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Exploring Influences on Backpacker Transport Choice

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Exploring influences on Backpacker Transport Choice

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Abstract

This paper describes and discusses part of a study that explores the complex and multifaceted area of transport network choice made by independent travellers – or as they are commonly known – backpackers. In doing so the paper reviews several areas of literature that are of direct relevance to the field of study and in doing so, explores and proposes a definition of exactly what constitutes a backpacker. In support of this the importance of the field of independent travel is discussed – both to the tourism industry generally and to host communities. Following this a conceptual framework of the factors that influence the choice of transport methods by backpackers is proposed and discussed.

1   Preamble

There appears to be little doubt of the development of interest in backpacking or independent travel[1] as an academic research area. Not only is this reflected in the ATLAS research group; the inaugural research conference and forthcoming text on the subject, but also by the growth in academic journal articles devoted to the subject (cf. Ryan and Mohsin (2001); Schevyens (2001); Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002)). Scarce within the growth of empirical research and, more specifically, within academic literature in the area is consideration of the transport methods used by the burgeoning backpacker market. Nor is any detailed consideration given to the range of factors underpinning the decision-making behaviour of backpackers using the transport methods.

The aim of this paper is to address this gap in the academic literature. Crucially, when considering this paper, it should be taken into account that [as Dellaert, Ettema and Lindh (1998) discuss] the choices made for travel methods employed are not single independent choices. Many of the decisions made are complex and multi-faceted, with inter-relationships to other services used, such as accommodation and activities.

This working paper presents the first part of a study that examines the factors that influence transport method choice in backpacking. An important part of this is consideration of the range of literature that underpins the area of backpacker transport operators. From this a conceptual framework has been developed and this is illustrated and discussed. Following this, some issues concerning implementing this conceptual framework within backpacking destinations are given and a discussion made of these.

2   Aim of the study

The study reported in this paper is very much a developmental piece of work in that – as previously mentioned – there is little theoretical underpinning directly within the area. The discussion and material presented within this paper concerns effectively what is the first stage of the project. The overall aim of the study is to –

'Develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence backpacker transport choice'

In order to achieve this aim in the longer term the first stages have been to perform a literature review and, from this develop a conceptual framework of the factors that influence the transport method choice in backpacking destinations. Consequently the conceptual model proposed and discussed in this paper is very much at an early stage and draws upon a range of literature, part of which is discussed in the next section. This paper presents the conceptual model for debate and comment. In addition to this, debate in this paper also develops the area of transport choice in backpacking destinations.

3   Need for the Study

Independent travel is a growing and important market sector – although estimates of value are difficult to obtain. Australian national tourism authorities have recently highlighted the importance of the sector, recognising that backpackers are the second highest visitors in terms of expenditure, behind study related visitors[2]. A recent publication by the Australian Tourism Council reports the results of a survey implemented by Student Uni Travel and TNT Magazine Australia[3].

The survey reported utilised a sample of 881 backpackers travelling in Australia. Although the survey covers many aspects, the most relevant is expenditure. The findings of the survey are illustrated in Figure 1. Data from the Australia Bureau of Tourism Research (reported in the above survey) states that average expenditure by visitors to Australia is AUD$2123. It can then be observed from the survey findings reported in Figure 1, that a *significant* proportion of backpackers are likely to spend in excess of this figure.

