THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF YOUTH AND CULTURAL TOURISM

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This year, the EU is focusing on young people. The aim is to include young people and their priorities in future policy-making, as well as to organize activities dedicated to young people across the EU. According to the European Parliament, one in six Europeans is between 15 and 29 years old, one in three young people said they had spent at least two weeks abroad working, training or studying in 2019, and 75% of young Europeans have a positive image of the European Union and democracy.

In this context, DiscoverEU, as an initiative of the European Union, offers young Europeans aged at least 18 the opportunity to discover Europe through learning experiences. Through travel, young people can discover the cultural diversity of Europe, the wonderful landscapes and the variety of towns and cities. At the heart of DiscoverEU is learning about European culture. Since the first call in 2018, young travelers have been encouraged to visit cultural heritage sites, e.g. European Capitals of Culture or European Heritage Label sites. The post-trip survey shows that many of the participants expanded their knowledge of European culture and history, and spontaneously, young people opted for cultural and architectural visits during their travels. For example, in the 2018 survey, 78% of respondents said that they visited museums during the DiscoverEU trip.

Cultural tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel and continues to occupy an important place in the tourism industry in most countries. Although it is quite difficult to make a clear distinction between "culturally motivated" tourists and other types of tourists, due to the growing trend of combining holiday and travel motives, they are particularly important for destinations seeking to attract "high quality" tourism and high value tourists. Attracting cultural tourists has become a common strategy in all countries and regions that want to preserve traditional culture, develop new cultural resources and create a cultural image.A lot of research in the field of cultural tourism currently focuses on the qualitative nature of the experience and the impact of cultural tourism, both for the tourists themselves and for the places and communities they visit.

Because all tourist activities involve a certain element of culture, whether it is a visit to a certain cultural site or an event or simply absorbed the "atmosphere" of a destination from a cafe on the sidewalk, there is a temptation to see every tourism activity as "cultural tourism". As the World Tourism Organization commented in 2004, "The definition of culture is almost as broad as tourism itself. In addition to the obvious material heritage and arts, some countries include in their definition, for example, sports, gastronomy, education, pilgrimages, crafts, stories and village life".

Recognizing that such a broad approach to cultural tourism probably makes it quite difficult to define what cultural tourism actually is, the UNWTO has proposed a "narrow" definition, which refers to "movements of people for essentially cultural reasons, such as tours study, performing arts and cultural tours, trips to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, trips to study nature, folklore or art and pilgrimages". The key element of this definition is that cultural tourism involves "essentially cultural motivations". This clarification is important because not every cultural consumption of tourists is stimulated by cultural motivations, given the fact that many trips to cultural events and attractions have culture as a secondary objective. For example, if it rains, tourists from the seaside have to give up the beach and thus visit a museum, for example. Tourists on a holiday in the city can "stumble" on a local festival during an exploratory walk.

These "accidental" cultural tourists can be very different in terms of motivation and behavior from those "culture hunters" who leave home with the intention of consuming specific cultural events.

A component of cultural tourism is heritage tourism. It is based on the cultural heritage of a nation. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) defines heritage as a broad concept that

includes tangible assets, such as natural and cultural environments, including landscapes, historic sites, built sites and environments, as well as intangible assets such as collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and life experiences (ICOMOS, 1999). These goods are identified and preserved for their intrinsic values or significance to a community, rather than for their extrinsic values as tourist attractions. In fact, the tourism potential of the assets is rarely considered when they are first identified. At the moment, most of the documentation about the meaning of a good focuses on its aesthetic, architectural, historical, social, spiritual or educational values, tourism being unclear in the sections of educational or social values.

According to this meaning of heritage tourism, memorial houses are a component part of this form of tourism. By memorial house is meant a smaller museum, dedicated to the memory of a personality or a family that founded and inhabited it. Visiting these memorial houses is undoubtedly a cultural experience. Although such visits are unlikely to be the main reason for a trip to a particular destination, their inclusion as independent tourist destinations in the holiday travel program or in the tourist offers of tour operators could have a significant impact on the overall tourist experience.

In the European Year of Youth, I conducted a research among young people aged between 18 and 26, aiming at investigating their interest in visiting memorial houses as well as the motivations for visiting them. The 500 respondents were mostly students. My research has shown that most of them have already visited memorial houses, especially at the initiative of schools. The young people stated that the main motivation to visit heritage sights is the novelty that the visit brings and the information they can learn. They also stated that they would visit memorial houses for the cultural experience they would have, but also to escape from everyday life and for relaxation, considering that such visits enrich the general culture, provide access to new information, but also help to an easier understanding of the past.

A quantitative approach to the researched phenomenon showed that over 60% of the young respondents stated that the organization of visits by schools, faculties and student associations to memorial houses would lead them to engage in such visits. As well, over 40% of young people said that if travel agencies would have special packages for young people including visits to memorial houses, this would lead them to make such visits and go on this kind of trips.

In general, society tends to digitize, inform and communicate online. Young people are the first to embrace this direction, so most of them have indicated, as the main sources of information regarding the tourism of memorial houses, the Internet and the various forms of advertising that can be found online, such as websites and social networks. They indicated specialized tourism sites, tourist sites of tourist destinations and advertisements on the Internet and social networks as the most important sources of information.

The conclusion is only one: young people are interested in culture, heritage and, in general, national and European cultural heritage. In turn, the European Union is dedicating a year to young people to start recovering time and experiences lost in the pandemic years. The context is favorable, therefore. All that is needed is the impetus to set things in motion, and that must come from the adults who "hold the buttons". This is the conclusion of a young man who, in the European Year of Youth, became an adviser of the Minister of Tourism and finished his Master's in business administration in tourism.