The impact and learning opportunities of a tourism community of practice on the development of urban tourism in the city of Timişoara

Cipriana Sava
Lecturer Phd
The Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management
The Christian University "D. Cantemir" Timişoara, România
cipriana.sava@gmail.com
Laura Coroamă
Junior University Teacher
The Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management
The Christian University "D. Cantemir" Timişoara, România
PhD Student (ALDIDAC, Université Paris Est, France)
lcoroama@yahoo.com

Abstract - The aim of this paper is to assess the impact of a community of practice, created within a tourism academic environment, on the development of urban tourism in the city of Timişoara. Our main hypothesis consists in the advantages of students' implication and participation in the conception and application of feasible projects meant to increase the visibility of urban tourism. Both students and the local community would benefit from a successful colaboration between the academic environment and the local population.

Keywords - urban tourism, situated learning, cultural tourism, community of practice.

I. INTRODUCTION

TOURISM holds an important position as far as regional development is concerned, the only condition being the sustainable use of the present tourist resources. Planning sustainable tourism at a regional level may be accomplished by implementing efficient strategies. While analysing sustainable tourism, one cannot ignore its educational implications. The young generation needs to be familiarized with these issues and educated according to clear principles regarding the environment and sustainable tourism.

II. PROBLEM FORMULATION

The aim of this paper is to raise awareness on the educational significance of developing urban tourism in the city of Timişoara. We formulate the hypothesis according to which the involvement of students in urban tourism-related activites would be highly profitable for the city. Moreover, we argue that the discovery of urban tourism by the young generation may also provide feelings of belonging to the local community and offer possibilities of learning and evaluating the skills they acquired during school time.

III. PROBLEM SOLUTION

The protection and the preservation of both the environment and the tourist potential generally concern the tourist areas already integrated in the tourist circuit, those partially exploited and those unexploited.

Therefore, if we were to observe some principles regarding the sustainable development of tourism, the following are the most pertinent for our research:

- the importance of the environment, whose value within tourism is essential and which must be passed on to the future generations;
- tourism should be considered a positive activity made available to the environment, local communities and visitors;
- the evolution of the environment - tourism relationship must be appropriate so that the former should support the latter on a long-term basis whilst tourism should not harm the environment;
- all the characteristics of the visited place are to be observed within the tourism development;
- it requires a certain equilibrium between the guests' needs and those of their destinations and hosts;
- all the people asked to respect these principles should be fully involved and responsible for their actions [1].

From the point of view of environment protection, there are undoubtedly some advantages regarding the support of sustainable tourism which are possible due to the following aspects:

- sustainable tourism facilitates understanding the effects tourism has on the natural, cultural and human environment;
- acces to recreational and local population facilities becomes easier;
- local farmlands become more profitable;
- development of tourism is made according to the capacity of the ecosystems;
- sustainable tourism protects the environment, raises benefits and the educational level of local communities.

The variety of types of tourism offers the development of at least one of the aspects mentioned above.

As it follows, we will focus on the description of the context of our study. The historical region of Banat is made of several areas belonging to România, Serbia and Hungary, a total of 28.586 km^2. The historic territory is divided as follows: in Romania – the Timiş county, the Caraş-Severin county with the exception of some villages (Bucova, Cornişoru, Bouţarii de Jos, Bouţarii de Sus and Prevecieri), the Arad county, the south area of the Mureş river, the Mehedinţi county (but only Baia Nouă, Dubova, Eibenthal, Ieşelniţa, Orşova and Sviniţa), and Sălciva and Pojoga towns in the Hunedoara county; in Serbia – Voivodina, with its Banat region located to the East of the Tisa river and divided in the North Banat District (Severni Banat except for the villages Ada, Senta and Kanjiza, situated at the West of the Tisa river), the Central Banat District (Srednji Banat) and the South Banat District (Južni Banat) and central Serbia: a small part of Banat, located at the West of Pancevo and the Timiş river (most of the Palilula village known under the name of "Pančevački Rit"), was attached to the metropolitan area of Belgrade. Another part of Banat is on the Hungarian territory: the south-western corner of Csongrád, located on the southern part of Mureş and on the eastern part of Tisa. We would also like to draw the attention upon the natural borders of Banat, more precisely the Mureş, Tisa and Danube rivers and the Timiş-Cerna corridor.

