

## Table of Content

Introduction .....	4
Problem formulation.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Philosophy of science .....	8
Ontological and epistemological considerations .....	9
Hermeneutic .....	10
Why combining Australia and youth travellers? .....	12
Case study design .....	13
Qualitative research .....	13
Data collection method .....	14
Participant observation .....	14
The use of narratives interviews.....	16
Selection of interviewees .....	18
Couchsurfing gatherings in Brisbane .....	19
Attending Couchsurfing events.....	20
Hosting couchsurfers .....	21
Meeting travellers 'on the road' .....	21
Final remarks on the choice of interviewees .....	22
Validity and Reliability .....	23
Theoretical framework .....	23
Conceptualising Youth Tourism: Backpacker or youth traveller?.....	23
Backpackers .....	24
Youth Tourism.....	26
Youth travellers.....	26
Contemporary Youth Tourism.....	27
Linking Youth Tourism to Age Distribution .....	28
How to go about Youth Travellers? .....	28
Identity construction .....	30

Social identity .....	30
Touristic Consumption.....	33
Destination choice .....	33
Transition Phases.....	33
Motivational factors .....	34
Exploring The Self .....	34
Analysis .....	37
Developing a taste of travelling.....	37
A kid dream.....	37
Taking the first steps.....	38
Chasing adventures.....	39
How do older youth travellers decide on sojourning? .....	40
Leaving work obligations .....	41
A desire to take on a new role.....	41
Curiosity.....	43
The right time to travel .....	43
Revealing the desire to travel .....	44
Influence from home environment .....	46
Identity construction and accommodation type.....	48
Escaping home environment.....	50
Escaping daily routine.....	53
Youth travellers and transition phases: It's an age thing .....	54
Comparison to other youth travellers .....	58
'Finding oneself'? .....	60
Conclusion.....	62
Discussion .....	64
Bibliography.....	65
Appendix 1: Interview Guide .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Appendix 2: Narrative Interviews .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Appendix 3: Transcription of Interviews .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>

Male, 26, German.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 27, German* .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 25, German .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 33, French Canadian .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 23, American (2) .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 28, French .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Male, 34, Swiss .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 29, British.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Male, 30, French Canadian.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 26, Czech.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 23, American (2) .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 29, Canadian .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Male, 27, Dutch .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Male, 25, German.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Female, 23, American.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Appendix 4: Findings from the empirical data .....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>
Appendix 5: Push and pull factors.....	<b>Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.</b>

# Introduction

In general, young travellers are often associated with having a preference for budget establishments as they travel with limited funds that may explain the earlier tendency within international tourism policy and planning to ignore the subgroup of tourists referred to as the ‘backpacker segment’ (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Richards & Wilson, 2005; Pearce, Murphy and Brymer, 2009).

Australia has been a noteworthy exception to this trend as the country since the early 1990s has acknowledged the importance of international backpackers. The country was the first destination to devise an actual strategy, the ‘Backpacker Tourism Strategy’, as an attempt to attract young international travellers (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1995; Slaughter, 2004; Pearce, Murphy and Brymer, 2009). By the means of the ‘Backpacker Tourism Strategy’ the trajectory of youth tourism has not just shaped Australia into a well-known ‘backpacker destination’ but has, in fact, developed into one of ‘the most desirable youth destinations in the world’ (WTO - WYSE 2011, 12). Attracting the youth market has been a key element for Australia for more than 30 years and a large part of these youngsters is categorised as ‘backpackers’ by the Australian tourism industry (Tourism Australia, 2011). The term ‘backpacker’ originates from Australia as well and can be traced back to 1983 when the first backpacker hostel opened in Cairns, Australia, under the name ‘the Backpackers Inn’ (McCulloch, 1991; Slaughter, 2004). Thus ‘backpacking’ is a fairly recent phenomenon which began to be used interchangeable in the academic literature in 1990 to describe a particular group of tourists (e.g. Pearce, 1990).

As seen in figure 1 more than 1.6 million youth travellers went to Australia in 2013<sup>1</sup> compared to 1.5 million in 2009. Though, the percentage of youth visitors have decreased - from 28% in 2009 to 26% in 2013<sup>2</sup> – the youth market accounts for more than a quarter of all inbound visitors making it economically important contributor to the Australian tourism economy (UNWTO, 2013).

Additionally, young travellers tend to stay in Australia for six or more months, spending an average of AUD 21,228<sup>3</sup>

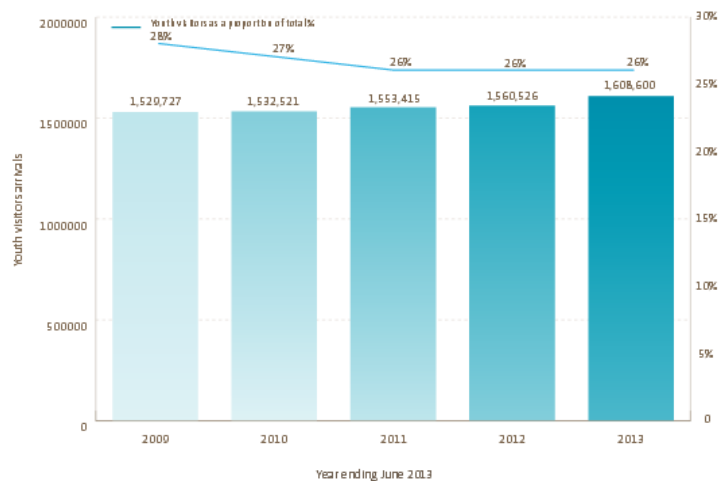


Figure 1: Youth arrivals in Australia (WYSE – WTO, 2011)

<sup>1</sup> In the year ending June 2013

<sup>2</sup> Student travellers are included in this rate but are excluded from this thesis as students may visit Australia for other reasons e.g. well-known university, study programs, different course opportunities (Hecht and Martin, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> Year 2009

compared to an average international visitor, who only spends AUD 3,313, the amount of money that young travellers spent in Australia is significant higher (UNWTO - WYSE 2011).

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation published the report 'The Power of Youth Travel' in 2011 in which they refer to youth visitors as a 'lucrative new market' (UNWTO - WYSE 2011). Furthermore, scholars such as Richards and Wilsons (2010) assert that the young traveller is a crucial segment in the world tourism as they 'travel more frequently and for longer periods' compared to other subgroups of tourists e.g. those who prefer package holidays (Richards and Wilsons 2010; 2). Especially the extended period young people spend abroad while travelling equalises the limited funds that the youth tourism frequently is synonymous with, making youth travel an important economic component within the tourism industry. More specifically, Richards (2011) has highlights five reasons that make youth tourism a point of interest from an economical angle:

Youth tourism and economic contribution		
	High value	Money poor, but time rich and often return to destination later in their travel career
	Resilient	Do not fear economic crisis, political problems or epidemics
	Economic contribution	Avoid big chains and spend money directly with local suppliers
	Contribution to other industries	Generate more jobs than they take and often work in rural areas
	Attract other tourists	Add 'buzz' to destinations. Family/ friends may often visit the destination as well

Table 1: The economical contribution of youth tourism (Richards, 2011)

If the tourism industry wants to devise future strategies to maintain or boost tourism at a particular destination, looking at the youth market may be a sterling idea as youth tourism may attract other kinds of tourist, as seen in the table 1 above (Richards, 2011). Firstly, youth tourism should be taken seriously because of being economic beneficial and secondly, the youth market grows faster than global travel and other consumer groups of tourists (UNWTO & WYSE 2011). UNWTO predicts that youth travel will increase from 200 million trips a year to 300 million by 2020 (table 2). Additionally, UNWTO and WYSE emphasise "youth

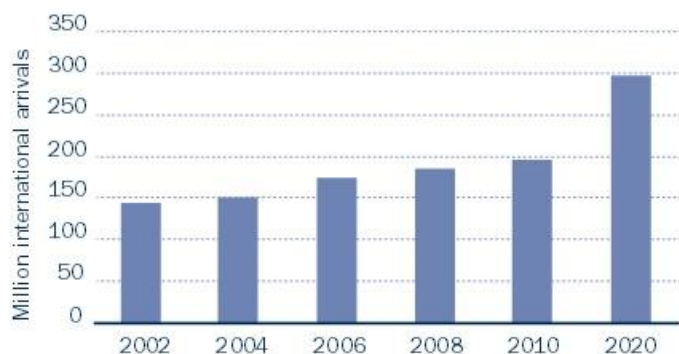


Figure 2: International youth trips per year (UNWTO & WYSE, 2011; 6)

*travel represents not just an important market segment, but also a vital resource for innovation and change”* (UNWTO & WYSE 2011; 5). For instance, youth travel can be a major force for development and social change. Attracting young people’s attention may be beneficial for various reasons, as this statement indicates; *“It is increasingly important for destinations to create long-term relationships with their visitors. This is even more important in the case with young people, who are likely to return to the destination later in their ‘travel career”* (UNWTO – WYSE, 2011; 21).

Previous research indicates that young people tend to revisit ‘once in a lifetime’ destination and the case with Australia 54% of young travellers will return to Australia later in life (WTO - WYSE 2011). Thus, the number designates that Australia is not just deemed to be ‘once in a lifetime destination’ as earlier thoughts have stressed (Davies 2014). Moreover, until recently<sup>4</sup> both the tourism industry and previous studies done by academic scholars have tended to perceive youth travellers as one homogeneous group without acknowledging dissimilar motivations and possible differences in relation to demands (Murphy, 2001; Speed and Harrison, 2004; Binder, 2004).

Academic literature has highlighted the positive aspect of youth tourism but much discussion is also attached to the negative perspectives of youth travellers and in particular backpackers (Desforges, 2000; Noy, 2004; Nash et al, 2011). Cohen (2004) for instance emphasises that they often perceive themselves as ‘real’ traveller in opposition to mass tourists. Furthermore from a socio-cultural perspective they cause problems for the host environment they are visiting and are often *“condemned for their appearance, conduct – especially sexual freedom and use of drugs – superficiality, stringiness and seclusion in backpacker enclaves”* (ibid p. 43). Nevertheless, youth tourism offers travellers the possibility to develop important life skills and is the reason why this segment is selected as the focal point in this thesis (Nash et al., 2011).

According to WTO youth travel consists of both student travellers and young travellers 15 to 29 years of age accounting for 20% of all international tourism as mentioned earlier. The intention with this thesis is to analyse why young independent travellers decide to sojourn for an extended time. The most important factors that categorise this segment from group of tourists are based on the following characteristics:

- Use budget accommodation
- Are involved in longer rather than very brief holidays
- Are predominantly under 40 years of age
- Have flexibility in their itineraries and
- Show a willingness to be involved in social and participatory holiday activities (Pearce, Murphy and Brymer, 2009; 10).

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<sup>4</sup> As Cohen (2004; 57) emphasises in the book ‘The Global Nomad’: “It follows that future research should desist from referring to backpacking as if it were a homogenous phenomenon, and should pay much more attention to its diverse manifestations, in terms of differences in age, gender, origins and particular subcultures”. After this statement, scientific literature has begun to acknowledge backpacking as a more diverse phenomenon.

The abovementioned elements might be applied to students as well but in this present thesis an attempt was made to exclude students as their decision making process might differentiate from youth travellers' reasons to go abroad e.g. well-known university, study programs and different course opportunities (Hecht and Martin, 2006).

Newlands (2004) argues that backpackers can be categorized into two demographic segments: young first-timers and older backpackers. The intention with this thesis is to analyse the older segment of the backpackers, or young adults as Maoz (2004) refers to, as previous studies have emphasised that this subcategory of tourists requires more attentions due to different demand compared to the younger backpackers (Slaughter, 2004).

Some researchers stress the necessity of additional studies of youth tourism in general. McCabe (2005) for instance asserts the need of obtaining sociological knowledge concerned the individual traveller as opposed to focus on economic aspects of youth tourism e.g. what they spend their money on while travelling. McCabe (2005) states *"What we know less about is how they construct their behaviour in a way that achieves certain things, such as identity construction and maintenance, or equally, how such experiences affect them"* (McCabe 2005, 91). As a result, this thesis sets out to demonstrate how travelling abroad for an extend period of time influence young travellers, in particular 'older' youth travellers in the age range mid 20s to 30-something, and how travelling affects their perception and construction of self.

Much academic literature is concerned around answering questions from the marketers' perspective in order to devise strategies for the marketing and the development of future tourism (Fodness and Murray, 1997). Based on the considerations mentioned above the youth tourism phenomenon will be explored from the consumers point of origin by the means of interview narratives.

## **Problem formulation**

The research question at hand can be summarised as following:

Why are youth travellers in their twenties and thirties sojourning for a prolonged period of time and how do they construct identity through in situ narratives?

In order to answer the research question the following sub-questions will help guide the thesis:

- What motivates youth travellers to embark in prolonged travelling and how do they develop a 'taste for travelling'?
- Does choice of accommodation have any significant to the way they choose to construct identities?
- How do 'older' youth travellers perceive their transitional phase from youth to the beginning of adulthood?

The first sub-question intends to analyse which push and pull motives that motivates travellers to go abroad and will shed light on the issues that influences their decision to leave their country of origin (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979). The second sub-question focuses on the role of accommodation and will in particular analyse how the preferred way of travelling influences youth travellers' journey and identity (Giddens, 1991). The last sub-question analyses how sojourning influences older youth travellers' current lives abroad and will determine the role of the transition phases from youth to early adulthood (Bynner and Chrisholm 1998; Arnould, Price and Zinkhan, 2004). The methodological angle will be presented in the subsequent section to provide the reasoning behind the strategies that guides the thesis.

## Methodology

The underlying philosophical assumptions in this thesis, how the gathered and produced knowledge influence the thesis, are affected by the chosen paradigm. On that account, the paradigmatic mind-set will be presented first to facilitate the understanding of method, data collection and data analysis as it dictates both choices of theory and general approach to problem solving.

### Philosophy of science

One needs to distinguish between the different paradigms and different views of understanding the world as it have an impact on how the research should be approached and understood. For instance the positivistic paradigm believes that the social world is 'out there' ready to be externally *observed* and described by the researcher, contrary the constructivist<sup>5</sup> paradigm which suggests that the researcher attempts to make sense of the social world by *comprehension* of the social structures that dictates peoples' cause of actions (Riis, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Elliot, 2005).

The positivistic approach accentuates 'rich descriptions of people as they exist and unfold in their natural habitats' whereas constructivism allows the researcher to investigate 'how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction' (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). Looking through the constructivist lens, perceptions and actions are socially constructed, in which individuals create the reality they are part of (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Thereby said, that constructivism is built on the idea that several realities exist as each individual may conceive the social world diversified (Guba, 1990). As the purpose of this master thesis is to gain an understanding of 'older youth travellers', their identity construction and motivations of travelling there is a need for understanding each individual, where for instance narratives can be used to understand the complex matter of establishing membership to certain groups. Measuring and using statistical information is not something which helps to answer the research question, as identity construction is a rather unconscious process

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'social constructivist' and 'constructivist' are used synonymously in this thesis



which often takes place in the mind of individuals where *constructivism* can help understand how youth travellers go about creating an identity (Giddens, 1991; Jenkins, 2008).

Paradigms can be viewed in numerous ways and Guba (1990) asserts that all research, despite the names of paradigms and worldview, should define the ontological and epistemological reflections as they assist in defining the methodological standpoint.

Defining the methodological standpoint	
Ontology	What is the form and nature of reality and how can it be known; what is true, what exists, what is real?
Epistemology	What is the relationship between the researcher and what can be known?
Methodology	How is knowledge produced? (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Table 2: Defining the methodological standpoint

These three questions should be answered in a chronological manner as ontology influences the epistemology which results in a specific methodology (ibid). The responses thereto are to be found below.

### **Ontological and epistemological considerations**

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the first question to be answered in relation to a research project and a philosophical context is concerning the ontological assumptions as they help to understand e.g. how the social world is perceived. The interpretive researcher’s ontological reflections view the social reality as being mentally constructed based on interactions with the social environment (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

More the interpretative stance sees the social world as a dynamic process in constant flux, as Bryman (2012) asserts: *“the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive”*. Importantly, it must be acknowledge that the researcher is part of the social world as no barriers exist between these two components. As each traveller might have their own reality of what can be considered correct taking an interpretative stance is useful as the researcher can interpret the social world in which he or she can infer with the individuals being analysed (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Interpretivism believes that human behaviour is a product of how people interpret the world where one can see things from individualistic aspects (Bryman, 2012). Complex concepts as ‘identity constructions’ and ‘transition phases’ imperatively can be combined with an epistemological stance where the researcher establish a relationship with the people used in the research. Furthermore the epistemological reflections call for an understanding of youth travellers’ worldview and identity construction and ideally should be analysed from each person’s perspective.

Interacting with individual travellers about their perceptions and way of viewing social structures may vary, thus the current research should not be considered as an attempt to find the ‘absolute truth’, which is non-existing

within the constructivist paradigm. Merely it should be seen as an understanding of how youth travellers make sense of their travel and own identity while sojourning which allow the researcher to assess the phenomenon based on *various* truths and perceptions.

According to constructivism knowledge is considered as a human construction which happens continuously (Guba, 1990). The obtained knowledge of young tourists is not discovered by the researcher him/ herself. Several theories were read in order to obtain knowledge of the field and to prepare questions to the interview guide. As the interview took place it was necessary to read further theorise as other theme occurred, which shows that the knowledge continuously is constructed throughout the thesis process (Marvasti, 2004).

