

TOURISM AND VALUES IN SCHOOL GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION

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Abstract: Tourism occupies a key place in contemporary geographic education as an interdisciplinary field in which natural, cultural, social, and economic processes intersect, giving it significant potential for shaping students' value orientations. In school geography, it functions not only as part of the curriculum content but also as a value based core through which students develop attitudes toward sustainable development, the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue, and responsible consumption. This study analyzes the role of tourism as a carrier of educational values and examines how curricula, methodological approaches, and practical activities (excursions, field studies, projects) support the formation of civic, environmental, and cultural values.

Keywords: tourism; geographic education; geographic values; sustainable development; cultural heritage; civic competences; field activities

School education is a key stage in the individual development of every person. For this reason, changes in the curricula, including their content, traditionally attract public attention, especially in recent years. For today's generation, what matters is not only the volume and content of the learning material, but also the way in which it is taught and acquired. In this context, the need for creative and innovative instruction-through which skills for independent thinking, self-expression, and active participation in the learning process are developed-has become increasingly evident. In this way, creative learning, which supports the development of human abilities and can be cultivated through active practice, is gaining growing importance.

This practice is encouraged in geographic education for the formation of competencies expressed as abilities and attitudes for applying knowledge about nature and society, using scientific research methods, formulating evidence-based conclusions for understanding change, and assuming personal responsibility for protecting the environment and the values of society (Prakapienė, 2013).

Creative geographic education promotes the concept of active learning, which is realized through observation and interpretation of experienced events, thus creating a natural basis for integrating different cognitive fields into the educational process-one of which is tourism.

Tourism is an economic sector closely connected to the characteristics of the natural environment and cultural heritage, which serve as tourist resources. It can function as a meaningful domain in which the creative skills formed in geography and economics classes can be developed, deepened, and applied in real settings, while simultaneously stimulating spatial analysis and value-based understanding of its specific features. Within these cultural and educational interactions, the specific role of educational tourism also stands out, as it expands the potential of tourist experiences by directing them toward purposeful learning and personal value development.

Educational tourism is a type of tourism focused on forming educational and cultural goals, providing opportunities for enriching knowledge, developing skills, and broadening the cultural horizons of tourists (Voleeva, 2021). According to Gramsci, culture-as well as education-should serve as a way for young people to develop “a critical awareness of their historical world, conceived in its

entirety, but also of their historical roots and future value orientation” (Fusaro, 2017, p. 82). This type of tourism is often associated with visits to educational institutions, museums, exhibitions, archaeological sites, historical landmarks, nature reserves, and other places connected to science, history, art, nature, and culture (Spasova, 2024).

Since tourism is a means of preserving cultural and natural heritage, its study can support the development of key groups of values among students-patriotic, moral, geographic, cultural, and others.

In this theoretical context, it is important to clarify the essence of values as an educational category. One of the leading researchers of values, Shalom Schwartz, defines them as “conscious needs that directly depend on the culture, environment, and mentality of a given society... internal standards that regulate the choice of specific behavior,” arranged by importance and forming a system of value priorities (Schwartz, 1992).

Educational tourism and value-oriented learning can be closely connected, because purposeful educational travel provides long-lasting experiences and impressions that remain in a person’s memory throughout life (Sherri, 2017). Interest in educational tourism is linked to the active desire and internal motivation of visitors to engage with a specific tourist product created on the basis of attractive and non-traditional forms of studying, exploring, training, and education. Examples of such educational trips, which can be grouped under the general concept of “specialized educational vacations,” include:

- thematic trips dedicated to tourists’ special interests and hobbies;
- ecological and nature-friendly holidays;
- educational tours of cultural and historical heritage sites and attractions;
- educational cruises and school trips;
- seminars held during vacations;

studying abroad, exchange programs, and others.

The most popular are educational excursions, which provide excellent opportunities for teaching students by enhancing their skills for research, observation, and evaluation, and by broadening their overall experience (Kazandzhieva, 2018). Thus, tourism is established as a natural extension of geographic education, which not only broadens students’ cognitive horizons but also shapes values essential for their personal and civic development.

Having emphasized the importance of educational tourism for forming students’ value development through creative approaches and methods, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the geography and economics curricula create conditions for such integration.

Curricula represent a regulatory framework that defines both the content and the expected learning outcomes, and through them-the opportunities for value formation. The State Educational Standard for General Education (Regulation No. 5 of 30.11.2015) formulates the key competencies, general educational goals, and expected results for all subjects. It sets goals for the development of:

- scientific literacy;
- research skills;
- sustainable development;
- cultural awareness;
- civic competencies;
- economic literacy;
- digital skills;
- personal and social development.