The Banat region presents a very diversified and rich offer of tourist resources which leads to increased tourism practices under various forms such as the circulation tourism, thermal and spa tourism, recreational tourism, business tourism, cultural and historic tourism, mountain tourism, sports tourism, hunting and fishing tourism, urban and rural tourism.

Timişoara is considered the capital of this region and by far the most impressive economic and cultural centre. The city has an area of 129,2683 km^2 and according to the last press release of the National Institute of Statistics in 2009, it had 312.113 inhabitants. In 2008 the number of accomodation places was of 3998, showing an increase of 246 places compared to 2007 (3752 places). Moreover, the number of tourists accomodated in Timişoara decreased from 230.701 to 224.739 people during the same period in 2008.

Our research is based on a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the tourist potential of the city. It is not in the scope of this paper to enlarge upon this aspect but we present a brief list of these points. As far as the strong points, supporting the development of efficient urban tourism, we mention:

- favourable geographical conditions, the existence of a transport network (including an international airport);
- an educational system providing a variety of teaching and learning forms;
- an attractive business environment, welcoming and sociable local population;
- a rich offer of tourist sights covering the historical and arhitectural heritage;
- localisation at less than 700 km from 13 major European capitals;
- a source of thermo-mineral waters and large green spaces;
- a multicultural environment with a low degree of conflict between local ethnies;
- the existence of both a complex of accomodation and eating facilities;
- the existence of a tourist info centre.

Among the aspects which are not very well represented according to the European standards, we would like to emphasize: the absence of a highway and the precarious state of local roads, the degradation of historical buildings, the traffic increase in the central area of the city, the high level of pollution, delays in the improvement of the Bega channel, the absence of accommodation units with high capacity, poor marketing for tourist attractions and few commercial spaces for the selling of local souvenirs. It is highly important to notice that these negative points can be improved with the help of the community and the local administrative institutions while the positive aspects may still attract many tourists.

This Romanian city is considered to be a reliable candidate for the development of urban tourism in the region. The variety of the heritage and the vivid economic and social life are other arguments that sustain its position within the tourism area. Timişoara proudly possesses the biggest assembly of historical buildings in Romania: Cetate, Iosefin and Fabric districts. The diversified architecture, the influences of the Viennese baroque and the numerous parks (117.57 hectars of parks as indicated by the Land Register Timişoara) led to the attribution of names such as „Little Vienna" or the „City of Parks".

We would like to mention some tourist attractions such as the Huniade Castle, the Baroque Palace, the Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral, the Roman-Catholic Cathedral, the Church of the Serbian Bishopric, the National Teatre, the Dicasterial Palace, the Public Baths Neptun, the Village Museum.

Several cultural events also take place every year and the most representative are: the International Festival „Musical Timişoara", the Hearts' Festival, Student Fest, International Rromani Art Festival, the Euroregional Theatre Festival, Ruga Timişoarei, the Spring and Winter Fairs.

In most cases, urban tourism develops in places with an intense economic, social and cultural activities. Urban tourism is synonymous with both visiting the historic, arhitectural and cultural patrimony, and participating to various activities and events.

Analyzing its contents one may say that it can provide recreational, cultural and business tourism. Recreational tourism refers to some aspects which are specific for the urban areas whilst the cultural one shares common traits with the former but it also includes the participation to events, festivals, fairs, concerts, exhibitions, museum visiting, etc. Travelling and economic-related events lead to the appearence of business tourism whilst the presence of specific and available infrastructure determins the emergence of conference organising.

Urban tourism is characterized by a short duration of stay. All the age groups are represented, with a minimum level of

cultural knowledge and oriented to knowledge acquisition. Moreover, the city provides a system of old and new buildings and a multicultural atmosphere but despite the annual number of tourists, the seasonal influence is low.

This type of tourism represents an important activity for several cities, being also significant to the increasing of incomes and labour force occupancy rate.

