

Empathy Within Intergenerational and Intragenerational Equity Through Tourism Education

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Abstract

The three sustainable development pillars inevitably raise the question of what kind of environment children will live and learn in. The answer largely depends on the method and influence of education in the life of modern society. The type and format of teaching that we provide to the youth today will create and shape their way of life in the next decades, i.e. whether in the future they will be good people, conscientious citizens and successful leaders depends on us now. Tourism has not only a significant economic role, but today it is also a social factor of integral importance for the formation of tolerance and understanding between societies. Moreover, today its dimensions are extremely diverse and wide-ranging, so education related to it requires new scientific approaches and special ways of communication based on personal example, social inclusion and empathy. The present study reveals the systematic relation of empathy and education within the concepts of intergenerational and intragenerational equity through tourism learning. Based on the theoretical reflection of specific characteristics of those concepts a conceptual model is proposed accounting for inclusion of tourism education in the governance of the social environment.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism, intergenerational equity, intragenerational equity, education

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Introduction

Sustainable development is a topic that is a subject of research in various scientific fields. The concept is so widely discussed that today it goes beyond the boundaries of “pure science” and allows interpretation from different points of view. Unfortunately, in some social groups and communities, there is still a tendency to define sustainable development only through the paradigm of environmental protection, without taking into account the social parameters of the concept. Tourism is an integral part of the economic and social environment worldwide. Its driving force is precisely the people who form the “face” of the tourist product and guarantee its quality. A key factor for the development of sustainable tourism is education, which “transfers knowledge” also by empathy. For this reason, **the thesis supported in the present study** is that tourism can contribute to sustainable development only if it relies on empathy and education within the two main paradigms of the sustainable equity doctrine - intergenerational and intragenerational tolerance. Education plays a key role in the formation of a civic philosophy, and in today's modern times, the flow of information gives rise to a number of changes in traditional educational and pedagogical practice. One of the tools through which students and teachers can “be together” in the learning and practical training process is the empathy - an immanent human ability, on which basis intergenerational tolerance and multiculturalism are built.

The object of research is tourism, in its role as a key factor in overcoming the negative effects of globalization and promoting the principles of sustainable development. **The subject** of research is the role of empathy and education in tourism, which could build continuity both between generations and within a generation, in the context of creating a solid sustainable social policy. **The aim** of the current study is by deriving the systematic relationship between education and empathy within the framework of the two equity doctrines, to present a theoretical conceptual model for the inclusion of tourism education in the governance of the social environment. For its realization the following **research tasks** have been formulated: defining the main concepts related to sustainable

development; arguing the role of empathy as a social and psychological phenomenon for the development of education and, in particular, specialized tourism education; bringing out the main systematic relations between intergenerational and intragenerational equity as tools for sustainable development; proposing a conceptual model for the inclusion of tourism education in the governance of the social environment.

1. Literature review and methodology

The concept of sustainable development dates back to the early 1990s. The term was first popularized in the 1987 “Our Common Future” report by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (UNWCED) that enforces the most commonly used definition to this day: “*it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (UNWCED, 1987, p. 15). A number of world organizations, as well as researchers and scientists in various fields are studying the phenomenon from different points of view, only to prove what was defined back in 1987: “*sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs*” (UNWCED, 1987: 17).

Tourism and tourism science are inextricably linked to the three main anchors of sustainable development, defined by different authors as *pillars* (Soto et. al., 2022); *components* (Duran et. al., 2015); *perspectives* (Oftedal et.al., 2020), or *dimensions* as originally described in The Rio Declaration on environment and development (UN, 1992). The genesis of the three pillars (social, economic and environmental) lies in the contradictions that arise when developing strategies and solutions to achieve sustainable development. The most serious conflicts are expressed in the relationship between (Berghöfer et. al., 2022): the human beings and all other forms of life on the planet; current and future generations; different social groups in society. In this context, the three dimensions of sustainable development are environmental sustainability, social justice and economic viability (ESCAP, 2015).

