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Using Educational Tourism in Geographical Education

Dalia PRAKAPIENĖ[1]

Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Vilnius, LITHUANIA

Loreta OLBERKYTĖ[2]

Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Vilnius, LITHUANIA

Abstract

The article analyses and defines the concept of educational tourism, presents the structure of the concept and looks into the opportunities for using educational tourism in geographical education. In order to reveal such opportunities a research was carried out in the Lithuanian national and regional parks using the qualitative method of content analysis and the quantitative method of questionnaire survey. The authors of the research identified the educational excursion activities conducted in the national and regional parks and established the areas of geography in which such activities could be used. The questionnaire survey analysed the current situation in the area of educational activities. The research into the variety of educational excursions in the Lithuanian national and regional parks confirmed opportunities for the integration of educational tourism and geography.

Keywords: educational tourism, geographical education, educational excursion, Lithuanian regional and national parks gender

Introduction

Educational institutions, especially schools, play a major role in the ever-changing modern society. Changes in the educational content have recently received considerable attention and the issues of what should be taught, how much needs to be taught and how it should be done have been intensively discussed. Creative education which facilitates the development of human abilities and self-expression and that can be developed through active practice has become very important. Such practice is encouraged in geographical education which involves, competence in natural science that is defined as

[1] Corresponding author: Assoc. Prof.; Department of Geography and Tourism, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Studentu 39, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania, dalia.prakapiene@leu.lt

[2] Assoc. Prof.; Department of Geography and Tourism, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Studentu 39, LT-08106 Vilnius, Lithuania, loreta.olberkyte@leu.lt

an ability and predisposition to use knowledge about the natural world as well as natural science research methods in order to answer questions, seek evidence-based conclusions and solutions, understand the changes in the nature caused by human activity, take personal responsibility for environmental preservation, and protect one's own and other people's health (Pradinio, 2008).

Educators are recommended to develop various teaching methods in the process of geographical education. One of the methods frequently used in extracurricular and project activities is the excursion or field trip. This is particularly relevant and important to the science of geography as learners are provided with an opportunity to learn in a specific environment which they can observe, research, compare, do tests and experiments, test hypotheses, etc. With the growing relevance and popularity of this method, educational tourism is becoming an important and useful tool in applying the method into practice.

The well-developed network of protected areas in Lithuania provides excellent opportunities for blending geography and educational tourism. The most-visited sights and areas are concentrated in 5 national parks, 6 reserves, 30 regional parks, 300 conservation areas and 4 UNESCO protected areas of international importance. Protected areas of different scale occupy approximately 15 percent of the country's area and are distributed throughout the country. Therefore, every institution for general education in Lithuania has favourable opportunities to use the above-mentioned means in their close environments through educational tourism. The Lithuanian national and regional parks have visitor educational centres and nature schools. There are about 139 paths for education, recreation, learning, health, as well as sightseeing routes, 83 viewpoints, 388 campsites and resorts. (Klimienė et al, 2011). Thus, we have very favourable conditions and opportunities for geography and other-subject education in a non-formal environment. Being a component of education as a whole, educational activities in regional parks are particularly important in the development of environmental protection competences in geographical education.

Following the Lithuanian curricula for general education, teachers integrate material on ecology into the geography syllabus thus providing more information about the nature and conservation methods, forming environmental education, and developing in pupils attitudes to nature based on the principles of ecology. Currently, most educationalists admit that, alongside with civic and democratic education, ecological education is the most important factor to determine the future of the human race. School environment and class activities are insufficient for achieving all the objectives of environmental education. Thus, educational tourism, its prospects, specific programmes and integration into the educational process have recently received growing attention. The curriculum of geography education is very favourable for this.

