



Case Study

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The Best Practices of Youth in Responsible Tourism: Insights from Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam



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ABSTRACT: Global tourism trends highlight the growing tourism demand for authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. Youths are known to be natural travellers who have made travel an essential part of their lives; they are thus likely keep looking for tourism experiences as they age. In designing future-proof tourism development, however, they are commonly underrepresented or perceived as mere observers in the tourism industry. On the contrary, the heightened demand for innovative and sustainable tourism practices has magnified the potential of youths to be champions of responsible tourism. This paper presents cases of Southeast Asian youths who are engaged in promoting responsible tourism while preserving their local communities' natural, social, and cultural integrity. In particular, this study offers views on the challenges faced by youths in championing responsible tourism as well as strategies to cultivate responsible youth leaders.

KEYWORDS: responsible tourism; responsible youth leader; Southeast Asia; responsible behaviour; best practices; case study

Introduction

Youths are emerging as a topic of interest in the academic tourism literature (e.g., Buffa, 2015; Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018; Šaparnienė et al., 2022). In Asia and the Pacific region, the youth segment is seen as a significant force whose spending power is growing (Asian Development Bank & World Tourism Organisation, 2022). Generally, the young comprise the largest share of the 7.7 billion global population, accounting for about 31.5% in 2018 and hailing mostly from emerging countries such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (ADB & WTO, 2022). Conceivably, it is crucial to understand today's young people as their knowledge influences their worldviews, behaviours, and values towards future environmental protection and social change (Bøhlerengen & Wiium, 2022). Notably, this cohort has the potential to drive sustainable development in the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2016).

Responsible tourism is when industry stakeholders engage in activities that benefit local communities and safeguard the natural and socio-economic environment (Caruna et al., 2014; Manete et al., 2014) to make tourism more sustainable (Goodwin, 2014). The concept was first introduced in the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. From the marketing perspective, responsible tourism provides a significant competitive advantage to the tourism industry. It also offers an opportunity for many emerging countries to maximise benefits via tourism development and recovery, especially in the Southeast Asia region (Yusrini et al., 2022).

The tourism-led growth hypothesis (TLGH) suggests that the tourism industry plays a significant role in a country's economic growth, for it provides employment opportunities, stimulates infrastructure development, and contributes to the income of local businesses (Rasool et al., 2021). Hence, countries are encouraged to create policies that encourage tourism development. In turn, enhanced government support and increased travel capacities drive service providers to compete with each other, aggressively spreading knowledge and awareness of destinations to potential travellers. In hindsight, high tourism expenditure is thus beneficial for the economy. However, welcoming a large number of visitors also has its consequences for destination countries, such as pollution, disrupted biodiversity, poor waste management, and the loss of local livelihoods due to foreign investors (Mbaiwa, 2003; The World Counts, 2022).

At times, the costs outweigh the benefits, wherein the quality of life and experience in a site significantly deteriorates due to distressed local cultures, displaced community members, and the abuse of common-pool resources – this is known as overtourism (Goodwin, 2016). In view of this phenomenon, one approach to continue promoting tourism while minimising its ramifications is to encourage responsible tourism, wherein stakeholders engage in activities based on what is best for the natural environment and local communities in the long term.

Goeldner and Ritchie (2005) claimed that key industry players include tourists, entrepreneurs, the government, and residents. It should be noted in this regard that younger community members are not mere spectators but catalysts as well (Rogers, 2011). Moreover, unlike other tourists, they are more environmentally conscious and are sustainable consumers (Chiu et al., 2015; Han et al., 2017), making them integral in defining global travel and sustainable tourism development (Buffa, 2015).

Youths who actively participate in local activities and advocate for societal well-being are known as responsible youth leaders (RYLs). RYLs can be described as "a leadership product" because youth leaders typically progress into leadership roles elsewhere. In what follows, this paper describes cases of Southeast Asian youth leaders who are championing responsible tourism in their communities. It then explains the challenges faced by youth in responsible tourism. Finally, strategies to cultivate RYLs are discussed before conclusions are presented at the end of this paper.

