Article

Connecting the Members of Generation Y to Destination Brands: A Case Study of the CUBIS Project

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Abstract: There is direct correlation between building powerful destination brands and the degree to which tourists and locals share the brands values. The massive penetration of the active population by Generation Y has generated a major shift in tourism marketing, based on the profile of this cohort. The members of Generation Y are very different from previous generations. The so-called "digital natives" share high technological proficiency; they like to share their skills; they are disloyal consumers; and they are affected by trends. In order to connect with members of Generation Y and to actively involve them into the life of tourist destinations, viral, participative, interactive, networked and versatile marketing techniques should be employed. This article introduces the Intelligent Solution for Brand Culturalization (CUBIS) Project, which is a collaborative research initiative that offers to Destination Management Organizations an innovative idea of how to connect the members of Generation Y with destination brands using information and communication technologies (ICT). The CUBIS Project aims to create emotional attachment with the brand values and supports the adoption of the brand by young locals and tourists. The CUBIS idea is flexible and highly adaptable to other destinations. The article uses exploratory qualitative research in the form of a case study.

Keywords: Generation Y; destination branding; brand culturalization; sustainable destination marketing; intelligent solution; digital natives

1. Introduction

At the European level, the sustainable development of tourism is a megatrend, along with globalization and experience economy [1]. The shortest official definition of "sustainable tourism", provided by the European Commission, states that it represents the "tourism that is economically and socially viable without detracting from the environment and local culture" [2] (p. 4). The sustainability concept has been depicted using a four pillars model [3]: the environmental pillar; the social pillar; the economic pillar; and (most recently added) the cultural pillar [4]. The sustainable development of tourism has been a top priority for the European Union (EU) since the 1990s [2]. The first efforts at the European Union level focused on fostering the sustainable development of tourism enterprises. Unfortunately, progress proved to be very slow in the business sector, mainly due to private ownership and reluctance to adhere to imposed measures. Under these circumstances, the European Commission switched perspective and started focusing on tourist destinations. In the last few years, therefore, the sustainable development of tourist destinations has become a central interest at the EU level [2,5]. From this basis, this article addresses the topic of sustainable marketing of tourist destinations, primarily from the perspective of the social and cultural pillars of sustainability.

It presents an innovative idea of how to connect a destination's brand to the members of Generation Y, based on their specific consumer profile, which includes psychological and behavior characteristics. The main concepts of "sustainable marketing", "destination branding", "brand culturalization" and "Generation Y" will be shortly explained in the following paragraphs.

As Fuller stated, "sustainable marketing" can be considered the answer that marketers offered to the sustainable consumption challenge [6]. The concept of sustainable marketing arose because consumers started to value sustainability and businesses had to appropriately address this challenge. In tourism, as mentioned before, sustainability is a major trend affecting consumption patterns. The new generations of tourists more and more value sustainability. Therefore, at the tourist destination level, the concept of sustainable marketing challenges marketing specialists to "reinvent strategy and craft win-win-win strategy outcomes" [6] (p. IX) in which both tourists and locals win (obtain genuine benefits), destinations win (achieve financial and other objectives) and ecosystems win (functioning is preserved and enhanced) at the same time [6].

Marketing tourist destinations refers to the process of planning and promoting places according to the specific needs of target markets [7]. The indicator of the successful accomplishment of this task is when locals and local businesses are fulfilled about living in that community and the expectations of both tourists and investors are met [7,8]. Marketing tourist destinations is very different from marketing the tourist products offered within a destination [9], due to the fact that a tourist destination is a more complex product. In this context, creating the destination identity, also called "destination branding", is a process of greater importance and complexity compared to other products in general marketing [8]. Branding tourist places has been one of the preferred topics in destination marketing literature and research for almost two decades. Explaining the great power a brand has in destination marketing, Ashworth and Goodall wrote about the ubiquity character a powerful brand confers to a place, which means that, through its brand, a destination becomes omnipresent in all products and services offered within that specific place [9]. A good brand is a brand which was built correctly, meaning it was based on comprehensive research, on the profile of target markets and which respects brand building theory. The problem is how to transform a good destination brand into a powerful one so that the abovementioned ubiquitousness applies. To answer this question, the concept of "brand culturalization" was formulated. It may be easily confounded with brand promotion, while its meaning is much more profound—to introduce the brand values into the local culture, in the hope that the members of the community adopt the brand values and identify themselves with those values [10]. The work of Knapp [10] is of topical importance for the correct understanding of destination brand culturalization. Some recently formulated synonyms for brand culturalization refer to "brand implementation", "brand adoption", "brand mobilization" or to "bringing to life of a brand" [11]. Underlining the great importance of this concept, Wirthwein and Bannon stated that "the true measure of a brand is not how well it is planned, but rather, how well it is implemented" [11] (p. 101). One of the greatest advantages of a well implemented brand is that, when people adopt the brand, they become co-owners of the brand, they become brand ambassadors and they start to promote the brand. An emotional attachment is created within the brand culturalization process between the place and both locals and tourists, who feel like embracing and sharing the values of the destination.

The article places the culturalization of a destination brand into the specific context of the Generational theory. Strauss and Howe created the Generational theory, which describes people based on their belonging to a specific generation determined by their birth year [12]. The fundamentals of this authentic theory are related to the fact that people who were born in the same period share similar core values and therefore act in a predictable way. In marketing terms, this theory is very useful within the process of profiling large cohorts of consumers. In order to be treated as a consumer, a person should usually have a disposable income. The most common source of income includes salaries. A person who works for a company and takes home a paycheck issues by that firm is usually called an "active employee". At present, three cohorts of people include consumers who are active employees in the work field: the members of Baby Boom (birth year approximately 1940–1960),

