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Tourism and the Individual

By the end of the chapter, the reader will be able to

- Define propensity and intensity
- Analyse barriers to travel and know how to disaggregate interest as a discrete barrier
- Understand the role of the leisure paradox in influencing travel over one's life span
- Analyse whether generational cohort theory or age-period cohort theory better explains changes in travel behaviour over time

Introduction

Tourism is a socially selective activity. While we may think that everybody has an opportunity to travel this is clearly not the case. Further, even among those who do travel, social, personal and demographic factors exert a significant effect on both propensity to and intensity of travel. This Chapter examines a range of factors that influence tourism propensity and intensity among individuals. It begins with a definition of these terms and then explores barriers to participation, the traditional leisure paradox and how it affects tourism and finally the role of generational cohort theory and tourism activity.

Propensity and intensity

Propensity relates to the participation rate, or the percentage of individuals within a population who travel. It is defined as the share of the population that makes at least one (holiday) trip of a specified number of overnight stays during a given reference period (Eurostat, 2010). Like all things in tourism, though, this simple

definition is not absolute, for propensity can be measured in a number of ways. Usually, the reference period is one calendar year or 12 months, depending on when the survey was completed. The length of stay can vary, with some European statistics looking at trips of four nights or longer (Eurostat, 2010), while others consider any overnight pleasure trip (Eurostat, 2017). The UNWTO, being an organisation that is interested in international travel, calculates propensity on the basis of the number (or percentage) of international travelers as a proportion of a market's total population.

Intensity or frequency is a simpler concept for it relates to the average number of trips taken over a given period of time. Again, though, the denominator can vary using either the entire population, and, therefore, calculating non-travellers as part of the intensity figure, or by focusing only on those who travelled. It is interesting to note that during COVID-19, a relationship was found between past and current intensity, with those who travelled frequently prior to the pandemic still likely to continue to travel, albeit at a less intense level, while those who travelled infrequently were most likely to forsake this activity (Boto-García & Baños-Pino, 2023; Song et al., 2023). This pattern has been attributed to pre-existing risk aversion attitudes (Lin et al., 2023).

Non-travel or limited interest in travel

One of the myths of tourism, especially in developed economies, is that everybody travels or at least has the potential to travel. Yet, one does not need to look very far to see the inherent flaw in this assumption. Some people may not be physically robust enough to travel. Some people may simply not want to travel. Others may not have any travel companions. Others still may not be able to afford to travel. In Europe, about 56% of residents took either a domestic or international pleasure trip during COVID-affected 2021 (Eurostat, 2023), down from the 62% reported in 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). Propensity varied significantly by country of origin, though, ranging from a low of a 24% in Bulgaria to a high of 81% in the Netherlands. Again, these figures are for COVID-impacted 2021 and are lower than in pre-COVID years. A study of Hong Kong (McKercher, 2009) showed propensity varied from the mid 60 percentile to the low 70 percentile depending on the state of the economy. Smith and Carmichael (2005) concluded that one in three Canadians do not travel. Overall, it appears that between one-quarter and one-third of residents of developed countries do not take an overnight pleasure trip in any given year. Obviously, this figure collapsed during COVID-19, while some say propensity may spike in the aftermath of the pandemic due to revenge travel (Tiwari & Chowdhary, 2021), although evidence supporting this assertion is mixed (Liu & Wang, 2023).

Our conceptualization of why people do not travel grew out of leisure constraints theory. This theory postulates that everyone wants leisure but due to a