Perceptions of Generation Y on Social Aspects Involving Sustainable Tourism in Romanian Destinations

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Abstract: Sustainable tourism destination management requires the simultaneous and multi-directional pursuit of interactions. One of these are tourists, which are structured differently, based on socioeconomic and psycho-formative criteria. Taking into account the general features of Generation Y, the study aims at analyzing their perception regarding social aspects demanded in sustainable tourism destinations in the case of Romania. The research is focuses on the survey method, which relies on a semi-structured questionnaire applied online in 2020. The answers were modeled, using data analysis tools or graphics functions in IBM-SPSS v.28. Study findings highlight the interesting social perceptions of Y tourists in Romania (RGY), with an emphasis on their desire for conflict-free destinations, to spend time with friends or family, but also to make carefully chosen friends. The perceptions regarding the acceptance of interactions with hosts varies by their socio-demographic characteristics, depending especially on the issues that require their active involvement. These reveal a predominantly interest on professional services, largely excluding creative activities for the acquisition of local traditions. In conclusion, RGY considers that their social inputs as neutral in the tourist areas. However, more attention should be focused on the management of tourism products, in order to come up with specific offers for a highly skilled, but stressed generation, as well as on finding ways able to boost through motivating solutions the young people's interest for social dimension of the sustainable tourism development.

Key words: *Perception, Active involvement, RGY, Social dimension, Sustainable tourism*

1.Introduction

Sustainable tourism has emerged and developed as a dominant paradigm in the quarter of the century that followed the launch of the 1987 Brundtland Report (Ruhanen et al., 2015).

The United Nations (UN) approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on September 25, 2015, subsequently achieving the 2030 Agenda for Global Development Goals. Based on the 17 UN SDGs, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has developed its own strategic goals to be achieved globally and declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development (OWTO, 2016).

Sustainability and development are not new concepts in tourism (Bramwell et al., 2017), so tourism actors become the pillars of the UN SDGs for the 2030 time horizon (Siakwah et al., 2020). UNWTO classifies the 17 objectives into 3 categories, namely: people, the planet and prosperity, and addresses all actors involved in tourism: tourists, locals, NGOs, public institutions, private companies and research institutes. However, the social dimension of sustainable tourism is not defined under this name, but it derives from gathering together all the intrinsic ideas of each goal regarding the following: human relations, mutual support, acceptance and promotion of good practices, tolerance, inclusion and peace, supporting entrepreneurship, agri-tourism, and education. Thus, the UNWTO urge for tourists is "Travel with caution!", meaning that every tourist through his decisions and actions during a trip, as

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long as they are made with care, can lead to the achievement of the Sustainable Tourism Objectives ([Tourism4SDGs.org](https://www.tourism4sdgs.org/), 2020). In this context, studies based on perception may be useful in analyzing behavior through self-recognition in relation to aspects that are difficult to quantify. Even though perception has a certain degree of subjectivity, inasmuch as it is related to how each individual can observe, understand, interpret and evaluate reality ([Bennett, 2016, p. 585](#)), it becomes a factor that influences behavior in general. Ajzen (1991), in explaining the theory of planned behavior, states that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control determine intentions. Intentions are generated by desires, but the latter guide actions and judgments that do not always have the purpose of engaging in an action or buying a tourism product ([Japutra et al., 2019](#)). On the other hand, the desires of tourists provide direct motivation for behaviors ([Bagozzi et al., 2003](#)) and help to transform motivations into actions ([Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001](#)).

