

ADAPTATION OF SOCIAL TOURISM AS OF ALTERNATIVE FORM OF TOURISM IN EUROPE

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Abstract: Based on the scientific literature, statistic data and legal documents, adaptation of social tourism as a branch of alternative tourism in Europe and at the same time in Lithuania is researched in theoretical and practical aspects. The concept of social tourism, definition criteria and evaluation aspects are revealed; management of social tourism is analyzed: participants, conditions and principles. Special attention is paid to the evaluation of contribution of social tourism to generating national income and regional development, to analysis of the situation of social tourism in Europe and Lithuania as well as to future tendencies of development Objective of this article - to review differentiation of conception of social tourism, problems and challenges of exclusiveness.

Key words: alternative tourism, social tourism, stable tourism, regional development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Due to change of climatic situation and common tendencies of tourism, redistribution of established directions of tourist traffic tourist behaviour and guidelines of tourism policy also change unavoidably. European tourism, which was incontestable continental leader for a long period of time in a context of global tourism, faces new challenges, connected with earlier competitive growth and reorientation of tourism policy of other regions (South-East Asia, North and South America): from active use of resources to stable and focused development of tourism, affordable to all social classes.

The European Union, reacting to the changes in the tourism sector, actively supports alternative tourism (and social tourism as well), an area of tourism sector which is developing fast and which contains the strongest advantages of Europe such as natural diversity of Europe, abundant cultural resources as well as disadvantages such as decreasing birthrate, changes in the integrate parts of net income, determining of efficiency of activity, global competition and increasing discrepancy between economical reality and political reality.

Scientific problem. Alternative tourism is a popular term, however its exact meaning is still subject to discussions and its universal definition is hardly possible as category of alternative tourism is outstandingly wide, including a great number of tourism types, from well-known until the newest forms, which have one common peculiarity – they are alternatives of mass tourism (Novelei, 2005). It means that they are of small volume and frequency, and are connected with groups of people, having certain specific

interests, most commonly well-educated and having income above average. The most important forms of alternative tourism are the following: Cultural tourism, Social tourism, Ecotourism, Rural tourism, Health tourism, Urban tourism (Wearing, Neil, 1999). Currently, theoretical ground of social tourism is insufficiently studied in Europe, however, a great deal of comparative research is carried out, reports are prepared, in which it is sought to analyze and systematize various processes of social tourism. Analysis of this ground and further research encourage creation of European, and at the same time Lithuanian, model of social tourism.

Object of Research - social tourism as a branch of alternative tourism.

Objective of this Article - to review differentiation of conception of social tourism, problems and challenges of exclusiveness.

Tasks of Research:

- to review social tourism policy in Europe and Lithuania;
- to list criteria of social tourism values and analyze its roles;
- to outline effect and contribution of social tourism into dimension of European tourism.

Methods of Research – analytical method, method of generalisation and systematic method of analysis of scientific literature and documents.

2. CHARACTERISTIC AND EVALUATION ASPECTS OF SOCIAL TOURISM

First signs of social tourism were noticed during the period of industrial society at the end of XIX cent. as leisure became available not merely for predominant social class but also for well-earning working class (Sharpley, 1999). However, specific actions for development of social tourism were taken only in 1936 after the International Labour Organization adopted Paid Leave Convention (Convention No. 5237). Later, in 1948, it is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, that everyone has a right to rest and leisure, and also to reasonable restriction of working hours and periodic paid leave. So, it can be stated that social tourism arose due to activists, who claimed that leisure and leave is a birthright of people. After the II World War developments of social tourism appeared at the horizon of politics of some countries. Concurrently, different associations were being created: family movements, labour councils, federations, and etc., whose main aim was to develop social tourism (International Bureau of Social Tourism, 2009).

From scientific position social tourism became a matter of concern in the 6th decade as W. Hunziker (1958) referred to social tourism as to a noble ideal against discrimination and self-integration challenges in the current world. This opinion was supported by L. Minnaert, R. Maitland ir G. Miller (2006), who stated that social tourism is a tourism with additional moral value, main task of which is to bring mutual benefit both to service provider and service receiver in tourism services' exchange.