It must be acknowledged that within the interpretivist paradigm the researcher cannot analyse the phenomenon without interaction, thus being *part* of the social construction the author of the thesis can affect the study and the produced knowledge (Botterill and Platenkamp 2012). Having sojourning herself the author of the master thesis could for instance have influenced the findings of the study. However, this was seen as an advantage as it might help to understand the sojourning of the interviewees. Furthermore it could assist in achieving a comfortable interview setting as interviewer and interviewee could be seen as more likeminded. However, there is also a change that the researcher's own experience of sojourning influences the study in such ways that makes it difficult to keep a distance to the topic. For this reason the researcher should consciously make an idealisation of having a neutral position when doing research but according to Guba (1990) it is impossible to be truly objective.

Thereby said that the epistemological stance is based on the matter that the researcher interprets phenomena subjectively and it is desirable to become self-conscious about these issues and the way they are understood. The interviews were listened to several times and the transcriptions of interviewees were read several times as an attempt to achieve a neutral stance to the interviews and the interviewees. Furthermore the interviews were established on the basis on several theories to obtain an academic understanding of youth tourism and not merely relying on personal experiences.

On the basis on the ontological and epistemological considerations the chosen research strategy adjoins a *qualitative approach* which will be elaborated on later in this chapter. However, being part of the underlying philosophies it is important to involve the hermeneutic principles as they signifies the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data

## **Hermeneutic**

The scientific approach in this thesis is also influenced by the hermeneutic principles which are used for various reasons; first and foremost to interpret the meaning of the different articles and books in relation to the theoretical framework and secondly to interpret the collected data in order to use it in relation to the analysis.

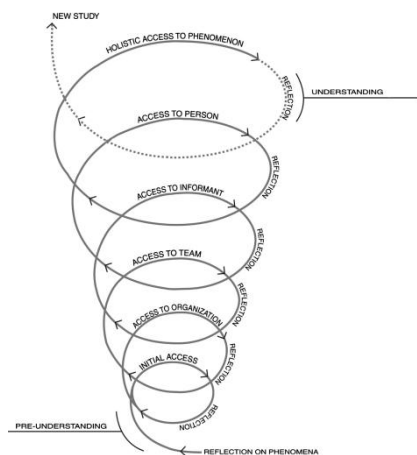


Figure 3: Hermeneutic (Stenbacka 2001)

Pre-understanding is a central term within the hermeneutic principles and it will be discussed how it affects the present thesis (Gilje and Grimen 2002). The researcher's pre-understanding has for instance been a driving force for this thesis and has affected the chosen topic. As already mentioned the author of the thesis had a pre-understanding of the topic due to some personal experiences gained from different sojourns for instance an eight months travel to Australia in 2009/ 2010. This made it possible for the researcher to detect if some of the pre-understandings obtained in Australia were consistence with the statements raised by the interviewees. More interestingly some contradictions were discovered during the empirical data collection as some interviewees made some

comments that were in opposition to each other and not in line with the pre-understanding that the scientist had. Working with hermeneutic displays how knowledge constantly is in the making (see figure 3).

From a previous project, concerning Danish youth sojourning to New Zealand, the researcher already had some pre-knowledge about youth travellers and long-distance travels which also formed the starting point for this present thesis. Obviously this pre-understanding had an impact on the later course of the research for instance on how texts and theories are to be understood. But working with hermeneutic it must be acknowledged that pre-understandings are part of the understanding of the chosen phenomenon 'youth travel' (Gadamer, 1975).

For instance the researcher read articles, books and theories in relation to youth tourism, identity construct and transition phases to expand the knowledge of the topic. Later the collection of empirical data was initiated by means of narrative interviews. Gadamer (1975) argues that knowledge is created through perceiving the links between phenomena and their contexts and by exploring similar kinds of phenomena, which is also acknowledged to be the case in this thesis. 'Youth travel' was examined by various academic texts, subsequently narrative interviews with young tourists were held. After each interview the researcher sees and perceives the social world with a different view when new knowledge is added, thus the scientist renews the knowledge of the subject. This new creation of knowledge is important as it influences the later process, since the research is perceived differently every time the author of the thesis questions the explored problem statement and phenomena. Knowledge is thereby perceived as a continuously ongoing process where interpretation of the explored phenomenon and knowledge is constantly reviewed. This ongoing process is known as the hermeneutic spiral.

Interpretivism and hermeneutic are important to pay further attention to as these notions affect the research throughout the thesis as they bring to light how the social world is construed hence how the gathered knowledge is regarded. The two notions are closely link to constructivism and commonly used in social science to understand human behaviour and social interaction (Gubrium and Holstein, 2011.) In addition the philosophical viewpoint is

typical within qualitative research (Bryman, 2008), thus this methodological choices will be discussed later. First, it is important to further elaborate on why Australia and youth travellers are the pivotal point in this study.

### **Why combining Australia and youth travellers?**

WTO (2011) states that 20 percent of all worldwide tourism is from the youth and student market making it a relevant topic to analyse further especially because youth travellers take much longer trips than the average tourist (UNWTO - WYSE 2011). In Australia the proportion of inbound youth travellers is even higher than this, 26 percent, making it an interesting country to look further into of various reasons (ibid.).

Based on the historical background of the backpacker concept Australia is an attractive destination for youth tourism. Kilroy, a European travel company specialised in offering products and services for youth and students, for instance refers to the destinations as follows: *“travel to Australia - a world of possibilities especially for backpackers”* (Kilroy, 2014 a; Kilroy, 2014 b). This backpacker destination that Australia has established is not due to randomness but because of an actual business strategy and carefully way of approaching youth tourism. Being the peak industry body representing Australia, the Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) has a strong voice within the tourism industry. Jennifer Woodbrige, National Industry Development manager of ATEC, comments on this matter:

*“We are committed to fostering growth in the sector and the country’s government tourism marketing bodies have certainly played a vital role in positioning Australia as one of the most desirable youth destinations in the world. However, the success and strength of Australia as a youth travel destination should undeniably be credited to the industry itself. Passion, hard work, resilience, excellence, determination and collaboration have been and will continue to be key elements to ensuring the expansion of Australia’s footprint within the global youth travel arena. The objective is to ensure that youth travellers of today and tomorrow have the opportunity to discover and immerse themselves in the exceptional experiences this country has to offer. “There’s nothing like Australia!”* (Woodbridge, 2011; 12).

ATEC emphasises the need to ensure future growth of the youth market and taking into account that the concept of youth tourism undoubtedly will be challenged due to demographic changes and the way in with youth undergo transition phases (which will be elaborated later) it seems to be of importance to examine how youth travellers currently located in Australia perceive their experiences.

Different implications have been considered in relation to analyse the concept of youth tourism and the next section will comment more on the matter of analysing youth travellers in Australia and argues why the preferred research design is *case study*.

## Case study design

From an easily understandable approach Flyvbjerg (2011) stresses that a case study is based on scientific research and specific phenomena with the intention to establish a detailed picture of the phenomena. A more adequate explanation is presented by Yin (2003) who argues that a case study can be defined as “*an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident [...] using multiple sources of evidence*” (p 13, 97). (Flyvbjerg 2011)

Using Yin’s (2009) definition of case studies the contemporary phenomenon in the present thesis is ‘youth travel’ where ‘older’ sojourners travelling to a specific environment, Australia, can be perceived as the real-life context. Thereby the aim of case studies is to explore phenomenon in the context and environment, in which it occurs. In so doing focusing on the description of the social environment related to ‘youth tourism in Australia’ and carrying out an analysis of how identity construction and transition phases influences the phenomenon. (R. K. Yin 2009)

Moreover, Yin (2009) believes that *multiple sources of evidence* should be used in case studies as it might assist in obtaining a broader understanding of the phenomena and context. In addition to existing statistics and reports concerning youth tourism participant observation is combined with narratives interviews from different participants in order to understand the case more in depth. Besides, a case study enables the researcher to explore thoughts and beliefs of a specific or small group of research objects (Flyvbjerg, 2011). By limiting the study to deal with ‘older’ youth travellers the thesis intends to focus on a specific group of youth travel where the researcher explores a non-planned case which takes place at a given point in time, which also characterises a case study (Yin, 2003).

Flyvbjerg (2011) asserts that the *strength* of case studies is the possibility of examining the *causes* of youth travellers sojourning hence a case study may help in understanding how identity is construction and how transitional phases influence the live of young tourists and their current lives abroad. What is even more relevant is the fact that case studies are used to analyse complex cases in-depth, like the chosen topics in the research, by means of existing theories which may result in the production of new knowledge concerning youth travel (Yin, 2009; Flyvbjerg, 2011). Having shed light on the philosophical mind-set and the chosen research design the next phase is to decide the strategy of empirical data collection and whether a quantitative or qualitative approach is relevant to use in relation to the circumstances.

## Qualitative research

The problem statement can generally be more comprehensive analysed either by the means of a quantitative or qualitative research strategy. Using a quantitative approach would make it possible to find patterns and thereby create a representative picture of *what* youth traveller do when they travel (Gilham, 2000; Bryman 2012). But the knowledge would not give the researcher an understanding of *why* travellers leave home environment and the answers to how they transit from the phase of youth to adulthood, and how this is interconnected with

construction of identities, would be excluded. Rather than scratching the surface the qualitative approach provides rich descriptions of complex phenomena as the topic is analysed more in-depth in which everyone is considered as a 'key' elements (Gilham 2000; Bryman, 2012). As a result, the chosen methodological route will be based on a qualitative research strategy where every older youth traveller is a 'key' to attain knowledge of identity construction in relation to transition phases and sojourning.

As the ontological viewpoint is based on interpretivism choosing a qualitative approach is adjacent as individuals can declare their thoughts and feelings thus help providing aspect on a complex matter as identity formation. Oppositely positivism, that views events from the outside, the constructivist approach has an inside view of events; e.g. when young sojourners decide to travel abroad. For instance people participating in the study are not seen as merely a number to make a generalised picture of youth tourism but treated as human beings with individual thoughts and opinions.

This paradigmatic stance is convergent with a qualitative approach as it allows the researcher to be part of the social world and gather knowledge closely connected with the pivotal event. Moreover, using qualitative research in the study gives the researcher the opportunity to establish close relationships with the people being examined correlating with the matter that the researcher personally encountered the participants used in the present thesis (Bryman, 2012).

The next section of the research will discuss on the matter of personally encountering the participants and elaborate on the selected research methods. Moreover, it is presented how the collection of data is convergent with the previous presented philosophical considerations.

## **Data collection method**

The qualitative data collected for this present study was carried out in the period between December 2013 and June 2014 and consists of two methods, participant observation and narrative interviews. The different implications for the gathered empirical data are explained in this section.

### **Participant observation**

Participant observation is part of a qualitative research which can be defined as "the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities" (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). This way of collecting empirical data is used for different purposes.

Similar to other studies on youth travellers or backpackers, this thesis makes use of participant observation (see for instance Binder, 2003; Maoz, 2003). In this study participant observation was initiated in the beginning of the research process so the author of the project could obtain knowledge of the people belonging to the target group and to explore the phenomenon of youth travel in Australia. Moreover it was used to identify the social norms

within the youth travel enclave and to explore how youth travellers interrelate (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002; Raudaskoski, 2010).

Beyond reading academic texts the scientist made an attempt to become part of the youth travel enclave. A significant and contributory factor in becoming part of the subculture of youth travellers can be attributed to the Couchsurfing (CS) community<sup>6</sup> as the author of the project made use of social CS gatherings in Brisbane, Australia (picture 1) and participated in CS events. The aim of observing the travel community was to acquire knowledge of the lives of older youth travellers, thereby easing facilitation of the research process (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). Subsequently the knowledge was used to formulate the issues addressed in the problem statement. To conclude, the CS gatherings and events were used to provide the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002, 91).

The method can be used to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon as it assists in a better understanding of the interplay between phenomenon and context (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002). Furthermore it should be noted that participant observation *“makes it possible to collect different types of data. Being on site over a period of time familiarizes the researcher to the community, thereby facilitating involvement in sensitive activities to which he/she generally would not be invited”* (Bernard, 1994, p. 142). The observations made for this research were only possible as the author of the study was situated in Australia when the writing process for this thesis begun which is relevant to mention.

The method of participant observation was used to identify and guide relationships with the participants as many of the interviewees were selected based on observations from CS meetings (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). As Bryman (1984) states the observer has the ability *“to get close to his subjects and so see the world from their perspective”* (p. 78). Another determining factor of applying the research method is based on the fact that it was used to improve the design of the narrative interviews and to ensure the appropriateness of interview questions. For instance the author of the thesis, lived with some of them, stayed with them in hostels, ate with them, sat with them in gathering places and enclaves and had several informal conversations with them. This can of course influence the findings of the research, but in this research it was considered to be significant as it could assist in the understanding of youth tourism on a much deeper level.

Observational studies often contribute with knowledge concerning *where* young tourists travel when sojourning and *how* they travel (accommodation type, transportation type) but exclude answers such as *why* they decide to leave home environment and *why* they decided to choose the specific destination. Choosing an additional method corresponding and contributing with answering these why questions is natural which makes it evident to present the narrative interviews which also pose the qualitative research strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> The world's largest travel community. Has arranged more than 100,000 events in cities across the globe

## The use of narratives interviews

As highlighted in the introduction the academic literature is lacking studies of the emerging segment 'the older youth travellers' and for several reasons narrative interviews is considered applicable. The majority of existing studies of backpacker tourism are based on communication with travellers by the means of interaction and interviews (Desforges, 2000; Elsrude, 2001; Murphy, 2001; Noy, 2004; Cohen, 2011). Desforges (2000) for instance asserts how an interview "*offers the opportunity to thoroughly analyse the uses of tourism in the lives of the interviewees*" (p. 933). Choosing qualitative interviews as the main empirical tool will help documenting and increase the understanding of the social constructions of the interviewees since the researcher, by the means of talk and interaction ameliorates the knowledge of individuals' identity construction (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997; Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). Moreover, the researcher had obtained some knowledge from the participant observations and based on the previous analysis of young Danish backpackers already had some skills using interviews as research method, and found the instrument useful for this study as well. By observing youth travellers first and then conducting interviews, the understanding of the case study and the people participating in the research is broader compared to simply observing what youth travellers do when they travel, which is another element that emphasises the application of an additional research method.

14 narratives interviews were conducted, consisting of 9 females and 5 males in the age range 23-34. The interviews lasted between 26 minutes to 1 hour and 18 minutes where the average length of the interview is 43 minutes. These interviews were gathered in the period between 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2013 to 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2014, while the researcher was spending some time abroad as part of her internship at Aalborg University.

Noteworthy, this study focuses on a small amount of people one on one as it allows the interviewees to explain significant events or narratives emphasising situations that were important for them. An attempt was made to exclude other individuals from the interview process with no other people interfering but in some cases, as some interviews was conducted in parks, libraries and other public places, other people interfered temporarily the interviews. Though, it was not considered to have any significant importance for the interviews.

Compared to focus group interviews other individuals might influences tourist's answers and in comparison with questionnaires the interviewees can express feelings and thoughts without any restraints which is characterised by a quantitative approach where interviewees are obliged to *select* between answers (Troest and Jeremiassen 2010). Having a constructivist stance and choosing interviews as research tool emphasise is placed on individualistic narratives which offers the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of complex concepts such as identity and transitional phases (Shenton 2004; March and Woodside 2005; Ateljevis and Li 2009; Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Conducting individual interviews in person the responsibilities of successfully carrying out the interview rely on the scientist (Kvale, 1996; Polkinghorne, 2008). Kvale (1996) asserts that the interview should be framed as a conversational interaction between the researcher and the person being interviewed rather than just operating with the interview to get some information. As already mentioned a relation was established to the interviewees before conducting the interview, as most of them were encountered during CS



gatherings. This helped shape the interviews in a more informal manner, thus helping to make the interviewees feel more comfortable and relaxed.

As will be presented in the theoretical reflections, identity is individualistic thoughts and actions (Giddens, 1991), and using narratives to analyse how youth travellers create and retain a particular identity while sojourning is believed to be ideally. Applying face-to-face interviews is appropriate when "*small number of people are involved and most of the questions are 'open' and require an extended response, depth of meaning is central and research aims mainly require insight and understanding*" (Gillham 2000, 11). Besides, doing interviews in person enables the author of the thesis to encounter the person being interviewed thus allowing the researcher to observe body language and consequently obtaining a deeper understanding of what is being said (Kvale, 1996).

The people used in the research were between the age of 23 and 34, and in this case referred to as the 'older' segment of youth travellers, being of similar age as many of the interviewees the interviewer was able to comfortably engage in conversations with the participants in a natural and emotionally supportive atmosphere (Blichfeldt 2006). Noteworthy, the role of the interviewer may have a decisive impact in the success of the interview technique therefore the researcher must establish a relaxed environment in which the interviewees feel comfortable enough to freely express feelings and thoughts (Kvale, 1996).

The preparation for these in situ narratives was based on observations and along the process different themes were discovered by participating in the CS events. An interview guide was made (appendix 1), consisting of themes found from the participation in the youth travel enclaves combined with theoretical aspects of youth travel. During the interview process the intention was to cover the themes but as the participant took part in shaping the conversation with their selected answers the interview process was seen as an informal conversation. This interview technique may be referred to as *semi-structured* since additional questions can be asked in the interview setting and allow the researcher to create a more flexible interview process (Bryman, 2008; Kvale, 2009). An attempt was made to avoid 'why' questions and emphasise was placed on asking questions such as '*how did your friends react to your decision*' and '*what do you mean by that*' in order to make the interviewees express the underlying reason of e.g. leaving home environment (Troost and Jeremiassen, 2010).

Regarding definitional concerns terms as 'backpacker' and 'tourists' were only mentioned if necessary in order to avoid placing the terms in the mind of the interviewee so the individuals could categorise themselves according to own interpretation of the terms. For this reason a section of the theoretical considerations elaborates further on how to refer to this subgroup of tourists.

