Niniejsze wystąpienie jest oparte na moich rozmyślaniach, jak i na opiniach ok. 180 studentów geografii, turystyki i wychowania fizycznego z Łodzi i Wrocławia, którym zadałem opracowanie eseju "Czy turystyka wirtualna ma rację bytu"?

Pojęcia turystyki i wirtualności są w zasadzie wzajemne wykluczające się, jeżeli rozumiemy pod turystykę osobiste doświadczenia związane z podróżą do miejsc odznaczających się oddziaływaniem rekreacyjnym i poznawczym. Ze swej strony "podróż" w przestrzeni wirtualnej posiada pewne właściwości które dają jej przewagę nad turystyką właściwa, bowiem pozwalają "odwiedzać" nieograniczoną ilość miejsc i obiektów od razu i zawsze, bez czasochłonnym przemieszczeniem. Wystarczy zasiąść przed komputerem i wejść w sieci. Wśród atutów turystyki wirtualnej należy podkreślić jej nikły koszt - płaci się jedynie połączenie internetowe. Poza tym, surfowanie turystyczne w internecie pozwala upośledzonym, chorym i po prostu tym których nie stać na podróż, poznanie dziedzictwa przyrodniczego i kulturowego świata, czyli posiada atut kompensacyjny. Z jednej strony turystyka wirtualna jest jakby sterylna, nieprawdziwa, z drugiej strony jest bezpieczna - nie można zostać okradzionym, lub pobitym, nie zarazisz się żółtaczką, nie odczuwasz braki higieny, nieprzyjemnych zapachów i innych niedogodności.

Ale nawet najlepsze strony turystyczne w internecie nie mogą dać efektów rekreacyjnych i emocjonalnych, których można zaznać jedynie w czasie podróży na żywo.

Jednak gdy rozważamy inne elementy turystyki (bez samego uczestnictwa na żywo) widzimy że nośniki elektroniczne i połączenia w przestrzeni wirtualnej są coraz bardziej nieodzowne - bez internetu dzisiaj nie sposób realizować promocję turystyczną, rezerwację w obiektach noclegowych, zarządzanie obiektów turystycznych, marketing, sprzedaż usług w internecie, itd.

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Virtual Tourism?

This communication is based on my personal reflection as well as on the opinions of 180 studenst in geography of tourism and in physsical education from Łódź University and the Academy of Physical Education in Wrocław, whom I have recently asked to prepare a short essay "Wheter virtual tourism?"

The definitions of virtuality tourism are contradictory, if we mean by tourism live personal experience involving travel to places having recreational and cognitive effects. The virtual tourism can only be a substitute of the recreation. However, the cognitive effects of the real travel and the surfing in the internet are comparable.

The virtual travel discloses some adventages over the tourism proper, such as the possibility to "visit" unlimited number of sites any time, regardless the weather conditions or any other access contraints. Among the strengths of the virtual travelingis its extremely low price. In fact, it only requires a payment for internet connection. In a way it is sterile, but also safe – one cannot be robbed, or hurt, or contract hepatitis, one doesn't feel bad hygiene and smells or other physical inconveniences.

But even the best web pages dispalying toutist attracions cannot produce the recreational abd emotional effects experienced during the real (live) tourist activitics. Nothing can replace the recreational and curative outcome of the natural attractions. In the same time, put apart the natural and man-made tourist attractions, all other elements of the contemporary tourist industry azre being managed, promoted and markeed via the electronic tools and particularly the internet.

So, though true touris experience cannot be virtual, the modern tourist industry can develop only on the basis of virtual carriers of information, networking and money flows. While tourist act might not, and maybe should not be virtual, the elements of the tourist system must rely on an ever broader scale on electronic means and particularly on the use of internet.

Let us underline thet virtual tourism is not a new type of tourism, such as rural tourism, or bird-watching. The virtual techniques do not change the nature of tourism, they simply make its promotion, managemet and marketing of tourist activities more accessible and easier for organization, networking and management.

What is the outcome of the use of multimedia for the consumer of live tourist experience?

1. Before starting the real trip, the potential touris can consult the Internet in order to get information about the envisaged destinations. This includes general information, such as situation and roa maps, climatic, trip formalistics, promotions materials and detailed data about attractive places and tourist infrastructures, details on services and proces, local customs and specyfics. The three-dimension techniques of presentation allows the potential guest to not only see pictures but also feel inside the interior of a museum, concert hall or hotel room.

2. On te basis of the information aquired on the web the potential tourist can make a decision and select a destination suiting him.

3. The Internet gives much better and wider opportunities to promote, spread information, manage and market the real travel offer. Crucial functions here are reservations and purchasing via Internet as well as contact in real time with the tour-operators and local organizers, as well as with people who can give advise and opinions about the envisaged travel and its components.

4. So, the live travel the tourist experience cannot be virtual. But the Internet carriers are nowdays a decisive part of all other elements of the tourist industry (preparing the travel, gathering informations, connecting with the travel agencies and increasingly in purchasing of the tourist services).

Even in the rich societies many people cannot participate in live tourism experience, so for them the virtual travel could be the only possible form of visualization of the tourist destinations.

In such cases the virtual travel is playing the role of substitute of the travel in reality. Here are some examples:
- handicapped people or those who cannot travel because of illness or advanced age. Small children also should not take part in some requiring forms of travel;

- those who cannot affort traveling;

- people who experience different time limitations, who wish to see in the Internet a given tourist attractions. Here a three-dimensions images is recommended;

- people who are not allowed to visit certain destination (for instance refugees, prisoniers);

Such and similar cases tend to vary and expand. I assume that the appropriate term for such virtual substitutes of the real traveling is virtual tourism.

Virtual tourism computer programs and packages are becoming increasingly a substantial segment of the information industry.

In the virtual tourism carrying some treats? Yes, as it is leaving little room for individual perceptions of the tourist attractions (leveling and thus simplifying, the individual perceptions). Another points is that the Internet presentations usually are too rosy, they tend to expose strenghts of the destinations, avoiding the existing problems dufficulties – for instance linked with acces, climate, noise, poor hygiene, delinquency, hazards, etc.

In conclusion I assume that the virtual tourism cannot be a mainstream development as it cannot bring a recreational effect nor any other live experience inherent in the very notion of tourist travel.

Having said that I would like to stress upon another conviction of mine – that the modern tourism cannot exit without virtual carriers of its promotion, organization, marketing and networking. So the virtualization of all tourist sectors behind the tourist act itself is a matter of superme importance for the fate of the industry. The big players in tourism trade – tourism and travel agencies, tour operators, hotel and restaurants chains, central government and local governments, experts, seem to understand the importance of the Internet as in the tourism ans related activities the role of virtual carriers is developing more rapidly than in other economic sectors.