Southeast Asian Youth Leaders for Responsible Tourism

The definition of "youth" is a notable issue in the literature; there appears to be no consensus on the average age of a youth. In the tourism context, statistical definitions of youth travel by the World Tourism Organisation generally refer to young people aged between 15 and 29 (UNWTO, 2016). Others have suggested that the average age of the young is expected to rise. Thus, the traditionally defined age range of the "young traveller" has shifted from 15 to 25 to

20 to 30 (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2002). Others have defined youths' age range as 18 to 30 (Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015), 16 to 29 (Rogerson, 2011), and 19 to 31 (Cavagnaro et al., 2018). Consequently, the span of youth age is widening, implying a larger and more heterogeneous market segment.

The role of youths in responsible tourism has been of growing interest in development and academia, especially in Southeast Asian countries (Buffa, 2015; Kasim & Wickens, 2020; Richards & Wilson, 2003). The World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) Travel Confederation has emphasised the importance of international youth travel (UNWTO, 2016). Moreover, Moisă (2010) highlighted youth involvement in social and environmental activities through overseas study or volunteerism in emerging countries. In this study, the multiple-case approach was used to first, address the complex issues that need to be explored in-depth and second, understand each country's best practices, challenges, and strategies in championing youth's role in responsible tourism.

The following sub-sections present the best practices of youths in Southeast Asia, specifically Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, who have taken the initiative to effectively advocate for responsible tourism to safeguard their community's environmental and social integrity.

Malaysia

Malaysia is known for its tropical climate, lush greenery, and abundant protected natural forests and islands. However, harmful activities like deforestation and the dumping of industrial wastes have significantly altered the natural landscape and destroyed the habitats of wildlife and fauna (Malaysia Kini, 2021). Consequently, Malaysia must ensure that it addresses these environmental concerns to protect its rainforests and wildlife (The Star, 2021).

Roots & Shoots Malaysia is a country chapter of Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots programme under the Jane Goodall Institute. The Malaysian chapter was established in 2015 to expand the international programme's advocacy in empowering youths "to create positive change for people, animals, and the environment, by providing the tools needed for them to initiate, and lead, projects and campaigns that make a difference" (Roots & Shoots Malaysia, n.d.). One of its projects is the annual Roots & Shoots Malaysia Award (RASMA), which is a platform for young Malaysians to "gain experience and volunteer with partner organisations in various fields, related to helping the environment, animals, and human communities" (The Sun, 2019). In support of collaboration in volunteerism, Roots & Shoots Malaysia has partnered with organisations such as Yayasan Hasanah, LeapEd Services Sdn Bhd, and the Habitat Foundation to conduct its youth-led action programme aimed at young people (The Edge Malaysia, 2019).

Local youth who participate in this project may realise their power to make a change upon engaging in groundwork, learning about policies, ideas, and advocacy, and actively contributing to solutions. Other activities under the Roots & Shoots programme involve education, waste management initiatives with Orang Asli and local communities, tiger and elephant tracking in rainforests, turtle and sun bear conservation, re-planting of endangered tree species, nature-based outdoor adventures and expedition projects, and more. Youth also get to harness technology shared by Google Earth Outreach via data collection and virtual reality tools. Through these service learning projects, Malaysian youth can connect with people of all ages who positively impact the environment, animals, and human communities. Thus,

guided by the values of education, engagement, and empowerment, the Roots & Shoots programme has positively impacted local communities, nature, wildlife, and the environment.

Other environmental and wildlife initiatives in Malaysia that promote youth empowerment include the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre, EcoKnights, Free Tree Society Kuala Lumpur, Fuze Ecoteer, and Turtle Conservation Society of Malaysia (TCS) (The Sun Daily, 2019). Through these programmes, youths are taking the initiative to exhibit their pride in Malaysia's irreplaceable natural heritage and enlist their active participation in protecting its natural ecosystems and services. In fact, to date, Roots & Shoots Malaysia has over ten active groups in various schools and is growing fast (Roots & Shoots Malaysia, n.d.). This implies the increasing visibility and awareness of youth in Malaysia; therefore, the voice of youth leaders needs to be centred on tourism development to inspire them to create a change for more inclusiveness, fairness, and responsibility.