Several aspects are defining and of utmost importance for the development of tourism activity:

- the attraction sights of the destination because it determines decisively the choice of the destination by tourists and influences their behaviour at the destination;
- the facilities and services at the destination;
- access roads;
- the image of the destination [2].

Nowadays, urban tourism is generally associated with cultural tourism which means visiting the elements of the historic patrimony (arheological heritage, monuments, castles, religious places, parks and gardens), visiting museums, participating to cultural events.

According to the Dictionary of Travel - Tourism and Hospitality Terms, published in 1996, cultural tourism is a general term referring to leisure travel motivated by one or more aspects of the culture of a particular area. Cultural tourism can be considered as an independent segment of the tourism industry as well as a complement to mainstream tourism, in conjunction with other forms of attraction [3]. Moreover, cultural tourism is a form of tourism motivated by interest in historical, artistic, scientific or heritage offered to a community, region, group or institution [4].

As the main motivation of this type of tourism is the pursuit of knowledge and its result is recreation, we believe that the involvement of young people in the promotion of urban tourism would be an excellent means for its development and affirmation on the European market.

The consumer of cultural tourism presents some of the following traits: unbiased and rightful perception of reality, spontaneity, honesty, nonconformism, creative spirit, inclination towards meditation and solitude.

Cultural tourism, as a form of urban tourism, depends on the tourist resources of anthropic origin and on different events capable of attracting tourists. Although cultural tourism needs a special approach it is characterised by a stable demand from tourists. It addresses a specialized public, with a certain level of education and it is more expensive than the recreational tourism.

We have to take into consideration the international context as well: the largest part of the tourist wave is oriented towards Western Europe (3/5 of the international tourism and 3/4 of the internal one). However, studies reveal a growing tendency of expansion to other areas such as North Africa or Eastern Europe.

The World Tourism Organization estimates, in its reports, an annual increase between 10 and 15% of travelling for cultural purposes. Currently, 20% of the total number of tourists are practicing cultural tourism all over the world, while in Europe, 60% of European tourists are motivated by culture [5].

At the moment, the European Union is promoting cultural tourism for identity purposes. This type of tourism encourages national identity and preservation of cultural patrimony, conservation of historic traditions and development of multicultural societies.

Cultural tourism may represent a strategic option that requires the establishment of specific objectives, target groups and appropriate activities. The last category may include the following components:

- an initial evaluation (identification and selection of the cultural objectives);
- choosing a strategy for the valorization and development of cultural tourism;
- advertising and promotion;
- the launching of a pilot circuit and its practical implementation;
- initiating a net of public and private representatives interested in cultural tourism; (tourist guides are included);
- permanent assessment.

A project supporting cultural tourism is in progress at a European level. We are referring to the "European cultural capital" project, launched in 1985 by the Council of EU Ministers at Melina Mercouri's proposal who became the Minister of Culture in Greece. The aim of this project is to bring countries and people together under cultural diversity and richness. The European Capital Event has become a strategic weapon for cities seeking to attract cultural visitors. Nowadays, the event has certainly developed beyond its mainly cultural origins becoming a part of urban economic and cultural reconstruction alternatives for cities in Europe [6].

Timişoara should start implementing such a project in order to develop cultural tourism considering its desire to compete for a European cultural capital in 2021.

Several positive aspects are coming in favour of tourism promotion in Timişoara such as the diversification of cultural sights, the quality of accommodation and food services, accessibility by roads, railway and air (the existence of an international airport), favourable image among the population of the Banat region.

Last year (between the 15th of August and the 15th of September), a sociological research, was presented in the "Analysis of tourism in Timişoara. Proposals for the development of tourism in Timişoara in a regional context". 250 Romanian and foreign tourists (with ages between 18 and 76) were questioned on the quality of local tourism and Andrei Rostaş, the coordinator of the project, emphasized that the majority of tourists get their information about the city by questioning their friends or by accessing the Internet. Therefore, it is advisable to improve the relationship between the communication and the new technologies: social networking may also influence the informational flow.

