

ASPECTS OF THE YOUTH TRAVEL DEMAND

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ABSTRACT: *Youth travel represents an important and booming component of the tourism market. Its evolution is largely connected to the general dynamic of tourism, and, at the same time, it also records its own trends generated by the action of specific factors.*

This paper presents a characterization of youth travel in terms of the size and structure of the specific demand in order to accurately and scientifically assess the tourism phenomenon from the perspective of its own features and of the future directions of development at European and international levels. In the second part of the paper, we identified and characterized the forms taken by youth travel, determined by the extremely varied motivations of youth. Among the best known may be listed the following: educational tourism, volunteer programs, “work and travel” programs, cultural exchanges, sports and adventure tourism.

Key words: youth travel, tourism demand, youth travel demand.

JEL codes: M31, L83.

Introduction

The tourism market is a market with a specific purpose; young people, as tourists, don't seek to purchase and consume regular, common and generalized products at the level of the entire population, but seek to find satisfactions induced by the actions within this activity sector.

Of course, the youth travel market should be seen as a component of the tourism market as a whole; in this context, the action mechanisms are similar, with significant differences in terms of the customers' motivations and characteristics.

The tourism demand on the youth travel market consists of all young people willing to travel for a certain period of time outside of their residence area for reasons like studying, resting and recreating, learning foreign languages, practicing various sports, etc, other activities than paid employment.

The volume, structure, dynamics and time and space dispersion, as well as the evolution trends of the tourism demand, are influenced by a series of factors with continuous or occasional action, which also determine the overall development of youth travel at national and international levels.

The current conditions on the youth travel market generated a series of changes at the demand's level, changes that will influence the elaboration and implementation of future strategies in the field.

Literature review

Numerous studies about youth travel conducted recently at global level and in Europe highlight a real increase of the importance of this market and its diversification, although these studies are too dispersed and structured on certain aspects to allow an overview of the phenomenon.

From the results of a large and important volume of researches targeting the youth travel market, we may conclude that this form of tourism represents an important and booming component of the tourism market and its evolution is influenced by a series of general or specific factors and

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permissive or restrictive factors. Several studies have attempted to establish the size of the youth travel market over the years, so that in 1991, the World Tourism Organisation reported that “every sixth arrival in the world is represented by a young tourist” (World Tourism Organization, 1991) and estimated that the average annual growth rate of youth travel was higher by 60% than the average annual growth rate of global tourism. In 1995, a report of the European Travel Commission identified youth travel as being a potential market for 125 million travellers, or 23% of the global market at that time (Wheatcroft S., Seekings J., 1995). For the year 2000, the Federation of International Youth Travel Organisations (F.I.Y.T.O.) declared that youth travel represented 20% of international arrivals, and five years later, the global market of this tourism form counted over 193 million arrivals in 2005, meaning almost 24% of total (World Tourism Organisation, 2008). Some studies conducted on a smaller scale (European Travel Monitor, 2007; World Tourism Organisation, 2001, 2002, 2008) take into account the potential of this market segment in the European countries with a tradition for tourism or in tourism regions of the world.

Dimensions of tourism demand

Assuming the youth of today are the tourism of tomorrow, it's necessary to know the functioning mechanisms of this field and, based on this, to anticipate its evolutions in order to design development strategies for youth travel and to develop certain actions meant to ensure the meeting of tourists' expectations.

Compared to other forms of tourism, youth travel hasn't been as severely hit by the economic crisis, meaning that in comparison to 2008 the sales volume in 2009 dropped by only 0.3% (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2010), while the overall tourism industry recorded a fall of 4% at global level (UNWTO, 2010). The decline recorded in early 2009 was recuperated in the second half of the year and currently many sectors of the youth travel market have started to register a slight growth. According to previsions, in 2010 youth travel will grow by 9% versus 4% for the whole tourism industry, and 5% of this growth is due to the bidders who have reacted to the economic crisis by diversifying the services and products available for young people (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2010).