Myanmar

Myanmar is a country with many hidden sites and vast tourism potential. The Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI) is a new non-profit initiative that aims to support responsible tourism development through knowledge-sharing, training, and research. It champions responsible tourism by empowering local communities and promoting environmental sustainability with the support of the governments of the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland, Netherlands, Ireland, and Denmark.

The institute offers an internship programme for young professionals to gain experience in the operations of not-for-profits as well as to elevate their knowledge of responsible business practices, especially in the tourism sector. The youth involved in this programme may gain valuable opportunities to build a professional network and work alongside the MRTI team. Moreover, they can create a positive impact in responsible tourism by acquiring soft skills and hard skills from their participation in events, seminars, conferences, and trips to explore Myanmar.

Another notable MRTI programme is its International Field Project (IFP) for Bachelor of Science in Tourism students. Local youths who participated in this project reported gaining not only academic knowledge but also stronger practical perspectives on the interrelationships among tourism, society, the environment, and the economy. Activities under this project include scientific research on current economic, social, and environmental issues, on-the-ground collaborations with industry experts and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) professionals, and engagement in international debates and practices with leading experts in the tourism sector.

To raise awareness and knowledge about tourism and hospitality among Myanmar youths, the Vocational Skills Development Programme is held by MRTI in partnership with Swiss Contact. Youths involved in this programme are given the chance to secure demand-driven employment, self-employment, and better incomes. Overall, by connecting with youths in different regions through online and offline activities, MRTI's projects allow the young generation in Myanmar to share and exchange skills, knowledge, information, and awareness related to responsible tourism, hospitality management, and environmental conservation. As a result, these programmes have been significant in encouraging youths and building their skill sets to become RYLs (MRTI, 2017). For a country like Myanmar that needs to raise the participation, voice,

and role of youths in responsible tourism, these youth initiatives inspire and guide other youths to be RYLs in their respective communities.

Philippines

The Philippines has a rich cultural heritage that can be attributed to the country's archipelagic nature as well as its long historical trade and colonial relations. These are evident in its numerous sites, artifacts, customs, and traditions that have European, American, and Asian influences.

The Kapitbahayan sa Kalye Bautista at Iba Pang Lugar (KKB) is an organisation that engages youths in preserving the cultural heritage of Quiapo, famously known as the Old Downtown of Manila. Though KKB conducts different activities¹ to promote its cause, it is most popularly known for the Lakbay Lakaran: A Neighborhood Walk. Supported by the MAHAL Project and in coordination with local government units, this programme involves organised tours by youth volunteers to explore underrated but historically significant sites. This initiative does not only unite youth from the community to support underprivileged families, but also offers youth a better perspective of their national cultural heritage and pride of place for a higher standard, cleaner, and more orderly community.

The Philippines is also famed for its natural attractions, luring tourists with its pristine beaches and fascinating geological formations. Its lush environment is also home to a wide variety of flora and fauna that are unique only to the Philippines. A group of young Filipino artists have thus dedicated their talents to promoting the protection of watersheds through art. KAGUBATAN is a virtual exhibit and educational webinar series that showcases different art mediums, from "photography, painting, to digital illustrations with subjects related to the interconnected relationships of people, nature, and culture" (WWF Philippines, 2021). Funds raised from the exhibit are donated to the WorldWide Fund (WWF) Philippines for the Ipo Watershed Restoration, which needs 1,000 seedlings. Revenues are also channelled to the Philippine Parks and Biodiversity as well as the Bantay Danaos of the Agusan Marshlands for the Ipo Watershed Bantay Gubat, led by Youth Engaged in Wetlands, an international youth group dedicated to the conservation, protection, and proper use of wetlands.

Thailand

Thailand has long been a popular tourist destination for its rich biodiversity, pristine beaches, and lush caves. The Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association (TEATA) has partnered with various stakeholders, such as governments, corporate organisations, and local youth groups, to protect the country's environment. To drive conservation and sustainable tourism, TEATA's projects focus on advocating for responsible tourism, such as honing youth leaders by supporting their tourism initiatives (TEATA, n.d.).