Literature Review

However, in Lithuania, there has not been in-depth scientific research into the issue, and only several individual scientific articles dealing with different topics of educational tourism can be found. Garbačiauskienė and Stulpinaitė (2006) analyse the excursion as a factor for the development of the knowledge society; Zaleskienė and Dobkevičienė-

Džiovėnienė (2007), Prakapas and Prakapiene (2011) approach the excursion in terms of efficiency as a method for civic education; Garalis, Švagždienė and Liesionienė (2008) analyse the excursion as an educational service, formulate the concept and the major theoretical aspects thereof; Švagždienė (2010) looks into the potential of the service of tourism in the context of a learning organisation. On the other hand, the topic of natural science education has been discussed much more widely. Lamanauskas (2005, 2010), Vilkonienė and Vilkonis (2005) analyse the concepts and problems of natural science education; Lamanauskas, Gedrovics and Raipulis (2004) approach natural science education as an integral phenomenon in Lithuania and Latvia; Lamanauskas and Ušeckienė (2002, 2009) address the importance and problems of natural science education in general education schools; Klangauskas (2006) reveals the relevance of learners' with special needs natural science education. Some links between educational tourism and geography and natural science education can be found in certain scientific and methodological articles. Vilkonis and Navickaitė (2007) discuss international learning partnership promoting outdoor education; Vilkonis and Vilkonienė (2008) analyse factors limiting children's education outdoors; Krivickienė (2010) addresses the importance of the excursion method in strengthening pupils' motivation for learning; Railienė (2010) identifies ways for teaching and consolidating general education school students' theoretical knowledge of geography, biology, physics and chemistry both in class and outdoors.

The analysis of foreign authors' works dealing with educational tourism revealed that the majority of scientists recommend this area of activity for adult education. Pitman et al (2010) emphasise that educational tourism promotes structured learning experiences and prove this by research into the opinions of university teachers, students and employers. Bhuiyan et al (2010), Fidgeon (2010), Pitman et al (2011) highlight that in terms of certain university studies educational tourism may be perceived as a tool for value- and experience-based learning.

Quezada (2004), Jason et al (2011) approach educational tourism in the form of student exchange programmes which provide students with opportunities for learning about other countries' cultures, customs and traditions, as well as for self-development and new experiences.

Sangsan-Anan et al (2012) blended the aspects of education, tourism and environment protection and suggested a new term of *environmental education tourism* using a causal relationship model of environmental education tourism. However, this does not relate to a particular system of education or aim at a specific target group.

The Purpose of study

The experience of Lithuanian and foreign scientists shows that the field of research into educational tourism is very wide and is perceived and approached in different ways. However, research into this field is inconsistent and mainly focuses on adult education with less attention paid to the analysis of educational tourism activities for general school pupils. The studies of Lithuanian scientists focus on specific subjects or particular problem areas; however, research into the situation and opportunities for

using educational tourism in geographical education at basic education schools is scarce. Thus, the scientific problem: what is the context for using educational tourism in geographical education in Lithuania?

The aim of the research was to reveal the opportunities for using educational tourism in geographical education.

The subject of the research was the opportunities for using educational tourism in geographical education.

The research methods included analysis of information sources and educational documents, questionnaire survey and content analysis.

Reseach Methodology

The research was conducted within October 2012 and January 2013. In order to ensure data reliability the principle of triangulation was applied combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The method of content analysis was applied to analyse the curricular for primary and basic education (Pradinio..., 2008) and to distinguish specific areas of activity whose educational guidelines highlight the opportunities for educational activities (Table 1). The integral areas of activity (spatial orientation and map reading, reading of geographical information, knowledge about regions, cognition and research of the environment) were used as categories in the content analysis and in the classification of educational activities in relation to educational excursions.

For the purpose of identifying the opportunities for geographical education in the protected areas of Lithuania a questionnaire was designed. For the questionnaire survey, target non-probability sampling was used and employees working in all the 5 national and 30 regional parks of Lithuania and responsible for organising or conducting excursions and educational activities were surveyed (a total of 35 five respondents). This sample is representative as usually only one employee is responsible for educational activities in each regional park. The choice of the particular parks was based on their specific features in terms of status, purpose and nature of activity.

