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Tourism and social policy: the value of social tourism.

Lynn Minnaert¹
Robert Maitland¹
Graham Miller²

¹ School of Architecture and the Built Environment

² University of Surrey

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TOURISM AND SOCIAL POLICY:

The value of Social Tourism

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Dr. Lynn Minnaert
University of Westminster, UK

Professor Robert Maitland
University of Westminster, UK

Dr. Graham Miller
University of Surrey, UK

Abstract

Social Tourism for low-income groups forms part of social policy in several countries of mainland Europe, but little research evidence of its benefits exists. This study empirically examines these benefits in terms of increases in social and family capital. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with participating families and their support workers, in a semi-longitudinal research design. Social Tourism was found to increase family capital in the short term, and social capital – in terms of social networks, related pro-active behavior and self-esteem - in the medium term. These increases can be seen as beneficial for the participants and to wider society. Consequently it is suggested that Social Tourism may be a cost-effective addition to social policy.

Keywords: Social Tourism, low-income, social capital, family capital

Bio sketch

Lynn Minnaert is a Research Fellow at the University of Westminster (35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS, Email minnael@wmin.ac.uk). Her research interest is tourism for low-income and minority groups. **Robert Maitland** is Director of the Centre for Tourism Research at the University of Westminster. His research focuses on city tourism and tourism policy. **Graham Miller** is a Senior Lecturer in management at the University of Surrey. His research interests are sustainable tourism and ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Hunziker describes Social Tourism as “the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements in society” (1951:1). It encompasses a variety of different initiatives, commercial and non-commercial, governmental and private, that aim to offer holiday experiences to groups that would not otherwise have them. It has been defined as “tourism with an added moral value, which aims to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange” (Minnaert, Maitland and Miller 2006:9). Examples of Social Tourism range from holiday initiatives for people with disabilities and charity holidays for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to the development of community-based tourism in economically underdeveloped areas. This article focuses on Social Tourism for members of low-income groups who would not otherwise go on holiday.

In several countries of mainland Europe (for example France, Belgium, Spain), Social Tourism is supported by public funding, and mostly takes the form of low-cost domestic holidays. In these countries, the basis for provision is the perceived *right* of all to enjoy tourism (EESC 2006). Social Tourism is provided on the grounds that it increases equality between groups of society (Minnaert, Maitland and Miller 2006). In other countries, including the UK and USA, Social Tourism is a less well-known phenomenon, and rarely publicly funded, since tourism is seen as a discretionary activity, to which no *right* exists. In these circumstances, any public funding for Social Tourism depends upon utilitarian considerations: whether it can confer net benefits to society as

a whole (Minnaert, Maitland and Miller 2006). In the UK for example, there is currently little government policy interest in Social Tourism. Whilst “Tourism for All”, is a topic in the 1999 “Tomorrow’s Tourism” policy (DCMS 1999) there is no reference to it in the 2004 follow-up policy document, “Tomorrow’s Tourism Today” (DCMS 2004). Assistance to low income groups is largely confined to grants from charitable bodies (Smith and Hughes 1999).

Where Social Tourism *is* an established part of public policy, its benefits are strongly asserted. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for example, in its Barcelona declaration, links Social Tourism to a set of benefits, which include improvement of well-being, personal development of the beneficiaries and the host community, European citizenship, improved health and increased employment opportunities (EESC 2006), and describes the member state governments as stakeholders in this form of tourism (EESC 2006). However, research to assess how far such benefits are actually realized is very limited. If Social Tourism is to be considered as a potential component of public policy in countries where it is not already established on a rights basis, evidence that it confers benefits on participants and the wider society - for example by increasing social and family capital - is needed. And if such benefits exist, research is needed to investigate how they can be maximized cost-effectively.

The aim of this paper is therefore twofold. First to draw together literature on social and family capital, social policy and learning to show how in principle Social Tourism might be seen as a contributor to public policy. Second, to test

the ideas empirically through a study of how Social Tourism affects personal and family development of low-income groups. The study was carried out with holiday participants and their “welfare agents” (WFA) (support workers, such as health workers, charity workers or social workers, who apply for the holiday on behalf of the participants). It examines how far Social Tourism has benefits beyond simply providing holidays to those who would otherwise not be able to afford them, and how far it can lead to increases in social and family capital for low income groups.

SOCIAL AND FAMILY CAPITAL

This section outlines the concepts of social and family capital relevant to the study. For more extensive reviews of the considerable literature in this field see for example Baron, Field and Schuller (2000), Swartz and Zolberg (2005), and Marjoribanks (2002).