Of course, visits made by backpackers are likely to be of a longer duration, so if *per diem* expenditure is examined this assertion does not hold true. It is important to note though, that expenditure by backpackers is much more likely to be at the community level and as such subject to substantially less revenue leakage from the destination[4].
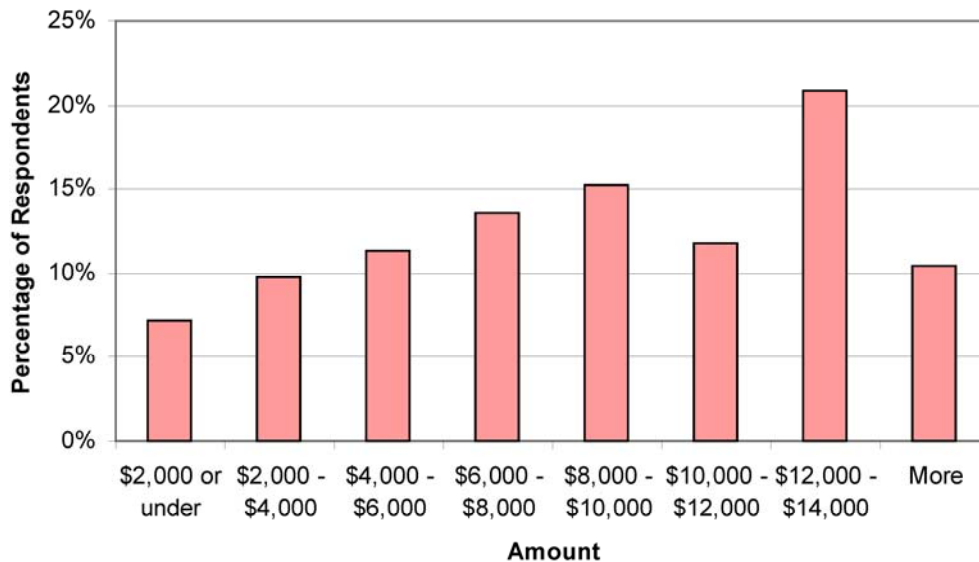
Figure 1 - In Australian dollars, how much do you plan to spend during your whole stay here in Australia?   Source: Anon (2002)

Supporting the previous assertion of the importance of the backpacker market, Mintel (2000) estimate that independent travel as a market segment (including amongst others the backpacking 'sector') has a value of £8.3 billion per annum.

As informative as the data is, crucially, very few tourism sectors hold such promise of economic development opportunities (as highlighted in Hampton (1998), Schevyens (2002) and others) or the opportunity for developing small, sustainable business networks. Evidence of these small-scale sustainable business networks can be observed in many backpacker destinations. Examples of these are the Backpacker Industry Marketing Group based along the Garden Route area of Southern South Africa and the Budget Backpacker Hostel (BBH) network in New Zealand.

The Backpacker Industry Marketing Group network collaborates in promoting the region as a destination and has (in the past) worked with backpacker transport operator servicing the region – the 'Baz Bus'. The BBH network in New Zealand does not appear to explicitly collaborate with transport operators – although they have a mutually supportive marketing relationship[5].

In developing this theme of sustainable business networks, literature from Ateljevic and Doorne (2001) comments on the role of backpacker transport networks in developing networks of small firms and tourism destinations and material from Vance (2002) further develops this arguing for the sustainable benefits of backpacking and small firms.

The academic research to date examining backpacker transport networks is partial in coverage, with many different approaches adopted. This partiality is particularly evident when examining the area of backpacker style transport operators and transport method choice. More specifically (and importantly for this study), there appears to be little consideration given to the decision making process undertaken by backpackers and the range of underpinning causal factors in this process. The literature within the area focuses upon specific issues, aspects or methodological approaches – some of which are highlighted later.

There is a clear need for research that examines the issue of transport method choice, particularly in those markets that are serviced by a range of operators offering a variety of products and services. This need exists on a number of levels – not least to offer an effective marketing approach to the sector. The need for research on the area is underlined by commentary from Ryan and Mohsin (2001) who in their discussion suggest that:

> **'Future research on backpackers may need to consider more carefully the nature of the location and the nature of the backpacker networks it is sustaining'**
>
> **(ibid p89)**

Exploration of the nature of the backpacker networks and the associated factors underpinning the purchasing decision will be beneficial in a number of ways. Firstly, it will allow more effective marketing of products and services. Secondly, it will inform the development of new, targeted transport services. Additionally, and equally as important, the research contributes to academic debate within the area of backpacking/ independent travel and consequently, the growing body of knowledge.

4   Backpacking – the literature debate

This section considers a number of key areas within the literature. Among these are consideration of what constitutes or defines a backpacker and literature concerning backpacker transport operators. A number of other areas are also considered within this section, which inform and contribute to the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.

