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The Nature of Youth Employment

Aims of the chapter

Roan and Diamond (2003) claim that labour market policy in Australia has focussed on the provision of employment and the preparation of young people for employment but entirely neglected quality of working life issues. The same may be said for other developed economies' labour market policies. In the anguish to get young people into work, which is understandable given the youth unemployment crisis, the nature of work itself has, until recently at least, rarely been questioned. In the run up to the May 2015 UK general election, rival parties were at loggerheads over the nature of jobs being created in the economy, with the ruling coalition parties pointing to the fall in unemployment and the opposition arguing that many of these jobs were barely paying the minimum wage and that furthermore many of the jobs now being offered were on zero-hour contracts and also on casual contracts, which are ones where the employer can hire staff without the guarantee of work. Suddenly the nature of work reappeared on policy makers' agendas and this, coupled with tourism's admittedly poor reputation as an employer, suggests the need for a closer look at the nature of youth employment in the sector. Consequently, this chapter presents and discusses different characteristics of youth employment in tourism and hospitality. It aims to provide an insight into the experience of youth employment as well as reviewing the role of trade unions in improving working conditions for young people. The chapter also addresses separately the nature of youth employment in developing countries, and concludes with a review of the relationship between responsible tourism and youth employment.

Working conditions for young people

Working conditions in tourism do not usually get a good press. The common portrayal of tourism employment is one where remuneration is low, formal training is scarce, working hours are long and unpredictable, and union representation is weak. In sum, the picture is not rosy. This characterisation is undoubtedly often justified, but on closer inspection tourism employment presents a more varied picture which is often ignored. The intention here is not to review in length the more traditional claims around working conditions, as these have been discussed at length elsewhere (Wood, 1997, Riley *et al.*, 2002, Baum, 2007). What this chapter will do is provide a nuanced review of youth employment in tourism, discussing challenges but also reviewing the attraction of tourism as a sector. As will be discussed, young people face particular challenges in employment settings and as such a youth-specific focus on aspects of the experience of work is timely.

Labour turnover

Labour turnover is a perennial issue in studies and descriptions of tourism employment. It is also an issue that HR managers continue to engage with, demonstrating its significance compared with other industrial sectors (Boella and Goss-Turner, 2013). Drawing on People 1st (2013) data, labour turn-over figures will vary depending on industry sub-sector, ranging from 31% for 'pubs, bars and nightclubs' to 9% for 'food and service management'. Widespread agreement exists that labour turnover is characteristic of tourism employment, and yet there is no agreement with regard to actual turnover rates, with a range of studies highlighting various statistics. At the higher end of estimates, Graver and Harrison (2002) suggest labour turnover can exceed 120% and Battersby (1990) in an older text claims that in some sub-sectors staff turnover rates are as high as 300%.

Getting to grips with turnover is made more difficult by the various measures that exist and the nature of turnover in the sector. There are various ways of measuring staff turnover but usually recourse is made to the so-called separation rate or 'crude turnover rate' (Johnson, 1981) which measures how many staff have left in relation to average number of staff employed in a specified period of time. Although widely used, what this measure fails to capture is who is leaving, i.e. whether there are certain sub-groups who are more affected by high labour turnover rates. Because of the separation rate's weakness in explaining structural characteristics of the tourism workforce, Tyson and York (2001) advocate using the stability index, which provides insights into the

extent to which the experienced workforce is being retained. In practice though this measure is rarely used.

Thus, Johnson (1981) splits the tourism workforce into 'transients', 'opportunists' and 'hard core' each with varying degrees of organisational tenure, a categorisation later picked up by Walmsley (2004) in an analysis of the tourism labour market in the British seaside resort of Torbay. Others have also focussed on the segmentation of the tourism workforce according to tenure. Wood (1997) and Krakover (2000) distinguish between core and peripheral workers, arguing that this distinction is sharper in tourism than in other industries. Lee-Ross and Pryce (2010) take the discussion back to Piore and Sabel's (1984) work on the primary and secondary labour markets, where the primary consists of core workers, and the secondary of part-time staff who are hired and fired as needed.

The causes and consequences of high labour turnover in the industry have likewise received much comment. The prevailing discourse holds that turnover is detrimental to businesses as it incurs administrative costs associated with staff leaving and the recruitment of new staff; staff with organisation-specific knowledge and skills take their skills with them when they leave, and it may be detrimental to staff morale, e.g. where staff have to cover periods of absence. There is also a case to be made for some labour turnover from a business perspective as it leads to the introduction of new talent, the 'fresh blood' argument and crucially it is a means of dealing with seasonal demand fluctuations. It is also often held up as a measure of poor employment practices in the industry and a justification, or excuse, depending on whose point of view one takes, for the low levels of training in the industry. Rowley and Purcell (2001) take issue with what Iverson and Deery (1997:71) describe as a turnover culture in the hospitality industry that is 'the acceptance of turnover as part of the work-group norm'. They argue, based on interviews with 21 managers, that much can be done to reduce labour turnover in the industry, notably improving working conditions and providing training and development opportunities.

Data on staff turnover levels (or its counterpart, tenure) by age, are scant, but what we know about patterns of youth employment in the sector certainly points to elevated levels of staff turnover for young people. First, tourism employment draws to a large extent on individuals who are flexible with regard to employment tenure. This is particularly the case in resorts that are characterised by high levels of seasonality. This kind of work appeals to a range of young people, from students looking for work outside of term time, to those who are desperate to accept any job regardless of tenure or conditions because of labour market circumstances, thereby gaining that all-important