Moreover, TEATA's vision is to ensure that all organisational members uphold balanced tourism by caring, sharing, and fairly disseminating knowledge and opportunities to tourism industry members for a sustainable future. Their initiatives include participating in top international and domestic projects, leading responsible tourism workshops and seminars, supporting social services and conservation projects through tourism activities, fostering

¹For more activities, please visit KKB's official Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KapitbahayansaKalyeBautista/about>

education and training about environmental conservation and cultural differences, promoting responsible tourism policies, encouraging local involvement in tourism operations, and coordinating responsible tourism activities (TEATA, n.d.).

With the aim of raising awareness about the significance of environmental conservation as well as educating tourists about responsible tourism practices, the ‘Low Carbon Contest: Vlog–The Journey Season 2’ is among the most recent activities arranged by TEATA and other public organisations such as the Thailand Greenhouse Gas Management Organisation (TGO). One of the main goals of this contest is to promote responsible tourism practices among the youth, primarily Thai students. To this end, the contestants are required to create a vlog or short video² to promote their idea/practice of how people can easily travel without damaging the environment, making travel both socially and economically sustainable in the long term. These vlogs created by the youth have a significant impact on the public and are released via several social media platforms that reach across the country. As a result, TEATA is able to effectively accomplish its goal of building awareness about responsible tourism among the youth and the public.

Another youth-led research project in Thailand is under the Greater Mekong Sub-region Study Centre of Nakhon Phanom University (GMSC-NPU), which seeks to cultivate a sustainable tourism industry in the Greater Mekong Sub-region of Nakhon Phanom, Thailand and Khammouan, Laos PDR through the network of local youth (Thipsingh, 2015). Specifically, this project focuses on creating fundamental awareness by educating youth about what they have and leading them to a sense of conservation. As a result, local youths from two local schools (Nakhon Phanom and Khammouan) have expressed their point of view that their tourism resources (e.g., nature, culture, folk wisdom, and service) highly contribute to sustainable tourism development. They have also developed a guideline model called “T-E-A-M” for sustainable tourism development. This model uses the English letter form, in which the letters stand for Team (T), Exchange (E), Action (A), and Management and Manpower (M). Therefore, it is apparent that the local youths involved in this project have learned from the sustainable tourism development community, which has guided them to understand the tourism problems in their community, participate in tourism planning, implement sustainable tourism, and receive mutual benefits and evaluations to develop responsible tourism.

Vietnam

Vietnam has been persistently challenged by the trade-off between environmental protection and economic development (Nguyen & Malesky, 2021). There are 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, forming a diverse ethnic minority population. However, these ethnic minorities are mainly in remote and border areas where the economy is underdeveloped. It is a poignant fact in emerging countries that these individuals are too poor to care about the environment, and are thus unwilling to support policies prioritising the environment.

The CBT Vietnam Project is a community-based tourism project born of the cooperation between Hanoi Open University, Capilano University, and Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Foundation in an attempt to build and strengthen the capacity of local ethnic minorities, small business owners, village governments, and local communities. Primarily, the CBT Vietnam Project's goal is to ensure that increased tourist visitation creates a positive

² For short videos, please visit TGO’s YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/TGOChannel>

experience for visitors and hosts in villages. It also offers a tremendous variety of training initiatives that focus on general tourism knowledge, tourism planning, entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship, and homestay development (Capilano University, n.d.).

Sapa is located in North Vietnam and is known for its pristine rice terraces, mountain atmosphere, and community of ethnic minorities. Sapa's rich culture and scenic beauty encompasses various ethnic festivals, white-water rivers, the tallest Fansipan mountain, and a deep valley of magnificent rice terraces that local people can utilise as tourist attractions. To maintain the remarkable village communities of Sapa, youth and other stakeholders (e.g., government and business owners) collaborate under the CBT Vietnam Project to teach local people basic tourism skills and nurture their entrepreneurial spirit so that they can create and achieve realistic goals. For example, the collaborators work with the Black Hmong, Red Dao, and Giay ethnic minority communities in the Lao Chai, Tavan, Taphin, and Giang Ta Chai villages. Through this project, the local people have improved sanitation, created community tourism products (i.e., temporary markets, walking circuits, and homestays), developed business plans, established community organisations, and coordinated community clean-up days with the youth (Capilano University, n.d.).

