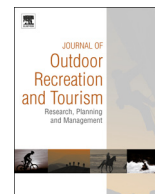




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The nexus between hiking and youth hostels (1907–1933): A historical analysis of the evolution of the German youth hostel movement

Gabriella Nagy

Department of Tourism, University of Otago, New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a historical analysis of data on the history of German youth hostelling up until 1933. While providing a detailed historical account of the evolution of German Youth hostels, the paper draws attention to the strong link between this evolutionary process and the dissemination of hiking. Consequently, the paper proposes that hiking fostered the emergence of youth hostels, which, in return by the 1920s, provided the entire German population the opportunity to participate in multi-day hiking. In concluding, it is suggested that future research should extend the knowledge on this topic, by investigating the role youth hostels in different countries played in spreading the idea of hiking.

Management implications: The paper provides a detailed historical analysis of the evolution of German youth hostelling. The advantages for management are the following:

- It explores the relationship between this evolutionary process and the dissemination of hiking.
- It facilitates the understanding of the role historical events play in the evolution of tourist accommodations and the influence that these facilities, in return, can have on the leisure activities of a whole nation.
- It may enable managers to be aware of and to integrate these new insights into planning or developing outdoor recreational facilities at a very early stage.

1. Introduction

There are more than 4000 youth hostels around the world today offering affordable accommodation to everyone, without restrictions (Hostelling International, 2011; UNWTO, 2016; Hostelworld Group, 2016). Although they enjoy a widespread popularity, there is little known about their origins. There is a wide range of tourism studies focusing on youth hostels and their users, however, to our best knowledge, no academic research has explored their evolution thus far. In reality, the youth hostel movement originated in Germany in the early 1900s, and youth hostels were created in order to make multi-day hiking possible for those with limited means. From Germany, this type of accommodation spread all over the world, bringing the idea of hiking to many nations (Graßl & Heath, 1982; Hostelling International, 2011; Kraus, 2013; Lüttgens, 1982; Seela, 2011).

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide a historical analysis of the evolution of the German youth hostel movement, in order to assess youth hostels' increasingly important part in the popularisation and dissemination of hiking up until the beginning of the Nazi era. While doing so, the paper draws on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the archival material (manuscripts, business

correspondence, newspaper clippings, annual and conference reports, meeting minutes, circulars and memos) of the German Youth Hostel Association (stored at Ludwigstein Castle in Germany), while the books and journal articles written on the history of German youth hostelling constitute the secondary sources.

The results of the historical analysis are presented in four sections. The first section introduces the early youth travel movements and the circumstances that instigated the 'urge to roam' in Germany for the first time. It discusses a series of historical processes which were in operation in Germany at the turn of the 19th century and created an appropriate climate in which the concept of youth hostels could come into existence. The subsequent three sections discuss the evolution of the youth hostel movement in a chronological order, according to the main historical events of Germany that brought significant changes in this development.

2. The history of German youth travel

The section introduces the early youth travel movements and the circumstances that instigated the Wanderlust, the 'urge to roam', in Germany for the first time and discusses a series of historical processes,

E-mail address: nagy.gabriella1980@gmail.com.

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which were in operation in Germany at the turn of the 19th century, and created an appropriate climate in which the concept of youth hostels could germinate.

2.1. Early German youth travel – Travelling scholars

Youth travel has a long history in Germany. Different kinds of travelling scholars (e.g. vagi scholars, bachants, vagrants, university students) and journeymen (apprentices of guilds) had been on the road since the 11th century. Although most of these young people on the road travelled for work and to soothe their hunger for wisdom, evidence suggests that there were some who became habituated to tramping and were simply driven by their 'urge to roam' (Adler, 1985; Dicke, Glismann, & Siemssen, 1994; Götz, 1959; Leeson, 1979;). Already the German word 'das Wandern' (the first part of this compound) has an element of romance in it. It covers all kinds of moving from place to place that is done at a leisurely tempo with the purpose of exploring the world. Thus, it can mean walking and tramping as well as rambling, hiking and roaming (Heath, 1962). Therefore, this 'urge to roam' is referred to as 'Wanderlust' in German, it is recalled in countless German folk songs and ballads (Coburn, 1950; Heath, 1962).

In the second half of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution brought an abrupt change in German social conditions. The railway system spread all over the country and factories were built that gradually replaced the guilds; bringing to an end all early travel movements and threatening the old carefree spirit of *Wanderlust* with extinction (Heath, 1962). However, while in the early stages of industrialisation people believed in progress and the rule of the machines, by the second half of the century they had started to feel its negative effects. The poor urban living conditions raised people's concern for their health (Graßl & Heath, 1982).

