

Original scientific article

Received: 25. April 2022;

Received in revised form: 10 May 2022;

Accepted: 15 May 2022;

Available online: 25 May 2022.

UDC: 338.48-53.37:502

doi: 10.5937/zrgfub2270073Z

EDUCATIONAL TOURISM IN THE FUNCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Summary: Educational tourism is a selective form of thematic tourism and implies a trend of acquiring new knowledge, transferring knowledge to others, as well as improving skills outside the classroom. It implies a tourist activity in which education is the primary or secondary motive for staying at the destination. The main goal of the travel is focused on activities that include visits to other countries to learn about different cultures. These include student exchange programs and study trips, work, and skills development in different and new environments, such as numerous international internships. There is a difference between travels where education is not the main motive; however, during the holiday guests are educated about certain aspects of the tourist offer (e.g. cultural attractions) and travels where education is the main motive for travel and stay at the destination.

Keywords: Educational Tourism, Environmental Protection, ERASMUS

Introduction

The term educational tourism comes from the English language - educational travel and means a tourist segment where the basis of the program is the combination of teaching and learning. The terms: study travel, study abroad vacation, and learning vacation are used for this type of tourism. Through educational tourism, tourists satisfy their curiosity, study language, culture, stimulate interest in art, architecture, folklore, and deepen their fascination with cultural and historical places (Hadžić, 2006). It is

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intended for the school and higher learning population and is attracting ever-growing attention due to the acquisition of higher education, professional development, and raising awareness of the values of national culture and the local communities (Hadžić, 2005). Significant elements for the offer of educational tourist experience are relevant attractions and events that these places provide in learning (parks, historical sites, zoos, archaeological sites); followed by the human resources responsible for learning during the journey (staff, curators, translators, lecturers, storytellers, researchers, and academics); and those who help plan and develop learning programs for travelers (special interest groups, conservation organizations, universities, language schools) (Ritchie, 2003).

Educational tourism, in addition to satisfying the demand of a constantly growing group of people, serves as an important element for the promotion of certain destinations and the creation of new tourist centers. It represents something that distinguishes a certain destination concerning the competition, and that is why educational tourism must be included in the tourist offer of the country. Getting to know new cultures, making your own decisions, making new friends, and improving your foreign language skills are just some of the benefits of traveling abroad for work, study, or leisure. At the global level, only a few companies are successfully engaged in educational tourism, and some of them are Elderhostel, EarthWatch, and ACIS (American Council for International Studies). In Serbia, many travel agencies offer various educational programs abroad. In addition to agencies, various foreign language schools play an important role in the scope of tourist offers that belong to educational tourism.

According to Ritchie, educational tourism has a broad meaning, from learning while traveling to learning-oriented travel (Ritchie, 2003). Therefore, there are two types of learning, informal which takes place during the trip, and formal which is also the goal of the trip itself. When it comes to motivation, education can be the primary and secondary motive for travel. In his paper, Wood (2001) raises the dilemma of whether people whose main motive for travel is education and not tourism activities themselves, should be labeled as members of educational tourism (Wood, 2001). Although their main motives are not certain tourist activities but education, school trips, language schools, or student exchanges, they have an impact on the destination itself, but also tourist movements. In his 2003 publication, Ritchie explains the connection between tourism and education, taking into account the external environment. According to the same author, educational tourism consists of educational trips (edu-tourism),

adult educational tourism, and youth educational tourism (Ritchie, 2003). For the first group, the emphasis is on tourism, education is important, but not crucial. Examples of the second group are language schools, school trips, or exchange programs. In these groups, the basic motive is education, while tourism is in second place (Pawlak, 2013). According to the mentioned research, persons for whom educational education is the primary or secondary motive participate in educational tourism. Ritchie (2003) states the definition of educational tourism according to which educational tourism includes tourist activities of those who spend the night, but also activities on excursions where education is the primary or secondary motive of their stay. Activities include educational trips, study groups, international and domestic student trips including foreign language schools, school excursions, and exchange programs. Educational tourism can be formally organized or organized as an individual trip (Ritchie, 2003).