The questionnaire was designed in three blocks: the first block included questions dealing with the preparation and organisation of educational excursions; the second block dealt with the methodological aspects of excursion running; the third block included demographic data. The questionnaire aimed to find out the employees' conceptions of educational tourism, examined the real variety of educational excursions, and asked about the opportunities for organising and expanding educational excursions in the regional and national parks.

On the basis of the survey findings, the variety of educational excursions offered in the above-mentioned parks was analysed with the focus on the content of the excursions. For this purpose, the general curricular for geography education (Pradinio..., 2008) were analysed and the excursions were grouped by the activity area integral to the process of geographic education.

All the educational excursions (a total of 103) run in the national and regional parks of Lithuania were analysed and, according to the topics and content, 88 excursions were selected as developing competences in geographic education.

Theoretical Outline

Two major concepts of *educational tourism* and *tourism education* are used in international literature. The usage of these concepts is still a subject of scientific discussions as in general there are no major differences between them, and they have a similar or even the same meaning. The first definitions of educational tourism referred to adults' continuous studies, sightseeing travel or cultural tourism (Kalinowski, 1992; Wood, 2001). Later, however, the notion underwent transformation and the emphasis was put on the aspect of education. Ritchie (2003, p.11) analyses this problem in two different aspects: in the first case, tourism being the main focus (tourism first), and in the second case, education being the main focus (education first). He attributes trips and excursions with a major focus on tourism itself and on the way of travelling to the case where the area of tourism is dominant. However, Ritchie does not deny the fact that while travelling this way, a person can also learn a lot of important things. He tends to apply this reasoning to *tourism education*. Ritchie indicates that in the case of *educational tourism* the main focus falls on education. He attributes school excursions, foreign language learning, exchange programmes, i.e. all activities related to the process of education, to *educational tourism*. Those who take part in educational tourism are motivated to gain specific knowledge or skills. However, this theory formulated by Ritchie is debatable and the author's definitions of the two concepts overlap each other. With a need for more comprehensive scientific reasoning, it can be stated that the notion of *tourism education* defines how to teach tourism, which methods to apply, etc.; while *educational tourism* refers to educational activity implemented through tourism. Educational tourism combines the two areas of activity, i.e. tourism and education (Figure 1).

