

ADVOCATING FOR A TOURISM AND MOBILITY POLICY FOR EUROPEAN YOUTH

Young people's **mobility** in Europe (Youth Tourism) presents numerous **challenges** in different fields.

- **Political:** developing one's European identity and citizenship, growing one's knowledge of Europe and support for the Union's actions;
- **Economic (short-term):** developing a non-relocatable activity, spread over different territories; impact on seasonality and employment...;
- **Economic (long-term):** renewing audiences and bolstering local economies;
- **Environmental:** discovering and developing sustainable and domestic practices;
- **Educational:** acquiring formal and non-formal skills related to mobility (planning, geography, orientation, languages, interculturality...)

The European Union's support for mobility practices has been powerful and effective (for example, with its Erasmus programme), both for the beneficiaries and in terms of the Union's image. However, this programme only partially reaches the population, and especially reaches the most educated and economically integrated social groups.

ISTO believes that developing European programmes in the aim of supporting young peoples' mobility is essential, particularly in order to:

- Foster a sense of European citizenship, enriched by meeting other people and discovering other cultures;
- Develop a positive image of European institutions;
- Help multicultural, innovative hosting spaces, aimed at young people, continue to develop themselves;
- Strengthen the domestic tourism economy (within the EU).

In order to achieve these goals, **a formative, visible, and unconditional system** (affecting the population as a whole), in keeping with the Erasmus and the "Discover EU" programmes, seems essential.

Only a European school-based system can guarantee that the largest possible number of people is reached. Unconditionality allows for a high degree of visibility and legibility. A scheme for children as young as 10 years old would enable an early, formative experience of cross-border travel.

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An **Erasmus Kids** programme would make it possible to reach Europe's entire population. It would unconditionally introduce younger generations to European mobility, while allowing them to experience the diversity present in languages, cultures, and traditions. This would also allow them to begin to grasp Europe's reality in terms of geography, history, and culture.

In order to develop this **Erasmus Kids** programme, a budget of EUR 280 million (i.e. only 0.15% of the European Union's budget) would be needed in order to grant a sum of EUR 100 to each young person eligible. This sum would be enough to cover a medium-length school trip (5 days on average).

ISTO believes that it is also necessary to develop a social policy to counteract inequalities and disadvantages on the topic of young people's mobility. In addition to a strong public policy, a social policy is needed to compensate for unequal opportunities.

In order to be as effective as possible, such a system must be based on existing social structures in order to target vulnerable groups and, thus, promote their integration and international mobility.

A budget of EUR 100 million, for instance, would make it possible for 300,000 young people to enjoy a medium-length trip.

A European policy encouraging Youth Tourism and mobility would strongly contribute to forming tomorrow's European citizens and positively impact their experience, skills, openness, sense of citizenship, integration, and social belonging.

To this end, ISTO, joined by its members and partners, asks that the European Parliament and the relevant departments of the European Commission propose, adopt, and favorise this **Erasmus Kids** initiative in the framework of the **EU's Youth Strategy for 2019-2027**.

2022 is the **European Year of Youth**. One of the main goals highlighted by this theme is "to encourage all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, from disadvantaged backgrounds, from rural or remote areas, or belonging to vulnerable groups, to become active citizens and actors of positive change". **Erasmus Kids** offers a concrete response to major needs felt by young people today.

Youth Tourism stakeholders believe that their activity is based on the following issues, motivations, means of action, and public support mechanisms.

Youth Tourism: goals and definitions

Youth Tourism is a diverse and heterogeneous practice. Both tourism and youth are ever-changing, cross-cutting concepts. We consider that Youth Tourism concerns people from ages 0 to 30 (for the EU, ages 0 to 14 are categorised as children, whereas ages 15 to 29 are categorised as young people). Youth Tourism consists of any touristic practice involving accommodation outside the family environment.

Tourism is first and foremost about leisure and personal development. The origin of tourism is educational, starting with the Grand Tour of the 18th century. It has long been considered solely from a cultural perspective. Mass tourism was not originally about the economy, but was linked to the social struggles for rest and holidays to be recognised as human rights.

Tourism has a visible impact on individuals' health, life experience, level of social cohesion, personal development, and skills. It also impacts the economy, as well as people's open-mindedness, citizenship, and integration. With this in mind, social tourism aims to make this practice accessible to the population as a whole.

Education, integration, and openness lie at the heart of Youth Tourism. Travelling sparks curiosity and creates new experiences and skills. It feeds people's understanding of the world and allows them to construct an identity and citizenship fuelled by open-mindedness to other realities, people, and cultures. However, travelling also requires people to use the skills they acquire. The first challenge faced by Youth Tourism is to allow young people to experience these diverse realities.

