

SOCIAL TOURISM

Global Challenges and Approaches

Edited by Joana Lima and Celeste Eusébio



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Joana Lima

Social Sciences School, University of Évora and CIDEHUS Research Unit, Évora, Portugal

Celeste Eusébio

Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro and GOVCOPP Research Unit, Aveiro, Portugal



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CABI
Nosworthy Way
Wallingford
Oxfordshire OX10 8DE
UK

Tel: +44 (0)1491 832111
Fax: +44 (0)1491 833508
E-mail: info@cabi.org
Website: www.cabi.org

CABI
WeWork
One Lincoln St
24th Floor
Boston, MA 02111
USA

T: +1 (617)682-9015
E-mail: cabi-nao@cabi.org

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Introduction

Joana Lima - Social Sciences School, University of Évora and CIDEHUS Research Unit, Portugal

Celeste Eusébio - Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism, University of Aveiro, GOVCOPP Research Unit, Portugal

Why a book reflecting on social tourism around the world?

The importance of holidays and travelling for human well-being has been formally recognised since 1948, with the recognition by the United Nations of holidays as a basic human right for individuals. This importance has since been reiterated by several governments that have recognised the right to paid holidays over the years (Hall and Brown, 2006). As stated by Richards (1999), holidays away from home (tourism) mitigate two constraints of daily life – time and place, creating conditions for individuals to dedicate themselves to their personal and social fulfilment.

Despite the recognition of tourism as an important part of present-day life, today's society is also marked by a worsening of social inequalities, even within developed countries. Consequently, a significant part (not to say a majority) of the population still doesn't have access to tourism. There are several constraints to the practice of tourism, among which the low level of income stands out as one of the most important.

In order to combat this inequality of access to tourism, the development of tourism programmes aimed at disadvantaged social groups is a possible measure to provide individuals who do not have access to tourism the opportunity to participate in this activity. Existing studies, although it is recognised that there is no unique definition, consensually consider that social tourism (ST) is related to initiatives that aim to include groups in tourism activities who are otherwise excluded from it. This measure, despite already arousing the interest of various entities (such as the European Economic and Social Committee, several private social tourism organisations and some governments around the world), has not yet received extensive and effective recognition or investment (either regarding financing or scientific studies).

As mentioned before, this is a topic that has only received more attention from researchers in recent years: only from 2008 did the number of publications start to grow significantly (according to a search performed on the Scopus database with “social tourism” as keyword and limited to studies with this expression on the title, abstract or keywords), even though the first published article, to our knowledge, dates from 1951.

Most of the authors in the field recognise the positive effects of ST for its participants and society (e.g. McCabe *et al.*, 2010; Minnaert, 2006; Minnaert *et al.*, 2009; and Smith and Hughes, 1999). The results of most studies stress the importance of social tourism for its participants, in terms of

well-being and quality of life improvement, and also emphasise benefits for learning and development of social behaviour. These results seem to indicate that encouraging tourism for disadvantaged groups may facilitate social inclusion, encouraging social solidarity and collective cohesion and leading to a decrease in poverty and exclusion. Another common conclusion of most studies is the recognition of the need for public intervention in ST initiatives and the challenges which this fact represents, in a period with important financial restrictions for most governments, are commonly recognised (Lima and Moura, 2017).

Reflections on social tourism, both conceptual and empirical, still seem to be necessary as a starting point for designing efficient strategies to promote what is now considered a basic right of individuals and a dimension that characterises modern society and quality of life – access to tourism. Existing research provides solid ground to develop further research, but there is indeed a window of opportunity for significantly improving knowledge on this topic.

In this sense, it is important to stress again that further research work is required, calling for more wide-ranging and transnational comparisons. Consequently, the opportunity to bring together conceptual chapters and others with practical examples from all around the world and analysing different targets inspired us to produce this book.

Structure of the book

As editors of this book we are excited to present this compilation of rich, diverse chapters on social tourism. The following 13 chapters bring together a variety of perspectives on social tourism around the world, illustrate many approaches that can be taken and point out directions for the future of social tourism.