Apart from that, the young people under this project engage with regional and local governments as well as local tourism stakeholders (e.g., hotels, local police, NGOs, and guides). For example, to build lasting and sustainable businesses, they facilitate familiarisation trips to the village with appropriate tour operators. On the other end, they arrange for the locals (many of whom have never left their village) to take trips to Hanoi to present their products to local and international private sector tourism companies. These transformative experiences have led to an enhanced understanding of product development, partnership agreements, fair and equitable pricing, cultural preservation, and village improvement strategies. In short, through the CBT Vietnam project, it is apparent that Vietnam's youth are now transforming the tourism industry into one that is equitable, sustainable, environmentally and culturally sensitive, and profitable (Capilano University, n.d.).

Overall, the Asian youth reflect many aspects of Asia's contemporary societies and cultures (Bui et al., 2013; Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018). In particular, they share the common ground of being open-minded, technologically savvy, and budget-oriented when travelling (Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018). However, their travel behaviours, motivations, preferences, awareness of environmental problems, and environmental attitudes are considered to vary from those of other travel groups (Han et al., 2017; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2002). To cultivate RYLs in the present and future, tourism stakeholders should therefore consider the different values that youths uphold and increase their involvement in responsible and sustainable tourism. In collaboration with the government and non-profit organisations in the local community, the youth may realise not only the importance of sustainable tourism development, but also their role in it (Thipsingh, 2015).

Challenges of Youth Leaders in Championing Responsible Tourism

The previous section discussed the best practices of youth involvement in responsible tourism in selected Southeast Asian countries. Despite youth leaders' commitment to promoting responsible tourism within their communities, this dynamic group is still developing. At present, they encounter three significant challenges – education, innovation, and economics –

that hinder them from promoting their advocacies. This section discusses the challenges encountered by the youth in supporting responsible tourism.

Education

Recent globalisation is depleting natural resources, exacerbating competition and conflict, and luring local communities, especially youths, away from their culture and natural surroundings. However, given their age, youths tend to be inexperienced and have minimal awareness of their host communities' environmental and social strengths when travelling (Cini & Passafaro, 2019; Rogerson, 2011). Those with no prior volunteer or ecotourism experience are usually unfamiliar with a foreign culture and may find their activities uncomfortable. Concomitantly, Eyisi et al.'s (2020) study reported that visitors' lack of tourism awareness and low respect for local culture threatens the hosts' culture.

An illustrative example of this phenomenon is Srisawad and Ounvichit's (2016) case study of the multicultural tourism community in Kudijeen, Thailand. They found that local communities, mainly youths, possess high risks of cultural loss and conflict due to internal diversity and the influx of foreign cultures brought by visiting tourists. Further, education in many parts of Southeast Asia does not consider the contextual diversity of local communities and often treats youths as passive learners (Srisawad & Ounvichit, 2016). It could be difficult for Southeast Asia to be economically and socially successful in tourism in the future without a good knowledge base. Therefore, educational institutions must teach their students about diverse environments and cultures, potentially through activities that allow them to engage with international communities.

Innovation

Youths are known to be innovative forces who have the potential to lead the tourism industry with new approaches (Cavagnaro et al., 2018). They are also critical in successful tourism development, such that destination managers and other authorities in the tourism industry must consider youths' voice in tourism planning. The involvement of youths is indeed crucial to implementing responsible tourism, as their attitude may directly affect the development of the tourism sector (Eyisi et al., 2020). However, they are often excluded from the decision-making process (Seraphin et al., 2020) and lack the support to fully utilise their potential.