2. Literature Review on GY in tourism

Generation Y (GY) which is considered to be made up of people born in the twentieth century, the 7th decade, respectively between 1977 and 1994 ([Gardiner et al., 2015](#)) and even 8, the years 1981-2000, ([Pîrghie & Matei, 2020](#)), began to be studied in more detail since the 2000s, when a large part of the members of this cohort were already beginning to occupy middle and upper places in the demographic pyramid. Thus, most of the studies have focused over time on the analysis of GY traits and behavior in the workplace ([Spiro, 2006](#), [Brown et al., 2009](#)), differing in flexibility and multitasking ([Sa'aban et al., 2013](#)), putting one's own life and well-being first, and work in the background ([Berkup, 2014](#)). The studies also take into account the influence of events, in which any generation inevitably participates, in the formation of beliefs, attitudes defining values in society, education and workforce ([Gardiner et al., 2013](#)). Because they were born with the expansion of technology, they are called the world's first technological and global generation ([Berkup, 2014](#)). These young people are followers of linguistic, social and cultural diversity ([Paul, 2001](#), [Gale, 2007](#)); they are knowledge-oriented and involved in family life ([Dawn, 2004](#)).

From a socio-psychological perspective, the generation N Y is materialistic and consumerist ([Jennings, 2010](#)), having self-esteem and personal admiration, but also experiencing anxiety, depression and less need for social approval ([Twenge & Campbell, 2008](#)).

Social media is an intensely analyzed direction of study in relation to GY, which shows that young people suffer from intrapsychic conflicts and not interpersonal conflicts ([Cabral, 2008](#)), and the use of social platforms can have both beneficial and negative effects for society ([Bolton et al., 2013](#)).

Compared to other generations, GY has its own needs in general ([Howe & Strauss, 2000](#)), and in particular people need to travel ([Glover, 2010](#)). As consumers of tourism and technology, Y people interact with other tourists to exchange experiences and media content ([Richards, 2007](#)), but also demonstrate interpersonal connectivity that combines social, cultural, and business practices in a unique way ([Jennings et al., 2010](#)), being able to bring new approaches to tourism on behalf of the society, as an innovative force ([Cavagnaro & Staffieri, 2015](#)).

Buffa (2015) studies the profiles, attitudes and implications of the generation Y for the sustainable strategies of tourism destinations, and makes a distinction between hard path Y tourists (HPYT) and soft path young tourists (SPYT). Cavagnaro et al. (2018) analyze the travel experience of YG only from the perspective of travel significance, clustering the typologies of tourists according to their profiles, so as to identify the group of millennials to whom a

sustainable tourism offer can be addressed. Starting from the two axes of Schwartz (1994), Cavagnaro et al. (2018) show that for millennials, travel can have social and individual significance, while previously Cavagnaro & Staffieri (2015) conducted a study of the values and travel needs of students.

Naderi & Van Steenburg (2018) analyze the participatory behavior of young people in environmental activities, using four psychological dimensions: altruism (a), frugality (b), risk aversion (c) and time orientation (d). Bollani et al. (2019) group the members of GY, depending on their perception of food sustainability, in: "Socio-Nature Sensitives" (a), "Info-Supporter" (b), "Proactive-Oriented" (c), and "Indifferent Millennials" (d), while Suchanek & Szmelter-Jarosz (2019) study the perceptions of millennials regarding the perspective of sustainable mobility.

The social and sustainable significance of tourism is approached in general from the perspective of the relationship between place and visitor in order to find a sustainable solution to over tourism in the social media era (Lee et al., 2020), but also from the perspective of the power of social networks, sustainable and responsible tourism (Shen et al., 2020). Fan et al. (2019) define six types of tourists according to online or face-to-face interaction during the trip: Disconnected Immersive Traveler (a), Digital Detox Traveler (b), Diversionary Traveler (c), Dual Zone Traveler (d), Daily Life Controller (e) and Social Media Addict (f). Hall et al. (2004) stated that GY has a growing potential for wine tourism, as it participates in specific activities, while Velikova et al., (2013) find in the profile of GY that wine consumption is a way of socialization in different locations and in groups of different sizes.

In the Romanian literature, the studies on the perceptions of Y tourists highlight aspects about the attractiveness and competitiveness of mountain destinations (Matei et al. 2019) and about volunteering among students and young researchers (Manea et al., 2013). Papers on topics related to the attitudes and behaviors of young people in Romania (Gavreliuc & Ciubota, 2013) or on tourists' perceptions of the slow phenomenon (Gheorghe, 2015), are useful for shaping an overall picture.