The book starts with a second part composed of case studies, with three chapters discussing the historical evolution of the concept and implementation of social tourism in different parts of the world. This discussion also results in the identification of challenges and opportunities for the development of social tourism in these contexts. In Greece, as discussed in Chapter 1, social tourism has been a part of social welfare policy for almost four decades. Its practice, however, has seen significant fluctuations over time due to a diversity of factors, but programmes are still operative and are almost exclusively supported by the public sector. In Mexico, the development of social tourism is relatively recent as it was only during the 20th century that tourism became more formally organised and involved public, private and social participation, as pointed out in Chapter 2. In Finland, although social tourism has a long tradition, it seems to have been neglected in sociopolitical discussions, as stated in Chapter 3. This chapter introduces a case study

concerning social tourism in Finland and focus on challenges and opportunities for the development of social tourism in this country.

Since the 1990s, studies have been published on the effects of tourist practice for visitors, highlighting the importance of the practice of tourism for individuals' personal and social development (e.g. Alexander *et al.*, 2010; Hall and Brown, 2006; Minnaert, 2006; Minnaert *et al.*, 2009; and Smith and Hughes, 1999). These studies identify a set of factors, of individuals and tourism practices, that can influence the way these effects are felt. Consequently, different personal, social and economic conditions, as well as different motivations and different tourist experiences for individuals, lead to different effects or different intensities of these effects (Alexander *et al.*, 2010; Dolnicar *et al.*, 2012; Shaw and Coles, 2004; Smith and Hughes, 1999). When considering studies on the effects of social tourism on participants, one conclusion became evident: the participants of social tourism programmes seem to feel the effects of engaging in tourism activity more intensely (Smith and Hughes, 1999; Minnaert, 2006; McCabe *et al.*, 2010).

The following part (7 chapters) of the book, reflects on tourism experiences lived by different target groups of social tourism. An aging population is a reality that is having a great impact on developed countries. With this in mind, Chapter 4 analyses the INATEL Foundation social tourism programmes offered to seniors and the benefits that the seniors obtained from their participation in these programmes. Regarding the same target, social tourism programmes for seniors in Slovenia and Spain are presented in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. These programmes are analysed in terms of the characteristics and benefits and their potential for future development. Chapter 7 changes the focus of the analysis to a group that is one of the target groups of social tourism initiatives which faces most travel constraints – low-income families with children with disabilities. This chapter focuses on the Portuguese situation. In Chapter 8, there is a discussion of how to consider children with disabilities in tourism, by listening to their voices regarding their needs and motivations. Also focusing on children, Chapter 9 presents a reflection on the effects of social tourism for the well-being and social inclusion of economically disadvantaged children. Children are the target considered again in Chapter 10, but associated with a different reflection: this chapter discusses the financial accessibility of current children's camps in France.

The last part of the book is devoted to practical challenges and policy implications. This part starts with a chapter which aims to provide relevant guidelines to develop social tourism programmes for low-income families, based on the interest of a sample of Portuguese low-income families in participating in social tourism programmes (Chapter 11). Chapter 12 provides a reflection on the roles of the public, private and voluntary sector in social tourism provision in Flanders, with a view to designing new business models for solving social problems. This part of the book ends with Chapter 13, where a critical reflection concerning social tourism policies is undertaken.

The last part of the book presents the conclusions. This chapter aims at identifying the main contribution of each chapter, summarising some challenges and identifying approaches for the future of social tourism around the world.

Hopes and expectations for the book

As mentioned above, many people are still prevented from participating in tourism activities due to various constraints (e.g. physical disabilities, poor economic conditions, reduced mobility and social isolation). To overcome these travel constraints, it is essential to develop innovative social tourism initiatives worldwide. It thus becomes imperative to think critically about the challenges and the approaches concerning social tourism initiatives offered around the world in order to facilitate access for disadvantaged groups (seniors, low-income families, children and youth and people with disabilities) to tourism activities.

This book seeks to bring together contributions from scholars from different parts of the world, in the wide-ranging field of social tourism, adding value to the existing knowledge. However, we recognise that this is only a sample of the initiatives being undertaken globally. For example, neither the situation in Brazil, a country which has a long tradition in social tourism, nor the emerging Asian situation are discussed in this book. Nevertheless, it presents a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, international and future-oriented perspective to understand social tourism in different countries and continents.

As the book presents theoretical reflections on this concept and also examples of practical implementation for different targets, we are hopeful that it will truly contribute to extending knowledge in this field and encourage academic discussion and knowledge-sharing regarding the relevance of thinking of tourism as a dimension of present-day life, in order to: (i) think critically about the challenges faced by the sector and the relevance of promoting social tourism initiatives for disadvantaged groups of society; (ii) promote research that bridges theory and practice, permitting the identification of guidelines for more effective social tourism initiatives; and (iii) encourage future research in the field.

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