In Southeast Asia, more than one-third of the total population is young; this sizeable group holds massive potential to be involved in developing and planning their respective countries. However, youth have limited participation in the formation of public policy that affects their lives and future (Intermingle in Trang, 2019). Scholars (e.g., Canosa et al., 2016; Koščak et al., 2021) claim that youth voices are overlooked due to methodological and ethical issues, and are often perceived as having less market value for tourism business and development. An example is the involvement of youth in homestay activities in Malaysia. Samsudin et al.'s (2021) study found that the youth in Homestay Kampung D' Belimbing have vast opportunities to contribute to homestay development; however, the elders rarely accept youths' views and continue using their existing ideas and strategies to manage the homestay programme. The issue of trust has led elderly villagers to ignore youths' potential and capabilities in presenting innovative ideas. For future development in the tourism industry, the youth need the freedom to develop new ideas and concepts. Therefore, youth empowerment programmes are essential to guide the younger generation in accelerating their embryonic ideas that can potentially benefit local communities.

Economics

Youths are valuable consumers in the tourism industry. However, there is little understanding of the benefits they gain from tourism development due to weak public-private partnerships, poor local tourism standards, as well as unprogressive institutional legislative frameworks (Šaparnienė et al., 2022). For instance, although the remarkable villages with natural and cultural heritage in Sapa, Vietnam have been branded as tourist destinations, most ethnic minority residents, especially youths, are still working in agriculture. This implies that youth have limited participation in tourism and economic activities (Nguyen, 2022). In fact, in developing countries like Vietnam, tourism activities are seen as a second source of income after agriculture and are still a relatively new, emerging sector to local communities (Capilano University, n.d.).

The literature has also delineated several factors that hinder the participation of local communities, including the youth, in tourism planning. These factors include unequal distribution, limited funds and government support, scarcity of tourism knowledge, lack of awareness and cooperation towards responsible tourism practices among local authorities, social-cultural and environmental costs to communities, limited access to employment, as well as insufficient potential incentives for youths to engage in tourism development (Chan et al., 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020; Tay et al., 2016; Truong et al., 2014). As a result, the exclusion from economic benefits is likely preventing youths from joining the collaboration process. These challenges have made tourism planning and development far too complicated for many young individuals.

Strategies to Cultivate RYLs

Youths, though irrelevant to tourism impacts at the moment, will be the leaders and tourists of tomorrow (UNWTO, 2016). Young people have limitless potential to develop their thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours; at the same time, they are highly susceptible and require firm guidance. With their strong motivation to face challenges and their awareness of various sustainability aspects, Buffa (2015) accentuates that youth can be the primary agents of meaningful social transitions and have strong potential to drive sustainable development in the tourism sector. In addition to being open to sustainable tourism products and services, youths are natural travellers; this signifies the opportunity for the tourism industry to grow without jeopardising the future (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; UNWTO & WYSE Travel Confederation, 2008).

Most importantly, travel has become the crux of the global youth culture, such that youths are frequently quoted to have ‘a thirst for more travel’ (Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018; Richards & Wilson, 2003). Nevertheless, there is a possibility for them to become vulnerable and even passive without proper knowledge and responsible practices pertaining to tourism. Therefore, nurturing a RYL who partakes in responsible tourism practices requires collaboration among several stakeholders (e.g., government, schools or universities, public or private non-profit/profit organisations). To this end, three strategies are suggested in this study for the tourism sector to maximise the potential of its youth leaders. These strategies should be seen as part of a broad approach to cultivate RYLs who deliver sustainable value in the long term.

Creating awareness and inspiring youth through mentorship

For a tourist to carry out responsible tourism, it is necessary to improve his/her understanding of sustainable tourism development as well as his/her realisation of how each action has an impact on the environment. With this awareness, tourists, especially the youth, can start the process of change from their smallest habits to reduce the negative impact of travel on the environment, ecosystems, socio-culture, and local communities.

Moreover, travel behaviours can be implemented to develop responsible tourism, such as not using plastic straws, reducing food waste, not taking souvenirs, rejecting illegal trade, choosing eco-friendly or sustainable accommodations, minimising waste and trash, avoiding airplanes in favour of local transport, wisely deciding when and where to travel, selecting travel companies that demonstrate sustainable practices, practising cultural sensitivity, buying and giving responsibly, and ultimately, being environmentally conscious. In Vietnam, for example, Canadian and Vietnamese tourism students from Capilano University and Hanoi Open University have developed a Tourist Code of Ethics that aims to minimise tourism's negative impacts and increase sustainable tourism development opportunities in communities (Capilano University, n.d.).

