

THE ACCESSIBLE SOCIAL TOURISM: A NEW TOURIST MODEL

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The concept Social Tourism has evolved historically moving from a focus in the economic resources to explore the people who benefit from it. This shift goes from young people, children, and the working class to the elderly and the handicapped. In any case, Social Tourism is intimately closed to social issues, linked, obviously to economic, political and social changes.

Social Tourism dates back to the early demands of socialist movement in matters of social, political and civil rights in the late XIX century and the beginning of last century. In 1936, these demands reach a milestone with the passage of the Treaty that regulates the paid holidays in Genève (Ortega y Rodríguez, 2007).

In Spain, it was not until the political transition in the seventies when the development of social policy and the consolidation of welfare State allowed the implementation of specific social policies focused in the development of Social Tourism by public institutions.

One of the main contributors to the development of Social Tourism, in Spain and other European Countries, lies in the continuous population aging, due, among other factors to the increase of life span (Pérez Ortiz, 2006: 97-98). Together with the tourist market globalization process, that has promoted the diversification of destinations and the market segmentation, such as senior tourism. Tourism has become one of the main sectors in economic activity and an important asset for country wealth, cultural exchange and sociological transformation.

In this scenario, the development of tourist activities has turned out as a new challenge to achieve the so-called inclusive tourism. According to some expert voices on the issue, social tourism is considered a social good which must be affordable for all citizens, without any kind of exclusion regardless of economic, social or personal circumstances (García Sánchez, 2003).

Furthermore, as stated before, the main aim of social tourism resides in the facilitation of access to tourism for minority and underprivileged people. (Molina y Canovas, 2001). Together with the achievement in social tourism, Accessible Tourism focuses on the access to leisure and tourist activities for any individual, regardless of their capabilities. In this regard, the development of the independent life movement shows concepts like the one of

functional diversity, which pursues to establish a social model for disability. As Romañach states (2005: 5), this concept point out how “for the first time in history a change in the vocabulary presents a term which is not negative or pejorative”. Traditional concepts with a more negative meaning are abandoned and vanished from the academic and institutional languages (Romañach y Lobato, 2005; Palacios y Romañach, 2006; Ferrerira, 2010).

From the vindication of movements toward the inclusiveness of tourism both in the field of social inequalities and in the field of capabilities, one concept is able to join both interests in one only all inclusive phenomenon: Accessible Social Tourism, define as the set of initiatives aimed to promote active participation of people with special needs (mainly accessibility and financial) in tourism, leading at the same time toward social and economic benefits for the society and the economic market (Garcés y Ferri, 2012).

Following this definition, it becomes necessary to clarify certain issued. First of all, to define who are people with special need. Secondly, wich are the social and economic benefits triggered by Accessible Social Tourism. As for the first question, are considered groups at risk people with disabilities, the sick, the elderly, refugees, economically deprived and minorities (McCabe, 2000). As a consequence of the progressive population ageing and the rising number of people with disability both in Spain and in Europe there has been an increasing demand of access (in equal conditions) to touristic and leisure activities.

As a result of those demands, social policy has launched intervention mostly in two sectors. First, in the development of equipment and infrastructures (Build, renovation and modernization), secondly, incentives for people. In both cases, innovative experience will allow millions of people to enjoy holidays, promoting a democratization both in travelling and tourism, with an expected sharp increase in those activities (Bélanger, 1993). Most international organizations have adopted this vision when projecting touristic expansion in a global scope, pursuing not only a guarantee to enjoy holidays and leisure time, but also to include periphery regions in the global circuit of international trade and Exchange, impacting therefore in the global development (Lanfant, 1980).

The social and economic profit of tourism is going to shape the trends of the tourism market from the point of view of the supply. Since social accessible tourism is a demanded good by the consumer, the market is going to find an opportunity for business and profit from these new formulas (Domínguez, Fraiz y Alén, 20011).

This transformation towards a more inclusive tourism is far away of being consolidated. Not only due to the existing barriers (not only the physical ones), but mostly because of the lack of information and training in the issue of Accessible Social Tourism by the people in charge of tourism retails. The case of Spain, one of the leading country in touristic activity, evidences how the actions in pursuit of more inclusive tourism has leded to a bigger social and human development.

Actions in the sense of promoting Accessible Social Tourism were the base to a social policy strategy focused on the development of healthy and active ageing thru the building of accessibility settings Ferri, Garcés, Durá y Sánchez, 2014). The consequences have been collected in a research paper, where the benefits were outlined. The active engaging in leisure and tourism activities lead to a better self- reported wellness, emotional wellness, self-reported health, personal development and better social support network, together with economic benefit both for private companies and public institutions (Ferri, 2013).