Making tourism accessible means guaranteeing a broad impact on these dimensions of community life. This impact is even greater when it occurs during childhood and youth.

Young people and travel

The most popular figure in Youth Tourism is the "Backpacker" - typically an 18- to 25-year-old travelling alone or in a small group. However, this image is only one of many facets of Youth Tourism. Moreover, this figure belongs to a category of users who are largely able to dispose of many mobility tools within existing systems (hostel networks, specific mobility conditions, information centres...).

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Youth Tourism practices include stays by families with children, personal stays (backpacking), school stays, or group holidays (courses, camps, holiday camps...). Personal stays are predominantly about socialising (for example, seeking accommodation with friends), opportunity effects (promotional offers), and specific activities. Since such diverse practices fall into vastly different economic and funding models, they require diverse facilities and services. Europe benefits from very diverse funding methods, with widely differing individual, public, or private support. Group travel for children is generally the most commonly funded scheme.

European identity

Europe is facing multiple forms of withdrawal, of which Brexit is the most blatant example. At the same time, the Erasmus scheme continues to be a great success. This programme has helped different categories of the population to interact and conveys a simple and warm image of Europe.

This is largely positive and helps to build a sense of European identity. However, Erasmus mainly affects the most privileged sectors of the population and is further widening the gap between an educated, mobile, European elite and people who have dropped out of school, have little training, or are stuck in reductive local realities. It is unfortunate that we do not allow all young people to experience travel.

This type of scheme allows people to get to know and experience Europe in a practical way - not only geographically, but also institutionally, politically, economically, and culturally. Building a European identity means experiencing other ways of life.

Europe and its institutions are distant and unknown concepts for many of our fellow citizens. Few people actually understand how the EU functions or grasp its reach. Travel should spark the idea, "Europe is my country." Travelling through it, and exploring its diverse cultures, makes people feel that they are part of a European population with a great history. Much of Europe's heritage evokes a past when its peoples were at war. Travelling and interacting with others can help build an awareness of peace.

Identity and citizenship

« The concepts of "space" and "the other" are central to a person's identity, whether it be local, national, or European. Travelling, mobility, and encountering other nationalities and cultures are central in shaping European citizenship.

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If mobility and experiencing otherness help form open-minded people, isolation and confinement fuel withdrawal. Travelling creates open-minded citizens through group travel and experiencing diverse cultures. Throughout Europe, there is a growing gap between mobile, generally pro-European, open-minded elites, and those who have fallen out of touch and are turning inward. This is true for all age groups and is more worrying for young people due to the foundational aspect of travel during youth.

Tourism is symptomatic of how a society functions as a whole. As an economic sector, this activity is totally dependent on urban and regional planning and transport policies. It has enormous impacts on the environment (both in terms of pollution but also awareness), employment, the economy, or even housing (by maintaining activity and, therefore, keeping a human presence in deserted areas, or by inducing real estate pressure in case of overtourism).

Equality and social inclusion

The practice of tourism can **integrate people... or exclude them**. For those who are able, travelling is a “normal” occurrence. Those who cannot travel are essentially excluded from a pressing social concern.

Tourism can, thus, be a source of social integration (I’m able to travel, like everyone else) or exclusion (Everyone else can travel, unlike me). Social tourism policies must first and foremost aim to be accessible to the largest possible number of people. Sharing a common experience helps to combat social exclusion.

Holidays are also opportunities to meet people and strengthen friendships, and to experience moments of community and togetherness. They create an ideal space in which to share emotions and strengthen interpersonal bonds. Travelling allows people to meet and experience a social or cultural melting pot. For young people, the experiences of togetherness and freedom (without the influence of parental control) are key in building a unique identity.

Integration and equality issues particularly affect young people, low-income families, unemployed people, young employees, and apprentices.

These issues are addressed through two types of policies: a **universal public action policy** (access for all) and a **targeted social action policy** (to compensate for inequalities).

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Training and skill acquisition

Travel is a training tool. It gives individuals opportunities to discover places, practices, and customs, and to gain independence. Travelling requires using existing skills and gaining or strengthening others.

Mobility allows each person to test out different facets of their identity - by participating in activities that break from everyday life or experiencing previously unknown cultures and communities, for example. Group travel also provides the opportunity to experience different lifestyles than those present within family units.