C. Hall (2000) defined social tourism as a result of tourism phenomenon, which became economically unsound element in the society. Similar concept of social tourism is introduced by the International Bureau of Social Tourism (2001), stating that all these concepts and phenomena occur in tourism due to participation of levels of society with low income, people travelling for religious reasons, elderly people, youth and disabled people, since their participation is possible only for certain social means applied.

I. Žalienė ir A. Sabaliauskaitė (2002) state that social tourism can be defined as journeys, which are paid from funds of trade unions, intended for social needs. It is a subsidized tourism and subsidies can be allocated by state, social and commercial structures in order to involve layers of society, having social support, into tourist traffic.

According to R. Bikmanienė ir kt. (2004), social tourism is defined more detailed as a service, which is paid by a service receiver, sponsors, state institutions, private organizations and other structures, provided to members of community travelling for

cognitive, professional, commercial, ethnic, cultural, recreational, religious, leisure, rehabilitation and other aims, and creating conditions for strengthening of relations between community member by helping them to intercommunicate, to better understand each other and, actually, to become integrated into society and to reduce social disjuncture.

The universal right to the tourism is supported by criterion of value, which form the ground for development of social tourism (table 1):

Table 1. Criterion of value
(Data source: International Bureau of Social Tourism, 2001)

Criterion	Discription
A right of majority to use tourism.	Number of people, who can currently enjoy their vacations, have significantly arisen due to popularity of tourism in the world. But there are still groups of people, for whom vacations are unavailable due to various reasons: lack of money, lack of attention of authorities for usage of social funds, passive actions of community organizations and nonprofits organizations
A contribution to a social integration	Tourism is an active means of social integration, which allows to open relations with other cultures, to get yourselves familiar with places, traditions, to perform cultural exchange, and to spend your leisure time meaningfully. Social tourism can efficiently assist in creation of civil Europe, i.e. to perform a role of a society creator
Creation of stable tourism structures	Social tourism, which is supported more by social preconditions than by economic ones, can assist in creation or preservation of touristic areas considering economic, social and environmental stability criteria. Management of various types of tourism is the main factor of stability of touristic areas. In fact, stability is a balance of different aspects of human activity, though in lots of underdeveloped countries, where tourism is considered to be the economic activity able to help them to deal with poverty, social tourism is just a criterion of development
Contribution to employment and economic growth	Whilst developing their activity, companies and organizations, managing travel business, should rely not just upon economic criteria of profit, but also criteria of social welfare: creation of stable, high-quality jobs, solution of seasonality and employment problems, cooperation of public and private partnership
Contribution to the world development	For majority of communities social tourism can provide an opportunity to overcome economic gap, crises and deal with difficulties in activity of various economic sectors. After communities will be able to live on the income received from tourism, local economics will become stronger and social stability will occur. Social tourism can and should be strengthened; it should help to provide equality, justice, democracy and welfare in the whole world, which are to establish conditions for solidary development of all people in the world. Social tourism is also a participant of regional development. Before a concept of “sustainable regional development” was started to popularize by international organizations, it was already used in the concept of social tourism.

Definition of conception of social tourism remains problematic due to diversity of opinions and different methods (e.g. statement of contents, expected results, aims and ideas) of defining social tourism aims. However, despite of different definitions, essence of social tourism remains the same – everybody, including those, who are at odds, has a right to rest and leisure after work everyday, every week and every year, in other words - universal right to the tourism, which is provided following principles of solidarity, stability and affordability. Social tourism is distinguished by certain peculiarities and it has some exclusive characteristics: trend, exclusive sources of finance, organized nature and wide popularity, specific product features and instruments for creation and implementation.

3. SOCIAL TOURISM: GUIDELINES OF MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPANTS

In order to distinguish social and unsocial aspects it is important to analyze factors and criteria, defining social tourism, and methods of social tourism management. In agreement with the International Bureau of Social Tourism (2001), it is possible to specify some criteria, which can be considered to be the guidelines of social tourism management and activity establishment:

- main aim should be an increase of tourism affordability for all groups, for which it is difficult to use services provided to them, or for one particular group;
- it is to be affordable for various groups and segments of consumers; it is also to be open for various forms of management and for different groups, which use social tourism services;
- groups, for which activity is intended for, are to be precisely defined: social categories, age groups, disabled people, following principles of nondiscrimination in respect of race, culture and social status;
- humanistic, educative, cultural initiatives and aims, and also initiatives and aims, connected with development of personality, are to be involved;
- economic activity is to be transparent, and profit is to be reduced until the level required in order to implement social aims;
- a product of social tourism is not to be connected only with money value;
- it should be sought to sustainably integrate tourist activity to the environment of the travel location;
- human resources are to be managed by encouraging integration, supported by high-quality work of staff of social tourism organizations.

