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HAVE WE BEEN WRONG? GENERATION Z'S TOURISM STUDENTS' COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK-RELATED PREFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the work preferences of Generation Z tourism students, emphasising their distinct expectations towards work-related preferences. Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, has now extensively entered the labour market and is currently marked as a generation with a strong demand for flexibility, digitalisation and teamwork. A survey involving 142 Generation Z tourism students from three European faculties explored their preferences regarding working time flexibility, remote work and value orientation. The findings reveal that Generation Z tourism students prefer a combination of fixed and flexible working hours and favour on-site over remote work. Interestingly, despite being open to dynamic challenges, they enjoy routine tasks specific to the tourism industry and, moreover, they are highly teamwork-oriented and seek meaningful work beyond just financial goals. This article provides valuable insights into the needs of Generation Z tourism students and highlights the gap between employers' expectations and the actual desires of these future workers regarding employment in tourism. Adapting job roles to align with these preferences could significantly attract more members of Generation Z to the tourism sector.

KEYWORDS

Generation Z students, work preferences, tourism industry, flexibility, teamwork

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1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, one of the largest sectors globally, has long been characterised by its dynamic nature and demand for flexibility (Rangus et al., 2020) and creativity (Alegro & Turnšek, 2021). As the industry continues to evolve, so too do the preferences of its workforce, particularly among younger generations. Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012 (Barhate & Dirani, 2022), is now strongly entering the labour market, bringing new expectations and values that differ from those of previous generations (Špindler et al., 2022). Understanding their complex attitudes towards work is crucial for the future of tourism, as these workers will play a central role in shaping the sector's competitiveness and resilience (Yan et al., 2024). Previous studies suggest that Generation Z prioritises work-life balance, sustainability of values and corporate social responsibility, while seeking personal fulfilment and career growth (Goh & Lee, 2018; Kong et al., 2020; Lanier, 2017). However, there remains a gap in the literature, particularly regarding the specific work preferences of this generation within the tourism industry. Unlike other sectors, tourism is often seasonal, demanding high levels of flexibility and adaptability, which may challenge Generation Z's preferences for stability and balance (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). Given the sector's rapid digital transformation, the question arises: are existing employment models adequately meeting the needs of this new generation, or have we misjudged what they truly want from a career in tourism?

This article explores Generation Z tourism students' relationship with work in the tourism sector, aiming to understand their preferences and the implications for tourism businesses. By examining key factors such as work conditions, flexibility, work organisation and orientation of business, this research seeks to uncover whether current presumptions about the expectations of such students align with their preferences. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions on the future of work in tourism, offering insights that may help shape more sustainable and competitive employment models for the industry (Calderón-Fajardo et al., 2024). Understanding Generation Z's complex work-related preferences is academically significant and practically valuable for tourism employers. As the industry faces growing challenges in attracting and retaining skilled labour, adapting to the expectations of this tech-savvy, socially conscious and career-oriented generation is essential (Haid et al., 2024). Ultimately, aligning employment practices with the values of Generation Z could be a crucial factor in ensuring the long-term success of the tourism sector in an increasingly competitive and uncertain global landscape.

2. WORKING IN TOURISM

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015, p. 19) emphasises the importance of "full and productive employment and decent work" and highlights challenges in attracting and retaining hospitality and tourism personnel. As one of the fastest-growing industries, tourism offers many opportunities and employs many people worldwide (Rangus & Brumen, 2016), therefore, understanding changes in work is vital to modern tourism (Gorenak et al., 2024). With the increased demand for travel, working in tourism is attractive to those looking for diverse experiences, cross-cultural contacts and a contribution to global connectivity. However, working in tourism also brings challenges, especially with rapid changes in the worldwide environment (Bertocchi et al., 2020; Zeng et al., 2022).

Tourism work is highly seasonal, resulting in temporary and fluctuating employment (Baum et al., 2020) that provides opportunities for short-term work but, at the same time, creates instability for employees. Employees must be flexible and constantly adapt to new roles and technology transforming tourism, from digital reservations to artificial intelligence in hotel services (Stankov & Gretzel, 2021). Innovations such as online platforms, mobile applications and artificial intelligence are automating routine tasks while creating new jobs in digital marketing and data management (Alegro et al., 2023; Gretzel et al., 2020). In addition to traditional skills, employees must be technologically literate to thrive in this environment (Xiang et al., 2015). A high level of customer interaction requires interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and emotional and intellectual intelligence (Engström et al., 2003). Employees must balance customer satisfaction with operational efficiency, often in high-pressure environments such as hotels and airports, while adaptability is vital to mastering various tasks, such as problem-solving and crisis-solving (Baum et al., 2016). As tourism is a global industry, language skills and cultural competence are valuable while cooperation with international tourists improves the quality of services, and sustainability becomes increasingly important (Lin et al., 2021). Employees contribute to environmental efforts by promoting sustainable practices (Font & McCabe, 2017). External events such as crises and pandemics have significantly impacted tourism with the COVID-19 pandemic causing massive job losses and changing consumer behaviour, bringing a greater focus on health and safety (Sigala, 2020). The sector now strives for more sustainable and stable employment with better worker conditions (Baum et al., 2020). Employers are increasingly attracting young workers, mainly

