# Overseas gap years and working holidays in the UK and Japan

Insights from a comparative approach

Lynley Aldridge,
University of Leeds; Hosei University

ISA Yokohama (July 2014)
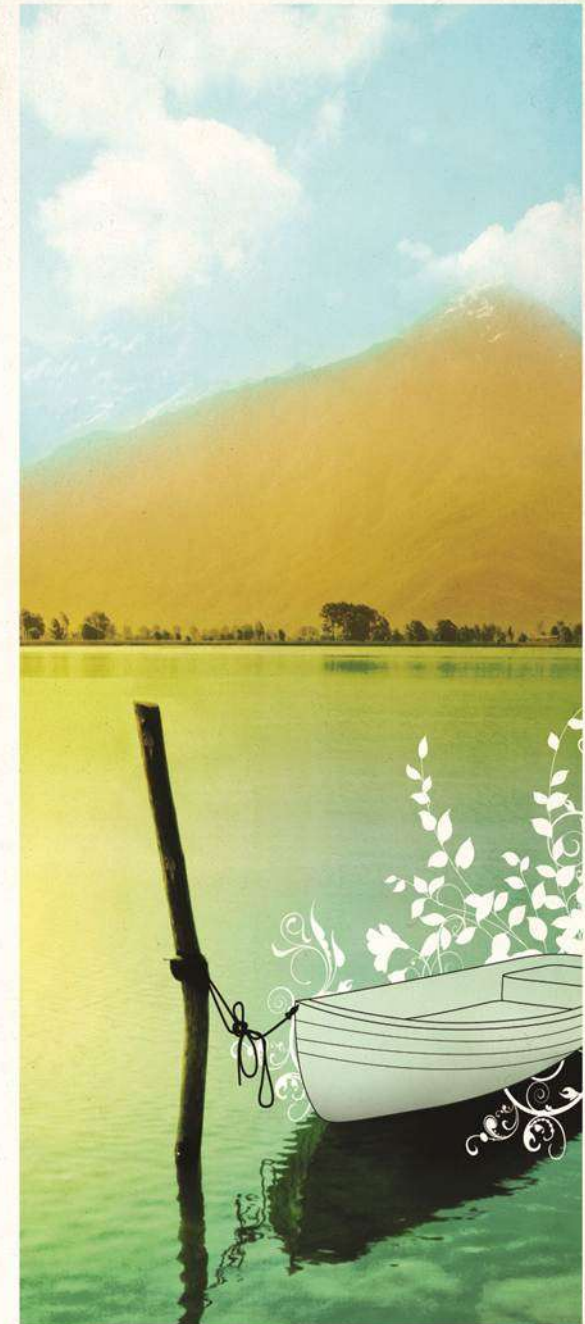
# Structure of presentation

- The "gap year" and the "working holiday"
- Background
- Research questions and methods
- Comparative dimension
  - Challenges
  - Benefits
- Conclusions

# The gap year

- "any period of time between 3 and 24 months which an individual takes 'out' of formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory" (Jones, 2004)

# The working holiday

- Reciprocal agreements allowing young people (e.g., 18-30) who meet specified criteria to live, work and/or study in another country for a short time (e.g., 1-2 yrs)

- "International understanding"
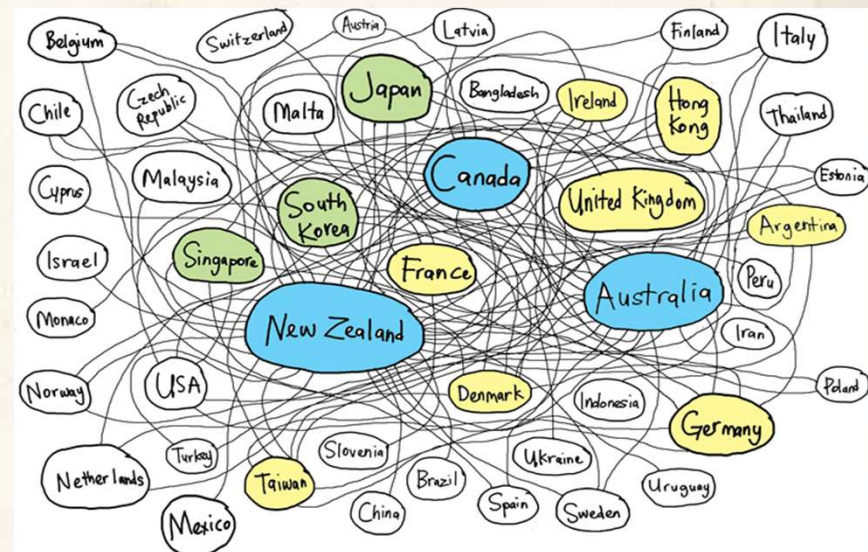


WHERE DO YOU WANT TO WORK?

Image from:
http://www.ytravelblog.com/working-holidays-around-the-world/

# Background

- Protracted/difficult transitions to employment
- Gap year travel as accumulation of capital, competitive advantage, inequality (Heath, 2007)
- Neoliberal emphasis on self-development encroaching into leisure sphere (Simpson, 2005)
- Variability (e.g., Japanese WHMs; Kawashima, 2010)
  - motivated by dissatisfaction; hard to re-establish careers
  - some felt they developed qualities that weren't valued

# Research questions and methods

- Motivations and perceived consequences
  - socio-cultural factors influencing aspirations, values, experiences, outcomes in relation to youth mobility
- Class, gender and/or other inequalities

- Interviews with former working holidaymakers, careers advisers, and employers

# Challenges

- Difficulty of asking "same" questions of "equivalent" populations in different countries, cultures, traditions, practices, languages
  - Participants and timing (Who takes a gap year? When?)
  - Variation in settings and roles (careers advisers; recruitment practices)
  - Vocabulary (e.g., terms for "job hunting", "graduate")

# Benefits #1

- Broaden focus of research
  - UK: competitive advantage/ social inequalities (considering resources that enabled participants to take gap years, influenced content of gap year, and facilitated access to benefits upon return)
  - Japan: age and gender related norms (considering pressure from society, family and peer group to act in certain ways according to one's age and gender)

# Benefits #2

- Widen range of expected possible outcomes
  - At simplest level, didn't just assume gap year would give competitive advantage nor be a disadvantage
  - Alerted to look for pressure from family/ peer group both contexts (e.g., suggested as something that sometimes pushed people in UK to take gap years )

# Benefits #3

- Explore underlying processes at work in both contexts, and how they play out in each specific context, to develop more rigorous theories
  - Pressure from family/ peer group can be seen in both contexts; may have a different impact in each

# Conclusions

- Broader analytic focus; wider range of outcomes
  - Similarity and variation
  - Repetitions, tensions, silences, and differences in nuances *within* and *between* contexts (neither is static or homogeneous)
- Explore underlying processes and specific nuanced contextual accounts

# Thank you

- Participants in this research
- University of Leeds
- Hosei University
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Lynley Aldridge
l.j.aldridge@leeds.ac.uk

# References

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