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A HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE OF GENERATION Z

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to find out what the characteristics of the tourist experience of Generation Z are. The research was designed using qualitative research techniques. Interviews were conducted with 139 young tourists living in 45 different provinces in Turkey and were analyzed using content analysis. Generation Z has a limited budget for travel. They need to devise certain strategies to cope with this. Escape from everyday life is their most important motivation in travel. The idea that the best time to travel is school and youth years. Young tourists find cultural, historical, and architectural elements interesting and are interested in traditional cuisine. They prefer types of transportation that they have not experienced before.

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INTRODUCTION

Different generations' tourism demands result in different tourism movements and experiences, and this differentiation is effectively utilized in the creation of tourism policies. Thence, the number of studies examining the relationship between different generations and tourism movements is steadily expanding (Akgiş İlhan et al., 2022a; Akgiş İlhan et al., 2022b; Corbisiero et. al., 2022; Benckendorff et al., 2010; Bernini & Cracolici, 2015;

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Rowiński et al., 2017; Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018). The tourist experiences of today's Generation Z will have a significant impact on future tourism trends. Understanding the experiences of this generation is important in determining future tourism trends. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the specifics and to gain a thorough understanding of the younger generation's tourism experiences. Understanding what this generation experiences during each phase of the tourist experience might help us to better understand the relationship between experience and tourism movements. Rather than maintaining the idea of focusing on individual phases of the tourist experience, a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding can be developed that provides insight into how tourists relate to their experience.

The starting point of this study is the question of how Generation Z's tourist experiences can be understood. Based on the idea that the 'tourist experience structure' conceptualized by Williams and Lew (2014) is highly functional, the assumption of this research is that the tourist experience is a six-stage cycle (Figure 1). All these stages are interrelated and reproduce each other. However, relevant studies examine each phase of Generation Z's tourist experience separately, not as a whole. This approach leaves us unable to develop a prediction about the entire tourist experience of Generation Z. At the same time, it creates a limitation in our analysis of the relationship between the stages in the tourist experience in detail. According to this, the following questions are addressed in this study: 'What are the features of planning, destination selection, travel to destination, experience in destination, returning home, and recall, and which are the components of Generation Z's tourist experience?'. The paper contributes to existing knowledge in two ways. Tourist experience is not just about experience at the destination. The departure and return processes are part of the experience. Similarly, recall is the starting point where a new experience is planned. Accordingly, experience consists of a cycle. In this context, its theoretical contribution is that it considers the tourist experience as a process rather than as discrete spatiotemporal experiences. In this sense, it will serve as a framework for related studies. It will also contribute to the relevant literature by allowing for a more comprehensive knowledge of Generation Z's tourist experience. The practical contribution of the study is to understand Generation Z's priorities in tourist experiences and, thereby, to provide insights for the development of correct and effective tourism policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Tourist Experience as a Process

Tourism-related goods and services must provide consumers with unforgettable experiences (Bigne et al., 2020). In light of tourism's 'unique' character, there is an increasing emphasis on the need to develop an 'experience economy' (Pine & Gillmore, 1999) in the industry. Creating an experience economy is possible with a good understanding of the tourist experience. The tourist experience concept, which was introduced in the 1960s, is one of the most critical concepts in this context, and one which still attracts attention (Zatori et al., 2018).

Starting from the phase of travel decision in a tourism activity, tourists experience is the processes of choosing the destination, traveling to the destination, returning home, and recalling in a chronological order. Accordingly, with a start and an end date, as well as the factors that influence them, the experience becomes a cause-and-effect problem. Therefore, the tourist experience needs to be considered holistically. In studies on the subject, there is a tendency to consider experiences independently, as stated above. This allows for a more precise knowledge of the sort of experience being researched, but also limits the development of a comprehensive theory of experience as a whole.

There are two widely accepted conceptualizations in the literature that consider the tourist experience as a process. These are suggested by MacCannel (1973) and Cohen (1973). Cohen (1979) describes the tourist experience in relation to five different modes. These are recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential experiences. Accordingly, the tourist experience ranges from a recreationally simple quest of pleasure to an existential effort to give life meaning (Williams & Lew, 2014). Another notable contribution to the tourist experience was made by MacCannel (1973). The tourist experience is described by MacCannel as 'the pursuit of authenticity'. Cohen and MacCannel's preliminary studies on the tourist experience have also influenced the emergence of various definitions and classifications of the concept. In this perspective, Williams and Lew (2014)'s 'tourist experience structure', another conceptualization of experience, is quite functional.

The tourist experience, according to Williams and Lew (2014), is classified into six phases; planning, destination selection, travel to the destination, experience at the destination, returning home, and recall (Figure 1). Planning is the phase where the destination, preferred travel

mode, and accommodation features are determined. This phase is developed within the framework of previous experiences, images of places, perceptions and suggestions. The planning and destination selection phases are followed by the experience of travel to the destination. Although travel to a destination is associated with transportation, travel is much more than a vehicle and a road. This is because it is widely recognized that in tourism activities, arriving at the destination is half of the enjoyment. In this sense, the events and emotions experienced during the journey become the main element of the tourist experience. The experience at the destination is another phase. The experience at the destination includes sightseeing, leisure shopping and the collection of souvenirs and memorabilia. The destination experience is followed by the phase of returning home and recall. Returning home is an integral part of the experience, like traveling to the destination, and is closely related to the emotional states of the tourists. Recall corresponds to the process of sharing what happened during the trip with family and friends, and where pre-planning is made for the next trip. The tourist experience emphasizes how a visit is organized by a planning process and then reenacted through memory. As it demonstrates the experience's relationship with the 'place' and the 'geographic transitions', it also provides an opportunity to evaluate the tourism's relationship with the geography.

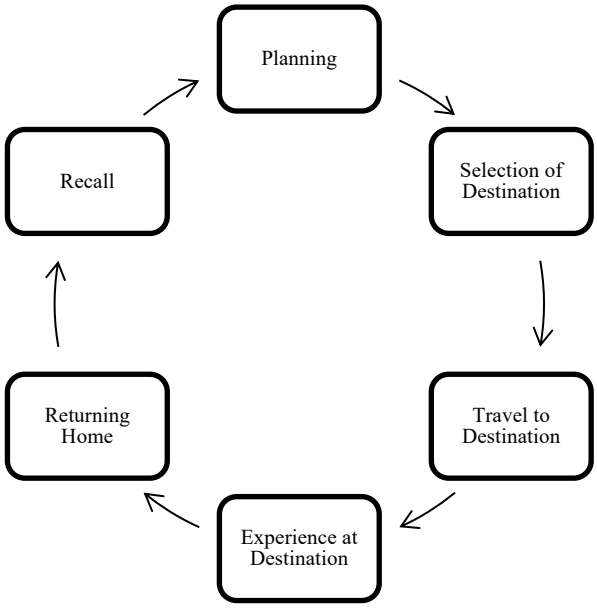


Figure 1. *Tourist Experience Conceptualization (Adapted from Williams and Lew, 2014)*

What Do We Know about the Tourist Experiences of Generation Z?