the members of Generation X (birth year approximately 1960–1980) and the members of Generation Y (birth year approximately 1980–2000) [12–15]. Based on their current age, they can be grouped as: senior consumers (the members of Baby Boom Generation), mature consumers (the members of Generation X) and young consumers (the members of Generation Y). In societies confronted with political, economic or social problems, some delays can be identified. Currently, the members of Generation Y, also called the Millennials, are very relevant in all fields, tourism included. In the last decades, they entered the workforce in massive numbers, becoming consumers who are active employees. Demographics show that Generation Y is the largest active generation, compared to previous generations [16]. Specialists consider them so important mainly because research has established that their profile is very different from the profiles of the other two active generations. A commonly used concept to define these important differences is the "generational gap", which has also been used in tourism related papers and books [13,15]. Many studies addressed this matter of topical relevance, trying to describe the phenomenon and consequently conceive useful strategies to bridge this generational gap. Some of the most significant differentiation elements in the profile of Generation Y include the high technological proficiency of its members, them being called "the digital natives" [13,17], and their high change tolerance. The latter trait can be explained by the fact that the Y cohort was born in a world strongly affected by social, economic, political and technological instability [13]. It is the only world they are familiar with and, in such context, the only logical conclusion is that life can be short and thus should be lived to the fullest. As a result, the young members of Generation Y have developed a very important shift in the consuming patterns—they are the most inconsistent and disloyal active consumers; they always need to experience new things; and they are savvy consumers who prefer to communicate using information communication technologies (ICTs). Another important aspect related to the members of Generation Y is that they are very affected by fashion and trends; they like to act trendy. As mentioned before, sustainability is a megatrend currently and therefore it affects the members of Generation Y [18]. As consumers, most of them are acting in a responsible way and they are oriented towards sustainability. As tourists, they prefer sustainable products and sustainable destinations, and they value the sustainable behavior of tourism enterprises [18]. In such context, the sustainable approach in destination marketing should include active preoccupations regarding the specific needs and traits of this generation. There are authors who divide the members of Generation Y into two distinct groups: the old or the early Millennials (birth year approximately 1980–1990) and the young or the late Millennials (birth year approximately 1990–2000). They suggest that there are significant differences between the two groups [19]. However, as recently stated, Old and Young Millennials are not so different; their common traits outweigh the differences between them [19]. The traits presented above are specific to all members of Generation Y. Therefore, no difference between Young and Old Millennials is considered relevant for the topic of this article. All members of Generation Y can be viewed, from a marketing perspective, as being the current young consumers.

In this context, the main goal of this paper is to present an innovative idea which offers an original answer to the following question: How can one develop tourist destination loyalty for the members of Generation Y? Therefore, the article's topic is related to both destination marketing and tourism sociological aspects. In tourism research, when people related issues are involved, Walle suggested that qualitative research methods are better suited [20]. Two decades ago, the same author concluded that "tourism scholars and practitioners deal with complex phenomena and, as a result, rigorous, scientific methods are not always appropriate for the problems encountered" [20] (p. 524). Therefore, in the so-called "tourism research tradition", the importance of qualitative research methods is incontestable [20]. Exploratory research is used in cases where a problem is not sufficiently known. Very poor research results were produced until now in the field of destination brand implementation for the members of Generation Y. Therefore, employing an exploratory research method was considered the best research strategy. Qualitative case studies, area-specific discussions or best practice examples are characteristic research methods for tourism research [21]. From the classic qualitative exploratory research methods, this article employs the case study method. As recently noticed in social sciences

research, in fields such as community studies, planning and development, the use of case studies is high and increasing [21]. The qualitative case study is a research method which contributes to the examination of emerging areas of research. Qualitative case study has been considered a research method which is very attractive in management and business due to the fact that it brings realities of management in front of people. Therefore, concepts are easier to understand through qualitative case studies [22]. Qualitative case studies in tourism research are often used in fields like destination image, destination planning, community development and sustainability [21]. The geographical scale of most qualitative case studies employed in tourism research papers is small, using local examples [21]. In addition, the research design of case studies in tourism is mainly based on a single case [21]. The qualitative case study included within this article introduces the idea of the CUBIS Research Project which proposes an innovative way to emotionally connect young people with the destination brand and to transform them into active brand insiders [11] or brand co-creators, using mobile and web-based technology. The project innovatively implements specific traits of Generation Y into destination marketing in order to support the bridging of the generational gap. The CUBIS Project is a joint initiative of Transilvania University of Brasov, Heilbronn University and a local software developer in Brasov, SC BIT Software, which is involved in research projects related to sustainable destination management.

The research design of the qualitative case study includes:

- a first section, mainly based on literature review, which introduces a strategic approach regarding the process of connecting the members of Generation Y with tourist places; and
- a second section, which presents the CUBIS Project. Thick description is used as approach.

Innovation in qualitative research has been defined as "the creation of new ways of doing things" [23] (p. 4). Because the idea of the Intelligent Solution for Brand Culturalization (CUBIS) Project is ingenious and original, innovation is also part of the approach.

Finding ways to address the generational gap is the responsible way to act in the present generational context. Therefore, the CUBIS Project can be considered a sustainable destination marketing approach, with highly adaptable and transferable results. The idea of the CUBIS Project was born after qualitative research, based on focus-group discussions, which were conducted in 2015 at Transilvania University of Brasov with the main purpose of validating several strategic actions for planning the sustainable development of tourist destinations, in accordance with the profile of the Generation Y. Some results of this focus group research will be reproduced in this article as well. The CUBIS Project will be presented in detail including the partnership, the objectives and the planned activities. A SWOT Analysis of the CUBIS Project is also included in the qualitative case study. The fact that the project is not finished and implemented yet can be considered the main research limitation, but the intention of the article is not to present in details the final results of the CUBIS Project, but to present a best-practice idea—the innovative idea of connecting members of Generation Y with the destination brand using ICT. Therefore, the main research aim of the article is to present how an innovative idea can be transposed into a viable research project in a field where there is poor previous research and literature.

The structure of the article consists of three main parts. The first part includes several conceptual clarifications regarding the notions of "sustainable tourism", "generational gap" and "brand culturalization". It contains two sections. The first one emphasizes the importance in destination marketing of innovative strategies which address the delicate issue of "bridging the generational gap". The second section supports the idea that the responsible path to follow in destination branding consists in actively involving young people from Generation Y into the life of tourist destinations. The second part includes a thick description of the CUBIS Project. It contains four sections. The first section presents how the idea of the CUBIS Project was born. The second section describes the partnership within the CUBIS Project. The third section introduces the main objectives of the CUBIS Project and explains its Technology Readiness Level. The fourth section presents the activities of

the project which are grouped in four working packages. The third part of the paper includes a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis of the CUBIS Project. It contains two sections. The first section identifies several strengths and weaknesses of the project and the second section focuses on the capacity of available resources to consider external context factors as opportunities or as threats. Several conclusions are presented in the end of the article regarding the relevance of the CUBIS Project at national and European levels.