Coleman contrasts social capital with two other forms of capital: physical capital (goods and services), and human capital (skills and abilities). If physical capital is comparatively tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the *relations* between persons (Coleman 1998). Apart from benefits like co-operation, trust and trustworthiness, Putnam also mentions social capital as a tool that “helps develop and maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society”, linked to better employment opportunities, a reduction in benefit dependency and thus a net benefit for society. It is also

linked to lessening illness, thus reducing the public cost of healthcare by reducing demand on the health service (Putnam 2000:288). This would indicate that increasing social capital could be a worthwhile public investment; and if Social Tourism can achieve an increase in social capital, it could potentially be justified for public funding.

A related concept is that of family capital. Parcel and Dufur describe it as “the bonds between parents and children that are useful in promoting child socialization. *(It)* reflects the time and attention parents spend in interaction with children, in monitoring their activities, and in promoting child well-being, including academic achievement” (Parcel & Dufur 2001:882). Families on low incomes or parents with limited schooling are not necessarily low on family capital. Family capital is determined by the stability of the family on the one hand, and the social contacts of the parents on the other hand (Parcel & Dufur 2001). Marjoribanks has shown the educational impacts of family capital: “family environmental contexts are moderately to largely associated with children’s academic performances and adolescents’ aspirations” (Marjoribanks 1998:328). The level of family capital can also affect the resilience of the family as a whole, and thus influence (being part of social capital) each member of that family (Belsey 2003). This highlights the importance of family capital, influencing both the family unit and each of its members. This study examines whether Social Tourism can increase social and family capital, affecting society as a whole and suggesting Social Tourism could contribute to social policy.

SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SOCIAL POLICY

Increases in social and family capital benefit individuals, and may have a positive impact on the wider society – in which case public support can be worthwhile. However, the importance of social and family capital depends upon the perspective taken on public policy. The two existing models that systematically organize different social policy ideas are those of Levitas (1998) and Silver (1994). Levitas' conceptualization is more helpful because Silver's paradigms fail to account for the effect of differing ideologies in institutional frameworks in different societies.

Levitas (1998) has analyzed different British policies that aim to reduce social exclusion, and has organized them in a system of three discourses. The first discourse is the *redistributionist* discourse (RED), which focuses on reducing poverty through income redistribution. It contrasts poverty with citizenship, and addresses the social, political, cultural and economic aspects of citizenship, so it can also be seen as a general critique of inequality. It aims to remove the factors that produce inequality and to redistribute resources and power (Levitas 1998). This view on social policy mainly emphasizes increasing the physical capital of excluded groups (by increasing their incomes), rather than their social capital, implying that a rise in physical capital can alleviate shortcomings in social and family capital.

The second discourse is the *social integrationist discourse* (SID), linking inclusion to work. Social policy should thus aim to increase participation in

paid work, and poverty should be reduced by increasing participation in employment rather than by income redistribution. It implies that an increase in human capital (skills and ability to work) can lead the way to an increase in physical, social and family capital.

The third discourse of social exclusion is the *moral underclass discourse* (MUD), which concentrates on the cultural explanations of poverty. It presents the socially excluded (or underclass) as culturally distinct from the mainstream, and focuses on the behavior of the poor rather than on the structure of society. It implies that state provided income supplements encourage dependency and so are bad, rather than good, for their recipients, and the wider society. Levitas describes this discourse as “gendered”, as it is about idle, criminal young men and single mothers (1998). This discourse focuses on socially undesirable behaviors (e.g. teenage pregnancy, benefit dependency, substance abuse), and sees them as part of a “culture” of the underclass - a cause rather than a result of exclusion. This perspective is strongly linked to the social and family capital of excluded groups and their values and attitudes, which differ from the mainstream. It implies that if social and family capital can be increased, an increase in physical capital and/or employment will follow.

How one interprets the role and key aims of social policy influences the role Social Tourism may play in it. From a RED point of view, Social Tourism provides low-income groups with holidays, which they would not have otherwise. This results in a more equal distribution of goods and services in

society (Levitas 1998), and is thus a justification for public investment *per se*, independent of its further benefits. Countries, which have historically seen holidays as a right can be seen as taking a RED perspective. They also assert – as discussed above – that an increase in equality (in terms of access to consumer goods) can automatically lead to an increase in social and family capital. Elsewhere this discourse of social exclusion is generally less influential in social policy.