from Generation Z, who are looking for flexibility, opportunities for development and compliance with ethical practices (Goh & Lee, 2018). Understanding these preferences is vital to retaining talent in a high-turnover industry.

3. GENERATIONS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Generations represent an essential sociological and cultural phenomenon, as individuals born in specific periods experience similar circumstances that shape their values, behaviour and attitudes towards society (Mannheim, 1952). According to the theory of Karl Mannheim (1952), individuals who mature at the same time are influenced by events and this leads to the formation of generational identities. Mannheim laid the groundwork for understanding how the socio-political environment and technological progress shape generational groups.

Later studies expanded Mannheim's theories, e.g. Strauss and Howe (1991) with the "generational cycle" theory, which argues that generations follow a cyclical pattern of archetypes based on historical events. Modern research (George et al., 2024) also considers technological progress essential in shaping generational views on work, communication, and social interactions. Understanding these differences is vital to effective management and intergenerational cooperation (Lyons & Kuron, 2014), so that organisations can reduce conflict and increase collaboration with appropriate management strategies, enabling a thriving work environment (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

The baby boom generation was born after World War II during economic prosperity, which shaped their values of security, loyalty and a work ethic (Leach et al., 2008; Yang & Guy, 2006). Generation X grew up in a social change marked by increased female employment and technological advances such as personal computers. They are known for their independence and pragmatism (Brown et al., 2015). Generation Y or millennials, who grew up with digital technology, are socially aware and prioritise inclusion and collaboration (Twenge et al., 2010). Generation Z is highly technologically savvy, mental health-oriented and has been shaped by events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic (Schroth, 2019; Seemiller & Grace, 2017).

Each generation brings different values to the workplace (Draxler et al., 2023). Baby boomers value loyalty and security, while Generation Xers seek work-life balance and flexibility. Millennials challenge traditional hierarchies and seek purpose at work, while Generation Z prioritises mental health and flexibility. Whereas older generations value traditional structures,

younger generations demand greater flexibility and inclusion. We will now explore in more detail the work preferences of Generation Z, which are becoming essential in modern work environments.

4. GENERATION Z AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS WORKING IN TOURISM

Each generation has specific characteristics that also affect the workplace. The characteristics of Generation Z are different from those before and are perceived as socially oriented (Dębski & Borkowska-Niszczota, 2020). Entrepreneurs of this generation are not limited to conventional corporate thinking, they are technologically savvy, ready to take risks and have good management skills (Yazici & Arslan Ayazlar, 2021). Therefore, Generation Z brings unique expectations, especially in the tourism sector.

Several factors shape Generation Z's motivation, and Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018) emphasise that enjoyment of work, team support, and opportunities for growth and learning are essential. Dissatisfaction with work, poor team dynamics and lack of purpose reduce motivation. Atmosphere and satisfaction can act as both motivators and barriers, reflecting the complexity of expectations – the social environment is vital – Generation Z thrives in those that encourage collaboration and open communication rather than rigid hierarchies (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). They value independence, self-confidence and happiness at work and if this is not possible, they will look for other opportunities. For them, work is not just a job but a way to achieve dreams and happiness. An essential characteristic of Generation Z is its dependence on technology, which is also expected in the workplace (Prensky, 2001), and it can either help or hinder tourism depending on its use (Monaco, 2018). It is essential because it enables more efficient work and corresponds to their knowledge of digital tools. While the first members of Generation Z entered the labour market shortly prior to COVID-19 or right at its beginning, many have started their careers being solidly welded to remote work (Dhar, 2024). Based on this there is no surprise that some studies have shown that up to two thirds of Generation Z workers opt for remote and hybrid work ("Two thirds of UK Gen Zs and millennials opt for remote and hybrid working", 2023), which goes with the fact that Generation Z members also value work-life balance and work flexibility (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). Enjoying work and achieving personal goals are more important to them than workload or job security and they are looking for jobs that embrace innovation and allow for flexibility. They value autonomy but

