

INNOVATIVE MODELS AND VISUAL-COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN EDUCATIONAL TOURISM. VISUAL APPEAL AND ATTRACTIVENESS

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Abstract: In the formation and construction of innovative models and visual-communicative strategies in educational tourism, visual appeal and attractiveness have a vital role and place in achieving practical results in the field of tourism and cultural heritage. The study aims to examine, analyse and summarize the existing global innovative practices and models in the management of tourism and educational activities, from the point of view of the effective and responsible use, creation and sharing of digital resources in the areas under consideration. Through specific examples from production and consumer practices in tourism, an attempt is made to prove the correlation between effective visual communication and visual narrative (indicative, descriptive, preservational, etc.), which in turn prioritize the arguments in the pragmatic process in building mental, sensory, visual and aesthetic perceptions aimed at the observation, orientation and presentation skills of the user. Examining the problems and prospects of educational tourism in the context of the visual appeal and attractiveness of tourist objects, cultural, historical and natural landmarks and the tourist destination as a whole, the paper advocates the thesis of the power and importance of the visual narrative and visual perception from the point of view of comprehension and understanding models, forms and objects, based on their temporal and spatial and temporal positioning. On this basis, the understanding of the pleasure of the tourist experience is outlined as something that values efforts, desires and needs, increases the quality of life, and enhances the feeling of satisfaction in the consumer.

This paper presents results of research project entitled “Research of opportunities for the implementation and development of educational tourism in Bulgaria: Cultural heritage in support of formal education”, won in 2023 Competition for financial support of basic research projects, organized by the Bulgarian National Science Fund, part of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria, Contract No. KP-06-N75/17 from 15.12.2023, led by Chief Assist. Sonya Spasova, PhD.

Keywords: educational tourism, visual appeal, visual attractiveness, visual communication, visual narrative, visual story, visual and aesthetic perceptions, tourist destination, tourist experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the main trends in the development of modern communication processes are the unification of visual languages, implying freedom of access and unlimited perception, technological convergence, media and communication transnationalization, genre hybridization, as well as the change in consumer attitudes with the aim of manipulating audiences and publics. Among them are the blurring of the boundaries between commercial and public activities and the identification, fragmentation and specialization of consumers of cultural, entertainment and educational content. On this background, the diversity of forms and the comprehensiveness of the communication space, in which traditional media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books) and metamedia (online newspapers, blogs, websites, platforms, social media) coexist, imply the idea of reality, authenticity and truthfulness, through the visual presentation and promotion of cultural, entertainment, educational and tourist production. In other words, there is a large-scale transformation of the media environment. According to L. Raicheva: “Today, this transformation is catalyzed by the capabilities of the blogosphere and social media, of mobile information and communication technologies, which also leads to a change in the foundations of the media paradigm – from mass media to means of individual media services. These, in turn, are included in the palette of services from cloud technologies of Web 2.0, which pave the way for the implementation of new business models and for expanding the network capabilities for using information systems. All these developments redefine many of the traditional parameters of the communication process.” (Raicheva, 2015)

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The importance of cultural heritage in relation to the application of current innovative methods in pedagogical and didactic terms is indisputable. Within the framework of the United Nations (UNESCO) and the European Union, cultural heritage is a basic factor for the formation of policy not only for intercultural integration, but also for the

sustainable development of individual countries, through effective and efficient socialization of cultural values for the development of education and upbringing.

The school as an institution has specific functions compared to other social institutions. It develops human potential, forms social role models and transmits culture across generations. Of particular importance for achieving these goals is the inclusion of historical sources in the educational content of individual academic subjects. Any trace of the past can become a source if it is drawn into the “flow of historical knowledge”, if the information contained in it is used to reveal the past.