From the SID perspective, social policy aims to increase participation in paid work (Levitas 1998). As Social Tourism does not directly result in employment, this discourse is unsuitable for this study. Even if employment were a long-term benefit of Social Tourism, the holidays would have influenced the participant's employability indirectly, not directly (as for example in the case of training, and education).

From the MUD perspective social policy aims to reduce the presence of a number of behaviors that hinder the individual's integration in society (Levitas 1998). It aims to increase social and family capital in terms of norms, values and behaviors, and bring these closer to those of mainstream society. This could benefit wider society, for example through lower crime levels, lower levels of benefit-dependency, and lower costs for health services. This means that if Social Tourism increases social and family capital it will generate benefits to society and could be justified on that basis. This study aims to assess the effects of Social Tourism from the perspective of the MUD

discourse – described by Wilson as the “most accepted of the three in a liberal Western society” (Wilson 1996:164).

Concentrating on the MUD approach to social capital means addressing certain behaviors in individuals that should change. Achieving behavior change requires an understanding of how individuals make decisions in the first place, so that public policy can encourage different behavioral options to be chosen. Issues of behavior and character are becoming increasingly popular in public policy debates (Nickson et al 2004; Offer 2006). Barr (2007) explains that knowledge, social norms, demographics, situational and psychological variables will all be responsible to some extent for different behaviors exhibited by different people in different contexts. The challenge is to prevent a behavioral ‘lock-in’ where people are either unwilling, or unable to remove themselves from an ultimately damaging form of behavior. If people are unable to change their behavior, then in order to avoid a state of cognitive dissonance, many of the messages encouraging change will either not be heard, or become the source of annoyance, resulting in message fatigue. When people are able to change behavior but have proved unwilling to do so, a different context may mean they to hear messages anew. By changing the context, Social Tourism may create opportunities for people to learn new behaviors, which can ultimately reduce their social exclusion and enhance social capital. The next section explores theories of learning to understand how Social Tourism can maximize the potential for changing behavior.

Social Tourism as a potential form of learning

This section discusses how ideas from learning theories can be applied to tourist experiences. Research on this theme is scarce, though Mitchell (1996) has outlined a number of alternative approaches. Here the focus is on ideas about experiential learning and situated learning since they specifically link learning to experience in non-institutionalized settings, such as going on holiday.

As the name suggests, experiential learning is learning rooted in experience. This form of learning first received attention at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, and represented an alternative to the more traditional, cognitive learning theories. It can be defined as learning that “begins with the experience followed by reflection, analysis and evaluation of the experience” (Boydell 1976:17). From the perspective of experiential learning, a holiday can offer the participant the chance to encounter new situations, witness different social interactions, and compare these to his or her own behavior pattern (Boydell 1976). A holiday, with its opportunities to explore a new environment and engage in new activities, meet new people and be faced with unexpected problems, can provide the encounters the participants need to start their experiential learning cycle, even if this learning is not intended. This can have two effects. First, the holiday makers can develop or improve their skills: this is known as single-loop learning (for example, the family learns to use public transport independently). Second, they may go through a deeper level of change, affecting the underlying views and attitudes for that behavior. This is known as double-loop learning (for example, successfully mastering the public

transport system creates greater self-esteem). In double-loop learning, the very norms for effective performance (and personal behavior) are reviewed (Argyris & Schön 1978).

Situated learning, as opposed to experiential learning, does not focus on the individual learning in itself, but rather on how the individual learns. This theory, developed in the 1990s, emphasizes that learning is a social activity, and largely rooted in participating in activities with a “community of practice”, who come together to carry out these activities (in school, at work, at home, in leisure activities)’ (Lave & Wenger 1991:33). Communities of practice can thus be described as entities that solve problems and promote learning via communication amongst their members (Johnson 2001). Members of low income groups are often not in paid employment, and have restricted social networks, giving limited access to new communities of practice. Holidays can bring contact with new communities of practice, which in turn can lead to increases in social capital and behavior change (Lesser & Storck 2001).

An important condition for any learning is goal difficulty level, and how the learners assess their chances for success. Rawsthorne and Elliot found that an important factor in performance is “whether participants pursuing a performance goal are focused on the possibility of a positive or negative performance outcome” (Rawsthorne & Elliot 1999:328). This means individuals are oriented either towards the attainment of success, or towards the avoidance of failure. Fear of failure can lead to performance avoidance (Silver et al 2006). Consequently, when goals are set too high or the learners

are pessimistic about their own success, the learning process can be diminished. In terms of Social Tourism and experiential learning, this could mean that holidays or situations that are too challenging for the learners can prevent behavior change.

