

Youth Travel Guidelines in the International and European Context

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Abstract: This paper wants to be an approach of the major guidelines in the dynamic of youth travel in the international and European context.

By looking at the influence of certain factors, we shaped two categories of major guidelines: quantitative – an increase in the interest for developing youth travel through wider involvement from stakeholders, increasing the number of tourists, specialized bodies, programs and facilities; and structural developments (qualitative) – diversification of tourism products for youth (adventure, educational, cultural, sports, etc.), emergence of new tourist destinations, quality service improvement as a result of increased demands from young tourists, development and diversification of the provided range of benefits, creating new partnerships, etc.

Key-Words: youth travel, youth travel guidelines, quantitative guidelines, structural mutations, stakeholders, trends in international youth travel.

1 Introduction

Youth travel is a booming market and it's becoming increasingly more important for many countries around the world as a result of the forecasted growth, especially on medium term. The main *arguments* of youth travel development are expressed by: *the obvious need of young people to travel* - as a way to develop their personality and steer demand towards new and active destinations or types of vacation; *a relatively low level of investments* in accommodation units due to the fact that young people don't demand luxurious or extremely diversified services (these accommodation units are classified from 1 to 3 stars even in our country); *the average or even high level of the budget* allocated for tourism because they are willing to save money, etc.

In the context of the mutations that are currently occurring in global economy and which represent a benchmark for the evolution of youth travel, certain guidelines are being shaped at

international and European level that have direct consequences over the prospects and courses of action for its development. Industry experts believe that in addition to general and specific trends of tourism, youth travel guidelines are influenced by a series of aspects, such as: *increased demand* mainly generated by the demographic trends; *increased concerns for safety and security*, especially for the segment of group travels; *the involvement of more parties in the travel decision of young people*, which is also relevant for groups of young tourists; *modern technology*, whose impact on youth travel is increasingly larger and complex; *the emergence of new destinations*; *increased budget* allotted by young tourists for *services and, particularly, for air travel*; *high mobility*; *increased demands of young tourists*, etc.

2. Youth Travel Guidelines

Starting from the mentioned aspects and in conjunction with the developments in global economy, a few major guidelines can be outlined in the dynamic of youth travel:

- Firstly, **quantitative** - an increase in the interest for the development of youth travel through wider involvement from stakeholders, increasing the number of tourists, specialized bodies, programs and facilities;
- Secondly, **qualitative, structural mutations** - diversification of tourism products for youth (adventure, educational, cultural, sports, etc.), emergence of new tourist destinations, quality service improvement as a result of increased demands from young tourists, development and diversification of the provided range of benefits, creating new partnerships, etc.

Regarding the *first category of guidelines*, there is currently a **growing interest in the development of youth travel**, a growth that is reflected in the increasing number of tourists, of bodies that work in this field of tourism, of tourism programs and facilities for young people.

As shown, the interest manifested by various countries for youth travel is growing, most of them believing that this type of tourism will become an important market segment and will consolidate its current position. There are “more optimistic” regions (such as: Middle East, Asia and Africa) regarding this market segment due to the predominantly young population and their active role in promoting it, and less confident regions (the entire American continent and Europe) because youth travel is already very important and this situation is unlikely to change in the near future (see figure no. 1).

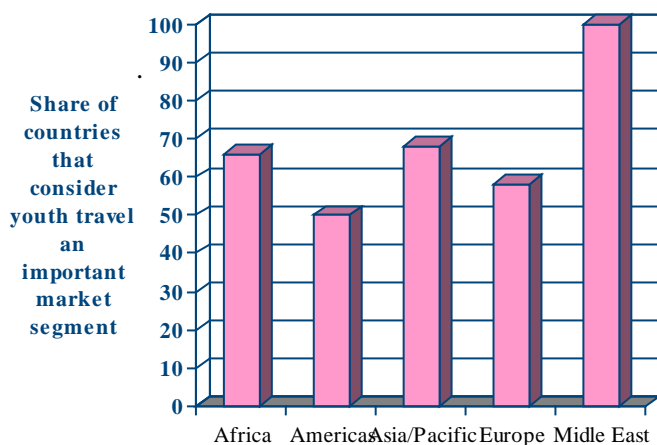


Fig. 1 Previsions regarding youth travel for the period 2010-2020 by world regions

Source: UNWTO, Survey on Youth and Student Tourism among National Tourism Administrations/Organizations

In the countries that forecast the growth of youth travel, there is a series of motivating factors, namely: the development and diversification of tourism products attractive for young people, relatively cheap tourist destinations, opportunities for adventure, for exploring wide life and for practicing sports, educational and cultural exchange programs and mobility programs that are in full expansion, the international dimension and formative character of this type of tourism, etc. Also, there are states that rely on the fact that their tourism potential can be capitalized better by youth travel, more accurately through its forms of manifestation: cultural tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism or sports tourism.