2. Profiling Young Tourists—The Sustainable Approach within Destination Marketing

The concept of "sustainable tourism" received many definitions which can be grouped into two categories: some definitions are "centred on tourism maintaining its business viability over a period of time" [24] (p. 43) and other definitions present sustainable tourism "in terms of a broader multi-sectoral context; . . . recognizing and mitigating tourism's impacts as part of achieving the bigger goal of sustainable development" [24] (p. 43). A very important theory that contributes to the correct understanding of the concept of sustainable development splits it into four pillars: the environmental pillar, the economic pillar, the social pillar and the cultural pillar [3,4]. The focus of this article is relevant to the social and cultural pillars of sustainable tourism. As mentioned by Ali and Frew, "tourism should be aligned to the cultures and values of people affected by it and involve the host community in its development" [24] (p. 44). One of the keywords defining sustainability is "equity". As it is said, "there are two types of equity: inter-generational and intra-generational" [24] (p. 41). In this context, the correct understanding of Generational theories and profiles directly contributes to the sustainable development in tourism. When sustainable marketing of tourism is under consideration, the social and cultural pillars also refer to creating products based on real and specific needs and values of customers. In tourism, therefore, acting in a responsible way also means creating tourist products tailored to tourists' profiles. As in many other fields, the Generational theory offers valuable profiling tools in tourism marketing. Defining the tourist destination as a macro-product, Cismaru and Proca stated that "understanding the main particular traits, values and behaviors of each social Generation of tourists, tourism employees and locals is crucial for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in order to successfully develop the tourist destination" [18].

2.1. Bridging the Generational Gap through Innovative Strategies for Destination Marketing

Gaps between generations were encountered before, but the gap between previous generations and Generation Y is considered as the most impactful [13]. The gap generated a major shift in marketing and communications which became "viral, participative, interactive and networked" [13]. It is mainly due to the high technological proficiency of the young members of this generation who were born into the Information Age. They all share natural communication skills with technologies and therefore they have been called "the digital natives" [17]. Starting with Generation Y, all following generations will be composed of digital natives. The profile of Generation Y also includes the following traits [12,15,25,26]:

- They are team oriented: friends, networking and connectivity are vital for them.
- They have multitasking skills.
- They like to experience new things and share their life.
- They value brands, fun and digital culture.
- They are very affected by trends.
- They are very well educated and therefore self-confident.
- They need to be respected and valued for who they are, what they know, etc.

As research has shown, the generational gap between previous generations and Generation Y also refers to the fact that classic strategies for developing customer loyalty no longer apply to young generations [15,26].

Profiling Generation Y soon became a topic of great interest mainly in developed countries; in recent years, it started to preoccupy worldwide scientists and experts as it is considered the

present "heroic generation", being able to produce huge societal change through collective power [12]. An example of how the members of Generation Y are changing society is related to their relationship with sustainability. Compared to former generations, the members of Generation Y have a very constructive and active relationship with sustainability [14,18]. One way in which they are transforming the world is by "putting into practice sustainability values together" [18] (p. 564). The concept of "sustainability" was the creation of the Baby Boom Generation, which is considered an idealistic or prophet generation. The members of Generation X developed the concept, put it to test, and discovered its strengths and weaknesses. Generation X is considered an unraveling and challenging generation. The members of Generation Y started to actively put into practice this concept. They have gone further by innovatively reshaping the content of this concept. For example, they have created new sustainability related concepts like the "circular economy" or the "sharing economy". More and more resource sharing projects are being successfully implemented worldwide. Tourism was one of the pioneer fields where sharing economy initiatives have become reality, with very positive impact [27].

In developed economies, the members of Generation Y have been active consumers for more than a decade. As a result, research has gone a step further and scientific literature is abundant in the field of tailoring strategies based on the specific profile of Generation Y. Most studies focus on the topic of human resources, but valuable research findings can be transferred and adapted to other sectors, such as destination marketing [18,28]. An example in this context might be the research recently conducted at Transilvania University of Brasov which analyzed for the first time this generation from the point of view of the relationship it has with a destination, proposing innovative strategies [18,28]. One of these strategies was the reverse-mentoring strategy. Reverse-mentoring is a concept born out of practical needs—bridging the gap between generations at the workplace. It refers to allowing younger employees to train older employees, especially through sharing their digital skills [26]. Taking into consideration the characteristics of Generation Y, the reverse-mentoring strategy perfectly suits the members of this generation because it makes them feel respected for what they know and it allows them to feel important and active. Reverse mentoring is the creation of the former CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch, in the late 1990s. It has been further developed in the HR field [26]. As research proved, using this concept in the different context of destination marketing can be a useful approach [28], because it allows young tourists to share their opinions, values and experiences, which makes them feel respected and appreciated. All these are important needs within the profile of Generation Y.

With the Generations of digital natives entering the tourism scene, up-to-date technology features must accompany all marketing efforts in order to satisfy the specific needs of these new cohorts. In this context, using innovative ICTs in destination marketing represents one of the main directions in the last European Union Policy for Tourism [29]. Therefore, a significant number of projects focused on this topic at the European level. In addition, at the EU level, a major strategic dimension is related to the empowerment of Generation Y in community life. It fulfills the needs of network interrelation and confirmation specific to the members of Generation Y. Encouraging the participation of young people in community life is a key aim of the EU-level action, as set out in Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Therefore, at the EU level, several projects focused on supporting youth participation in society/local community [30], such as PARTISPACE Project [31], SocIEtY—Social Innovation or Empowering the Young for the Common Good [32] or the European Youth Portal [33]. The last one also includes the Ideas Lab platform where creative young people can generate ideas on a wide range of issues, which are then rated online by their peers around Europe.

With the abovementioned specific traits, values and needs of this Generation Y, the concept of the experience economy becomes of vital importance. These young people are the real consumers of authentic experiences. Authenticity in tourist destination marketing [34] has been classified in three main categories:

- The objective authenticity—when tourists have access to authentic, unique resources within a destination;

- The symbolic authenticity—when tourists have access to resources on which has been projected a unique character; and
- The existential authenticity—when tourists live a unique, authentic experience within a destination.

The latter is significantly related to the concept of tourist experience [34], which became more and more relevant in the new generational context in which we live. The existential authenticity is what the young members of the Generation Y are looking for [35] and in this context, destinations should exploit and profit from this concept.

In the same experience-related context, new concepts were born in order to satisfy the unique needs of the young members of Generation Y. The profile of these digital natives more and more includes specific needs related to game-like experiences. It goes hand in hand with smart technologies [35]. In this context, one of the innovative concepts created by the savvy members of Generation Y is "gamification", which is expected to soon become a major trend affecting most industries. It refers to adding game-like experiences in non-gaming contexts. With the Generation Y entering the tourism sector as active decision-makers, new specific needs were formulated related to living a gameful tourist experience [35]. The digital natives truly need to feel like living in a game context. Therefore, by adding game-like experiences while interacting with young tourists and locals, DMOs can actually contribute to their satisfaction. As recently stated, by using gamification, the entire relationship between tourism stakeholders can be transformed [35]. Through gamification, tourists and locals are likely to feel more engaged, to act more responsible and to develop emotional attachment to the destination.

