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Extension of Use of Foreign Languages in Youth Tourism – A Way towards Economic Development, Dialogue, Tolerance

Irina Antoaneta TANASESCU^{1*}

Abstract

This paper aims to study the relation between the evolution of youth tourism in Romania in the European context and the enhancement factors of development represented by the formation of communication skills in foreign languages, with emphasis on the so called “rare” languages; these skills include culture knowledge on the target tourist segments. The research methodology consists in highlighting the potential of the economic development of youth tourism reflected by literature in relation to the increase in competitiveness of those operators who turn into good account the online and offline communication in various foreign languages. The research of statistical sources on the evolution of the youth tourism in Romania and throughout world is correlated with the provisions of the strategic development plans of this form of tourism and the modern teaching methods as well as the content of the training programmes in the sector of the communication in foreign languages.

The conclusions of the paper are:

- *the youth tourism will have a globally sustained dynamics and the data in the paper demonstrate that by 2020 at least a quarter of the customers in this sector will come from among the young people under the age of 19;*
- *a specialist considers that the future of this form of tourism will be in countries such as Romania, where the UNWTO inaugurated in 2013 the first youth tourism cluster worldwide;*
- *in order to correlate the resources of the two sectors involved, i.e. youth tourism and education in foreign languages, it is required to have a complex strategic approach as the removal of the communication barriers and the management of cultural differences represent nowadays the way towards dialogue, tolerance and economic development.*

Keywords: *Youth tourism; foreign languages; sustainable development; tolerance.*

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1. Introduction

The youth tourism is a field where the concept research, the delimitation of the consumer segmentation, the definition and the highlight of the economic and socio-cultural development potential have had so far a precarious level, have involved contradictions of theoretical and applicative nature and have not been correlated with the researches conducted in the convergent sectors. At present, the literature on tourism generates confusions in relation to the profile of the young tourist. The statistical sources, whether global, European or national, also fail to refer to this domain of tourism in a concrete and distinct manner. Our research was conducted in the economic context and also in the context of the education in foreign languages which we consider essential in order to properly use the potential of this sector and to optimally meet the quality-related demands of the segments – the target customers. Furthermore, the research aims at how Romania designed the development of this type of tourism, considering that the strategic plans prepared in the European context hardly refer to the communication in foreign languages and its importance in connection with removing socio-cultural barriers which exist in relation to collaboration among the young tourists throughout the world. The research is useful in a context where professional practitioners in youth tourism abroad have seen and pointed out before us, Romanians, the great natural and anthropic resources which may ensure a dynamic and sustainable development of the youth tourism in our country.

2. Problem Statement

In Romania, and across Europe in general, the literature on tourism does not provide a clear concept and fails to highlight the characteristics of this activity; there are hundreds of definitions from various approach angles and this hinders the analysis of the achievements, in general, and the analysis of the private development prospects through the use degree of current resources, in particular. In this paper we try to opt for a potentially convergent definition of the specific features of the youth tourism. Starting from this concept, we will seek in the literature the positive consequences of this form of tourism for the Romanian economy in the European context. We will summarise the strategic vision on the development of youth tourism in Romania by analysing the medium and long-term activity plans. The research will corroborate these plans with the strategies on the interdisciplinary tourism education, including the information in foreign

languages on the different cultures of the young tourists visiting Romania. We will try to argument the need to apply some good practices which make good use of youth tourism in education and ensure therefore the future of the complete and complex specialised human potential in relation to quality tourism services for young people, the ones which will ensure the development of this sector in the following 20 years.

3. Research Questions/Aims of the Research

We intend to find argument-based answers to the following questions:

- what are the features of the youth tourism which justify and impose the strategies specific to this activity and other adjacent activities, in our case education in foreign languages, with focus on the “rare” languages?;
- what perspectives outline the analysis of the global, European and national statistical sources regarding the evolution of the youth tourism?;
- how coherent and convergent are the strategic plans on development of youth tourism and the plans on the education in foreign languages in Romania?;
- how may the exchanges of good practices be developed?; how may the European and international experiences be adapted to the Romanian realities in order to enhance the natural and anthropic potential already recognised and pointed out by the international forums specialised in tourism?

4. Research Methodology

We have made use of the following research methods:

- study of the tourism literature, noting that for the youth tourism there are very few distinct references both in Europe and in other areas of the world, whereas Romania has an early approach;
- analysis of the medium and long-term national strategic plans based on the objectives with regard to tourism and education in foreign languages;
- analysis of the national and European statistical sources with a view to pinpointing the economic and social results obtained between preparation of the plans and the present date;
- identification of the good practices in these two sectors and how they may be implemented in Romania.

5. Findings

5.1 Youth Tourism - Concept

The main institution which regulates the issues worldwide is the World Tourism Organisation founded on 27 September 1970 within the United Nations General Assembly in Mexico [1:72].