Achieving these requires integrating content from several subjects, not only geography and economics.

In relation to the topic under study, the following key goals can be identified in the geography and economics curricula for general education:

- development of spatial thinking;
- formation of geographic literacy;
- skills for working with information;

- application of research skills;
- formation of values for sustainable development;
- cultural awareness;
- demonstration of social engagement;
- economic literacy.

On this basis, the main goals of geographic education in grades 8-10 should be outlined, as they define the framework within which tourism can be used as educational content to support the formation of students' future value development (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Key goals of geographic education in grades 8–10

Tourism is one of the most integrative themes in geography, which is why its study naturally supports the achievement of the main goals of geographic education. One of these goals is the development of spatial thinking and geographic literacy. Tourist activities require working with maps, routes, locations, and spatial models, which provides broad opportunities for applying these skills in a real-world context. Through examples related to tourist travel, students can locate destinations, analyze tourist accessibility, assess connections within the transport infrastructure, and prepare reports on natural and cultural resources. This deepens their understanding of the spatial characteristics of the geographic environment and the territorial interconnectedness of geographic objects.

Tourism as a subject of study makes it possible to conduct field investigations along tourist routes, to analyze statistical data, and to apply statistical indicators related to tourist flows, seasonality, visitation rates, revenues, and more. These activities develop research skills and contribute to achieving the goal of forming scientific literacy and inquiry-based competencies.

Tourism, as an economic sector, demonstrates in practice the application of the concept of sustainable resource use, nature conservation, responsible behavior, and the avoidance of potential environmental risks. In this way, students become aware of the relationship between tourism and the natural environment, and it can serve as a foundation for developing values related to sustainable development. Moreover, it becomes evident that tourist activity can be both a factor for conservation

and a source of pressure on natural systems. All of this creates conditions for fostering critical thinking regarding the need for balanced and responsible tourism practices.

Encouraging interethnic and religious tolerance through the study of cultural heritage, traditions, and the various religions and ethnic groups closely connected with tourism can contribute to the development of intercultural understanding and acceptance of differences among students. This leads to the development of cultural awareness and respect for diversity. In the context of tourist activity, questions arise related to the preservation of cultural sites, the specific characteristics of local communities, the social effects of tourism, and the responsible behavior of tourists. These topics naturally direct attention toward the development of civic competencies and social engagement, through which students learn to think as present and future active and responsible citizens.

Tourism functions as a significant economic sector that supports the development of economic culture. Through its study, students acquire knowledge about services, markets, employment, entrepreneurship, and regional development, thereby contributing to the formation of their economic literacy and entrepreneurial thinking. This also requires the development of skills for working with information and digital resources, since tourism makes use of GIS, online maps, tourist portals, and statistical databases, enabling students to work with real digital tools. Studying the sector also provides opportunities for planning and carrying out field activities, project-based work, and participation in situations close to real-life contexts. In this way, students develop a sense of responsibility, initiative, communication skills, and social competencies, which support their personal growth and social engagement, and thus contribute to the formation of personal and social values.

The outlined set of goals and competencies is implemented through the specific learning content provided in the geography and economics curricula. In this context, the topics related to tourism are particularly important, as they appear in all programs from grades 8 to 10 and offer broad opportunities for developing spatial thinking, scientific literacy, sustainable values, and cultural awareness. Tourism as a subject of study is included in the curricula and serves as an instrument for achieving all key goals of geographic education. It appears in the learning content either as separate topics or as focal points within thematic lines related to natural resources, population, economy, and regional development of various geographic regions and of Bulgaria.

In grade 8, students acquire fundamental knowledge related to the components of the natural environment (relief, climate, water bodies, biosphere). This is essential because natural tourist resources-such as mountain resorts, coastal areas, mineral springs, and protected territories-derive directly from these natural components. Mastering the basic physical-geographic concepts forms the foundation upon which students build their understanding of different types of tourist resources, tourist flows, and tourism-related processes.

At the same time, geography and economics education in grade 8 contributes to the development of a number of key skills and competencies that later have direct application in the study of tourism-related topics (Fig. 2).

