

# FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EVOLUTION OF YOUTH TRAVEL

Lecturer PhD Student Claudia MOISĂ  
University "1 Decembrie 1918" Alba Iulia

## *Abstract:*

*Youth travel is an important part of global tourism, consequently, getting to know the evolution of this form of tourism requires an approach of the aspects regarding the permissive and restrictive factors that influence the youth travel dynamic worldwide. In terms of the factors that influence youth travel, we highlighted these two categories of factors (permissive and restrictive) and, within each category, we tried to singularize the influence of every factor over youth travel.*

*Key words: tourism, youth travel, factors influencing evolution of youth travel, general factors, specific factors, factors that favour the development of youth travel, factors that restrict the development of youth travel*

## **Introduction**

The spectacular evolution of tourism reveals the perceptive nature of this activity sector to the dynamic of society, its evolution under the influence of a complex system of factors, differentiated by nature, role and participation in different proportions to the tourism phenomenon. Their influence varies not only in accordance to the specific content, but also in relation to the moment and place of action and, in addition, their mutual conditioning and the simultaneity of their action potentiate the final effect, making it difficult to quantify each contribution.

The goal of this paper is to analyze and clarify the influence that a series of factors have on the evolution of youth tourism, starting with their classification in two basic categories:

- general factors (demographic, incomes, prices and rates for tourism products, tourism offer, urbanization, leisure time, technical progress, etc), and

- specific factors (socio-economic characteristics and the financial resources of the family, lack of information, etc), and to review the

definitions given by various bodies in the field to youth travel.

## **The main factors influencing youth travel**

As a part of tourism, youth travel is influenced by two types of factors: **factors that favour** the development of youth travel and which may be divided in *general factors* (demographic, incomes, prices and rates for tourism products, tourism offer, urbanization, leisure time, technical progress, etc) and *specific factors* (socio-economic characteristics and the financial resources of the family, lack of information, etc) and **factors that restrict** the running and development of the activity, such as limited financial resources and the socio-economic characteristics of the family, lack of free time, lack of information regarding tourism offers, language barriers, etc.

- The main factor influencing youth travel is the **demographic factor**, namely **the population's dynamic and the changes in its structure in terms of age, occupation, environment**, etc.

The population is a pool for the tourism offer, but its response to the demographic changes is relatively

weak, even in the regions with a high level of economic development. The strong growth of the population in the last century did not fuel tourism in a systematic manner as it was foreseen, especially in regions with increased population growth where the change of the tourism intensity is slower, sometimes even imperceptible. It's about the regions with underdeveloped economy, where the birth rate is either exceeded by the death rate or is not accompanied by a proportional increase in the quality of life.

At global level it is estimated that together with the population increase, the indicator that expresses the share of tourists changed from 1/400 in 1950, corresponding to a population of 2.5 billion people, to 1/38 in 1998, for a population of 5 billion people and to 1/2 in 2000, corresponding to a population of 6 billion people (Cristureanu, 2006). Thus, we can see a spectacular evolution of the tourism intensity, explained by the correlation of the demographic growth with the worldwide economic development.

In conclusion, the demographic factor shows its effects on tourism, stimulating it in those regions where there are material, social and cultural conditions that come from economic development and, therefore, the quantitative connection between the tourism offer and the population size is not significant.

If in terms of quantity the demographic factor is not a determining factor of the tourism offer, the structural changes in terms of age, environment (urban, rural) and occupation influence tourism as a whole and they especially influence specific forms of tourism. The analysis of the demographic changes regards primarily the changes in the age pyramid and in the active population/inactive population ratio. Thus, the restructuring of the age pyramid shows a growth of the elderly population and it determines a larger

portion of this population to be involved in practicing a specific form of tourism, joining tourists that are mainly middle-aged, the so-called active population. Regarding the ageing phenomenon, the share of people over the age of 60 is increasing across Europe (14.5% of the population in 2000, meaning 40 million people, compared to 13% in 1997; 17.1% of the European Union population in 2008, with an upward trend of 30% in 2060 (Giannakouris, 2008)), which positively influences the tourism activity because of the characteristics of elderly people: a general good state of health and mobility, free time to practice tourism, well informed consumers, curious of new experiences, less seasonal than other categories of tourists, practicing tourism throughout the year. Regarding the vacation destinations, elderly tourists prefer the sea, tours and short stays in urban centers.