The changes occurred within the demand refer to “au pair” programs, insurance services and language travels which increased in 2009 compared to 2008, while the providers of work contracts abroad reported a slight drop owed mainly to the tougher conditions for granting visas and the lack of contracts in certain countries. The demand for accommodation services within youth travel has remained more or less on the same level during 2009, which means a very good evolution considering the significant decreases recorded by the overall hotel industry. For example, the occupancy level of hotels in the United States dropped by 9% in 2009, and in Europe, in the first half of 2009, there was a double digits drop and the gross operating profit per available room fell by 30% in most cities (TRI Hospitality Consulting, 2010). There were large variations between different regions of the world in terms of demand, the two American continents recorded a 5% drop in 2009 compared to 2008, while Asia (14%) and Oceania (13%) showed strong growth, and Europe had a decrease of only 1%.

The demand represented by young tourists has certain common features that differentiate it from other types of tourism demand. It's about the high level of mobility possessed by youth, the complexity of their motivations, the budget allotted by young people to practice tourism, the duration of the stay, etc.

A feature of the youth travel demand is *the high mobility level*. As seen, young people are eager to reach remote destinations for a long period of time and the activities carried on during the stay must be as varied and as physical as possible.

Seen in terms of the motivation behind it, the tourism demand is extremely complex, meaning young people have the *most varied reasons* to practice tourism.

The demand expressed by young people is the starting point for allotting their limited

income. Income represents the material basis of any act of consumption, including the tourism consumption, which depends on the income of the youth. Tourism expenditures made by young people are in direct relation with their income, and because the later is not high enough, young people save money to go on long journeys and, in most cases, the total tourism expenditures are close to their annual income.

Regarding the *budget allotted to practice tourism* it may be said the total average expenditure of young people for purchasing tourism products has increased in recent years, reaching approximately 2600\$ (Richards, G., 2007). This value is three times higher than the average budget of a trip, which was 883 euros in 2008 (Conrady, R., 2010). Out of the total budget of 2.600\$, about 40% represent transport expenses, which, in most cases, means the value of the airplane tickets, and approximately 1550 dollars are spent at the destination. Holding second place in the structure of the budget is the accommodation, which is responsible of the largest share of the money spent at the destination, although previous studies show that young people allot a small percentage of the budget for accommodation compared to other types of tourists (see figure no. 1).

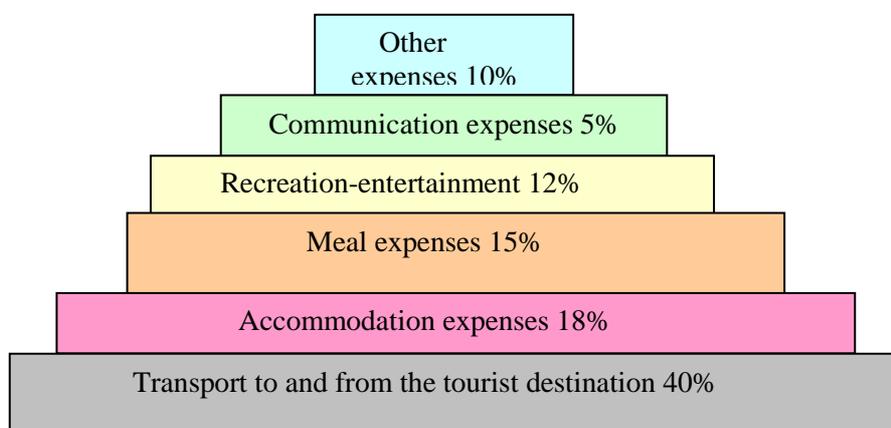


Fig. no. 1. The budget structure for youth travel

Source: drawn by author.

Depending on the youth's region/country of origin, the biggest budget belongs to young people from North-America (approximately 3300\$) because of the relatively high costs of transport, and the lowest budget belongs to Europeans, meaning about 2300\$/trip, but it must be mentioned that the high frequency of travel of European tourists leads to a total annual budget higher than the one of young people from other regions. The travel budget varies also in accordance with the chosen destination so that the total average spending for a trip to East Asia and the Pacific is 4600\$, while a young tourist spends in Thailand an average of 2200\$ and one who travels in Turkey spends 700\$. Young people who visit destinations like Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Central and South America have the largest budgets for their trip and a big part of these budgets are allotted for airplane tickets to remote destinations, while young people visiting Europe and the Mediterranean regions have the lowest budgets.