In relation to the epistemological stance, where the researchers follows a close relationship with the participants, it must be emphasised that during the social interaction, observations and in situ narratives, the scientist and interviewees socially negotiate the contextual based answers used for the analysis (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). The process of conducting interviews can be linked to hermeneutics as it can be perceived as an ongoing process, where the researcher go in-depth with each participant during the interview and compare the findings with the whole knowledge of the study. Nevertheless, carried out in a responsible manner interviews are still considered

as being the most important and effective way in understanding fellow human beings (Brinkmann and Tanggard 2010).

As already mentioned all of the interviews took place *during* the youth traveller's sojourning i.e. after leaving home environment and before their return back. Guthrie and Anderson (2010) argue "*that the 'on the spot' interview, undertaken while the visitor is in the process of the destination experience, captures the immediacy of that experience before it has been filtered through self image, social image, distortions of memory or the impact of other, post visit images*" (p. 113).

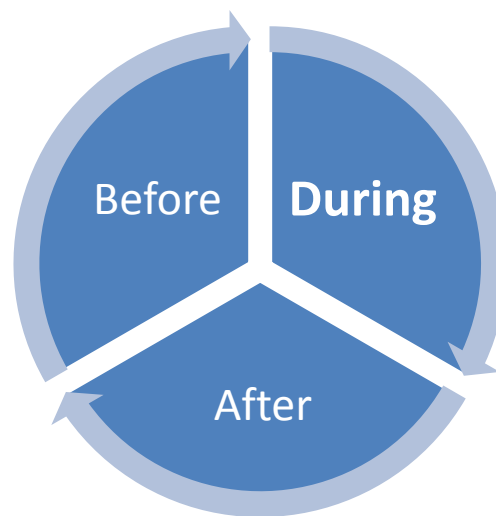


Figure 4: The experiences sequence (Smed, 2009)

Most narrative interviews tend to be made after the actual experience or event has taken place which makes it problematic as interviewee consciously or unconsciously can manipulate the visitor narratives as these narratives become a reflection of the situation that have been experienced (Guthrie and Anderson 2010). Again, this is the reason why the interviews took place *during* the sojourn abroad and different preparations were needed before the interviews took place as seen in figure 4. The section below will present how the people participating in the study were found.

## Selection of interviewees

Working with a qualitative approach requires long-term planning which is the reason why the process of conducting interviews was initiated while the researcher still were carrying out her internship in Australia. The selection of interviewees is based on four different initiatives/ approaches:

- Attending Couchsurfing gatherings in Brisbane,
- Attending Couchsurfing events,

- Hosting couchsurfers , and
- Meeting travellers 'on the road'.

## Couchsurfing gatherings in Brisbane

Being the world's largest travel community with more than 5.5 million members spread over 100.000 cities the common denominator for CS members is travelling (Couchsurfing 2014). CS is also an opportunity to explore 'authentic' culture as hosts invite surfers to their private homes where travellers can 'surf the couch' in exchange for cultural education<sup>7</sup> (travel stories, local cuisine, life experiences). Especially since half of the members are between the age of 25-34 (ibid) which is an aptly age distribution considering the desire to explore the phenomena 'youth travellers'. The CS gatherings in Brisbane were held every fortnight next to the heart of Brisbane at a local bar where travellers, or whoever wanted to participate, could chat and meet likeminded people and in particular locals. Since this thesis calls for a study of youth travellers it seemed like an ideal site to meet travellers.



Picture 1: Couch surfing gathering in Brisbane (private photo)

It should further be noted that the location, Brisbane, in which most of the interviews took place is referred to as being right in the middle of the "the backpacker highway" which is the huge stretch of highway on the east coast of Australia, between Sydney in the south and Cairns in the north (Kilroy, 2014).

As mentioned in the previous section CS is an important instrument in relation to the data collection. The researcher was introduced to CS in 2009 before a voyage to Australia and had some prior knowledge of the

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<sup>7</sup> As the author herself has couchsurfed in 2009, surfers usually serve a meal (sometimes a traditional dish from one's country of origin) to the host in exchange for accommodation

community and how CS gatherings normally proceed. The attendances to these meeting varied in numbers but most of the time 30-50 participants were congregated at the Brisbane CS gatherings. The researcher could observe all those taking part in the meeting and evaded those travellers who ostensibly just had graduated from upper secondary school or high school.

The researcher especially paid attention to outgoing travellers willing to talk about their lives and their current situation in Australia. But in an attempt to find interviewees introducing questions like “what have brought you to Australia?” and “how long do you intend to stay here?” were asked among all the couchsurfers. Travellers that were granted a Working Holiday Visa (WHV) by the Australian Government, allowing them to combine work and travel while sojourning in Australia, were asked to participate in the study<sup>8</sup>. Initially they all agreed to contribute with their stories and experiences and were interviewed a few days after the CS gathering. These interviews were held at various public places in Brisbane wherever most convenient for the interviewees like state library, outdoor parks and cafés.

In the beginning of the field work CS gatherings was used as a particular approach to find interviewees likewise attending CS events which may be said to be a more spontaneous interview method.

### **Attending Couchsurfing events**

Another initiative used to collect empirical data was by the means of attending CS events. CS can be used for surfing or hosting but some couchsurfers use the community to expand the circle of acquaintanceships in the area where the person is situated. The author of the present thesis took part in some of the events that was posted on CS resulting in various participation e.g. concert and dining. Some of the events were attended without the intention to interview people but merely to encounter other people. By chance, the author fell into conversations with individuals closely linked to the target group and the phenomena and naturally requested the traveller for an interview. Some people were just passing through Brisbane and coincidentally agreed on attending the event, and due to time restriction the interview had to be carried out instantaneously.

By means of a voice recorder built in a mobile phone, pen and note papers the author conducted interviews in a park during Australia Day<sup>9</sup>, on a daytrip to Moreton Island and by joining a concert a Friday evening. This could be seen as a rather unstructured interview method but at that point in time the researcher was well-acquainted with the phenomenon and had conducted several interviews, why an interview guide was seen as unnecessary. Rather than conducting prepared interviews at pre-arranged locations it was important to interview the right people even though it was during unusual circumstances.

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<sup>8</sup> Later in the research it will be discussed why this selection of working holiday makers was changed

<sup>9</sup> The official national day of Australia celebrated annually on 26 January

## Hosting couchsurfers

At the end of the stay in Australia the researcher shared accommodation with an experienced host from the CS community and new opportunities were detected. Having couchsurfing herself the author of the thesis had previous experience with being a surfer but not as acting as a host. With excitement the author started to host couchsurfers hoping to get in contact with some youth travellers and potential interviewees. Compared with the two previous initiatives this way of approaching participants was quite different and comprising a more personal context. The travellers shared their life and accommodation with the researcher with varying degrees of duration; from a few hours up to three days. The only information the participants received before they came and stayed overnight was the fact that they maybe could contribute to a research carried out by the author of the present research.

Having a relationship between the researcher and the people being interviewed seem to be an advantage: “The sine qua non is a commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the actor [...] Because of the commitment to see through the eyes of one’s subjects close involvement is advocated” (Bryman, 1984; 77-78). The author made use of participant observation as several hours, and in some cases days, were spent with the interviewees. This constitutes an outstanding opportunity which certainly could be utilised to examine interviewees closely and achieve a good insight of the social world of the youth travellers.

Opposed to conducting interviews at a café or in a nearby park this approach requires more time investment which can be perceived as one of the pitfalls when operating with a qualitative research. Regardless of time frame this method of collecting empirical materials contributed with some valuable data. Most likely the quality of the interviews can be attributed to the time available as well as the relaxed atmosphere that the author of the present thesis had sought to provide.

## Meeting travellers ‘on the road’

Just like the approach seen in “attending CS events”, the fourth and final initiative, in the context of recruiting participants that could help answer the research question at hand and thereby add perspectives to the study, was on a more incidental level. As some older youth travellers were encountered in different situations the possibility to conduct interviews with these travellers existed as well. Based on the fact that the country in which they travel is less important compared to how they older youth travellers construct identities through sojourning, the decision of including these travellers as well were taken.

After finishing the stay in Australia the author of the research travelled around the North Island of New Zealand for a few days and spent some time in Samoa. Although the trips not decidedly were considered as a way to collect empirical data the researcher made the acquaintance of some older youth travellers precisely correlated to the chosen phenomenon. For instance at a hostel in Auckland the researcher met an individual traveller from United Kingdom who had spent five months in Australia who suddenly found a cheap flight ticket to New Zealand and decided to go the following day.

Another traveller that the researcher encountered was on Lake Taupo, New Zealand, during a few hours of sailing. Being of similar age and both being individual travellers a conversation was established. Having some interesting stories to tell the researcher asked for an interview and he was more than happy to participate. After the boat excursion the researcher interviewed the traveller at the hostel he was staying at. It must be added that even though he was the only exception of youth travellers who not directly was connected to Australia his social world can still be categorised as an 'older youth traveller's'. It should also be noted that even though Australia is used as the primary destination choice for the people participating in the study a case study, the research does not emphasise

Furthermore he had already booked his flight ticket to Australia and was going there to following month. For this reason his narratives has been added as part of the research. In addition, the theoretical reflections, which are to be presented later, will emphasise how 'backpackers' or in this case 'youth travellers' is more a social construction and a way of travelling rather than a distinct categorisation.

Another participant was found on the pacific island, Samoa, where the researcher happened to encounter a European youth traveller. Neither did this individual meet the criteria established in the beginning of the research process, as she was studying while she was in Australia, but her statements about identity construction and sojourning were still considered as having a significant value, thus her answers are too be found in the analysis.

### **Final remarks on the choice of interviewees**

As seen in the presented empirical methods and the different initiatives above it is easier devising a strategy than completely following the proposed route. At first, the selection of interviewees was based on the fact that they had a working holiday visa, but later in the process it was realised that this strategy was rather narrow-minded since youth travellers actually may be too old to obtain a working holiday visa. Combined with the fact that WTO (2008) argues that youth is difficult to link to a certain age the research includes travellers above the age of thirty as well.

Youth tourism consists of both student travellers and young travellers (WTO, 2008) however, students are not the pivotal point in this study instead emphasise is placed on obtaining knowledge from youth travellers as they travel more freely and arrange their own travel itinerary (Pearce, 1995; Cohen, 2004). The reason why students were not as relevant to interview for this study is the mere fact that the decision making process can be based on university reputation or other factors related to educational program which differs significant from the decision making process of a 'backpacker'. Especially 'older youth travellers' may have a desire to explore own identity more than students<sup>10</sup> as they sustain a 'normal' everyday life abroad, going to university and have lectures. Contrary, youth travellers might have an everyday life abroad that is quite different to the life in home country.

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<sup>10</sup> To be elaborated on later

## **Validity and Reliability**

Validity is stronger with the use of additional strategies used with interviewing, such as participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002). Participant observation can be instance be used to help answer the research questions and to build theory, which is the case in this thesis (DeWALT and DeWALT, 2002). To increase the internal validity of the thesis theories regarding youth tourism, backpacking, identity construction and transition phases were examined in order to prepare the questions for the interviews. During each interview an increased knowledge was established making it possible to read further theories and articles of the topic and improving the interview setting. For instance several follow up questions were asked in order to make sure the researcher understood the interviewees correctly (Bryman, 2008).

From an ethical point of view the interviewees were promised anonymity so they could express themselves freely, the names were therefore given another name by the researcher. This was mainly done by increase the trustworthiness of the findings (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002).

As the thesis deals with narratives interviews and a case study makes it difficult to replicate the findings of the study, under similar circumstances. The researcher's age, gender as well as choice of interviewees influences the situation in such manner that makes it difficult to achieve the same results if the study was to be carried out once more. The reliability is naturally low as the case is very unique and not possible to generalise upon from a statistical perspective (Bryman, 2008).

## **Theoretical framework**

Having looked into the methodological considerations the thesis continues with discussing the theories appropriate to use in this research. The concept of youth tourism, one of the main pillars in this project, is presented at the beginning of the chapter to help create a solid foundation of the concept as it is used throughout the thesis. Next the concept of identity construction, another central pillar of the project, will be introduced by means of several definitions and theories regarding identity construction since this approach will help to shed light on how youth travellers construct their identity through social interaction and consumption.

### **Conceptualising Youth Tourism: Backpacker or youth traveller?**

The aim of this chapter is to 'unpack' the backpacker and the youth traveller to establish an understanding of the chosen tourist segment. Different definitions will be used to gain insight into the concept of youth tourism and to help create an understanding of what separates e.g. youth tourists from other sub-groups of tourists. It should be highlighted that no attempt will be made to find a definite categorisation of what a backpacker is, instead the emphasis is placed on obtaining knowledge of the concepts known as *youth travellers* and *youth tourism*. The subchapter begins with introducing Pearce's definition of 'backpackers', one of the most acknowledged definitions used to particularly describe young tourists.

## Backpackers

As mentioned, the first hostel named 'Backpackers Inn' opened in 1983 and ever since the term 'backpacker' has been used to describe a certain type of travellers. A few years later Phillip Pearce, a social scientist, introduced the term *backpacker* to the academic tourism literature in early 1990s as he noted its already widespread use within Australian tourism industries. The definition, that later should be regarded as one of the most widely used definitions, is used to describe a particular type of youth niche market which Pearce (1990) believed could be characterised by five criteria:

- a preference for budget accommodation,
- social interaction with other travellers,
- independence and flexibility in their plans,
- preference for longer rather than brief holidays, and
- emphasis on holiday that are informal and participatory (Pearce 1990).

In contrast to ordinary tourists, using budget accommodation is seen as the most decisive criteria when defining the backpacker. By downgrading the comfort and expenses for accommodation, the backpacker can extend their trip and embark in different (leisure) activities. Backpackers often try to understand the lifestyle and culture of the countries they visit and may choose to make an effort in meeting other people (including locals) to expand their horizon (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). Pre-arranged package holidays are an uncommon phenomenon among backpackers as they 'go-with-the-flow' and tend to have a spontaneous travel schedule (ibid.). This allows travellers to take recommendations from other travellers into account while searching for 'authentic' experiences 'off the beaten track' (ibid.). Cohen (2004) has later argued that backpackers' quest for authenticity and the need to 'do their own thing' is quite ironic as backpackers often do the same thing, "*like the mass tourists, from whom they desire to distinguish themselves*" (p. 396). Focusing on external factors such as accommodation, way of travelling, and length of stay might help separating backpackers from mass tourists must Pearce (1990) also conclude that "*backpacking is best defined socially rather than in economic or demographic terms*" (p. 1).

A practical example of a tourism organisation, which uses Pearce's definition from 1990 as a point of reference to distinguish backpackers from other travellers, is Tourism Western Australia (see Tourism Western Australia, 2008; 1). The tourism organisation also acknowledges that '*backpacking is a state of mind*' rather than a distinct categorisation based on age and dollars spent at the destination (Tourism Western Australia 2008, 1). This displays that backpacker and youth tourism should try to make an attempt to insight into the lives of those who could be categorised as backpackers as it appears to be constructed in the mind of each traveller, which will be addressed more in the methodological considerations.

Some of the predominant scholars working with youth tourism made a research together, in which they consider backpackers to be those travellers who:

- Use budget accommodation



- Are involved in longer rather than very brief holidays
- Are predominantly under 40 years of age
- Have flexibility in their itineraries and
- Show a willingness to be involved in social and participatory holiday activities (Pearce et al., 2009; 10).

Many similarities exist between Peace's (1990) original definition of backpackers and the characterisation mentioned above by Pearce et al. (2009). The only difference appears to be the upper age limit, which is set to be 40. A discussion of combining age limit with definitional issues of youth tourism will be presented later in this chapter as opens up for several reflections.

Ateljevic and Doorne (2004) argue that "The term 'backpacker' has over the last decade become synonymous with a travelstyle that emphasises freedom and mobility" (p. 60). The freedom and mobility that Ateljevic and Doorne (2004) refer to may be a result of the increasing globalised society, where getting from A to B is fast and assessable mainly due to easy internet access, which enables backpackers to book cheap flight tickets. Young tourists have the freedom to choose between numerous destinations and Ateljevic and Doorne (2004) insinuate that backpacking increasing is associated with a way of travelling instead of how they travel e.g. choice of accommodation, what they spend their money on while travelling, etc. (Sørensen 2003). Similar to Cohen's non-institutionalized tourists ('drifters' and 'explorers') backpackers travel abroad to seek out new experiences compared with institutionalised mass tourists, who may surround themselves with more similar living environment when travelling abroad<sup>11</sup> (Cohen, 1972). In same vein, Richards and Wilson (2004) write in their book 'The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and in Practice', in which they conducted a research concerning backpackers:

*"Some respondents were highly oriented towards experiencing as much as possible during their trip. This seems to be particularly true for backpackers, who tended to be motivated by experiential factors, whereas tourists were more likely to be in search of relaxation"* (p. 25).

The study carried out by Richards and Wilson (2004) supports Cohen's classifications of tourists from 1972, as Cohen asserts non-institutionalised tourists are curious and emphasise educational or rewarding experiences, in contrast to institutionalised tourists who emphasise a more hedonistic lifestyle. Besides, Currie et al (2011) state that *"backpackers are one subgroup, or subculture, that has unbridled itself from mass tourism and strives to achieve a fuller tourism experience"* (p. 47). Another relevant term to discuss in relation to the backpacker phenomenon is 'youth tourism', which will be conceptualised in order to achieve a broader perspective on the topic.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on Cohen's classifications of tourists (1972)

## Youth Tourism

According to WYSE Travel Confederation<sup>12</sup> the youth niche market can be defined as the following:

*“Youth travel includes all independent trips for periods of less than one year by people aged 16-29 which are motivated, in part or in full, by a desire to experience other cultures, build life experience and/or benefit from formal and informal learning opportunities outside one’s usual environment” (WTO 2008, 1).*

WYSE definition distinguishes between youth travels and other type of travellers by arguing that young tourists (16 to 29 of age) sojourn because of a quest for *cultural* encounters, in order to gain *life experiences* synonymous with the ability to *learn* something. Furthermore it takes place *outside* the everyday life of the independent traveller. A finale note is that WYSE & WTO restrict the journey to last no more than one year. Compared with WYSE and WTO’s definition of youth tourism and Pearce’s (1990) definition of backpackers this abovementioned definition does not confines any age or travel limit.