The demographic changes in Northern Europe, United States of America and Japan will increase the importance of the "third age" market and in regions where the population is increasingly younger – South Europe, South America and Southeast Asia – a growth of the market will be recorded for the segment of people between 18 and 30 years old.

At global level the youth represents 30-35% of the population and is demographic segment with a major role in increasing the tourist traffic due to more free time, the need for training, the desire to have fun, etc.

The number of pupils and students is rapidly increasing all over the world and, consequently, this is a good thing for the youth travel industry. This population segment includes young people who are travelling more often – both in groups and individually – and from a younger age than the previous generations. They are spending more and are travelling farther, towards more adventurous destinations and expecting more from their experiences than

previous generations (Richards and Wilson, 2003).

They will also contribute to increasing the social support of young people travelling in terms of the fact that parents, educators and employees – all the generations past young age – consider the independent travels of youth an important factor of personal development. This fact is also proven by the growing number of young people travelling in groups; the tour operators think that for many education institutions, travelling for tourism purposes has become a less optional activity and an increasingly more important part of a polished education (SYTA, 2003).

Youth travel was at the middle of the '90s a declining market or a stationing market because the number of young people in Europe recorded a drop and thus experts started to worry that the demographical changes might lead to a substantial reduction in the number of young people who practice tourism. Between 2000 and 2020 the proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 will drop from 12.2% to 10.9% of total EU population (Eurostat, 1999). For example, in Great Britain, until the 1970s the number of people aged 16 to 24 had increased every year starting with 1914, but today there are a million less people in this group age than at the beginning of the 1980s. The share of people in this age group continued to drop with 9% between 1993 and 1998, and in 2000, almost 39% (over 22.5 million people) of the population in Great Britain was over 45 years old (European Commission, 2001). But, in 1991, there were four major factors that influenced the youth travel market at European level in an "optimistic scenario", which also had influence in the coming period over:

➤ changes of perception regarding the limits of social classes, which allowed increased access to various opportunities related to tourism and travelling and which were

previously available only to tourists from the privileged social classes;

- the increase in the percentage of young people with complete education (including access to structures of tertiary level of education);
- the number of unemployed young people, which started to drop;
- the important increase of the income earned by parents.

The three socio-demographic categories with a major role in the restructuring of the tourism offer are:

- the 18-35 age group – tourists travelling alone or in groups will especially dominate the Asian outbound (China, Japan, being the most dynamic segments);
- people over 50 years old (baby-boomers) – are characteristic from a demographical standpoint for the tourism demand in Western Europe and North America. Most are early retired persons, who have enough time and resources to travel, stay for longer periods of time at a destination, their spending is above average and their main travelling motivation is cultural;
- family groups – they engage in group travels and request destinations that simultaneously satisfy two generations (parents - children).

▪ **The incomes of young people** – are the main requirement for tourism demand, an increase of revenues leading to an increase in tourism expenditure.

The incomes of the population express a country's level of economic and social development and indirectly, the opportunities for practicing tourism. Therefore, the growth of individual incomes – results of the economic growth and, accordingly, of the gross domestic product – directly influences the structure of consumption and, implicitly, the access to tourism for various social categories.

Because young people are influenced in practicing tourism by their limited finances, the level of their income is not only reflected in the level

of participation, but also in the level and structure of the requested tourism services, the duration of their stay, the travelled distance, the frequency of travels, the organized or particular feature of the holiday, travelling within or outside the borders, the option for a particular mode of transport.

In general, youth turns to the following means to finance a holiday:

- family and relatives (parents, grandparents, other members of the family, etc.);
- personal savings;
- facilities like holiday checks and vouchers issued by certain trade unions or by other bodies;
- various means that make the vacation less expensive (last minute deals, more people travelling with the same vehicle to reduce the cost of transport, housing more people in one room, etc.);

Young people save money to make a long journey because, in most cases, the expenditure is close to their annual income.