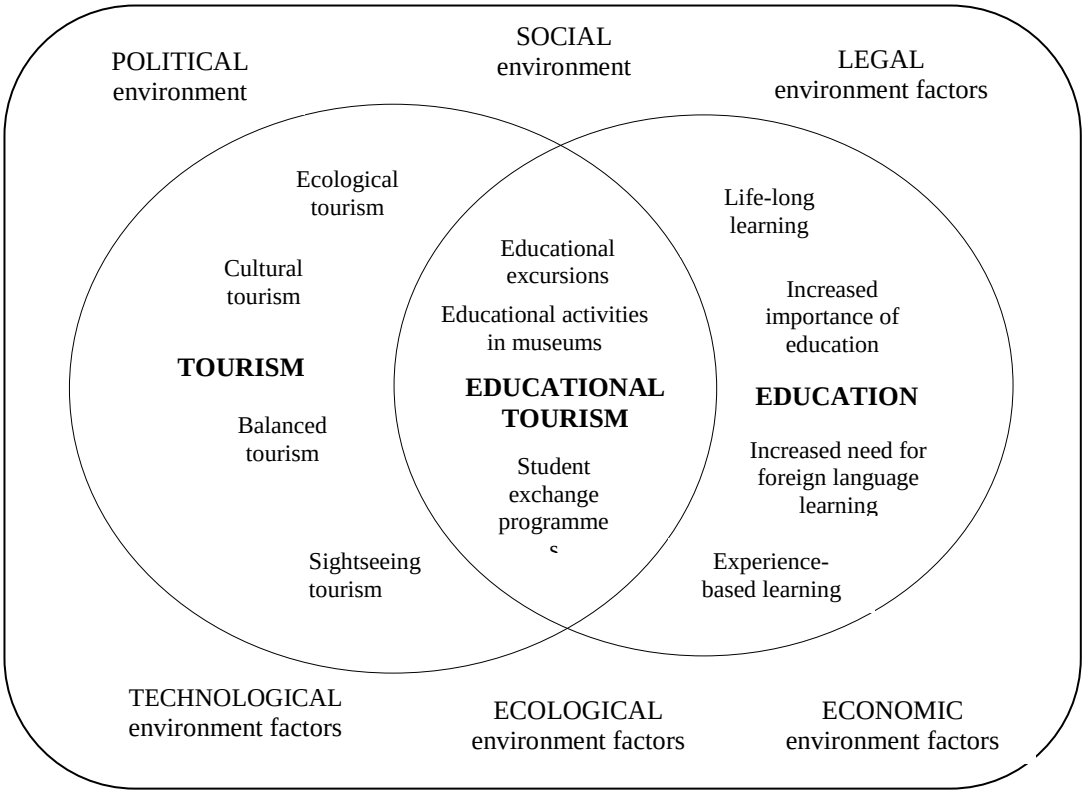

Figure 1.
Structure of Educational Tourism Concept (Prakapienė, 2011:10)

The scientific areas in question supplement each other and use one another's resources. It can be claimed that educational tourism often takes a particular product from the tourism market and, on the ground of the science of education, makes quality use of it in the area of education. However, it is necessary to emphasise that educational tourism is an integral part of the environment and is inevitably influenced by the external environment factors widely-analysed in the science of management, namely, political, social, economic, ecological, technological and legal factors. Therefore, changes in the external environment and globalisation processes have direct influence on the organisation and development of educational tourism.

The structural model of the concept of educational tourism given above is confirmed in other authors' works. Ankomah and Larson (2000) state that educational tourism is a programme, a lesson or another activity during which the participants as a group take part in a trip whose main aim is educational activity related to a particular area. Bhuiyan et al (2010) and Fidgeon (2010) emphasise that educational tourism creates favourable conditions for learning for individuals of any age. Education can be implemented not only at schools providing general or higher education but also through life-long learning which helps to combine theoretical knowledge with practical experience. This could be implemented through student and pupil exchange programmes, educational activities in museums, educational excursions and trips.

The opportunities for using educational tourism in geographical education are best in the field of educational excursions. Jovaiša (2007, p.67) defines the excursion as a form of teaching, usually a lesson at an object in a natural setting. There are various types of educational excursion: excursions aimed at introducing a new topic from the curriculum, those aimed at consolidating already taught material, review excursions, and integrated excursions aimed at reaching various teaching goals. Ritchie, Carr and Cooper (2008) distinguish two major groups of educational excursion. The first group includes excursions which are directly related to the process of education, general curricular and particular subjects. These excursions extend formal education. The second group of educational excursion also performs an educational function but is not related to a particular lesson or subject. Excursions of this type are usually organised within the process of non-formal education.

The method of excursion can be used in every subject taught. However, geographical education is one of the most favourable academic fields due to two main factors: the subject / environment of learning and practice. The general curricular (Pradinio..., 2008, p.861) states that the natural world is a whole. Therefore, natural sciences should not be only taught individually; instead their common points, such as general natural science topics directly linked to pupils' everyday life and universal concepts and laws, should be analysed applying the common methods for the cognition of living and non-living objects in the nature. However, pupils need not only knowledge and skills but also a particular learning environment suitable for a particular subject. Therefore, geographical education is closely related to pupils' activity in the natural and man-made environment. Educational excursions provide pupils with opportunities to develop their observation and research skills broaden their experience, develop a scientific approach to the world and a responsible attitude to the environment, nature and life.