In this study, we will analyze the perceptions of Romanian people born between 1980-2000 on social aspects in choosing or time spending in a destination, including human relations, acceptance and learning of traditional practices, their active participation in activities with a social dimension, in order to identify some specificities of their demands to whom a sustainable tourist offer can be addressed socially. From specialized literature, we have understood the need to study tourism in Romania following the axis of time and generations, as well as the axis of interpersonal connections.

The research objectives of this study are: a) To identify the social criteria of RGY in choosing a destination; b) To analyze the degree to which the need for socialization is perceived; c) To evaluate the way in which Y tourists relate to social dimension of the sustainable tourism development.

3. Methods and research design

The survey method, which relies on a semi-structured questionnaire is applied. Using the online environment and the social media platforms, the questionnaire was applied, based on the "snowball" sampling, in the first part of March 2020, when the Covid19 pandemic phenomenon was in full swing and Romania was in a state of emergency. Being a technological generation (Berkup, 2014), millennials were not skeptical in responding, but this type of sampling had

limitations in controlling the structure, which is why it acquired the features of the networks of interview operators. On the other hand, the predominance of female respondents is a recognized feature in research, given the greater affinity of women versus men in answering online questionnaires (Matei et al., 2021). In the end, out of 205 responses only 200 were validated.

Table 1. Demographic data of the sample

Variables	Items	%	Variables	Items	%
Gender	Male	24.5	Revenues	≤100 €	19.5
	Female	75.5		101-300 €	15.5
Age groups	18-24	75.0		301-600€	44.0
	25-35	23.0		6001-1200€	13.5
	35-45	2.0		>1201€	7.5
Education	Lyceum	24.0	Marital state	Married	12.5
	Graduated	61.5		Unmarried	87.5
	Pos-Graduated	14.5	Jobs	Tourism	8.0
Residence	Metropole	34.5		Retail	11.5
	City ¹	13.5		IT	10.0
	Big town ²	21.0		Education	4.5
	Medium town ³	11.0		Health	6.0
	Small town ⁴	10.5		Engineering	10.5
	Village	9.5		No /part-time	49.5

¹population: 200,000-400,000; ²population: 100,000-200,000; ³population: 25,000-100,000;

⁴population: 5,000-25,000

The questionnaire consisted of 19 items and required the respondents to show their attachment to them by using a three-step Likert scale, where 1 represents “low importance”, 2 stands for “medium importance” and 3 for “high importance”. Thus, the 19 items were divided into 4 categories: self-orientation (self-discovery, avoiding urban congestion, testing physical boundaries, stimulating creativity), social security (tourist-locals conflicts, tourist-tourism staff conflicts, tourist-tourist conflicts), orientation towards sustainability (traditional cultural events, traditional product fairs, craft learning courses, wine tastings, guided tours in parks, guided tours in architectural sites, bringing contributions to the destination), and socialization (association with other tourists, making new friends, visiting relatives/friends, spending time with family, spending time with friends). Only one question was open, in which respondents had to choose the first three favorite destinations visited, in order of their importance.

For processing the answers, statistical data analysis was employed, using quantitative methods, based on IBM-SPSS Statistics v.28 software, Chi square, frequency descriptive statistic and graph function (relationship map) as well as bivariate analysis. Bivariate analyses, a non-parametric test, helps to identify a statistical association between two variables, and the degree of association and the prediction of each other influences (Sandilands, 2014). As the independent and dependent variables were categorical, the study applied the Spearman correlation (r_s). It measures, statistically, the strength of a monotonic relationship between paired data, taking values from +1 (a perfect positive association) to -1 (a perfect negative association), separate by 0 value, which signifies no relations between the two. For each negative or positive results, it is interpreted on five steps of correlation, from very weak (0.00-0.19) to very strong (0.80-1.00) (Schober et al., 2018).

Based on the frequency of Likert-scale structured options graphs were compiled (Microsoft Excel 2016) on three categories of issues, and AddIn Pro Word Clouds was used for representing the word cloud for the open-ended question.