Chadee and Cutler reached the conclusion that 65% of students will use their savings to finance the journeys they have planned, while 9% will probably get a loan from a bank (Chadee and Cutler, 1996). This implies that students are planning journeys and making savings in advance, but there are also students that are taking jobs for a short period of time in order to raise money to travel. The study also revealed that only 8% of youth intend to borrow money from relatives and this is in accordance with the hypothesis that students are able to travel only if they have financial support from their parents.

- **Prices and tariffs** – represent another factor that stimulates tourism

development, influencing the tourism product as a whole or only one of its components: transport, accommodation, food, entertainment.

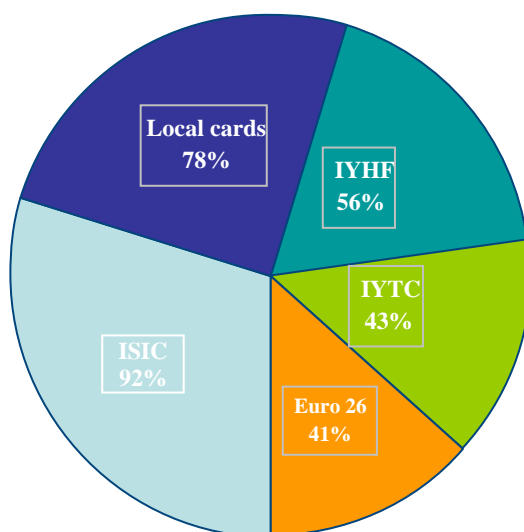
Charging high prices limits the access of young people to tourism services and is mainly reflected in the low number of tourists, in the short stays, in the travel distances, etc; at the same time, low prices stimulate demand, but there are also side effects – for example, very low prices or their drastic cut may generate distrust in the quality of the services and, as a result, a low travel frequency.

Discounts are very important for most young people and students. Over half of them receive discounts due to their student status as follows (Richards and Wilson, 2003):

- Up to 30% because of their age (up to 26 years old);
- Up to 25% for train and bus transport;
- Up to 17% for accommodation.

Of course, there are a few discounts for young people over 26 years old, such as air travel discounts by using member cards and discounts given to tourist groups.

According to the study “*New Horizons II – The Young Independent Traveller 2007*” conducted at global level by the World Youth Student & Education Travel Confederation in 2007, over half (approximately 60%) of the youth who practiced tourism in 2006 benefited from the following discounts: air travel (46%), surface travel (43%) and accommodation (40%) (Richards, 2007). Regarding the discount cards, the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) was the best known and most used by young people in order to benefit of those discounts (see figure no.1)



**Figure 1. The awareness level regarding discount cards among youth**

Source: Richards, G., *New Horizons II – The Young Independent Traveller 2007*, WYSE Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2007.

The situation in 2007 regarding the discounts obtained by youth card holders for various tourism services and products is illustrated below:

**Table 1**  
**Discounts obtained by using cards by travel product, 2007**

Type of card	-%-								
	Air travel	Surface travel	Accommodation	Language course	Work abroad	Study abroad	Volunteer program	Insurance	Tours
Euro 26	1,3	1,2	0,6	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,5	0,6
IYHF	0,3	1,0	5,1	0,3	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,4	0,7
Local	4,8	5,9	3,1	1,9	1,3	2,2	1,3	3,9	4,2
ISIC	19,7	17,5	11,9	3,5	3,1	3,7	2,8	8,8	12
IYTC	4,0	2,6	3,1	0,3	0,4	0,4	0,4	1,2	1,7
Other	18,2	18,2	19,8	21,5	22	21,2	21,8	19,9	19,3

Source: Richards, G., *New Horizons II – The Young Independent Traveller 2007*, WYSE Travel Confederation, Amsterdam, 2007.

After analyzing the data above, we can see the most used youth card in 2007 was ISIC, which helped students save an average of 100\$ on their last important trip. The saved amount increased considerably for longer journeys, with those who travelled for between four and six months saving over 150\$, and those with a minimum

stay of 14 days saving an average of 70\$.