Educational tourism is a specific form of tourism and has an impact on increasing the educational and professional development of the population. It developed due to the growing popularity of teaching and learning, acquiring knowledge, and improving technical competence outside the classroom. In educational tourism, the main motive is the personal desire of the tourist to expand knowledge and activities that include visits to other places and countries to learn about its material and spiritual culture. Such travel programs include student exchanges and language schools, painting colonies, art and craft workshops, study trips, participation in conferences, congresses, and virtual tourist trips. The search for academic qualifications or, more broadly, learning has been going on for centuries. Tourism broadens the horizons because learning occurs on every trip, so tourism is seen as a form of education. Over time, several types of educational tourism have been profiled (Ritchie, 2003). The first type includes tourists whose primary motive is education, while the second type of tourist education is a secondary activity. The first type of educational tourism is realized through purposeful learning on the travel, whether attending foreign language schools, participation in school excursions on student or university trips (Figure 1).

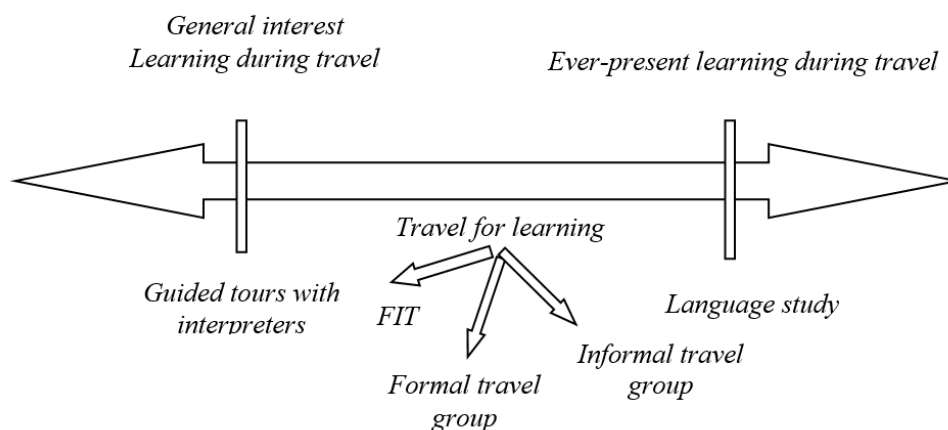


Figure 1 – Purpose of educational travel (Ritchie, 2003).

The question arises as to how many students or pupils who travel for learning can be tourists in the classical sense of the word. However, even if the main motive is learning, excursions have the characteristics of tourist trips because many places and their cultural-historical and natural heritage are visited secondarily. In the model described by Ritchie (2003), educational tourism is located between education, tourism, and changes in the environment and consists of:

- travel for education (edu-tour) in the field of eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and educational tourism for adults, the so-called senior tourism which is a major part of the tourism experience and motivation;
- university/school - pupil and student tourism are realized through language learning, participation in excursions, and exchange programs where the educational aspect is in the first place and the basic motivation while the tourist motive takes the second place.

Observing the concept of educational tourism, using a systematic approach, we look at its market, which contributes to a better understanding, both on the side of tourist supply and the side of tourist demand. If we look at the demand, i.e. users of educational tourism, demographic factors (number, structure, and employment), motivation, the usefulness of educational tourism, and experience are important. When it comes to the party that creates a product called educational tourism, attention is focused on the primary nature of the product, organizing and managing marketing, educational tourism resources, impact on the destination of educational tourism, and factors connecting stakeholders or individuals.