Given that the average tourist spending is 96 euros/day (Conrady, R., Buck, M., 2010), the expenditure of a young tourist is relatively low, being around 50\$. Regions like North Africa, the Indian Subcontinent and Eastern Europe are destinations where the youth spends approximately 50\$ daily, and areas with the highest number of tourists that spend very much per day are North America, Northern Europe, China, Japan and East Asia and the Pacific. In the case of long journeys, the differences among destinations are not as clear in terms of daily spending, but are more clear when it comes to the degree of luxury or the range of activities young people may afford. The daily spending level is in inverse proportion with the number of days spent by tourists in tourist

destinations. In terms of total expenditure, young tourists are significant contributors to the economy of the region they are visiting.

In tourism, *the average length of stay* is generally a few days (3-4), and regarding the evolution over time, we're talking about a reduction of the stay due to the phenomenon of splitting vacations.

The specific of youth travel is a longer period of stay associated with school vacations or, sometimes, with the periods of learning a foreign language, of the work and travel programs, etc.

Keeping up with the general trends of the tourism market, young people have started to travel more frequently and shortened the period of stay. It was noticed in recent researches that the average stay in youth travel is an average of 53 days, a value that is much higher the average value recorded globally in 2008, which was 9.3 days. The length of stay varies from a few days (6) to a few months (180 days), the longest periods of stay belonging to tourists who visit South Asia and the Pacific, North America and the Indian subcontinent, while the regions with the shortest stays are Eastern Europe, North Africa, Southern Europe, Central and South Africa (see table no. 1). In recent years, the number of travels with a stay of two weeks has increased considerably, representing 45% of total, at the expense of the six months stays, which still represent 8% of total travels made on the youth travel market.

The length of stay varies also in accordance with the youth's country of origin. Therefore, young tourists from Africa took the longest trips (68 days) and tourists from Latin America took the shortest trips (47 days).

Table no. 1.

The average period of stay, depending on the youth's region of origin in 2007

Region of origin of young tourists	Average length of stay - days
Africa	68
North America	56
Asia/Pacific	55
Europe	53
Latin America	47
Total	53

Source: World Tourism Organization & World Youth Student & Educational Travel Confederation, *Youth Travel Matters – Understanding the Global Phenomenon of Youth Travel*, World Tourism Organization, Madrid, 2008.

Young people who travel for a longer period of time visit several countries during their trip or are motivated to practice certain types of youth travel that require a longer stay in one location (learning a foreign language, volunteer actions, etc), which suggests that young people travel longer than other categories of tourists.

Driven by economic, social, cultural and political changes, the tourism clientele represented by young people has diversified and it has become more demanding and, as a consequence, the tourism offer will have to adapt to the heterogeneity of needs and expectations in order to satisfy them.

Forms of youth travel

Just as tourism, youth travel generally takes a multitude of shapes determined by the extremely varied motivations of young people. Among the most known are: educational tourism, volunteer programs, "work and travel" programs, cultural exchanges, sports and adventure tourism.

Educational tourism aims to improve the education process, to enrich the educational experiences by providing scholarships abroad, tourist packages that include camps, excursions,

language classes for any level of knowledge, including training on certain fields (medical, legal, tourism, management, etc.) or on categories of interest (fashion, design, arts, theatre, dance, etc.). Summer schools, theme camps organized nationally and internationally are also included in the structure of educational tourism.

The tourism offer is varied and includes programs for children and young adults, as well as for their parents and grandparents, for pupils, students, graduates, post-graduates, young employees; and they provide academic and training studies for admission at prestigious universities from all over the world, as well as the integration in an interactive, highly qualified environment, acknowledged internationally. In addition, the programs allow leisure options, cultural diversity and various fun activities with colleagues of other nationalities in attractive locations.

This form of tourism is increasingly developing in Romania due to the requirement imposed by society to know at least two foreign languages and to get familiarized with various cultures. We are becoming more and more aware of these requirements as we go through different stages of educational training and subsequently as we start to build a career.

Types of tourism have developed because of the knowledge and education needs manifested over time by various civilizations and not because of pleasure, as we tend to believe. For example, in Great Britain, tourism was a key factor in educating the population and was given an educational role since ancient times.

The current form of educational tourism has developed as civilizations have increasingly developed; the new technologies have been discovered and, at the same time, the desire to continuously assimilate concepts, techniques, implementation strategies for them has also developed. Then, the desire for self-culture outside of the educational environment created the premises of a new form of tourism – creative tourism – defined as being related with the participating activities within the culture of the host country through interactive workshops and informal learning experiences.