Educational excursions can be arranged in a wide variety of environments from the nature to a particular company or institution to a museum, etc. They can be organised independently, e.g., by the teachers, or formally, i.e. by a travel company. Every educational excursion is strictly defined in terms of structure and activity. However, the process of excursion organisation requires a lot of human resources, subject methodology preparation and time. Zaleskienė, Dobkevičienė-Džiovėnienė (2007), who identify the problems of excursion organisation, emphasise financial expenses, because not every family or foster-parents can afford to send their children on a trip. Consequently, pupils from different classes go on excursions arranged by travel companies. Another problem is that travel organisers usually offer either sightseeing or holiday tours. Recently, the market has been supplemented with educational excursions; however, often their content does not meet educational goals and objectives because tour organisers do not familiarise themselves with educational curricula, do not know pupils' needs, are reluctant to do extra preparation, etc. One more serious problem is a lack of qualified guides who have some experience in education as well as the skills and will to work with pupils. Therefore, in some cases teachers should be encouraged to organise independent trips by themselves or in close cooperation with companies or institutions which design and organise educational excursions such as travel organisers, tourist information centres, museums, etc.

Interpretation of Research Results

After the analysis of the findings, 88 excursions matching the content of geographical education were identified. However, it may be concluded that not all regional parks have designed educational excursions and prepared specific educational activities to offer. According to the respondents, if needed, specific excursions are design for certain cases in consultation with the teachers in order to meet their needs.

The widest variety of educational activities and excursions offered was found in the national parks of Aukštaitija and Dzūkija. This could be explained by the fact that these national parks have working groups dealing with the area of educational tourism. The national park of Aukštaitija has established a centre for education and tourism in Kaltanėnai, and the national park of Dzūkija has created a working group which includes a lot of teachers. The excursions offered are grouped according to pupils' age and grade and designed to mach the educational content.

Among regional parks, the regional parks of Kurtuvėnai and Pajūris offer the widest variety of excursions and activities. Their educational excursions include not only biologic variety-related activities but also integrate geological, geo-morphological, hydrological, and landscape geography elements.

Before analysing the educational activities and excursions, the analysis of the general curricular was performed in order to highlight the main areas of activity and link the general guidelines for education to the content of specific excursions. Table 1 presents the guidelines which could be implemented in protected areas instead of indoor environments.

Table 1.
Guidelines for Geographical Education Implemented in Educational Excursions (Pradinio..., 2008: 977-1009)

Grade	***Activity area***	***Guidelines***
5-6	*Reading of geographical information*	Pupils study the factors that determine the movement of water and its concentration on land; they analyse what a lake is, identify the source (spring, lake, etc.), mouth, stream bed and valley of a river.
		Pupils analyse the factors which determine the variety of flora and fauna, identify the most typical plants and animals in Lithuania and in the world.
	Cognition and research of environment	Pupils recognise and define natural and social objects in their environment, observe, explore them and will define them. They carry out simple research (e.g., of a stream, village, etc.), learn to distinguish research results from conclusions.
7-8	*Reading of geographical information*	Pupils learn to distinguish rocks from minerals by examining samples and identifying their differences. They learn to organise a field trip, analyse the location of relief forms and the impact of decay and human activity on the terrain.
		Pupils outline the causes of the formation of terrestrial waters (rivers, lakes, wetlands, glaciers, underwater) and their significance to the nature and man.
		Pupils study the factors which determine the location of different geographical zones; they search for causal relationships.
9-10	*Reading of geographical information*	Pupils explain the causes of the formation of the present terrain in Lithuania and Europe.
		Pupils analyse the external factors (erosion, karst, wind and glacier action) that change the terrain in Lithuania and study their impact on the present terrain.

