

## **Study on the awareness of the concept of volunteer tourism**

Ruxandra Gabriela ALBU<sup>1</sup>, Codruţa Adina BĂLTESCU<sup>2</sup>,  
Ioana Bianca CHIŢU<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:** *This paper presents the results of a qualitative research conducted among the master students at the study programme Business Administration in Tourism, within the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, Transilvania University of Braşov, which targeted the awareness of the concept of volunteer tourism. The research has shown that the subjects have little information about this type of tourism, which should be better promoted in the future, among young people, especially among those who study tourism.*

**Key-words:** *volunteer tourism, tourist destination, local community, tourist experience, qualitative research*

### **1. Introduction**

Volunteer tourism has developed over the last decade, being strongly influenced by the emergence of modern technology (Gard McGehee, 2014; Sin et al., 2015; World Lifetime Journeys, 2017). The main reasons for choosing this type of tourism may target the possibility of travelling, seeing new people and places, making friends, learning novel things, personal well-being, recording this kind of activity in the CV, doing some good to someone, desire for existential authenticity, or may be a chance to change one's life and thinking (World Lifetime Journeys, 2017; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Weaver, 2015).

An initiative aimed at volunteer tourism is WWOOF, which gives people the chance to volunteer in farms and agroecological households. The volunteers (WWOOFers) work at these farms and instead receive food and accommodation. WWOOF originally stood for "Working Weekends On Organic Farms" and began in England in 1971 (WWOOF, 2017). Following this experience, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, ruxandra.albu@unitbv.ro

<sup>2</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, codruta.baltescu@unitbv.ro

<sup>3</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, ioana.chitu@unitbv.ro

WWOOFers benefit both from the cultural exchange, and from the accumulation of knowledge on agroecological practices and rural areas.

WWOOF Romania was established in 2008, with 3 host farms. At present, this network includes 48 host farms. In 2013, WWOOF Romania became a member of WWOOF Federation of Organizations (FoWO), a global network of 40 national WWOOF organizations, which promote the global agroecological movement and the benefits of the knowledge exchange within farms and agroecological households. WWOOF Romania Program facilitated access to volunteering for more than 1000 people from over 30 countries (WWOOF Romania, 2017).

Another example of voluntary tourism activities is *Scottish Dolphin Centre*, where young volunteers can practice every year, from March to October, various types of activities: environmental interpretation and education experience, project management, events organisation, research experience, build skills and experience for a career change (Scottish Dolphin Centre, 2017).

## **2. Methodological aspects of the qualitative research**

Through this study, we aimed at identifying the level of knowledge concerning the concept of volunteer tourism among the master students from the specialism Business Administration in Tourism, within *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

The starting hypothesis in conducting the research was that *master students do not know the concept of volunteer tourism*.

In order to reach the above-stated aim, the following objectives were established:

1. *Identification of the factors that determine the choice of a tourist destination.*
2. *Awareness of the concept of volunteer tourism.*
3. *Identification of the factors which might influence the decision to practice volunteer tourism.*

In order to achieve the objectives listed above, a qualitative research was conducted, using the in-depth, semi-structured interview method (Constantin and Tecău, 2013). The sample was made of 16 subjects. The structure of the interviewed people is presented in Table 1.

The sample included 16 subjects who met the condition of being master students at the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration, within *Transilvania* University of Braşov, the study programme Business Administration in Tourism.

The sample structure is shown in Table 1.

Participant	Age	Gender	Studies
<i>S1</i>	23	Female	Higher
<i>S2</i>	22	Female	Higher
<i>S3</i>	23	Male	Higher
<i>S4</i>	22	Female	Higher
<i>S5</i>	22	Male	Higher
<i>S6</i>	22	Female	Higher
<i>S7</i>	23	Female	Higher
<i>S8</i>	23	Female	Higher
<i>S9</i>	24	Female	Higher
<i>S10</i>	23	Male	Higher
<i>S11</i>	29	Female	Higher
<i>S12</i>	23	Female	Higher
<i>S13</i>	22	Female	Higher
<i>S14</i>	25	Female	Higher
<i>S15</i>	23	Female	Higher
<i>S16</i>	23	Male	Higher

Table 1. *The research sample*

According to the analysis of the research sample, the proportion of female respondents was 75% and the one of male respondents was 25%. All respondents were higher-education graduates and their age ranged between 22-29 years old.