Generation Z includes individuals who were born in 1995 and after; in these days, the oldest member of whom is 27 years old (Eisner, 2005). The European Travel Commission (ETC) (2020), on the other hand, classifies those born after 1996 as Generation Z (ETC, 2020). Discussing the latest generation of Millennials or Generation Z, Howe et al. (2008) emphasize that the dividing line between Generation Y and Generation Z is not clear. However, Generation Z is distinguished from Generation Y due to its expanding proficiency in digital technologies and new online activities, such as social media and network development (Corbisiero & Ruspini, 2018).

The main differences between Generation Y and Generation Z can be understood in terms of context, behavior and consumption characteristics. In terms of context, Generation Y is associated with economic stability, globalization, and the emergence of the Internet. Generation Z, on the other hand, is conceptualized in relation to mobility, social networks, and digitalization. In terms of behavioral characteristics, while Generation Y is globalist, questioning and self-focused, Generation Z, on the other hand, is undefined id, dialogue-enhancing, and realistic. Finally, in the context of consumption patterns, while Generation Y values experience, festivals, shopping, and flagship brands, Generation Z values consuming unique, unlimited, and ethical products (ETC, 2020). Another distinction that members of Generation Z possess is that they interact with new technology on a daily basis; particularly the Internet (Monaco, 2018). These habits of theirs result in the extensive use of communication and Internet technology, also in the context of tourism. The needs of Generation Z tourists are also quite diverse compared to Generation Y. In this context, they have developed certain purchasing behavior. These are making last-minute decisions, looking for opportunities, relying on word-of-mouth recommendations when choosing a destination, and maximizing the use of resources and low-cost services (Haddouche & Salamone, 2018). Generation Z is a generation that has grown up in the age of globalization. Therefore, financial crises, terrorism, climate change, and technology appear to be other influential developments in shaping their travel characteristics (ETC, 2020).

The relevant studies elicit that the travel budget is crucial in student and youth tourism. A study by Robinson and Schänzel (2019) on Generation Z's tourist experiences provides important results. According to their study, there are numerous factors that influence the choice of service. These

include affordability and budget, easy accessibility to these services, flexibility of travel plans, as well as luck. Similarly, choosing free museums is also associated with saving. According to Eugenio-Martin and Inchausti-Sintes (2016), tourists' proclivity towards similar means of saving may encourage them to spend more money at a destination. The ETC (2020) report, on the other hand, states that alternative accommodation, such as camps and caravans or staying with friends/family members, is not popular among Generation Z.

Young tourists are increasingly inclined to choose tourism modes that will provide them with 'highly valued' and unique experiences. Living with the locals and having more and deeper contact with local cultures are among the most remarkable motivations (UNWTO, 2016). In this sense Akgiş İlhan et al. (2022a) found that the locals' welcoming approach towards young tourists played a key role in the establishment of positive emotion-based social networks.

Xu and Tavitiyaman (2018) find that the most important attractions and motivations of young tourists from Hong Kong are local foods, escape, perceived value, and culture. Robinson and Schänzel (2019), on the other hand, explain why Generation Z travels with two different factors; external and internal factors. Intrinsic factors include seeking adventure and novelty. External factors include attractions, escapes, and popular culture (the norm). In a report by the European Travel Commission (2020), it was determined that Generation Z is extremely interested in localism and originality. A strong interest in sampling locally produced food and drink and learning about local urban culture are two examples of this. In a research study conducted on ten Generation Z tourists residing in Turkey's Isparta province and traveling alone the Generation Z tourists stated their motivation to travel alone was seeing new places, meeting new people, seeking adventure, a feeling of freedom, and learning. They also indicated that traveling alone boosted their self-confidence and that they mostly had positive experiences in travels they made alone. According to the results of Akgiş İlhan et al. (2022a) geomorphologically unique elements attract the attention of Generation Z. The young students perceive the mountains and the city as a monolithic unit and they are interested in natural elements is the positive sense of place for recreational areas, with green and rich plant diversity in a steppe-dominated topography. Similarly, Binti Ghani's (2019) research shows that urban recreational areas are important destinations for Generation Z.

The evolution of social media and communication technologies has influenced not only the way tourists search, analyze, produce, purchase, and consume information, products, and services, but also their behavior patterns (Bizirgianni & Dionysopoulou, 2013). Generation Z recognizes social media as an important part of marketing, possibly because they grew up in a highly commercialized world (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). The most active users of these technologies are young tourists. The Post-Z generation uses the Internet almost entirely to access information they need to make purchasing decisions and make reservations (Monaco, 2018). Similarly, when it comes to choosing travel destinations, 96% of Chinese Generation Z members state that social media plays a role in influencing them more than it does other generations (Expedia Group, 2017). Generation Z is dreaming or planning to travel, despite the COVID-19 pandemic (Contiki, 2021). According to this, it can be foreseen that this generation will play a critical role in the future of tourism industry.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, the basic assumptions of the research, the research design, the study area, the sample characteristics, and the data collection and analysis processes are explained.

Research Design

The tourist experience as a process is unique to everyone. Every experience is created and construed by tourists. Therefore, in this study, it is considered that the tourist experience is an internal reality and that information about the tourist experience is not based on objective, but rather on subjective values. The tourist experience cannot be measured precisely because it is not an objective reality. Making meaning of the tourist experience is therefore consistent with interpretivist epistemology. Based on this assumption in this research, the qualitative research method was used and the phenomenological research design was chosen to reveal Generation Z's tourist experiences as a process. The phenomenological approach is a design for examining the participants' perspectives, feelings, and thoughts on the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014).

Sample Group

Due to the rapid evolution of young people's tastes, life experiences, and consumer spending power since 1995, the ETC divided Generation Z into

three subgroups; the 8-11 years old (older primary school children), 12-17 years old (teenagers, secondary school age), and 18-24 years old (students and young professionals). This research focuses on the tourist experiences of the 18-24 age group. The sample of the study consists of 139 Generation Z members from forty-five different cities in Turkey who have traveled individually, with friends, or with their families. 79 of the participants are women 60 of them are men. The study area is given in Figure 2.