4.1   WHO IS A BACKPACKER?

As with many definitions in the tourism management field of study, exactly who or what constitutes a backpacker is open to much debate – so indeed is whether the interchangeable terms backpacker, independent traveller or 'fully independent traveller' applies. This has been debated since the early 1970s, beginning with Cohen's early work considering the area of 'drifter' tourism (Cohen 1973). More recently, authors such as Pearce (1990) (quoted in Loker-Murphy 1996) consider backpackers to be –

> **'predominantly young travellers on extended holiday who have a preference for budget accommodation, a flexible and informal travel itinerary, and who place an emphasis on meeting people and participating in a range of activities'.**
> **(ibid. p.25)**

Other authors contributing to the debate such as Sorenson (1999) utilise more general definitions, considering backpackers to be self-organised, multiple destination tourists who ascribe much importance to the spatial and organisational matters in the undertaking of their mode of tourism.

The Tourism Research Council of New Zealand have recently defined a range of travel styles that are relevant to this study. Although they use the 'independent travel' terminology – much of the work is focussed upon the backpacker market – and the definitions can consequently taken to be interchangable. In all, the Tourism Research Council states that there are four typologies of travel in New Zealand – Fully Independent Travel (FIT); Semi Independent Travel (SIT); Packages and Tour Groups (Tourism Research Council 2003a). The independent categories in the work are classified through two main 'tests'. First is the issue of purchasing of travel elements[6]. In using these elements, fully independent travellers must not have purchased any of these pre-arrival.

Semi independent travellers must have purchased at least one of these travel elements. The conceptual divide between the categories is less defined in the second 'test'. The category of fully independent travel displays the following characteristics –

> **FIT travelers have the ability to be the most responsive to situations and have the ability to alter plans significantly given their lack of prepayment. This method of travel suits particular groups of people over others, and holidays of FIT travelers are quite distinct from the other travel styles.**
>
> (ibid. 2003a)

Within the same work, the category of semi-independent travel is said to display the following characteristics –

> **SIT visitors share many of the characteristics of the Fully independent travelers. Semi independent travelers have a significant amount of freedom with only part of their travel prepaid. SIT's tend to have prepaid for an activity within New Zealand, either a ski trip, a conference or convention, or some educational costs.**
>
> Tourism Research Council (2003b)

Alternatively, there is a motivation-based focus to backpacker definitions proposed by many authors. One of most extensive and all-inclusive is the model identified by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), proposing seven categories of travel motivation. Others, such as those discussed by Ateljevic and Doorne (2000) consider a traveller's need for new and unexplored areas or the need to 'play with identity'. Elsrud (2001) continues this thread, with discussion of a need for risk taking (real or perceived) during long-term travel. More specifically, Sorenson (1999) considers that the key parameter of defining who or what a backpacker is their own perception of his/her travelling and tourism activities'.

Adopting a definition for this study is problematic – but extremely important. The previous discussion has highlighted a few of the (many) conceptual approaches in use. The definition proposed by Pearce (1990) is considered to be most useful, in that it captures elements of the accommodation, travel and informal nature of backpacking. Consequently, the Pearce definition is adopted for the study. This paper adopts the backpacker term –

although in many places this is interchangeable with the other terminology in use on the area. Additionally, the issues of risk taking and self-perception inherent in some of the other definitions are crucial to this study – for these impact upon transport method choice. These are also included within the framework – albeit in a more informal manner.

4.2   TRANSPORT USE BY BACKPACKERS

Consideration of the transport used by backpacker's features sparsely within the literature discussing the area. Whilst this is hardly surprising given that backpacker orientated transport operators are relative newcomers to the marketplace, the absence of discussion of *general* transport use by backpackers is. As Hampton (1998) notes, the transport needs of backpackers are often considered minimalist – but they are being recognised as a valuable revenue source and starting to emerge in many backpacker destinations.