Firstly, we will reproduce the definition given by this prestigious body as this definition is also the most often used in articles and books written on tourism: “Youth tourism includes independent trips (the young tourists are not accompanied by a parent or guardian) for periods less than one year by people aged 16 – 29 which are motivated, in part or in full, by a desire to experience other cultures or benefit from formal or informal learning opportunities outside one’s usual environment” [2]

The definition certainly raises a lot of question marks. If we take into account the age, which is beyond doubt a fundamental criterion, there are definitions which also include in this segment the young tourists below 35.

According to the definition given by the United Nations [3:27] “Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Basic criterion which defines this group, the age is in most analyses correlated with the education level and the availability on its labour market”.

In September 1950, FIYTO (Federation of International Youth Travel Organizations) was established in Cannes. Initially, this organisation was intended to function at European level. Due to its success, it became in 1973 a global organisation, with 450 members from over 80 countries and is recognised by UNWTO as its main partner.

“The principles recognised by the Federation are: democracy, freedom, human rights and respect for nature”. [4:435]

The youth tourism targets some customers who have a well-defined profile in terms of consumerism behaviour [5:10].

- they find it easy to create bonds with people of different cultures;
- they are much more mobile than the other categories of tourists;
- they have the desire to visit new places and may therefore create some new travel destinations;
- they focus on spending their money locally and contribute to the economic development of the destination area to a significant extent;
- they can find temporary jobs and save money for travelling.”

5.2 Development of Youth Tourism in Romania in the European Context between 2015 and 2018

As already mentioned, there is no unitary approach on youth tourism yet, which makes it difficult to analyse the dynamics of this market segment. Nevertheless, some data from national and European statistics show that this sector is on an increasingly ascending trend. We will reproduce below the dynamics of the establishments of tourists' reception considered by the customers mentioned to be the most edifying (table 1) [6:22].

Table 1. Number of hostels, youth hotels and bungalows for 2015-2017

Year \ Structure	2015	2016	2017
Hostels	248	266	300
Youth hotels	1473	No data available	1545
Bungalows	280	288	434

Source: [6:22]

The net use index of tourists' accommodation capacity in use available in the first quarter of 2018 increased by 1.3% compared to the same timeframe in 2017. For hostels the rate was 17.2% and for bungalows 13.1%. The most popular destinations were in the "Mountain Area Resorts".

The use indices by counties were: Bucharest (37.6%), Bihor (29.4%), Timis (28.1%), Mures (27.7%), Iasi (27.4%), Cluj (25.9%), Brasov (24.9%), Calarasi (24.7%), Covasna (24.4%), Prahova (24.3%) [7:6].

The tourists came from: Israel, Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Hungary, the United States of America, the Republic of Moldova, Spain, Japan, Holland and of course Romania.

At European level, WTO estimates that in 2020 Europe will receive 335.6 million tourists. (Table 2) [8:88]

Table 2. Estimate of the international tourists arrivals in Europe, 1995-2020

Area	1995		2020		Increases	
	Arrivals (mil. tourists)	%	Arrivals (mil. tourists)	%	2020/1995	Annual average ratio
Total Europe, of which	335.6	100	717	100	213.6	3.1
Central and Eastern Europe	77.2	23	245	34.2	317.4	4.8
Northern Europe	36.2	10.8	98	13.7	270.7	4
Southern Europe	94.1	28	155	21.6	164.7	2
Western Europe	116.7	34.8	184	25.6	157.7	1.8
East Mediterranean Europe	11.4	3.4	35	4.9	307	4.6

Source: WTO, Tourism 2020, Vision, Madrid, 1997 as cited by C. Sava [8:88]

In 2020 the Balkan states will attract 79 million foreign tourists, 92% of them will go to Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

In worldwide terms, the Secretary General of the UNWTO, Taleb Rifai stated that “by 2020 the segment of the young people below 19 travelling around the world will reach 350 million, and Romania will be a popular destination” [9].

The records on the arrivals and check-ins in hostels in Romania show that the destinations favoured by the young foreigners are:

Israel: Maramures, Bucovina, Sighisoara, Brasov, Bucharest;

Germany: seaside resorts, spa resorts, Transylvania;

Italy: Northern Moldova, Bucovina, the Black Sea side, the Danube Delta, the Prahova Valley;

USA: medieval towns/cities in Transylvania, Bucharest, Bucovina;

Japan: Maramures, Bucovina, Sighisoara, Brasov, Bucharest;

Holland: Spa Resorts

The young tourists practice various forms of this type of travel:

- educational tourism;
- volunteer programmes;
- “work and travel” programme;
- cultural exchange;
- sports and adventure tourism;
- event tourism (festivals, concerts, team building);
- recreational tourism.