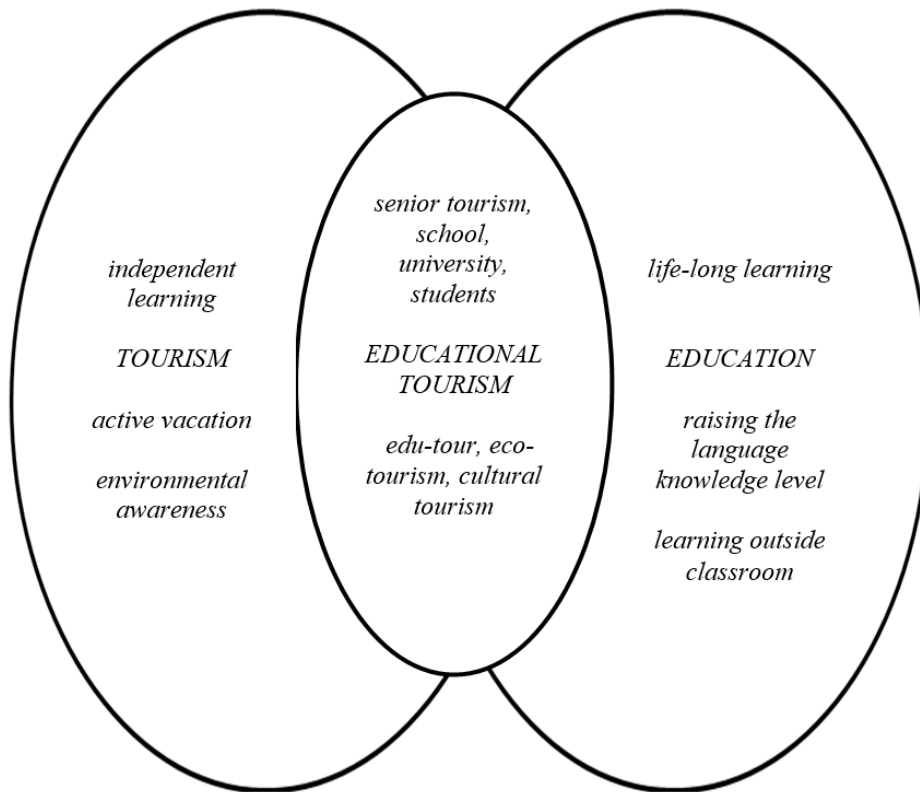


Figure 2 - Concept of educational tourism (Jovanović, 2013).

ERASMUS+ Program

Encouraged by the success of the ERASMUS (European Union Student Exchange Program) program launched in 1987, thanks to which 3 million students and 300,000 academic staff took the opportunity to participate in mobility in 33 European countries, the European Union decided to ensure the program continued and expanded version called ERASMUS + (European Commission, 2014). Students, scientists, pupils, adult learners, young people, volunteers, professors, teachers, people working with young people, experts in organizations involved in the field of education and training of young people make up the ERASMUS + program. Bearing in mind that the main group of programs consists of young people, it can be noticed that they are important participants in educational tourism.

The Erasmus exchange program provides individuals with the opportunity for professional development and change of living environment, the opportunity to learn a foreign language, learn about new cultures, increase self-confidence, open new horizons, develop academic skills, and travel. Thanks to globalization, internationalization, and raising the level of awareness among young people about the importance of international exchange to study or practice, there are a growing number of tourist arrivals that are recorded as educational tourism.

Interesting data on Erasmus student motivation are presented in the ERASMUS Program Impact Study conducted by the European Commission on a sample of 56,733 students (europa.eu). According to the research above, the main motives for choosing an Erasmus program are the possibility of temporary residence in another country, improving language skills and skills development, but also increased employment opportunities abroad after mobility.

In their scientific paper, a group of authors from a Slovenian university determined the most important reasons for using the program on a sample of 360 Erasmus students, namely learning about something new (4.7), professional development (4.6), learning about other cultures (4, 5), making acquaintances (4,5), the possibility of staying one semester (4,4), improving a foreign language (4,3) and the experience of European identity (4,0) (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap & Axelsson, 2015). In the research on the impact of Erasmus, the European Commission made a regional division and assessed the motives for its use in certain parts of Europe. Thus, it was concluded that for students in the north of Europe the most important motives are meeting new people and future impact on careers in their country; in southern Europe the most important for students are learning languages, "soft" skills, and career development abroad; in Eastern Europe, the main motives are learning a foreign language and influencing a career in their own country; and for students who are in Western Europe, the most important thing is the experience of living abroad and meeting new people (The Erasmus Impact Study Regional Analysis, 2016).