		Pupils study the geographical features, economic significance and ecological condition of the Baltic Sea and the Curonian Lagoon. They analyse the opportunities for using and protecting inland waters. Pupils study the conditions for the formation of the Lithuanian underwater, lakes, and wetlands; they analyse their significance to the human and nature.
		Pupils study the components of the nature (terrain, soil, flora and fauna), analyse their interrelation, search for connections with humans, and explain their interconnections in Lithuania. Pupils outline the variety of flora and fauna in Lithuania and the factors which have determined it.
		Pupils study the concepts of protected areas (reserve, conservation area, national park and regional park) and heritage (natural and cultural) objects. They get acquainted with the nearest protected area.
	Cognition and research of environment	Pupils independently plan natural, social and economic observations and researches and choose appropriate strategies.
		During the observation of the environment and research, pupils are taught to use information sources (geographical and other) and to evaluate them critically in terms of reliability and amount of information.

The analysis of the detailed excursion descriptions aimed at identifying the specific educational activities and competences developed in particular excursions. However, it was noticed that in the case of more than a half of the analysed excursions it was difficult to identify the specific educational activities performed. In some cases, the term *sightseeing excursion* was confused with that of *educational excursion*. Therefore, it may be concluded that not all the employees working in the regional parks understand the goals, objectives and structure of the educational excursion, and the variety of educational excursions is not fully developed. Yet the assumption about the lack of competence of the specialists working in the parks could only be confirmed or rejected by further research.

The situation is also ambiguous in terms of the classification of excursions by age and grade. More than 60 percent of all the educational excursions analysed are *multipurpose*, i.e. adaptable for pupils of any grade. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that differentiation of excursions by age groups should be more significant. This, in turn, would require from educational activity guides and educators more thorough preparation and differentiation of information and tasks according to age groups. However, it would require extra time, which the respondents claimed not to have. Creating new positions would involve extra financial expenses which are currently unavailable and even non-negotiable.

The analysis of the excursions in terms of content allowed the authors to identify the main areas of geography, in which the main activity is related to a specific area of science while directly matching the content of geographical education. The analysis revealed that integrated excursions and educational paths are arranged in most cases. Excursions of this type analyse the whole ecosystem: relief, hydrography, flora and fauna, etc. Nevertheless, *single-purpose* excursions were also identified. The subject of such an excursion focuses on a specific area of science (Figure 2).

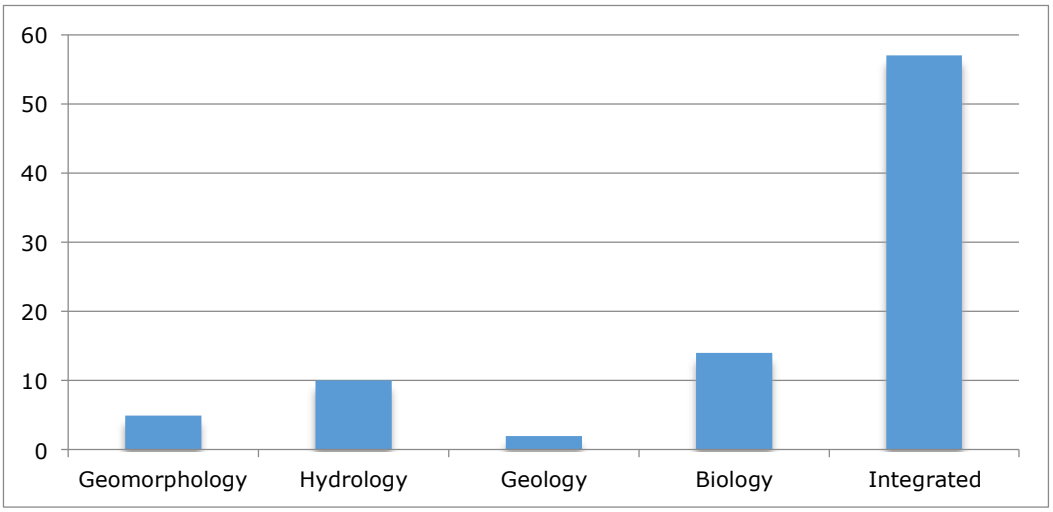

Figure 2.
Distribution of Educational Excursions by Scientific Areas (N)