Notably, inspiring youth through mentorship programmes is vital in cultivating responsible tourism practices. Indeed, a wide variety of youth action programmes encourage youth to become community leaders in the tourism industry. They do so by engaging youths in continual communication, trust-building and collaboration, elderly consultation, women empowerment, teacher and student engagement, community revitalisation, volunteer efforts, petitions for environmental improvements in their communities, local community work, literacy programme development, cultural events, and many more. In Malaysia, for instance, the collaboration between Root & Shoots Malaysia and Youth United For Earth (YUFE) has produced a sustainability mentorship programme that is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This mentorship programme aims to guide, enrich, and empower aspiring youth leaders by connecting them with leading industry professionals to make valuable and lasting contributions to society, the environment, and future generations (YUFE, n.d.).

Generally, youth development programmes and activities place their participants in leadership roles; in this manner, they educate the youth on leadership by teaching them to work closely with others, hone work skills, interact with local cultures, engage in local community activities, and practise critical thinking (Redmond & Dolan, 2016). It is also important to instil leadership-specific values and traits in youth via these programmes, as summarised in Figure 1. Therefore, participating in mentorship programmes builds responsible leadership behaviour among youth and helps them understand the true meaning of being a RYL.

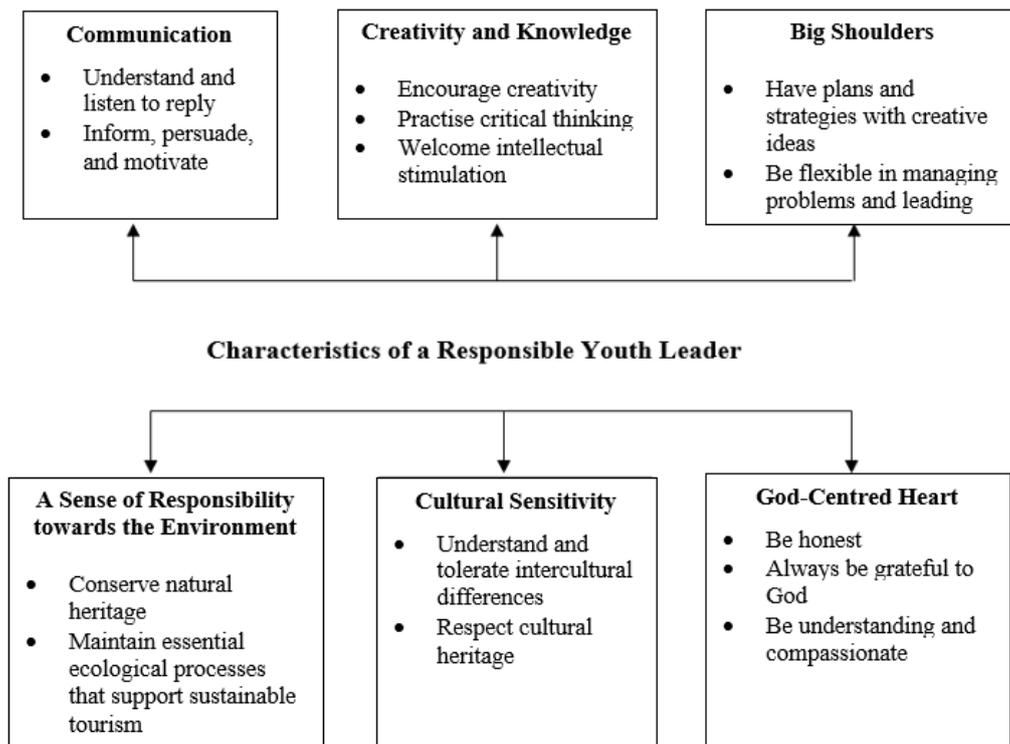


Figure 1: Characteristics of a Responsible Youth Leader

Building relationships with youth

Tourism is considered an essential tool of economic growth; as such, local communities should react positively to tourism development (Thipsingh, 2015). For this purpose, it is increasingly vital for destinations to create long-term relationships with their visitors. This is even more important in the case of youth, who are likely to return to the destination later to contribute to travel and tourism opportunities.

