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Introduction

Overview of content

The tourism and hospitality sector counts among the world's largest in terms of business volume and employment. The United Nations World Tourism Organization suggests one in 11 jobs globally are to be found in tourism (UNWTO, 2013:78). Although precise employment figures in tourism are difficult to establish, as a heavily customer-facing, service-orientated sector it is in many of its operations highly labour intensive. Despite advances in technology, the possibilities of substituting labour by technology in tourism remain limited. For this reason tourism is frequently regarded favourably by policy makers, both in the developed and the developing world, in their attempts to drive down unemployment, particularly youth unemployment which in many countries is at crisis levels. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), for example, young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.

The general consensus suggests tourism is in fact characterised by high levels of youth employment. However, it is also frequently described as a low-wage sector that provides many low skilled, part-time and/or temporary jobs, where working conditions are poor, where employers are unwilling to provide formal training and where labour turnover is notoriously high. There appear then to be two sides, at least, to youth employment in tourism. On the one hand tourism provides young people with jobs, on the other we may question the extent to which these jobs are desirable and ultimately beneficial to young people's long-term career development. Admittedly, the finer detail of tourism employment is often lost when making such broad brush claims. This book therefore attempts to investigate the scope, nature and determinants of youth employment in tourism. It addresses a gap in the literature on tourism employment, where first there has been little explicit focus on youth (as opposed to say migrant or female employment in the sector), but second where other books

on employment in tourism have traditionally adopted a human resource management perspective, i.e. focussing primarily on the needs of organisations. This aligns with what Ladkin (2011:1150) in a review of the study of labour in tourism has hinted at: “Some may argue that tourism labor research has been dominated for too long by management themes, and the real value lies in what it tells us about wider societal issues”. This is not to say that no society- or policy-orientated texts on tourism employment exist. Baum (2006) and Riley, Ladkin and Szivas (2002) provide two useful examples of such texts.

It is perhaps surprising, given its policy relevance, that at the time of publication the only substantial work in the area of youth employment explicitly in tourism and hospitality was undertaken by the ILO as part of a series of publications that sought to better understand tourism employment (the other publications focused on gender and migration, see Baum 2012, 2013). This text seeks to provide a more detailed look at youth employment than was initially outlined in the ILO working paper that, given its purpose, had a more scene-setting function. This text therefore aims to make available in a critical and yet accessible format key thinking in the area of youth employment in tourism. While the text is therefore sector-specific, the analysis has implications for other sectors, especially those belonging to the service industries.

In addition to problems of definition, research and writing in the area of tourism and hospitality is hampered, but also made more interesting, by the inextricable nature of the forces that shape it. Lee-Ross and Pryce (2010) point specifically to the complexities in tourism labour markets and provide the example of seasonality, which is often related to low pay and poor working conditions. Another example to stress the point is the relationship between labour turnover and training, where employers frequently suggest they do not train because of high levels of labour turnover in the sector, and employees argue that high levels of labour turnover are the result of poor career development opportunities, which include the lack of training.

Arguably therefore, this text could have been structured in a number of ways and the reader will note some cross-referencing throughout. Nonetheless, as a whole the book endeavours to take a comprehensive review of the many and varied facets of youth employment in the sector and the interrelationships between them, it is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 describes the blight of youth unemployment and its effect on the individual and society. Some of the causes of high levels of youth unemployment relating to the structural changes to labour markets are also discussed.

With the scene thus set, Chapter 2 presents youth employment as a concept, from the perspective of the social meaning of youth and also exploring statistical attempts at defining and operationalising youth employment within the tourism and hospitality sector. Informal employment and its relationship to youth employment is also discussed. Finally, Chapter 2 attempts to assess levels of youth employment in tourism and hospitality drawing on official statistics as well as academic sources and the so-called 'grey literature'.

Chapter 3 discusses the nature of youth employment. Working conditions in tourism are often regarded as poor and yet for some young people tourism is a sector of choice. This chapter therefore tackles the issue of working conditions and the experience of employment in tourism. It also explores the role of trade unions in improving working conditions for youth, by drawing attention to employment malpractices and providing a platform for social dialogue. The chapter then looks at the nature of youth employment in developing countries before turning to the relationship between responsible tourism and youth employment.

Chapter 4 explores reasons for the high rates of youth unemployment generally and considers these as they apply and do not apply to tourism and hospitality. It addresses the question of youth employment from both the supply and the demand side perspectives. The supply side reviews youth perceptions of tourism employment while the demand side discusses the business perspective, whereby emphasis is placed on skills shortages as well as on attitudes towards employing youth. The chapter concludes by describing a range of initiatives that seek to promote youth employment in the sector.

Chapter 5 scrutinises the nature of the relationship between education, particularly higher education, and youth employment. It reviews the development of tourism and hospitality higher education, with a particular focus on perceptions of the purpose of education from the policy makers' standpoint. The relationship between education and economic growth is reviewed, before turning to the notion of employability, whereby a critical look at the ongoing skills debate and the role employers, universities and policy makers play in the provision of a skilled tourism workforce is provided. In continuing with the employability theme the chapter closes with a review of the potential advantages of hiring young people.

Chapter 6 focuses on the education to work transition, as this is regarded as a key 'sticking point' in policy circles when it comes to providing meaningful employment to young people. It begins by outlining current thinking in the area of career decision-making and uses this to review studies in tourism that