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## SOCIAL TOURISM- A FACTOR IN CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

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### Abstract

*Tourism has to maintain an individual and social balance, so that as well as providing personal fulfilment, it can be development in harmony with the human, natural and cultural environment and fit into a context of sustainable development. At the threshold of the third millennium, those of us involved in social tourism are faced with the emergence of threefold revolution:*

*- a revolution of the imagination and of creation in the development of new products and new services in response to the needs of a new and changing market;*

*- a revolution in management that must be bold and innovative, especially in the area of legal statutes ;*

*- a revolution of the heart in response to the needs of those excluded from globalisation.*

*Thus, the tourism becomes core part of the European Tourism Model, ready to cope with the challenges raised by the Lisbon Strategy (2002) which targets, for the next 10 years, "to turn the European economy into the highest performance economy based on knowledge and able to deliver a sustainable growth through high employment rate and a better social synergy". The work aims to highlight the benefits of tourism promotion, especially of the social one, in a wider context starting from the tourism enduring development principles up until it's position within the European and Romanian social policy.*

**Keywords:** European Tourism Model, social tourism, economic change

**JEL Classification:** L83, O10, O19

### I. Changes on a worldwide scale

Today, when the tourism through all it's components is the most developed industry in the European union, having the highest growth rate (2-4.5% a year as total revenue and 1-1.5% as new jobs creation) the actual tourism policy shows clearly it's contribution towards improving the quality of life (reducing the

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unemployment rate, protecting the environment, developing certain areas etc.).

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In this way, attention should be given to the challenge that the Lisbon Agenda raises for tourism, especially social tourism. As the strategic objective of the agenda is to make Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained growth, growth providing more and better jobs and greater social cohesion", it will be necessary to analyse whether social tourism contributes effectively and positively to this goal, how it achieves this, and how its contribution could be enhanced.

The general mobility of people is growing all the time for all manner of reasons, whether it is for work, emigration, immigration, leisure or tourism, and this calls into question the very identity of tourism.

Tourism is a world-wide phenomenon because it is of economic importance to all countries in a society who is going through unprecedented changes. The advent of new family structures (step-families, single-parents...), the growing numbers of people living alone, the increase in leisure time, the improvement in life expectancy and the general ageing of the population resulting from it, with its consequences on policies related to pensions and social security, are all profoundly changing the face of tourism.

Access to holidays for all, especially for young people in developing countries means specific products need to be designed for these customers.

Social tourism can provide original answers to these new social and demographic models, in terms of products and services. This is indeed the real challenge of the next few years. In much the same way, the problem of the emergence of a new customer base for tourism related to the expansion of tourism in certain countries needs to be addressed.

The expected increase in international arrivals and new flows of tourists requires the provision of appropriate products. And the industrialised countries are faced with the needs and expectations of excluded people, of populations stemming from emigration.

Consideration is being given and initiatives developed, here and there, to respond to the need to integrate those people 'left on the shelf' by globalisation.

More generally, tourism has to take up the challenge of sustainable development in all countries, whether they are industrialised or developing (such as the Mediterranean basin, Tunisia and the countries of Asia and Africa). Social tourism

must put its resources, attainments and values at the disposal of regional and local communities to help them achieve the best kind of socio-economic development.

Finally, social tourism has to be recognised as a participant in the social and mutually supportive economy. It can and must explore to its benefit the resources of the social economy of economic sectors other than its own to find sources of funding, new legal formulae (the mutual aid cooperative, for example).

New information technologies, such as the internet, represent a real opportunity to meet some of these challenges. It is necessary to adapt, use and learn to exploit their potential to the full so as to develop a strong network between those involved in social tourism, to improve the circulation of specific information and to move into the era of electronic commerce... in spite of any reservations there may still be regarding the security of transactions or difficulties of a legal nature. To confront the challenges of globalisation in tourism, social tourism organisations need to forge alliances in order to make themselves heard and put forward solutions.

## **II. The contribution of social tourism to social integration and to global development**

Tourism is a powerful driver of social integration, fostering contact with other cultures, places, customs and, especially, people: without travel, holidays and tourism, it would be impossible for people to meet, talk and acknowledge one another as fundamentally equal, yet culturally different.

This cultural exchange and enjoyment of leisure time is an important means of personal development, both for tourists and for those who receive them in their local environment. The cultural exchange generated by tourism is especially valuable for young people, enhancing their intellectual development and enriching their view of the world.

