

What are the prospects for 'Tourism for all'? Considering Social Tourism.

## Introduction

Social tourism concerns the inclusion of all members of a society in participation in tourism. Such participation is made possible through the provision of some form of system of social or welfare support (Minnaert, Diekmann, and McCabe 2011). The interventions should have a well-defined social intention, such as to combat isolation and loneliness in older people, or to encourage family cohesion amongst low-income families or to support accessible tourism for people with disabilities. Social tourism is not a new concept, but it has in recent years attracted greater attention from researchers. This perspective article provides some background to the historical development of and progress made to improve inclusivity in access to tourism and points to the potential for the future.

## 75 years of developments 1946-2020

The modern mass tourism industry has its origins in ideas of personal and social improvement, health and religious and other education (Walton 2013). The social dimension of the tourism industry has therefore run parallel to the development of the market-based approach (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006). *Social Tourism* as a concept emerged in the French speaking research community in the 1960's, and is strongly rooted in ideology of social democratic traditions. Hunziker is credited with bringing the idea to the attention of the research community (1957), and established the Bureau Internationale de Tourisme Sociale (BITS). Haulot (1981) developed the concept following the UNWTO Manila Declaration on World Tourism in 1980, which specifically recognised the links between the rights of workers to paid holidays and the development of modern mass tourism participation. The role of Trades Unions and other organisations in the active provision of holiday travel opportunities to (generally low-paid) workers or members forms the basis of modern social tourism. The issue of the rights to tourism first surfaced in articles discussing the ethical foundations of social tourism (Minnaert, Maitland and Miller 2006), in terms of the role of the state, local conventions, social rights and entitlements to explain the many diverse approaches to social tourism. However, the issue of the rights to tourism and social tourism's role in such debates is contested and tourism is at best conceived as a social right (see McCabe and Diekmann 2015).

Research has shown that socially excluded groups derive important benefits from participation in tourism, and that social tourism can lead to a range of positive outcomes for social tourists, social and welfare policy, and society. These are outlined in figure 1.

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Low-income families receive important opportunities to repair and build relationships (McCabe 2009), older people benefit from improved social opportunities (Morgan, Pritchard and Sedgley 2015), children benefit from experiences and learning (Minnaert 2016) and people with disabilities benefit from improved health (Shaw, Veitch and Coles 2005) and access to opportunities (Darcy and Buhalis 2010). Social tourism, therefore, is linked to the concept of 'Tourism for All'. Other studies have looked at other aspects of the experience, such as the role of activities in providing beneficial experiences (Komppula, Ilves and Airey 2016), or the role of charities in the provision of social tourism (Hunter-Jones 2011). In terms of benefits to society, the EU pointed to the importance of citizenship rights and social justice (EC 2006). Regarding impacts on policy, social tourism can contribute to greater sustainability for destinations through longer tourism seasons, evening out the spread of demand, providing more stable employment and increased taxes (Cisneros-Martínez, McCabe, & Fernández-Morales (2018). Social policies include education, healthy and active ageing, wellbeing (McCabe and Johnson 2013).

## Future perspective 75 years 2020-2095

Social tourism remains an important area for future research and policy. Increasing wealth and income inequality, even in richer nations (McCall & Percheski 2010), means that access to tourism is becoming more concentrated amongst uncertain in an era of systematic reductions in public sector funding. Further research is needed to provide evidence on the effects of exclusion on people, such as, effects of longer periods without access to a holiday away from home, exploring the impacts of breaks on newly emerging disadvantaged groups (such as new economic migrants, trans, non-binary and intersex people). Research is needed on programmes and policies for social tourism, how they can be expanded, and the effects on destination sustainability. We need a better understanding of the health effects of tourism, both positive (relaxation, pleasure, learning, physical activity, relationships) and negative (relationship breakdown, over-indulgence, stress). We must forge inter-disciplinary research with medical practitioners, sociologists, gerontologists, social policy research and education to develop better measures and indicators of tourism's effects, to ensure that social tourism programmes lead to optimal outcomes for those most in need of support. Future research must assess the needs of people in developing countries, whose appetites for tourism opportunities and cultural and social norms are diverse, to ensure that policies and programmes for social tourism are relevant to their needs and generate the most benefit.

## Conclusions

Social tourism is an important area for future research. As tourism becomes even more established as a result of improvements in global economic development, increased wealth and available leisure time, the need to consider disparities in access to participation for disadvantaged members of society. Social tourism offers potential for improved sustainability and contribute to social and inclusionary policies.

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FIG 1: THE TRIPLE GAINS OF SOCIAL TOURISM