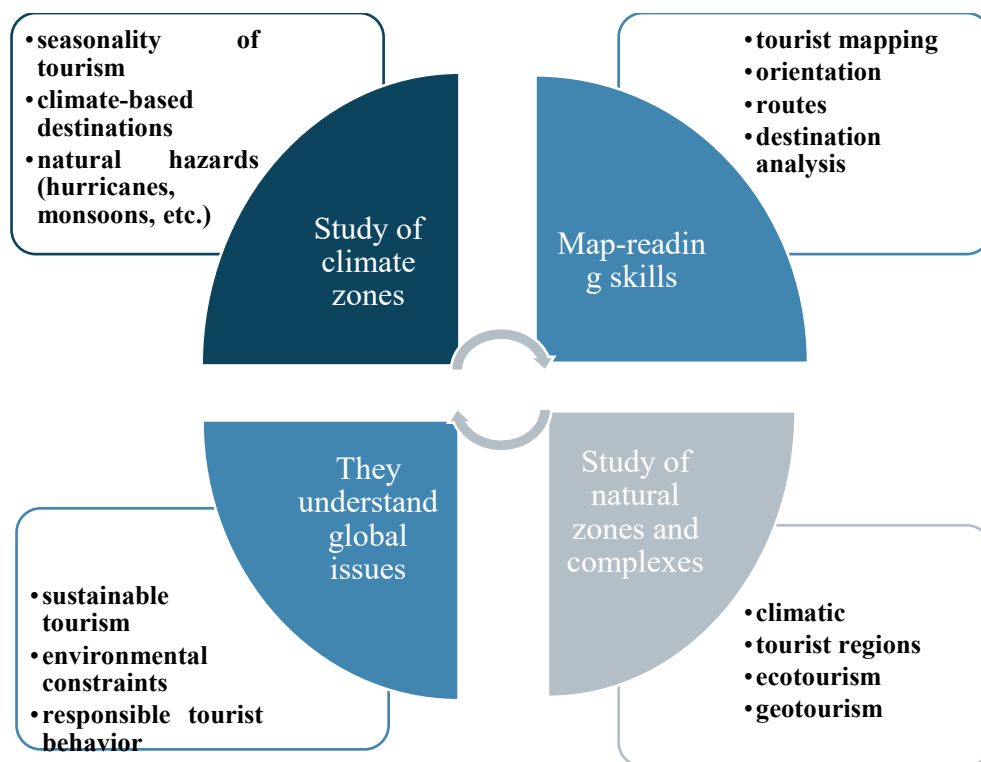


Figure 2. Relationship between physical-geographic competencies in Grade 8 and their application in tourism

The visualized relationships outline the framework within which key competencies related to the study of tourism are formed. The thematic analysis examines in detail the content emphases and their role in building these competencies.

To illustrate even more clearly how the individual physical-geographic topics in grade 8 support the understanding of tourism-related processes, a synthesized table with concrete examples is presented below. It highlights specific topics, the key concepts involved in their study, and the concrete opportunities for applying them when exploring tourism-related content (Table 1).

Table 1. Opportunities for integrating tourism-related content with geography and economics topics in Grade 8

Topic	Concepts	Tourism-related links
Planet Earth	shape, movements, time	time zones → international travel; seasonality → tourist seasons
Atmosphere	climate, precipitation, atmospheric fronts	climate zones → tourist regions; adverse weather events → tourism risks
Hydrosphere	oceans, ocean and sea currents, rivers, lakes	marine tourism; spa tourism (mineral waters); river tourism
Lithosphere	relief, volcanoes, earthquakes	mountain tourism; risks and safety
Pedosphere and Biosphere	soils, vegetation, wildlife	ecotourism; nature parks

Topic	Concepts	Tourism-related links
Global issues	climate change, environmental problems	sustainable tourism; environmental constraints

The table not only demonstrates the content-related connections between the physical-geographic topics and tourism, but also reveals the value-forming potential of each topic. Tourism serves as a context in which knowledge, skills, and competencies related to the natural environment can be transformed into specific values and attitudes, leading to future responsible behavior of students as active citizens of society.

When studying the topic “*Planet Earth*”, value-based attitudes related to global awareness and cultural respect can be formed. Time zones, seasonality, and international travel develop understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity, awareness of global interconnectedness, tolerance, intercultural communication, and appreciation of different ways of life. This supports the formation of values such as tolerance and acceptance of differences in the world.

Climate zones, precipitation patterns, and natural hazards help develop skills for assessing risks, responsible behavior while traveling, and awareness of the consequences of climate change. In this way, values such as environmental responsibility can be cultivated.

When studying the topic “*The Hydrosphere*”, students can develop universal human values related to health, well-being, and the need for responsible use and protection of water resources. In the context of learning about marine, spa, and river tourism, value-based attitudes can be encouraged regarding the care for the state of water resources, understanding the importance of clean water, and fostering a value-oriented attitude toward human health.