As a whole, these characteristics suggest potential strategic directions that destinations may approach in the process of bridging the generational gap. Bridging the generational gap is about creating connections and cooperation between the members of different generations. It also refers to creating the right context for the members of new generations to share their values in order to help the members of former generations understand them better. The unique characteristics within the profile of Generation Y tourists offer DMOs real possibilities to conceive innovative and original strategies in order to match their special and unprecedented needs.

2.2. Sustainable Destination Marketing through Participatory Initiatives Related to Brand Culturalization

The sustainable approach regarding the design of the tourist product from the destination marketing perspective should focus on respecting, reflecting and promoting the community core values [36]. Managing a tourist destination in a sustainable way demands for the active involvement of both locals and tourists in everything related to destination planning and destination marketing [36], including destination branding. This approach respects the specific demands related to the social and cultural pillars of the sustainable development in tourism. The responsible way of addressing destination planning and marketing issues is that everyone who is affected by tourism in a place should be part of the decision-making related to that specific destination.

In the new generational context presented previously, participatory initiatives are vital within tourist destination marketing. Two elements defining Generation Y strongly support this statement:

- Generation Y is the most numerous active cohort at present [16]; and
- Generation Y is a "hero generation", meaning its members are expected to highly influence society and produce social change [12,13].

Transforming young people from Generation Y into active participants in the life of tourist destinations is therefore the responsible path to follow.

In a time when the destination branding industry is flourishing in Europe, being also highly supported by the European Commission [29], participatory initiatives can also focus on building destination brands. As mentioned in the previous section, members of Generation Y are maybe the most brand oriented generation compared to former generations [13]. In addition, they are very self-confident and educated and expect their opinion to be valued. The most appropriate approach in

such a context is to transform young people into brand insiders [11], make them feel like they are active co-creators of the destination brand. The members of Generation Y also like to share their opinions and highly appreciate friends' opinions, as well [13]. However, the definition of a friend is very different for them—a friend is a person from the network [13]. The sharing process usually happens via technology. In this framework, tourism is also affected by a trend created by the members of Generation Y related to generating and sharing personal evaluations in the form of different media [13,37]. As recently suggested, tourist destinations should more and more use consumer generated content to their benefit [37].

The process of building brands involves several steps including brand research, brand blueprint, brand architecture, brand promotion, brand culturalization, brand stewardship, etc. [10,11]. Because the members of Generation Y are very hard to transform into loyal consumers compared to previous generations, the focus should be placed on brand culturalization. Destination brand culturalization in this context can be understood as the process of introducing the brand values into the young people's culture. Through brand culturalization, they become emotionally attached to destination brands and turn into brand advocates or brand ambassadors. However, sustainable brand culturalization initiatives should respect the unique traits within the profile of Generation Y. First, successful brand culturalization campaigns should be based on technology, both mobile and web. Research proved that websites or web-platforms can be important tools within the process of brand implementation [11]. Two major and successful projects which used information technology for true brand culturalization can be mentioned: the New Zealand brand culturalization campaign for the national brand "100% Pure New Zealand" [38] and the Australian brand culturalization campaign for the national brand "There's nothing like . . . Australia!" [39]. Both projects transformed the abovementioned brands into some of the most powerful country brands in the world because they were highly adopted and supported by the local population and by tourists. Using consumer generated content can also be a valuable and useful feature in brand culturalization initiatives of DMOs. As a rule applying in this new generational context, versatile brands [11] are much easier to implement. A versatile brand allows young locals and tourists to creatively contribute to the shaping of the brand.

Given this background, the present paper introduces the research project named CUBIS, which is the acronym of Intelligent (I) Solution (S) for Brand (B) Culturalization (CU). Its main aim is to create a tool for destination brand implementation based on the characteristics of Generation Y. It is therefore based on mobile and web technology, includes features of consumer generated content and gamification and is related to the concept of the versatile brand. The idea of the CUBIS Project will be presented and analyzed in the following sections.

3. The CUBIS Project

A fruitful research cooperation initiative between Transilvania University of Brasov and Heilbronn University started in 2016, in the field of tourist destination marketing. Two research projects issued out of this cooperation, one related to destination brand culturalization (the CUBIS Project) and a second one related to collaborative marketing of wine-tourism destinations (the ROVINTIS Project). The goal of this paper is to present the CUBIS Project, as a good example of an innovative research project which respects the most recent EU policies in tourism, with high transferability of its results to all destinations that are interested in the process of implementing their brands in a way which respects the generational profile of the present-day tourists.

3.1. The Preliminary Phase

In 2015, a team composed of researchers from Transilvania University and from the École Hôtelière de Lausanne put into practice qualitative research in order to identify:

- the relationship the members of Generation Y have with sustainability in tourism and hospitality; and

- potential strategies for tourist destinations willing to develop in a sustainable way, tailored to the profile of the Generation Y [18,28].

The selected research method was the focus group. Three focus group discussions were conducted in Brasov, at Transilvania University with 24 students (8 students each) from tourism management study programs. The discussions were organized on a structure of seven questions:

- "What is a sustainable tourist destination from your point of view?
- Who in particular do you think is responsible for making your destination a more sustainable destination and why?
- Do you agree with the following statement: present-day employees are interested in working for companies that 'strive to create sustainable economic, social and environmental prosperity worldwide'
- Do you think the statement 'if you do not exist on Facebook, you do not exist at all' also applies to tourist destinations? How do you feel about becoming 'friends' with destinations?
- How do you feel about becoming a tourism employee in your destination in the near future?
- How do you think a sustainable destination should promote itself?
- What would you do for your destination in order to support its sustainable development?" [18] (pp. 565–566).

Very important data have been produced during the three group discussions, providing strategic elements for DMOs. Some of the most relevant findings include the following:

- The members of Generation Y value sustainability in tourism. It is "the right way" or even the "normal way" for them. They understand all the pillars of sustanability and have a preference for the social pillar.
- They would like to be actively involved in the process of developing a tourist destination in a sustainable way, but they do not know how. Therefore, they need proper guidance from tourism stakeholders. Destinations should create opportunities for them to be part of the destination's life.
- The respondents associated the sustainable promotion of tourist destinations with the Internet, You Tube and pictures. In addition, most of them found the idea of promoting a destination through social media platforms interesting. DMOs should therefore communicate with the members of this generation using Web 2.0 technologies and applications.