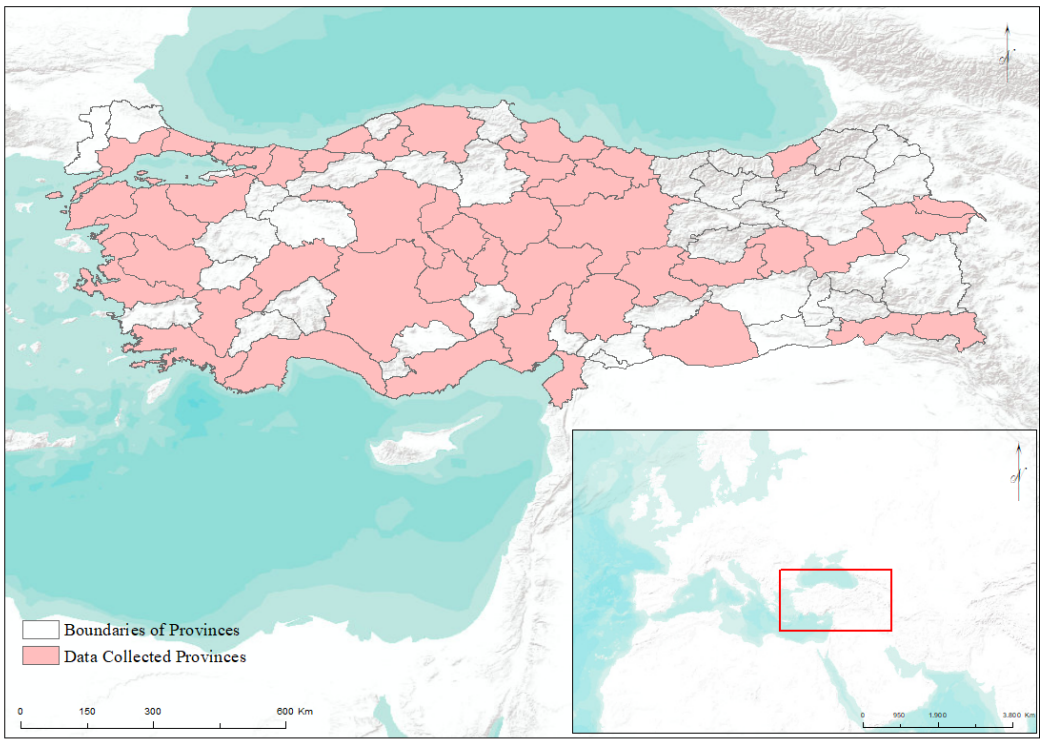


Figure 2. *Study Area*

Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The form contains six questions relating to six different types of tourist experience (see in Appendix). The participants were asked to describe the phases of planning, choice of destination, travel to the destination, experience in the destination, returning home, and recall, considering any travel they have made. The snowball sampling technique was used to determine the sample. Data was collected throughout 2019 and 2020 years. The period in which the research data are collected is the dates when lockdowns are applied due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the interviews were conducted online, not face-to-face. To collect data on experience, an online questionnaire was used. The interview form consisting of six questions was prepared using Google Forms and the participants were asked to answer them.

Data Analysis

The data were evaluated using content analysis. Content analysis is recognized as a method for obtaining information on a certain concept, opinion, circumstance, feature, or variable associated with the issue under investigation (Hermann, 2008). Content analysis varies within itself. In this study, summative content analysis (Mayring, 2004) is employed. For each phase of the students' tourist experience, separate codes were created, and themes were created using these codes. Therefore, the components of each phase of the experience were identified and the tourist experience processes were analyzed (Figure 3).

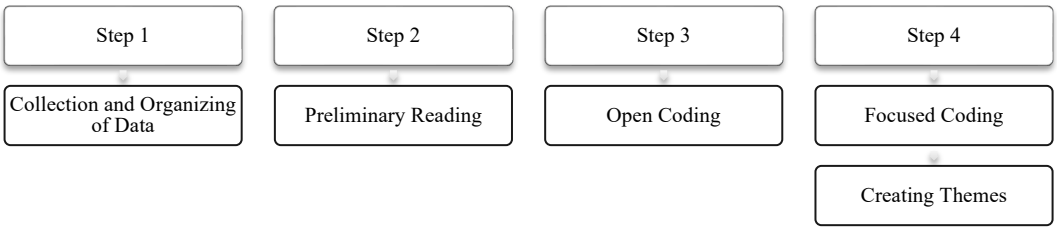


Figure 3. *Coding Process*

Social location of researchers and their place in research: Researchers' social location influences research questions and interpretation of data as they approach research and participants (Jaconson & Mustafa, 2019). All three of the researchers are faculty members at different universities, two of them at the Faculty of Tourism and one at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The students of all three are predominantly Z generation and they are doing research on the target group for more qualified teaching. In this context, they have published studies on Generation Z in respected journals and conferences.

Two researchers are conducting the "tourism geography" course in their departments. For this reason, the conceptualization of Williams and Lew (2014) in consultation with Generation Z students in the lessons was influential in the emergence of the research question. The researchers' familiarity with communicating with Generation Z, their ability to communicate openly and mutually with this generation, and the fact that they consulted with the students in the courses on this subject caused them to prefer the qualitative research method in the research.

One of the researchers has 9 years, the other 3 years, and the third has 30 years of academic experience. Researchers look at the Z generation

from the X and Y generations. There are even some studies describing the Z generation in 1990 and later (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022). Although there is no definite limit, when evaluated from this point of view, the researchers were able to look at and conceptualize the X, Y, and Z generations while interpreting the results.