In topics such as “*The Lithosphere*,” “*The Pedosphere*,” and “*The Biosphere*,” values such as environmental ethics, care, empathy, respect, and responsibility toward nature can be cultivated. Studying content related to landforms, volcanoes, and earthquakes can be linked to the development of respect for the power of nature, responsibility during mountain activities, and last but not least the encouragement of an adventurous spirit. The topics on ecotourism and nature parks contribute to fostering care for living nature, respect for ecosystems, and, most importantly, awareness of the human footprint on the environment.

Civic engagement, environmental responsibility, and solidarity are values necessary for understanding global problems and their consequences. Studying topics related to climate change and ecology helps students develop critical thinking, demonstrate commitment to addressing global challenges, and recognize their personal role in promoting sustainable tourism.

These topics from the grade 8 curriculum demonstrate that they possess significant potential for value formation when connected to tourism. In this way, students acquire not only knowledge but also develop environmental, social, and civic values that are essential for their growth as active, informed, and responsible citizens.

The following table presents selected key topics, the competencies acquired, and their specific applications within tourism-related content (Table 2). Based on this, it becomes possible to trace how the grade 9 curriculum expands students’ geographic knowledge and provides a foundation for understanding the socio-economic and cultural aspects of tourism.

Table 2. Opportunities for integrating tourism-related content with geography and economics topics in Grade 9

Topic	Key knowledge	Tourism-related links
Population size, distribution and movement	demographic processes; demographic issues; demographic policy	tourist flows; migration; tourism workforce; demographic risks
Settlements and urbanization	types of settlements; urbanization; agglomerations; megalopolises	urban tourism; infrastructure; cultural attractions; megacities as tourist hubs

World economy	economic structure; factors; GDP/GNP; circular economy	tourism as part of the tertiary sector; economic impacts; sustainable models
Primary sector	agriculture, fishing, extraction; types of agriculture	agro-tourism; wine tourism; fishing tourism; rural tourism
Tertiary sector. Transport	transport systems; infrastructure; factors	tourist transport; accessibility; logistics; international corridors
Global and regional organizations	UN, EU, NATO, OPEC; international cooperation	tourism policies; visa regimes; cultural heritage (UNESCO)

Demographic knowledge makes it possible to analyze information about which groups travel the most, how age, religion, and culture influence tourism services, and how demographic crises may affect the tourism sector. All of this provides an appropriate foundation for developing values such as social sensitivity, tolerance, and respect for differences.

The study of major cities, agglomerations, and megacities as key tourist centers provides a foundation for developing values related to sustainable urban development, responsible consumption, and cultural participation. Through urban tourism and its infrastructure, students gain an understanding of how tourist zones are formed, how infrastructure influences tourism, and what the social and environmental consequences of these processes are.

The study of the global economy, the primary sector, transport, and international organizations highlights the complex role of tourism as part of both global and national socio-economic processes. These topics within the curriculum create a complementary framework through which students understand tourism not merely as travel, but as an economic activity, a form of cultural exchange, and a factor contributing to sustainable development.

When studying the global economy, students acquire knowledge about the functioning of global markets, the factors that determine economic development, and the place of the tertiary sector in the modern economy. In this way, they come to understand the role tourism plays as an economic driver that creates employment and generates significant revenue. By also stimulating entrepreneurial opportunities, this content supports the development of values such as economic literacy.

Mastering the content related to the primary sector shows how natural resources and traditional economic activities form the basis for diverse types of tourism-rural, wine, fishing, and others. This directs attention to the importance of nature and local communities as carriers of cultural identity and sustainable development, as well as to values such as respect for traditions, care for the natural environment, and support for local producers.

The topics related to transport define the key prerequisites for the development of tourism. It is essential for students to understand that transport systems, infrastructure, and logistics enable them to comprehend how travel is organized, how routes are planned, and which factors determine the quality of tourism services.

The content related to international organizations reveals the broader potential of tourism. Structures such as UNESCO, the EU, and the UN play an important role in the preservation of cultural heritage, visa policies, and sustainable development strategies. Through this curriculum content, students come to understand that tourism is part of international cooperation and that its development is linked to peace, cultural exchange, and global responsibility.

The following table provides a synthesized overview of key topics in grade 10, highlighting the connections between national geography, economic processes, and tourism development (Table 3).