Lastly, what is notable, in the report made by WYSE and WTO (2008), is that the term ‘young independent traveller’ is used above ‘backpacker’<sup>13</sup>. This may indicate that the term ‘backpacker’ is more applicable in a customer to business context rather than in a scientific correlation<sup>14</sup>.

## Youth travellers

A definition where the aspects of backpacking and the concept of youth tourism are converging into one description is the statement presented below, presented by Ateljevic and Li (2009), who characterise youth travellers as:

*“a young person aged 30 or under, who is travelling outside the family structure but not for business, and not primarily to visit friends or relatives, and whose travel includes at least one overnight stay. Youth travellers are normally free and independent travellers embarking individually or in groups for different purposes, including education and personal development [...] Youth travellers tend to stay longer on a single trip, stay in budget accommodation establishments, and experiment with different experiences including adventure activities and attending special events” (Ateljevic and Li 2009, 12).*

Compared with Pearce’s (1990) original definition this classification emphasises that youth travellers are classified as a group of tourists, who use travelling as an opportunity to gather educational, cultural or environmental knowledge during their sojourn. Moreover, youth travellers intentionally travel in order to achieve

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<sup>12</sup> WYSE Travel Confederation is the world’s largest network of youth and student travel operators (WYSE Travel Confederation 2014)

<sup>13</sup> ‘Young independent traveller’ is used 51 times whereas ‘backpacker’ only is mentioned 22 times

<sup>14</sup> The author of the thesis personally witnesses how the term ‘backpacker’ was used in marketing material throughout Australia, New Zealand and Thailand in order to appeal to the younger audience of the tourism marketplace

a sense of *personal development*, which Ateljevic and Li (2009) highlight is another highly valued outcome of their journey.

Noteworthy, Ateljevic and Li's (2009) implies that youth travellers on a working holiday visa are not part of the definition as they exclude business related travel. This stance will be ignored in this present thesis as people who have obtained a working holiday visa not *only* work during their trip but also *travel*.

There appears to be several correlations between the phenomenon of backpackers and the phenomenon of youth travellers and the concluding remarks of conceptualising youth tourism will be presented below where some present considerations are taken into account.

## Contemporary Youth Tourism

As part of the last sections of definitional concerns the term 'flashpacker' is included as it emerged in different contexts while obtaining knowledge about the terms 'backpacker' and 'youth travel'. The notion of flashpacker is a reflection of the changing demographics and trends especially represented in the western society (Paris 2012). In particular the younger generation are influencing the tourism industry as they have children at an older age and postpone adulthood's responsibilities and travel around the globe with their increased disposable income, smart phones and wireless internet connection (WTO, 2008; Hannam and Diekmann, 2010).

What exactly separates backpackers from flashpackers is not precisely clear, but in Paris' (2012) research two key characteristics are used to differentiate backpackers from flashpackers: travel expenditure and technology use (Paris 2012). Hannam and Diekmann (2010) agree that flashpackers travel with a higher budget than traditional backpackers and that flashpackers in general take technological gadgets with them while travelling. The use of technology in relation to youth tourism have been examined earlier (e.g. Mascheroni, 2007; Paris 2008) and it appears that youth travellers especially travel both on the internet and with the internet (Germann 2006). If the use of technology indicates whether or not a youth travellers can be categorised as being a 'backpacker' or 'flashpacker' can be discussed, as it seems rather narrow-minded.

Generally flashpackers are older than backpackers as previous studies indicate (Paris, 2012; Hannam and Diekmann, 2010) and in the western society it appears as though the flashpacker culture is no-longer limited to the use of technology, instead non-flashpackers make use of digital devices as well. Many youth travellers for instance carry a mobile phone with them while travelling and stay connected to the virtual world by the means of facebook and Ipads<sup>15</sup>. Even though the concept of flashpacking is rather new it seems to be an obsolete term due to the easy accessibility of travelling and simultaneously being online.

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<sup>15</sup> The researcher travelled around in Australia, New Zealand and Thailand and witnesses the widespread use of technology both amongst young and older travellers

Like the term 'backpacker' this thesis will desist using the term 'flashpacker' and merely use the underlying explanations, highlighted by the previous mentioned scholars, to shed light on youth tourism. Another element that frequently is used to differentiate youth travellers from other tourists is age distribution. Classifying youth travellers in this manner will be contemplated in the next paragraph.

### **Linking Youth Tourism to Age Distribution**

Age distribution is also an occurrence used within the tourism industry. Tourism Australia for instance uses the age span 15-29 years of age to define youth travellers and emphasises that the chosen age span is applied based on the facts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Tourism Australia 2013). The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) also suggests that backpackers can be categorized as travellers in the age 15-29 years (WTO 2008). Why scientific tourism researches determine youth travellers based on age delimitation is understandable as it allow scholars to deal with tourists from a statistical matter. But as the statement below remarks age distribution arise other implications:

“the concept ‘youth’ is increasingly difficult to link to age, as young people are delaying their entry into work, marriage, and family formation, and older people strive hard to remain ‘young’. This underlines the point that youth travel is not solely a question of demographics, but increasingly one of travel style. ‘Youth’ accommodation is now used by travellers at all ages, many of whom seek to maintain the relatively independent travel styles of their younger counterparts” (WTO 2008, 1).

From a demographic standpoint youth tourism may be thought of having less importance due to the increasingly aging population, but as noted in a similar stance “*young adults are continuing to live a ‘younger’ lifestyle for longer, putting off the responsibilities of adulthood such as raising children or buying property until later and continuing to travel as a youth traveller for longer*” (WTO - WYSE 2011, 9). Age distribution as a way to categorise youth tourism is questioned in the statements above. Instead WTO (2008; 2011) suggests that ‘youth’ is extended to include the older members of youth travel though without accentuating a specific age limit for the denotation ‘young’. Besides, budget accommodation previous known as ‘youth hostels’ and ‘backpackers’ may today be used by other groups of tourists who emphasise a non-expensive place to stay during their travel (WTO – WYSE, 2011).

### **How to go about Youth Travellers?**

The distinction between backpackers, youth tourists and other travellers is ambiguous as other travellers also favour ‘youth’ accommodation e.g. backpacker hostels and budget lodgings (Uriely et al, 2002; Sørensen 2003; Richard and Wilson, 2004). Besides, linking age to the term ‘youth’ is also problematic as discussed in the antecedent section. The vague boundaries make it difficult to categorise ‘backpackers’, ‘flashpackers’ and ‘youth travellers’ from other tourists which underlines that the use of these terms should be used with some precaution.

As current studies indicate the distinction between backpackers and other tourists remains rather fuzzy (see O’Reilly 2005; Cohen 2004) and when asking the backpackers themselves they often reject the term ‘backpacker’

and 'tourist' labels in exchange for self-identification as 'travellers' (Welk, 2004; Davidson, 2005; O'Reilly, 2005; O'Reilly, 2006). O'Reilly (2006) asserts that "as more and more people partake of the backpacker image and travel in this mode, a common structure of consumption has formed: the backpacker is now an easily recognizable stereotype" (p. 999). The fact that the backpacker is believed to be an *easily recognizable stereotype* might cause some problematic pitfalls as other academic literatures have underlined. Again, this exemplify the complexity when using terms like 'backpacker' or 'flashpacker' when referring to a group of tourists that research literature usually would classify by the terms of age, travel mode or choice of accommodation.

Additionally, Maoz and Bekermann (2010) emphasise the importance of accentuating how individuals identify themselves when constructing social groups. The label individuals choose to describe themselves with is especially relevant when analysing identity formation. If the interviewees in this thesis describe themselves as 'backpacker' or 'traveller' the study will assume they are, since there might be a risk of categorising tourists with a definition they cannot identify them with, as previous researches have proven (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Welk, 2004; O'Reilly, 2005). For this reason precautions are taken to not classify travellers with any stereotypical label or image that they cannot relate to.

A final definition of the concept of youth tourism may be difficult to agree on as Aviation and Tourism International (ATI) already stated in 1995 in which they emphasised that there is "*little agreement concerning the definition of 'youth tourism'*" (ATI 1995). However, some definitions presented by the academic literatures mentioned in this chapter will be used to distinguish youth travellers from other sub-cultures of tourists.

Within the tourism discourse backpackers are a much researched field. Previous studies regarding the youth tourism phenomenon is considered to be closely linked to youth travellers, hence important to have an understanding of in this thesis. However, the number of people who describes themselves with the 'backpacker' label has decreased the last 10 years; nearly 15% in 2012 compared to about 30% in 2002 which is one of this reasons why this thesis abstains from referring to young tourists as 'backpackers' (IPK International 2013, 21).

Instead, this study prefers to use the term 'youth traveller', which partly derives from Pearce's (1990) and Ateljevic and Li's (2009) description of young tourists. However, without restricting the individuals to be under the age of 30, as youth may be difficult to link to a certain age (WTO, 2008). Instead it should be acknowledged that backpacking, or in this case youth travels, *is a state of mind* (Tourism Western Australia, 2008). It should further be acknowledged that not all 'youth travellers' or 'young travellers' agree with these labels, that the author of the project allocates, as they might interpret it differently.

No matter how older youth travellers may be categorised it is still relevant to analyse this sub-group of tourists as they 'represent a major growth segment' as already mentioned in the introduction (Richards and Wilsons, 2010; 2). In fact Richards and Wilsons (2010) assert that most previous studies of backpackers have been based on external definitions. This stance indicates that *external definitions* e.g. age, country of origin and occupation should be used carefully when segregating 'youth travel' from other tourism segments. The external classification mentioned by Richards and Wilson (2010) is not used to define travellers in this thesis in order to separate them

from other tourists. Being part of consumption though, the choice of accommodation might still indicate how travellers choose to construct identities, which will be elaborated on later in the theoretical considerations.

Sørensen (2003) believes *“backpacker’ is more a social construct than a definition”* (p. 852). Having said that, Cohen (2004) asserts the need to challenge the conceptions of what a backpacker is, or in this case what a youth traveller is. Therefore, the prominent focal point is the ‘older youth traveller’ not the ‘original youth traveller’ that previously has dominated the academic tourism field. Last but not least the above definitions and thoughts do not take into account that youth travellers may be viewed differently in relation to specific countries and conclusion must be that defining ‘backpackers’ and ‘youth travellers’ is very subjective. Having theorised some characteristics of youth tourism the next section will introduce the concept of identity construction which is the other main pillar of the theoretical considerations.

## **Identity construction**

Identity construction will be presented by the means of different scholars to establish a sense of understanding of this rather fluid and complex concept (Giddens and Sutton, 2014). The discussion of social identity construction will be framed by introducing several theoretical positions followed by theories on touristic consumption, destination choice and transition phases.

### **Social identity**

The purpose of social identity theories is to examine how the social context affects the individual, thus helping to understand the interplay between youth traveller and the construction of identity. Some scientists have argued that it only makes sense to understand own identity in relation to others. The first two scholars to work with this matter were Tajfel and Turner (1979) who argued that people have a tendency to categorize them self into one or more “in-groups” and thereby creating a part of their identity on the basis of membership of that particular group, enforcing boundaries with other groups, the “out-groups”. Depending on the social context different situations may trigger the individual to establish memberships to certain groups. Thereby said, that social identity theory can be used to examine individual-based behaviour; a sense of belonging to the social world (ibid.)

Later work, such as Giddens (1991), highlights similar thoughts, as he reflects on self-identity in this manner:

*“Self-identity is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual.... A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, not – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography... must continually integrate events which occur in the external world and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self”* (Giddens, 1991; p 52-4).

Giddens (1991) notes that identity is an ongoing process that are created, maintained and changed through individualistic thoughts and through social interaction with the external world. In similar vein, Therkelsen and

Gram (2008) argue that identity is an ‘ongoing dynamic process’ which is important to reflect on when having an Interpretivist approach (Bryman, 2008). In this research it is interesting to analyse if youth travellers reflect on their previous identity in home environment and to see if they perceive their current identity while sojourning as being any different.

Referring to other groups of people can clarify how individuals choose to construct their own identity, hence in this thesis the theory can be used to outline how young adults construct identities when describing their membership to certain groups e.g. tourists, locals. Giddens (1991) highlights that individuals make use of events, e.g. travelling abroad for an extended period of time, and construct an identity based on the experienced, which also underlines the fact of using in situ narratives as a methodological approach. Likewise, Jantzen et al. (2011) argue that experiences can have an effect and support a desired identity which goes hand in hand with the topic of the thesis, thus help to answer the research question at hand.

Richard Jenkins, a well-known sociologist and author of the book “*Social Identity*”, says the following about identity formation:

*“one of the things that we have in common is our difference from others. In the face of their difference our similarity often comes into focus. Defining ‘us’ involves defining a range of ‘thems’ also. When we say something about others we are often saying something about ourselves. In the human world, similarity and difference are always functions of a point of view: our similarity is their difference and vice versa”* (Jenkins, 2008; 102-3).

Like Giddens (1991) Jenkins shares a similar view on social identity. Hence, identity construction can be understood as a way to obtain knowledge about how travellers individually perceive themselves by the means of

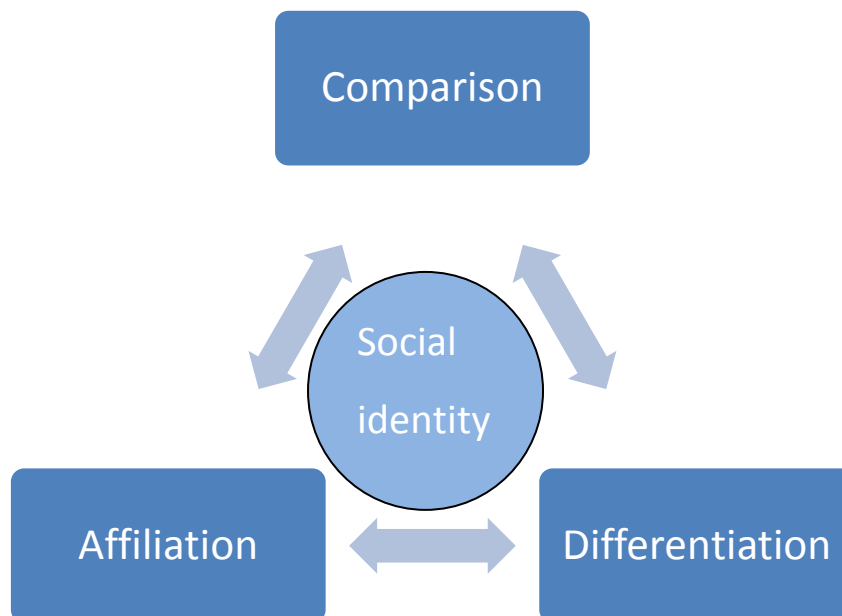


Figure 4: Social desires – a motivational dynamic (inspired by Arnould et al. 2004)

seeking out differences or similarities with other people, i.e. 'us' as travellers and 'them' as 'backpackers'. On another note if travellers distinguish themselves from a different group of individuals the differentiation helps shed light on what a person can or cannot identify herself/ himself simply because "*we discover what we are in what we are not, and vice versa*" (Jenkins, 2008; 103).

Multi-motivational theories are recommended to use in order to understand the complex aspects of motivation and identity (Ryan, 1991). For this reasons the previous-mentioned theory will be combined with the theory of Arnould, Price and Zinkhan (2004) who believe that people are motivated to behave in three certain ways:

Travellers can choose to *compare* themselves with other travellers, or they can have a desire of belongingness to a certain group, which is known as affiliation. Lastly, Arnould et al. (2004) highlight *differentiation* when individuals distinguish themselves from other e.g. other subgroups of tourists. Whether travellers use *comparison, affiliation or differentiation* when referring to other human beings is interesting to analyse as statements about other people may, as emphasised earlier, reveal how individuals construct identities. This theory is similar to the theory of Jenkins (2008) though Arnould et al. (2004) approach seems to be more manageable as three ways specifically are highlighted instead of merely having an 'us' and 'them' approach. When analysing complex matters as identity construction and motives of travelling applying and combining the two theories in the analysis creates a broader understanding of youth travel.

The terms 'identity' and 'self' will in this project be understood interchangeably to denote the way youth travellers use to describe themselves. And even though individuals pose several identities the concept of 'identity' and 'self' refers to the considerations of individuals' aspects of themselves and the descriptions of their time abroad.

Additionally, the *primary* identities, those formed in early life, such as gender identity and ethnicity will obviously influence the *secondary* identities of youth travellers, which Giddens and Sutton (2014) argue is based on social roles and occupation (Giddens and Sutton 2014). This study is limited to analyse the identity of travellers going abroad where emphasise is placed on obtaining knowledge of older youth travellers in specific, whereas the age distribution is considered to be more of relevance than e.g. ethnicity and occupation.

Moreover, "*identities are complex and fluid, changing as people gain new roles or leave behind old ones. It also means that identity is rarely fixed but is in a constant process of change*" (Giddens and Sutton, 2014; 139). Again this highlights the fact that identities are an ongoing process where individuals have the possibility to create a different identity. Besides, if any of these travellers gain new roles or leave old ones behind when sojourning will be analysed in this study. By the means of distinguishing travellers from other tourists some aspects of identity construction can be clarified. Next part of the theoretical considerations will determine how a desired identity can be created from other aspects, namely through touristic consumption.