One of the few pieces of literature that considers backpacker transport operators is that by Ateljevic and Doorne (2001) who discuss the growth of transport operators in New Zealand. The paper comments on some of the consumer side development drivers of backpacker transport operators – such as the demand for flexibility and independence in travel with a level of organisation. Subsequent developments and marketing tools such as flexible ticketing and linked promotions (i.e. for en-route activities) are also highlighted and discussed. Whilst the role of the transport networks in developing the tourism sector is acknowledged, the reverse relationship is also highlighted – a closely intertwined process. The paper offers a conceptual model of the development of the backpacker tourism industry and transport operators.

Whilst the Ateljevic and Doorne (2001) paper considers New Zealand, much of the commentary is equally valid in some of the emerging backpacker tourism destinations. Destinations such as Ireland, Scotland and South Africa are three examples of this; all three have a number of backpacker-oriented transport operators offering a range of services and products. These include (but are not limited to) jump on-jump off operators offering services with similar characteristics.

Material from Moran (1999) examines the experiences of travellers on structured backpacker tours in New Zealand. Moran's work is of direct relevance when adopting a

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loose definition of what a backpacker tour is and bringing it within the scope of this study. Unfortunately the Moran material, whilst wide, lacks depth of analysis, examining a narrow range of tours with a limited survey sample and attempt to draw wide ranging observations from this. The material from Moran largely focuses upon the environment attractions within the destination and how they impact upon the touristic experience enjoyed by the traveller. The material does not directly examine why people have chosen the tour – although there are a number of indicators evident from the findings that provide an illumination of this.

Hampton (1998) briefly considers backpacker oriented transport operators in his commentary on backpacker tourism and its contribution to economic development in parts of South East Asia. Whilst none of these services *presently* display a level of development seen in other destinations, they appear to offer services targeted towards the backpacker market. Furthermore, publications from Tourism New Zealand (2001) also consider backpacker transport operators, in the New Zealand context. The publications briefly discuss the range of options available for travel 'in-country' – but significantly also highlight the proportion of travellers who use other methods such as domestic buses and hitchhiking. They do explore why backpackers elect to travel by particular methods.

Whilst there is a mass of literature on transport in tourism and specifically transport method choice, particularly in regard to urban transport (cf. Fowkes and Wardman 1988; Bradley 1988), as previously commented upon, the field of backpacker transport has been neglected. Significantly, little consideration is given to the question of *why* backpackers choose the method or methods of travel used and the importance of each.

A range of other literature also informs the conceptual model that is illustrated in Figure 1. Among these is the work by Moran (2000) on structured backpacker tours in New Zealand, Tickell (2001) on traveller identity and Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002) on backpacking experiences.
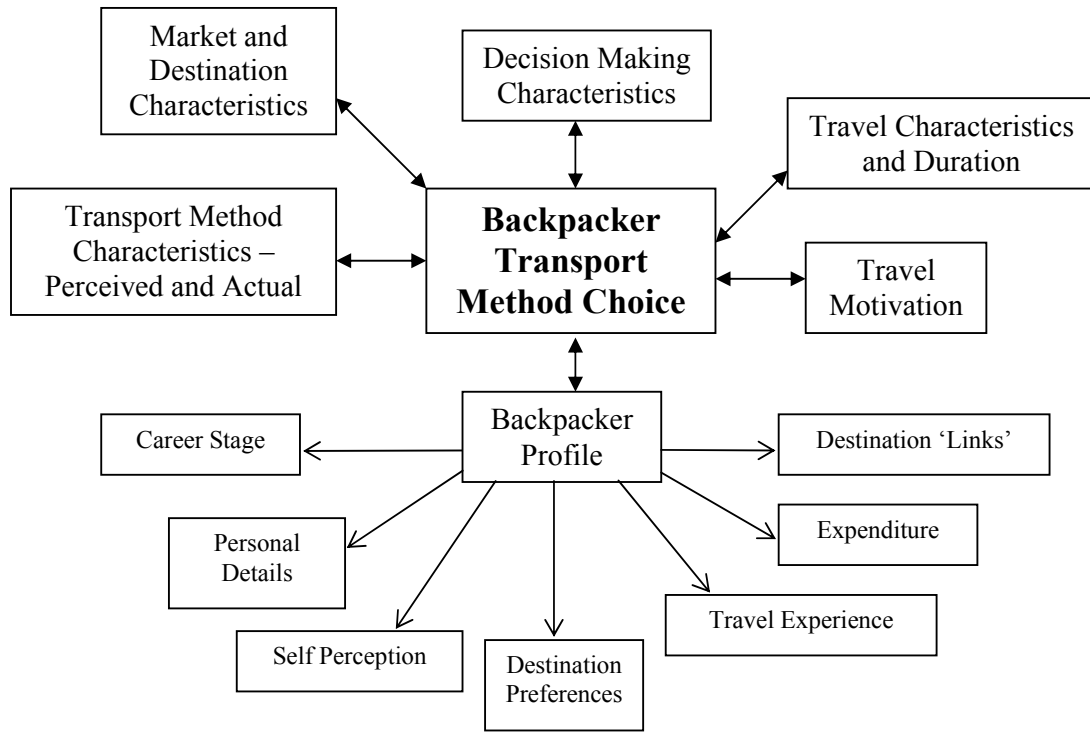
Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework

5 Towards a conceptual framework

Constructing a conceptual framework to understand backpacker transport choice is very much a developmental process, given the lack of previous studies in the area. The conceptual framework currently used for the study is displayed in Figure 2. The conceptual framework examines a number of areas. These are derived from the literature in the area and encompass a range of issues.

The areas of the conceptual framework and, indeed, the issues examined within them have a dual purpose. Initially they allow a brief 'pen-picture' of the interviewee to be constructed. The areas then allow data collection to examine factors that are believed to influence and impact upon transport method choice. This will further develop understanding of the impact of these areas. The areas of theory are further discussed and developed in this section, although many of the areas within the framework are of such a great size and complexity that out of necessity that they are dealt with summarily in this paper.

5.1 MARKET AND DESTINATION CHARACTERISTICS

The characteristics of the destination studied and the backpacker travel market within that destination play an important but as yet undefined role in determining travel method choice for backpackers. Characteristics of the destination examined within this study and relevant to the decision making process include a number of issues, among them –

- the ease of access to transport services
- the cost of the transport services being examined
- the diversity and variety of transport services available within the destination (both to the domestic market and those biased towards independent non-domestic travellers).

Other relevant factors that are likely to influence the decision making process, but are believed to be of less importance to the decision making include the following issues –

- geography of the destination, including the spatial distribution of tourist attractions
- population and commerce distribution within the destination
- the nature, type and range of services that are available to backpackers.

The nature and context of the backpacker travel market within the destination also plays an important role in determining transport method choice. Anecdotal evidence (such as the popularity of those destinations with a greater developed infrastructure) suggests that the more developed the backpacker travel market is, the more travellers it attracts. This can be observed in destinations such as the east coast of Australia which attract a high volume of young, independent travellers (but whether these would be classed as 'backpackers' is open to much debate). This attraction may result because of the perception of 'ease of travel' held in the youth travel market – which conversely, consequently in turn creates a demand for more transport services. Particularly on the east coast of Australia – but by no means restricted to that destination – it can be observed that this high demand ultimately leads towards a 'mass-tourism' focus. This mass tourism focus is often subsequently rejected by travellers who are oriented towards a more independent style (as discussed in Atlejevic and Doorne 2001). In such a way a version of the 'destination life cycle' is then created.

Just as important as these factors and arguably influencing the 'less-experienced' or perhaps the younger traveller is the marketing and perception of the destination with the tourism generating countries, particularly for backpackers. A mass of tourism literature suggests that perception of the destination is all-important in destination choice. Common sense would also dictate that this is the case.

Using New Zealand as a case study further reinforces this. Tourism New Zealand considers that the decision to travel to that destination is influenced by – among other factors – viewed images of the country, word-of-mouth and feedback (ibid 2000). Consequently the conceptual framework includes an examination of the perceptions and images of the destination prior to travel. Also examined are the information sources used (such as guidebooks). There is little work that examines the impact of such entrenched publications such as the Lonely Planet. Observations made when travelling in New Zealand and other popular backpacker destinations though, suggest that the destination image created within travel literature plays a great part in attracting visitors.