also feedback and instructions from superiors, while they are motivated by meaningful work, contributing to the community, and making a positive impact. Unlike older generations, Generation Z does not see salary as the main factor when looking for a job (Goh & Lee, 2018), they are more attracted to recognition, a good working environment and the feeling that they contribute to a company's success. They are attracted to jobs where they can make a real difference, such as tourism (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018). Many young members of Generation Z are attracted to jobs in tourism because of the excitement, travel and personal fulfilment (Goh & Lee, 2018), while their decision to pursue such a career, especially in their hometowns, is often linked to the reputation of the companies that want to employ them (Martínez González et al., 2017). Employers who promote a positive work environment and community development can attract Generation Z workers. Their sense of community and attachment to their hometowns, especially those designated as World Heritage Sites, strongly influences their career choices (Bermúdez-González et al., 2023). Based on this we could conclude that Generation Z prefers flexible working hours, autonomy, and on-site work if there is personal interaction and tasks that involve technology. They seek dynamic challenges, value teamwork, and like to work with meaning over financial gain.

Although Generation Z is often portrayed as a globally homogeneous 'digital native' cohort, comparative surveys show notable variation in work values and socio-political attitudes across countries (e.g., de Boer & Bordoloi, 2022; Faber, 2025). Such differences reflect local labour-market conditions, policy regimes and cultural norms, reminding us that generational labels do not override national contexts. Moreover, scholars disagree on whether observed gaps are true cohort effects or artefacts of age and period (Lau & Kennedy, 2023; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Our cross-sectional design cannot disentangle these factors; findings should therefore be interpreted as descriptive of European Generation Z tourism students rather than of a global generation.

5. METHODOLOGY

For this article, we are using data gathered from a broader survey. The data in this part of the article is presented for explanatory purposes so that readers can fully understand the study that was conducted.

5.1. RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

The research aimed to answer the following question: How do Generation Z tourism students position themselves across key work dimensions such as flexibility,

work location and task dynamics, and how do these preferences differ from common assumptions? We stated the following hypotheses:

H₁: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer flexible working hours.

The preference for flexible working hours reflects Generation Z's broader desire for work-life balance and autonomy, distinguishing them from previous generations (Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018). This generation views work as a pathway to personal fulfillment rather than mere employment, making time management autonomy crucial to their job satisfaction (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Their digitally native background enables efficient work across different schedules, supporting their expectation for temporal flexibility in managing professional and personal responsibilities.

H₂: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer remote work.

Despite their digital nativity, Generation Z values in-person interaction and the experiential nature of tourism work. Their preference for on-site work stems from their desire for meaningful customer interactions and cultural sensitivity development, which are essential in tourism (Engström et al., 2003). The dynamic, high-pressure environments of tourism, such as hotels and airports, provide the variety and personal engagement that align with their need for purposeful work and community contribution.

H₃: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer digital work tasks.

As digital natives who expect technology integration in the workplace, Generation Z naturally gravitates toward digital work tasks (Prensky, 2001). Their technological literacy enables them to thrive in tourism's digital transformation, from online platforms to artificial intelligence applications (Gretzel et al., 2020). This preference reflects their comfort with digital tools and their expectation that technology should enhance work efficiency and correspond to their existing digital competencies.

H₄: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer dynamic work.

Generation Z's attraction to dynamic work aligns with their entrepreneurial mindset and readiness to take risks while seeking variety over routine (Yazici & Arslan Ayazlar, 2021). Their preference for creative challenges reflects their desire for work that provides excitement, personal growth and learning opportunities rather than repetitive tasks (Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018). The tourism industry's inherent variability and problem-solving requirements match their expectation for engaging, non-conventional, work experiences.

H₅: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer teamwork.

Generation Z thrives in collaborative environments that encourage open communication rather than rigid hierarchies, reflecting their socially oriented nature (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). Their preference for teamwork stems from valuing team support and collective problem-solving as essential motivational factors (Fratricová & Kirchmayer, 2018). This collaborative orientation aligns with their broader social consciousness and desire to contribute meaningfully to group achievements rather than pursuing individual success.

H₆: The majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer value-oriented work.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z does not prioritize salary as the main job selection factor, instead seeking recognition and meaningful contribution to company success (Goh & Lee, 2018). Their preference for value-oriented work reflects their attraction to jobs where they can make a real difference and contribute to community development (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018). This orientation toward purpose over profit demonstrates their desire for work that aligns with their social consciousness and provides personal fulfillment beyond financial rewards.

5.2. INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire consisted of three parts, containing a total of six semantic differentials asking respondents about their work preferences. The statements used a seven-point Likert scale where value four (4) shows the exact *middle*. In contrast, value one (1) suggests a *very traditional working environment*, and value seven (7) indicates a *working environment presumed to be favourable* to Generation Z workers. We see the Likert scale as quasi-continuous (Chimi & Russell, 2009; Wu & Leung, 2017), allowing us to use selected statistical methods for conducting our research. The final part of the questionnaire consists of demographic questions concerning gender, age, education, study level and type of study.