## **Touristic Consumption**

Constantly each individual needs to make decisions and opt between different choices. From decisions that might influence a person's lifespan (getting married, divorced, quitting a job), where opportunities and risks may need to be evaluated, to decisions regarding a particular lifestyle or other decision-making-processes that might influence how individuals try to construct a desired identity (Ryan 1991; Giddens 1991). Within a tourism context Sirgy and Su (2000) assert that '*tourists choose destinations to conform to their self-image, whether that is their own self image or the social image, the way they hope to appear to others*' (Sirgy and Su, 2000 in Guthrie and Anderson 2010; 114). By choosing, prioritising and selecting between several options an individual establishes a desired self-image when visiting a certain destination. Thereby said, that the decision-making-processes behind prioritising between different destinations may clarify elements of a traveller's desired self-identity as Ryan (1991) also has noted. As Giddens (1991) sets it, consumption may "*give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity*" (p. 81). Moreover, Smed (2011) makes the following stance concerning consumption with a tourism context:

*"Consumption of products, and in the case of tourism, experiences, may be used to create a sense of meaning in life, because products may function as building blocks for constructing and understanding oneself and one's place in the world"* (p. 241).

As Smed (2011) outlines experiences can be understood as the building blocks of individual's self-identity. Furthermore it is argued that experiences are used to *create a sense of meaning in life*. How older youth travellers create a certain place in the world when travelling is to be further analysed. Hence, making it relevant to conceptualise the decision-making-process as it might suggest how young travellers choose to construct identities through touristic consumption. In this thesis looking into youth travellers' narrative of the destination they visit and the way they go about it may be a statement about a desired self-image.

## **Destination choice**

In relation to identity formation the question of 'who are we' can closely be linked to the question of 'where are we', which Dixon and Durrheim (2000) examined in their study of identity and place-identity. Identities are closely linked to place (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000), tourists' identities may therefore be interesting to analyse as travellers remove themselves from their usual place and thereby their day-to-day place. How youth travellers choose to construct identities will therefore be examined as a large part of the people participating in the study choose to sojourn for several months or even years. Not only may tourists decide to visit a certain destination but it may also be linked to a certain lifespan in their lives which the next part will theorise.

## **Transition Phases**

Older youth travellers, that have decided to live a life 'on the road' for a prolonged period, are in particular interesting to analyse as they might have or are about to exit the phase of late adolescence/ youth. For this

reason some sociological thoughts are relevant to introduce as this thesis make use of some prominent social theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Richard Jenkins. Fundamentally *“youth can be an extended period of life reaching into the late 20s, and defined in terms of a ‘moratorium’ on adulthood* (Erikson (1968) in Bynner and Chisholm, 1998). Erikson noted as early as in 1968 that youth can be extended into a later phase in life, where moratorium is to be understood as *“the status of a person who is actively involved in exploring different identities, but had not made a commitment”* (Cherry, 2014). This might be relevant to analyse when dealing with older youth travellers as youth now are reaching into later phases of life, especially if they use travelling as a way to find a sense of self (WTO, 2008). Giddens (2006) refers to these moments as fateful moments: *‘those when individuals are called on to take decisions that are particularly consequential for their ambitions, or more generally for their future lives’ [...] fateful moments are times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroad in his existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences”* (p. 32-33). Moratorium could be connected with existential moments in travellers’ life where decision are to be made regarding ‘settling down’, which this thesis also intends to shed further light on.

The last part of the theoretical reflections consist of investigating the motives underpinning the decisions of why older youth travellers might engage in prolonged sojourning.

## **Motivational factors**

Travel motivation is a key concept for understanding why individuals make decisions to a preferred destination (Kim et al., 2006). As peoples’ decision making process can be a statement about a person’s self-identity the theory is considered to of relevance in understanding the psychological forces and factors that motivate individuals to visit a certain place, thus help analysing how youth travellers’ construction identities (Chon, 1989; Ryan, 1991). Chen and Tsai (2007) argue that motivation can act as the driving force behind all actions, thus the motivational aspects of sojourning. For this reason Dann’s (1977) push and pull motivational framework will be included as it sheds light on the driving forces of leaving home.

*Push factors* refer to the intrinsic forces which lead to the decision to leave home environment which commonly are known as escape, relaxation, seeing and learning, instances that emerge from psychological or physical desires which pushes the individual to go abroad. *Pull factors* are external forces that pulls the individual to go to a certain destination, such as warm weather, sunny beaches, natural environment or cultural elements, also known as destination-attractiveness (Dann, 1977). It should be noted that these pull and push factors can be more or less intertwined and should not be seen as oppositions to each other.

## **Exploring The Self**

One may ask why it is interesting to analyse identity in correlation with sojourning. According to Stein (2011) travels are specifically built into travellers’ life in order to allow time off away from their everyday life: *“a period of enhanced personal freedom that can tell us much about how people choose to construct and enact an identity when social rules and proscriptions are eased, removed, or shifted”* (p. 291). Moving away from home society

allow people to act differently than usual and to re-construct their identity which is going to be a focal point in this study.

“the decision to start travelling is closely linked to moments in their (travellers’) lives when self-identity is open to question. It is in these instances that travel is drawn upon to reimagine the self” (Desforges, 2000; 933).

As seen in the quotation above Desforges (2000) believes that the wish to leave home environment is developed in accordance with a certain time in travellers’ life and by a desire to *reimagine the self* (Crompton, 1979). As emphasised earlier, young travellers tend to travel for an extended time of period making it interesting to further theorise *when* exactly self-identity is open to be negotiated. Furthermore, Crompton believes that travelling often is based on a feeling of disequilibrium, which could be connected with a desire to explore the self.

It was already noticed in 1988 that especially young people were motivated to reimagining the self while travelling as they were transforming from youth into adulthood (Riley, 1988). Noy (2004) shares the same view and elaborates: “*the trip commonly takes place during the period between the end of youthful obligations, such as high school, college, [...] and the commencement of young adulthood, and is perceived as a transitional period*” (p. 84). Using travelling as a way to undergo a transformational period might be important to analyse further and as Desforges (2000) puts it: “*All life spans involve significant transitions [...] where identity has to be renegotiated, new autobiographies have to be constructed, and new trajectories have to be set*” (Desforges, 2000; 932). Obtaining more knowledge about the point in life where travellers feel the need to undergo a *transitional period* is interesting to obtain further knowledge about. Especially as the chosen target group in average travels for more than six months.

To the knowledge of the researcher limited studies exist about the ‘older’ segment of backpackers making it interesting to scrutinize if these individuals, older than the ‘average backpacker’, perceive their travel e.g. to Australia as a transitional period. Especially since previous studies have indicated that young adults “*are often at a junction in life*” which makes it appealing to travel (Currie et al 2011; 49). Compared to young students, who just have finished their high school or college degree, the chosen consumer group in this research will be analysed by the means of looking further into *when* and *how* youth travelling is used to reimagine their self-image by sojourning. Being closer to adulthood the kinds of youthful obligations the interviewees emphasise will be analysed and their situation before embarking on a prolonged journey will furthermore be analysed to clarify if the interviewees in this research emphasise other obligations than younger travellers from previous studies.

Furthermore travellers might perceive their experiences abroad as more than just memorable experiences, as O’Reilly (2006) indicates in this sentence:

*“the sense of having more in common with fellow travellers of different nationalities than with many fellow nationals; [...] the development of a feeling of common humanity, often expressed in the stories about the “kindness of strangers” or the similarities between people all over the world; [...]the belief that travel can lead to*

*self-development and self-knowledge; and finally, the realization for many that the “big trip” has not helped to get it out of their system, but has rather planted a seed of desire for more” (O’Reilly 2006, 999).*

The quotation above emphasise that especially a prolonged trip abroad can be used as a way to construct an identity and further it can act as a stronger development of the individual. There it might be relevant to see if and how youth travellers develop a seed of desire for more sojourning.

Academic literature has previously indicated a strong link between tourism and personal development (e.g. O’Reilly, 2006; Ateljevic and Li, 2009; Currie et al., 2011). Two of the first tourism scholars, Crompton and MacCannell, detected this in the 1970s, suggesting that tourists ‘find themselves’ while travelling; *“an opportunity for re-evaluating and discovering more about themselves or for acting our self-images and in so doing redefined and modified them”* (Crompton, 1979; 18). Crompton’s word travelling is used as a way to discover the self, or ‘the authentic self’ as MacCannell (1973) puts it. On another note, travellers might also have a desire to escape the daily life in home environment (Iso-Ahola 1982). The reason *why* tourists travel is an issue that have gained much attention among academic scholars.

MacCannell argues that tourists travel because they feel alienated from the modern society (MacCannell, 1999). MacCannell thereby saw tourism consumption as an opportunity to gain a bigger picture of the world, where tourists can search for a meaningful place in the world (ibid.). Though more recent work perceives tourism as the means to *“develop a new sense of self”* in a more fluid way:

*“The full process of the anticipation of holidays, the act of travel, and the narration of holiday stories on return are all tied into an imagination and performance which enables tourists to think of themselves as particular sorts of person”* (Desforges, 2000; 930).

Searching for the self and developing a new sense of self has in fact been a focal point in several studies (Riley, 1988; Sørensen, 2003; Noy, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005). Desforges (2000) thereby argues that travelling creates the opportunity for the traveller to perform and create a particular sort of person, more adventures or exciting. In same vein as Currie et al (2011) and Maoz (2004) also believe that *“people tend to travel at junctures in life to seek personal change and growth, to seek answers to questions about their identities and to find things that are missing in their lives”* (Crompton, 1979; Desforges, 2000; Hastings, 1998; Hills, 1965; Riley 1988). What sort of junctions youth travellers seem to be in when travelling will now be analysed, in line with the previous-mentioned theories in the methodological considerations.

# Analysis

This part of the thesis will present the empirical data that analyses youth travellers' journeys outside their home country. Several themes occurred during the in situ narratives, and some of them will be analysed in this part of the thesis. One of the first themes that wanted to be covered in the interview settings was to discover the reason of the participants' sojourning and the thoughts concerning the decision making process.

## Developing a taste of travelling

An important part in analysing youth travellers' way of constructing identities is to gain insight into their perception of their own trip and the thoughts they attribute the extended journey away from home environment.

### A kid dream

A distinctive pattern of developing a desire of travelling emerged from the interviews. Five of the interviewees, made comments like *"I always wanted to travel"* and emphasised a curiosity of experiencing different cultures, countries and meeting new people as a reasons to travel, which are in line with Cohen's (1972) theory that argues tourist travel in order to seek new environment.

For other interviewees travelling had since early childhood been in their consciousness with a fervent desire to explore the world. A very good example is Sara, who decided to go on a world trip for 6 to 8 years, and the researcher asked her where she got the idea of travelling the world from. She explains the following:

*"I always had it. Always. I have always been admiring people that were travelling. When I was 10 years old you could give me 5 Euros and I would just put it on the bank account called 'world trip' even though it was not the actually name. But for me it was. I was saving for my big dream all my life basically (laughing)." (Sara, 28, France 06:30).*

For as far as she could remember Sara always had a desire of travelling the world and wanted to belong to the group of people she admired; travellers, which can be analysed as *affiliation* to this particular group of travellers. Clearly, travelling has been a *big dream* for her and the yearning of travelling was amplified as she started travelling in Europe, which she refers to as the *baby steps* of travelling. This is similar to the research carried out by Richards and Wilson (2010) who argues that *"as travel experience increases, so people tend to travel further afield"* (p. 5). At the age of 17 she went to Mexico on her first trip alone, where she had the *greatest experience* and this could further have triggered the idea of achieving her big dream; to travel the world. Consumption is a relevant element to consider as she saved up for her trip most of her life apparently and can be argued to be the building blocks for creating a certain desired self-identity (Giddens, 1991; Smed, 2011).

Of all the people participating in this study Sara is the one who intends to travel the longest, as she plans to travel for eight years. For this reason it is understandable why she constructs an identity much focused around travelling as it seems to play an important part in the way she decides to live her current life.

Especially those who mentioned travelling was a “kid dream” was much focused around constructing an identity defined as a *traveller* and perceived it as an integrated part of their lives. This might be due to the reasons that they also were travelling for minimum a year and most of them in fact wanted to travel for several years. On the contrary, those who were travelling for four or five months saw their trip as a break from their *serious life* and obligations in home environment where they could allow themselves to *play around* as Greg puts it (25, German 28:52).

### Taking the first steps

Many of the interviewees started travelling with their parents and grew up with the belief that travelling is a *natural* thing to do (Robert, 27, Netherlands). The first independent trip abroad was often close to their country of origin as they were too *scared* (Kate, 27; German) or *afraid* (Susan, 29, British) to travel too far away. This first sojourning abroad was often at the age of 16-18 and could be seen as a *nice little starter trip* (Mini, female, 23, US) or as baby steps as Sara puts it. But upon return they felt hungry for more travelling, which supports O'Reilly's thoughts that a big trip can *plant a seed of desire* for more travelling.

Remarkably, only few of the people interviewed developed a *taste of travelling* in a relatively old age. The interviewer asked for instance this female traveller, when she went on her first extended journey, where to she answered it was after a divorce and also adds:

*“I did it quite old, I was 29 years old. I was old! And I've just been to France and play safe for the first travel because it was the same language as me, it was easier and really safe for a girl travelling in Europe and this first experience was really amazing and I discovered a lot of things about myself, so it gave me the taste to continue and since this I have always been travelling [...] It was an amazing trip to France so I think this is really important in developing the taste of travelling”* (Penny, 33, French Canada 07:22-11:27).

Even though this interviewee was *old* when she went on the extended trip abroad, she still chose to *play safe* as she went to a country with a similar culture and without any language barriers. She refers to this two months long trip as being *easy, safe* and *amazing* she *developed a taste of travelling* which gave her a desire to explore more of the world. Furthermore, she decided on travelling when her identity was *open to question* and could use travelling as a way to *re-imagine* the self, as she needed to create a new role as a divorced individual (Desforges, 2000). This also points to the significance of the first trip abroad as it, in this case, influences how the youth traveller sojourns in later life. Many other interviewees also spoke of their first independent trip without the presence of their parents as something slightly magical. Sara went to Mexico realising she now needed to see the rest of the world. Eric had his first ‘big trip’ at the age of 18 and had travelled ever since:

*“There more people I got to know, the more nice places they showed me in their countries, and the more I travelled the more I want to travel. As a student I was also on semester breaks and I was either working for money or travelling, whenever I could [...] After I came back from my trip in 2009 I realised that I wanted to do an even bigger trip than that. I already realised it on my flight home. I realised I’m a bit tired of constantly moving around but I don’t really feel like going home actually. I’m going home to work and save more money and then I would like to start travelling slower staying a month or two at a place getting to really know it, make friends and then move on to the next place like travel in a different style and after four years I just realised it’s time to do that. Something in me just said ‘go’ and I did [...] after four years this feeling of itch of hitting the road and going travelling again was getting too strong. So in this moment I talked with my boss and I said I need to go travelling and she understood so I quit my job and here I am - five months later I’m still happy travelling” (Eric, 34, Switzerland 01:33-05:11-16:18).*

Developing a taste of travelling, as Penny calls it, often happens on the basis on a ‘big trip’ and upon arrival in home country realising that sojourning has created an urge of further exploration of more destination (O’Reilly, 2006). Travelling influenced Eric’s way of living and construction of identity as he during adolescence discovered a passion for travelling. Being at home was seen as a way to save up money, so he could visit more countries which only amplified the yearning of *hitting the road*. In this case, the state of travelling is so strong that even though the youth travellers was on his way home to Switzerland, after being on a journey for 9 months in South America in 2008/2009, he realised he wanted an *even bigger trip than that*. Eric realised that his current life in Switzerland was not satisfying the need of exploring the world, which resulted in him saving up more money, so he could travel for an even longer period of time to satisfy his insatiable desire to travel. After four years in Switzerland something in him said ‘go’ and he felt an *itch*. This feeling was often heard in the youth travellers’ enclaves to describe their yearning for travelling or as they would say ‘I had itchy feet’ or ‘I’ve been bitten by the travel bug’. Youth travellers seem to experience something in earlier life that persuades them to hit the road again, this might indicate that travelling can create a sense of meaning in the lives of young travellers (Smed, 2009).

## **Chasing adventures**

Susan is another good example of how a previous trip abroad initiated a certain feeling and desire to explore more of what the world has to offer.

*“I just want to experience things. When I was in America I went to Utah and saw Monument Valley and this is about three years ago and it was the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen and I just want to have more. I was amazed and I just wanted to have that feeling again [...] I guess that’s what I’m chasing. I’m chasing the ‘wow, this is awesome kind of thing” (Susan, 28, UK 18:35).*

In an attempt to achieve the feeling she had when she went to America, which was her first journey abroad, she had a desire to travel abroad again. She also explained how she engaged herself in several adventure activities like skydiving, white-water rafting, and dune-surfing, which might be a way of trying to reach the 'wow' feeling. Academic scholars have previously highlighted that especially youth travellers are chasing a particular feeling which sometimes results in engaging in adventure activities (Richard and Wilson, 2004; Ateljevic and Li, 2009). But in this research adventure activities were not seen as an important matter and the older youth travellers did not use the activities to construct identities. Instead they mentioned that they decided to participate in adventure activities because it was much different than in home environment, e.g. paragliding and landing on a beach whereas in home country this would not be possible" (Anne, 25, German).