A comprehensive study of the concept of “distributive justice” touched upon in The Rio Declaration was done by John Rawls in 1971. Broadly speaking, distributive justice relates to people's perceptions and understandings of what exactly is a fair distribution of goods (Rawls, 1999). Based on his extensive research and available scientific interpretations, distributive justice is conditionally divided into 3 sub-theories:

1) Egalitarianism - In a narrow sense, egalitarianism is a way of thinking that differences in benefits for individuals could be acceptable if they were the result of conscious and voluntary human choice, and differences resulting from extraneous influences were unfair (Scheffler, 2003). In a broad sense, the term is associated with treating people equally, with no hint of discrimination based on gender, social or economic status;

2) Sufficientarianism - A doctrine that aims to increase the number of people who have “enough” in any situation or have “enough” advantage over others (Alcantud et. al., 2022);

3) Prioritarianism - A theory that places emphasis on poor welfare. The doctrine asserts that priority should be placed on those who are disadvantaged and their interests should be of greater importance in the equitable distribution of goods (Holtug, 2022).

The Brundtland report and the understanding of distributive justice gave rise to a wave of interpretation and critical analysis worldwide. Most authors define the concept of sustainable development as sufficientarian, but the fifth and sixth principles of The Rio Declaration are prioritarian, and in a different context - even egalitarian (Boulanger, 2013). Based on their value system and objective capabilities, people choose the degree of their socio-economic responsibility. Social justice manifests itself in two main ways that are inextricably linked to distributive justice: intergenerational and intragenerational justice. In general, intergenerational justice implies the provision of equal conditions for development within the current generation, i.e. equality between

individual social communities and between individuals within these communities. Intragenerational justice encompasses equal opportunities between current and future generations in terms of resource use, consumption of goods and human rights (Caney, 2018).

Based on the study of the meaning of intergenerational and intragenerational equity, the present study used a comparative analysis in determining the key characteristics of the two concepts. A descriptive method was applied in the definition of basic terms related to sustainable development. The author assessed the influence of empathy in the educational process through the methods of observation and transduction.

For this purpose, the results of an observation of students majoring in “Tourism” at the University of Economics - Varna are presented. An experiment was done with evolving the students in a charity event of a regional tourism organization. The experiment provoked several significant conclusions (derived on a transductive basis) about the role of empathy and the relationship between professor and students (respectively, representatives of the Y and Z generations).

At the end of the article, a conceptual model for including tourism and tourism education as tools for achieving generational justice and equality was proposed. The model tries to find the place of education in the field of social sciences in the system of sustainable development management and governance and to highlight its role in increasing the quality of communication between generations and within one generation.

2. Understanding sustainable development related concepts

For the purposes of the sustainable development concept interpretation, an experiment was carried out on the Internet. When entering keywords “sustainable development related terms” Google shows more than 200 results, most of which are related to the purely ecological focus of sustainability, the most common terms being: circular economy; carbon footprint; carbon neutral; climate change; ecosystem; natural capital; biodegradable goods; energy; environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG); greenhouse effect; eco-friendly; recyclable products; greenwashing. The results clearly show that the main priority of sustainable development is the protection of the environment and biodiversity, as well as the fight against climate change. The economic and above all the social dimension of sustainability remain in the background. For the purposes of the study, the emphasis is placed precisely on the social relationships that provoke the emergence of the following concepts:

⊗ **Capability approach** - It was developed as a theoretical model, according to which GDP growth should not be considered as a unique indicator of the well-being and quality of life. It is aimed at the idea of equality and protection of the dignity of all social groups, including those threatened with marginalization (Ponce et. al., 2018);

⊗ **Generativity** - It is considered one of the stages in human life that is reached at a more mature age. Generally speaking, generativity represents one's attitude toward the future and one's desire to lead the next generation (Shiel et. al., 2020);