5.3. SAMPLE AND VALIDITY

As noted above, the survey was conducted amongst tourism students in three different faculties in Europe where 928 students belonging to Generation Z were studying in the academic year 2023/2024. We emailed all of them, asking them to complete the online survey we had prepared. Thirty days were allowed to fill in the survey and we acquired a total of 142 responses representing 15.3% of all students contacted. Basic demographics are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of demographic data (average age: 22,2)

Variable		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	42	29.6
	Female	97	68.3
	Did not want to disclose	3	2.1
Study level	Bachelor's degree	118	83.1
	Master's degree	24	16.9
Type of study	Full time	126	88.7
	Part-time	16	11.3

Source: authors.

From Table 1, we can observe several of the respondents' demographic characteristics. The average age is 22.22. Regarding gender distribution, most are female, with 97 (68.3%), while 42 are male, representing 29.6% of the sample. A small proportion, three individuals (2.1%), chose not to disclose their gender. The data also highlights the educational background of the participants. The vast majority, 118 (83.1%), are pursuing a bachelor's degree, while 24 (16.9%) are enrolled in a master's program. Regarding the type of study, most are full-time students, accounting for 126 (88.7%), whereas 16 (11.3%) are studying part-time.

When analysing the fit between the sample and the population, we decided to compare the sample to the population using three different demographic data sets: gender, average age and type of study.

We obtained data on students from European Statistical Office portal (Eurostat, 2025). For the comparison between sample and population regarding gender we found that a total of 116,590 students were studying '1015 – Travel, tourism and leisure'. A total of 32.3% were male, and 67.7% female. When comparing this to our sample that includes 30.2% male and 69.8% female, we decided to perform a chi-square goodness-of-fit test. The test statistic was calculated at 0.89 with one degree of freedom, giving a *p*-value of 0.35. Since this is above 0.05, the difference is not statistically significant or in other terms, our sample adequately represents the population. The second comparison we did was based on average age. The European Statistical Office portal unfortunately does not provide age categories for students in '1015 – Travel, tourism, and leisure', thus we took information about students in general. Considering only students of Generation Z, so only those aged 18–28 at the time of data collection we have calculated that the average age of students in Europe is 22.06 (Eurostat, 2025), while our sample average age is calculated at 22.22. The one-sample *t*-test yielded a value of 1.949 and a significance *p*-value of 0.052. Although very close to the limits these numbers indicate that the sample represents population adequately. The

third comparison we did was based on type of study. The European Statistical Office portal unfortunately does not provide this information for students in '1015 – Travel, tourism, and leisure' either, thus we took the information about students in general. While amongst European students that represent our population, in this case 85.9% study full-time while 14.1% study part-time (Eurostat, 2025), there are 88.7% in our sample that study full-time and 11.3% that study part-time. In this final step, we performed a chi-square goodness-of-fit test on the sample and population data regarding the type of study. The calculated chi-square value is 0.941, which is less than a critical value of 3.841; thus, we can conclude that based on this parameter, the sample also fits the population. While we do acknowledge that we have compared sample to population directly to tourism students only in the aspect of gender, the other two comparisons because of the unavailability of data were made between the sample and general student population.

6. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

To test the internal consistency, we used Cronbach's alpha test, which is commonly used to assess the reliability of a set of scaled or test items.

We have included the six variables used in our survey, and the result showed a value of 0.771. Values of Cronbach's alpha in the range between 0.70 and 0.79 indicate acceptable reliability, while values above 0.90 indicate excellent reliability (Cronbach, 1951; George & Mallery, 2000).

6.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF VARIABLES

For this article, we will analyse the six statements we created based on semantic differentials. In Table 2 we present the descriptive statistics of these statements.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the analysed variables
($n = 142$)

Variable	\bar{X}	SEM	s^2	Skew
Fixed / flexible work	3.67	1.90	3.76	0.088
On-site / remote work	3.84	1.63	2.66	0.106
Analogue / digital work	3.80	1.58	2.50	0.112
Routine / dynamic work	3.73	1.60	2.55	-0.080
Individual / teamwork	4.62	1.52	2.32	-0.347
Profit / value-oriented work	4.66	1.57	2.47	-0.282

Note: \bar{X} – sample mean, SEM – standard error of the mean, s^2 – sample variance, Skew – skewness.

Source: authors.