In addition, some youth travellers seem to be influenced by several factors around the age of childhood or early youth 15-16 of age. Greg for instance saw Ayer's rock in television when he was a child which was the reason he wanted to come to Australia, Susan read the book "the beach" when she was 15 and especially wants to travel to Thailand because of this, and June mentioned that she wanted to visit Australia since she was 16. As many of the interviewees have stated that travelling always was a "kid dream" indicates that the desire to travel and sojourn for an extended period of time develops at an early stage in life and may be worth looking further into. Besides the different attitudes towards travelling different conditions in homeland influenced the decision to go travelling and some of the reasons will be highlighted in the next part of the analysis.

## **How do older youth travellers decide on sojourning?**

The decision making process behind leaving home environment is a critical factor in analysis how youth travellers construct identities while sojourning especially taking into consideration that several choices can be taken to express a certain desired identity. This section will examine the reason why youth travellers wish to take on a new identity and look further into the circumstances in home environment that could have influenced the decision to start travelling for a longer period of time.

Giddens and Sutton (2014) argue that identity constantly is changing as individuals leave behind old roles and take on a new, for instance when travellers go abroad for several months or years. For this reason analysing the circumstances in home environment and the element that causes the individual traveller to leave is interesting to look further into as it might influence the way that interviewees construct new identities.

Questions like "*why did you decide to go travelling right now?*" and "*what were your circumstances back home before you decided to travel?*" were asked to find out if youth travellers' decision to leave normal surroundings in any way could be connected with the process of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Even though the answers varied to different extends the most important thing to notice was a high occurrence of negative emotions which the participants emphasised during the interviews.



## Leaving work obligations

Noy (2004) has previously expressed that especially 'young' youth travellers commonly take a trip abroad "during the period between the end of youthful obligations, such as high school and college, and the commencement of young adulthood" (p. 84). In the case with 'older' youth travellers undertaking a trip for an extended period of time is much similar to 'young' travellers. 'Older' travellers indicate that the youthful obligations for example are: job, relationship and studies. This period of finishing some obligations makes it possible for youth travellers to re-evaluate or to discover their self-identity by means of sojourning (Crompton, 1979). Most frequently, a feeling of dissatisfaction with the current situation in home environment initiated the decision to leave home country. Looking at the statement made by Lee is an example of feeling a state of disequilibrium:

*"I had a career back home from 2006-2010 and I decided to do it and I was like 'if I don't do it now I'm never going to do it'. And I decided to do it after I came from holiday and came back in my office and pressed play in the answering machine and 'you have 99 new voice messages' and took a look at my email '100-something new emails' and then I was just like 'holy shit'".*

Interviewer: *"So that was when you decided that you wanted to travel?"*

*"kind of yes. I just came back from vacation and then I would need to wait one more year to have two weeks of vacation and I said 'no I want to be on vacation all the time' (laugh) and then I just decided on a place to go" (Lee, 30, French Canada 16:42).*

Lee felt a certain pressure because of his job and decided to give up the identity that was connected with his job and career as, he explained during the interview, he used travelling as a way to live out another lifestyle: *"the purpose of working here is just to make money not to make a career or something like that. It was the same in the west (Canada), it was just something to make money and to live the lifestyle in the place"* (09:16). In line with Crompton's (1979) theory Lee experienced a state of disequilibrium and wanted to be liberated from the tensions he felt at work. His job as a social worker could have been connected with a certain stressful environment due to all the voice messages and emails. Eventually he decided to create an identity as someone who is having casual work and not working on developing a career. In New Zealand for instance he was working as a dishwasher and helped out in the kitchen at hostels. The reason why he refers to his current lifestyle as *a vacation* might be because he approximately would work ten weeks, then save as much money as possible in order to take two or three months off to travel around the country. This also highlights that Lee possibly is trying to postpone adulthood as he decided to give up his career while being in this *transitional period* where he had the opportunity to take on a new role as traveller, which relates to the next theme.

## A desire to take on a new role

Several factors underlie the reason why individuals decide to leave home. Some of the interviewees had a feeling of being too attached to something and then came to the conclusion that they wanted to do something else with

their lives. Sara for instance decided to leave France and in the following statement she emphasises why it was at this point in her life that she reached to the decision of going:

*“I arrived at a crossroad in my life where I was either settling down having a proper career and making my way in France or leaving for my dream. I always figured that my world trip should be when I’m young like I could do it when I retire but I wanted to do it while I was still young so I decided to take a break from my studies, from my boyfriend and to leave my apartment [...] and I realised that I didn’t wanted the strings anymore I didn’t want to have a proper career and I was not ready for it yet, so I thought ‘Okay I can go and maybe come back in three or four years after I’ve seen the world’ but the more I’m on the road the less it’s an option. I won’t go back to France because it’s not my life anymore I’m not the same girl that left two years ago” (Sara, 28, France 29:40).*

Not only did Sara decide that she wanted to take on a new role as a fulltime travellers but she also made a choice of completely renouncing her old identity as she do not have any intentions of going back to France. She mentions that she *didn’t want the strings anymore* and decided to cut the *strings* that tied her to France such as apartment, boyfriend and studies. As she is *reimagining her self-identity* and realises that the time spend abroad will be impossible for her to quit as she cannot associate with her previous life (Desforges, 2000). As a result she constructs an identity exclusively focused around the concept of constantly being on the road and seems to be more engulfed in exploring her new identity as a traveller. Sara expresses her situation as a *crossroad*, much in line with Giddens (2006) notion of fateful moments, as she needed to take decisions that had consequences for her future life. She arrived at a *crossroad in her existence*, which is much similar to the following narrative by Penny, who experienced a life-crisis or a sort of bewilderment of who to be and where she should go in life.

*“when I was at the university I thought it was a good idea to get married, to get a big scholarship that you get when you get married. So I used to be married for 10 years and we bought the huge house with the pool and all the stuff that people in my country like to own. This is the old life and at 29 I had the 30s crisis so I just decided to restart a new life which is more exciting, more amazing, more entertaining so that’s why I at 29 started to travel” (Penny, 33 French Canada 13:50).*

From Giddens and Sutton’s (2014) point of view Penny expresses her identities very clearly as she is talking about her *old* and her *new* life. Her old role were focused around university, getting married, having a big house whereas her new role is described much more positively. This can be considered as a *fateful moment* in Penny’s life as she took her life up to re-consideration when she hit the 30s crisis, which she believed was a way to restarting a new life, which is more adventurous and exciting (Desforges, 2000; Giddens, 2006). Furthermore she could be in the state of moratorium where she tries out some different identities e.g. when travelling in order to create a new sense of meaning in her life (Erikson, 1968; Smed, 2011).

## Curiosity

A lot of the people participating in this study emphasised *curiosity* as a reason to leave their home environment. A majority of the interviewees were making comments like “*I want to experience new things and meet new people*” or “*I’m a very curious person I would like to experience how other people live, how they understand the world, what they eat - everything*”. Some even said: “*I need to know everything and see everything*” (Eric, 34, Switzerland). This underpins the fact that experiences can be used as a way to support a desired identity (Jantzen et al. 2011).

Similar to the study of backpackers carried out by Richards and Wilson (2004) older youth travellers also are highly oriented towards obtaining knowledge of the host country they visit. On the contrary, the interviewees had a preference for settling down for a longer period of time and getting to know the culture more in depth instead of experiencing as much as possible, which backpackers analysed in Richards and Wilson’s (2004) study tended to prefer. Especially interaction with the local community was an important factor that influenced the desire to slow down, which could be a way to achieve a fuller tourism experience which in line with a previous study of backpackers (Currie et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, both this current study and Richards and Wilson’s (2004) previous study on backpackers agree on the fact that youth tourism can be distinguished from mass tourism due to the longer journeys and the willingness to be involved in participatory experiences (Pearce et al., 2009; Currie et al., 2011). Experiential factors seem to be an element that was important for the interviewees, but they also mentioned several other reasons which were more oriented towards intrinsic motives.

## The right time to travel

Many of the interviewees also argued that they left home environment because of some given circumstances and simply because *it was the right time* to undertake such a journey abroad, as seen in this statement:

*“I think it’s the right time. You can do it after you finish school but I didn’t do it because I did apprenticeship then I quit my job to study and I had the money. So it’s the right time to do it and I don’t want to work (giggle) it is more like a big holiday now and not a typical travel and work thing”* (Anne, 25, German 05:22).

Anne travelled to Australia after she quit her office work and stated it was *the right time to do it*, which also was stated by other interviewees. Anne further said that she did everything the ‘normal’ way such as she finished her bachelor degree, found a job and had her own place. Some circumstances made her quit her job and, influenced by one of her friends from Germany, she decided to travel to Australia. Anne was also at a junction in her life as she gave up her identity as working in an office and left her work responsibilities in exchange for a temporary job

on a sheep farm as part of WWOOFing<sup>16</sup>. This indicates a search for authentic experiences that could be found 'off the beaten track' (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995).

## Revealing the desire to travel

Distancing themselves not only from work responsibilities but also from the responsibilities that people in the home environment place on them was another theme that emerged during the conversations with youth travellers. In some cases it was the pressure from parents or significant others that were indicated as an unsatisfied feeling and a reason to leave the circumstances back home. One interviewee actually expressed how she kept her travel *a secret* from her parents up until five-six months before she left as she knew they would not support her idea of leaving the states. "Because they wanted me to stay on the street and narrow path; go to school, find a job, retire (laugh) I knew they wouldn't help me" (Belinda, female, 23, US 06:58). Another negative reaction from a significant other was presented by June, who stated the following:

*"Me moving away from family is not something new I have been moving around in Canada a lot. Canada is a pretty big country [...] so it's not really a new scenario for me to go a little bit further that's how I look at it. I know that people were disappointed. I had a pretty big falling out with my grandparents the very last day I was in Canada. But at the end of the day I have to do my own thing I don't really care what other people think. I think that why it's so easy for me to come here. My decisions are not influenced by their opinions; family or friends. I just do whatever" (June, 29, Canada 12:52)*

This individual constructs her identity as someone who easily can move around as she has done it in her previous life several times. Using the theory of Dixon and Durrheim (2000), who argue that 'who we are is where we are' could be a way of her saying that her place in the world is not attached to merely one particular destination. Even though some of her family members were disappointed of her decision to leave she came to the conclusion that she had to *do her own thing*. Just as Belinda, this individual decided to leave even though some family members did not agree with her decision. As Ryan (1991) previously has argued the decision making process may insinuate something about a person's identity and in June's case she might want to make a statement around the fact that she perceived her decision of leaving home environment as easy as she *do whatever* she feels like doing.

In the rest of the cases the home environment reacted more or less positively when the youth traveller told they were going to sojourn for an extended period of time. But in two cases the individuals did not tell the home environment until they had finalised the decision making process of sojourning. Mary for instance decided to keep her travel for herself until she was sure of going, and told her parents about her decision in this way: "I kind of bought it on slowly. I first started with 'I'm thinking about doing a small trip to Asia when I graduate' but I

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<sup>16</sup> Willing Workers On Organic Farms

*didn't really mention anything until I knew definite that I was going*" (Mary, female, 23, US 08:17). Lastly, Susan also chose to present her idea of travelling after she had booked her flight:

*"my family didn't really say anything (laugh) they were just 'all right' they just want me to be happy so I could do whatever I wanted to do. My friend were a little bit surprised because I had never really talked about travel and I always wanted to do it but I never really talk to my friends about it, I don't know why, so they were a bit surprised"* (Susan, 28, UK 04:25).

This individual might have had a more or less secret desire to travel as asserted that she *always wanted to travel* but never had the confidence to do it which might explain the reason why she never talked about it with her friends. Noteworthy, in the three cases above the individuals decided to leave for an unknown period of time and two of them actually intended to settle down else than country of origin.

In the following quotation Kate argues why she decided to travel and explains the realisation she had before reaching to the conclusion that she wants to sojourn.

*"I was not happy back in Germany. In the end I can't complain about my life in Germany. I studied, I had a great time while studying, I had a really nice boyfriend and we lived together and everything was fine but I was never really happy. I thought that I just put myself into things that other people wanted me to do like my mom or grandma, they said 'oh yeah now your studying that's good' and especially for my one grandma it's really important to tell other people what your grandchildren do and 'don't you want to get pregnant soon and bla' and all that stuff and it was just too much for me. I realised 'this is not really the life that I want for myself and I can't do everything just for other people, I somehow have to find my way in life'"* (Kate, 27, German 25:28).

Kate was not ready to take on the responsibilities as an adult and left the obligations at home as things were *'too much'* as she describes. Besides she was *never really happy* in Germany and in accordance with Smed (2009) thought travelling abroad could offer her a way to be more satisfied with her life. According to Giddens and Sutton's (2014) theory Kate choose to end an old identity where her significant others, especially her mother and grandmother, have been influencing the choices she previously had made. She realised she had to *find her way in life* but, as some of the other interviewees also emphasised Kate was not exactly aware of which new identity she wanted to construct. This displays a moratorium in her life where she is capable of exploring several identities without having to decide on a particular one (Erikson, 1968). Besides, during her journey she decided to break up with her boyfriend from Germany and explains:

*"he wants me to come back and find a proper job and get children and raise a family and all that stuff and at the moment I'm feeling like I found myself somehow. I'm still on my way and I'm still looking for the person who I really am not what other people wants me to be, so I'm not*

*keen to go back right now, I'm not finished on my way and I don't want him to wait for me any longer because I can't tell him when I will be finished with that"* (Kate, 27, German 20:30)

It makes sense that she does not want to return back to Germany as the process of exploring her identity not is finished. The decision to leave Germany can be linked with a desire to explore her self-identity and one can say her *self-identity was open to question* as she settled on travelling to Australia (Desforges, 2000). Giddens (1991) argues that identity is an ongoing process and as Kate still is in the process of transforming and creating her identity, she is *not keen to go back right now*. These statements indicate that Kate uses her travel as means to postpone the responsibilities of adulthood, which her previous boyfriend clearly wanted her to follow.

### **Influence from home environment**

As presented earlier Sara decided to completely cut the strings to France and did not intend to return. Some other travellers also emphasised the wish to 'escape' their home and to be secluded from the societal influences in their country. Robert went travelling around Australia in 2009 for half a year and had to *quit his journey* back to the Netherlands, he therefore had *an unfinished trip* and decided to return back to Australia, this time for one year, and he expressed a desire to get the 'ties loosen':

*"I don't want to settle down in the Netherlands yet. I want to have the ties loosen you know. Cut down a little bit"*.

Interviewer: *"you want to get what loosen?"*

*"The ties. In the Netherlands you are tied to family, to friends to cultural things, and all those things and I want to cut them down for a while. Be in another country and I chose Australia because I loved it the last time and I want to settle down here for a year"* (Robert, 17, Netherlands 01:15).

Robert uses the phrase to *have the ties loosen* as he temporarily wants to be unattached to the Netherlands. According to the push and pull theory Roberts' statement points towards emphasise on the push motives as he wants to escape the connections he has to the Netherlands. This seems to be much in line with a study carried out by Thrane's (2008) who discovered a strong escapist motivation among students who travelled overseas. Besides, the interviewer found it interesting to obtain knowledge about why he had this urge to travel before *settling down and why it was important for him to escape his home environment, where to he replied:*

*"It's more a personal development I'm into and I want to have a personal development without the influence of the Netherlands I don't want to be influenced by the culture. Do I want to be influenced by Australia? That's another thing. Yes, I have no reasons why I don't want to but it's more that I want to get out of the influences that I have already and develop myself as I am not*

*how people look at me and what they think I am. If I'm travelling I meet new people that has no clue about who I am so they don't put an image and don't read me like they think I am. There's a whole influence that happens everywhere and that influence is really good to get out of. Your own culture, own place and to get out of there. You have a place to rest and can develop different areas of yourself it's really good for your personal development to go travelling and things like that"* (Robert, male, 27, Netherlands 40:55).

In the case with Robert, he obviously wanted to escape the social rules and proscription from the Netherlands and decided to return to Australia (Stein, 2011). When he is away from his country of origin and culture he has the opportunity to act out a self-image that might differ compared to his identity in the Dutch culture (Crompton, 1979). This way of constructing his identity is much focused around the need to act out his self-image without the presence of people that he knows as *they don't put an image and don't read me* like people back home. Stein (2011) refers to this way of constructing a temporary new identity as a "vacation identity" where individuals freely can engage in unusual behaviour or to have an out-of-the closet behaviour.

As Roberts indicates that he uses travelling to escape the society in the Netherlands and to gain a wider and bigger aspect about life, which can be stated as *push motives*. Of *pull motives* he mentions: preference of being influenced by the Australian society above the Dutch culture, Australians tend to help each other out, and Australia is a safe country to travel in (A complete list of all the interviewee' push and pull factors that emerged from the empirical findings can be seen in appendix 5).

Similar to Sara, Robert has a desire to construct a new identity and emphasises that he perceives the trip as part of a personal development, which is in line with the theory of Crompton (1979). Moreover, Ateljevic and Li (2009) argue that youth travellers embark in a trip because of personal development which is the case with this interviewee. Besides, travelling allows Robert to explore and *develop different areas of himself* and in so doing developing a stronger sense of self (Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2005).

Clare from Czech Republic decided to leave her home based on various push and pull motives. Push factors: She wanted to separate herself from Czech people, which she described as *cold*, mainly because she wanted to improve her English and hopefully get a better job in the future. Pull factors: she chose Australia as it was *far far far away* and had a desire to travel to a *socially different environment* (Crompton, 1979). Paradoxically Clare ended up going to the same school in Sydney as her best friend from back home and was surrounded by Eastern Europeans as she was living with Czech and Slovakian people. Besides, she was travelling with a Czech female when the researcher encountered her. This indicates, as previous studies have argued, that some youth travellers might end up in enclaves that are similar to their home environment (Cohen, 2004).