A significant influence in the development of youth travel belongs to the **stakeholders** whose actions of involvement, interests and influences must be acknowledged in the national, regional and international context. Their importance consists in supplying material, financial, informational and human resources, determining the size of the youth travel phenomenon and strengthening its position within tourism.

The main stakeholders involved in youth travel are young people, the business environment (tourism companies, service providers, investors), the government/state, local authorities and other organizations (NGOs, universities, etc.) (see figure no. 2).

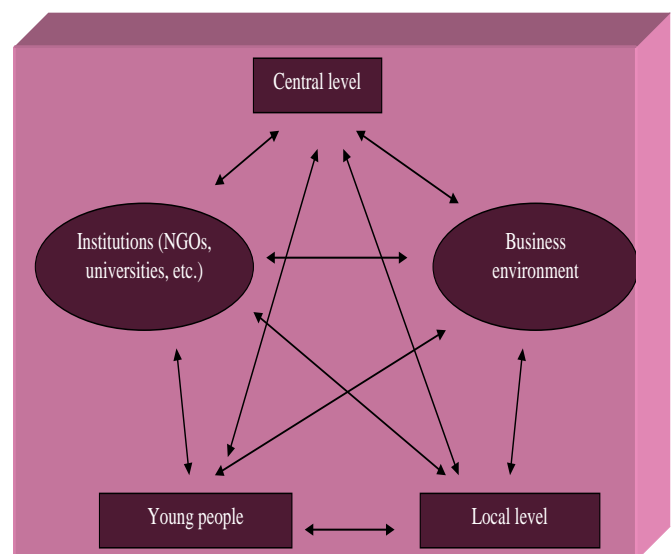


Fig. 2 Stakeholders involved in youth travel

Source: prepared by authors

At European and international level there is a growing interest from certain categories of stakeholders regarding the institutionalization and organization of youth travel, and the level of involvement in youth travel development policies is also growing, even if it differs among countries and regions. Thus, there are many countries that have developed and are implementing strategies for the development of youth travel with the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders from the business environment, from local, regional or central level and from specialized bodies. Understanding the motivations and constraints of young people as stakeholders is a crucial element in shaping the strategic course of action.

The most important **trend** that currently manifests on the market is **a growth of youth travel** at global level, as well as on regions, this growth being sustained by the recovery of tourism after the global economic crisis, by sustained policies, by incentives and facilities granted to young people. Being a booming market, it requires more attention, particularly in terms of future strategies that will encourage youth travel.

Dynamically speaking, youth travel is on an upward curve, as demonstrated by the main indicators of global tourism traffic.

Young people today outnumber their predecessors, are better informed and, in time, will purchase increasingly more tourism products that will meet their expectations. The overall demand in the youth travel industry reacted well to the impact of the global economic crisis, recording a decline of only 0.3% [7], lower than that of the global tourism industry (-4% in 2009). This underlines the particularity of the youth travel market as being less weak-willed, which may contribute to maintaining the balance of tourist destinations worldwide. Also, it should be undervalued because it has a huge growth potential – 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 25 or 1.7 billion people aged 15 to 30, which represent an important market segment of future consumers and an approximate value of 136 billion dollar per year [2]. The increased propensity of young people towards practicing tourism can contribute to stimulating others to travel: if young people are accustomed from an early age to travel, they will be more tolerant towards their peers and they will represent potential consumers of tourism services as adults, encouraging family and friends to do the same.

This evolution is also due to the action of specific factors, such as: increased share of students worldwide, increased incomes, the emergence of new tourist destinations, etc.

The different rates of development of world countries leave a mark on the evolution of youth travel. The countries that are expected to have the fastest growing rate in terms of tourism demand, including for youth travel, are shown in table no. 1.

