (trips organized outside the season, with discounts for people aged over 55, where the price is available to the accompanying person as well, regardless of their age).

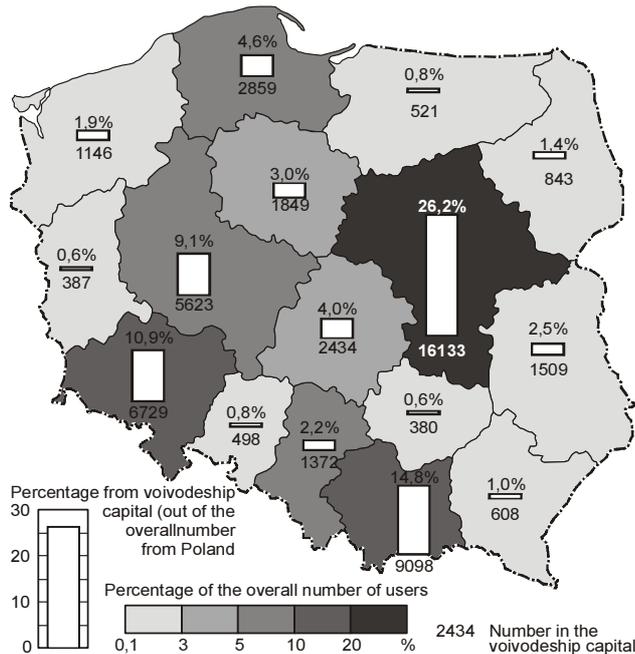


Fig. 1. Origin of Polish CouchSurfing portal users (as of 29th August 2011)
Source: KOWALCZYK-ANIOL (2011)

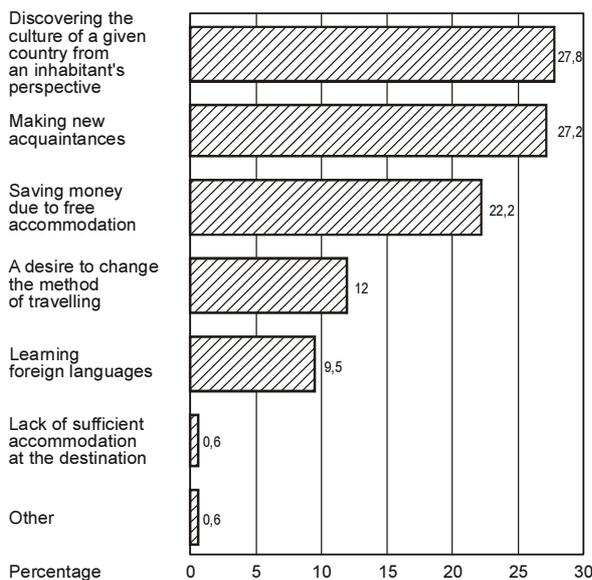


Fig. 2. Motivations for using couch surfing portals
Source: KOWALCZYK-ANIOL (2011)

Another form of travel organization among the Polish young is connected with scholarship schemes. Due to the fact that they are institutionally connected with a degree (they are a part of a university course or a student's training), they are not available to every member of Generation Y. Therefore, they are not included in the present study. It must be stressed, however, that today's chance to travel as part of a scholarship scheme is an excellent opportunity for Polish students. At present, it is a wide-ranging (the two largest programs, i.e. ERASMUS and CEEPUS cover almost the whole of Europe) and are highly significant socio-educational initiative which is becoming increasingly popular (FARACIK 2011). According to official statistics, 14,021 Polish students took part in ERASMUS, the largest scholarship program, in the 2010/11 academic year alone, and a total of 108,041 students over the period from 1998/99 to 2010/11 (<http://www.erasmus.org.pl/odnosniki-podstawowe/statystyki>; 28.11.2012).

3. GENERATION Y AND THEIR TRAVEL COMPANIONS

Respondents from Generation Y rarely travel alone (less than 7%); they choose much more often to travel in the company of friends (nearly 70%) than other, especially older, generations (Table 2). This is another feature clearly distinguishing Y's as tourists. The research results presented earlier (SZAFRANIEC 2011, 2012) also pointed to the community-oriented preferences of Poles from this generation. Extremely interesting here are the results of a survey conducted by Kanapek in 2010, for her *licencjat* degree, among young people aged 15-25 taking part in the 85th Łódź Pilgrimage to Jasna Góra⁶. The results clearly correspond to the phenomena discussed in this paper. The main motivations to go on a pilgrimage among the studied group were religious (18%), the special atmosphere of a pilgrimage (community) (22%), friends' persuasion (17%) and company (16%).