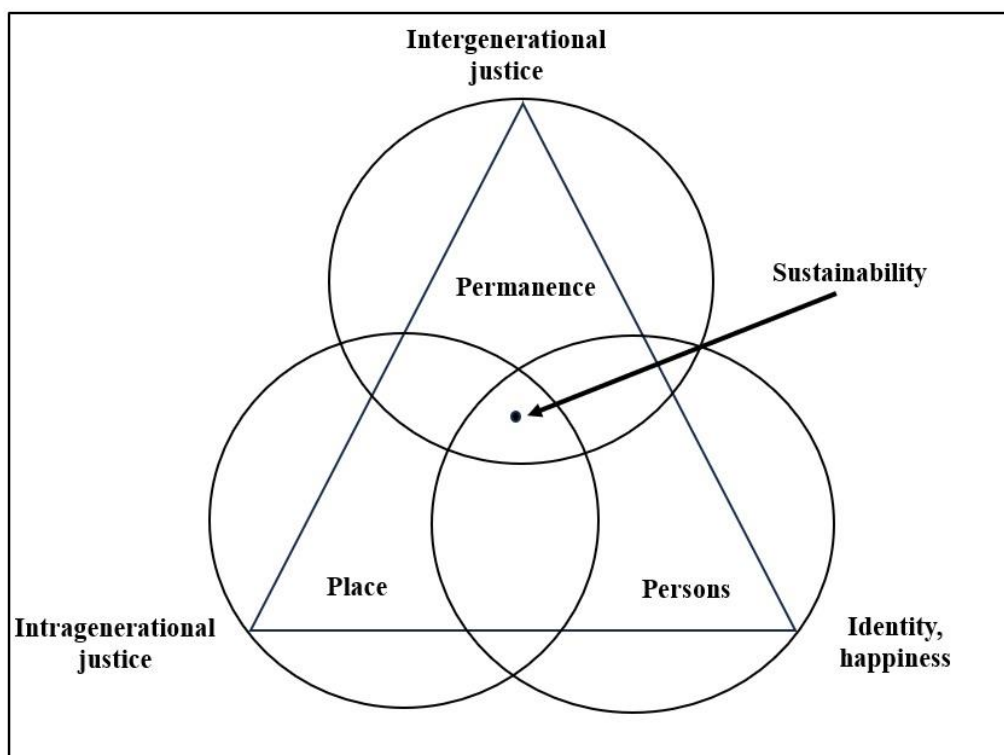
⊗ **Inclusive globalization** - The term entered the scientific literature as a kind of continuation of the “inclusive growth” and “inclusive development” understanding. It is based on the principles of shared good, openness of societies and economies to each other and creation of equal opportunities for all (Xie, 2023);

⊗ **Social cohesion** - The concept is aimed at overcoming poverty and ensuring equality for all social groups, by combining social inclusion, effective governance and creating a sense of belonging among citizens (Rodelo et. al., 202);

⊗ **Global citizenship** - Passed through the works of Confucius, Socrates, Aristotle and Spinoza, today the term is identified with the understanding of public awareness, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Sageidet and Heggen, 2021);

⊗ **Intergenerational and intragenerational justice** - As we have already indicated, the two terms respectively concern the interrelationships between representatives of different

generations and between those within a generation. More than 10 years ago, Lucas Seghezzo proposed a new, 5-dimensional model (Figure 1) for interpreting sustainable development, where generational relationships also take place (Seghezzo, 2009).



Source: Seghezzo, 2009: 548.

Figure 1. Dimensions of sustainable development

Place is of particular importance, as it not only extends within certain geographical boundaries, but is also a conditional perceptual category for cultural and folk-psychological belonging. *Permanence* refers not only to maintaining current levels of development, but also requires continuous attempts at its improvement. The author points out that the main area of intragenerational justice is exactly permanence. *People* are the next major component in the proposed model, which is central to the formation of social identity. Here comes the question of the subjective interpretation of personal happiness. Well-being is often defined in the context of economic prosperity, but for many people it is more about freedom, choice and personal achievement (Seghezzo, 2009).

In the scientific literature, the terms intergenerational and intragenerational justice are often used simultaneously. This is necessary because the Sustainable Development Goals imply improving the interaction between generations and within one generation. The differences between the two concepts are systematized in Table 1.

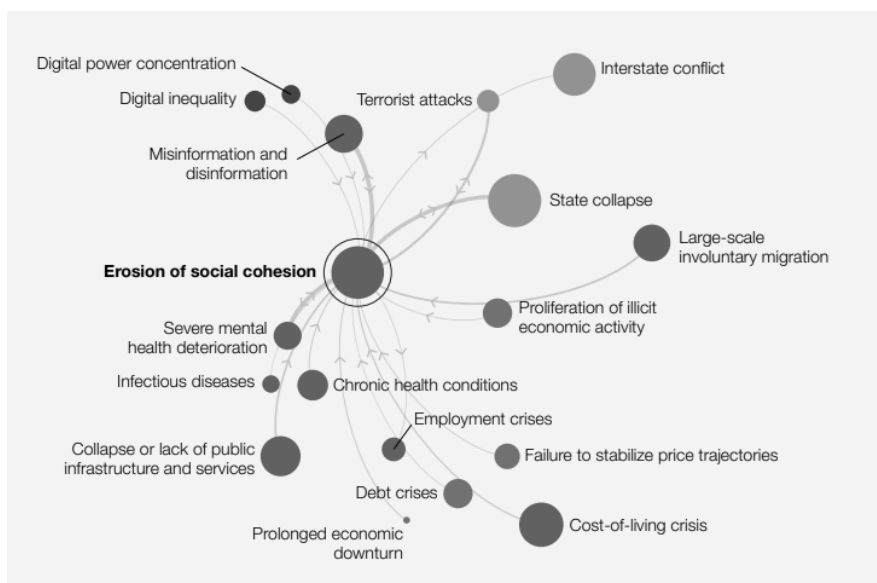
Table 1. Comparison between intergenerational and intragenerational justice