An additional condition for successful situated learning is level of contact with new communities of practice. For a community of practice to be successful, the members must meet or communicate more than just once, and form a structured network based on trust and common interest (Lesser & Storck 2001). In the case of Social Tourism, this means that the most successful holidays will be those which expose holiday makers to new communities of practice during activities or via socializing. Both conditions highlight that the choice of holiday and destination can have important effects on the success of the holiday, in terms of learning and the extent to which socially undesirable behavior is reduced.

So far it has been argued that, in societies where holidays are not seen as a right, Social Tourism can only be justified as a part of social policy if the holiday benefits not merely participants, but also the rest of society. Such benefits could be achieved through an increase in social capital and family capital. The MUD view of social exclusion argues that socially excluded groups are excluded because of socially undesirable characteristics, which prevent their integration in mainstream society. A holiday may reduce these characteristics, and change certain values and behaviors, through an experiential or situated learning process. The most successful Social Tourism

initiatives are thus those where the learning possibilities of the individual are maximized. This means that the difficulty level must be seen as achievable, and that there must be in-depth interaction with a new community of practice.

The fieldwork for this study aimed to examine to what extent Social Tourism has benefits for the participants and society, the nature of those benefits and how they can be maximized.

Study methods

The study involved qualitative fieldwork with the participants of Social Tourism and their welfare agents. A qualitative method was chosen to examine the tourist experience because this “is a complex phenomenon, a frame of mind, a way of being, and above all, more complex to researchers than a simple series of constructs which can be measured, quantified” (Page 2002:141). The fieldwork examined how far Social Tourism affected behavior, which areas of life were affected, the learning processes involved and how far they depended on holiday type.

The fieldwork was carried out with the support of the Family Holiday Association, a London-based Social Tourism charity, which provides about 1100 UK families per year with a holiday. All these families have low incomes, and can be affected by various social problems: for example they include carers for disabled children, women who have fled a violent relationship, persons affected by HIV and people with mental health problems. The

holidays provided are usually for one week, taken in Britain, and in basic, self-catering holiday parks at the seaside in the low season. The cost depends on the size of the family, but averages around \$1200 for the whole family. Most families go on an individual holiday, unaccompanied by a welfare agent, but social organizations can also apply for funding for group holidays they organize themselves. Welfare agents would usually accompany the group holidays, and often organize activities. In some cases they also provide participants with food and toiletries from the grants.

Ethical concerns regarding privacy of the respondents and clear communication with them were of utmost importance for this study. Therefore, the welfare agents were first approached for help when selecting participants for the research. They were sent information letters about the research, and were telephoned individually. They were then asked to provide clients who had been allocated a holiday with an invitation letter. This ensured that the respondents could discuss the research with their welfare agent before participating. A random sample was taken from those participants volunteering to participate in the research.

The fieldwork was carried out in two rounds. The first round was conducted in the first month after the holiday and involved 40 respondents; the second round was carried out in the sixth month after the holiday and involved 30 of the original 40 respondents (a retention rate of 75%). This dual structure aimed to examine not only the immediate effects of the holiday, but also its effects in the medium term. The methods used were semi-structured

interviews for individual holiday participants, and focus groups for group holiday participants. For all welfare agents, semi-structured interviews were used.

The data were manually coded. The choice of a manual coding method was underpinned by the relatively small sample size and the fact that data often had to be coded under several concepts at a time. The respondents did not use a common or uniform vocabulary to explain their experiences, which resulted in a very nuanced and hard to codify set of concepts that were closely interlinked. The data were then analyzed thematically and tested for validity in the second round.

In longitudinal research, an important issue is the effect of time and perspective on the respondents' answers. Contradictory accounts can also be obtained from different respondents. A pluralist analysis was therefore chosen "where different versions of reality are revealed by a range of actors who operate with a variety of interests and perceptions" (Pettigrew 1990:272).

In the presentation of the findings, all names have been changed. Quotes are reproduced exactly and without changes to vocabulary and grammar, to preserve their authenticity. Quotes refer to the interviews and focus groups carried out in the first round (post-holiday interview 1 or PHI1) and the second round (post-holiday interview 2 or PHI2). The findings have been presented thematically rather than chronologically, combining data from the two interview rounds.

FINDINGS

This section is divided into two parts. The first part will examine the effects of Social Tourism on family capital (in terms of family relations, stability of the family and the family's social contacts). The second part will examine the effects on social capital (in terms of extended social networks, and related changes to behavior and confidence).