International camps are the best schools for children and young people because this new information is assimilated like in a game, facilitating learning through similarity, imitation and repetition. The participants in these programs can be housed in university campuses, at families selected by the school, in student apartments or hostels and hotels, depending on age, preferences and type of program. The programs include educational, social, cultural, sports activities and trips and could take place through intercultural exchanges, meaning the host country will also organize these types of programs in the countries where the young people come from.

The demand for the tourism practiced to learn a foreign language is rising (over 2% of young tourists are mainly motivated by learning a language and spend for these types of stays around 3300\$) and the average age of the participants is dropping. The average stay for this type of tourism is 5-6 weeks and the evolution is upward. Great Britain is the most important destination for language tourism, underlining the dominance of the English language on the market; but new destinations have also started to develop, such as: USA, Spain, Australia, Japan, Germany, France and Brazil. The suppliers of these types of tourism services signal the existence of convergence areas between their products and the products belonging to other sectors of youth travel, such as providing work experience, adventure travelling, cultural experiences and volunteering.

Currently, the tourism practiced for learning languages has an extremely important role for those countries that have as official language one of the languages of international circulation, like English or Spanish. For example, a report from 2005 of the British Council showed that the demand for spots as international students in “destinations where the main language is English” is predicted to increase from 1 million in 2003 to 2.6 millions in 2020 (Richards, G., 2006). The Language Travel magazine estimated that the total market for English classes in countries where the native language is English recorded over 7.5 billion dollars (total spending made by students).

Young people have the opportunity to get to know other countries through **volunteer programs**. The activity period as a volunteer may vary from a few weeks to a year, during which

the participant is provided with accommodation, food, transport and pocket money. These programs don't provide work visas, this being an activity carried on voluntarily. The youth will also benefit of language courses, health insurance, a few days off each month, etc. The monthly money allotment for volunteers vary from country to country; therefore, in Italy they receive 162 euros, while foreign volunteer working in Romania receive 80 euros. A recent (Richards, G., 2008) study showed that the global volunteer market volume is 1.6 million volunteers annually, with a value between 1,7 and 2.6 billion dollars.

Young volunteers are an important market in certain countries, and the fields where they can work as volunteers are varied: environmental protection, art and culture, activities involving children, young people or elderly, patrimony, sports or leisure. For example, Honduras launched the Volunteer Academy for Educational Tourism, whose purpose is to attract young tourists towards the natural and cultural resources of the country. These tourists are considered cosmopolitan visitors, educated, who will appreciate the unique and diverse experience that Honduras has to offer.

In Romania, due to the fact not all young people have access to adequate education, various volunteer organizations are involved in holding classes on different subjects (foreign languages, IT, environment, etc.). Therefore, with the help of its volunteers, the Youth Action for Peace Romania Association organizes a series of free classes aimed at acquiring new knowledge in foreign languages and IT by disadvantaged youth.

Volunteer camps represent opportunities to explore the potential provided by an international group of young people that work together to achieve a project, to develop communication, to have fun or to interact with the local communities. Volunteer camps shouldn't be treated as means to an end for personal goals, like in the case of tourism in a certain area, or learning a language, or looking for work or spending a cheap vacation. A few of these personal goals could be reached, but this shouldn't affect the importance of the group experience, which involves overcoming the limits of the comfort ensured by your own language and culture.

In order to consolidate and promote the policies that stimulate volunteering, the European Union declared 2011 the European Year of Volunteering. Based on the objectives of the European Union for the European Year of Volunteering, the following specific objectives may be suggested for Romania:

- Adopting and implementing policies to stimulate volunteering;
- Developing local and regional partnerships in order to promote volunteering actions;
- Increase citizen involvement in this type of activities.