5.3 Online and Offline Communication in Foreign Languages – the Enhancement Factor of Youth Tourism

United Europe means communication among citizens from different cultures, widening the cultural horizon, tolerance and economic progress. The premises for the sustainable tourism intended for young people also include acquisition of skills to communicate in foreign languages other than English language, even the so called “rare languages” because we live a globalised multicultural and plurilingual world. To communicate in a foreign language means nowadays to master at an acceptable level a portfolio of information on the area culture or the culture of the destination country or the tourists’ country of origin. As a consequence, it is necessary to make major changes of strategic and operational nature both in the sector of services and the field of education. The two categories of “actors” involved in this process – organisations which provide tourists’ services for young people, organisations which operate in the sector of communication – fostering in tourism, on the one hand, and the trainers in the sector of foreign languages – education of all levels, NGOs, professional associations, on the other hand, have a difficult mission toward modernising the learning process so that the one-to-one relationship between these two sectors should ensure convergent strategic actions to support the dynamic and sustainable development of the youth tourism.

Plurilingualism is the fundamental principle of the educational linguistic policies which ensure unity in diversity.

In 2001 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe drafted the recommendation 1539 by which they “invite the Member States to foster plurilingualism, the cultural diversity and the understanding among peoples and nations and to encourage all Europeans to acquire the skills to communicate in several languages” [10:1-16].

The European Union has set in the “White Paper” the goal that every citizen should learn at least two foreign languages and prepared a European profile for training teachers of foreign languages. The Council of Europe approved the Standards on linguistic skills for transparency and quality and the “Common Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment”.

In its turn, the youth tourism has a big impact on education. The good practices disseminated in international language camps where young people from England, Germany, France, Spain, Russia, China, come and socialise for minimum two weeks, may also be taken over by and in Romania.

An exceptional example is the European project no. 135390-LLP-1-2007-DE-KAZMP entitled “Be multilingual – Improving the motivation of the trainees in foreign languages by implementation of modern learning methods in tourism”. The project conducted within the framework of the LIFELONG LEARNING programme of the European Commission was initiated and supervised by VolkshochschuleimLandkreis Cham e.V. and had as partners lifelong training organisations and foundations from Austria, Spain, France, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, Romania (Repere Association – Bacau Branch) [11:9-14]. Following this project, a self-driven learning manual was prepared. This manual may be used by both students and entrepreneurs in tourism, especially the ones from the small and medium establishments of tourists’ reception located in rural environments who are gradually guided in selecting the learning materials and the learning methods so that they may identify their own needs and opt for activities which favour the social interaction and attract larger groups toward learning modern language(s) specific to the segments – the target customers. “Furthermore, the project stipulates training and raising awareness among teachers and other categories of trainers, by creating a new methodological and pedagogical concept which includes: self-driven learning, content-related learning and family learning and also aspects on how they may be integrated in the formal and informal education systems” [11]. In addition, we should also note the innovative pedagogical methods such as “Dis-moi les couleurs du monde” (knowing cultures by comparing languages), Galanet (intercomprehension of Romanic languages), E-tandem (learning a language with a partner using the Internet).

5.4 Strategic Landmarks regarding Development of Youth Tourism in Romania for the Timeframe 2020-2026

In this part of the paper we will use a series of provisions of the Master Plan on Development of National Tourism for the timeframe 2007-2026, drafted by 6 UNWTO consultants and 20 Romanian experts. The action plan and the implementation were the responsibilities of the Government which appointed an Implementation Committee to monitor enforcement of recommendations and to assist in overcoming the difficulties encountered. All forums responsible have acknowledged that the recommendations were implemented in part despite the fact that significant European structural funds were available for the period 2007 - 2013.

The Master Plan mentions on page 65 the number of the new accommodation establishments for the young tourists available in 2006:

- hostels – 41;

- youth hotels – 34;
- bungalows – 298.

As shown in table 1 above, the numbers for 2017 are significantly higher, especially for youth hotels; this supports the idea that this form of tourism is in on an increasingly ascending trend.

At the end of 2006 there were 184 companies authorised as tour operators located in all counties. Most of them were in Bucharest (36), Brasov (15), Constanta (14), Cluj (13), Iasi (12) [12:65]

At the end of 2017 the situation was completely different. There were 2,611 travel agencies: Bucharest (732), Brasov (101), Constanta (140), Cluj (89), Iasi (60) etc.