Following this research project, several strategies were formulated by the research team for tourist destinations which are interested to develop in a sustainable way in the new generational context created by the members of Generation Y [28]:

1. The virtual persona strategy: Destinations should promote their brand on the Internet and act like a real (virtual) person.
2. The technological innovation strategy: Destinations should communicate using modern technologies and applications, both web and mobile.
3. The team reverse-mentoring strategy: Destinations should create the possibility for members of Generation Y to be actively involved in the destination's life, allowing them to share their values, as a group of people, and to bring a real contribution to the development of the destination.

These research findings triggered the main idea of the CUBIS Project, as is described in the following sections.

3.2. The Partnership

The CUBIS Project is the joint initiative of one research team, grouping researchers from two European universities (Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania and Heilbronn University,

Germany), a team from the local DMO (the Association for Tourism Promotion and Development from Brasov County in Romania) and one team from SC BIT Software SRL (a local developer of Business Intelligence solutions, actively involved in research activities). The Romanian research team and the other two teams have been involved for more than three years in a National Partnership Research Project called DIMAST (Destination Intelligent Management for Sustainable Tourism) in which they are developing, together with four other partners, an innovative Decision Support System for the sustainable management of tourist destinations, based on the EU ETIS Toolkit (European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destinations) [40]. The harmonious and fruitful cooperation, as well as the active involvement of the German research partner, led to this new initiative, called the CUBIS Project.

Both Brasov and Heilbronn are tourist destinations managed by active and successful Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and both are sharing a brand-related problem which urgently needed to be addressed. While Heilbronn was facing a "multiple unofficial brands" situation, Brasov had to deal with the situation of having a great brand, according to tourism specialists, but which was still very weak in terms of brand identity and visibility. In 2016, the local DMO in Heilbronn, called Heilbronn Marketing GMBH, decided to get involved directly in the process of building a unique, official brand for Heilbronn tourist destination. For the Heilbronn Marketing GMBH it was a major decision to end a long period when several un-official brands co-existed (for example "Heilbronn. Erleben", "Heilbronn am Neckar", "Heilbronn. The realm of wine", etc.). In situations like this, when a destination has multiple simultaneous brands, the brand power is split between all existing brands. This results in the destination image being unclear and weak, with tourists often feeling confused about the destination identity. The process of building a unique brand for Heilbronn was ongoing when the CUBIS Project was formulated.

Although Brasov County has one of the most active and successful DMOs in Romania and its local brand (BeLive.It), launched in 2009, received high appreciation at ITB Berlin 2009, no brand culturalization action took place. As a result, the local brand is not known by the majority of the local community, making it severely weak and inefficient [41]. The importance of place brand culturalization is not recognized, neither at local nor at national levels in Romania. In addition, brand culturalization scientific literature is almost absent. The same happens in Germany. Consequently, both countries were facing a knowledge gap which had to be properly addressed. After conducting quantitative research in 2012, which showed the fact that the brand "BeLive.It" was not known by the majority of the tourists and locals in Brasov, the local DMO in Brasov carried on qualitative research in 2015, in order to understand the weaknesses of the brand. The results proved out that people, mostly the young members of the community and tourists, did not understand the brand promise and therefore were unable to share the brand values. Studying both brand-related situations in Heilbronn and Brasov, the researchers from the two above-mentioned universities concluded that they were facing a very important marketing problem related to brand culturalization. After research and cooperation, the research team brought the main idea of the CUBIS Project—to implement reverse-mentoring method for improving the relationship between a destination and its young (Y) generation of locals/tourists using innovative ICT—as a win-win strategy (both destination and young people win) [28].

BIT Software has recently developed the innovative technology called Plotto, an online video research solution with survey and storytelling tools, which perfectly suited the main idea and objectives of the CUBIS Project [42]. Due to the high experience and expertise in the fields of developing web and mobile applications, Cloud computing and Business Intelligence solutions for destinations, BIT Software became a full Partner within the CUBIS Project.

Because Brasov already had a good brand, highly appreciated by international experts for accurately respecting the theory of building brands for tourist destinations, the team decided that the CUBIS Project should focus on the culturalization of Brasov's brand "BeLive.It" and therefore, the local DMO became an active Partner within the CUBIS Project.

3.3. The Technology Readiness Level and the Objectives of the CUBIS Project

The main aim of the CUBIS Project is to develop, test and validate an innovative and flexible mobile ICT solution for place brand culturalization through reverse-mentoring for Brasov destination. This method includes video survey and storytelling functionalities to determine the active involvement of currently savvy people from Generation Y in the process of destination branding, with the main target of supporting the young local community members and young tourists, as well as to develop cultural identity with the local brand values through actively co-creating the destination brand identity.

The scenario of the CUBIS Solution is the following: the local brand of Brasov will have an attached QR Code, which will accompany the brand everywhere, so that every resident or tourist in Brasov can scan the code and be directed into the CUBIS platform, where he/she will be offered the possibility to co-create the brand personality through uploading short videos and stories. Young people are usually highly receptive to scanning QR Codes in public places and therefore the CUBIS Solution will definitely attract more members of Generation Y. The CUBIS Platform will actually be a survey which will be structured on the main values of the local brand and will also include innovative technology for user generated video and audio responses. As the brand of Brasov is created based on a word game, the quiz on the CUBIS Platform will exploit the versatility of the "BeLive.It" brand. For example, by scanning the QR Code while waiting for the bus, a young tourist will engage in the following scenario: "Why should you believe Brasov today? Show it to the world right now!" He/she will be offered the possibility to upload a short video, a vocal message or a photo for answering the question on the CUBIS Platform. The CUBIS Platform will have open access (through Cloud hosting) so that parts of each respondent's vision about the local brand can be shared with others.

Based on a literature review regarding the characteristics of the digital natives, the research team also took into consideration the possibility to include gamification functionalities in the CUBIS Platform. For example, after uploading the short video, vocal message or photo, based on daily top viewed posts, those who are in first three positions will be able to collect "BeLive.It" points. The local DMO can negotiate partnership agreements with local HORECA businesses and offer discounts for those who collect a specific number of BeLive.It points. In the end, each respondent will become familiarized with the local brand values and, due to his/her active and visible contribution to the creation of place brand personality, he/she will develop stronger cultural identity with the local brand values. The brand personality will therefore be collaboratively shaped through team reverse-mentoring and not fully imposed by the creator of the brand (which usually is the local DMO). As a result, the brand values will naturally become part of the local culture (cultural heritage).