The growing importance of health was expressed in two ways: firstly, in the development of many life reform movements that propagated the return to 'natural' lifestyles. These movements proposed to renew all areas of life - from agriculture to clothing - in order to have a healthier lifestyle. There were groups supporting ecological agriculture, natural medicine and healing, alcohol and nicotine abstinence, vegetarianism, as well as nudism (Seidel & Zelck, 2009). Secondly, it was expressed in the increased demand for leisure activities, the provision of outdoor recreational facilities and the establishment of hiking clubs, which brought along a second wave of *Wanderlust* (Götz, 1959; Graßl & Heath, 1982).

However, this time there was a big difference. Until then, travel had always been work- or study-bound – at least on the surface. Now, for the first time in history, people started to hike out of their own free will (Lüttgens, 1982; Münker, 1944). It is from this point onwards that we can talk about hiking in its modern sense, as how we know it today.

2.2. Mountaineering and hiking clubs

In Germany, the first person to popularise physical exercise was Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, a gymnastic educator who considered walking as an indispensable element of the national education and a valuable addition to his gymnastics. Therefore, in addition to the hikes to the nearby outdoor gymnastic and training areas, he organised multi-day walking trips for the members of his gymnastic community in the early 1800s. Although initially only 25 boys belonged to his group in Mecklenburg, it soon became a mass movement, leading also to girls getting involved in gymnastics and hiking (Lüttgens, 1982).

By the 1860s, the need for physical education started to be recognised by doctors and teachers, and Jahn's admirers established the German Gymnastic Community. The community had several training stations in the country and organised frequent walking trips. Moreover, in the 1880s, many other gymnastic clubs and sport clubs were established, including some for women. In 1889, these clubs were all united under the German Sports Department for Physical Training (*Deutschen*

Sportbehörde für Leibesübungen). In 1914, there were 11,491 clubs with 1.5 million members in Germany (Götz, 1959).

It is worth mentioning that the gymnastic movement had been founded with nationalist motivations. Ever since the wars against the French occupation of Germany territories – in the early 19th century – nationalism had been on the rise in Germany. The physical training of youth in preparation for military service was regarded as a natural and patriotic duty; it had the aim of uniting the homeland on the basis of race and language (Biesanz, 1941).

Simultaneously, thanks to the growing popularity of hiking, the German-Austro Alpine Club was founded in 1869, along with several other hiking and mountain clubs. These clubs marked out tracks, published hiking maps, guides and newspapers, and they also built and maintained around 760 mountain huts and lodges in the German and Austrian mountain ranges and what is now South Tyrol (Arnberger, 1970; Lüttgens, 1982). In 1908, when the Association of German Mountain and Rambling Clubs united these clubs, they had 165,000 members (Götz, 1959; Lüttgens, 1982).

The reports on the walking trips organised by these clubs, together with the allure of some contemporary romantic literature (e.g. Riehl, 1892 *Wanderbook*), attracted more people out of their dark urban homes into nature (Lüttgens, 1982). However, at this time, these clubs catered to the upper and upper-middle class only, as a new recreation (Götz, 1959). Middle-class people, workers (including the rural population) were not wanted in them and could not have afforded the high membership fees (Kraus, 2013). The majority of the population still worked 14–16 h per day, for at least 6 days a week, living in horrible conditions in rental barracks which were tiny, grim, lightless and airless flats. Their life was a rat race of working, eating and sleeping without any significant leisure time. After they got paid on Saturdays, they tended to escape their sorrows by going to the pubs, of which there were plenty, where they drank alcohol and played cards (Götz, 1959; Lüttgens, 1982).

In an attempt to counter this tendency, several homeland and rambling clubs emerged all over the country and propagated the love of nature and homeland among the workers. These clubs also published maps and guide books, held presentations, organised exhibitions and built observation towers, huts, and bridges. By the end of the 19th century, they had around 50 hostels providing accommodation and refreshment for lower-class wanderers (Götz, 1959; Lüttgens, 1982).

At the same time and for the same reasons, the Friends of Nature Society (*Naturfreunde*), was also established in 1895 in Vienna. From there, the organisation expanded rapidly, and by 1905 it was present in Germany too. By 1914, it had 36 local groups in South Germany. While the Alpine Club was and became more conservative and even nationalist, the Friends of Nature were oriented towards the social democrats (Markham, 2008). Its members organised walks and natural history lectures, set up libraries and collections, published writings on natural and local history topics, and built shelters, huts and 'Friends of Nature houses' for their members in the Alps and other mountainous regions (Zimmer, 1984).

2.3. Hiking students

Students also caught this second wave of the *Wanderlust*. The German 'scholars' and students' hostels (*Studenten- und Schülerherbergen*) emerged to host them. The first of these was established in 1884 by Guido Rotter, a factory owner and walking enthusiast. Over the years, with the help of the industrialist, Piette-Rivage, and several mountain clubs, it grew into a network of cheap accommodations that facilitated the hiking of the academic male youth (Schirrmann, 1940). In return for a yearly fee, its members received a membership card that entitled them to twenty free nights in the hostels. These hostels were open only during the holidays and they were almost exclusively housed in inns, where they had three-five beds reserved for members. Rotter's organisation reached its greatest extent in 1913 with

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