For the same period (2006-2007) the National Centre for Tourism Education (CNIT) had 937 skilled guides for the following categories (table 3). [12:71-2]

Table 3. Skilled guides existing at the end of 2006

National	758
Local	93
specialists:	
• Mountain	56
• Religious	26
• Horseback riding	1
• Sport	1
• Animation	1
• Ecotourism	1
Total	937

Source: [12:72]

The guides available at that date were skilled for the following foreign languages (table 4)

Table 4. Foreign languages spoken by guides available at the end of 2006

Arab	3
Bulgarian	1
Czech	9
English	622
French	190

German	105
Greek	6
Hindu	1
Italian	43
Hebraic	1
Japanese	29
Hungarian	20
Norwegian	4
Dutch	1
Portuguese	3
Polish	3
Romanian only	68
Russian	10
Spanish	26
Swedish	4
Turkish	2

Source: [12:72]

We can see that at the beginning of the period under analysis there was a shortage of facilities required for a quality youth tourism, which means that for the activities specific to this segment – horseback riding, sports, animation, ecotourism, there were no skilled guides or guides speaking foreign languages, except the most frequent ones – English, French, German.

In 2017 the Ministry of Tourism published the list of licensed guides consisting of 2,404 persons with national certification and 460 persons with local certification. Sadly, we were unable to find statistics on foreign languages available in the current list of guides. However, the National Authority for Tourism (ANT) states that all licensed guides are to speak at least two popular foreign languages, irrespective of the type of their permit (national, local, mountain, religious etc).

In 2007 Romania had 16 ANT offices abroad, with one employee each and the following responsibilities [12:75]:

- providing tourists with information;
- promoting Romania to tour operators;
- developing liaisons with the media;
- coordinating promotion campaigns, advertisements, stands and exhibitions for Romania.

Under such circumstances maintaining or entering foreign markets was almost impossible.

In 2007 there were 37 tourist information centres nationwide and 90 employees who, according to the Master Plan, had no skills required to present or communicate information. On March 30 2018 Romania had 89 Tourist Information Centres (CIT).

At present the official education in tourism provided by high schools and universities specialised in tourism is considered to be have a good level; yet, it does not rely on formation of practical skills. There is also the institutionalised system of adult training within the Institute for Tourism Education (CNIT) operating under the National Agency for Tourism (ANT).

Effective 2000, CNIT subcontracted the activity of a private provider of training courses – THR – GC (Tourism, Hotel & Restaurant Consulting Group) established in 1998.

Despite all actions taken in 2007, only 20% of graduates of high schools and universities specialised in tourism work in the sector of hospitality and tourism in Romania. Currently, their level of skills is still low and does not meet the tourists' requirements.

The Master Plan states that “the tourism guide should not provide information the same way as an audio tape, but possess linguistic skills and culture knowledge in history, geography, art and architecture, economy, politics, religion and sociology in relation to the countries where they work or where the tourists originate” [12].

Improving in professional terms as well as in terms of one's conduct represents to all operational staff a challenge and one step forward to a competitive position for Romania as destination for young tourists on the domestic and foreign market. Numerous international partnerships were concluded with tourism organisations, training organisations, fostering organisations with a view to embracing the modern methods intended for communication-fostering in international languages, especially in the online version which the young people mainly use.

“Considering the economic and social status of youth on one hand, and the need la support their educational process on the other hand, the youth tourism movement is considered an important part of social tourism. From this perspective, the development of youth travel in European countries is a major concern for each country, as well as for international organizational that activate in youth travel and social tourism” [13:158].

In 2017 Romania saw the absolute record in terms of tourism compared to 1990-2016. The strategic plans estimate that Romania will become in the next 10 years a top destination on the European map.

6. Discussions

The issue approached is topical and extremely complex; nevertheless, the specialist works tackle it to a low extent. The segment of young tourists was actually underestimated, affected by prejudices and therefore insufficiently analysed with scientific rigour. The impossibility to avoid some redundancies in the statistical data, the shortage of analyses on the one-to-one relationship between tourism and education in foreign languages, did not enable a very coherent approach from a scientific viewpoint. As a result, the role of the research is to signal some mutations which emerged in these two sectors and the need to practice an innovative management adapted to the new realities. The limitations of the research mainly consist in the fact that it does not ensure the generalisation capacity in relation to the findings made due to the constraints entailed by the shortage of information strictly focused on the youth tourism.

7. Conclusions

The youth tourism no longer represents a market niche, but a dynamic strategic sector capable to significantly contribute to the economic development of Romania.

In this sector there are global issues which require global solutions; that is the reason why strategic partnerships and international projects are essential.

The increasingly high expectations of the young tourists call for quality performance not only in relation to basic services - accommodation, transport, food, but also in the people-to-people relations, more exactly in communication, which means linguistic skills and diversified knowledge adapted to the target segments.

Romania has all material and human resources for a quality tourism designed for young persons; yet it needs to have the know-how, to implement the most modern managerial concepts in order to develop the skills to design an offer in line with the customers' consumerism preferences and in full acknowledgment of the strategies adopted by the internal and international competitors.

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