5.2   TRANSPORT METHOD CHARACTERISTICS

Travellers have many options for travel in some of the popular typical international backpacker destinations. Destinations such as Victoria, Australia include transport options such as domestic networks, specialist backpacker transport networks and a variety of tours offering a wide range of services, facilities and activities included. In including this area within the conceptual framework a number of characteristics of the transport method used is considered. These characteristics are such as –

- facilities on-board, such as music provision and games (for extended journeys)
- the frequency of 'stops' – a factor particularly relevant for services that offer a jump on – jump off element
- on–journey activities – these can include visits to attractions (such as the bungee jumping sites in Queenstown New Zealand) or visits to natural attractions (such as the Pinnacles, Western Australia).

- the profile of fellow travellers – for some travellers this appears to be very important and can include age, background and travel experience.

In implementing this, much of the data can be gained from the marketing literature produced and distributed by the various transport companies involved. Many companies appear to use some or all of the factors as marketing points.

Arguably more important than some of the physical or service characteristics is the *perception* of the transport method and operator held by the traveller. Anecdotal experience gained from dialogue with backpackers in destinations such as Australia and New Zealand suggest that some operators have reputations as party buses, whilst others are considered as 'boring' and consequently attract different customer profiles. Again, New Zealand is a good example of this with services such as Kiwi Experience considered party buses, whilst services such as the Magic Transport Network are considered to be far quieter. This can also be observed in other popular backpacker destinations. The impact and influence of the perception of transport method and operator is considered important in the context of this study, for as Murphy (2000) notes, social interaction with other tourists is an integral part of backpacking.

Assessing the impact of this perception though in the context of this study is difficult. It is important to note that each travel experience may be different – even if it is the same service, vehicle and driver – as the group dynamics in the individual situation can impact upon the experience. Whilst it is recognised that this is an important part of this section of the conceptual framework and the study as a whole, assessing or quantifying the impact of this is very problematic. Certain 'clues' to the differing group dynamics can be gleaned during the data collection – but even these are open to interpretation. This remains an 'unresolved' issue in the study.

5.3   BACKPACKER PROFILE

The study aims at developing an understanding of travel method choice. Integral to developing this understanding is consideration of the profile and key characteristics of the travellers themselves. In keeping with the qualitative nature of the study and to assist in developing this understanding, the aim of this part of the conceptual framework is to

develop a brief 'pen-picture' of the interviewee. To this end, this area of the conceptual framework used in the study collects data on a number of areas, which are –

- **Career stage** – traditionally backpacking has been the experience of people 'pre-career' – quite often before beginning a higher education course. Dialogue with backpackers suggests that this former 'profile' is changing with a growing number of people taking an employer sponsored long term career break (i.e. upto 12 months). It is quite often the case that travellers may actually leave jobs to travel, or travel as part of a process of career change. The career stage of the traveller (and of course related to this, their age and life experience) is likely to impact upon travel methods desired – as their life experience is likely to be reflected in the method chosen.

- **Self-perception** – travelling identity and the role of self-perception has been discussed by a number of authors. Desforges (2000) considers that the decision to travel can be as a result of questioning and exploring self-identity. Related to this, Sirgy and Su (2000) consider that the match between destination image and traveller self-concept/ social-image influences destination choice. Experience suggests that this is particularly so for backpacking experiences – whether they be in more or less developed backpacking destinations. This is further reinforced by Murphy (2000)'s work. He considers that the social interaction of backpackers is key to the travel experience and believes that meeting people (fellow backpackers and sometimes local people) is second only to economic imperatives in travel method choice. All of these authors highlight the fact that self-perception, identity and social aspects of these are important to the travel method choice and as such are featured herein.

- **Destination links** – again, anecdotal evidence from conversations with backpackers suggests that if they have family connections within a destination, these can influence the choice of transport method. The closer the connection, the more impact this is likely to have. This impact can occur through many factors, such as the provision of pre-purchasing information for tickets, advice on the availability of domestic transport services or occasionally through the short term loan of transport.