Increases in family capital

An improvement in the family relations of the respondents was one of the clearest outcomes in the first round of interviews, in the month after the return of the respondents. The great majority of respondents indicated positive behavior changes, mainly referring to the relationship with the children, the time spent with them and the change in parenting styles. One participant, whose daughter has behavioral problems at school and at home, for example mentioned how she and her daughter spend more time together since the holiday, and how they enjoy each other's company more (PH1).

Lindsey (participant): I am spending quite a lot of time with my little one now, quality time. Maybe it's just sitting down at home doing a puzzle, or sitting in the garden having biscuits together. Or going out in the weekend.

Daniel, a disabled father of a teenage son, reported how their relationship had improved dramatically after the holiday (PH1).

Daniel (participant): It's a lot better yeah. He's certainly opened up more, at one time he wouldn't speak to anybody, like when you'd say, how was work. But now he's like "I am doing this today", "I am doing that today". He's looking forward to go to college, and everything seems to be falling into place. He's happy now. (PHI1)

A concern voiced by the majority of the welfare agents was that parents did not often play or spend time with their children. One month after the holiday, a general improvement in this area was reported. Many comments showed how this positively affected both the children (doing better at school, being proud and happy to spend time with their parents, being better behaved), and the parents (feeling less guilty, feeling more positive towards the children, spending quality time together). This behavioral change was directly linked to the holiday experience by the respondents: after they had spent time together on holiday and had engaged in new activities, this new behavior pattern was repeated at home. This can be seen as a form of experiential learning.

In the second round, these changes were still present in most cases. This effect was mainly noted in the relationship between parents and children. Lindsey was one of the parents who in the second round of interviews again emphasized how she and her daughter were still closer, and how that positively influenced the behavior of the child (PHI2)

Lindsey (participant): Last weekend we went up to London to the Lord Mayor Show. She really enjoyed it actually ... It was weird because normally I don't

really go out much and spend time on my own with her like that but it was really good.

Improvements in the relationships between the adults were less clear. This was mainly because most interviewees headed single-parent families. In some cases though, the holiday was reported to have had a very positive effect on the relationship between the parents. Katherine said:

Katherine: So we were spending like two hours a day together, as husband and wife, not just as mum and dad so that was lovely. That brought us together. (PHI2).

As discussed earlier, family capital is based on the stability of the family on the one hand, and the social contacts of the parents on the other hand (Parcel & Dufur 2001). The study results have shown that a holiday can contribute to both. First, a better relationship between the family members can reduce tension, and therefore make family life more agreeable. Such improvements in the relationship were generally illustrated by examples such as more frequent family outings, or spending “quality time” together after the holiday. Increases in family capital are more generally linked to higher educational performance and aspirations, and are also claimed to improve family resilience (Marjoribanks 1998). Both of these factors can reduce certain characteristics (low education, family break-down), thus achieving the aims of the MUD view of social policy, and benefiting both participants and society generally.

Second, the social contacts of the participants were shown to increase - most clearly where the group holidays were concerned. Participants in group holidays mentioned meeting new people as one of the main benefits of the holiday, and often kept in touch with fellow participants after the holiday. Welfare agent Abdul emphasized the role of sharing, talking, and coming together as the great benefit of a group holiday. He also pointed out that participants learnt from each other, which would suggest that the group can act as a new community of practice, as presented in the situated learning theory:

Abdul (WFA): Coming together, sharing, talking... and it is also important because you'll find that people get information more word of mouth than reading. So as people gather together they talk about issues, so they learn something from each other (PHI2)

Moreover, enlarging social networks contributes not only to family capital, but also to the social capital of individual family members. In the following section, more individual consequences of increased social contact for other areas of life are discussed.

Increases in social capital

Portes describes social capital as the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures (Portes 1998:6). The study findings show that Social Tourism led to increases in the

social capital of many respondents. This could take a variety of forms, and some holiday types were more effective at improving particular aspects. The following discussion highlights the benefits of Social Tourism for expanding membership into social networks and other social structures. These expanding networks were also found to have impacts on other areas of the participants' lives such as confidence, and attitude to or perspective on life.

Social contact

Social isolation was often reported by respondents, and many testified that holidays had led to an expansion of their social networks. This was most noticeable in the case of the group holidays: the respondents often reported that the chance to talk about their problems to people in the same situation was a great benefit of the holiday. For example participants Harry and Anthony both mentioned making new friends, with whom they were aiming to keep in touch. (PH11).