The central idea of the CUBIS Project, which consists of stimulating the active participation of young people from Generation Y in the process of co-creating a destination personality, has already been introduced in 2015 by a member of the CUBIS Project [28]. In the same context, it has been demonstrated that the most appropriate environment to accomplish such a task, based on the specific profile of Generation Y, is the digital social environment [18,28]. As it has been emphasized, reverse-mentoring applied at the destination level supports bridging the gap between the members of Generation Y and the places they live in or visit [28].

As recommended by project management specialists [43], at the moment when the main investment decision had to be taken, the research team focused on establishing the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of the CUBIS Project. There is a trend in many European states related to establishing the TRL within research projects [44]. The TRL framework was first created by NASA and later adopted by many government agencies or companies [44]. In the context presented above, the CUBIS project proposal was at its starting point within the 2nd technology readiness level (TRL2) because both idea and basic (embryonic) technology proposal have been formulated on paper [43,44]. The CUBIS Project developed the existing idea and explicitly proposed the most appropriate mix of technologies to reach the targeted goal. Starting with the activities included in the second phase, each technological component will be separately developed, tested and validated in a simulated environment in order to prove the feasibility of the initial idea. After demonstrating

the proof-of-concept, the final stage of the CUBIS Project will include the integration of the basic technological components in order to assess early feasibility of the developed solution by testing it in a simulated environment. By the end of the CUBIS Project, the team assumes that the 4th TRL will be reached [43,44].

Based on the initial TRL, as presented above, the first specific objective of the CUBIS Project, which supports the basic theoretical concept that has already been formulated on paper, consisted in accurately formulating the preliminary conceptual design/architecture of the CUBIS Solution and its application, based on identification of possible components, technologies and features to be used within. After the detailed concept argumentation, active research and development activities will be performed, including analytical studies in a simulated environment, in order to accomplish the second specific objective of CUBIS Project which consists of demonstrating the CUBIS proof-of-concept through components functionality validation, both analytically and experimentally. Following the successful proof-of-concept work, CUBIS basic components will have to be integrated to establish that the pieces actually work together and that the integrated CUBIS Solution is consistent with the basic performance and functional requirements of potential users. Therefore, the third objective is related to validating the CUBIS Solution basic performance and functionality from an integrated perspective, based on confirmation of the theoretical predictions in a simulated environment. The fourth objective set for the CUBIS Project consists in the comprehensive dissemination of its partial and final results, at both national and international levels, mainly European. The dissemination plan focuses on two directions: dissemination among academics (including the communication of partial and final results within three European conferences on topics related to destination management and marketing and the writing of three articles in visible publications) and dissemination among practitioners (including the participation at four international tourism fairs with oral presentations of the CUBIS Project). An important element in the dissemination plan is related to raising awareness of the importance that brand culturalization has in tourist destination marketing. To achieve this particular aim, the research team has planned to publish a book on the topic of destination brand culturalization and to organize a Think Tank devoted to the study of brand culturalization strategies in the new generational context.

3.4. The Management of the Activities

The main activities of the project were designed to fit the logical architecture of the first three objectives, following a natural progression on the technology readiness level (TRL) scale. Together with the pertinent and comprehensive risk assessment activities, both components and integrated solutions, the activities of the CUBIS Project were planned, within a step-by-step process, to support the successful achievement of the project's main goal. The dissemination activities were planned to continuously sustain the other activities, directly contributing to the success of the project.

The team of the CUBIS Project designed structured activities concatenated in four Working Packages (WP).

WP1 "CUBIS Concept Argumentation" had the main objective of formulating and disseminating the preliminary conceptual design/architecture of the CUBIS Solution based on identification of possible technologies to be used in CUBIS. The specific research activities included in this package started in November 2016 and ended in April 2017. This article is part of the dissemination scheme established for WP1, aiming to introduce the CUBIS concept.

WP2 "CUBIS Proof-of-Concept demonstrated in a simulated environment" was planned to outline the main elements of the architecture for each component to be used in the CUBIS Project, based on validation of the theoretical predictions in a simulated environment. Qualitative research regarding each application component to be used in the CUBIS method, based on Focus Group research, was scheduled to take place, involving eight groups of eight members from Generation Y (students). The groups should provide valuable information regarding the best functionalities for: the CUBIS web platform, the CUBIS mobile app, the CUBIS gamification features and the innovative technology for user generated video and audio responses. The second activity within WP2 is related to the technology

development assessment. Based on analytic/theoretical predictions formulated after completion of the first two activities in WP2, the testing in a simulated environment will be prepared for each component of the CUBIS solution.

WP3 "Performance requirements for CUBIS Solution" endeavors to identify basic functionalities for the CUBIS Solution based on respondents needs. In this context, new qualitative research activities will be designed regarding the performance requirements of CUBIS Solution. Focus Group was the preferred research method, with two groups of eight members, one with members of Generation Y students, and the second with specialists, decision makers directly involved in the process of place branding for Brasov (mainly from the local DMO). The theme regards the identification of basic functionalities for the CUBIS Solution, based on specific needs and interests of respondents.

WP4 "CUBIS Solution Early Feasibility Assessment" aims to integrate the basic components in order to assess the early feasibility of the CUBIS integrated Solution by testing it in a simulated environment.

The CUBIS Project management schedule, planned for a period of eighteen months, also includes milestones, risks and deliverables for each WP. The project is currently in its second phase, corresponding to the research activities in WP2.

4. A SWOT Analysis of the CUBIS Project

After six months of the CUBIS project, several strengths and weaknesses can be formulated with regard to the Project's resources—human, intellectual, physical and financial. In such context, a SWOT Analysis was considered a valuable and necessary technique to proceed to the next phases of the Project in a responsible manner.

4.1. Strenghts and Weaknesses

The most relevant strengths and weaknesses of the CUBIS Project are grouped into four categories, based on the resource type they are related to.

- Human Resources

Members from the scientific research team were actively involved in previous research projects on topics related to destination marketing, destination sustainable development or Generation Y and tourist destination strategies. They have contributed to the publication of their research results in several articles and book chapters.

Researchers from Transilvania University have started a fruitful cooperation with the local DMO in Brasov and the technology developer—BIT Software in 2014, within the DIMAST Project which aims to develop an innovative decision support system for the sustainable development of tourist destinations, based on the European Tourist Indicators System for destinations, launched in 2013. The Project is currently in its final stage, all previous phases having been successfully completed. In this context, cooperation between the Project's partners is a strength of great importance. The fact that they have known each other for more than four years, and were used to working with shared procedures and documents contributed to the successful completion of the first phase of the CUBIS Project.