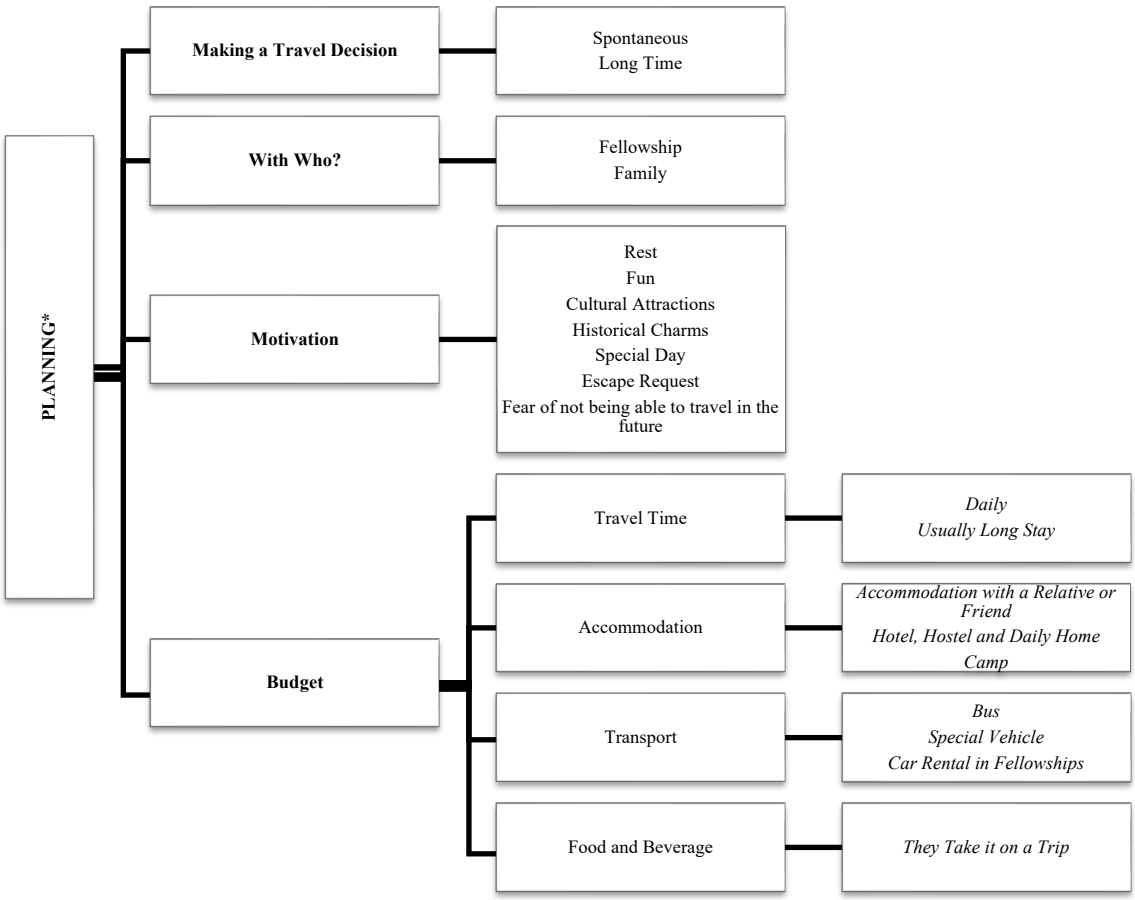


Figure 4. *Planning Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes

RESULTS

Planning

According to the results, the planning stage of participants' tourist experiences consists of four components (Figure 4). These are travel decision-making, who to travel with, motivations, and budgeting. The majority of the students reported that their travel decisions were not made on the spur of the moment, but rather after much consideration. Long-term plans are usually travels made with families, while travels with friends tend to be spontaneous.

Motivation, which is one of the elements of the planning process, varies greatly amongst the students and is highly variable. Rest and entertainment, which are the main motivations of tourism, are also remarkable in terms of Generation Z's travel motivations. However, one of the most powerful motivators for the students' travel decisions and destination choices is a desire to be in a 'different place'. What is different is hidden in other sorts of motivation. Other motivations, namely historical, cultural and gastronomic attractions, correspond to the students' 'different' conceptualizations. The students also believe that after completing their education, their professional life will be exceedingly hectic. Therefore, they expect to have 'time pressure/contraction' in the future and will be unable to set aside sufficient time for their travels. For this reason, they believe that their school years are ideal for travel. In addition, special day celebrations are considered as a determinant in Generation Z's travel preferences, particularly when traveling with friends.

"When I was arranging my vacation, I considered the historical and cultural diversity of Istanbul, the city to which I will travel." YT1

"The planning for this trip was based on learning about the region's historical and cultural traits, as well as tasting the region's unique cuisine, and the itinerary was created accordingly." YT20

"We planned a trip with our friends to three or four cities that we had not seen in our country during the spring semester of our third year of university. The idea was proposed that university years would never return, and that we might never have the opportunity to travel in business life again." YT4

"Since high school, I have been dreaming of visiting other cities if I get to university, thinking that I might not have this opportunity again. After graduating from high school, I moved to Kırşehir to attend university. After a few weeks, I started making friends. They were friends like me who wanted to travel and see new places, and we started to discuss where to go." YT9

When the tourist in question is a student, budget is probably one of the most important factors to consider when arranging the trip. Determinants in the budgeting of the students are the duration of the trip, accommodation, transportation, and food and beverage. According to the findings of the research, young people prefer trips with accommodation rather than day trips when traveling independently from families. The majority of spontaneous trips tend to be daily trips. Accommodation expenditure, on the other hand, is the second component of budgeting. The students employ two common ways to cut their accommodation expenditure. The first of these is accommodation with relatives or friends.

This saving method is also determinant in the choice of destination, as will be stated later. It is considered that the second preferred method for lowering accommodation costs is to stay in student dormitories. In addition, due to financial constraints, camping, daily house rentals, and hostels are preferred accommodation options.

The duration of stay arises when traveling with family. This is because families cover travel expenditures. In terms of accommodation amenities, it is clear that hotels and large hotels are preferred for vacations with family. In this type of accommodation, package tours take priority (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Word Cloud on Planning Stage*

"I have the right to stay in state-owned student dormitories as a guest. I contacted the dormitory where I was going as it would be economically convenient during my trip. I asked for confirmation to stay, and my request was accepted." YT5

Transportation is another important aspect to consider in budgeting. The students generally prefer bus travel for transportation. However, at this point, the number of persons who will participate in the trip is determinant. This is because, while small groups prefer to travel by bus, larger groups of students prefer to rent a car. This creates an advantage in terms of budgeting. The final component of budgeting concerns food and beverage facilities. Similar to the strategies for accommodation and transportation, most of the students bring the food and beverages they will need in the first few days of the trip, or throughout the trip, if it is short-term.

"We opted to use my family's car for transportation while organizing the trip. I planned the foods based on the supplies we will bring with us and the shopping we will do when we get there. I tried to take everything we needed with us as far as possible. I planned to minimize costs in this manner.'' YT18

Selection of Destination

The budget, like the planning process, is one of the most influential factors in the students' destination choices according to the results (Figure 6). In this respect, a family or friend living in the destination chosen means that the travel budget is minimal because it provides opportunities for the students in terms of accommodation. For this reason, the students tend to prefer destinations where their acquaintances live. In the absence of such an opportunity, they choose destinations with low accommodation fees, again in relation to their budget.

The proximity of the destination to the place of residence is another factor affecting the choice of destination. Proximity is directly related to the duration of the trip, the choice of accommodation, and again, the travel budget. Due to a limited budget, the students prefer daily, short-distance travel. The participants also state that they made long-distance travels. They state that they reduce their expenses at the destination they go to cover their long-distance travel expenses. Natural and historical wonders, traditional life and architecture, nightlife and entertainment options, and beaches were commonly highlighted in the features of the destinations they chose (Figure 7).

"…my motivations include meeting expectations, self-realization, the urge to discover novelties and differences, such as new and different cultures, civilizations, lifestyles, and the thought that new memories will accumulate." YT2

"My trip to Konya falls under cultural motives. My interest in another place, my interest in historical places and architecture have been effective. Again, I also have personal motives that encouraged me to go on this trip, such as making new friends, seeing new places, having different experiences, and enjoying the trip." YT19

"Factors such as being a tourist's first-time destination and the desire to explore, as well as being a city with a coast, a beach, historical structures and natural formations, and an abundance of activities to participate in, were all considered while making the decision. Furthermore, the low cost and ease of access are appealing aspects in the choice of this destination." YT27

"While choosing the destination, a close region was preferred in order to save transportation cost and time. Developed tourism facilities, proximity to entertainment, vacation, and ease of transportation, proximity to tourism destinations, and the possibility of seeing historical wonders make the Antalya region attractive. When an ideal place for accommodation is found, the choice of destination is completely clear." YT40