- **The tourism offer** consists of tourism resources (natural and man-made), equipments and labour force and acts directly over the consumer and the phenomenon in its entirety. The abundance of natural, historical, civilization and cultural values of a country or region, as well as their level

of development, exercise a great force of attraction on youth, determining the size and direction of tourist flows.

The suppliers of tourism products for youth tend to develop new products as the market matures and as experienced travellers enter a new stage of their tourist carrier.

The increased revenues of the tourism providers based on the activity of young people, as well as the benefits that youth and students can obtain by travelling, has changed the attitude towards the youth travel market. Taken as a whole, the tourism industry has had a slow reaction in terms of accepting the importance of youth travel as being a significant and expanding market segment. While some tour operators conquered the target market of youth travel with considerable success, the market represented by youth travelling in other regions of the world was largely neglected and even abandoned in favour of other market segments.

School holidays are the most requested periods by young people and the availability of cheap tourism products is obviously limited, consequently, specific programmes don't "attract" youth with low incomes. Therefore, tourism wasn't successful in many countries, the main impediment being the service sector, which thinks that subsidizing accommodation during holidays is a form of unfair competition. At the same time, the Tourism and Air Transport Associations claims that approximately 35% of the demand for holidays during peak season can't be honoured due to the reduced accommodation capacity, the only solution being the rescheduling of school and student holidays.

Despite this fact, youth travel was not assessed at its real value and it wasn't even studied properly, in part due to problems regarding the quantification of this market; therefore, this "neglect" leads to the misconception

that youth tourism might have a too low economic value.

In this respect, in 1995, the European Travel Commission published a study regarding the youth travel market in Europe. The study covered 26 countries and it was a response to the neglect made consciently by the tourism industry and by the governmental authorities responsible for tourism development. Although young people were seen before as an unwanted element at most destinations, over time, they became a very attractive market segment.

Because youth travel is a profitable and expanding market, it should be better supported by the public sector, as well as the private sector.

- **The urbanization process** determines a series of changes regarding tourism traffic. The influence is manifested because of the effects of urbanization over the natural environment and over the psyche of young people. The higher is the urbanization level and the denser are the urban areas, the more increased is the tourism demand and the tourism consumption within leisure activities. Hence the need to escape from large urban centers to quiet and less polluted areas for recreation, rest, fun, and to cultural areas, as an expression of the need for education and spiritual fulfilment, a need that occurs in weekends and vacations.

- **Free time** – its scale and focus influence the tourism phenomenon in both a positive manner and a negative manner. Increasing free time at the expense of the working hours and of the work week, increasing the length of the annual paid vacation, improving quality of life and satisfying social demands favour a growth in the number of tourists and concentrates vacations in the same period of the year (summer). The negative influence is the crowding of holiday resorts and of the means of transport, with adverse consequences over quality. In

developed countries, about 30% of free time is for tourism, which is in competition with other leisure time activities like sports, cultural events and activities run at home.

Because young people have more free time than other groups of population, they travel relatively more than other tourist categories.

▪ **The technical progress** has direct consequences on the mobility level of the population, favouring travelling and impacting other phenomena like urbanization, industrialization, pollution, etc., which, at their turn, leave their mark on tourism. Technology influences in a direct manner the tourism demand, which is directed towards certain means of transport, of information, towards direct systems of distribution and towards new destination that became more accessible or towards complex tourism products that incorporate new technologies and provide a new type of tourism. The global tourism industry is still confronting with the implications of the “computer era” in the sense that it can transform from its supporter into an adversary. While many countries and activity sectors successfully use the Internet to launch various promotion campaigns, other regions of the world – such as Canada and Hong Kong, are still feeling the negative effects of the rapid spread of information (and disinformation) about the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003. The tourism industry in Canada recorded devastating losses in the summer of 2003 due to SARS – losses from which is still not fully recovered. After a moderate loss of revenue, youth hostels in Canada recorded a return to expected levels in less than three months after the initial outbreak. Although some improvements have been made, the industry experts believe that this impact will be felt in the coming years also.

