

States' Policies Regarding Youth Travel

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***Abstract:** Many experts within the tourism industry believe youth travel is the fastest growing market segment, and the previsions of the World Tourism Organisation estimate that young people will account in the near future for over 25% of the global tourism market volume. On one hand, this phenomenon can be explained by the cultural motivation of young people to practice tourism and, on the other hand, by the relatively low and acceptable transportation costs, at least for young people living in developed countries. We must also underline the role played by various organisms and associations in tourism in the development of networks of accommodation units accessible for youth, such as dorms or hostels.*

Youth travel holds an important place in global tourism and, consequently, knowing the evolution of this tourism form in various developed countries implies approaching the aspects regarding the dimensions of this phenomenon at national level, various programmes and facilities offered to the youth in practicing tourism, as well as its development perspectives and directions.

This paper also includes a practical approach that analyzes the touristic activities, products and events organized and provided by various countries for the youth travel segment.

***Keywords:** youth travel, tourism products, cultural events, travel tours, educational exchanges.*

Introduction

Despite the growing dimensions and dynamics of the youth travel market, few countries have a specific development strategy for this tourism form. The absence of information regarding the size, and particularly the economic and social meaning of youth travel, as well as the existence of an unclearness in defining the youth travel concept, are the main problems that the world states face when elaborating its development strategies. There are numerous approaches of this market, which is rather seen as an age segment (but with variable limits), a niche market, a mean to achieve international trades or a way to promote peace and understanding at a global level. There is a close connection between the acknowledging level of youth travel and the development of policies at the level of the states in this area; in other words, the countries that don't acknowledge the youth travel market won't develop a strategy for young tourists.

The most coherent policies regarding youth and student travel were

developed in Asia, where tourism is considered in many countries as an extension of the educational process and a mean to achieve peace and international understanding. In Latin America, the development of cultural travel tours is becoming increasingly important for tourism in general and for youth travels in particular.

1. The policy specific for youth and student travel

States' governments can facilitate the development of youth travel not only through a tourism policy, but also through an educational and cultural policy. As seen in figure no. 29, there are many activity sectors where governments can influence youth travel. They also have an important role in creating the infrastructure and facilities for youth travel, more precisely through investments in modernizations and development of accommodation units, food service, recreation, etc., and they can also influence this tourism activity through visa policies.

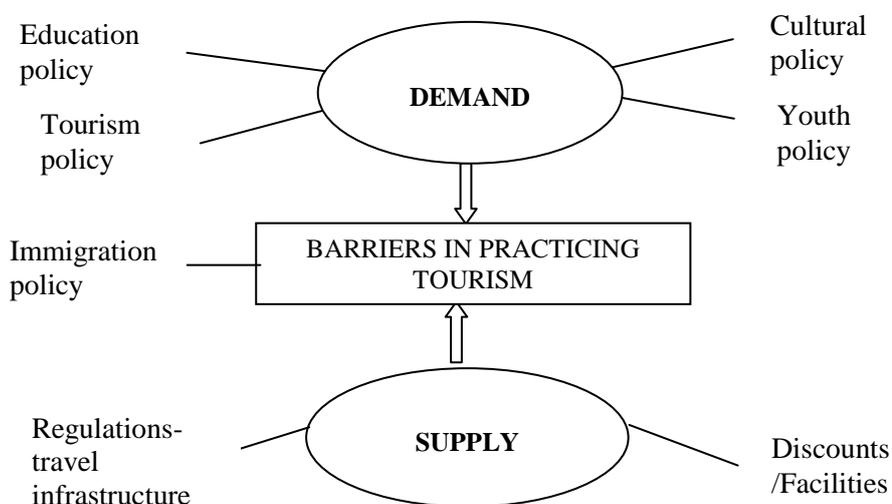


Figure 1. The national political framework regarding youth travel

Source: Richards, G., *ISTC/UNWTO Survey on Student and Youth Tourism among National Tourism Administrations/ Organizations*, Tourism Market Trends– World Overview & Tourism Topics, 2005 Edition, World Tourism Organization, Madrid, 2006.

There are countries that acknowledge the connection between youth travel, education and cultural exchange. For example, the Danish policy for youth has the objective: “All young people should be able to enjoy the possibilities of an eventful youth qualifying them for an independent and diversified life as active contributors to the development of society” (World Tourism Organization, 2006). The consequence of this perspective is the promoting of travelling and studying abroad of young people by the government of this country. In the year 2000, in Denmark,

4370 students have received scholarships to study abroad (in addition to those who participated in exchange programmes, such as ERASMUS).

Many countries of the world underline the importance of the visa policy for youth travel. Due to international terrorisms, there are already certain threats for students who practice tourism and for the ones who work during summers, in terms of a more harsh scrutiny of the residence visas. For example, Richard Florida, the author of the “creative class” concept, in the paper “*The Rise of the Creative Class: And How it’s transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*”, warns that the strict policy of the visas for the United States of America will direct many young people towards other countries due to the difficulties faced in obtaining a visa (Florida, 2002). Other arguments in this direction are added by the report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (O.E.C.D.) regarding education (O.E.C.D, 2005), which shows a slowdown in the dynamic of the tourism practiced by students in the United States due to a recent regulation that stipulates that all citizens returning to the USA from Mexico or Canada must have a valid passport.