Intergenerational equity	Intragenerational equity
Equity which exists between generations	Equity which exists between members of a single generation
Intergenerational mobility	Intragenerational mobility
Result of a drastic change of the social class. Long-term perspectives.	Not related to a drastic change of social class. Short-term perspectives.
Intergenerational justice key words	Intragenerational justice key words
succession; facilitation; equal distribution	communication; teamwork; equal distribution

Source: the author

Intergenerational justice has a wider scope and, accordingly, implies the overcoming of more societal differences. In this sense, the term refers to a wider variety of situations and options for social relationships (Smith, 2023).

This year's World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Risks Report highlights the problem of the social cohesion erosion. The breakdown of social stability and the polarization of society has been identified as the fifth most serious short-term risk to global citizenship, preceded only by the cost-of-living crisis, natural disasters and cataclysms, geo-economic conflicts and the inability to limit the negative impacts of climate change (WEF, 2023). The main problem here is that social clashes (provoked by different political, ideological or other understandings) are not only intergenerational and become more and more noticeable within a generation (Figure 2).



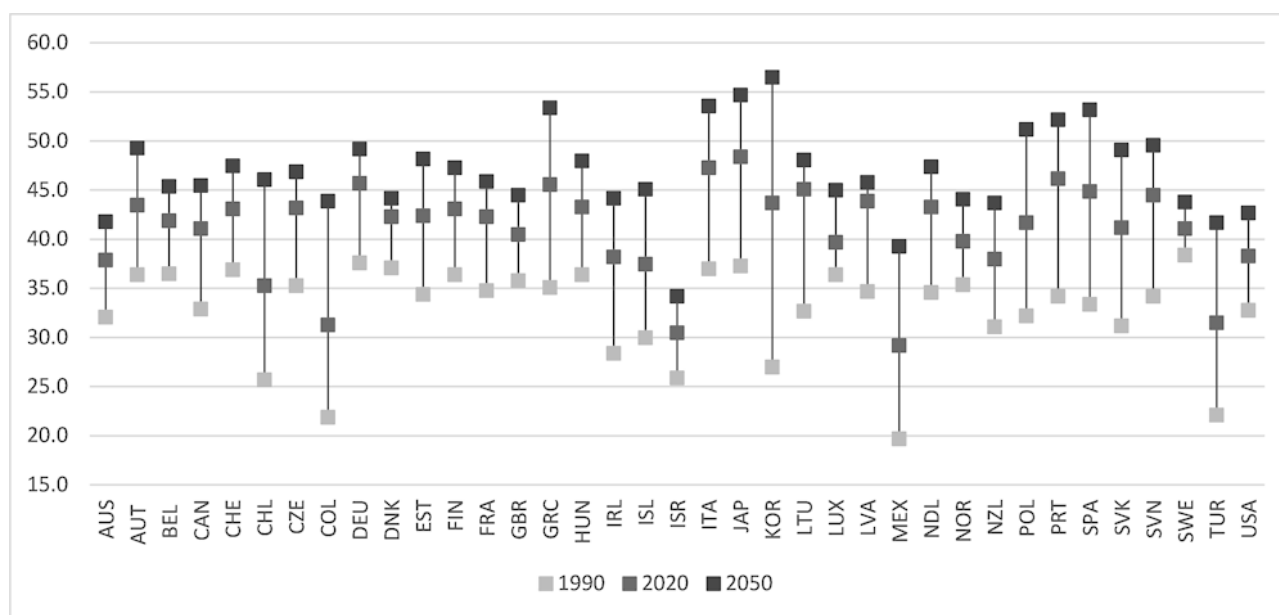
Source: WEF, 2023, p. 23.