4. Results and discussions

The Chi square test showed some associations with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), between gender, education, income, marital status and responses to travel motivations, as well as the type of relationship, rejected or desired during the stay. These results are related to the size and structure of the sample, which is why the research focused on quantitative aspects (frequency relationships and bivariate analysis).

The destinations chosen as total frequency place Brașov (city and its surroundings) on top (45%), followed by Sibiu (36.5%) and then Constanța (23.5%). Almost equal percentages (15.5%) have the Black Sea and Vama Veche (a youth informal sea resort), and 10% for the Danube Delta, Maramureș, Cluj-Napoca (Figure 1 a).

However, in order of their importance for the respondents, as first destinations, Brașov (21%) and mountain areas remain the most demanded, with often references to isolated areas, highways (Transalpina and Transfăgărașan), and mountain protected areas (Apuseni Natural Park, Retezat National Park or Piatra Craiului National Park). Sibiu, Constanța and the county of Maramureș, each accounted as first for about 10%. The Danube Delta, the Danube Gorges and Bucovina (painted monasteries) were each the first choice for 5% of respondents. If high school and college graduates, which hold the majority in the 18-24 age group, choose especially the mountains, followed by Brașov and the Black Sea Coast, the respondents with post-university studies consume almost all destinations equally (Figure 1 b.)

Figure 1. Word cloud of three top nominated destinations (a) and relationship map for the first destinations by the RGY's perceptions (b).

The bivariate analysis shows a statistical correlation between the place of residence and first destination ranking, but a weak correlation. Thus, the Spearman correlation (S_2) show that the

residence influences positively, even weakly the first preferred destination for RGY ($r_s = 0.56$, $n = 200$, $p = 0.021$).

The reasons for choosing these destinations in the perception of RGY are mostly related to spending time with friends (76.0%) (Figure 2 a), which correlates with marital state and travel social preference (Figure 2 b). Cultural events, even traditional ones highly satisfy 42.0% of respondents, statistically influenced by gender. But, the RGY interest for fairs with local products and meetings with local artisan is rather averagely rating. Predictors factors are gender and residence, both with positive correlations.

Conservation sites, either nature or archaeological are higher demanded and results highlight a correlation with residence. In terms of social interactions, the GY, mainly the postgraduate respondents, prefer that visits to national and natural parks or archaeological sites to be professional, with explanations given by guides (Figure 2a, b).

The least attractive for RGY are the packages that promote wine tastings and creative tourism. For the last one, tourist with a lower educational level, would not be tempted to involve in craft learning courses.

Analyzed in terms of sustainable development directions of tourism, according to the perceptions of the respondents, GY are not concerned with choosing a destination for activities that would generate jobs, such as traditional products from fairs or souvenir centers, but high skill interpretation services are essential, which may be interpret as although involve a smaller segment of the local communities, it must be very well qualified.

Figure 2. Rating (1-3) of type of activities demanded in a destination by RGY (a), and their correlations with socio-demographic characteristics (b)

The atmosphere or safety given by the types of relationships between tourists or between them and the segments of local actors in a destination is an important aspect. About 80% of the tourists prefer safe places (Figure 3 a) and there are no significant differences in terms of structural or socio-demographic aspects, but gender and age groups reflect positive monotonic relationships, while revenue show a negative association (Figure 3 b). Therefore, RGY represents a non-conflicting group, which does not accept and does not generate inconveniences in the relations developed during the periods of stay, aspect congruent with the requirements of a harmonious, sustainable development.

Figure 3. The RGY perception on rating types of human relations desired in a destination.

Social expectations from such experiences are related to spending as much time as possible in their group, usually with their or family (73.0%), and relatives or friend(s) which does not contradict the possibility of making new friends, but with the option to make their own choices and not necessarily accept a mass of tourists. RGY expresses their need to find themselves (63.0%) in a non-stressful environment, unlike the one of urban agglomerations. This expectation can be seen as a need for solitary moments, but also for discovering the way everyone reacts in other circumstances, outside the work or residence. They are not very interested in being involved in activities testing their physical endurance in the course of hiking, in entertainment or food consumption, in creative activities, etc. (Figure 4).