3. RESULTS

Regarding the dominance of subjects, J-F. Lyotard is of the opinion that it is no longer accompanied neither by freedom, nor public education, and not even better distribution of wealth, but only by greater certainty regarding facts. According to the author, factuality by presumption excludes the personal point of view, but in the case under consideration it is a question of a certain supremacy of individuality, an interpretation of reality reduced to a multitude of means, forms, objects, instruments, etc., leading to the formation of subjects without objects, which is associated with the “regression in contemporary civilization”. In this regard, his statement is also: “It is precisely this metaphysical equilibrium subject/object that is currently being disturbed in favour of the subject, armed with all the advanced technologies of communication, in whose horizon the object has disappeared. This disturbed equilibrium urgently calls for the return of the object.” (Lyotard,1999) Lyotard firmly stands behind the notion: “The objectification of the environment is decisive for the personal interpretation and the value attitude towards the elements of the surrounding world. As well as for the degree of identification between the presented facts and the (im)possibility of their recognition, due to the “peculiar field of presentation”. (Lyotard,1999) On this basis, it can be concluded that innovative interactive and visual-communicative models and practices can play a significant role in rethinking the relationships between producers, technologies, techniques and consumers. It is precisely the presence of new possibilities for interpreting and recognizing tourist cultural and natural objects with the help of these models and practices for determining their spatial and temporal parameters that is linked to the formation and construction of ideas and concepts and understandings, as essential elements of public communication. In this way, formally visual communication with the means of the media industry contributes to the inclusion of this interpretation in the wide range of interests of consumers, audiences and publics. Visualizing and promoting tourism products and services in an innovative way is directly linked to the elements of the information and communication environment with which presenters and representatives interact, subjectifying the real context of individual tourist sites.

In the most general sense, interactivity can be considered as a form of two-way communication. Since interactive communication itself implies the creation of a dynamic environment, a changing space and specific navigation depending on the preferences of these same users, audiences and publics, dynamic design, the results of each tourist trip are different, depending on the knowledge, competencies, information accumulations, interests, needs, orientations and requirements of the individual tourist. For example, in electronic tourism (e-tourism) interactivity is a process of active involvement of people and machines in searching and sharing certain information related to the demand and supply of tourist products and services. Sheizaf Rafaeli defines interactivity as “an expression of space where there is a series of communication exchanges, with all later transmissions of messages having relations to previous exchanges and transmissions”. Distinguishing between three levels of interactivity, such as “user intervention”, “information selection” and “response and engagement in conversation”, he insists that it could also be illustrated with the help of banners, which can be “dynamic” (different on each visit), “animated” (containing animated elements) and “interactive” (adjusting automatically depending on the tastes of the users). In a communication context, Rafaeli describes interactivity as an experience based on chance and temporality, as what is exchanged in the process of interaction depends on what has been exchanged as information and message before. The author distinguishes three levels of interactivity: “two-level non-interactive communication”, “reactive communication or quasi-interactivity” and “fully interactive communication”. (Rafaeli, 1996) On this background, it could be summarized that interactivity is a variable characteristic of the communication environment and at the same time an expression of space, manifested in a series of communication exchanges, with each transmission of messages having a bearing on the degree of effectiveness of these exchanges.

From the point of view of visual appeal and attractiveness of tourist products and services in the context of educational tourism, visual literacy, visual experience, visual culture acquire particular importance. In this sense, an adequate approach to the development of visual culture through the interpretation related to visual experience and their situating in relation to certain production-consumption mechanisms could lead to the overcoming of certain visual-communication matrices and negative practices and models. In the modern conditions of globalization and information society, in which the Internet, new media and global communication networks contribute for the

continuous changes in consumer habits, attitudes, needs, both in a purely semiotic and functional-structural aspect, a new virtual reality is created. In it, not only are the various consumer and spiritual models of behavior intertwined, but images, thoughts and meanings that the consumer receives when consuming cultural-entertainment and educational-disciplinary tourism production are superimposed. All this leads to the construction of new models of behavior by all participants in the tourist, cultural and educational processes through the exchange of visual messages, and to the emergence of new forms of organizational-management and production-consumer experience.

In turn, visual communication, which is based entirely on the use of artistic images, graphic signs, typography, pictograms, color interpretations, design solutions and visual messages, plays an essential role in marketing and advertising in tourism, where visual identity has a fundamental character. All of them are related to the creation and use of visual materials, role of logo in the brand identity of the tourist destination, psychology of colors and their influence on the choice of a color palette for the tourist brand, choice of fonts and their impact on the readability and aesthetics of the visual message, the design and content of advertising materials related to visual presentations and representations and the tools and techniques for their effective presentation. Building the brand identity of the tourist destination includes a clear definition of the values, mission and vision of the brand, and the logo, color palette and tone of visual communication must be recognizable and consistent. The process of building an organizational brand identity, perceived as a system of values at three levels – “visual identity”, “brand individuality identity” and “brand character identity”, corresponds to the theoretical system of values that form the brand identity, which are created through the means of graphic design, integrated communications and organizational behavior, derived in the current study. The character of the organizational brand largely determines the style of reaction of the organizational structure in the field of tourism in different situations and when dealing with different problems, being built on the set of traits expressed in certain social behaviors, on the basis of which consumers give their assessment of its essence. Reflecting on the character of the brand as a whole, L. Berry comes to the idea of the “soul” of organizations, which he describes as a stable value system, predetermining and directing all strategic decisions and tactics. According to him: “Corporate practices that deprive customers of self-esteem or fairness may be legal, but they undermine trust, as well as the building and maintenance of relationships”. (Berry, 1995)