We included in the interview guide questions aimed at identifying the main factors that contribute to the choice of a tourist destination, and at identifying the most recently visited destinations, as well as questions aimed at establishing the level of knowledge concerning the concept of volunteer tourism, and the main reasons that might raise the subjects' interest in practicing such an activity in the future.

The qualitative research method resorted to was the exploratory one, respectively the exploratory survey, a method used for exploring a new and complex domain, for obtaining information in which the secondary data are difficult to obtain, or for generating a theory. As a communication technique, we opted for the individual direct communication, the semi-directive (semi-structured) in-depth interview.

The interviews were conducted between May 2017 and July 2017, and were afterwards transcribed in order to conduct a content analysis.

### 3. Content analysis

In the content analysis, the questions in the semi-structured interview were correlated with the previously stated objectives.

For the first research objective, which targeted the “*identification of the factors that determine the choice of a tourist destination*”, following the analysis of the subjects’ answers, we identified as a main factor in making the decision to visit a tourist destination the *price* (17% of the respondents mentioned this aspect), followed by the tourist attractions within the destination (9%) and, with equal percentages, the renown of the destination, the climate, the leisure time, the landscape and the history of the tourist destination (4%). Among the other factors mentioned, we also refer to the recommendations received, to the comfort offered, to the accommodation units, to mass-media etc. Figure no. 1 shows the distribution of the subjects’ answers to question no. 2 in the interview guide, which targeted the first research objective.

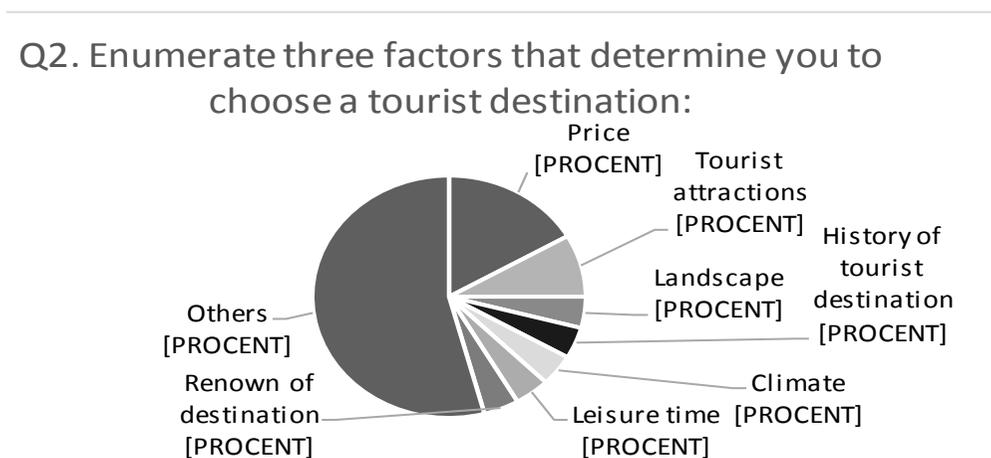


Fig. 1. *Factors that determine the choice of a tourist destination*

Among the recently visited destinations, the subjects enumerated: internal destinations, such as Râşnov, Cluj, Sibiu, Sinaia, Vidraru Lake, Curtea de Argeş Monastery, Transfăgărăşan, Bran, Romanian seaside, Danube Delta, and external destinations, such as Rome, Debrecen, Hungary, Barcelona and Brussels.