Thus, some countries take measures in order to facilitate granting visas for young people, such as, simplifying the procedure for obtaining them, extending their duration or reducing visa taxes. Japan offers visa extensions or tax cuts for the youth coming from ASEAN countries (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and Hungary provides a 50% discount for visa taxes for foreign youth who visit the country.

Despite all the advantages provided by this form of tourism, few countries have a specific policy for youth travel, and they generally emphasize promotion and marketing. In Hungary, youth travel is part of the National Tourism Master Plan until 2013; in India, developing travel products for young people was one of the key objectives included in the 10th Five-year plan (2002-2007); in Malaysia, student travel was included in the 8th National Development Plan, and in countries like South Africa and India, the tourism activity is integrated in various National Youth Plans. “World Youth Forum of the United Nations” (Braga, Portugal, August 1998) recommended to include tourism within the national youth policies, but, currently, there is no close connection between youth travel and the policies of many states.

Some countries have come up with much more flexible visas for students, which allow them to study for a longer period of time. In New Zealand, “the students’ immigration policy has evolved during 2005 in the direction of encouraging access and flexibility for work opportunities – which influences all aspects, including language and school level. The new government initiatives include an international student scholarship program and more opportunities for post-graduate students” (Richards, 2006).

The most comprehensive policies for youth travel seem to be have been developed in Asia, where certain countries see tourism as an extension of the education process and as a mean to develop understanding at global level. Thus,

Taiwan has elaborated the “Action Plan to Promote International Student and Youth Travel”, whose main objectives are: attracting young foreign tourists by creating a new tourism image for this country, allotting governmental resources for developing youth travel and elaborating a marketing strategy to actively promote international youth and student travel.

In *Philippines*, the development of youth travel is based on two main objectives: raising awareness among young Filipinos regarding the sense of preservation and capitalization of the national tourism potential and promoting tourism as a mean to educate and shape young people. In Asia, youth travel is seen as an educational tool for promoting understanding and instilling certain values.

Although they don't have a clear policy for youth travel, some countries still elaborate certain directions for the future development of this market. For example, in *Kuwait* “youth is one of the tourism market segments targeted by the Tourism Master Plan in this country, which shapes the framework for developing and promoting this market segment.”

In many other countries the development of youth travel is left to voluntary associations rather than the private or governmental sector. In *Italy*, “Centro turistico studentesco e giovanile” (C.T.S.) is an important association in this field, promoting youth travel in partnership with various international organizations. C.T.S. provides travel products specific for youth and has branch offices across Italy and abroad. Another Italian association, “Associazione italiana alberghi per la gioventù” is specialized in accommodation services for youth.

Because national development strategies for youth travel are closely related with the education policy, in the last years many countries have begun to promote various study programmes for foreign students, these representing a new source of income, especially for universities. For example, in *Great Britain*, in 2004, over 43.000 foreign students have enrolled in British universities from the 300.000 that applied to primarily learn English. In recent years the number of Chinese students in British universities has increased and they currently represent one in seven of all foreign students.

In *Malaysia*, student travel has become a priority area and in order to develop its potential for education and student travel, considerable efforts have been put into promoting Malaysia as an education centre. An expert commission was established at national level to develop education tourism, which includes objectives like the marketing and promotion of education, as well as the facilitation of administrative procedures for students and parents.

In *Australia*, there was even a programme to attract foreign students, students who don't only travel across Australia, but also attract friends and relatives to practice tourism during their stay there. A recent study points out that almost half of the students were visited by relatives and friends for an average period of 31 days (Jarvis & Peel, 2005). This experience was also repeated in Malaysia, where it was noticed the 36.468 foreign students generated “additional spinoffs as parents of foreign students took the opportunity to spend their holidays at tourist attractions when visiting their children”.

In some countries, young people are targeted for work during summers. The Australian Working Holiday Maker visa programme is also promoted on the French and British markets. The number of visas granted within this programme increased from 74.450 in 1999-2000 to 93.760 in the 2003-2004 (Newlands, 2005). In New Zealand, the number of work visas issued for holidays has increased dramatically in recent years and the number of countries included in this programme will be increased.

Not too long ago, the main development directions for youth travel at global level were initiated by various organisms in the private or voluntary sector, while governments were mostly conservative in approaching this market. Youth travel was traditionally considered a less profitable market segment and therefore, unattractive for many countries that tried to develop "quality tourism", but the current popularity regarding long-time travels done by youth, studying abroad, learning a foreign language and the accommodation units for youth have determined many states to re-evaluate their attitude towards this tourism form.

2. Tourism activities, products and events organized within youth travel by the governments

The active involvement of the governments in developing tourism products for youth is less common and only a few countries (approximately 20%) around the globe are actively involved in this direction.

Because of the special attention given to the youth travel policy, especially by countries in Asia and the Middle East, the development of youth travel products is more obvious in these regions than in Europe, the American continent or Africa (see the figure below).