As we can see from Table 2, we received responses from 142 respondents to all six semantic differentials created. In the first variable, we asked the respondents to determine if they prefer fixed working hours (working a fixed schedule) or variable working hours (working schedule varies from week to week). The mean value was 3.67 with a standard error of 1.90 and a skewness coefficient of 0.088. In the second variable, we asked respondents if they would prefer on-site work (working from a designated location) or remote work (working from home or any remote location). The mean value of responses was 3.84, with a standard error of 1.63, and a skewness coefficient of 0.106. For the third variable, we asked whether respondents preferred analogue work (traditional working methods) or digital work (using digital tools and platforms). The mean value was 3.80, with a standard error of 1.58, and a skewness coefficient of 0.112. In the fourth variable, respondents were asked if they preferred routine work (structured and predictable tasks) or dynamic work (varied and changing tasks). The mean value was 3.73, with a standard error of 1.60, and a skewness coefficient of -0.080. For the fifth variable, we asked respondents to choose between working individually (solo tasks) or in teams (collaborative tasks). The mean value was 4.62, with a standard error of 1.52, and a skewness coefficient of -0.347. In the sixth variable, respondents were asked if they prioritised profit-oriented work (focused on financial outcomes) or value-oriented work (focused on meaningful or purpose-driven outcomes). The mean value was 4.66, with a standard error of 1.57, and a skewness coefficient of -0.282.

The results presented in Table 2 were, in some cases, somewhat surprising. Thus, we decided to look deeper into each variable described above, and the results are shown in Tables 3 to 8.

As we can see from Table 3, the responses indicate a balanced distribution of preferences regarding fixed versus flexible working hours. A total of 33.8% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward fixed working hours (working schedule is fixed), with another 14.1% (those selecting 3) slightly favouring fixed hours. Meanwhile, 12.0% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer flexible working hours, and 24.6% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more flexible schedules (working schedules vary from week to week). Notably, 15.5% chose 4, reflecting a completely neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between fixed or flexible working hours. This suggests a relatively even spread of opinions, with no overwhelming consensus, however, respondents lean slightly more towards fixed working hours in general.

Table 3. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing fixed vs flexible working hours

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – Fixed working hours	26	18.3
2	22	15.5
3	20	14.1
4	22	15.5
5	17	12.0
6	26	18.3
7 – Flexible working hours	9	6.3
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal, they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly fixed with minor adjustments; 3 – Fixed core hours with some flexibility; 4 – Moderate flexibility; 5 – Significant flexibility with some constraints; 6 – High flexibility with minimal restrictions.

Source: authors.

As we can see from Table 4, the responses indicate a varied distribution of preferences regarding on-site versus remote work. A total of 22.6% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward on-site work (working from a designated location), with another 18.3% (those selecting 3) slightly favouring on-site work. Meanwhile, 14.1% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer remote work, and 17.6% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more remote work (working from home or another location). Notably, 27.5% chose 4, reflecting a completely neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between on-site or remote work. This suggests that while opinions are spread across the spectrum, a significant portion remains neutral, with no overwhelming consensus toward either working mode, however, respondents lean slightly more towards on-site work in general.

As we can see from Table 5, the responses indicate a broad distribution of preferences regarding analogue versus digital work tasks. A total of 22.5% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward analogue work tasks (traditional, non-digital methods), with another 18.3% (those selecting 3) slightly favour analogue work. Meanwhile, 12.7% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer digital work tasks, and 16.9% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more digital work (using digital tools and platforms). Notably, 29.6% chose 4, reflecting a completely neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between analogue or digital work tasks. This suggests a relatively even spread of opinion, with a significant portion of respondents remaining neutral and no strong inclination toward either approach to work tasks, however, respondents lean slightly more towards analogue work tasks.

Table 4. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing on-site vs remote work

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – On-site work	12	8.5
2	20	14.1
3	26	18.3
4	39	27.5
5	20	14.1
6	16	11.3
7 – Remote work	9	6.3
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal, they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly on-site with occasional remote; 3 – On-site with some remote flexibility; 4 – Hybrid with more on-site; 5 – Balanced hybrid; 6 – Mostly remote with occasional on-site.

Source: authors.

Table 5. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing analogue work vs digital work tasks

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – Analogue work tasks	11	7.7
2	21	14.8
3	26	18.3
4	42	29.6
5	18	12.7
6	17	12.0
7 – Digital work tasks	7	4.9
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal, they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly analogue with minimal digital tools; 3 – Analogue-focused with some digital support; 4 – Mixed analogue and digital methods; 5 – Digital-focused with some analogue elements; 6 – Mostly digital with minimal analogue tasks.

Source: authors.