For the second objective “*Awareness of the concept of volunteer tourism*” I asked the subjects the question no. 3, in the interview guide (figure no. 2) 87% of the subjects did not know this concept.

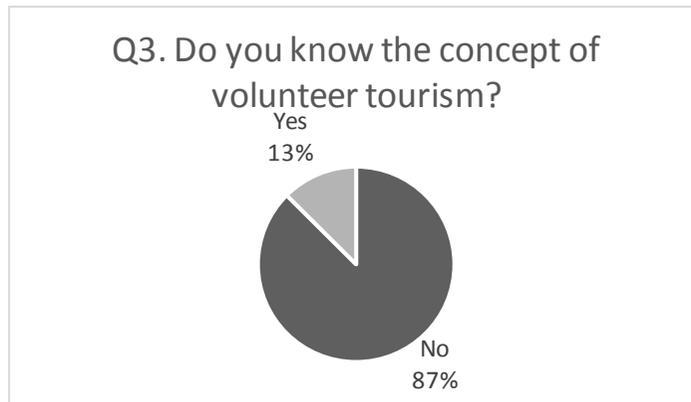


Fig. 2. Do you know the concept of volunteer tourism?

Among the definitions given to this concept by the subjects who declared they knew what the concept of volunteer tourism meant, we mention the definition given by *Subject 8* namely “.....unpaid voluntary work for the benefit of the community” and the one given by *Subject 15* “....helping disadvantaged people in regions with high tourism potential“. None of the 16 interviewed subjects had practiced this type of tourism up to that moment.

The third research objective “*Identification of the factors which might influence the decision to practice volunteer tourism*”, was allotted in the interview guide the question number 8. Starting from the definition of volunteer tourism, which is “*the practice of voluntary work without payment, for the benefit of the respective community, usually for a charitable purpose*”, the subjects were asked to choose from a number of six factors those of importance for them in the decision to practice this type of tourism. Figure no. 3 shows the distribution of the interviewed subjects’ preferences on the six factors which might influence the desire to practice volunteer tourism.

It is interesting to note that, for the subjects included in the sample, who are aged between 22 and 29 years old, the most important factors which would make them practice volunteer tourism are: *the possibility to understand new cultures* and *to visit new tourist destinations*. Some of the subjects said, however, that an important reason for their practicing this type of tourism is to help certain communities that live in regions with high tourist potential, yet lack the necessary resources to start a business in tourism (they cannot hire persons to provide various services to potential tourists) and 37% of the respondents said they would practice volunteer tourism in order to take advantage of the possibility to record this type of activity in the CV.