Figure 2. Risk interconnections: the erosion of social cohesion

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) offers a governance model for promoting intergenerational equity, with a focus on age diversity. One of the few positive aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic was precisely the solidarity and mutual assistance between generations that appeared for objective reasons. This has also become a priority of many national policies, implementing packages of measures to provide public services that meet the requirements and capabilities of different generations (OECD, 2020). The formation of policies to improve intergenerational relationships is of utmost importance given the global trend towards an aging population (Figure 3). It is important to clarify that human societies modify and reconstruct the rules and institutions that allow the distribution of power and wealth. In this way, combating inequality is achieved through changing and/or reversible political initiatives. Improving people's quality of life has a multiplier effect on the economy, since it increases the demand for ideas and, at the same time, allows their production and distribution to be much easier and more profitable.

⊗ **Agents of change** - In the context of the idea of global citizenship and the goal of achieving equity between generations, young people are recognized as agents of change, i.e. those that catalyze social processes and support the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals;

⊗ **Learning environment** – According to the Western Governors University (WGU) the learning environment has three dimensions: *physical* (material base, design and degree of comfort of classrooms in different educational institutions); *psychological* (trust between students and between them and their teachers; a sense of security, continuity, freedom to engage and a team work); *emotional* (freedom of self-expression and sharing of opinion and ideas; an opportunity to build emotional intelligence) (WGU, 2021).



Source: OECD, 2020: 114.

Figure 3. Median age across OECD countries for 1990, 2020 and projections in 2050

Focusing on education and tourism as tools to overcome social erosion, we should seek and assess the role of empathy in achieving better communication and strengthening generational bonds. One of the most used definitions of empathy is introduced by David Batson in “The Social Neuroscience of Empathy” book where the author defines empathy as “*the processes whereby one person can come to know the internal state of another and can be motivated to respond with sensitive care*” (Batson, 2009: 11).

The study of empathy as an element of the system of relationships between generations and within one generation is based on the author's thesis that it can be successfully applied both in education, including tourism education, and in service and the creation of a competitive product in the tourism sector.

The importance of empathy in tourism is provoked by the following features:

- ⊗ As a service sector, tourism creates a product “by people for people” and in this sense sympathy, respect, the ability to understand the opinion and the needs of others is an important prerequisite for both the creation of the tourist product and its realization;

- ⊗ By its very nature, tourism represents a continuous process of exchange of cultures and national psychologies and lifestyles;

- ⊗ Tourism is a social phenomenon, “created for all” and implies understanding and respect for individual perceptions and preferences, regardless of gender, age, religion, nationality and ideology;

- ⊗ Tourism is strongly influenced by globalization and as a social phenomenon should be interpreted in two ways - as a conduit of negative influences on the one hand and as a tool for achieving sustainable development on the other;

- ⊗ Empathy is an essential pillar of succession and hospitality, the latter having a genetic link with tourism.

The importance of empathy in education and specifically in tourism education can be explained by the following statements:

- ⊗ Education is a key factor for any country and has an essential role in the socio-economic development of the nation;

- ⊗ Every educational institution is designed as much to impart new knowledge and skills as to build emotional intelligence;

⊗ The educational environment creates an opportunity for contact between different generations (professors - students), and the constructive nature of these relationships is helped by empathy;

⊗ Personal example is also conveyed by empathy. In education, a professor is of particular importance in their role as a mentor, constantly inculcating moral public values, even with their behavior;

⊗ Empathy creates a sense of collectivity, and educational environments are most effective when generations work as a team and respect each other's achievements.

Building empathy in education is most often studied in the field of preschool and elementary pedagogy. However, the globalization process and social decay provoke the need to strengthen the ties between professors and students. The creation of a community and its preservation over time is a complex process that is far from dependent only on the governance, political will and socio-economic well-being of a given nation.

3. Results and findings

In December 2023, students majoring in “Tourism” at the University of Economics - Varna (22 years old) were given the following challenge by their assistant professor (31 years old):

- ⊗ to visit (if desired by them) a charity event of a regional tourist organization;
- ⊗ to buy (again if desired) products prepared for charity sale for the benefit of elderly people;
- ⊗ to get involved in the organization of the event by helping to install and dismantle equipment necessary for the event (if desired);

It was explained to the students in advance that some of their professors would also attend the event. Beyond this information, no incentives were promised to those who would join the event. Out of 35 people invited, 10 people responded to the invitation, and 8 others warned in advance that the day and time of the event did not fit with their work commitments. The observation of their behavior and the analysis of the conversations we have with them provide a basis for determining the importance of empathy and education in creating intergenerational and intragenerational justice. The main reasons for attending the event are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Personal motivation to attend the event