The analysis of the educational excursions in the regional and national parks revealed a trend that the most attention is given to integrated excursions and educational activities (57 excursions out of 88) which present and analyse the whole ecosystem and a complex of different sciences (Figure 2). Nevertheless, in almost all of them the dominant content element can be identified. In most cases, the main subject of the activity is encoded in the title of the excursion. For example, Biržai regional park organises an educational excursion called *Earth Depths Museum* which presents the natural and cultural aspects of the region. However, its main target and focus is sinkholes (karsts), i.e. a subject of geology and geomorphology.

The research findings show that the most common activities are those related to the analysis of biodiversity (biology), when visitors get acquainted with the rarest and most useful plants, watch birds, analyse the forest ecosystem. Examples of this would be excursions called *Useful Plants, Voices of Waking Birds, Plants of Wild Meadows*, etc. The activities mentioned before are usually performed in educational sessions arranged on nature trails in protected areas. Out of the 88 educational excursions analysed, the main subject of 14 excursions matched the research subject of biology. The smallest number of educational theme activities is devoted to the fields of geology and geomorphology. For example, excursions called *History of Šaukliai Boulder Field* and *Along the Paths of Giants* present the geomorphologic development of the area. However, it should not be assumed that the fields of geology and geomorphology are not analysed or are not relevant to the protected areas; they are usually part of the integrated excursions.

In order to achieve higher accuracy and correlation with formal documents the excursions were grouped by the area of geographical education (Figure 3). Thus one excursion could include several areas of activity. According to this criterion, every excursion was analysed in terms of the possibilities for educational activities in all areas of geographical education: spatial orientation and map reading, reading of geographical information, knowledge about regions, and cognition and research of the environment.

Direct link was found only with two of the areas of activity: reading of geographical information and cognition and research of the environment. The analysis also showed a realistic opportunity for the implementation of spatial orientation; however, it would require some special corrections to the educational activities currently offered in the protected areas. The respondents stated a need for closer cooperation with teachers and a more detailed analysis of the content of geographical education.

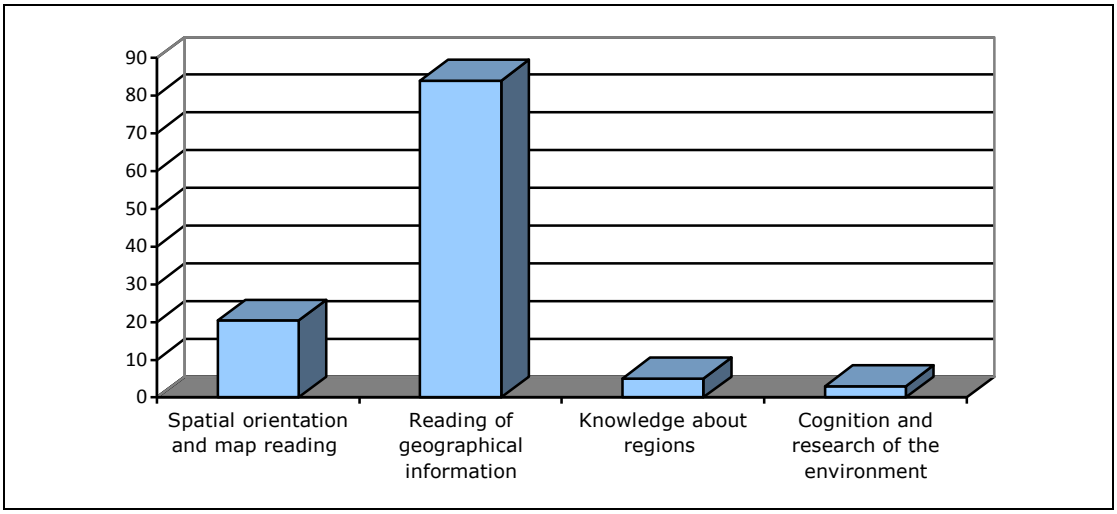

Figure 3.