Impact of the ERASMUS Program on the Educational Tourism Development

The Erasmus program as part of educational tourism has a great impact on tourism, which manifests itself in several forms. The number of Erasmus students is increasing every year, and the increase is reflected in the growth

of tourist movements. Erasmus financial support is provided to a significant number of students and the usual financial resources that are normally spent in the place of residence are redirected to the country, i.e. the destination where the study stay is conducted, and in that way, the economy of a certain destination is stimulated. In addition, accommodation used during the tourist season in Mediterranean destinations to accommodate tourists, in many cases provides accommodation to Erasmus students in the winter, so that capacity owners earn additional funds that allow them to further invest in tourism. Students often decide to spend their study stay in destinations that are not known to tourists due to lower living costs and thus help in discovering new tourist destinations.

The Erasmus program also influences the promotion of the destination where the study stay or professional internship takes place. Students get to know the local culture, traditions, customs, visit tourist attractions, and thus become promoters of the destination to their acquaintances during the exchange, but also after returning to the domicile country. The promotion also takes place through social networks, and according to Baruah (2012), the world is currently in a revolution of social networks used for everyday communication. One of the most important advantages of social networks is the dissemination of knowledge and information between different groups (Baruah, 2012). In a short period, social networks have become an important form of promotion because they are available to a large number of users, without investing money, information is timely and always available, and their reach is great. By using social networks during their Erasmus stay, and taking into account their advantages, students contribute to the promotion of the destination (Baruah, 2012).

An additional contribution of the Erasmus program in tourism certainly belongs to the ESN (Erasmus student network). ESN is a student association, a non-profit student volunteer organization that brings together students from all faculties eager to socialize with students from all over Europe. ESN operates at the European level and exists in all EU member states and their cities where there is a possibility to participate in Erasmus programs. ESN members at the local level provide basic assistance to international students with issues such as administrative problems, finding accommodation, or adapting in the first days of their stay at the destination. ESN also has an impact on tourism because members of the association organize day trips and multi-day travels, sports, cultural and entertainment events, regional European competitions, and numerous other activities that encourage international students to travel, but also to promote the destination.

The Erasmus+ program brings numerous benefits for students, but also all tourism entities. Although the number of Erasmus+ students is growing every year, a large number of students are not informed about all the benefits they may yield in the future from a temporary stay at a university abroad. With the financial support of the European Union program, students find it easier to stay in another country, and upon returning to their country of residence, thanks to the acquired qualifications and skills, it is easier for them to find a job after graduation.

The Tourist Board, in addition to assisting future Erasmus students, receives advice from them on what tourist facilities are missing, which activities should be improved to attract members of educational tourism, but also receives free labor. After their study stays, students often opt for a professional internship at the same destination. In this way, the tourist board gets students with knowledge of several foreign languages, which are ready to do an internship in their premises, improve the quality of tourist spaces and help tourist communities in promotion in different markets and languages.

Erasmus students have a great influence on the promotion of the destination during their stay, but also after their return. By organizing free tourist guides, who would introduce them to the local tradition, culture, and customs at the beginning of their stay in the destination, it is possible to increase students' knowledge of the destination itself. In that way, their "word of mouth" will be more important because they will know more tourist information about the destination itself. The quality of Erasmus students' education and their stay in the destination is increased by organizing excursions, most of which are not available outside the tourist season. The advantages that the destination has from Erasmus students are numerous. Tourism entities must comprehend what short-term and long-term benefits the destination may yield by attracting members of educational tourism.

Conclusions

Educational programs enable students of different geographical, cultural, religious, and socio-economic characteristics to develop a better understanding of diversity in their home country, and also in the world. Cultural exchanges between young people began after World War II because cultural exchanges were then promoted to avoid future conflicts. In the beginning, exchanges took place through letters, and with the development

of information and communication technology, this form of exchange was improved and more often takes place live. Modern cultural exchange programs take place in such a way that during the program, young people have the opportunity to live in another country in a domicile family, for a shorter or longer period, and in this way get to know another culture.

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