Motivation	Number of students
To spend time together	9 out of 10 students
To participate in a tourism organization event	5 out of 10 students
To observe how an event is organized and run	3 out of 10 students
To contact people from the tourism industry	5 out of 10 students
To spend more time with my professors	6 out of 10 students
To have fun	10 out of 10 students
To get to know my colleagues and professors outside of the classroom	6 out of 10 students
To support a charity initiative	8 out of 10 students
To feel useful	4 out of 10 students
To help those who need my help	3 out of 10 students

Source: the author

The power of empathy as a means of bridging generational differences can be found in almost all of the student responses. It is important to point out here that one of the participants had specifically changed his work shift to be able to attend the event. When asked why he did this, he answered unequivocally: “To be together!” Another student attended the event with a leg injury, his motives were the same.

Very often, not only in the scientific literature, education is seen as part of the state system - just a sector that creates a specific good. However, education also has a “face” - all the teachers

who, with their behavior and attitude, can attract or repel young people. Empathy and healthy intergenerational relationships in education are difficult to build and require effort from both sides. At times there is an “imitation effect” where students try to imitate the behavior of their mentors. It is in this sense that the role of teachers is extremely important, as they are obliged to be a good example for all adolescents. Based on the personal example of their professors, all students stayed until the end of the event and took part in the dismantling, arrangement and removal of the equipment necessary for the event to take place. At an initial invitation event within two hours, the students stayed nearly five hours. The reasons for their stay until the end of the event are systematized in Table 3.

Table 3. Personal motivation to stay until the end of the event

Motivation	Number of students
My teachers stay, I stay too	6 out of 10 students
I want to help and feel useful	8 out of 10 students
We came together and we will leave together	10 out of 10 students
I want to work in a team with my colleagues and professors	8 out of 10 students
I am having fun and I am enjoying it very much	6 out of 10 students

Source: the author

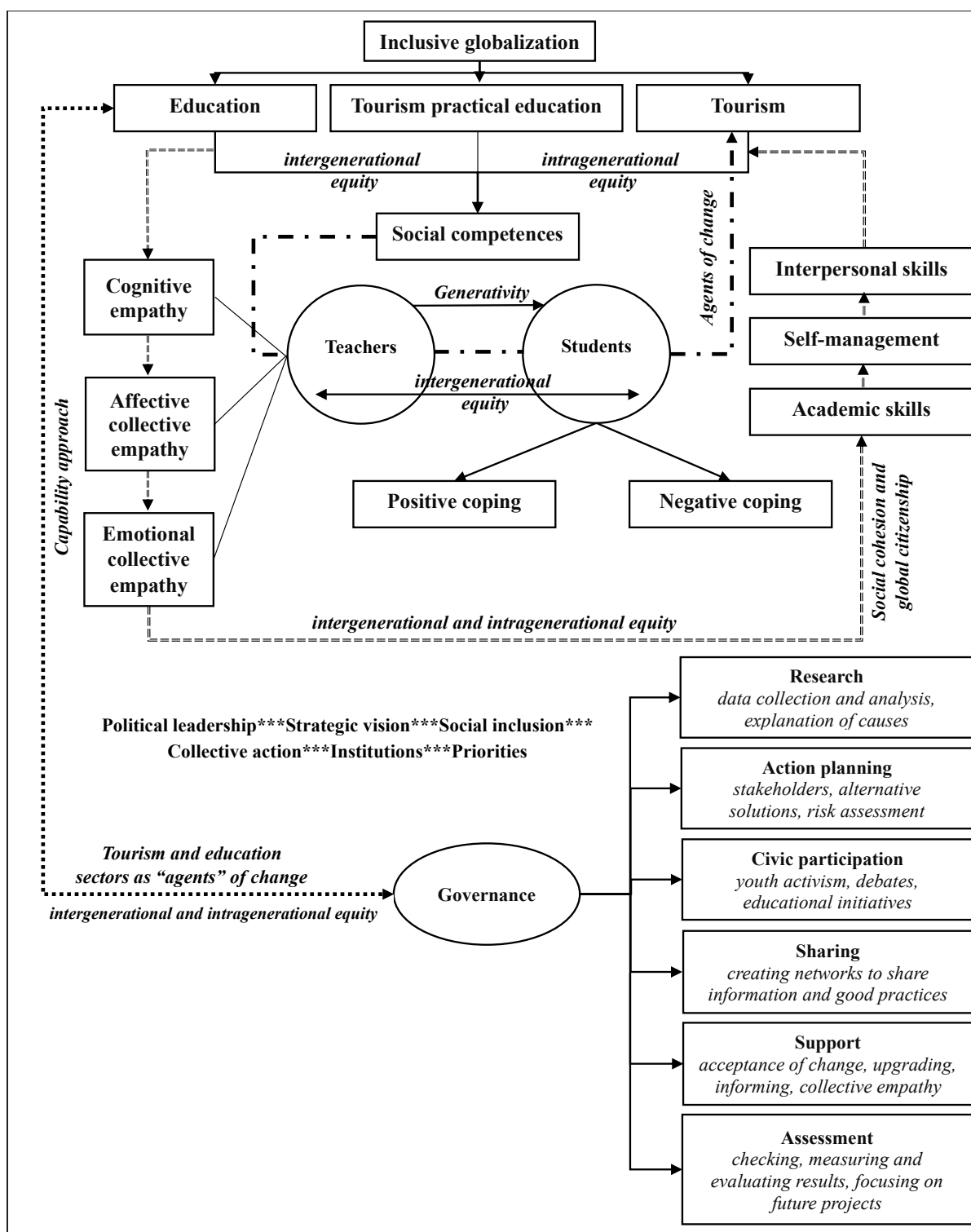
It is important to point out that despite their limited budget, all students also got involved in the charity initiative itself by purchasing products intended for sale. The conducted experiment brought to the fore two deductive conclusions: 1) Education is one of the main pillars on which basis generational ties can be strengthened. Teamwork, empathy, respect and the desire to be together is at the heart of achieving intergenerational and intragenerational justice; 2) Not everything is in the hands of the government. It is people who can contribute to the development of global citizenship in the context of sustainable development.