In the case of individual family holidays, most participants focused on spending time together as a family, resulting in an increase in family capital. Most participants did not build strong personal ties with other holiday makers. However their social capital could increase in other ways. Rather than expanding their membership in social networks, they often increased their involvement in *social structures*, most commonly the support organization via the welfare agent. In many cases the participants proved more engaged or open to the support program, or more confident in seeking help from the support staff, as this welfare agent describes:

Gemma (WFA): Afterwards they might come to a group or they might bring their child to stay and play. They might even not have been confident enough to talk to you before, but then afterwards they are. (PHI2)

Confidence

Gemma's comment indicates how an increase in social contact may lead to a higher level of confidence after the holiday. However the findings overall in this respect were mixed. There were cases where the holiday had been successful and the participants reported an increase in confidence. This applied to the group holidays in all cases, and to the individual holidays when the respondents were generally able to cope. For Katherine, whose son has severe behavioral problems, the individual holiday improved her confidence as a parent (PHI1).

Anne (WFA): Tim's behavior, Katherine was quite concerned about before she went, "what will I do with him when he starts in public". I said "do exactly the same as you are doing now with him", and she has actually got the confidence to take that forward now, if he screams in a supermarket, so what. If she can manage to take this child away and cope with him in front of all these holiday makers, Asda or Tesco's is not a problem. (PHI1)

When Sandra, a single mother with mental health problems, participated in a group holiday, it led her to try new activities, and do things she would not have done on her own (PHI1).

Sandra (participant): Also being with other single parents, they are more or less in the same boat, like my little one, you think I am not the only one, everybody else is the same. So that opened my eyes a bit.

Interviewer: And did that give you a bit of strength?

S: More confidence yeah. Because otherwise we would have just sat here and not do anything, so that were quite good. (PHI1)

However, not all respondents experienced these benefits. Some found the holiday very challenging, because of the lack of support, or because of the lack of organized entertainment. This can be linked back to the relationship between the goal difficulty level and performance. In this case the respondents felt over-stimulated or threatened by the difficulties they encountered on the holiday. Rupert was an example of this over-stimulation, he found an individual holiday with three children damaging to his confidence as a parent.

Rupert (participant): It was a nice bit of bonding for them three. But for myself it wasn't really very relaxing. I found it a little hard really. I would have found it easier staying at home, because I have all my equipment and everything here. And there was more to do in the garden here than there was there, you know, for the little ones. (PHI1)

These findings highlight how the holiday type needs to be tailored to the participants to achieve the desired results. Holidays can provide the

participants with learning situations that can potentially change their behavior, but this does not happen automatically. Some participants would have benefited from a higher level of support during the holiday, either in the form of a group holiday or in the form of more organized activities for children and adults. Organized entertainment was often seen as a way to structure the holiday, and many respondents who went on individual holidays expressed a preference for holiday parks where there were plentiful entertainment opportunities..

Changing perspectives

Social capital is described as “productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (Coleman 1998:98). This was mainly noticeable in the second round of the research: over 6 months gains in social capital had developed further, and combined with the potential for learning of the holiday, this had resulted in new, additional benefits for about half of the respondents. The holiday, as a potential learning experience, had given many respondents the time to reflect on their lives, and identify areas where a change was desirable. With the help of their new social networks, the support of the social organization and by accessing new information channels, these particular respondents were able to turn motivation into positive changes to their lives.

The research findings made clear that this benefit did not develop immediately, and time to work on changes was often needed. In the first month after the holiday, about half of the participants and welfare agents

described the escape from routine as one of the most important benefits of the holiday. Being able to leave the worries and financial problems at home, and concentrate on more positive things changed the perspective of the participants. Many welfare agents like Aisha and Anne emphasized how the daily worries could make people so focused on them, “they can’t see beyond that” (PHI1). Daniel also testified how being away from the unsafe estate where he lives made him free his mind to spend time with his teenage son (PHI1).

Daniel (participant): I wasn't too excited at first, because, where I live, there is a lot of drug users, and I didn't wanna leave me house. The week we were going away there was scaffolding up as well. And I am on the second floor, where nobody gets to, but then they put scaffolding. And I've got a back balcony, so someone could get up the balcony. So that was a weight on me mind. But on the holiday I was more relaxed, and so was me son, he's opened up more, he's telling us what he's doing (PHI1).

This can be linked to the experiential learning theory, where the “experience” stage needs to be followed by generalization for learning to be successful. During the holiday, many participants took time to reflect on their lives, and decided they wanted to make changes in some areas. Many respondents testified that they put these new behaviors into practice while on the holiday (for example, Daniel and his son who communicated more). This development can be the basis for a lasting behavior change, resulting in increased social capital for the individual; or family capital for the family unit.