- Intellectual Resources

A specific dimension of the CUBIS Project is related to the technological components of the project, such as a digital survey platform which offers the possibility to provide video responses and gamification functionalities. BIT Software has recently developed Plotto, which is a truly innovative technology for video and audio surveys. As mentioned previously, the partners in the CUBIS Project, together with four other partners, will launch in 2017 the DIMAST Solution which is a Decision Support System for the sustainable management of tourist destinations. All technologies developed within the DIMAST Research Project as well as the Plotto technology provide valuable knowhow for the CUBIS Project.

- Physical Resources

A significant weakness within the CUBIS Project is related to the lack of relevant books at the Transilvania University of Brasov Library on the topics related to the Project's idea. This is because no Study Program within this institution is expressly related to Destination Management or Marketing. In this context, to address this risk, one researcher from Transilvania University spent one month at Heilbronn University for research reasons. The Faculty of International Business within Heilbronn University offers several Study Programs in Destination Management and there is significant literature on this topic available at the University Library. A very important strength though is related to previous research conducted at Transilvania University on the topic of "Sustainable destination marketing and the members of Generation Y". As presented previously, the entire idea of the CUBIS Project originates in the focus group discussions conducted in 2015 by researchers from Transilvania University and the École Hôtelière de Lausanne. The main findings of this research have been communicated at prestigious international conferences [18] and published in important volumes [28,45].

- Financial Resources

A delicate matter related to the CUBIS Project partially concerns the funding sources. There are no financial problems as far as the funding administered by the involved universities and the technology developer are concerned. The local DMO in Brasov has the legal form of a public-private association with a budget mainly established by the Council of Brasov County, which is the main contributor, as the legal representative for most localities in the county. No legal approval for funding allocation has been adopted yet at this level regarding the CUBIS Project. In November 2016, when the first phase of the project started, it was too late to apply for the Council's allocation. According to local administrative procedures, public allocations are awarded based on a list of local priorities. A weakness of the CUBIS Project is related to the fact that it was not included on the list of Brasov's priorities. Nevertheless, with the first phase successfully completed and the CUBIS idea properly disseminated, this funding related problem will definitely be solved.

4.2. Main Opportunities and Threats

The forward-looking, highly innovative and multidisciplinary character of the CUBIS Project makes it easy to identify opportunities and hard to find real threats for it. In this section, the focus regards the capacity of available resources to consider external context factors (political, economic, socio-demographic, technological) as opportunities or as threats.

- Human Resources

Skilled human resources are particularly prominent in research projects which combine technology with a specific research field. Transilvania University of Brasov is offering doctoral study programs in tourism marketing and, in this context, identifying young doctoral researchers with technology skills may open valuable research occasions within the CUBIS Project as well.

- Intellectual Resources

An important future research direction refers to the fact that after completion of the CUBIS Project, the CUBIS Solution can further develop into an innovative Decision Support System (DSS) for place/destination marketing with a great advantage—the immediacy [8]. Immediacy means that tourists or locals will very quickly engage with the virtual persona of the tourist destination, sharing valuable feedback to decision-makers.

The rate of technological progress is growing faster than ever. New technology features as well as new fashion trends in technology will always appear. This is an important threat to the success of the CUBIS Project which forces the research team to stay abreast of up-to-date technology findings and trends.

● Physical Resources

Recent research results showed that there is a generational delay which can be identified in the Romanian society of about 10–15 years. At present, young people who were born in Romania at the end of the 1990s can be considered as the first "pure" or "authentic" members of Generation Y who are entering the workforce. The members of Generation Y are the current junior students in Romanian universities. People who were born in Romania between the 1980s and the 1990s still share some values of the former Generation (Generation X) because they are a Transition Generation. However, they also share some values of Generation Y, such as certain digital skills; the fact that they like to share their lives and opinions in virtual contexts; and that they expect their points of view and beliefs to be valued and fashion and trends are influential on them. The CUBIS Project includes several testing phases mainly related to technology features. In this context, the generational shift in Romania, with the authentic Generation Y students entering universities, is a very important opportunity for the CUBIS Project, offering favorable research circumstances. Romania has been chosen for testing due to this research opening, too. The presumption of the research team from the CUBIS Project is that, in societies affected by such generational delay, the members of Generation Y will reflect and manifest the pure traits of this generation.

● Financial Resources

The Technology Readiness Level (TRL) included at the end of the CUBIS Project is situated on the 4th level (technology validated in lab), which means that no final product or prototype will be offered to the market. The specific TRL level included within the project was decided based on the available funds. Funding opportunities in Romania, Germany or at the EU level can be further identified to proceed from TRL 4 to TRL 7 (system prototype demonstration in operational environment), TRL 8 (system complete and qualified) or even TRL 9 (system proven in operational environment). Proper dissemination of the Project's results can bring the CUBIS Solution to the attention of other DMOs dealing with branding specific problems. They can become interested in developing the CUBIS Solution into a final product and, at that point, they can also identify funding opportunities in their countries or regions. At first sight, it can be viewed as a threat to the CUBIS Project, but it actually represents a true opportunity, because the long-term target of the research team within this project is to transform the CUBIS Solution into a real and useful tool for sustainable destination marketing.

A very important threat affecting the successful implementation of the CUBIS Project concerns the need to sustain the engagement of the young consumers. Generation Y is not loyal and has a very short attention span. The point scheme included in the CUBIS Project might not be enough of a long term motivation. New forms of recognition need to be identified through future research to keep the young consumers interested in the platform and make sure they will continue to contribute.

Within the new generational context, new financial opportunities may appear, public or private bodies offering funds for research projects which address the delicate matter of building customer loyalty for the members of the new cohorts of people.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

As research has shown, Generation Y is still dynamic, which means that new specific traits and values may crystallize in time. They are a "heroic" generation, which means they have the collective power to produce great changes in society. In this context, at the tourist destination level, DMOs have a great responsibility regarding the proper guidance of this generation. First, destinations should be committed to sustainability. Part of this commitment is their assumed responsibility to share sustainability values and educate both tourists and locals in this direction. As stated before in this article, members of Generation Y are very open to put sustainability into practice, but they need to be guided and educated in this direction. The term "edutainment" [17] has been considered as the most suitable for educating this generation; it means educating them through entertainment, games and having fun. The members of Generation Y need to share their skills, they need to feel appreciated and

useful. They are the "digital natives" and they communicate through advanced technologies. In order to be able to "edutain" the members of Generation Y, DMOs should first connect with them using their specific "digital" language. In addition, tourists and locals from Generation Y should be offered the real possibility to become an active collective stakeholder, to feel they can directly contribute to shaping the life of the destination. The idea of the CUBIS Project is related to connecting members of Generation Y to destination brands. The CUBIS Project proposes a practical solution to determine active participation of young people into the life of tourist destinations, based on their specific needs and characteristics.