In the EU's case, social tourism could be effective in helping to build the Citizens' Europe. It is important to stress that the general opinion is that social tourism holidays should not be differentiated from tourist holidays in general, but should help with social integration.

General tourist holidays should provide social tourism groups with suitable conditions for enjoying their holiday and not the other way round. Clearly this implies that an effort has to be made not only as regards facilities, but also the type of service and hence the special training that workers in the sector should receive.

The conditions required for the development of social tourism are the same as those needed for an area and its inhabitants to see tourist activity as a driver of development. Insofar as communities can earn their livelihood from tourist activity, the local economy and social stability will be strengthened. As recommended by

many international bodies, tourist activity is a good antidote to wars and disasters of all types.

Tourism signifies welcome, exchange, the enhancement of local assets, friendship and communication between people, as opposed to war, which represents aggression, invasion and the destruction of nature. If one only loves what one knows, then tourism can encourage people to become closer and learn about each other, thus promoting peace, harmony and development. Social tourism can and should be reinforced, and should help to promote the conditions of equality, justice, democracy and well-being that enable the mutually-supportive development of all peoples around the world.

Tourism is possibly already and will certainly one day become the most powerful global industry, and one of the greatest contributors to employment, development, wealth and quality of life in its beneficiaries. While social tourism contributes to this economic strength, it is not yet sufficiently aware of its own power, its economic importance and, indeed, its ability to make the choice of destinations conditional on sustainability. Social tourism companies and bodies need to look beyond economic criteria when developing their activities.

One criterion that should be used is the creation of stable, high-quality employment, which is key to the sustainable development of a tourist destination. In particular, social tourism's contribution (whether it be great or small) to combating seasonality is a basic criterion when aiming for quality and stability of employment, and should form an integral part of the European tourism model. Public-private partnerships in the management of social tourism can serve as a useful instrument and indicator for meeting this criterion.

Although social tourism is an economic activity, it is also clearly a social activity, bringing benefits in this field. Visitors benefit on their holidays, tourism workers benefit in their work, and society as a whole gains. In the EU's case, social tourism is having an increasing impact on the construction of the Citizens' Europe and will surely continue to do so. Travel within Europe by as many citizens as possible can only lead to greater knowledge, understanding and tolerance.

The advantages of the social tourism's development and, implicitly, promotion, should be regarded in a wider context, by starting from the principles of the tourism's lasting development, continuing with the social European policy, and recovering in the Romanian one, thus:

- access of a larger number of people to the holidays
- stressing the „human” aspect of the tourism activity development
- tourism season's extension
- a better turning into account of the natural, cultural and anthropic potential
- reorients the tourism flows to less frequented areas

- offers conditions of maintenance for the receiving zones during the entire year
- socialisation instrument / improves the human relationships (social cohesion)
- rises the employment level
- economic development of the local communities
- it's a solution for the disfavored zones (mining, industrial..)
- growth of the life's quality at the society level.

It can be noticed that the social tourism, by its development, answers to many demands foreseen either in the general directions of the social policy (European and Romanian), either as basic principles of the tourism's lasting development (stated during the „Agenda 21” of the *UNO Conference for Environment and Development held at Rio, 1992*), in all the three big fields taken into account by them: economic, ecologic and social.

So, on economic level, it can be ascertained the fact that the social tourism can be a solution to the most difficult problem that tourism is dealing with, namely the seasonality. In this way, by a complex running and turning into account, during a longer period of time, it is ensured the increase of the returns from this field. The social tourism, by a sustained development, contributes to the reduction of the imbalances emerged between various zones and revitalizes the disfavored zones (with a very low economic activity, a low living level, diminished incomes of the population), being even able to prevent the occurrence of other imbalances.

Social tourism, by this extension of the tourism season, creates a safe labor market and redistributes the labor force made available from other highly restructured economic sectors (industry, agriculture etc.)

At the same time, by specific offers, the social tourism represents a way of developing the rural zones, by the expansion of specific offer's area and the creation of jobs in the rural regions, others than the traditional ones, improving the living conditions and rising the incomes of the local population.

On ecologic level, in the conditions of complying and promoting the principles of the lasting development (already recalled), the social tourism represents a means of protection, preservation and turning to account a country's cultural, historical and architectural potential.

In social context, the social tourism, by the access of a large number of people (regardless of their statute) to holidays, it is manifesting as an active way of education and increasing the people instruction and civilization level.

Briefly, the social tourism, by the contributions it brings to the three levels, leads to the increase of the life's quality, both for the ones who benefit of its offers, and for the operators in the tourism sector and the local community, on the whole.

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