Table 1

The expected evolution of tourism demand for the period 2007-2017

Rank	Country	Projected growth
1.	China	9,1%
2.	India	7,9%
3.	Croatia	7,9%
4.	Vietnam	7,5%
5.	Hong Kong	7,4%
6.	Romania	7,0%

Source: European Tourism Futures Institute, www.tourism-futures.org

As seen in the table above, four of these six countries are Asian states, which proves once more that the Asia and Pacific area will have the fastest growth in terms of the overall tourism industry. The tourism growth in this region of the world is mostly due to economic growth and to the flow of foreign investments in the area. Also, it's expected that China and India will become in the following years the new "Asian tigers" of tourism. It shouldn't be overlooked that our country is ranked sixth, being the second European country, after Croatia, that will record a growth of approximately 7% in tourism demand, having a favourable impact on the development of youth travel.

Thus, in accordance with the trends recorded in the international tourist traffic's dynamic and structure, we can say that the emitter of youth travel is concentrated in a relatively small group of countries with booming economies, while the scope of the receiving tourism is much broader, comprising countries with developed economies, as well as developing countries.

In connection with the conducted analyses and the receptivity of countries to this phenomenon, it may be said that one of the current **trends** in international youth travel is **the concentration of emission** in South East Asia. Countries like China and India are important pools of demand that generate yearly revenues of approximately 17 billion dollars, with China alone having 256 million young users of Internet and an expected growth rate regarding young people of 500 million people by 2015 (approximately the size of the European

Union). Young Chinese show special interest in other cultures, they want to travel and study abroad, placing emphasis on Western education and choosing destinations such as: USA, Australia, Japan, Great Britain, South Korea, Canada, Singapore, France, Germany and Russia. Studies show that 1.27 million young Chinese studied abroad in 2010 [8], positioning China first in the world, and an additional 645.000 Chinese students will have studied abroad by 2025 [5], an increase of 84% compared to 2007. These two countries will be joined by other emerging markets, such as Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Czech Republic, Vietnam, Pakistan, Russia, Georgia or states from Central Asia, namely Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

As shown, the main **reception areas** for youth travel are located in **Europe and America**, but new destinations such as Asia, Africa and the Middle East have increased their market share.

In terms of *the second category of trends* on the youth travel market, namely structural mutations, what stands out are the development and diversification of vacations or youth programs, the emergence of new tourism destinations, the improvement of quality service due to the increasing demands of young people regarding comfort, safety and security, the creation of new partnerships, etc.

One of the effects of increased demand for youth travel is that certain segments of this market have become more visible and more clearly defined as a result of product development and diversification. The products in question are relatively new products for youth, such as: *adventure products, extreme sports, "work and travel" programs*, which represent a market niche that is rapidly expanding at global level, *mobility programs*, etc.

Being characterized by the desire for dynamic, active and original vacations, young people prefer services specific for **sports and adventure tourism**, such as: extreme sports, hiking, mountain-biking, climbing, winter sports (skiing, snowboarding) or water sports (surfing, water ski and scuba diving, kayaking and canoeing on rivers and lakes, etc.). The specific features of an adventure tourism product refer to: the fact that it has a certain risk factor; the tourist has to have certain skills to practice it; it takes place in less accessible areas. Sports and adventure tourism are increasingly more demanded forms of tourism by young tourists from all over the world and, therefore, an increasing number of destinations are offering these types of activities and a higher risk level. Young people are typically curious to discover places still untouched by civilization and are brave

to explore them in a manner that incites the senses (winter hiking, climbing, diving, rafting, paragliding, bungee jumping, canoeing, etc.). The environment itself has become an important tourist attraction (natural protected areas, national parks), young people being drawn to exploring and adventures in nature.

Even in times of crisis, adventure tourism, which often implies carrying a backpack, tent accommodation and plenty of exercise, is on an upward trend both in Europe and internationally. In 2009, at global level, 89 billion dollars were spent on active holidays, without including money for transport and for purchasing the necessary equipment, the average cost of a vacation ranging between 450 and 800 dollars. The countries from where most backpackers are coming are: USA, Argentine, Brazil, Great Britain, Germany and Spain.