Observing the tourist figures for 2009, the results of this research showed that 51,2% (128 persons) of tourists visit the city during the holidays and the rest of 48,8 % (122 persons) come for business purposes (fig.1)
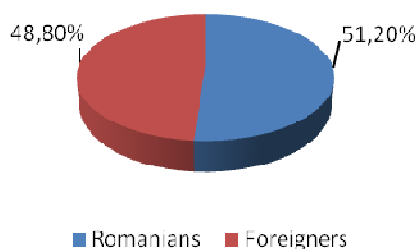
Fig.1 Tourist distribution according to their nationality

However, one may not argue that the people's motivation while spending their holiday in this city is culture-oriented. The reasons range from friends and relatives visiting to participation to sports events or business meetings.

Statistics revealed that 59,6% people who responded to the questionnaire were women (149) and 40,4% were men – the data indicates that women are more interested in coming to Timişoara. The means of transport used by tourists are the train (46%), the car (30%) and the plane (24%). Thus, the train remains more accessible to tourists, probably for money reasons (fig.2).
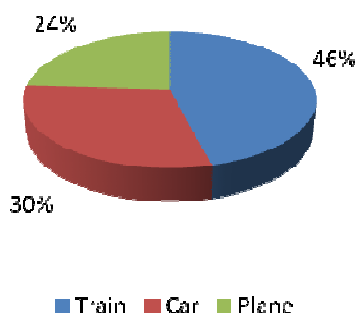

Fig.2 Tourist distribution according to the means of transport used

58% of the respondents believe that the city is not dangerous while 42% perceive it as an unsafe place. As far as the accommodation preferences are concerned, 177 (70,8%) tourists chose hotels (94 people) and pensions (83 people), while 61 tourists, that is 24,4%, chose to stay at relatives and friends, and only 4,8% preferred going to hostels and camping sites (fig.3).
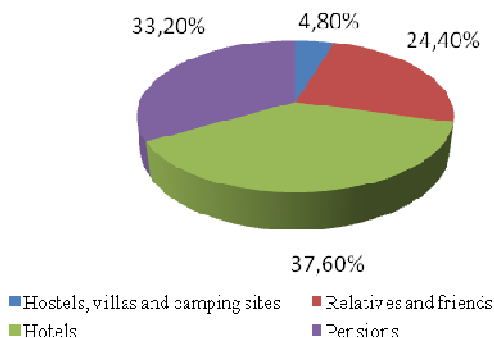

Fig.3 Tourist distribution according to the accommodation service they have chosen

While asked if they preferred to do a city tour accompanied by a guide, the majority of the questioned group (195 tourists – 78%) responded affirmatively.

The analyzed data shows that tourists of all ages, both Romanians and foreigners, consider Timişoara as a tourist place, despite some inconveniences.

Can we develop urban tourism despite the country's economic problems? Can we develop a strategy for Timişoara in order to enter the highway of international urban tourism? As we mentioned above an action plan may be established and local resources may also be involved for the development of urban tourism. What we consider innovative for our research is the proposal of integrating and valorizing students for this urban project. The present generation of young people is also known in the field of sociology as the "Y Generation" and it is generally marked by an increased use and familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies and a particular concern for environmental issues. Characteristics of the generation vary by region, depending on social and economic conditions. The region of Banat has benefited for centuries from a multicultural society with influences from the Germans, Serbians, Hungarians or Bulgarians. Therefore, the education system has also been more flexible and open to the linguistic and cultural diversity. The Romanian Y Generation from this part of the country characterises itself by this linguistic openness which contributed to the general level of knowledge and behaviour towards other cultures. One may wonder whether this aspect is related to modern urban tourism and we argue that it is strongly connected to it for various reasons.

Firstly, taking into account the actual level of instability as far as education is concerned, the school or the university do not offer an exclusive space for the transfer of information. The latest technologies, which this generation is familiar with, are more attractive and illusory. Therefore, we believe that offering other possibilities for learning in an informal environment would be more useful for young people. Urban tourism does not necessarily start with a foreign public but with a local one: inviting students to all kinds of tourist activities within the city borders stimulates urban tourism. Moreover, at the university level there are many exchange programmes, which allow students to visit, live and study in other European countries. This mobility has a positive impact on our urban tourism: students have experienced in foreign countries a different culture, and the attitude towards tourism is a part of culture. Sharing their ideas, and, even more important, acting in real life influences and enriches urban tourism. It is also important to notice that these exchanges usually take place between cities.