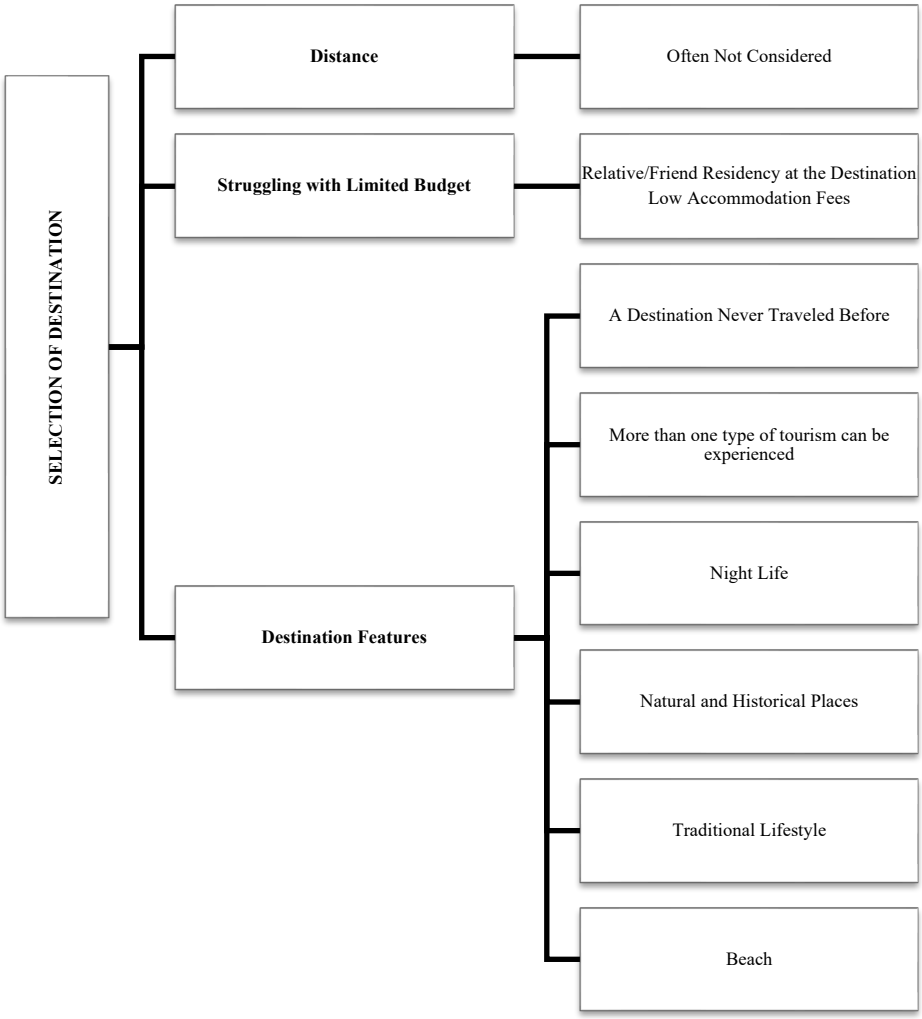


Figure 6. *Selection of Destination Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes



Figure 7. *Word Cloud on Selection of Destination Stage*

Travel to the Destination

During the travel planning process, transportation vehicles and systems used by the participants when they arrived at the destination were

mentioned. In this sense, a land route is utilized in transportation, and buses or rented cars are favored, depending on the size of the group traveling. Similarly, for travels with family, private cars are frequently used.

The departure time at the beginning of the trip is important. Participants depart early in the morning if the destination they are traveling to is close. If the destination is far away, they prefer to leave at night. The reason for this differentiation is the desire to spend the first day of the trip productively in terms of time. In other words, they want to devote the initial days of their trip to the destination experience (Figure 8).

"Other than taking the bus, students in Turkey have few options for traveling from one city to another on a budget." YT6

"Economically, there are no other options for us students in our country other than taking the bus from one city to another. Although the city to be visited for this is a little distant from where we are, bus travel is favored for transportation to the city because it is relatively inexpensive." YT10

"In April 2019, a three-person ticket was purchased in order to take advantage of the Metro bus company's campaign in which the return ticket is only 5 TRY when purchasing a round-trip ticket." YT13

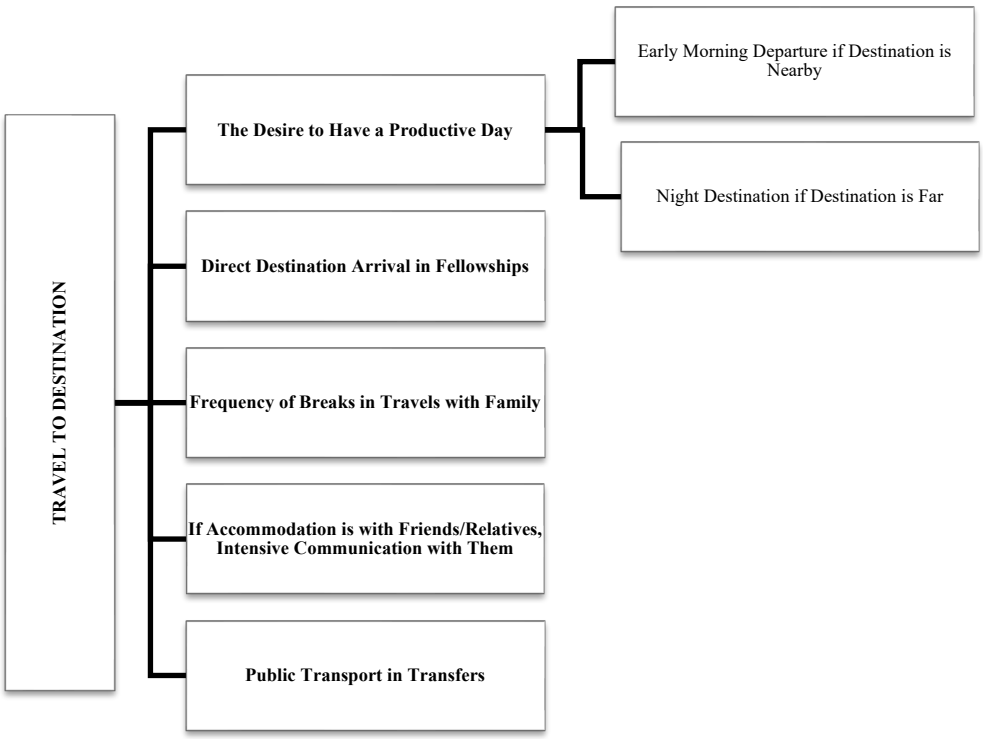


Figure 8. *Travel to Destination Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes

Another feature of travel to a destination is that the travel is made for the purpose of arriving directly at the destination. Visiting other destinations on the travel route is out of question. Finally, the features associated with the place to stay at the destination are among the characteristics of travel to the destination. This is because if the accommodation is to be shared with friends or relatives, there is intense communication among these people during the journey. It is noteworthy that there are more breaks and stops when traveling with family. Such breaks or stops are more frequent, in particular, if there are tourist destinations along or near the route. In addition, in travels made by plane or bus, public transportation is widely used for transfers (Figure 9).



Figure 9. *Word Cloud on Travel to Destination Stage*

Experience at Destination

The participants' destination experience begins with the determination of the areas to be visited within the destination. When determining this, they make use of travel websites or applications. Areas with high scores, which were previously voted on by visitors, have priority in the visit preferences of the participants. Accordingly, historical sites, buildings with traditional architecture, and museums were found to be the most often visited places by the participants. It is noteworthy that historical and religious sites are more preferred in travels made with family. In addition, museums, being free or cheap to visit, are among the priorities of the students (Figure 10).