As we can see from Table 6, the responses indicate a varied distribution of preferences regarding routine versus dynamic work tasks. A total of 24.0% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward routine work tasks (structured and predictable tasks), with another 16.2% (those selecting 3) slightly favouring routine work. Meanwhile, 18.3% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer dynamic work tasks, and 13.4% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more dynamic work (varied and changing tasks). Notably, 28.2% chose 4, reflecting a completely

neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between routine or dynamic work tasks. That suggests that while there is a diversity of opinion, many respondents remain neutral, with no strong preference toward either type of work task, however, respondents lean slightly more towards routine work tasks.

Table 6. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing routine vs dynamic work tasks

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – Routine work tasks	17	12.0
2	17	12.0
3	23	16.2
4	40	28.2
5	26	18.3
6	14	9.9
7 – Dynamic work tasks	5	3.5
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal, they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly routine with occasional variations; 3 – Routine-focused with some dynamic elements; 4 – Mixed routine and dynamic tasks; 5 – Dynamic-focused with some routine elements; 6 – Mostly dynamic with minimal routine tasks.

Source: authors.

As we can see from Table 7, the responses indicate a varied distribution of preferences regarding individual versus teamwork. A total of 9.1% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward individual work (solo tasks), with another 11.3% (those selecting 3) slightly favouring individual work. Meanwhile, 18.3% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer teamwork, and 33.1% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more teamwork (collaborative tasks). Notably, 28.2% chose 4, reflecting a completely neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between individual and teamwork, which suggests that while there is a diversity of opinion, and although many respondents remain neutral, more favour teamwork.

As we can see from Table 8, the responses indicate a varied distribution of preferences regarding profit-oriented versus value-oriented work. A total of 11.3% (those selecting 1 and 2) lean toward profit-oriented work (focused on the financial outcome), with another 9.9% (those selecting 3) slightly favouring profit-oriented work. Meanwhile, 18.3% (those selecting 5) slightly prefer value-oriented work, and 34.5% (those selecting 6 and 7) lean toward more value-oriented work (focused on meaningful or purpose-driven outcomes). Notably, 26.1% chose 4, reflecting a completely neutral stance, indicating no clear preference between profit- and value-oriented work. This suggests that while there

is a diversity of opinion, many respondents remain neutral, however more respondents favour value-oriented work.

Table 7. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing individual work vs teamwork preferences

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – Individual work	5	3.5
2	8	5.6
3	16	11.3
4	40	28.2
5	26	18.3
6	32	22.5
7 – Teamwork	15	10.6
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly individual with occasional collaboration; 3 – Individual-focused with some team interaction; 4 – Mixed individual and team tasks; 5 – Team-focused with some individual work; 6 – Mostly teamwork with minimal individual tasks.

Source: authors.

Table 8. Detailed analysis of the responses for the variable analysing profit-oriented vs value-oriented work

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
1 – Profit oriented work	3	2.1
2	13	9.2
3	14	9.9
4	37	26.1
5	26	18.3
6	30	21.1
7 – Value oriented work	19	13.4
Total	142	100.0

Note: Values 2–6 were not given to the respondents, however for the purpose of following the guidelines of the journal they could be labelled as: 2 – Mostly profit-driven with some value considerations; 3 – Profit-focused with some value integration; 4 – Mixed profit and value objectives; 5 – Value-focused with some profit considerations; 6 – Mostly value-driven with minimal profit focus.

Source: authors.

7. FINDINGS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study provides a comprehensive exploration of the work preferences of Generation Z tourism students, addressing six key dimensions: flexibility, work

location, task dynamics, individual versus teamwork and value-oriented versus profit-driven work. As we have used a quasi-continuous Likert scale, we have combined answers 1–3 on one side and 5–7 on the other, with answer 4 being completely neutral thus being analysed separately.

The data show that Generation Z tourism students exhibit a relatively balanced preference between fixed and flexible work hours. Table 3 reveals that 47.9% of respondents prefer fixed working hours, while 36.6% lean toward flexible schedules, with 15.5% remaining neutral. This result rejects the first hypothesis (H_1), that the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer flexible working hours. Referring to Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018), Generation Z values autonomy and appreciates workplaces that allow them to balance their personal and professional lives while prioritising flexibility. They also value independence (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). In fact, a substantial portion of respondents in this work demonstrate a preference for fixed schedules, suggesting that flexibility may not be as critical for Generation Z tourism students as previously assumed. This may be influenced by the structured nature of the tourism industry, where operating hours often require adherence to specific schedules. The results show that they value their free time and want to draw a strict line between it and working hours. Also, as Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018) state, how working hours are organised matters less to them compared to enjoying their work and reaching personal goals.