Secondly, urban tourism is a modern and continuously transforming source of knowledge. We do not refer only to the informative aspect but also to the learning and social sides of this experience. Participating to the developing of urban tourism (assuring for instance the advertising campaign) gives also a sense of belonging to a community. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger are cognitive anthropologists who analysed what they called a "community of practice" - a group of people who share a common interest, a craft, and/or a profession. The group can evolve naturally because of the members' common interest in a particular domain or area, or it

can be created specifically with the goal of gaining knowledge related to their field. Both variants may be valid for our student public: for some of them (due to their home education or other personal experiences) getting involved in promoting urban tourism may be perceived as natural or voluntary. It is through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group that the members learn from each other, and have an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. Creating such a practice community would also help students learn more about their city and urban tourism in general, while being integrated in a larger local community. Although school provides information, it rarely offers opportunities to apply knowledge in the real world. Students may evaluate their competences, practical abilities, attitudes, and finally their self mirrored in the life of the local community.

Although there are tour guides in many languages, few people know about the city tours they organise because they are not thought on a regular basis but on request. Thus, at this level, advertising plays an important part in order to let people know these opportunities. This is another stage where students may be involved. Moreover, students learn foreign languages starting from an early age and this is a fundamental element for the developing of urban tourism. Students' activities within this strategy of developing urban tourism may have major consequences on the educational scale: learning from their peers, learning to obey a specific code of conduct, developing a solid attitude towards environment protection and also becoming more conscious of environmental issues, discovering tourist sights in a dynamic and attractive form, evaluating their knowledge acquired in a formal way, at school or at university, accomplishing activities within a multicultural and multilinguistic atmosphere while being in contact with people of different ages, nationalities, cultures or professions.

School does not offer real opportunities for developing practical skills any more. Studies showed that, although students have good performances at national exams, they have a serious lack as far as their skill possession is concerned. Involvement in real task solving, as the activity of urban tourism is, may help young people express their creativity, make use of knowledge acquired in formal or informal situations and also stimulate their self-esteem doubled by a feeling of personal accomplishment.

The Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management of Timişoara has launched a programme whose main objective is enhancing the relationship between the academic environment and primary, secondary and high school students. This initiative is linked to students' needs to actively participate to their own learning process. Modern world debates perceive young people engaged in their education and in the community's life. As we have argued previously, intentionally participation to a community has several consequences on the individual's personal and professional life. The European policies regarding long-life learning urge teachers and researchers to focus their power into creating educational structures providing a supportive atmosphere for learning within a group for a longer period of time. That is the reason why the group we are promoting in our university addresses itself to a large sector: children, Romanian and international students, representatives of the local community and of other companies.

As Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (2005) put it, communities of practice are everywhere and we are involved in a number of them: at home, work, school, etc. If we take as an example our group of students engaged in the project we mentioned, they represent a community formed on some common principles and objectives. However, each of this group belongs, separately, to other groups or communities of practice, exterior to the university such as a football team, a dance course, their work community, etc. What we would like to stress here is that the present group receives information and enriching knowledge from other communities of practice through its components.

In some groups we are core members and in others we are more at the margins. The first category usually includes the founders of the community or the persons with more experience, in our case, the teachers. The latter one comprises the members with less experience but of extremely value for the coherence and cohesion of the group. Our students are the members at the margins and it is the core members' responsibility to welcome and train the new-comers.

Firstly, every community of practice has a main domain shared by all its members. Our initiative has as a main domain of interest tourism and all its derivatives as secondary domains. The quality of a member is not the same as in a golf club; membership supposes a certain degree of commitment to the domain of the community. Students that are not interested in tourism or its activities should not be advised to join this community of practice. Therefore, another demand is the possession of specific competences in the field. This group is addressed mainly to second-year students who have already acquired certain academic skills and knowledge about fundamental economic principles and theories.