"Most recommended accommodation facilities and the accommodation facilities with high scores from visitors are the most important factors in choosing the accommodation facility." YT6

"The places and venues that were liked were visited upon deciding by looking at the comments and photos of people who had been to the city before. The liked venues were spotted on the map using Google Maps and Foursquare applications." YT13

"During our tourist trip to Mardin (necklace at night, scenery in daytime), Kırklar Church, Virgin Mary Church and Patriarchate, Zeynel Abidin Mosque and Tomb, Zinciriye Madrasah, Dara Ruins and Mardin's bazaar and inns were visited." YT20

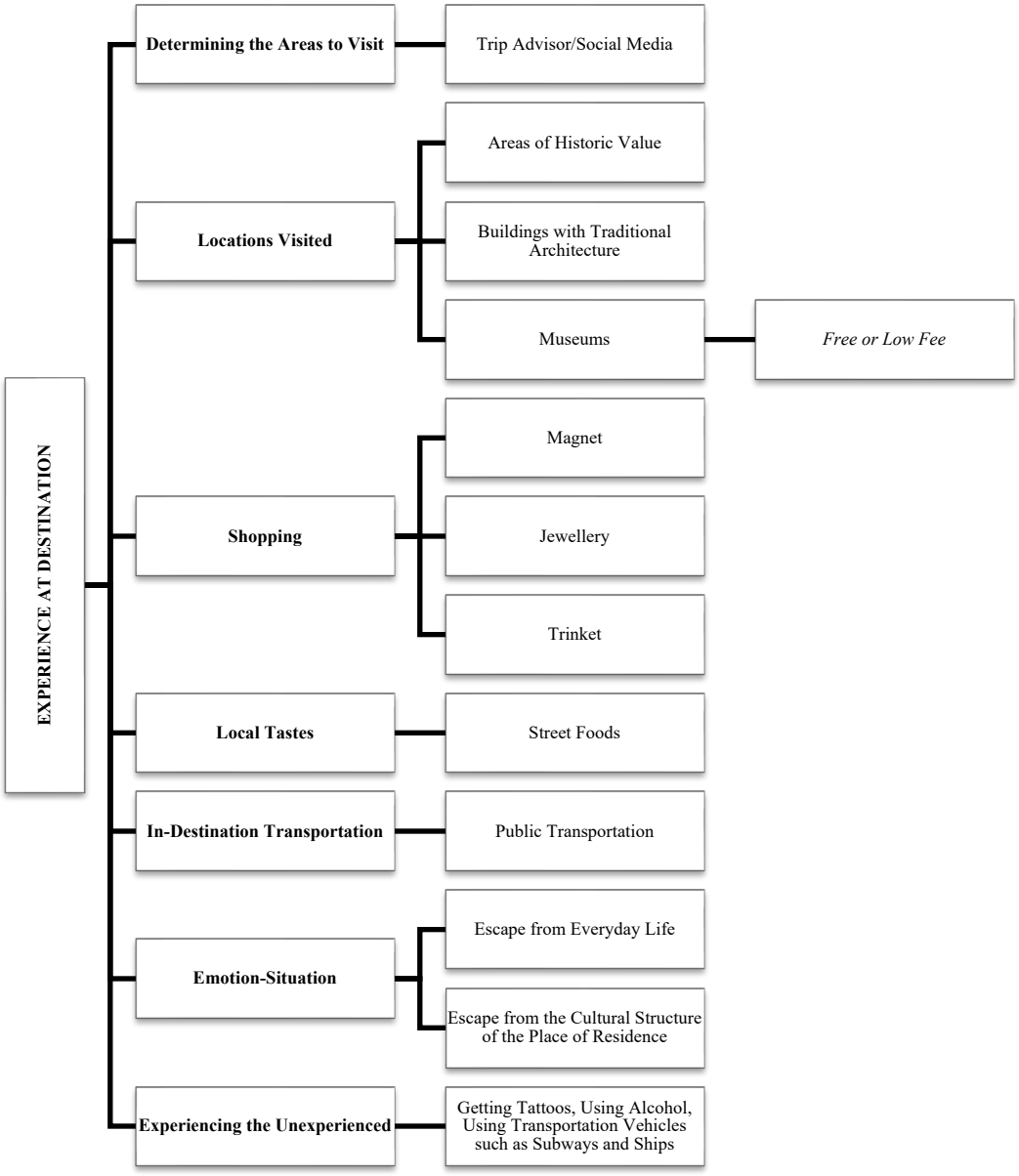


Figure 10. *Experience at Destination Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes

As previously stated, in order to lower their travel expenses, the participants supply a large portion of the food products they would need during their travel at the point of departure. It is also noticed that they

definitely sample the local delicacies in the visited destination (Figure 11). These products generally correspond to more accessible and low-cost street foods. In addition, the participants who prefer an all-inclusive concept meet their food needs from the hotel's facilities. However, these are few in number.



Figure 11. *Word Cloud on Experience at Destination Stage*

The constraints related to their budgets are also determinant in the transportation preferences for the destination. All the participants traveling by bus stated that they prefer public transportation vehicles for intra-destination transportation. Several participants mentioned that they had used a ship or a metro for the first time. In this sense, if there are several transportation mode alternatives in the visited place, the students tend to prefer those that they have not previously used.

"The municipal fish restaurants on the beach allow you to have both cheap and delicious feasts. Entertainment life is also very common here. There are so many venues that can appeal to everyone and every budget." YT21

"This tourist trip has a very special importance for me because I have never seen a sea in my life due to the location of the city I live in. I got to know the sea for the first time, and I crossed the sea by ferry. Since I live in a small city, I have never taken the metro. I took the metro in Istanbul. I visited significant historical sites and natural wonders and, being in a different place with new people, made me tremendously pleased. At that time, I decided I had to experience the places I couldn't see, the happiness I couldn't experience, everything that I watched with admiration from afar." YT28

"I had very important experiences with this nature tourism event. The fact that I had never seen the sea, as I live in Central Anatolia, was the most important factor for me. Because of this event, I was able to fully appreciate this experience for the first time." YT36

The most striking concept regarding the emotional states of the participants at the destination is 'escape'. Travel offers young people a temporary escape from everyday life and the culture of their place of residence. This escape is not only a mental escape but also an escape that offers students the opportunity to experience what they have not experienced before. A number of the participants reported that this was their first time getting a tattoo, drinking alcohol, or seeing the sea. Shopping is an integral part of travel. The participants also stated that shopping is an important component of their experience at the destination. The products they bought the most were magnets, jewelry, and trinkets. Trinkets are generally related to region-specific natural or cultural elements. The participants stated that the products purchased were both for themselves and as gifts.

"People, I felt, needed a break from their normal lives and places like this." YT34

"During the day, pubs with campaigns were visited, and alternate dining options were sought based on recommendations. It felt good to get away from Kırşehir, where a conservative and oppressive tradition prevails." YT13

Returning Home

The most important characteristic of the participants in the phase of returning home is related to their emotional states (Figure 12). All the processes from making the travel decision to the experience at the destination created a positive emotional state in the participants. On the other hand, the phase of returning home is associated with negative emotions. Sadness and boring travel are the most evident of these. Sadness comes from the fact that returning home signifies the end of the journey. Boring travel is similarly associated with the fact that the 'escape' is over, and the routine will begin again (Figure 13). Although unpleasant emotions are the most significant aspect of returning home, the pleasure that travel brings is fascinating. The individuals' good emotional states also attract attention during journeys they make without their family members.