As seen in the previous section older youth travellers' decision making process of leaving their country of origin is based on various circumstances. The common thread seems to be the somewhat negative mind-set of the situation and the life back home whether it was based on thoughts regarding unemployment, culture, parents, or a desire to create a new role and identity. In the case with Robert, it seems as though he wanted to *escape* the

Dutch culture and the influence people had on his way of creating an identity. The next part of the analysis will look further into the lives of youth travellers to analyse which and how they make use of consumption while travelling, mainly by means of accommodation preferences.

## Identity construction and accommodation type

One of the most important criteria that separate youth travellers from other subgroup of tourists is the preference for budget accommodation. However, it is worth noting that many of the interviewees were found by means of CS and it has obviously influenced the analytical aspect of older youth travellers and their use of budget accommodation. It can be discussed whether or not CS can be categorised as budget accommodation. Although CS not directly involves payment CS is, in this case, considered to be part of the budget accommodation market. Besides, the World Travel Trends Report 2013/ 2014 refers to CS as a *different kind of low-cost accommodation that has emerged in recent years* and furthermore lists it as 'private accommodation' (IPK International 2013, 23-4). Like backpackers and hostels no room rates exist within the CS community but the codes of practice normally entail a meal, a gift or something that can be regarded as having symbolic significance given to the host whom the surfer is staying at.

One of the interviewees that emphasised the preference for CS above hostels was Robert. When the interview took place he had been three weeks in Australia but he also went there in 2009 for half a year where he used CS. He explains the advantages of using this source as a way of travelling and why he also is keen on doing it during his second trip to Australia:

*"I really like the things that I see, but it's also because of the money. It would be a lot cheaper (to CS). You get so much more for it. That's the thing. It's really interesting to do it from while to while. It's cheaper, you have a lot of experiences and it's not just that it's cheaper, hostels are really expensive"* (Robert, 27, Netherlands 26:34).

From an economical perspective Robert believes that CS could be beneficial but he also highlights the *interesting experiences* he gets while doing it mainly because he could gain an insight into the life of locals (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). In line with many other interviewees contemplating hotel accommodation was not even an option exclusively based on financial thoughts. Almost all of the participants indicated that staying at hostels or other budget accommodations were rather expensive especially considering the fact that many of them were sojourning for several months and some even years. Seven of the youth travellers, which constitutes for half of the interviewees, had therefore found a more lasting solution to accommodate the issue of travelling abroad and had sub-rented a room or were staying at a shared accommodation. This was especially the case for travellers who knew they were going to sojourn for an extended period of time, those who had found a fulltime job and were more or less settled down at a certain city. Two of the interviewees had found another option as they were staying, sleeping and living in a car while being abroad.



*“the good thing is you can always park the car wherever you want. It makes so much difference between living in a car and living in a house, because a house can’t move [...] so you always have to get your car from your house and drive to a certain place, do your thing and drive back home. But in a car you always drive to a new place and that’s your home at this moments [...] and it actually just started with my backpack. That was my home first but since I got a car it’s of course a lot easier to travel [...] it’s getting so comfortable and easy to travel and live actually, so I think I can get use to it [...] Maybe some people say it’s not their thing to live in a car for a long time, but I would say I easily could live in a car and sleep and whatever in the car for a very long time because I don’t mind actually. It’s nice” (Ben, 26, German 13:10).*

In relation to budget accommodation Ben chooses to live in a car as it makes him very mobile and gives him the freedom to constantly explore new places. He even refers to the car as *home* which is described as being *safe, comfortable, nice, easy*, and realising not something everyone could do for a long period of time. During the interview the participant revealed that he never made use of an actual itinerary while sojourning, with good reason it seems as he emphasises the ability to flexible move from place to place (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004).

The other interviewee, who also travelled and lived in the car, had the following statement about planning the trip: *“I didn’t plan anything, I went here and my friend picked me up in Sydney and yeah we had a car and that was the plan”* (Anne, 25, German 02:28). This way of travelling is much in line with Pearce’s definition of backpackers who have a rather loose approach to itinerary compared to e.g. holiday package tourists.

Oppositely, Penny, who used a mix of CS and budget accommodation, underlined the fact that she needed to do a lot of planning in order to search and find the right hosts in different countries. In the following quote she presents some thoughts about CS in opposition to hostel and hotel accommodation:

*“when I’m travelling I just cut in the comfort like a big mattress. I’m not travelling as a princess I think it’s a really good thing because when I’m back in Canada I appreciate much more my things. I think it’s a good way to feel the local vibe of a country when you’re travelling like this (Couchsurfing) [...] Because if you’re only going to the big hostels you don’t meet anyone and it’s luxurious and this (Couchsurfing) is not. For example in Zambia you can book a 4 star hotel but you cannot feel what’s happening in the country because it is kind of hidden”* (Penny, 33, French Canada 11:27).

Penny statement refers to a number of the criteria presented by Pearce, Murphy and Brymer’s (2009). Firstly, she emphasises budget accommodation for two reasons; firstly, cutting down on her comfort while travelling, e.g. a big mattress, make her appreciate her normal way of living in French Canada which thereby is seen as more luxurious. Secondly, it seems like this interviewee has a preference for understanding the lifestyle and the culture of the country being visited, as she shows a willingness to be involved in local and social activities (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). CS is used as the mean to interact with locals in order to *feel the local vibe of a country* making it possible to discover the *hidden* culture of the country. Regarding the age criterion Penny mentioned during the

conversation that this probably was going to be her last travel 'like this' so the interviewer posed the following question:

I: *"you said this was going to be your last travel?"*

P: *"Like this way. Because I think I'm a bit too old for the backpackers and the dormitories and hearing snoring people, partying people going in and out at different time at night, and at my age I really need a good sleep and it's not really relaxing and it's impossible to travel 6-8 months only in the big hostels. If you do that you will do nothing because it's really expensive. So the compromise is to do backpackers/ hostels and some couchsurfing and it's going to be impossible to travel for a long time but for the next travel my wish is to share the travel with someone. Going by two and for a shorter time and renting some private rooms. This is my challenge for my next travel it's going to be different" (22:30).*

The quotation above indicates that Penny's preference for budget accommodation, such as backpackers and dormitories, is jeopardised by the need for a good sleep. She clearly distinguishes herself from the party people and will rather go for a short time in the future and have a private room. Undoubtedly her next trip will be *different* as it is *impossible* for her to continue sojourning for an extended time of period due to work responsibilities. Besides, she wants to combine staying at hostels with CS, on the one hand because of economical considerations and on the other hand because of noisy travellers. Furthermore she will probably not stay at backpackers on her next trip, which could be a way of saying that she still is in search of identity, as she puts it; *I'm a bit too old for backpackers*. This poses another significant component that will be further analysed later in the analysis.

## **Escaping home environment**

As already mentioned, people might have various reason to travel and to escape home environment. The reason why the interviewees used in this thesis made the decision to travel has already been analysed and to some extent they all highlighted they had the opportunity to sojourn for an extended period of time, and had experienced a state of disequilibrium. When directly asked the individuals would explain one answer but later in the conversations alluding more personal motives to leave home environment. Some of their answers will be introduced and analysed below.

June for instance highlighted in the interview: *"I think that one of the main things that helped me realise that coming here was a good idea was the fact that there is a good economy and there's good work here and you can get a good wage"* (June, 29, Canada 13:37). This can clearly be categorised as a pull motive but in the interview process June also emphasised that she could see a change in herself and the interviewer asked her what exactly has changed?

“...I’m more relaxed. I had really bad anxiety back home in Canada. Really bad. Insomnia. I was really skinny I couldn’t eat. I didn’t like being this type of skinny I was because I knew it was because I was depressed and insomniac and weren’t eating properly and just couldn’t seem to be that person that I wanted to be. Here I feel comfortable I want to try new foods, try new snacks, try different things. I like whom I am here. It’s different. And that’s a rare thing for me to say; that I like whom I am [...] I feel like because I don’t have the influence around me from North America like the friends. I feel like I am more who I want to be now, the person I want to be seen as now, the one that I found hard to be, like I used to drink every day, I used to smoke weed every day and I used to smoke cigarettes every day up until I came here and as soon as I left Canada I stopped. Mainly because everyone around me did that so I felt like I had no choice but to join in” (June, 29, Canada 12:50 - 28:06).

During this statement June asserts several reasons why she wanted to leave Canada and what is quite noteworthy is the strong contrast divided between Canada and Australia, as seen in the table below.

Canada	Australia
Depressed	Comfortable
Anxiety	Relaxed
No appetite	Trying out new foods and snacks
Being abusive	Quitting her abuse
Could not be the person I wanted to be	I like whom I am here

Table 3: June’s reasons to escape home environment

The most important factor that influenced her decision making process could have been the fact that she *couldn’t be the person she wanted to be* and had some rather unhealthy habits, which stopped as soon as she left Canada. Leaving Canada was synonymous with her leaving her old identity where she apparently surrounded herself with bad influence from her peers. Belongingness to the group of people who were smoking and drinking can be described as *affiliation* (Arnould et al 2004). Besides, it seems as though the pressure from peers were so strong that she has *no choice but to join in*. Saying goodbye to the influence from friends gave her the opportunity to try out and to create a new identity as the social role back home were part of her old life. One can therefore say that June actually was escaping the old person she used to be in Canada and used travelling as a mean to act out a new self-image (Crompton, 1979). This is especially possible as she went to a physical and socially different environment contrary the life lived back home (Crompton, 1979).

In the same vein, Belinda also expresses a desire to escape her home environment, as the author of the thesis asked her how she prepared herself for the trip, she answered: *“It was always something that I wanted to do. I*

*grew up thinking I wanted to be someone else so I don't perceive it as a big decision even though a lot of people say 'oh you're so brave'. No I'm not. I'm just doing what I always wanted to do"* (Belinda, 23, US 10:10).

Like June, Belinda did not clearly indicate which circumstances in the US that were keeping her from creating the identity that she wanted. It could have been the parental influence, whom wanted her on the *street and narrow path* as highlighted earlier. Likewise, Kate also stressed the pressure from her significant others as being one of the reasons why she left Germany, and she also added:

*"I wanted to learn English so I wanted to stay in an English-speaking country and I can't really tell you what (snapping with fingers) the thing was that said 'I want to go to Australia'. I think Australia was more a synonym for me to just leave everything else behind. To start new somehow"* (Kate, 27, German 24:44).

Kate from Germany told how she *felt kind of lost* after finishing her studies and during a trip to South Africa she realised that she wanted to improve her English as the communication with other people had to include signs with legs and hands due to poor English. As she had obligations in Germany (boyfriend) she decided to go to England where she worked as an au pair but the experience, and in particular the host family, did not exceed her expectations and she *gave up* her au pair job and returned to Germany after a few weeks abroad. It was therefore important for her to travel to a place where she could not just return home, like she did in an earlier situation. This might explain why *Australia was more a synonym to leave everything behind* and to start on something *new* as she previously had failed.

Kate also emphasised the societal pressure of finding a *proper job, getting children and raising a family* which was a common issue mentioned in different contexts by the older youth travellers. Lee for instance wanted a *break from his daily routine* as a social worker (Iso-Ahola, 1982). As he puts it himself he was *taking a break from 'real' life*. When questioning him further around the issue of having a 'normal' and 'real' life it was clear that the society forced him to act in a certain way:

*"normal by definition is an average of the normal people. What people do in general [...] Most people go this way so that's why I call it normal. But travelling like I do at 30 years old is not something that everybody does. Because you don't want to leave stuff behind which is more than understandable because they have a family, they have a career, because they want to push more into their career, they want to push more into the family thing, they want to push more into their life in general. They have too much to leave or too much to lose to leave everything behind and travel with a backpack... That's something you normally do when you are done with work. But not at 30 years old. My lifestyle is not really normal for a 30 years old man"* (Lee, 30, Canada 21:36).

Lee argues that most people act in a way that can be characterised as 'normal'. Since his *lifestyle is not really normal*, for a person at his age, he uses *differentiation* to describe his identity which does not follow the same

path as peers. When the interviewer asked him whether or not he wanted to settle down at one point and establish a family life, his answer was *yes*, but added: *“No not right now (laugh). Not for the next two or three years at least. Now it’s a world tour that I’m doing”* (Lee, male, 30, French Canada 37:58). This last comment indicates that Lee not quite is ready to settle down as he wishes to do a world tour for two or three years. He is thereby postponing the obligations of adulthood which people consider to be ‘normal’ for a person at his age (Hannam and Diekmann, 2010). Sara, who also was doing a world tour, had the following comment about her life compared to the ‘normal’ life her brother was living:

*“my brother doesn’t really understand. He has a ‘normal life’; a girlfriend, a baby, a home and a proper career so he doesn’t understand how you can throw away all that money for just being abroad and not having achieved anything. It it’s not an investment that I’m doing. For me it is. In my head it’s not a waste. For him it is”* (Sara, female, 28, France 12:51).

This traveller uses *comparison* to compare her life with the life of her brother, who is living a ‘normal’ life as she calls it (Arnould et al, 2004). This might be the reason why she believes he does not understand her situation. It could also be a reflection about the societal pressure that people living a ‘normal’ life, e.g. like her brother, place on her. For this reason she has decided to never settle down, which is an element that will be introduced later in this analysis chapter.

The last comment concerning societal pressure and living a normal life is based on a statement from Eric, the oldest youth travellers that were interviewed for this study. He had a lot of stories to tell and was, before the interview took place, telling some stories about his friends, who apparently also were travelling a lot. The interviewer therefore asked him more about his friends and asked if he had met them through CS, since he was an experienced member of the travel community:

*“a lot yes. Even in my hometown most of my friends are (from CS). I don’t have many childhood friends anymore. Because they developed in a complete different direction than me and we don’t even have the same topics in common anymore most of them have now families and bought a house, have a family and have this settled life that I’m not seeking at the moment. So most of my friends, I made them when I was already an adult”* (Eric, 34, Switzerland, 38:40).

Eric has during his life and adulthood taken a distance to his childhood friends, who has a settled life, and replaced them with likeminded travellers as himself. He argues that the reason is due to different directions in life. Eric makes a *comparison* between him and his childhood friends, who decided to follow a different path, which Lee and Sara refer to as a ‘normal’ life (Arnould et al, 2004).

## **Escaping daily routine**

Besides feeling a pressure from society to follow a 'normal' path in life several interviewees also highlighted a desire to escape the daily routines in home environment which is similar to the theory of Iso-Ahola (1982). Some of them will be mentioned in this section of the analysis.

Mary for instance wanted to escape the 'rat race' in the US and decided to follow whatever she felt inspired by, Greg stated *"If I get too much into a routine I just want to get out of it. For a year it's fine but after one year or one and a half year I try to get away again. Not stop working just work at a different place, meet new people"* (09:47). Greg also perceived his life in Germany as his serious life. Susan had been working since the age of 15 and did not succeed in finishing a degree and used to work within the hospitality field in the UK. She emphasised that the pay in UK is absolutely atrocious and found a much better paid job in Australia and explains: *"you don't need to be super professional, you can get around with messing around and having laugh and I've done desk jobs before and I drive me crazy to be stuck behind a desk even though the pay is so much better and there's more potential for a career"* (11:38).

This also indicates that Susan wanted to have a break from constantly has working and was fine with working with waitressing and bartending in Australia on a casual level. This is similar to the theory of Werry (2008) who place tourism as opposition to labour where travelling is used as a way to experience liberation.

As seen in the comments from youth travellers participating in this thesis it appears that tourism is used as a mean to deal with different elements in home country which they seem to be escaping from in various degrees. This desire to have a break from the daily routine was much connected with work responsibilities and some found it liberating to escape the job they used to have back home. This signifies that travelling for an extended period of time can be used to temporarily or permanently escape from obligations in relation to work related pressure or influence from peers.

Other individuals have a desire to construct a new identity in order to be the person, they believe they are, whereas others escaping from parental pressure. Moreover, several interviewees insinuated societal pressure as another reason to explore their self-identity, especially if the youth traveller were making a comparison to people of similar age living a 'normal' life. This indicates that especially older youth travellers take a distance to the normal way of going through the transition phases from youth to adulthood. If youth travellers perceive themselves as belonging to the *youth phase*, the *adulthood phase* or something else will be analysed next as it will help analyse how older youth travellers construct identities while travelling abroad.

## **Youth travellers and transition phases: It's an age thing**

Many of the interviewees seemed to be in a process and in progress of changing their lives hence transforming their identities. They seemed to use their previous life in home environment as a reflective stage as part of their live-span development from youth to adult. During the interview process the author of the thesis did not directly ask the participants how they would describe themselves but asked instead how they perceived their current

situation abroad. In many cases the participants were implying thought on their transition phase and one had the following comment concerning living a life abroad in comparison to his everyday life:

Interviewer: *“what do you think is still missing? You said you think there is something missing in your life”.*

*“Well kind of. I don’t know now. Probably that’s why. The thing is, I still try to get away from things. I don’t know what you call it. You know pay rent, find a house, just basic things you need to obviously do when you start to be an adult. Because what I’m doing now is I still feel free I don’t have things I need to look after; paying my rent for this one, I need to find a job for this. I feel I can still do what I want and that’s maybe kind of a childish though but maybe that’s why I’m still a bit of a child (giggles)”.* (Ben, male, 26, German 31:15).