Based on the conducted experiment and the study of the limits of empathy in education according to the works of Qin et. al. (Qin et. al., 2022), a conceptual model is proposed to establish the interrelationships between empathy, education and tourism and the role of public administration for the process of turning young people into “agents of change” (Figure 4).

Inclusive globalization affects all spheres of the socio-economic life of nations. Education, as a basis for improving generational connections, relies on the social competences of educators and their willingness to pass on their knowledge to younger people. Intergenerational tolerance in the learning process gives rise to collective empathy, characterized not only by understanding and respect, but also by an attempt to imitate and copy this behavior of the mentor, which students have recognized as the most correct model for them.

Motivation is a key feature of intergenerational relationships. Transmitting “meaning” to the younger generations leads to a high degree of awareness, which in turn leads to increased levels of interpersonal skills, self-management, academic skills, and improved peer relationships (Yancheva, 2020). The role of the state is found in prioritizing education as a basis for creating global citizenship and as an environment for inculcating values and overcoming social erosion. Governance goes through 6 classic stages: *research* (data collection and analysis, explanation of causes); *action planning* (indicating potential stakeholders, finding alternative solutions, risk assessment); *endorsement of civic participation* (stimulating youth activism and educational initiatives); *sharing information* (creating local, national and international information networks to share good practices); *supporting the nation* (fostering smooth acceptance of change and creating public (collective) empathy); *constant assessment of the results achieved* (monitoring, control and focus on future projects).

The empathy formed in adolescents could become their competitive advantage as professionals in the tourism sector, which, as we have already pointed out, requires the possession of soft skills that turn an ordinary manager into a leader.



Source: the author

Figure 4. Conceptual model for inclusion of tourism education in the governance of the social environment

Moreover, participation and engagement with events of professionals in the industry could be extremely beneficial for young people, creating contacts and acquaintances on the one hand and orienting them in choosing a profession and specialization on the other hand.

Conclusion

Education, including tourism education as a kind of specific knowledge, should be included as a core component of the social inclusion management system. The educational environment is the one that largely builds the personality and character of the youth. There is no doubt the role of teachers, who should create favorable conditions and an appropriate atmosphere for the transmission of knowledge, meaning and values. Empathy, as a component of emotional intelligence and a specific type of “social skill”, is inextricably linked with the construction of the emotional dimension of the educational environment.

Tourism education has a highly integral character. Combining science and tourism practice (both with an exceptional social orientation) is a prerequisite for creating intergenerational and intragenerational justice and in this sense supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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