- **Expenditure** – the work discussed previously by Murphy (2000) highlighted the role of economic factors in transport choice. Experience suggests that many backpackers are travelling on a low budget as they do not have a regular income stream. Consequently it is expected that the level of expenditure purely on travel is likely to

have a primary role in guiding purchase decisions for travel products, services and experiences.

- **Travel experience** – literature within the area of backpacking suggests that travel experience, both within the destination and in other destinations influences two key areas. First is the choice of travel method made by the traveller. Second is the actual decision making process – particularly the role and level of planning undertaken within this process. Experienced travellers are likely to be more comfortable with travelling having made less preparation. Underlining this, McCabe (2000) suggests that the decision process in transport choice – although not specifically backpacking – is a result of previous travel experiences. This is further supported by material from Elsrud (2001), which suggests that using a pre-booked ticket is a sign of in-experience.

- **Destination preferences** – destination image plays a role in this area – and has been discussed elsewhere. Other factors such as the activities available in the destination, the possibility to meet local people or conversely, to avoid other travellers has also been highlighted as key motivators in destination and travel method choice.

- **Personal details** – this aims to collect data concerning the nationality, citizenship and life experience of the backpacker – all factors that impact upon the choice of travel method utilised. Schevyens (2002) recognises that the demographic profile of backpackers is changing – as previously highlighted many travellers are now taking a career break or travelling later in life. The exact impact of this is unclear, but should be clarified through this work.

Analysis in order to gain understanding and establish meaning in this part of the conceptual framework is complex. In order to assist this, analysis will be constructed using both a thematic basis (using the points made previously and others that may arise) and on a case-by-case basis.

5.4   TRAVEL MOTIVATION

Motivation to travel is a complex area of study and there is a large body of research undertaken concerning travel generally. It is considered core to understanding transport choice. The area of motivation in backpacking is less studied, although many authors consider the area as an adjunct to their main theme and this section draws upon this. From the body of literature, several main themes emerge relevant to this study. First of these

themes is the 'need to escape', either from a career job or from mundane, everyday life experience experienced by the traveller in their home environment. This has been the case since the original 'drifter tourism' studied by Cohen in the 1970's (Cohen 1973). The second of the themes to emerge is the requirement by travellers to gain life experience or to have new and novel experiences. This need appears to surface through dialogue with ex-travellers, media attention to backpacking and backers experiences and a general dissatisfaction with their current life. The last major theme to emerge from the material is the desire to visit and to see new places – partly led by the modern 'globalisation' of horizons and again, partly led by media portrayal of emerging destinations.

As the field of travel motivation is not the main theme of the project, it has not been focussed upon, although the area is considered core within the conceptual framework for a number of reasons. The reason or motivation to travel impacts upon the length of the overall trip made. This consequently, is likely to impact upon the travel style or multiple styles utilised – be it the 'party' oriented transport, domestic networks or vehicle hire/ purchase. Similarly so, motivation to travel appears to be closely linked with other aspects of the conceptual framework, such as expenditure of the traveller, age and career stage of the traveller and, more specifically, the destination chosen to travel within.

5.5   TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS AND DURATION

This aspect of the conceptual framework is closely linked to the area of travel motivation and indeed, to many other areas discussed in this paper. Some of the literature within the area has observed that whilst backpacking is a discrete market sector, there are many theoretical variations within the style, ranging from structured backpacker tours to fully independent travel. This plays a major role in the context of the framework and indeed the body of knowledge in this area will be extended by this study.

The duration of the travel 'trip', both in total and within the destination being studied is important within the context of this study and particularly in the decision making process. Using a destination such as New Zealand as an example, a destination with multiple transport operators and multiple transport options all offering a different length of travel trip, the time available for travel influences the travel method chosen. It may also restrict the choices available to certain operators. With the option of visiting many attractions

during travel, an extended amount of time can be spent reaching a destination. Conversely, the same trip can be expedited quickly. The same situation is also likely to occur given the seasonal fluctuations in many transport operators schedules and – during off season – the extended length of time needed for jump on – jump off services.