Secondly, a community of practice distinguishes itself from any other community by the fact that its members organise activities in relation with their interest in their domain, tourism in our situation. These common activities and projects gather all the members of the community – old members and new-comers – who help each other and share information. The difference between a course or a seminar and this community we are developing consists in the type of relationship and attitude we promote. In other words, our aim is to build a relationship based on trust which may enable students and teachers learn from each other. We abandon the barriers between teachers as providers of information and students as receptors and rethink the entire teaching and learning process.

Thirdly, the members of this community are practitioners, meaning they work on a shared repertoire made of information, various personal and collective skills, stories, tools, ways and strategies of dealing with problems and their solutions. This practice requires both time and interaction, active participation to the life of the community.

The present generation, characterized as digital natives, is not necessarily a significant segment of people willing to spend a lot of time in school or university libraries. Computers, games, volunteer activities define them as a social and learning group. This argument recalls social constructivism theories that emphasize the importance of the

learner being actively engaged in his own learning process. As a consequence, learning is no longer perceived as the teacher's unique responsibility but a collaborative action taking place within the "walls" of a community of practice.

Experimental and situated learning (Wenger, 2005) are also related to the concept of community of practice. We learn many things from our daily experience and from the people we interact with even if this activity does not take place in a formal environment. The members of our community will be in contact with representatives of tourism agencies, public administration, schools, thus a various public that shares its interests and needs. As C. Girija Navaneedhan (2010) puts it "learners and instructors should develop an awareness of each other's points of view and then look to own beliefs, standards and values, thus being both subjective and objective at the same time." [7] By *instructors* we understand any person with experience who shares the domain of interest of our community. Navaneedhan also argues in favour of the idea that regular practice of learning techniques "leads to the development of a cognitive apprenticeship" which implies a certain degree of attention from the part of the learner, acquisition and reproduction (accurate or not) of the information, motivation as a significant factor of learning, all leading to the reproduction of the desired skill.

In our community of practice, the students' activity is designed to offer them a simulated equivalent of an internship or apprenticeship. They must assume some roles and responsibilities in order to achieve their goals and improve the community's image and repertoire of information. Being in contact with tourism agencies and schools, developing their communication skills and making connection between the academic knowledge and real life data shape the students' identities as active and engaged citizens of Timişoara. As students' in tourism it is within their scope of interest to be aware of the tourist potential of their own city or the city they live in.

One of the problems urban tourism encounters nowadays is the absence of efficient marketing strategies. Among the long-term objectives of this community of students is to familiarize the population of Timişoara with the tourist potential of their place and region starting with small projects organized in schools, for example. These digital natives have all the skills to develop a primary marketing strategy which could give an improved perspective of what urban tourism can become in Timişoara. Designing materials and having an online presence, this community would gain visibility on both the real and the virtual environment.

It is true that there is a variety of on-going projects which promote Timişoara but our initiative stands for a changing of the point of view. This project is thought and put in practice by students, thus reflecting their perspective on urban tourism. The decision to join this community came as a result of their decision, their personal motivational system. As teachers we offer support and background information if they need it.

Social networking is another reason why this activity is useful for the promotion of the city on a larger scale. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular and widespread social networks with a great potential of dissemination. Accessing and managing these communication systems is almost exclusively within the area of these digital natives as

their skills are more updated than those of the other generations. Connections between the traditional system of teaching (based on courses and seminars) and a more interactive means of learning, as working in a community, are meant to give the students self-efficiency feelings: they should be aware of their achievements and their impact not only on their learning process but on their identity development too. If the members of this community are motivated in accomplishing their goals the work they will provide will be of high quality as they are not just observers but real and active participants.

The members of a community of practice are involved in a set of relationships over time and communities develop around things that matter to people (Wenger, 2005). The fact that they are organizing around some particular area of knowledge and activity gives members a sense of joint enterprise and identity. We need to emphasize the idea that such a community involves practice: modalities of doing and approaching things that are shared to some significant extent among members. As long as this activity is not compulsory and imposed to the students there are many chances that they involve and provide some quality work for their benefit and for the others.