Contrary to expectations that Generation Z tourism students would prefer remote work in the second hypothesis (H_2), that the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer remote work; the findings show a slight inclination toward on-site work. Table 4 indicates that 40.9% prefer on-site work, while 31.7% favour remote work, with 27.5% remaining neutral, thus rejecting the hypothesis. This distribution implies that Generation Z tourism students may value the in-person, experiential aspects of their jobs, which aligns with the nature of the tourism industry. Although Generation Z is looking for new experiences and adventures that come with a career in tourism (Brown et al., 2015; Buzinde et al., 2018), the sector often demands physical presence, especially in customer-facing roles where interaction with clients and immersion in the local culture are essential. Thus, while remote work has gained prominence in many industries, Generation Z tourism students seem to prioritise the hands-on experiences that comes with being on-site.

Regarding the preference between analogue and digital work tasks, the results show a slight preference for analogue tasks. Table 5 reveals that 40.8% prefer analogue tasks, while 29.8% favour digital tasks, with 29.6% remaining neutral. The third hypothesis (H_3), that

the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer digital work tasks, is also rejected. A significant trait of Generation Z is their reliance on technology; they have grown up surrounded by it, so they expect to see it in their work environment (Prensky, 2001). However, despite the general assumption that Generation Z is more comfortable with digital technologies due to their upbringing in the digital age, this slight preference for analogue tasks might reflect the specific demands of the tourism industry, where personal, face-to-face interactions are often valued over digital solutions. Furthermore, the neutral responses from 29.6% of the sample may indicate a willingness to work in analogue and digital environments, suggesting that Generation Z tourism students are adaptable and open to various task formats.

In terms of task variety, the findings show a relatively neutral stance among Generation Z tourism students, with a slight preference for routine tasks over dynamic ones. Table 6 shows that 40.2% prefer routine tasks, while 31.7% lean toward dynamic tasks, and 28.2% expressing neutrality. This result rejects the fourth hypothesis (H_4), that the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer dynamic work. Many representatives of Generation Z are attracted to tourism jobs because they offer excitement, travel opportunities, and personal fulfilment (Goh & Lee, 2018). However, the tourism industry often involves repetitive tasks such as administrative duties or customer service interactions, which may explain why some respondents prefer routine tasks. However, the significant neutral responses suggest that Generation Z tourism students are open to a balance between routine and dynamic tasks, potentially thriving in environments where both are present.

A stronger preference is observed for teamwork over individual work. This supports the fifth hypothesis (H_5), that the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer teamwork. Table 7 shows that 51.5% favour teamwork, while 20.4% lean toward individual work, the remaining 28.4% are neutral. These results compare well with the findings of Dangmei and Singh (2016), who state that this generation thrives in settings that encourage teamwork and open communication rather than rigid hierarchies. The preference for teamwork may reflect Generation Z's inclination toward collective problem-solving and collaboration, which aligns well with the tourism industry, where teamwork is often essential for delivering seamless customer experiences. The significant proportion of neutral responses (28.4%) also suggests that while teamwork is valued, some respondents are open to individual tasks, particularly in roles that require a combination of both. That aligns with the findings of Fratričová and Kirchmayer (2018), who point out that enjoying their work, having a supportive team, opportunities for career growth, and continuous learning are crucial for this generation.

The results of this research also support the final sixth hypothesis (H_6), that the majority of Generation Z tourism students prefer value-oriented work. These findings align with previous research that Generation Z does not see salary as the main factor when looking for a job (Goh & Lee, 2018). As Kirchmayer and Fratričová (2018) state, they desire meaningful work, community engagement, and the chance to create a positive impact. Table 8 shows that 52.8% of respondents lean toward value-oriented work, while only 21.2% favour profit-oriented work, with 26.1% expressing neutrality. This finding aligns with broader research on Generation Z, which consistently shows that they are more purpose-driven in their career choices and value the pursuit of happiness at work (Dangmei & Singh, 2016). As Goh and Lee (2018) further point out, they care more about being recognised for their efforts, having a good work environment, and feeling like they are helping the company succeed.

In the tourism industry, where experiences and meaningful interactions are central, organisations that emphasise sustainability, social responsibility and meaningful customer experiences will likely appeal more to such students and future workers. Based on the findings of all six hypotheses, we have created a spider diagram based on mean values indicated in Table 2, which shows the preferences of Generation Z tourism students, the results of which are shown in Figure 1.