The main **development directions for youth travel products** refer to:

- The technical and material base specific for youth travel, in particular the development of dorms and hostels networks;
- Designing tour packages;
- Developing information services among youth;
- Setting up cultural routes;
- Programmes with various discounts and facilities.

In most cases, these activities are carried out in partnership with the private sector or through governmental schemes that promote the activity of the private sector in the field of youth travel.

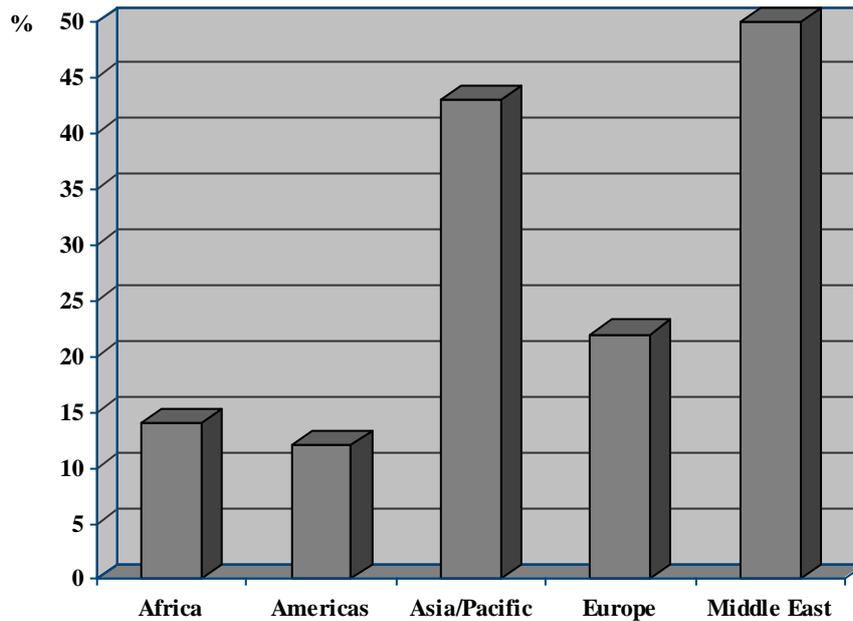


Figure 2. Countries with a specific policy regarding youth travel product development by region

Source: Richards, G., *ISTC/UNWTO Survey on Student and Youth Tourism among National Tourism Administrations/ Organizations*, Tourism Market Trends– World Overview & Tourism Topics, 2005 Edition, World Tourism Organization, Madrid, 2006.

For example, in Philippine there are certain products specific for young people, such as education travel across the country for groups of pupils and students or youth exchange programmes, in partnership with the local governmental units and with the support of the private sector. This type of projects can also be found in Taiwan, where the experts in the field think that “attracting more young travellers” and “developing new tourism markets” are the most important objectives; 2006 was declared by Taiwan “Youth Travel Year”, creating a friendly environment for international youth travel.

The school market is very important in many countries, particularly regarding domestic tourism. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Ministry of Tourism develops various governmental policies to facilitate youth travel, especially for those who wish to know their country better. These programmes have stimulated the creation of tourism agencies specialised in school excursions programmes. Zambia developed and implemented similar projects, which increased the number of accommodation units for youth, and in Ghana and Malaysia, Tourism Clubs were created to stimulate children to travel.

In some countries, the role of *cultural events* is considered a very important aspect in developing youth travel. Venezuela was the host of the 16th World Youth Festival in 2005, where approximately 20.000 people from around the world participated. Also in 2005, 1.000 young people were attracted by the “World Youth Day” in Luxemburg, and in 2001, a youth festival was held in Algeria, where thousands of young people from several countries attended, thereby stimulating the tourism flow. Hungary said that “Thanks to the increased number of musical and cultural festivals and the development of low cost airlines, youth travel showed significant increase during the last years” (WTO, 2006).

In Latin America, the development of *cultural routes* is becoming increasingly important for tourism in general and for youth travel in particular. In Peru, the PURIC (an old word for “walk”) programme is promoted to encourage young people to get to know the country by going on tourism routes “on the Inca trails”, programme supported by the public-private partnership, and Venezuela has a signed agreement with the International Student Travel Confederation (I.S.T.C.) to promote student cards in this country also.

In Belgium, developing youth travel products is mainly the task of the voluntary sector because youth travel is considered as being connected with social tourism. Voluntary organizations develop accommodation units for young people, design specific tourism products (routes, etc.) and provide facilities (discount cards).

In the context of youth travel, numerous countries actively promote a development policy for *educational exchanges*, programmes that are run in Europe and at international level. Several years ago, many national tourism organizations promoted various programmes to encourage youth to travel abroad with the purpose to make them interested in the patrimony and culture of other countries, and in many cases, these travels provide the opportunity to learn a foreign language or to study abroad.

There are signals that certain countries are aware of the long term benefits generated by attracting young people to practice tourism. For example, in Canada, the work programme for post-graduates provides foreign students the chance to work for up to two years after graduation; before 2005, they were allowed to work for only one year.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say there is a close relationship between the recognition level of youth travel by the state and the development of the policies in this field, as well as the research activity of this tourism market.

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