Another aspect which we consider important to be mentioned is the identity dimension. Each community of practice has a collective identity which defines the group as an individual entity. On the other hand, every member of the community has its own identity which influences the group and has consequences on the members' attitude and status. The proposal we are bringing into discussion, with focus on school-pupils involvement, is meant to reinforce the cohesion of the group and the expression of its identity. Continuing the theory of communities of practice we would like to place our experiment in social relationships – situations of co-participation between university students and school students, students and local administration representatives, students and tourism agencies, etc. In other words, we perceive learning not as knowledge acquisition but as experimental and participative learning.

Firstly, the students who joined this community learn at the periphery, guided by teachers or other adults concerned about the community's interests. Thus, the things they are involved in, the tasks they are given may be of less importance for the community compared to their teachers' activity. However, as they become more competent the students become more involved in the main processes of that particular community. At this stage, they move from legitimate peripheral participation to "full participation" (Wenger, 2005).

Secondly, in our case study, a first step will consist in giving the students basic tasks of gathering information for a project regarding the presentation of their city. Looking for specific data, interacting with other students in order to reach their goal and solve the task will help the members of this community acquire new skills or re-define the ones they have already processed. Other steps will involve creating a virtual image on the Internet to improve and strengthen their communication within their community of practice; working on a contact network with local tourism agencies to develop urban tourism and promote it among the school students and

the local community. Learning is, thus, not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals as much as a process of *social* participation. The nature of the *situation* impacts significantly on the process.

Urban tourism in Timişoara, as we have developed this issue in the first part of our paper, is strongly related to the promotion and marketing strategies. The creation of this community is focused on learning skills by participation. As Mark Tennant (1997) has pointed out, Jean Lave's and Etienne Wenger's concept of situated learning involves people being full participants in the world and in generating meaning.

Creating meaning is therefore the ultimate objective of our experiment. The students as members of a community of practice generate new meanings both for their community and for the urban community. Even more, a language learning dimension can be introduced at a higher level of this community. Gaining visibility on the Internet is conditioned by the practice of foreign languages. As English is a compulsory subject during the first two years, writing in English would be another means of improving their skills in an informal environment. Urban tourism also requires the dissemination of information at several levels, eased by the use of foreign languages.

According to some previous research the region of Banat is well known as a multilinguistic and multicultural environment whose population speaks more than the mother tongue. Thus, the people of Timişoara have a much diversified language portfolio: Romanian as the official language of the country, languages belonging to the national minorities (German, Serbian, Hungarian or Bulgarian) and other foreign European languages (English, French, Italian or Spanish). Although this eclectic population may possess total or partial linguistic skills their variety has a significant impact on the development of urban tourism through a dense network of relations with a wide range of people.

Our experimental tourism community of practice, whose members are students in a tourism faculty, makes often use of this linguistic heritage in order to enrol in different local projects concerning the promotion of the city in the country and abroad. This aspect represents another advantage of this community of practice: its members have the opportunity to valorise their language knowledge and skills in order to attain their objectives. Therefore, learning a language does not remain tributary to passing an exam.

The limits of our research are especially of a temporal dimension: the quality of this community of practice will suffer significant changes during a longer period of time. Acquiring visibility and recognition within the local area requires a certain level of maturity from the community's part. Preserving the old members of the community and constantly renewing the staff and the activities will contribute to the creation of a stronger position of this group.

Learning is in the relationship between people, the work of this community of students should be in their interest as they are the main target of this participative project. The Romanian educational system is constantly accused of being too much focused on theoretical aspects. The implementation of such a participative project for students tries to diminish the consequences of the traditional learning process. Another limit, however, would be the degree of preparation the students possess for working in such a new structure. We argue that, during the first stage, the activities should be centred on the cohesion of the group, namely:

- knowing the members and their status within the community;
- finding and developing efficient strategies of communication and conflict solving;
- relating both to the group and to the professional tasks;
- doing primary research based on the community's interests and objectives.