Again according to L. Raicheva: “The changing media in the modern communication environment identifies key transformations in their complex relationships with the social, cultural and political attitudes of their audiences: from individual, through formal communication to the formation of their globalized integrated identity. The parameters of the content are shifting from the plane of information, education and entertainment in traditional media – to the synthesis of information, communication and service in new media”. (Raicheva, 2015) She also claims that if the content in traditional media is distinguished from commercial messages, then in the new ones they are in a certain interconnectedness and interdependence. In her reasoning, she comes to the conclusion that the quality of media content in the first is distinguished by creative and aesthetic parameters, claiming to be “stigmatizing”, while in the second there is a tendency of continuous renewal. And in this sense her conclusion is that if in traditional media communication is primarily “one-way” and/or “linear”, i.e. “mass”, then in the case of the Internet and new media it is “two-way, individualized, interactive, selectively-desirable – nonlinear”. Ultimately, Raicheva believes that audiences and users are also transformed in a certain way, namely from “mass, dispersed, heterogeneous, anonymous and easily manipulated” in the case of some, to “individualized, potentially homogenized, interactive, capable of rapid reaction” and consequently more resistant to manipulation in the case of others. In her study “Verbal and Visual Arguments in Building the Image in Tourism (Public Relations through the Prism of Words and Images)” S. Alexieva claims that: “In the changing communication environment on both sides of traditional and new media, with the increasingly aggressive participation of social media, with the ever-increasing diversity of video messages, rhetorical communication is part of the diagnosis of the most effective arguments in information world without borders”. (Aleksieva, 2020)

Examining the problems and prospects of educational tourism related to the visual appeal and attractiveness of tourist sites through the prism of the ongoing processes in the systems of tourism, culture and education, the aim is to clarify the picture of the ways to influence its sustainability. The proposed innovative models and visual-communicative strategies for unlocking its potential encounter certain difficulties and functional-structural obstacles. This is also predetermined by the fact that its specifics and characteristic features are not adequately reflected in the technological visual-communicative resource used, thus there is a risk of its marginalization by relating it only to existing tourist cultural-entertainment and educational-disciplinary practices. This clearly shows the need to strengthen the interactions between the structural elements of the above-mentioned organizational systems to democratize access to visual educational and entertainment content, which would have a beneficial impact on social cohesion, well-being and cultural development of the individual, the community and society as a whole. There is already considerable overlap between tourism and student mobility, according to accepted definitions of “tourism”, “educational tourism”, and “internationally mobile students” (Selby, 2021)

The intersection of products, services and consumption in the tourism, culture and education sectors occurs in the field of different industries and public spheres. All of them include a multitude of different activities (e.g. tourism, culture, education, entertainment, knowledge, presentation and representation activities, recording, publishing, performance, distribution, broadcasting and retail), which are organized in value chains with three main stages, such as production, distribution and consumption. Digitalization in all these sectors and spheres has caused the need for a radical restructuring of organizational-management and production-consumption processes, reducing production and distribution costs, and at the same time leading to significant changes in the consumption and perception of visual content. These changes disrupt the structure of economic entities in these sectors and organizations in the public sector, posing entirely new challenges and opportunities for development. Thus, the newly emerged structures, conditioned by the emergence of new actors and entities, on the one hand retain some inherited characteristics, mainly related to the high return and the scale and scope of professional content, and on the other hand justify their existence by resorting to interactions with a number of unfavorable external factors and to cultural distinctions, leading to the expansion of the processes of re-intermediation of these structures. In this sense, it can be argued that public information and cultural and educational content, precisely under these newly emerged conditions, begin to use the potential of the active persons in question and of the new media in general. Therefore, it is necessary to develop adequate strategies, models and approaches, based on existing good European and global practices and transnational partnerships to facilitate and improve access to visual content in the spheres of tourism, culture and education. At the same time, they must be fully coordinated with public goals and with corporate, social and national interests in the new digital reality. (Hussein & Kusairi 2022)