In 2017, Romania ranks the 29th out of the 29 EU Member States regarding the Digital Economy and Society Index [46], 35th out of 136 countries in Country Brand Strategy rating, and 68th out of 136 in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index [47]. Recent research concluded that behavioral educational programs for tourists and new demographic trends should be included within tourist destination strategies in Romania [48]. In this context, at local and national levels, the CUBIS Project can be viewed as an innovative and up-to-the-minute initiative which contributes to raising the efficiency of local place brands through youth empowerment, and hence, to gaining competitive advantage as tourist destinations. Brasov was chosen for the CUBIS Project due to its brand profile. Even though the local brand "BeLive.It" was mainly developed based on the profile of Generation Y, it is weak, not-known, not adopted and not supported by local youth or by young tourists. The local DMO is one of the top organizations in Romania and, after conducting research, a conclusion of vital importance was formulated—Brasov was dealing with a brand culturalization problem. In this context, the CUBIS Project offers an innovative solution for solving such a problem.

At the international level, the only place brand culturalization campaigns that actively involved locals using web platforms are those of New Zealand [38], and Australia [39]. In Europe, the importance of place brand culturalization was not acknowledged and, in practice, the concept itself is usually confounded with place brand promotion. However, the European Union is actively involved in strategies and actions related to youth empowerment, cultural heritage digitization and European destinations branding support. In this context, at the European level, the CUBIS Project contributes to the achievement of:

- the 2nd main objective (youth empowerment) and the 5th field of action (ensure full participation of youth in the life of local communities) of the EU Strategy for Youth [49];
- initiatives No. 1 (develop mechanisms for dialogue with youth) and No. 5 (make effective use of ICT to broaden participation of young people) from the 4th field of action within the Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010–2018) [50];
- the priorities A.2. (promoting access to cultural heritage via digital means) and B.1. (participatory governance of cultural heritage) from the EU Work Plan for Culture 2015–2018 [51];
- the EU policy recommendations for 2015–2020—No. 4 (stimulate cultural participation of young generations) and No. 7 (give particular attention to learning of cultural awareness and expression) [52];
- the 5th point in the EU Recommendation on digitization of culture [53];
- the scope of the proposed Directive on the accessibility of public sector bodies' websites [54];
- the 2nd and 3rd pillars of the EU Digital Single Market Strategy [55]; and
- the 18th action (supporting European destinations branding) and the 2nd objective (developing innovation in the tourism industry) from the last EU Tourism Policy [29].

As the CUBIS Project's main aim creatively fits the Europeana Strategy 2015–2020 [56], after completion, the CUBIS Solution can be further integrated into the EUROPEANA web platform (the labs section). Summarizing, the CUBIS Project innovatively answers the 1st (smart growth) and 3rd (inclusive growth) priorities from EUROPA 2020 Strategy [56].

Considering its primary goal and objectives, the CUBIS Project has a strong trans-disciplinary character, through the disciplines it involves: social marketing, sustainable tourism, destination

marketing and cultural economics. Through the vital ICT dimension, the CUBIS Project transcends the boundaries of the involved disciplines, being able to generate new and original trans-disciplinary research perspectives. As discussed in the previous section, after completion of the CUBIS Project, the CUBIS Solution can further develop into an innovative Decision Support System (DSS) for place/destination marketing. The CUBIS Solution can also be further developed and adapted to all fields where product brand culturalization is needed. Additionally, it can lead to other intelligent and innovative solutions for active participation of the young members of Generation Y into the social life of communities.

At the EU level, the competitiveness of tourist destinations is defined through three main concepts: sustainable development, high-quality and ICT [57]. This means that, in order to gain competitive advantage, a tourist destination should focus on how to develop in a sustainable way, on how to offer high-quality products and on how to make best use of ICT. All three concepts are part of the profile which defines the members of Generation Y. As qualitative research conducted in 2015 at Transilvania University proved, the members of Generation Y value sustainability and would like to bring their direct contribution to implementing sustainable development within tourist destinations. They only need proper guidance from the destination's stakeholders. They also like to share their opinions, values and skills but they need to be offered the possibility to do so. Being the "digital natives", they need ICT to communicate. The CUBIS Project addresses all of these aspects and offers an innovative idea of how to gain competitive advantage in a sustainable way through connecting the members of Generation Y to a destination brand using ICT.

As mentioned in this article, there is a major scientific gap regarding the topic of sustainable destination marketing within the generational context. Because it is a narrow research topic, very poor literature exists in this field. The three group discussions conducted in 2015 at Transilvania University are the only source of information regarding the direct relationship between the members of Generation Y and tourist destinations willing to develop in a sustainable way. Due to the fact that at the EU level, sustainable development of tourist destinations has become a focal concern in the last decade [29], which also means that European funding policy will support it, more and more tourist destinations might become interested in finding innovative ways to develop in a sustainable way ecologically, economically, socially and culturally. The idea of the CUBIS Project is highly adaptable and transferable to other destinations. The main research limitation in this article is related to the fact that the CUBIS Project is only in its second phase; therefore, final results cannot be depicted. As mentioned at the beginning, describing the final results of the CUBIS Project was not the aim of this paper, but to present a best-practice example of an innovative idea related to the sustainable marketing of tourist destinations transposed into a viable research project.

Taking into consideration the description of the CUBIS Project, as well as the SWOT analysis presented above, several management implications can be identified. The most stringent is related to obtaining proper funding from the Council of Brasov County. Another important aspect concerns the TRL level 4 established for the end of the project. Because TRL4 is not considered as a very credible one [43,44], the management team should focus on identifying funding opportunities in Romania, Germany or at the EU level to progress on the TRL scale and reach higher levels.

The concept of "generational gap" brings in front of us an important perspective: future generations, starting with Generation Y, will be very different from previous ones. ICT was the main generator of this generational gap and, starting with Generation Y, all destination marketing specialists will have to deal with the "digital natives" [17]. From a marketing viewpoint, profiling new generations of consumers is vital for success. The "generational gap" presents communication with the members of Generation Y in a very challenging nature. In tourism literature and research, this topic has been approached mainly by HR specialists. This article shows that it should be expanded to other directions as well, such as destination marketing.

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