It is worth noticing that regardless of age group, the respondents travel with families (64%), stated by 58% of the respondents from Generation Y, i.e. slightly fewer than among the older cohorts (the maximum was 66% in older generations) (Table 2). It should be said, however, that only 31% of the respondents from Generation Y have set up a family (are married), compared to 59% of the overall number of respondents. The remaining have not entered this particular stage of life yet or are living together informally. This result confirms a typical Polish tendency – Poles often undertake family tourism (literally). At the same time, the focus on the family is an important

feature of the studied generation (MOSCARDO & BENCKENDORFF 2010), including its Polish representatives. Preferences regarding travel with friends and family are an important signal for tourism products suppliers. It will be interesting to see whether Y's will change these preferences when they enter the next stages of life.

4. GENERATION Y'S TOURIST PREFERENCES – DESTINATIONS AND 'STYLES' OF RECREATION DURING TOURIST TRIPS

In her research, the author also dealt with tourists' expectations from the destinations visited, as well as the 'style' of recreation during the trip. The most distinctive of the features defining Generation Y is their active way of spending time during trips (83%) and the search for entertainment (74%) (Table 4). Two, seemingly contradictory groups of responses – looking for contact with nature (79%) and authenticity of the visited sites (69%), versus the appreciation of comfort (77%), are extremely significant.

Table 4. Expectations from visited destinations and preferred ways of spending time on holidays (multiple choice option) – in percentages

Preferences	Older generations	Generation Y	Total
I appreciate comfort in recreation	61.5	76.7	65.2
I'm looking for authenticity in visited destinations	55.3	69.2	58.6
I'm looking for peace and quiet	57.2	39.6	53.0
I'm looking for contact with nature	76.2	79.0	76.9
I'm looking for entertainment	28.2	74.4	39.2
I like to be active on holiday	59.8	83.3	65.4
I like to travel back to the same places	62.6	71.3	64.7

Source: author's research.

Almost all of the above are definitely more important for the studied Y's than for their parents and grandparents. It is confirmed that "(...) the young are a more colourful and expressive generation, perceiving the world and their own lives more intensively, with far less indifference. More young people stress the importance of many different things in their lives, nearly all of which they rate very highly" (SZAFRANIEC 2011, p. 40). We observe visibly higher requirements and challenges for the modern tourist industry, set by the 'i-Pod generation'. Taking into account the results of research on Polish tourism activity, as well as on the tourism spaces of consecutive generations (e.g. three generations of Łódź

families, KOWALCZYK-ANIOŁ 2007), it is worth noticing that the tourism spaces of this age group are considerably larger and more diversified. It is interesting that over 71% of the Y's approached stated that they liked to revisit the same places.

The analysis above, based both on literature and empirical study, shows that the contemporary Polish young display behaviour in general similar to those of the global Generation Y. These similarities can be also observed in tourism – e.g. new post-modern trends, such as gap year and internet couch surfing portals, are becoming increasingly popular new forms of independent travel, driven by youthful curiosity of the world, as well as openness to diversity, optimism, a good command of foreign languages, independence, and other characteristic features of this generation. On the other hand, it is easy to notice Generation Y's consumption habits – the appreciation of comfort and entertainment, as well as an orientation towards friends and family, who are frequently travel companions.

FOOTNOTES

¹ WRZESIEŃ (2010) refers to Polish Generation X as the 'End-of-the-Century' Generation, while to Generation Y – as the 'European Seekers'

² Every proposal for an age range provokes a discussion, but it is necessary to make a clear contrast of generation differences. Therefore, the author has adopted the division into BB, X and Y generations. She is aware of the many controversies concerning this division, but the advantages it offers support this choice.

³ At this point, it is worth quoting the data referring to a phenomenon called 'nesting'. In 2008, in the EU, nearly 51 million people aged 18-34 (45.6% of the whole) lived with their parents (for a variety of socio-cultural reasons, mainly due to financial limitations). Poland is one of the top ten EU countries in which adult children stay at their family home for a very long time – women up to the age of 28.5, and men – until they are nearly 30 (SZAFRANIEC 2011).

⁴ In Polish, there is not a single accepted term corresponding to the English 'couch surfing'. The phenomenon is popularly referred to as mutual hospitality portals or clubs, free accommodation social networks, or 'sleeping on a couch'.

⁵ Voluntary work trips have gained in popularity since 1990. In 2010 their number was estimated 1.67 million. The majority of volunteers come from the USA, while the main reception areas are Latin America, Africa and Asia.

⁶ The analysis was based on 78 correctly filled in questionnaires from those distributed among randomly chosen pilgrims to Jasna Góra, during the 85th Lodz Pilgrimage. 24% of the respondents were taking part in the pilgrimage for the first time, 28% – for the second time, and the others – for the third or more.

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