The tourism practiced by young people to gain work experience, namely "**work and travel**" **programs**, represents a market niche that is continuously developing at global level. It is the most dynamic form of tourism within independent travelling on the youth travel market. Most "work and travel" programs have their roots in the youth exchange programs organized in countries that have this type of partnership, being popular in regions like North America, Western Europe and Australasia. By far, the most know destination for this type of program is the United States of America, followed by Australia, Great Britain, France, Spain, Greece, etc. According to studies, over 7% of the youth travel global market is connected in some way or another to working abroad, and these tourists spend an average of 3.200\$ (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2009) per trip, but 40% of the total cost is covered by working at the destination. Most young people participating in these programs make the decision to travel and work abroad based on the information gathered from friends who participated in these programs, and the average duration of such a trip is 6 months. The main advantages gained by young people after participating in a work and travel program are:

- Gaining work experience in a different cultural environment;
- Improving a foreign language;
- Establishing contacts with people from all over the world;
- Visiting other places than the places at home;

- The opportunity to behave freely and have fun with other young people;
- The opportunity to earn an important amount of money.

“Work and travel” programs are mainly targeted at young students, but also at young graduates who take “a year off” between high school and university. It is estimated that the tourism practiced by young people who have a “sabbatical year” is around 1-1.5 million travels per year, and most of these travels are organized independently.

Cultural exchanges, as a form of youth travel, have a significant impact over the attitude of young people, inducing a sense of cultural tolerance and understanding, the feeling of interpersonal trust and empathy with the global issues. In other words, the direct benefits obtained by young people after participating in such exchanges are seen in: the development of the capacity to understand better the culture of other people, of your own personality and identity, as well as the feeling of belonging to the common destiny of humanity.

Cultural exchanges between youth started to develop after the Second World War when the first organizations whose main objective was to facilitate meetings between young people of different nationalities in order to avoid future conflicts started to appear. The factors with the biggest influence over the development of the intercultural tolerance spirit are the direct contact of youth with the local population and with other young people and the positive practical experience.

Of course, such exchanges are directly influenced by the objectives of the youth policies adopted at governmental level. For example, in Portugal, “one of the priorities in the areas of youth policies is to stimulate the geographical mobility of young people in Portugal and Europe by promoting the direct knowledge of each country in terms of culture, nature and history”.

Another form of youth travel is **sports and adventure tourism**. These types of vacations represent an important way to satisfy certain needs of young people regarding their leisure time and the ways to spend it in an active manner, in the heart of nature. We must underline the importance of sports and adventure trips in terms of developing the personality of youth, the opportunity to discover new territories, new cultures or ways of life or simply to discover the importance that these have in achieving a rich experience of life.

Adventure tourism means more than exercising outdoors, it means a little history, culture or contact with the local communities, more than traditional tourism.

Youth travel has the feature of a “consumer product”, especially in the case of sports or adventure activities, meaning young people are important consumers of destinations and “trendy” activities and of thrills in general. Today, young people who seek thrills are no longer satisfied with extreme sports (like they used to be) like bungee jumping, snowboarding or surfing on the ocean’s waves. The most “fashionable” entertainment is much more dangerous, and a top of these activities would look like this: *volcano boarding* – a type of snowboarding on an active volcano and not on a snowy slope, *cliff jumping*, *AirKick* – people are thrown in a water pool with a catapult, *Zorbing ball* – people enter a giant ball and roll, etc.

The activities suggested during a sports and adventure trip consider developing the team spirit, the communication abilities and the capacity to adapt by taking into account the specific abilities of each participant.

Currently, there is a growing importance of the tourism leisure activities aimed at young people with an active lifestyle and who are believers in original and authentic products focused, among others, on discovering nature (observing flora and fauna – bird watching, admiring the landscape – hiking, etc). Because of its long beaches, sacred mountains and eco-friendly hikes, South-East Asia is and will remain the number one destination for young people seeking adventure (YTI Magazine, July 2010).

In addition to these forms of youth travel, there are certainly others with more or less importance within the framework of this form of tourism.

Conclusions

In the last decade, the youth travel sector has been through rapid transformations, meaning a series of phenomena occurred, such as: a supply and demand growth, the emergence of new market segments, diversification, improvement and acknowledgement of this form of tourism by the world governments.

The youth travel market has certain specific features, among which the most important is the complexity and heterogeneity, both in terms of the motivations of youth reflected in practicing various forms of tourism, and in terms of the substantial offer.

As seen, youth travel holds an important place in global tourism, and, as a consequence, knowing the main coordinates of the youth travel market implies approaching the aspects regarding the dynamic of youth travel at worldwide level, the size of the market, the main destinations and tourist flows, the youth travel demand, as well as its forms.

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