The statement above presented by Ben clearly indicates his view on his own transition phase. What is quite interesting is the distinction between child/ adult without any youth. He realises that he identifies more himself as being a child than an adult. Separating himself from different contexts in their usual environment could be seen as a transition to be more ready to get through the phase from child to adulthood. His expression of wanting to *get away* from things like finding a house, paying rent, and finding a job might be used as a way to experience the state of freedom he is chasing. This indicates that he is using travelling as means to postpone the responsibilities of adulthood (WTO, 2008; Hannam and Diekmann, 2010). Besides, dreaming of obtaining freedom is a common issue mentioned in previous studies and in this case the feeling of being *free* is an intrinsic push motive.



Picture 2: Seen in Auckland, New Zealand (private photo)

In another context Ben also highlighted that “I think I’m still young, I can do a lot of things, so it doesn’t make sense for me right now to settle down; find a job, find a wife and find a house, just keep living the same life over and over again [...] I’m hungry for more adventures” (08:20). It looks like Ben is escaping from things that just put me down or put me into the place where I needed such as job, wife, house, which is connected to adulthood obligations. The fact the he refers to the ‘normal’ way of living as a life filled with routine, where individuals live the same life over and over again, sounds rather negatively from his point of view. This might be a reason why he actually considers his life in Germany as boring. In fact he said that he might decide on sojourning again, and he also

obtained his second year work visa to Australia which could allow him to satisfy his hunger for more adventures. These thoughts are similar to the findings of Richards and Wilson (2010) study: "People who travel to countries as relatively poor backpackers travel later as wealthier travellers and spend more money" (Richards and Wilsons 2010; 9).

Another interviewee who uses the expression *child* to describe her situation was Belinda. As mentioned earlier Belinda kept her travel as her own little secret and she said: "*I kept it to myself. Like my little green child I wanted to grow*" (Belinda, female, 23, US 07:51). The researcher did not know this expression and asked her more about this green child where to she replied said "*It's just a creation*" (ibid). Combined with the fact that she also asserted that she "*grew up thinking I wanted to be someone else*" indicates that Belinda still perceived herself as a child but actually wanted to grow into someone else. Leaving the US could give her the opportunity to have a "*period of enhanced personal freedom that can tell us much about how people choose to construct and enact an identity when social rules and proscriptions are eased, removed, or shifted*" (Stein 2011, 291). Moving away from home society allow individuals like Belinda to act differently than usual and to re-construct their identity.

Similar to Belinda, Mary was also 23 years of age and from the US, she used the phrase "I'm still relatively young" (41:58) to describe her view on self-identity. This is similar to her narrative around her some anxiety issues she had when she was *a bit younger* and refer to this phase as her *adolescence* (18:02). This indicates that she is somewhere between the phase of adolescence and adulthood using an extended trip abroad to, as she says, *challenge herself* and to put herself *out of her comfort zone*, maybe as a way to help her prepare for the next phase in life. Even though she articulate settling down would be a *relief* and something she *would love to do* she still believes it will be a *hard transition* to go back to the US and calls it *a down thing*. She emphasises that *starting a new life* back home in the US is difficult due to the *adventurous side* of her, implying that her current life abroad is a break from her life in the US. One of the final comments Mary gave during the interview was some reflection about her age, as seen here:

*"it makes me feel better though that most people I talk with at my age or early 20s are in the same way, even if they are doing their master's or whatever. It's still like a journey for all of us, we don't exactly know where it's leading to but you kind of just have to keep going and see how it goes"* (Mary, female, 23, US 54:05).

Using Arnould et al.'s (2004) theory Mary uses *comparison* to compare herself with *people at her age* to reflect upon her situation as a traveller. She is justifying how confusion is an acceptable feeling, as she still have not figured out what to exactly do with her life similar to her peers. This also point towards the idea of Giddens (1991) who argues that identity constantly is in the making and not a fixed part of a person's life. Mary is therefore on a *journey* of discovering her self-identity where travelling is used as a mean to help exploring how her later life should evolve.



On the contrary, when the interviewer introduced the purpose of the interview for Anne she laughed when she heard the term 'young people' and repeated it with an indication of a question mark, which could point towards Anne perceiving herself as an adult:

*“So many come here after they finish school to find themselves and that’s not the thing I do. I have already found myself for sure (laugh). I think when they are eighteen and come here without knowing what to do with their life and the future. But I already do [...] if you have never been to Australia you don’t know who you are? It’s so stupid. So many other experiences create you as a person not this thing (travelling) Maybe a little bit. I don’t think it’s so good to say in general that ‘I have been to Australia and now I know who I am’. So it’s the age” (Anne, female, 25, German 28:10).*

This interviewee underlined that young people need to do something on their own and highlighted later in the interview how she had handled things on her own; having her own apartment, and a fulltime job. This goes hand in hand with her opinion of travelling and 'finding oneself' as she highlights *it’s not so good to say in fact* she finds it rather *stupid*. Furthermore, explaining how eighteen years old travellers are finding themselves while travelling she is, according to Jenkins (2008), displaying something about her own identity. Anne believes that other experiences can create you as a person and seem to connect 'finding oneself' with a person's phase in life. Being almost twenty-six of age Anne should have found herself and she *differentiates* herself from people who are much younger. Detaching her from younger travellers and doing things *which not everybody was doing*, like working on a sheep farm, allowed her to explore new sides of her identity. Even though this interviewee distanced herself as constructing a different identity while travelling, she revealed that the journey enabled her to satisfy her quest for *personal experiences* (04:27).

A different view on 'finding oneself' while travelling is presented by this interviewee, who attached several comments on the issue of age and reflections of why young people decide to go travelling, he said:

*“I think that a lot of people are travelling to find their own place. I’m twenty-seven years old now and only this year [...] I want to be [at rest], I want to settle down so maybe it’s also definitely an age thing. Last time was at Ian’s (his host) place and I was thinking and really had the feeling “I really want to have my own place, settle down” buy my own things and stuff like that. Owning things. Settle down. This is new for me. It’s interesting that I’m beginning to have this feeling” (Robert, 27, Netherland 51:16).*

Roberts constructs an identity in relation to hitting a certain point in his life, which he links to his age. He is starting to feel a readiness to settle down, which opens up a new life for him since this feeling has not occurred before. As he, with his own words, decided to settle down in Australia for one year, might be a way to deal with the transition phase from adolescence to adulthood, preparing him for a life as an adult.

Robert, who also accentuated that he wanted to travel abroad to escape the influences from the Dutch culture, referred to people in the Netherlands in this way: *“they are more like ants working for the society instead of developing themselves”* (28:48). Furthermore, he also referred to people in the Netherlands as *robots*, implying he takes an even further distance to his home environment as they do not seem to take care of each other, which he emphasised several times that the Australian people do. For him it makes sense to explore his own identity and to focus on personal development, which his home environment seems to neglect. This interviewee calls Dutch people ants and robots, which might indicate a feeling of being *alienated* as he *differentiate* and separate himself from their influence based on a feeling of estrangement (Giddens and Sutton, 2014; Arnould et al, 2004).

The interviewee seemed to be quite aware of his transitional period from youth to adulthood as he stated *“I think it’s a little bit of a phase I go through”* (Robert, 27, Netherland 40:52). This point towards the matter that some youth travellers use sojourning, especially for several months or years, to re-imagine and discover an identity that can help them get through youth into adulthood.

Similar to Robert another interviewee expressed a feeling of alienation of her home country: *“...people in France are thinking that I don’t come from their country so maybe it makes me feel like I don’t belong there. So that’s maybe why it was easy to leave”* (Sara, 28, France 43:57). This comment displays that Sara is using sojourning as a way to establish a sense of meaning in life as it appears that the people in France were placing her in an out-group which made her feel differentiate from them (Tajfel, 1979). Hence, she is using travelling to create a sense of meaning in her life, as her previous life did not appear to satisfy her.

## **Comparison to other youth travellers**

Some interviewees chose to construct an identity on the basis of social identity theory either by *comparing*, *differentiate* or *affiliate* themselves from other individuals (Arnould et al, 2004). The next section will present some travellers that used *differentiation* to categorise themselves from other travellers and in particular younger youth travellers. One interviewee explained how she used to work as an au pair which she tried out the second time after finishing her studies and *“it worked out to a certain point but then I realised ‘it’s not my way, it’s not what I wanted to do, I’m too old for that’”* (Kate, female, 27, German 15:14). Not only did she feel she was older than other individuals who work as an au pair she also distinguishes herself from other travellers when she was travelling in Australia, as she explains in this statement:

*“I like staying more there (couchsurfing) than at the backpackers spending time with all the Germans, because I can also spend time with Germans in Germany so there is no need for me to do that”* (Kate, 27, German 34:54).

As the quotation indicates the interviewee prefers to spend time with locals, which she highlights is one of the reasons why she is using CS, than staying at the backpackers *with all the Germans*. Several comments were especially associated with young German travellers. Greg for instance said that everyone in Germany travel to Australia after high school: *“That’s what everybody is doing and most Germans that you meet here are 18-19*

*years old. But still some of them are travelling alone but most of them are travelling with friends and they don't really speak English or are kind of shy to speaking English" (14:08).*

Greg obviously tries to *differentiate* himself from the young youth travellers around the age of eighteen and nineteen as he during the interview highlighted that he wanted to communicate with locals and additionally he was staying in an apartment in Sydney where he was living with Australians, thereby insinuating that he was speaking English. Furthermore, he added this comment about the young Germans.

*"They have an amazing time. When you are coming out of high school and everything is really new for you like partying. It is really exciting wherever you go, but at twenty-five you've been to these parties so it's not that special anymore. [...] I went to a party here and stayed ten minutes, it was bad. I wasn't drunk enough and everybody else was too drunk". (Greg, 25, German 15:36).*

According to the theory of Jenkins (2008) Greg defines his identity when defining the differences that he perceives distinguishes him from younger travellers. It seems to be rather normal for eighteen and nineteen years old youth travellers to be excited about travelling and partying in Australia but being 25 years of age Greg does not consider this as something *special anymore*. This was re-confirmed as he decided to give it a try and actually went to a party when he once stayed at a hostel, only to verify that partying at hostels is for people travelling around Australia who just have finished high school. Another interviewee made a comment about travelling around in Australia and how she perceives herself and her trip as being different:

Interviewer: *"what did your friends, that also have been here, tell you about their trip to Australia?"*

*"there are all different experiences most of them were fairly young when they came out here so they did the stereotypical Byron Bay, up to Cairns partying along up the way so that was really hard for me to take in since I'm older now since I'm twenty-nine and I didn't want to do the same sort of thing. I feel like that was something you needed to do when you were twenty not twenty-nine and now I just don't feel like partying every single night so it seems different.*

Interviewer: *"your trip is different than your friends' trip"*

*"yes I would say so. Even just me going to Tasmania was already a start of my trip being different than everybody else I know. Even the people I knew from Australia" (June, 29, Canada 01:40).*

Again, using the theory of Jenkins (2008) this interviewee asserts how her trip is much different compared to the trip of people around the age of 20. She tries to be *different* than these younger youth travellers as she finds it hard to associate with people partying every single night, especially because they are following the stereotypical image of travellers which she apparently tries to avoid. Her comment can also be associated with transition

phases as she indicates it is acceptable for twenty years old travellers to constantly party but improperly for a person who nearly is thirty. Moreover, to underline the fact that she travels in a different manner, she adds that her visit to Tasmania, which took place in the beginning of her sojourning, also were acknowledged by Australians as being different.

The above mentioned comments shows that the people participating in this research takes a distance to the younger youth travellers and this is often done on the basis of comparison between 'us' as older travellers and 'them' as young travellers. Some scholars have argued that youth travellers especially tend to travel off the beaten track, even though they seem to follow a rather stereotypical itinerary, as June also highlights. Some of the interviewees in this research indicated that they wanted to travel in a different manner and in particular to stay at one place for an extended period of time instead of rushing from place to place and constantly moving. Furthermore it also illustrates that youth tourism cannot be seen as a homogenous sub-market of tourists as there is a difference between what old and young youth travellers demand when sojourning.

### **'Finding oneself'?**

As mentioned, a large number of the interviewees had some issues in relation to transitional phases and to take on the serious role as responsible adults. Furthermore some thoughts and opinions regarding finding oneself by mean of travelling have been presented, but the last part of the analysis will briefly present the views on finding oneself. All the people participating in the study made statements on the topic of finding themselves and to go in depth with one of the interviewees Sara will be used as an example.

One interviewee said during the interview session that she once met a girl while travelling, who cried because she was homesick. This made her realised that she never had cried of this reason. Instead Sara stated she had cried because she was *too happy* (29:52). She elaborates her answer:

*"I don't have a religion, I'm glad that people need religion to help them, but I don't have one. I think human beings need a religion to believe in something to go forward to in their life. If I have to say that I believe in something then, I believe in happiness. It's my leader in my life I'm just following my path to be happy and yes I'm really happy with what I do right now and that's why I'm not homesick because I know that even if it's a nomadic place, I found my place in the world, it's on the road and it's my best companion - the road. My backpack is my lover and that's it (laughing)" (Sara, 28, France 31:20).*

Sara uses an interesting expression to categorise her place in the world, which is a nomadic place as she has decided to settle down with her best *companion*, the road, and with her *lover*, her backpack. In line with Dixon and Durrheim's (2000) theory the destination choice is not limited to one certain place as her place is on the road living the nomadic life. She is feeling at home while being on the road as this establishes a sense of meaning in her life (Smed, 2009). Furthermore she presented this narrative about her experience of visiting a floating temple in Japan:

*“When you ask about that (temple) they don’t explain it to you very well and there is no book, there is no bible like we have or a Koran so; an interesting country, beautiful sunset, a new friend, nice animals around me it was just like... A dream... And I realised that I was smiling and that my cheek was wet because I was crying and yeah that was perfect. The floating temple for me was a very high moment, really really intense. That’s a really happy memory” (Sara, 28, France 42:05).*

Sara reached her dream of travelling the world, which she had dreamt of ever since she was a child, and visited a place which she actually categorises as *a dream*, this realisation of being able to visit a place that can be depicted as a dream could be the reason why she feels like she has found her place in the world (Smed, 2009).

Furthermore this statement shows that individuals can use consumption e.g. a trip to Japan or a world trip to construct a desired identity in which powerful feelings can be attached to the experience. In the case with Sara, it shows that she found herself living a life ‘on the road’.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to analyse why older youth travellers are sojourning and how such travels influence the construction of their identities. The empirical data constitutes of 14 in situ narratives that explores the desire to leave home environment and examines how they develop a taste for travelling.

The findings of youth travellers' narratives display that sojourning is used as means to deal with different elements in home country, which they seem to be escaping from in various degrees. Especially the desire to construct a new identity and to leave the old behind in home environment was a common result which were emphasised by the interviewees. Especially since the circumstances in home environment often were raised in a rather negative way.

Noteworthy, the findings of the empirical gatherings indicate that the desire to travel abroad often is developed early in the participants' life span; a majority of them highlighted either that travelling was a 'kid dream' or something they 'always wanted to do' while others recently discovered the yearning for travelling due to divorce or due to the breakup of a relationship. Many of the people participating in the study also revealed that the more they travelled, the further away they went. Furthermore, another frequent theme that was discovered in the master thesis was the desire to have a break from the daily routine. This was much connected with work responsibilities and some found it liberating to escape the job they previously had. This signifies that travelling for an extended period of time can be used to temporarily or permanently escape from work obligations and to take a break from 'real life' as one interviewee emphasised.

Apart from escaping work responsibilities in home country the older youth travellers also emphasised circumstances such as; bad influences, parental pressure, 30s crisis, curiosity, especially in relation to cultural and lifestyle experiences of the country visited, boredom and some simply just felt an itch of being 'on the road'. Of more intrinsic factors others went in search for identity as they believed travelling could be used as a way to explore who they really are. A desire to take on a new identity was frequently expressed by the older youth travellers as a reason to travel abroad for a prolonged period of time.

Moreover, several interviewees emphasised societal pressure as another reason to explore their self-identity, especially if the youth traveller were making a comparison to people of similar age living a 'normal' life. This indicates that especially older youth travellers take a distance to the normal way of going through the transition phases from youth to adulthood. Travelling away from home environment gave the youth travellers a possibility to discover more about themselves, making it possible to explore new aspects of their self-image or to construct a desired identity. This point towards the matter that some youth travellers use sojourning, especially for travels lasting several months or years, to re-imagine and discover an identity that can help them get through the transition phase from youth into adulthood.

This case study also point towards that some older youth travellers use travelling as means to escape home environment, some due to a feeling of being alienation of the society in their home country, others due to work responsibilities or societal pressure such as; finding a job, getting married and having children.

There were different reflections on the construction of identities but the majority of the interviewees stated in several ways how they used sojourning as a way to create a sense of meaning in their lives and in the meanwhile to postpone the responsibilities that were connected with adulthood. This thesis suggests that those in their mid 20s and early 30s find themselves in a transitional period where sojourning for a prolonged period away from home environment allows youth travellers to find themselves through identity exploration.

## Discussion

The findings of the thesis displays that a taste for travelling often is developed at an early age, which suggests that further studies in relation to youth tourism could be relevant to further analyse. For instance there seem to be a difference in the way mid 20s to 30s sojourn compared to the way backpackers or younger tourists travel. How exactly this influences the tourism industry is relevant to examine further as it is believed it will have an impact on e.g. accommodation type, interaction with host environment and the experience of travelling in general. This also calls for the fact that the tourism industry can differentiate their products in order to accommodate the different sub-group of youth travellers.

How older youth travellers' desire of achieving cultural and lifestyle experiences while travelling is worth to look further into, especially as previous studies show that younger travellers seek adventure activities and the desire to experience as much as possible, thus being able to provide better opportunities for tourists' experiences.

A longitudinal study of youth travellers, who uses sojourning as means to postpone the responsibilities of adulthood would also be interesting to investigate more in-depth as this study only focuses on a case study by means of in situ experiences.



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