Guest editorial

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Millennials and Generation Z: Challenges and Future Perspectives for International Tourism

Millennials, Generation Z and the future of tourism

Aim of this thematic issue is to focus on the future of tourism through generational lenses. The generational shift represents a major force that will shape the future of tourism. More specifically, this special issue concentrates upon the relationship between the Millennial generation, Generation Z (Gen Z) members and tourism. These generations represent a clear break with the past in many ways.

There is no consensus on the definition of Millennials and Gen Zers: they are large and heterogeneous groups. Moreover, it is not easy to mark borders between generations (e.g. the term Millennials often crosses over with Generations Y and Z). Some scholars (Furstenberg, 2017) have warned against over-generalisations about such diverse groups. However, previous research highlights interesting trends (see e.g. Howe and Strauss, 2000; Greenberg and Weber, 2008; Palfrey and Gasser, 2008; Taylor and Keeter, 2010; Rainer and Rainer, 2011; Seemiller and Grace, 2016; Varkey Foundation, 2017).

The term Millennials is usually considered to apply to individuals who reached adulthood around the turn of the twenty-first century. The Millennial generation is a key subgroup of Generation Y: it includes some of the earliest digital natives ("early" Millennials) but also differs from Generation Y because of the Millennials' growing competence with digital technology, the new social media and networking online activities ("late" Millennials). This generation is more and more immersed in multi-modal messages and global online cultures, often resulting in new forms of understanding, engagement, practices and relationships. The Millennial generation has been defined as one that is competent, qualified, technological (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Taylor and Keeter, 2010; Benckendorff et al., 2010; Rainer and Rainer, 2011). Millennials have grown up amid major global economic and environmental crises: they prefer to make sustainable choices, to support socially responsible brands, to live experiences instead of materiality, focusing on the production of shared values (see e.g. Ruspini and Bernardi, 2018). In other words, Millennials consider themselves explorers, and would rather spend money on experiences than materials things.

These features have an impact on their tourism choices: Millennials travel more often, book more over the Internet, explore more destinations, tend to stay ahead of travel trends, look for experiences and information and try to gain as much as possible from their travel also in terms of cultural understanding. Because they are technologically "smart" and actively engaged with social media to communicate and share their travel experiences and feelings they are "natural" promoters and influencers (see e.g. Richards, 2007; Canada Tourism Commission, 2015). Other studies show that although Millennials are more likely to integrate social and/or environmental causes into purchasing decisions, they are also increasingly price-sensitive and seem less willing to pay more for travel that supports a social cause (Barton et al., 2013).

Gen Z (also known as the "Net Generation", the "iGeneration" or post Millennial Generation) is a common name for the group born after Millennials: the first generation of the twenty-first century. They are emerging as the next big challenge for researchers and trend forecasters. Gen Z members are 100 per cent digital natives: if Millennials were internet pioneers, Gen Zers have grown up in an era of mobile devices and smartphones, raised in a world of social websites, and do not remember a time before the Internet. Gen Zers are highly educated, creative and innovative. They are pragmatic, hardworking and multi-taskers with short

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attention spans, have specific needs for communication and consumption and, thanks to ubiquitous connectivity, have more in common with their international peers than any previous generation. They have global values and are increasingly conscious consumers, too: Gen Zers have been shaped by the turbulent times they grew up in, amid the global economic uncertainty and the global environmental crisis (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008; Seemiller and Grace, 2016). Gen Z members are also pessimistic about the future: extremism, global terrorism and war are the biggest fears among the world's young people (Varkey Foundation, 2017).

If Millennials and Gen Z share many characteristics, most notably a savvy with technology and a comfort-level with the global world, Gen Z, however, will most likely show some consumer-oriented differences from Millennials (especially early Millennials) because of the age of these individuals during periods of economic recession (Wood, 2013). All these peculiar features are incorporated into tourism choices. In order to ensure strong future growth prospects for tourism, the tourism industry has to better understand peculiarities and expectations of Millennials and Gen Zers.

Form and contents of the thematic issue

Based on these premises, this special issue adds new knowledge to the existing body of literature on the relationship between generations and tourism: an understanding of generational shifts in tourist behaviour facilitates the effective prediction and accommodation of future tourism trends.

The eight articles included in the special issue – written by senior and junior leading scholars from different countries – present unique studies to explore the ways Millennials and Gen Z members are influencing tourism in Asia, Europe, the USA. By using a variety of "qualitative" and "quantitative" methods, the authors address a number of issues: implications on tourism of changing expectations and behaviours between the two Generations; if and how Millennials and Gen Zers care about sustainable tourism; the relationship between technology and tourism; how the tourism industry should prepare for the generational shift.

The special issue opens with an article by Salvatore Monaco "Tourism and the new generations: emerging trends and social implications in Italy" outlining the profile of Italian tourists belonging to the newest generations: Millennials and Gen Zers. These generations are characterised by a high degree of expertise in new technologies and a particularly conscious approach as consumers. The paper addresses a series of questions: What tourism choices characterize Millennials and post-Millennials? What are the needs of these generations that the tourist industry must respond to? How do new technologies support Millennials and post-Millennials in their tourism choices? The paper presents the results of an on-line empirical survey conducted on a sample of 200 Italian web users. The research considers the differences between the two age groups, as well as possible differences within each group linked to other socio-demographic variables (such as gender and area of residence).