"We had our dinner at 20.10, we got on the buses at 21.00, it was time to leave Istanbul. I was very happy when I arrived, but when I left, a sadness filled me. I said myself, I wished I could live here until my death. There were things I experienced and saw for the first time. I fell asleep thinking of all these..." YT16

"Even though I never wanted to leave the city, we had to leave. Coming back, drained from exhaustion, but with great memories, was an unbelievable joy." YT29

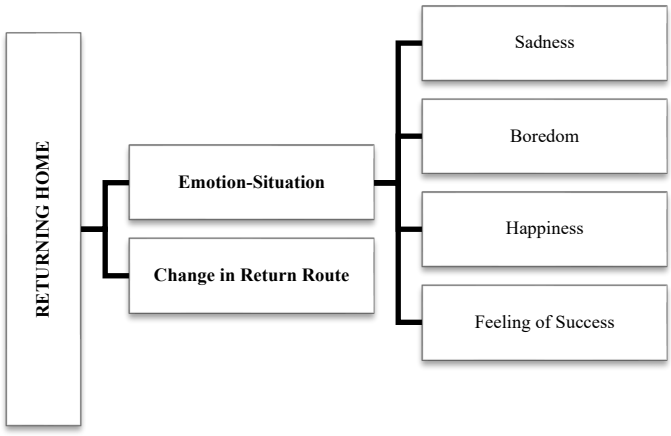


Figure 12. *Returning Home Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes



Figure 13. *Word cloud on returning home stage*

Another component of the phase of returning home is the participants making changes in their return itinerary. Sometimes this change takes place in the form of accommodation at another destination on the way back or a short break from the travel. The main purpose of this change is to make the journey longer.

"I was very pleased with the beauty of the region, and I was even more satisfied than I expected. For this reason, I did not want to leave the region. Although we came to the end of the planned time, we changed the plan and stayed an extra day in the region. This situation has proven me that I made the right choice of region. During our return home, we made another last-minute change of decision; we decided to return by a different route than the one we came by. This situation made the road a little longer, but it meant spending a little more time in the region." YT18

"Our traveling back was entirely unplanned. We wanted to cancel the tickets we had purchased to stay longer, and so we did. We even got the opportunity to make the journey longer to visit other places.'' YT34

Recall

Results on recall, the final phase of the tourist experience, are extremely limited (Figure 14). Recall has two components. The first of those is photographs. All of the participants stated that they took many photographs during their travels and shared these photographs with their friends and families through their social media accounts.

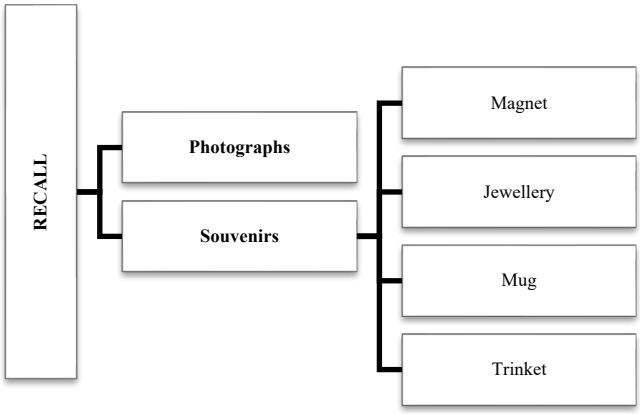


Figure 14. *Recall Stage*

Note: * Bold texts indicate themes, thin texts indicate codes, and italics indicate sub-codes

"…I gave magnets I bought from Balıklıgöl, porcelain mosaic patterns I bought from Gaziantep Castle, and key chains to my friends as gifts. I shared many photos that we had taken from the social media account that I had newly created. When I went to my hometown, I gave the scarves I had bought to my mother, and the silver coffee set I had bought to my sister." YT2

"Lots of photos were taken to keep the memories alive, because these pleasant reminders are triggers with the ability to elicit those memories. As on other trips, buying magnets was not neglected on this trip either." YT13

In addition to photographs, souvenirs purchased related to the travel destination were also considered as recollective elements. Key chains and magnets were the most purchased souvenirs. In addition, trinkets related to historical or cultural elements in the destination and jewelry, especially for women, were other types of souvenirs. The choice of these products is undoubtedly related to the travel budgets of the participants. In addition to these souvenirs, a number of students reported that they had purchased items with local motifs and patterns, such as glasses, plates, and cups (Figure 15).



Figure 15. *Word Cloud on Recall Stage*

DISCUSSION

The number of studies attempting to understand Generation Z has been increasing. Most of the research on this generation focuses on globalization and technology (Li et al., 2019; Szymkowiak et al., 2021). Tourism is one of the most studied disciplines of Generation Z (Olsson et al., 2020; Priporas et al., 2020). In tourism research, it can be stated that there is a tendency to regard Generation Z as an active generation rather than a passive one. There is a clear acceptance of this generation as both managers and employees of the future tourism industry. In this sense, there are studies that question Generation Z in the context of the workforce, and which develop planning proposals accordingly (Özkan & Solmaz, 2015; Goh & Lee, 2018; Goh & Okumuş, 2020; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

A report by Barclays Bank (2018) highlights the key role of Generation Z in the future economic development of nations. In addition to being consumers, this generation will also be the policymakers of the future. In this context, in this study, the experiences of Generation Z regarding six different phases of experience, conceptualized by Williams and Lew (2014), planning, destination selection, travel to destination, experience at destination, returning home, and recall, are examined within the scope of the tourist experience structure.

The budget is one of the most significant components that produces the tourist experience of Generation Z (Donaldson & Gatsinzi, 2005). Xu et al. (2009) highlight that young travelers have relatively low incomes. This is caused by young travelers' dependence on scholarships and student loans. Similarly, Roy et al. (2021) also note that budget plays a significant role in young tourists' decision-making processes. Research findings

confirm that budget is an influential factor in every phase of the tourist experience. Generation Z has a limited budget for travel. They need to devise certain strategies to cope with this. These include changing modes of transportation, staying in their friends' and relatives' houses to save money on accommodation, and bringing the food they will need with them. This finding is also consistent with a study conducted by Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) which suggests that young travelers stay at a friends' or relatives' house to conserve their budgets. Similarly, Lim et al. (2015) also suggest that most young travelers prefer to stay mostly in hotels, and sometimes in the homes of their relatives and friends. Thereby, research findings show that participants prefer low-cost services. According to Lim et al. (2015), these alternative financing strategies demonstrate young people's strong interest in tourist activities. Additionally, the limited budget leads to daily trips to closer destinations, which is consistent with the findings of Mignon (2003).

Technology is a key term to use when defining Generation Z. With this, these young people are able to search for and book travel products easily at any time of day. This also means that they can take advantage of last-minute deals (Aina & Ezeuduji, 2021). The use of digital tools is also a determinant in their last-minute travel decisions. Accordingly, research findings show that the planning process of travel with families is long, while travel with friends tends to be spontaneous. In these last-minute decisions, Generation Z's digital capacity is a determinant.