In fact, youths are more supportive of tourism development than other age groups (Nguyen, 2022). This makes them more able to take practical actions to advocate for less negative economic, environmental, and social impacts on the community, especially by campaigning for environmental clean-ups, empowering women in the local tourism sector, and promoting locally made products. Therefore, to achieve responsible tourism goals, youth leaders need cultural intelligence not only to obtain more enjoyable experiences and connections with local people but also to gain a greater understanding of local cultural, social, and environmental issues within their community or in communities at their travel destinations. For youth, interaction with the local community is often a fundamental step in cultivating their responsible leadership. Local youth leaders should therefore involve and engage with the local community to make positive impacts on the conservation of natural and cultural heritage so as to maintain the world's diversity.

A few notable examples from emerging countries demonstrate how building relationships with youth can promote responsible tourism. In Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has made efforts to sustainably develop the tourism industry through projects that engage diverse groups, especially the youth (The Nation Thailand, 2022). In addition, the TAT has launched a new campaign to promote responsible tourism among Thai youth travellers by offering over Bt 400,000 in prizes through online content competitions, eco-friendly trips, and

quizzes. Similarly, in the Philippines, the WWF Philippines National Youth Council has implemented various campaigns and programmes to bring together youths from different backgrounds, all of whom actively advocate for the conservation of the natural environment (WWF Philippines, 2020). Moulding young minds into future conservation leaders through these programmes and initiatives will inspire the youth to consider sustainability in tourism activities and pursue deeper environmental knowledge in their daily activities.

Developing partnerships

Most of the challenges traditionally faced by youth in the tourism industry (e.g., lack of awareness, poor knowledge, limited resources and funding) can be overcome by connecting youth leaders from different communities (Thipsingh, 2015). Therefore, one of the most effective strategies is establishing a youth forum or youth travel organisation that can act as a focal point for information exchange, innovation, and marketing and development. Connecting youth leaders from different communities in this way forms a network that raises awareness about responsible practices while travelling. This network can significantly help those who live in a community as well as those who visit it.

For example, at the local and international levels, the ASEAN Youth Forum (AYF) is a movement that represents the voice of youth leaders in ASEAN countries. Specifically, it is a platform to express their concerns and strategies for achieving a better ASEAN (AYF, 2021). AYF also organises an annual solidarity meeting of youth civil society organisations in Southeast Asia, which is held parallel to the ASEAN People's Forum (APF), the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth, and the ASEAN Summit. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the issues and concerns of youth in the ASEAN region and subsequently, find the best solutions to address them. AYF has already drawn in more than 2,500 youth leaders in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, being in a group of people who share the same perspective or attitude can motivate youths to participate more in their society's activities (Šaparnienė et al., 2022). Once young people gather information, interact with fellow members, and share their ideas, their sense of leadership will be stimulated, along with a sense of responsibility.

Conclusion

The projected growth of the tourism sector and its negative impacts on local communities call for youths' support to achieve responsible tourism development goals. Ergo, responsible youth leadership should be a core component of any responsible tourism initiative. As environmentally conscious travellers, youths have the potential to pave the way for sustainability in tourism (Buffa, 2015). Indeed, they have already begun raising awareness about the importance of responsible tourism and their role as RYLs, in addition to proposing innovative ideas to join hands in implementing practical solutions for responsible tourism development.

Using a multiple-case approach, this study has brought attention to the best practices of youths in Southeast Asian countries, highlighting the potential of youth in contributing to their communities and responsible tourism development. Subsequently, three significant challenges confronting RYL have been outlined and discussed in this paper. In response to these challenges, this study proposes three strategies to improve responsible tourism from the

Southeast Asian perspective. Notably, these strategies call for cooperation from the youth and related stakeholders; together, these parties create a great source of strength that can initiate positive change towards achieving responsible tourism goals in the host country. Likewise, based on the successful cases of youth leaders in several Southeast Asian countries, this study emphasises the actions and behaviours of the younger generation that will bring about successful tourism planning as well as significant change for responsible tourism.

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