The second article "Millennials: America's cash cow is not necessarily a herd", by Steven Migacz and James Petrick, examines the travel motivations, perceived benefits of travel, and the utility of travel media among US Millennials. Data were collected in multiple phases, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. Results revealed that several significant differences exist between two Millennial subgroups, labelled "Young and Free Millennials" and "Professional Millennials". Implications from this study include directions for both tourism marketers and destination suppliers based on the differences and perceptions of both groups and suggest Millennials are not a homogeneous market. With respect to promotional activities, results of this study also provide a more accurate reflection of inter-generational motives and benefits, furnishing tourism marketers with more effective messaging strategies.

The third paper "Understanding Millennials' tourism experience: values and meaning to travel as a key for identifying target clusters for youth (sustainable) tourism", by Elena Cavagnaro, Simona Staffieri and Albert Postma aims at better understanding the tourism experience of Millennials by connecting their value orientations to the meaning that they give to travel. In doing so, it also aims at discovering profiles of young tourists that can be targeted both now and in the future by tourism organisations. Data were collected in the Netherlands: 423 Dutch Millennials answered a survey on values and the

meaning they attribute to travelling based on validated scales. Ten different value orientations and four travel meanings have been identified. Findings show that both tourism organisations and destination management organisations should take notice that the millennial target group is not homogenous. To satisfy Millennial tourists in the present and future, tourism organisations should consider the different values that they uphold and the different meanings that they give to travel.

Article Number 4 "Millennials, sharing economy and tourism: the case of Seoul" by Monica Bernardi, illustrates the "Sharing City, Seoul" project in order to highlight the role that Millennials are playing in transforming the tourist market by relying on the tools of the sharing economy. The Korean project is promoting and favouring online Millennial enterpreneurship, thus impacting also on the tourism sector. Millennials are indeed showing an increasing purchasing power, especially the Asian ones. A three-stage methodology – based on in-depth interviews with the "sharing organisations" involved in the "Sharing City, Seoul" project, participant observation, and institutional and online materials – has made it possible to comprehend how Millennials are changing the travel and tourism landscape in Seoul through disruptive innovation of the sharing economy, and to propose some recommendations for the tourism market.

"Do hostels play a role in pleasing Millennial travellers? The Portuguese case" by Medéia Veríssimo and Carlos Costa (Paper Number 5) aims to identify the best hostel practices and trends, and to evaluate and discuss how they are keeping up with the present demand created by the Millennials market. The methodological approach is based on two complementary qualitative methods: ethnographic participant observation and netnography. Portuguese hostels are the target of this study, as they are considered among the best in the world. Results indicate that, while staying in a hostel, Millennials wish to: meet people, engage in activities and events, have local experiences, feel comfortable/at home, get good value for money and enjoy the convenience. In return, hostels play an important role in hospitality industry by offering: central location, an interactive atmosphere, functional facilities, well-planned design and decoration, a set of activities and events and personal treatment.

Article Number 6 "Generation Z and the tourist experience: tourist stories and use of social networks" by Hamed Haddouche and Christine Salomone underlines the importance of youth tourism on a global scale. The paper focuses on Gen Zers, a major challenge for the tourism industry due to the rise of new technologies and the development of digital applications that reinforce individualised tourism practices. Through the collection of interviews and micro-life stories, the article discusses Gen Zers travel experiences. Often presented as a narcissistic generation, seeking to put forward its "self", for example by posting selfies, this study reveals, among others, that Gen Z seems to show a great modesty during its tourist experiences.

Paper Number 7 "Who Am I if you can't see me? The "self" of young travellers as a driver of eWOM in social media" by Maria Ek Styvén and Tim Foster analyses factors influencing the propensity to share travel experiences in social media during a trip, across a sample of Millennial and Gen Z consumers in three different countries. An online survey was sent to consumers between 16 and 30 years in Sweden, UK and India and structural equation modelling and multi-group analysis were conducted to compare results between countries and generations. Findings show that young travellers' need for uniqueness and opinion leadership with regard to travel tends to increase their propensity to share travel experiences in social media during a trip. Reflected appraisal of self is related to need for uniqueness and opinion leadership and may therefore indirectly influence the propensity to share. Some differences were found between generations and countries.

The last article "Meeting the needs of the Millennials and Generation Z: gamification in tourism through geocaching" by David Sarpong, Gareth R.T. White and Heather Skinner presents a conceptual framework based on an understanding of the principles of popular mobile-enabled games, indicating how organisations in the tourism sector could meet the needs of Millennials and Gen Z through engaging with the existing gamified location-based practice of geocaching as an ICT-enabled gamified enhancement to the destination experience. Findings indicate that through engaging with geocaching, smaller entrepreneurial businesses can reap the benefits associated with employing the principles and practices associated with smart tourism to meet the needs of this new generation of tourists who seek richer digital and often gamified tourism experiences.

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