In the world's top tourist destinations for adventure, the first place in the group of emerging countries is occupied by Slovakia, followed by Israel, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovenia, Chile and even Romania (ranked 11th out of 164 countries), while in the category of developed countries, the first positions are occupied by Iceland, Switzerland, New Zealand, England and Australia. Of the top 20 destinations, 15 are European countries, which proves that the old continent has a significant potential for adventure tourism and provides a wide range of tourism products or destinations of this type.

Cultural exchanges are included in the same category of relatively new products that enjoy a growing demand; their diversification in terms of content and destinations will influence the tourism market of young people.

Developing and diversifying facilities provided for young people by providers and organizers of holidays and by organizations they are members of or by the state are also a new trend in youth travel. Because school holidays are the most demanded periods for youth travel and the availability of cheap tourism products is limited, suppliers, intermediaries and other bodies provide various facilities (such as: lower accommodation rates by providing rooms with multiple beds or lower tariffs for transport services) to attract a wider segment of youth.

The most common types of facilities provided globally are free products, social programs, discounts for services (accommodation, transport, leisure) and cards. An eloquent example is France, where public authorities and five major unions and other bodies in the field have signed

since 2001 a partnership to facilitate the access to vacations for as many people as possible, mainly focusing on young people. In this manner, the “loisirs” tickets have been launched on the market and they allow young people to spend relaxing and fun holidays that include meals, access to various leisure and entertainment activities, etc. in regional outdoor resorts and amusement parks.

Another trend is the **emergence of new tourist destinations** for youth travel. Europe is facing fierce competition on this market, the number of specific tourist destinations for young people almost doubled and new areas such as Brazil, Taiwan and Costa Rica emerged. Experts also expect a continuous rise in the number of young people who work during holidays to cover their travel expenses. Countries such as England and Australia, which are destinations preferred by youth, capitalize on this upward trend through aggressive and flexible marketing in terms of the work and travel opportunities. As known, young people spend on average more time at a destination than other segments of tourists. They also exercise less pressure on cultural and natural resources, contributing to the protection of the environment and playing a major role in the development of local tourist attractions. At the same time, at international level, there is a trend to **centralize** youth travel **destinations**, either in terms of certain segments of young people (South East Asia for backpackers), or in terms of forms of travel (Europe for adventure and winter sports tourism, Europe and North America for educational tourism).

The concerns related to safety and security represent a challenge, as well as an opportunity for players in the field. The organizers of tourism products for young people that prefer adventure and sports vacations are mostly concerned by issues related to the security and safety of young tourists during transport and at the destination. Those who travel alone are less preoccupied with issues of this type and the traditional image of Europe might be to “safe” for the type of tourists who seek challenges and adventure. In this context, school boards are increasingly more involved in decisions about school trips, and parents and family members show a growing interest in accompanying groups of young people during trips, especially when it is a major event.

Another aspect related to responsibility and which recorded in recent years a significant increase is **creating of partnerships** as an influence factor [7] of business in youth travel. This is proven by the importance of the efforts to develop connections between stakeholders in tourism as the economic

climate began to deteriorate at global level due to the economic crisis.

In some countries, the expansion of youth travel is based on enhancing cooperation and on building partnerships, particularly in the area of holiday tourism, which are materialized in youth exchanges in various regions of the world and which contribute to creating their own image about a certain destination.

Capitalizing on the current and future opportunities, the tourism industry has to be receptive in order to acknowledge young tourists as being a separate and important market segment that has a significant potential for long-term development.

Considering the economic and social status of youth on one hand, and the need to 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 organizations that activate in youth travel and social tourism.

In summary, it can be said that the youth travel market is facing a series of quantitative and qualitative trends whose identification and accurate assessment will ensure the overall development of youth travel in Europe and at global level.

3 Conclusion

Considering the *mutations* that are currently happening in global economy (economic globalisation, sustainable development, the development of the tertiary sector, technical progress and computerization, economic and financial crisis, global demographic trends, age structure and regional distribution, etc.), *the main guidelines* that are shaped on this market are quantitative and structural (qualitative) and mainly refer to: increasing the interest for the development of youth travel through wider involvement from stakeholders, increasing the number of tourists, specialized bodies, programs and facilities, diversifying tourism products for youth, the emergence of new tourist destinations, quality service improvement as a result of increased demands from young tourists, developing and diversifying the provided range of benefits, creating new partnerships, etc.

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