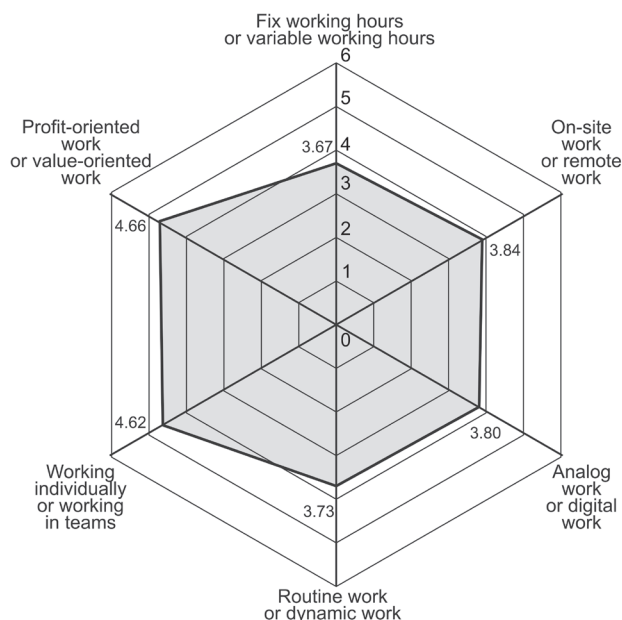


Figure 1. Spider diagram of the key work dimension preferences of Generation Z tourism students

Source: authors

These findings have important implications for tourism organisations seeking to attract and retain Generation Z tourism students and future employees.

The balanced preference for both fixed and flexible work hours suggests that employers should offer varied scheduling options to accommodate diverse employee needs, with some workers thriving on predictable schedules and others valuing flexibility, particularly in roles not requiring constant on-site presence. While remote work is not a top priority for Generation Z tourism students, offering occasional remote or hybrid options, especially in administrative or digital marketing roles, could enhance job satisfaction by appealing to those who value autonomy. Additionally, tourism employers should embrace both analogue and digital work environments, providing digital tools for efficiency while preserving the human-centred interactions central to the industry. Striking this balance will align with Generation Z's adaptability. Furthermore, emphasising teamwork and socially responsible, purpose-driven initiatives in recruitment strategies will likely resonate with such students, who prioritise meaningful work and collaborative environments, helping tourism organisations position themselves as attractive, value-driven employers.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Our research challenges common generalizations about Generation Z by examining the work preferences of tourism students, revealing how industry-specific socialization shapes attitudes differently from broader youth populations. We show how tourism organisations can attract and retain this workforce by examining six key dimensions – flexibility, work location, task dynamics, individual vs teamwork and value- or profit-oriented work.

An important finding is a balanced preference for fixed and flexible working hours, challenging the belief that Generation Z prefers flexibility. Although previous research has identified flexibility as key (Dangmei & Singh, 2016; Kirchmayer & Fratričová, 2018), our study shows that many prefer fixed schedules. This reflects the operational requirements of the tourism industry, where a clear line between professional and private life is valued. Employers should, therefore, offer a variety of schedules (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Also, the slight preference for on-site work is at odds with expectations that Generation Z, brought up in the digital age, will favour remote work. Our findings show they value the personal interaction and cultural immersion essential to tourism. Tourism organisations should offer hybrid options where possible, but the hands-on nature of the industry remains vital to job satisfaction (Halová & Müller, 2021).

Surprisingly, Generation Z tourism students prefer analogue tasks over digital, even though they are

digital natives. That may be due to the emphasis on personal interactions, where digital solutions do not consistently deliver a better experience. Generation Z seems flexible, so a balanced approach between analogue and digital tasks is optimal (Jung & Yoon, 2021). The preference for routine over dynamic tasks emphasises the need for balance. Although tourism is associated with diversity, many Generation Z tourism students are comfortable with routine, reflecting the repetitive nature of some roles. Employers should provide a balance between routine and variety to keep employees engaged. Teamwork is still vital, as Generation Z tourism students that value collaboration and collective problem-solving, which are essential for delivering a great user experience. Employers should encourage a team environment and open communication (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Finally, a strong preference for values over profit emphasises the desire for meaningful employment. This aligns with the tourism industry's increasing emphasis on sustainability and ethics. Employers prioritising social responsibility and community involvement are more likely to attract Generation Z tourism students to become their future employees.

These findings highlight the limitations of broad generalizations about Generation Z work preferences, which often stem from journalistic oversimplification. Our results suggest that work attitudes are significantly influenced by industry-specific socialization and may vary considerably across different national contexts and educational systems.

In short, while some Generation Z members' preferences align with broader assumptions, others, such as flexibility and technology, challenge dominant views. Tourism employers should adopt a flexible approach, offer varied schedules, a mix of analogue and digital tasks, and emphasise teamwork and values. This will help shape sustainable and competitive employment models in tourism.

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