The perception of the benefits brought by RGY through consumption, behavior, or local involvement in a destination is neutral or seen rather as less important (Figure 5).

Figure 4. RGY perception on self-contribution and social expectations during a trip or a stay.

The bivariate analysis show negatively correlations between age groups and several variables (Figure 4), which signifies that the older the respondents, the lower the importance for these activities is.

There is also a correlation between marital status and the type of trip chosen ($r_s=0,146$; $p<0.05$), which means that those who opt for solitary travel are predominantly those who emphasize the value of self-recovery.

Negative correlations are also identified between gender and physical limits testing variable, in the sense that men appreciate movement, physical effort involved in tourism activities, but also between association with other unknown tourists and respondents' jobs. These negative

trends are a consequence of the coding process with lower values of men, respectively of jobs that require higher levels of training.

Finally, the perception of the benefits brought by RGY through consumption, behavior, or local involvement in a destination is neutral (44.5%) or seen rather as less important *41.0%)(Figure 5). Statistical analysis reveal that the respondents views about their sustainable contributions in tourism correlates with their professional positions ($r_s = -0.125$ $p = 0.05$). Thus, teachers, doctors, engineers, Its, who have more experience and implicitly a broader social perspective, consider a lower their involvement or impact in a destination and vice versa for those who are still pursuing their studies or a temporary specialization.

Figure 5. Relationship maps of the RGY's perception upon their contributions of tourists in destinations.

5. Conclusions

Generation Y's perception of the social dimension in tourism has common general aspects, but also differences depending on the demographic profile within this cohort. In general, the idea is that GY needs destinations that allow them to recover from a social point of view, needing a proper socialization and an opportunity to meditate on their inner self. The subgroup with advanced tertiary education is oriented especially towards less human impacted destinations (national parks, archaeological sites, etc.), but in which to benefit from as much professionalism as possible as far as the received services are concerned. GY is a segment of tourism consumers who do not focus on local products and do not want to be involved in the creative tourism of cultural traditions. As the educational level drops, the degree of rejection increases. Regardless of age, the training, motivations for choosing these destinations in the perception of RGY are mostly related to socializing with the family, with the group to which they belong, and even with new acquaintances, but after a thorough selection process.

The perceptions of the GY regarding the safety in social aspects of destinations are in total consensus with sustainable development, because they choose destinations having a rather low potential for conflict, largely denying the occurrence of such situations.

These people are not very keen about endurance physical activities, although they love the natural environment and that of the big cities. They are totally dedicated to socializing and focus greatly on relationships.

They claim that their role as potential active participants in the life of the destination to bring it benefits is of medium to low value, being inversely proportional to their level of training

and professional experience. Otherwise, this focusing on a neutral value comes from their desire to do tourism for themselves and their group, because they are not ready yet to become pro-social tourists and to promote inclusion in the community, but it can also be attributed to an excessive care not to bring about cultural changes in these territories.

Given the above, the conclusions go in two directions. As this generation of tourism consumers is one that dominates the tourism market, tourism industry must slightly differentiate the measures taken for the sustainable development of the social dimension of Romanian tourism. Thus, on the one hand, there is a need for changes in the organization of local communities from a tourism standpoint, in order to attract Y tourists, and on the other hand, the training of tourism staff must be a permanent concern along with the development of in situ social activities inspired by what happens in the online environment.

Changes in the RGY mentality are also needed to make it become a driving force in supporting sustainable development in social tourism.

Limits of study and future research

Due to pandemic period, the impossibility of interacting face to face with the respondents, the sampling suffered in terms of size, structure. Therefore, future research on the social dimension of sustainable destination in the perception of GY will continue to expand the number of variables to cover the issues, sizing up the sample, too. Moreover, research will be carried out on certain destinations in order to better reflect the particularities of the demand of these tourists.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the anonymous respondents who found the time and willingness to complete the questionnaire, without which this research could not be carried out.

All authors have an equal contribution to this research.

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