In the second round, these results were not only maintained but the examples of behavior change became much more marked. This would indicate that the effects of the holiday need some time to be incorporated into the behavior of the participants. It also became noticeable that support from the WFA was an important factor in this process, and that this support was sought more often after than before the holiday. Most support opportunities were already available before the holiday, but the participants did not take them up until after their holiday. Participants Nancy and Katherine for example became much more involved in their support organizations: they enrolled in a parenting course and sought individual counseling (PHI2). WFA Gemma also highlighted this development:

Gemma (WFA): Afterwards they might come to a group or they might bring their child to stay and play. They might even not have been confident enough to talk to you before, but then afterwards they are. (PHI2)

This more pro-active attitude often coincided with the new outlook on life that had been developed: respondents reported that they had evaluated their life on the holiday, and found a desire to change certain aspects. Many respondents emphasized that the holiday changed their aspirations in life, and how things that seemed out of reach now seemed possible after all. Welfare agent Leanne described the holiday as “a little taste of what it could be like”, which motivated some of her clients strongly (PHI2). She linked this to the more active attitude a lot of her clients adopt when granted the holiday.

Leanne (WFA): You've got to book the holiday. And in an area like this, people are not used to doing things like that, they are used to having everything done for them. They go to the Social if they run out of money, they go to Social Services saying "my washing machine has cracked up, you've got to get me a new one". They are not used to having a look around and finding the best buy and saving up for it. (PHI2)

It was found that in the cases where the participants received adequate support, for example from their welfare agents, the behavior change sought was mostly achieved. Examples are the two respondents who were in work, who both changed jobs (Rachel and Kloey, PHI2). One decided to look for a more flexible job, so she could spend more time with her autistic son; the other left her job and opened her own market stall. Three respondents changed their views on debt and money (Katherine, Nancy and Carry – PHI2), and started budgeting better.

Anne (WFA): I know [Katherine] had terrible trouble the year before last at Christmas time, she had no money, she was depressed. But this year seems to have been a complete turn-around, they have budgeted, it wasn't huge amounts, but budgeting for the holiday has started the ball rolling with them. (PHI2)

DISCUSSION

These findings generally show that Social Tourism can facilitate considerable changes in the lives of the participants. Although these changes may seem small, for the participants they were often fundamental and a stepping stone for further development. The changes were achieved for a relatively modest investment in terms of time and money: the participants often only went away for a week, to fairly basic accommodation in holiday parks during the low season. Social Tourism was reported by the majority of respondents to have positively affected one or more areas of daily life after the holiday; these are discussed below. The first area was the *family capital* of the respondents - the relationships between the family members and their resilience when faced with adversity. This benefit was reported by most of participants, in the short term and in the medium term. Both adults and children benefited from an increase in family capital, which could encourage the adults to change parenting techniques and encourage a more active lifestyle for the family (for example, going out more). For the children this could lead to better behavior both at home and at school.

The second area of improvement was an increase in the *social capital* of the respondents, or an increase in the valuable relations between the individual and the world surrounding him or her. This was reported by most of the respondents in the short term, and about half of the respondents achieved beneficial behavior changes in the medium term. Ways in which an increase in social capital can manifest itself include improvements in self-confidence, extension of support networks, new ways of prioritizing duties, changes in work circumstances, and better budgeting skills.

The most important factor for a successful holiday was not the holiday type, but the level of support for the participant. Very independent families who could cope well on their own generally reported benefits from an individual family holiday. Families who found it harder to cope usually found individual holidays challenging, and that could have negative effects on their confidence. These families benefited from having additional support on the holiday, either in the form of a family member and organized entertainment, or in the form of a group holiday.

During the holiday, appropriate support is needed so that the opportunities for encountering new situations and reflecting on them are optimized. The level of support deemed “appropriate” depends on the independence and ability to cope of the participants: some participants will require no support at all and prefer to go on holiday alone, whereas other families might find this too challenging and will prefer extra support. This support could be provided by the holiday provider (for example through childcare facilities, organized forms of entertainment), or by the supporting organization and the welfare agent (in the case of group holidays). What is appropriate will depend on the family: if the welfare agent suspects the parents need support to improve their family relations, the imposed structure of a group holiday, with group activities with adults and children, may be beneficial.