Educational Excursions by Area of Educational Activity (N)

Knowledge about regions is best reflected in the ninth grade whose focus is on the geography of Lithuania. Therefore, all the excursions can be classed as aimed at learning about the region of Lithuania. However, this is not shown in Figure 3 as it presents the results which are directly related to the formal content of education (Table 1), in which regional geography refers to the comparison of different regions and systemic analysis.

The results showed that the largest number of excursions are related to reading of geographical information (84 excursions out of 88) and cognition and research of the environment (34 excursions out of 88), while spatial orientation and map reading is included in the smallest number of excursions (3 out of 88).

After the analysis of the content of the educational excursions suitable to be used in the process of geographical education, the following activities and skill development areas were identified as those most frequent:

- analysing natural phenomena and processes;
- identifying the structural components of natural phenomena in real environments;
- recording changes in the natural environment and identify their impact on the environment and man;
- learning to recognise rocks, forms of relief, plants, etc. in practice;
- identifying the influence, benefits and harms of human activity on the natural environment;

- researching the natural environment, (relief, waters, landscape, etc.).

Given the content of the educational activities and excursions analysed, it may be stated that in the majority of cases there is no clearly-defined educational activity, and it is often a case of a mere passive excursion of sightseeing nature without active educational activities included. Pupils are provided with a lot of information but few practice opportunities. It must be emphasised that educational excursions are most effective only if pupils take an active part and perform specific tasks.

In summary, it may be assumed that in the future both educationalists and travel business representatives should orient their future activities towards cooperation and creation of a joint quality product. This would create opportunities for more varied and better-quality organisation of the educational process as well as for the development of tourism.

Conclusions

Educational tourism is an educational activity implemented during excursions or trips which facilitates gaining knowledge and competences through practice. The model of the structure of the educational tourism concept identifies three main components: the science of tourism, the science of education, and the factors of the external environment.

The opportunities for using educational tourism in geographical education are created through student exchange programmes, educational activities in museums, and educational excursions and trips. However, the most popular form of educational tourism implementation is the educational excursion which provides opportunities for the development of pupils' observation and research skills, and broadens pupils' experience, as well as develops a scientific approach to the world and a responsible attitude to the environment, nature and life.

The analysis of the educational excursions organised in the regional and national parks of Lithuania which match the content of geographical education revealed the main advantages and disadvantages of the educational activities. It was found that not all the national and regional parks of Lithuania have designed educational excursions and defined specific educational activities. The widest variety of educational excursions is offered in the national parks of Aukštaitija and Dzūkija and the regional parks of Kurtuvėnai and Pajūris.

The educational excursions offered are mainly oriented towards complex integration of natural sciences. Therefore, the dominant area of science was difficult to identify in more than half of the excursions. This matches the content of geography science which integrates natural and social phenomena.

In terms of the areas of geographic education activity, the largest number of educational excursions is related to reading of geographical information and cognition and research of the environment. Analysing, recording, identifying and researching are the most frequently offered educational activities. This corresponds to the theoretical outline of educational tourism which is based on active educational activity in non-traditional places.

In pursuance of the development and expansion of educational tourism and educational excursions and a real benefit in terms of education, more detailed research needs to be performed in the future to highlight the peculiarities of the preparation and organisation of educational excursions in the national and regional parks of Lithuania. Also, analysis should be carried out and suggestions need to be made on how to create a comprehensive system for educating and developing professionals who prepare and run educational excursions. As well as that, specific activity areas through which educational excursions could be matched to the school curricular need to be defined.

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