Internet space and the accompanying new forms and means of visual communication not only expand the possibilities of educational tourism, but also change visual communication itself in this sphere. In the new conditions, the directions in the activities of the media industry as a whole have not been radically changed. The traditional public and business function of individual subjects, expressed in informing, educating and entertaining, retains its essence and manifestation. In practice, only the method of its implementation has changed. The conditions that have arisen for the emergence of a completely new media system, characterized by active information-communication and entertaining activity of many new participants, networks, platforms, products and services, stimulate the processes of convergence, which in turn leads to modern media acting simultaneously as an information system, a communication intermediary and a conductor of a multicultural industry. Reflecting on the problems associated with the generation and consumption of media content in this new media system, Yu. Kancheva makes the following interpretation: “A different and subjective point of view applied to the web space as a user edit can reject complex research, careful rational studies, can reject the truth. Such processes threaten intellectual values, some of which are the foundations of the entire civilization. It is precisely because of the frequency of these processes that the phenomenon of “historical revisionism” has again been discussed. Revisionism as part of historiography represents a different interpretation of the events, evidence and reasons for a given historical event that are widely accepted by historians. Different interpretations of events and facts can completely change the imposed ideas”. (Kancheva, 2013)

S. Alexieva argues the following: “The process of persuasive communication, which builds/changes the image of contemporary tourism, uses the power of various verbal and visual elements. On the one hand, it builds on rhetorical argumentation in a complex and diverse environment as messages, and on the other, it uses the power of public relations through the prism of words and images. Not in all global industries, where image building focuses in the public space the synergy of verbal and visual arguments, can the effect of attractive communication be sought”. (Aleksieva, 2020) Further in the text, bringing out the importance of the topic related to the power of visual arguments in image building and the vision of the contemporary website in tourism, she emphasizes the importance of its visual content (good vision, precise and up-to-date text, professional photos and videos, attractive images), which does not complement, but builds on the verbal elements on the site and has an emotional impact on the user experience.

Intensively functioning social media, as well as the emergence of new generations of mobile devices, lead to accelerated changes in the formation and transformation of communities. The virtual communities formed and built in this way, where each of the participants can contribute to the production of social, cultural and even creative content, contribute to the blurring of boundaries and differences between creators and users. The latter distribute their solutions, products and messages themselves, without relying on the existing institutionalized production-executive and intermediary entities. This contributes to the elimination of a number of restrictions related to the free presentation and representation of the media audiovisual product, and to the control over the transmission of messages, meanings and goals. In this regard, Yu. Kancheva’s statement is also relevant: “One of the huge opportunities provided by Web 2.0 technologies is the possibility for text and forms of presentation to be connected in any way and again to each other. Links establish cross-connections between individual sites, thus the principle of

the classical pyramid, according to which the news is built, partially loses its meaning and is replaced by network structures. The non-linear presentation of a given story can be supplemented with various connections in the network". (Kancheva, 2013) She is of the opinion that instead of the user moving like on a tightrope, following the main idea in the product, they can collect "the pieces of the puzzle and decide for themselves how to arrange the picture", and for links and references to be useful, they must be "taken care of", i.e. checked and updated.

As a substitute for a teacher or support for his activities for an individual work regime information technology taking into account the specifics of representative user capabilities are actively used, which allow assessing strengths and weaknesses of the student, as well as consider his experience, interests and even a unique learning style, based on which the individual tourism routes are built. (Kotsyuba & Shikov, 2022)

4. CONCLUSIONS

Educational tourism research plays an important role in understanding and improving this type of tourism, as well as in determining its impacts and potential challenges. It can be expressed in various forms, such as: excursions, lectures, courses, workshops and even long-term educational programs that include stays in different regions and countries. This type of tourism often refers to visits to educational institutions, museums, exhibitions, archaeological sites, historical sites, nature reserves and other places of interest related to science, history, art, nature and culture, which are an integral part of the system of the cultural heritage. Hence educational tourism is an important, prospective and mass direction of international cultural exchange.

Destination strategies are central to the future development of tourism. They are typically created using a traditional management studies approach, characterized by an emphasis on growing visitor numbers along with varying commitments to sustainability. (John & Paddison 2022)

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