Appropriate support is also important after the holiday. It was found that after the holiday, appropriate support needs to be given to allow new motivations to

be embedded as changed behaviors. If the holiday has given the participants the chance to reflect on their life and make generalizations about what they would like to change, support may still be needed to implement changes. The welfare agent normally has the necessary knowledge to support the participant after their return home.

Increasing social and family capital has social as well as individual benefits; it also has financial implications. An average holiday with the Family Holiday Association costs approximately \$1200 (for all family members). This investment can reduce certain costs society bears. Some of these are direct costs such as reduction in healthcare costs – three respondents in this study reported that they stopped taking medication for stress-related illnesses, for example. More common are reductions in indirect or opportunity costs. For example, the holidays proved able to reduce problems such as low self-esteem and bad family relationships. This in turn helps address mental health problems like depression, or improves the chance of finding employment, thus making individuals more independent from state income support. Holidays can also be seen as a complementary or alternative form of intervention to others that are more expensive. In 2003, the cost of a parenting class in the UK was estimated at \$1500 per person (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk>). The cost of the average social holiday, for a whole family, is thus \$300 less. This does not mean Social Tourism can replace other initiatives fully, but the holiday could increase uptake of the necessary support, and reduce reliance on other services. Moreover, Social Tourism has the potential not only to increase family capital,

but also the social capital of the individual family members. This can also improve the reach and effectiveness of support services, which are often available but do not always reach those most in need of them (SEU 2004:6).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the value of Social Tourism for low-income groups, in terms of the benefits it can bring both in the short term and in the medium term. It has shown that for a modest investment in terms of time and money, holidays can facilitate significant increases in social and family capital for the participants (in terms of family relations, confidence, social network and a changed perspective on life). It has also highlighted new aspects of the social effects of tourism, and has linked tourism to unintended learning opportunities. It has shown the potential of tourism as a part of social policy: not only because of the inherent benefits of the holiday, but also as a support for the success of other, existing interventions. It has been shown that tourism can be seen as potentially cost-effective. The findings have policy as well as research implications.

The research findings highlight the meaningful role tourism can play in social policy. Perceiving tourism as a potential catalyst of social benefits, on the level of the individual, the family and through them society, goes against its typical depiction as a frivolous and hedonist activity. Tourism already plays this role in several countries and regions of mainland Europe, where its benefits have been recognized by the European Union (EESC 2006).

The implications for the way in which Social Tourism is provided focus on the need for adequate support to participants during and after the holiday. The role of the welfare agent is crucial, both in helping to choose a suitable holiday and in supporting the family after their return. This has management implications. Making the most of Social Tourism can be an intensive process that can stretch over many months, from booking the holiday to supporting the participants upon their return. This is outside the normal role of many welfare agents so that the necessary time is not always available. Welfare agents also need to be able to be very flexible in the support they offer. The areas participants might want to improve can range from family development to career change, and may fall outside the area the organization usually works in. Some welfare agents in the study were able to provide this flexible support, others were not able to do so because of time constraints or lack of human and financial resources. Social Tourism will not provide the same benefits automatically for every participant, so welfare agents need to be aware of their role in the process and how they can influence outcomes – and must be trained and resourced to do so.

Many routes for further research are still open. Firstly, future research opportunities exist in the area of the effects of Social Tourism on participants. This study has aimed to offer a short and medium term perspective of Social Tourism benefits, but a longitudinal study is needed to show its long-term implications. Another area of research is the type of participant. This study has shown great similarities between the potential benefits of Social Tourism

for different target groups, for example single parents, families with disabled children, asylum seekers, and victims of domestic violence. However social holidays might have more or different benefits on particular social subgroups. An example of a potential research topic is Social Tourism for older people, examining if holidays can improve autonomy at an older age.

Secondly, research is needed to design a model of successful and cost-effective provision. One focus is management, involving research with the welfare agents and Social Tourism providers to identify, codify and disseminate good practice. Another is comparing Social Tourism with other forms of intervention in terms of cost and effectiveness. For example, results of formal parenting classes and the experiential learning of parenting skills during the holiday could be compared.

Thirdly, opinion research is needed to highlight public attitudes towards government funding of Social Tourism, since Social Tourism may be seen simply as a 'reward' for deviant behavior of the moral underclass or for groups that do not contribute greatly to society. It is unusual to see holidays as a potential learning process and an incentive to change behavior, and this perspective may contradict current widespread views of holidays as a reward for hard work. Although in many countries in mainland Europe there seems to be a high public acceptance of Social Tourism as a part of social policy, this is less likely to be the case in countries like the US and the UK, unless much more evidence can be shown of the wider benefits for society.

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