Travelling requires a planned use of organisational skills, including time and space management. It requires us to project ourselves into the future, into another environment. In order to travel, you have to make a reservation, manage a schedule, choose a mode of transport... This requires calculation, geography, and language skills. Those who have mastered this forget that even taking a train is not always a matter of course for everyone. Doing so requires an understanding of geography, administrative systems, and specific methods of communication.

Travel experiences, especially those occurring during youth or childhood, are formative; they leave an indelible impression.

In turn, these experiences have an impact on social and economic issues: learning governs one's skills and integration.

Economy and sustainable development

The **economic dimension** of tourism is evident - tourism accounts for around 10% of Europe's GDP.

The economic stakes of tourism are, thus, enormous. Tourism implies guaranteeing that a sector works properly, ensuring the sustainability of its activity in the long term, facing up to climatic and environmental challenges, and adapting to changes in users' practices.

Clients' expectations for tourism offers are high, particularly in terms of mobility. Mobility policies do not seem to suit public expectations anymore and, thus, must be reworked. Several solutions exist - for example, offering night trains at adapted rates.

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This could best respond to certain trends - in several countries, for example, more and more people are eschewing air travel. It is essential to adapt tourism offers, all the while addressing climate and sustainability issues within a clear regulatory framework.

Health

Mobility, travel, rest, and disconnecting from one's daily life all have a huge positive impact on our **health**. This is all the more striking and obvious after the months of lockdown brought about by COVID-19.

Youth Tourism and public policies

Tourism in general, and Youth Tourism in particular, is a practice that depends on or impacts multiple public policies, including those of health, education, social cohesion, and citizenship.

A tourism policy aimed towards each young person can address these different dimensions. To be effective, it must take this into account and diversify its means of action: for example, by helping economically or culturally vulnerable people to go on holiday, acting on accommodation and transport supply, acting on information and communication...

The actors of Youth Tourism - mainly public authorities and associations - use different solutions for this: supervising and regulating operators, distributing financial aid for departure (for individuals or groups), organising accommodation and collective stays, offering socio-educational support, or observing and analysing practices. Social tourism policies for young people make it possible to regulate or finance these different solutions. An effective policy must encompass all of these different solutions and act on all types of tourism practices.

Matching these local, regional, or national modes of intervention with international practices is an international (and more particularly European) challenge. In other terms, a regional Youth Tourism policy aiming to get young people to leave home is an overly simplistic approach to the issues at stake.

The challenges of building a European identity, of securing a broad buy-in to the European Project (and thus of tackling exclusion and withdrawal), and of developing non-formal skills linked to the travel experience, require developing specific projects.

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Erasmus Kids and Discover EU

These proposals aim to act on both universal and targeted dimensions of public policy.

The “Erasmus Kids” programme aims to create a formative moment - a sort of rite of passage - for every European. It is about enabling Europe to provide an impetus for its discovery. Its ambition relates to identity and citizenship over a 30-year period. The goal is to weave a long-term vision of Europe and create the ideal conditions so that a narrative of Europe, and of the thrill of travel, can thrive.

Reaching all segments of the population unconditionally requires targeting education systems.

By facilitating young people’s first experience of cross-border mobility, the Union would become a part of citizens’ history - in their personal, communal, and professional lives and personal growth as “travellers”.

Such a scheme may be contingent on the intervention of tutors or of the public authorities responsible for education. However, European intervention is the best way to make such a scheme possible.

This scheme could easily be integrated into educational programmes that include, to a greater or lesser extent, skills related to mobility (geography, mathematics, foreign languages...). Travelling also helps to strengthen informal skills and abilities.

The positive, unconditional nature of this project also allows for positive communication with parents.

The extension of the “Discover EU” scheme aims to support young people who have not had the opportunity to travel. It aims to create a movement of social action targeted at disadvantaged groups. Some young people are currently excluded from the Erasmus programme. As a result, they cannot discover Europe or participate in European society. Mobility and travel call on essential skills and are the basis for full citizenship.

The reasons for a lack of mobility are generally related to socio-economic factors, but also to age and culture. The Erasmus programme has proven its impact on education and cultural interaction in Europe. However, some groups of young people cannot benefit from the positive effects of cultural interaction and discovering Europe.

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The culture of exploring, learning, and experiencing new ideas peaks between the ages of 16 and 25. This is when we learn that we are a part of society, that we can explore new horizons, that we have a place in Europe, or... that we become disappointed, frustrated, and afraid of the unknown.

In order to be effective, this scheme must base itself on existing social structures to select target groups and avoid any adverse effects.