It is prudent to discuss Generation Z's motivations from multiple perspectives. The most notable motivations are rest, entertainment, and historical, cultural, and gastronomic attractions. The idea that the best time to travel is school and youth years, along with special occasion celebrations, are regarded as the main travel motivations of Generation Z. In addition, 'the desire to be in a different place' is an often-emphasized motivation. The desire to visit new places and to be in a different place is consistent with the results of Roy et al. (2021)'s study on young tourists.

Generation Z members generally prefer hotels, free student dormitories, rental houses, and staying at the homes of their acquaintances as guests. This finding differs from the results in the ETC (2020) report. This report suggests that alternative accommodation options, such as camping and caravans, are not popular among Generation Z. With regard to transportation, buses are the most widely used mode of transportation. All of the participants reported that they prefer public transport for intra-destination transportation. A number of the participants stated that they

had used a ship or a metro system for the first time. In this sense, if there are several transportation alternatives in the visited place, the students tend to prefer those that they have not used before.

In the participants' experience at the destination, they chose to benefit from travel websites or applications in determining the areas to be visited within the destination. Areas with high scores, which were previously voted on by visitors, have priority in the visit preferences of the participants. According to Nowreen and Hossain (2021), the Internet and social media have a positive effect on the travel motivation of Generation Z members aged between 18 and 24, as they obtain information regarding destination selection, financial planning, accommodation, food, culture of the destination, and so on. Communication technologies are also efficiently utilized in the recollection phase of the travel. All of the participants stated that they took many photos during their travels and shared these photos with their friends and families through their social media accounts. Kim and Fesenmaier (2017) emphasize the importance of social media in post-holiday experiences.

It can be seen that historical sites, buildings with traditional architecture, and museums are the most often visited places by the participants. It is also noted that they definitely try the native delicacies at the visited destination. This result regarding local delicacies is consistent with the research findings of the ETC (2020). These products generally correspond to more accessible and low-cost street food.

The most striking concept regarding the emotional states of most of the participants at the destination is ‘escape’. This escape is not only a mental escape, but also an escape that offers students the opportunity to experience what they have not experienced before. This result on escape motivation is consistent with the research results of Xu and Tavitiyaman (2018) and Robinson and Schänzel (2019). The most important characteristic of the participants in the phase of returning home is related to the escape. All of the processes from making the travel decision to the experience at the destination created a positive mood in the participants. On the other hand, the process of returning home is associated with negative emotions. Ending ‘escape’ and the forthcoming routine bring about a negative emotional state. Therefore, both physical and abstract ‘experience’ is important for Generation Z. In their research, Prayag and Hosany (2014) emphasize the need for young travelers to get to know themselves and state that they prefer personalized tourism activities, which clearly show an interest in experience.

Family also draws attention as an important component in Generation Z's tourist experience. In travel with the family, both the accommodation and the mode of transportation used vary. In which case, budget is no longer a problem. Package tours are widely used when traveling with families. As for the places visited within the destination, religious sites are prominent, in addition to cultural and historical attractions. According to Wang et al. (2004), young people are effective in influencing the travel preferences of their families. The research findings also demonstrate that Generation Z follows the preferences of family.

CONCLUSION

As young people have begun to travel more frequently and over longer distances in recent years, youth travel has become an increasingly important part of the global tourism industry (World Tourism Organization, 2008). The travel characteristics of Generation Z, conceptualized within youth tourism, are interpreted as the main factors that will shape the tourism geography of the future, both on a global scale and in countries with a high youth population. According to the findings of the study, the tourist experiences of Generation Z are as follows:

- They anticipate having a hectic work schedule in the future. In other words, they feel time pressure. That is why they travel.
- They have a limited budget for travel. However, they develop strategies to cope with this problem.
- They travel for an escape from everyday life and culture.
- The planning process of travel with families is long, while travel with friends tends to be spontaneous. They also tend to take last-minute decisions.
- They chose to benefit from travel websites or applications in determining the areas to be visited within the destination. Communication technologies are also efficiently utilized in the recollection phase of the travel.
- They find the traditional characteristics of destinations interesting, such as architecture and local delicacies.
- They visit culturally important destinations, such as historical sites and museums.

- Only the process of returning home is associated with negative emotions.

The tourist experience is a multi-stage process from the planning to the completion of the travel. All these processes are interconnected and relate to each other. For instance, a bad experience at a destination may cause the return journey to be earlier than planned. Similarly, a bad experience in transportation during the travel to the destination or the return journey may shape the transportation preference for the next trip. Therefore, the tourist experience must be considered holistically. In this regard, this study, which acknowledges the tourist experience as a process, as well as the study's theoretical, and methodological features, will provide existing knowledge with a practical contribution. Understanding the holistic nature of the tourist experience will contribute to the development of effective tourism policies in practical terms.

Methodological Implications

- *Interpretivist epistemology:* The perspective of the Z generation, which can be considered as an important generation in the tourism planning of the future, on the tourist experience should be handled with an interpretive perspective. To achieve this, it is important to adopt qualitative research methods and techniques rather than quantitative methods. The results of this research showed that an interpretive perspective can reveal the tourist experience of Generation Z more deeply. In addition, future studies focusing not only on generation but also intersectional analyzes could give a broader picture.
- *Observation:* Alternative methodological approaches are needed to incorporate people's perceptions into destination planning and management (Bachi et al., 2020). By using the observation technique in determining the tourist experiences of the Z generation towards destinations, studies can be carried out on how the components of the tourist experience are perceived in depth.

Theoretical Implications

- This study is intended to analyze the tourist experiences of Generation Z holistically in the context of Turkey. Different studies could be conducted to examine the tourist experiences of Generation Z in different countries.

- Conducting cross-country comparative research will broaden the theoretical framework for the tourist experience of Generation Z. Tourist experiences of Generation Z in different developed and developing countries can be affected by many factors such as economic conditions, society, culture, and family structure. This study laid the groundwork for cross-country comparative research. Thus, empirical studies where such factors will be employed as variables can be conducted.
- Due to time and research funding constraints, on-site interviews could not be conducted. New studies involving face-to-face interviews with Generation Z can be conducted.
- To understand the tourist experience of Gen Z, they may be asked to make an itinerary. In this way, researchers can analyze this process by being directly involved in the experience. Therefore, participatory research can help improve the foresight on this issue.

Practical Implications

- Destination managers can plan unique experiences and activities that will appeal to this generation, considering the tourist experience components of the Z generation.
- Considering every component of the tourist experience, important marketing techniques can be developed for destinations.
- The satisfaction of the Z generation, which may occur as a result of their unforgettable tourist experiences, can positively affect the behavioral intention towards the destinations and may arouse the desire to visit the destination again.
- Each component of the tourist experience (planning, destination selection, travel to the destination, experience at the destination, returning home, and recall), which is accepted as a process, can be used by destination management organizations as an important tool that can be used in destination planning studies.

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Appendix

Interview Form

1. Explain the planning stage of your travel.
2. Explain the destination selection stage of your travel.
3. Explain the experience at the destination stage of your travel.
4. Explain the returning home stage of your travel.
5. Explain the recall stage of your travel.