Table 3. Opportunities for integrating tourism-related content with geography and economics topics in Grade 10

Topic	Key knowledge	Tourism-related links
Geographical location and borders of Bulgaria	absolute, relative and ecological location; borders; neighbouring countries	tourism accessibility; international corridors; cross-border tourism
Natural environment of Bulgaria	relief, climate, waters, soils, vegetation, wildlife	natural tourist resources; climatic regions; spa, mountain, seaside, eco- and geotourism
Natural regions of Bulgaria	Danubian Plain, Balkan Mountains, Srednogie, Thracian–Strandzha region, Rila–Rhodope region, Black Sea coast	tourist regions; protected areas; nature parks; regional tourist routes
Population of Bulgaria	demographic processes; structure; ethnic and religious groups; migration	tourism markets; workforce; cultural diversity; social effects of tourism
Light and food industries	textiles; footwear; food industry	culinary tourism; festivals; crafts
Tourism in Bulgaria	tourist resources; routes; state of tourism	national tourist regions; natural and cultural sites; digital routes

In this stage of study, tourism becomes a central theme, as Bulgaria possesses a wide variety of tourist resources. By examining the country's geographical location, students gain an understanding of Bulgaria's tourism accessibility (international transport corridors, cross-border tourist flows) and its international connections. The natural environment of Bulgaria forms the basis for nature-based tourism-mountain, seaside, spa, and ecotourism. Through the study of natural regions and protected areas, students recognize the importance of nature parks, unique natural landscapes, and regional tourism products.

The content related to the secondary sector provides opportunities for the development of industrial tourism. Industry and energy production create possibilities for visiting factories, technology parks, and energy facilities.

Overall, tourism in Bulgaria brings together the country's natural and cultural-historical resources. By studying tourist regions, sites, and contemporary forms of travel, students gain an understanding of how national tourist identity is constructed and how it reflects Bulgaria's values, traditions, and uniqueness. The geography and economics curriculum in grade 10, when integrated with tourism-related content, provides substantial potential for cultivating key values among students (Fig. 3).

The analysis of the geography and economics curriculum in grades 8, 9, and 10 shows that tourism represents an effective and sustainable framework for integrating knowledge, skills, and values within school geographic education. Through the gradual progression-from natural resources and landscapes in grade 8, through global socio-economic processes in grade 9, to the national space and Bulgaria's tourist identity in grade 10-tourism is established as an interdisciplinary and value-rich educational environment.

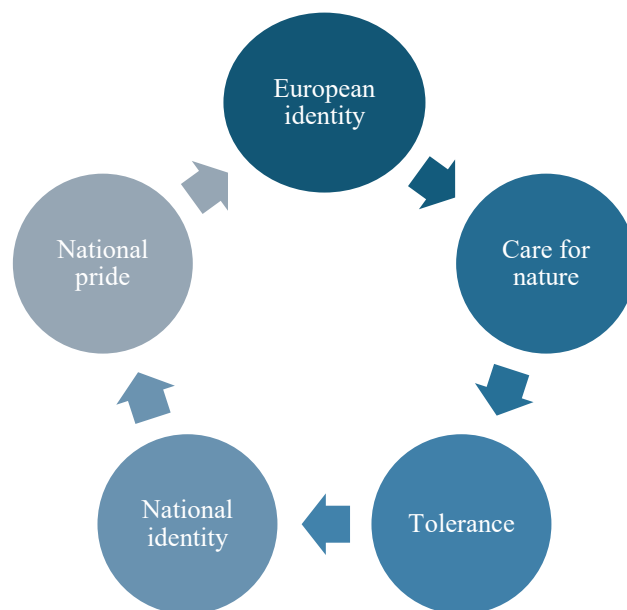


Figure 3. Types of values that can be developed in the teaching of geography and economics in Grade 10

This thematic line supports the development of key competencies such as spatial thinking, economic and cultural literacy, the ability to analyze real-world situations, entrepreneurial behavior, and a conscious attitude toward nature and heritage. At the same time, the examples and case studies from the tourism industry create conditions for cultivating values such as sustainability, responsibility, respect for cultural diversity, a sense of belonging to the local community, and active civic engagement. Taken as a whole, the analysis demonstrates that tourism is not merely a thematic focus but a unifying domain whose study enriches geographic education, brings it closer to real-world contexts, and supports the formation of individuals capable of understanding, evaluating, and responsibly interacting with the world around them. This positions the tourism perspective as a significant resource for the modern school and as a key element in achieving the goals of contemporary education.

The publication is carried out under the project “Regional Studies of the Territory of Northeastern Bulgaria – Phase 3” (No. RD-08-65/28.01.2026) of the Department of Geography, Regional Development and Tourism at Shumen University “Episkop Konstantin Preslavski”.

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