Present and future generations of young tourists have been growing with

the Internet, so it’s no wonder that this medium plays an important role in youth travel before, while and after travelling. While the Internet facilitates rapid spreading of news about terrorism, natural disasters, epidemics, etc., it is also an important global communication mean and an advertising tool, so its influence over youth travel throughout the world and in Europe should not be underestimated.

Other factors that influence youth travel have emerged more recently, and they are:

- increasing the vacation budget;
- cheapening travel tickets;
- increasing the distance covered by buses reserved for young tourists;
- signing employment contracts for short periods of time, leading to some rather obvious vacancies regarding employment;
- increasing the number of suppliers of specific products for the young people and students who travel;
- increasing the number of tourist guides, such as *Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet*, covering a growing number of destinations outside the usual routes, including the ones visited by young people and students;
- the growing tendency of young travellers to work or study during their travel in order to finance it;
- the inclination of young people to travel to destinations that tend to be avoided by other categories of tourists (most time because of accessibility or because of political issues and problems of infrastructure), which means that this market is less exposed to external shocks (such as: wars, terrorist attacks, political turmoil).

All these factors contribute for certain to the development of youth travel, pushing young people and students to travel towards destinations throughout the world.

Although the dynamic of youth travel is impressive, it’s important to mention that youth travel is restricted by a series of factors and this form of

tourism is not available for all young people. Today, more than ever, there are considerable economic and social disparities between and inside countries, which are real obstacles for many who wish to travel.

The demand of young tourists is influenced by restrictive factors like the financial resources of the family, the socio-economic features of the family, lack of free time, lack of information regarding tourism offers, language barriers, etc.; factors that are obviously influencing the decision to travel.

The categories of young people who can't practice tourism for various reasons are:

- young people coming from low income families (single-parent families, farmers, unemployed, etc)
- young people who are looking for a job or are starting a family, and who invest in tourism after this stage
- young people living in the rural or semi-rural area and who cumulate the advantages of living in the country (nature) with its disadvantages

The obstacles encountered by various age groups in practicing tourism are:

□ *for children:*

- increasing the cost of the stay at the destination;
- the decision of the parents to take their children with them;
- the fear of the children to leave the family environment;
- the delayed development of tourism leisure and entertainment services in comparison to the offer of holiday resorts;
- the security syndrome manifested by parents, as a result of highly publicized accidents;

□ *for young people:*

- inexistent facilities for people aged 18 to 25;
- the existent delay between demand (motivated by conviviality, fun, various cultural and sporting activities) and supply (preferably the training of tour operators);

- last moment decisions resulted because of the young people's difficulty to anticipate;

- the lack of offers specific for youth, which forces them to go back to standard products, destined for families and adults;

- difficulties of cohabitation with other categories of tourists.

Despite all these obstacles, the youth is less sensitive to risks than other tourists. Thus, only an insignificant proportion (about 3% in 2007) of young people cancelled their trip due to terrorism, criminal acts, political turmoil, natural disasters, epidemics or other problems. Even then, the perceived levels of the crime rate have caused a feeling of anxiety rather than a change of travel plans.

It's interesting that young males are more predisposed than young females to be affected by terrorism, war or natural disasters, although women are more predisposed at being anxious about travelling in areas with high crime rate. In general, tourists with a high level of education, high incomes and who make longer journeys are less likely to be concerned about potential problems that may occur at the destination. An explanation for this behaviour may be that tourists with these features have the tendency to carefully plan the trips, and so they are aware of any problem before. Regarding the style of travelling, backpackers and travellers are less anxious than tourists regarding potential problems. Those with specific travel motivation, such as volunteers or those who are visiting friends or relatives, tend not to abandon the trip. Volunteers in particular are less likely to be frightened by a natural disaster, maybe because most volunteer programmes are meant to mitigate the impact of such phenomena.



## Conclusions

The information presented above provides insight into the complexity of the factors influencing the evolution of youth travel both positively and negatively. Knowing the factors that condition the evolution of this form of tourism on the market and the influence exerted by them is significantly

important for the development of youth travel, both domestically and internationally.

In conclusion, it appears that, regardless of the influence of certain factors, youth travel is a sector of the tourism industry that is growing much faster than the tourism market in general.

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