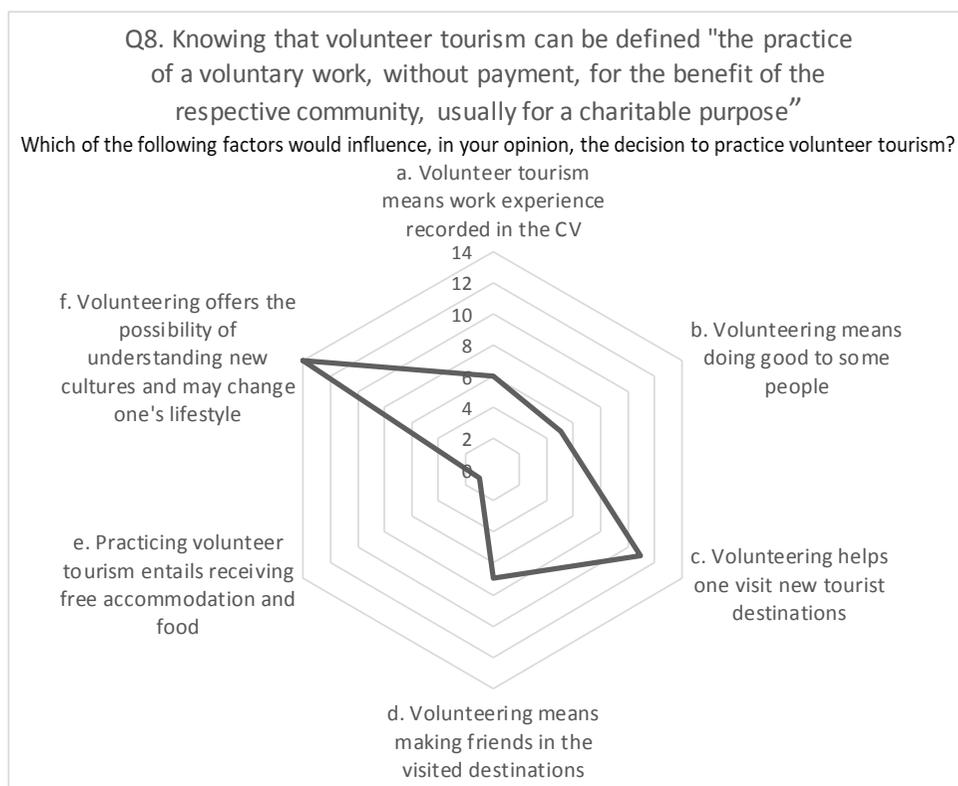


Fig. 3. *Factors which, in the interviewees' opinion, would influence the decision to practice volunteer tourism*

#### 4. Conclusions

The most important conclusions of the qualitative research were:

- the hypothesis which this study started from was partially confirmed (87.5 of the interviewed subjects said they did not know this concept);
- in the interviewed subjects' opinion, the most important factors which determine the choice of a tourist destination are the price (17%), the tourist attractions within the destination (9%) and, with equal percentages, the renown of the destination, the climate, the leisure time, the landscape and the history of the tourist destination (4%);
- the most important factors which might determine the master students to practice volunteer tourism are: the possibility to understand new cultures, and to visit new tourist destinations.

At present, volunteer tourism is a very complex activity that many master students can practice. Volunteer tourism is an important source of information and useful experiences for those practicing it. Promoting this type of tourism among Romanian youth would entail a higher interest in this kind of activity, and would benefit both the volunteers, and the local communities living in the destinations included in this kind of programmes.

## 5. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge that this paper has benefitted from documentation material and feedback from teachers and students during the Erasmus+ teaching mobility on University of Highlands and Islands, Moray College, Great Britain, 21-28 October 2016.

## 6. References

- Constantin, C.P. and Tecău. A. S., 2013. *Introducere în cercetarea de marketing*. București: Editura Universitară.
- Gard McGehee, N., 2014. Volunteer tourism: evolution, issues and futures. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 22, Issue 6.
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N., 2017. Finding oneself while discovering others: An existential perspective on volunteer tourism in Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research*, Volume 65, July, pp. 1-12.
- Mostafanezhad, M., 2015. Traveling for a cause: Critical examinations of volunteer tourism and social justice. *Tourism Studies*, Vol.15, issue 2, pp. 119-131.
- Oakes, T., [s.a.]. *Scottish Dolphin Centre*. Available at: <http://dolphincentre.whales.org/> [Accessed 10 September, 2017].
- Sin, H. L. and Weaver D., 2015. Volunteer tourism and beyond: motivations and barriers to participation in protected area enhancement. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 23, Issue 5.
- World Lifetime Journeys. *Voluntourism or Volunteer Tourism* <<https://worldlifetimejourneys.com/ro/turismul-de-voluntariat-ro.html>> [Accessed 17 September, 2017]
- WWOOF Live and Learn on Organic Farms, History of WWOOF <<http://wwoofinternational.org/history-of-wwoof>> [Accessed 20 September, 2017].

WWOOF Romania, WWOOF Romania ... un program Eco Ruralis,  
<<https://www.woof.ro/ro/woof-romania-un-program-eco-ruralis>>  
[Accessed 10 September, 2017]