5.6   DECISION MAKING CHARACTERISTICS

Decision making is a complex and very broad subject and the conceptual framework examines a few selected areas. Primarily important in developing an understanding of backpacker transport choice is the issue of location of the decision making. Specifically this concerns whether the traveller decides upon the method of travel to be employed in their home country, on arrival in the destination or post departure. This has specific impacts upon the market being examined, but is also important in placing the decision making in context. Closely linked to this is the influence upon the traveller of promotions, special offers or discounts on the travel method. Again, in many destinations, competition can be intense and these factors play a large part in determining transport choice.

The area of decision making also brings into relevance the influence of previous travel and the linkages between the travel methods used in previous trips and the one that is currently being used. Definitively establishing these is difficult, but some notation of their influence is important. Linked to decision making and also believed to be of some importance to understanding decision making in transport choice is the issue of education (examined in more depth elsewhere). If the backpacker or traveller being questioned has received a bachelors degree or similar level of education it is likely that the information searching behaviour is more extensive in nature and may also be more focussed – although this remains to be established.

5.7   INTER-RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FACTORS

The conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 1 also collects data on other factors as they may arise from the fieldwork. As important as these factors may be – to be established after field testing – the inter relationships between the various factors (illustrated in the framework) are considered key to the research. To some extent these inter-relationships

will be explored during the analysis of the data collected after field testing of the framework.

A factor previously discussed is the subjectivity of the individual travel experience. This is particularly important if considering the inter-relationships between the areas or factors in the conceptual framework. This may prove to be one of the limiting factors in drawing conclusions from any application of the framework in field research. In the process of constructing understanding being able to adjust for the subjectivity of experiences inherent in the process may be difficult, but core to establishing relevance of the framework. Further development of the conceptual framework in this regard is expected after field application and testing has taken place.

6   Concluding comments.

This section draws together a few key points and highlights some areas that require further work. This paper has discussed definitions of backpacking and whilst a grounded definition does not yet exist it can be observed that development of such a definition is underway. This paper has also discussed the importance of the backpacking sector to both the tourism industry and also to regional and economic development in destination countries and within host communities. It is likely that this importance can only increase in the future and as such, is likely to becoming an increasing focus of academic study and of attention from National Tourism Authorities.

This discussion has also highlighted the fact that previous work on the area of backpacker transport is at best partial. Whilst this work undoubtedly contributes to understanding of this area, there is a great deal of development work that is still needed. Furthermore, whilst this work addresses one important area, as Ryan and Mohsin (2001) suggest, future research on backpackers needs to consider more carefully both the nature of the location/ destination and the nature of the backpacker networks it is sustaining. This is particularly the case in the context of this study and further research is needed to explore this.

This study proposes and develops a conceptual framework for developing understanding of the area being examined. It is important to note though that the whole issue of transport

choice in backpacking is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon – and as such is difficult to model. A contribution to understanding in the area is the likely outcome of this work. Constructive debate and development will assist in this process. As with all such work, field testing and further analysis of the conceptual framework will undoubtedly assist development. This is reported in other literature elsewhere. Application of the framework to alternative destinations is key to broadening this understanding and it is expected that this will take place in the future.

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[1] The terms backpacker and independent traveller are used interchangeably within this paper. There are many differing viewpoints in the academic debate but little agreement as to exactly what constitutes a backpacker or independent traveller.

[2] Australia visitors who come to study pay a high level of tuition fees (likely to be over AUD $7000 per annum). If these fees are removed from the estimated expenditure, then backpackers are likely to become the highest expenditure visitors.

[3] Student Uni Travel is a major travel agent in Australia. Along with STA Travel they serve the majority of backpackers travelling in and onwards from Australia. They also support the BUNAC overseas travel programmes. TNT Magazine Australia is a regionally focussed national distributed 'free' publication commonly distributed in backpacker hostels, booking agencies and backpacker focussed tourism operators. Publication is supported by commercial advertising revenue.

[4] This is a point discussed in greater depth in Vance (2002).

[5] Indeed, without well-developed transport networks for the backpacking industry it seems unlikely that the BBH network would exist.

[6] The travel elements that are defined within the classification are:

- Domestic airfares
- Accommodation
- Meals
- Other transport
- Some sightseeing/activities/attractions/other entertainment
- Event/conference
- Educational fees