The selection of the student-members is also a delicate issue for the old-members. Taking into consideration the essence of a community of practice, the members can come voluntarily according to their needs and interests. We have underlined that an active participation and implication within the group's activity require some basic specialized knowledge. Depending on the community's impact among the student community of the university, we could accept a variety of profiles at the very beginning. However, once the community has enrolled in serious urban tourism-related projects, a more thorough selection must be undertaken. The less experiences members could take in charge other aspects from the life of the community: issues regarding its status among other communities, personalized training for the new-comers, searching for new projects, etc. The main responsibility of the core members is to supervise the balance of the community, its identity and its future.

Another limit we would like to emphasize is that the community's impact on the development of urban tourism depends on the collaboration both with the local administration (we are referring to its degree of openness regarding new projects) and with the schooling system. We cannot disregard the present crisis and its effects upon the development of tourism in general but also on the social structures. Therefore, a negative response from the part of the local community may have impact on our community of practice even though partial projects could be done based on the community's possibilities and connections.

What core-member profiles do we need in this community of practice? It is true that the experimental dimension is tolerant at such an extent that the present core-members, namely teachers and other professionals joined the community without previous specific training. However, if we perceive this project at a larger temporal scale we have to consider a suitable context for the preparation and training of these members. This student community of practice has some characteristics which cannot be disregarded. Being a formal institution whose main purpose is the learning process we cannot accept any type of members only on the criterion that they have the same interests. Even if for the new-comers this aspect may be acceptable, the old-members, the more experienced ones have to assume other responsibilities, related to learning and urban tourism – as the main theme of all the group's activities.

Educators need to explore with people in communities how all may participate to the full. One of the implications for schools and universities is that instruction should be oriented towards children's interests in a collaborative way. Such

activities need to involve both students and adults, the latter being involved in projects planned by the students. Learning process and participative attitude are no longer exclusively the students' objectives. On the contrary, parents, and adults in general, can learn from their activities. In our case, adults can embody double positions: parents and professionals at the same time. Talking about the development of urban tourism, any contact of this community could be helpful for the future projects. For instance, a first task, whose aim was to create a system of relationships between the members of the community and also make them aware of the activities they will organise, consisted in the designing of a category inside the university's website. In other words, the students have experienced teamwork for solving a task given by their teachers: conceiving the community's virtual identity and also posting a presentation of Timişoara as seen through the eyes of a student. This exercise has had a noticeable impact of the community's cohesion and collective identity. The discussions with the students have revealed that they contacted several information sources (such as the city's info centre, local travel agencies, friends working in institutions related to tourism, etc.) in order to accomplish this project.

Another aspect of this first project is the accessing of new technologies and their use for the purpose of advertising and promoting local tourist attractions. The majority of students are also members in a number of social networks and are constantly in contact with foreign students. This would be another means of sharing information about tourism in the cities these students live, for example because knowing a person involves learning about his/her city, country, language, culture, etc.

We argue that the development of urban tourism should not be reduced to complex projects led only by institutions such as the public administration, and other organisms – travel agencies, associations, etc. Small communities of practice whose members are still in the process of learning in a formal environment could be very beneficial for the urban image. Our belief is that our duty as teachers and members of such a community is to prepare and train students for their future roles and responsibilities in life, as people and as professionals.

Tourism is a very open activity and today's generation has a *traveller*'s profile: both in real life (more and more Romanians go abroad for their holidays, student exchanges are very frequent) and in the virtual existence (we refer to a dynamic presence on social networks, virtual communities, etc). The case we presented in this paper is an example of a first step towards a better understanding of the concept and of its efficient use in the purpose of urban tourism promotion.

Taking into account that one of our university's specializations is tourism we consider that it is of utmost importance to design a structure closer to the general activity of tourism. Considering the students' psychological and motivational profile and their knowledge acquired during high school and the first years of university, we strongly believe

that this community of practice would help them evolve and make use of their information and skills.

IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, our research has revealed that urban tourism could be a future useful and profitable project for the development of Timişoara. Despite the economical crisis the country is undertaking now there are several opportunities for the development of this type of tourism, namely by the students' participation in tourist activities. This initiative, as we have analysed it in this article, proves to be efficient for a large spectrum of participants. Our study has equally highlighted the educational advantages of such a participative perspective. Urban tourism has to become a priority for the following years if Timişoara aims to be a cultural European capital.

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