Different institutions, working in the field of social tourism in Europe and administering it, contribute to the social tourism management:

- national federations and syndicates;
- public institutions, whose goal or one of fields of activity is tourism;
- associations of social tourism, sporting or cultural activity;
- cooperative institutions;
- trade unions;
- joint companies.

Social tourism participants are considered to be as follows:

- *European Union (EU) institutions.* EU institutions (Parliament, European Commission) carry out surveys, sound out opinions, make reports, connected with social tourism, at international conferences. The ground of their activity is to collect process and spread various social tourism experience, accumulated by European states, to encourage new initiatives of each state, connected with development of social tourism. (European Commission, Directorate-General for Enterprise, Tourism Department, 2006);
- *Governments of EU Member States.* Participation of governments of EU Member States in social tourism activity is different due to historical, ideological and social reason. In some states (France, Belgium, Spain) institutions of national, regional or local authorities render a considerable financial support mostly for development of local cheaper tourism and support the idea that all layers of society without exceptions have a right to enjoy tourism. Such funds are allocated for different groups: youth, elderly people, disabled people, socially supported persons, and etc. In other states, such as United Kingdom social tourism is not considered to be a phenomenon and is less supported by the state, and financial support by itself depends on a practical decision;
- *Employers and employees.* Business organizations of different EU countries financially support their staff members by organizing their vacations, presenting

traveller's cheques, and so on. Besides, companies are established, which expand their aims and activity in the social field by offering special products of social tourism for aged citizens, children and disabled people. After emerging of social tourism trade unions – organizations protecting rights of workers, actively participate in tourist activity in order to bring profit to their members. Their participation is shown by a support to material infrastructure: recreation centres, guesthouses, and etc., and also to specialized services. Experience of various countries (Portugal, Poland, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, United Kingdom) is different, but social tourism activity, connected with trade unions, exists almost in all countries;

- *Specialized associations and organizations.* Specialized associations and organizations comprise cooperatives of consumers, which have wide agency network in some countries, and are engaged in tourist activity together with organizations of youth, elderly people and environment protection. French agency “National Agency of Traveller's Cheques” can be attributed to such specialized organizations. This agency was established in 1982 as a public organization of industrial and commercial nature and after 28 years of functioning it remains the means of social policy useful for tourism. An interesting initiative of three organizations from United Kingdom (Family Holiday Association), Belgium (Toerisme Vlaanderen) and France (Vacances Ouvertes), which cooperate in organizing “tourism for everybody” in all three countries, is worth mentioning (European Parliament, 2005). The aim of mentioned organizations is to expand and spread their services between consumers and tourism specialists. In case of conclusion of agreements with other EU states such aim assumes international nature. It is an example of economic and social importance, where a benefit undoubtedly becomes comprehensive;
- *Groups, directly and indirectly connected with social tourism.* It is obvious that receivers of tourism services are main participants of various social tourism programs and activity. They are the first to use economic and social advantages, ensuring the opportunity to spend leisure and vacation by participating in chosen sporting or cultural activity. Furthermore, they can attend valuable local recreation, cultural and tourism resources, communicate with local inhabitants. It helps to achieve self-cognition and ensures rest and personal balance. Usually communities of areas, in which social tourism is developed, also make profit from it (employment, economic and development activities).

Any tourism organization (association, cooperative, joint company, fund, federation, non-profit organization, and etc.), which in accordance with its articles of association or definition of activity clearly matches social aims to make tourism affordable for larger number of persons (therefore, it is not restricted by a single goal – to make a profit)(World Congress of Social Tourism, 2006) can claim to membership and, at the same time management, of development of social tourism.

4. OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL TOURISM SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LITHUANIA

Situation of social tourism in Europe. From all those people, who cannot have a vacation, 40 % of Europeans don't have an opportunity to have a vacation due to economic reasons and disablement. So, it is not surprising that consideration is given to solutions of travel problems of disabled people both in “European Disability Strategy 2003-2010” and in Communication “On Situation of Disabled People” approved by the European Commission in 2007, and the United Nations “Convention of Rights of Disabled People” was signed by all EU Member States, except Latvia (Fifth European Forum for Social Tourism, 2009).

According to the data from the European Commission, about 70 % of people with disabilities could travel under favourable conditions – after adjustment of tourism infrastructure. An example of Germany would be illustrative and useful enough. Among a great number of social activity organizations the most popular are the Federal Self-Help Association for People with Disabilities (BSK) and the National Tourism Coordination Agency (Natko), which organize journeys for people with physical disabilities. Each journey is accompanied by a special guide; companies, providing accommodation services and excursions, and information, connected with problems of travelling of disabled people, are checked in advance. Such Web-sites as “www.you-too.com” inform disabled people about a possibility to enter public buildings, events, and visited places. Information of similar nature considerably facilitates active journeys of disabled and elderly people. Other example would be German Railways (Deutsche Bahn), which provide their services to disabled people starting from travel planning, boarding, exit, transshipment and finishing by the equipment, adjusted for a wheel-chair, in trains, train stations, and etc.

Part of elderly, unemployed and retired citizens, having sufficient European living standards, actively participates in the tourism market; they are consumers of alternative tourism, especially health and second-home tourism. The phenomenon of the “second-home” is especially popular among elderly people in traditional countries with national welfare model (Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom). According to the data for 2005, the major part of “second-homes” was purchased by residents of Scandinavia, Britain, and Finland, where the number is especially high – 26 %. Thus, “purchase of second-home” in countries of Southern Europe in order to spend the cold season near the Mediterranean Sea can be called a tendency. Number of this segment amounts up to approximately 800 000 and is increasing each year. But still, financial independence is typical for smaller part of European citizens of retiring age. For the rest part of elderly and disabled people travelling problems are often connected with social disjuncture, mobility obstacles and lack of financial ability. According to Eurostat data, 7 of 10 journeys of inhabitants above 65 years are local and short-distanced, and only 41 % of people of the same age group travel once a year with duration of journey of 4 days or longer (Urhausen, 2008).

EU young people (14-24 years) comprise only 15 % of all tourists (statistics of 2006). A survey, carried out by the European Commission in 2007, specifies reasons, which condition low percentage of youth travel: financial reasons, restricted knowledge of foreign languages, lack of information, fear of mobility and little-known places, passport problem, cultural reasons. Mentioned reasons are tried to eliminate by means of EU structural funds, youth organizations, whose activity is focused on youth engagement and increase of socialization. (Survey Results on Youth Tourism in Europe Union, European Commission, 2007).

Encountered political, demographic and sociopolitical tourism problems are solved by various European institutions, governments of separate states, international organizations, private companies, which create a development model of initiatives of social tourism future. For the development model of initiatives of social tourism to become in future one of the main component parts of the European tourism model, it is necessary to implement certain criteria:

- to allocate support from economic, territorial and social point of view to groups, which mostly need such support. Especially to groups with physical or psychical disability, or to those, for whom it is hard to travel due to reasons, which are conditioned by geographical position, e.g. for those, who live on European islands. For this reason travel expenses will be partly covered equally to everybody regardless of journey and stay duration in order to help all people, who are at odds;
- to be economically and socially profitable within short, average duration and long period both at public and private levels;

- to help in creation of stable, high-quality jobs during the entire year. In order to implement aim of engagement centralized management is necessary and efforts to extend a stay in tourism institutions to the maximum;
- to ensure personal and social improvement of both people, using tourism services, and host communities;
- to retain high-quality services, complying with specified requirements;
- it is pursued under the condition of cooperation of public and private sector.
- implementation of this model is not a short-term or easy task, there are still a lot of ambiguities and difficulties:
- high/low season phenomenon in Northern and Central Europe, and on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea; it is empty there during off-season and there is a lack of appropriate infrastructure, which would operate during the entire year;
- due to emigration number of employed people increased a lot, so it is necessary to develop economic activity in order to retain the same living standards;
- a lot of places of interests, emerged in the world, which offer competitive and innovative products and services;
- inappropriate use of human resources during off-season and mid-season.

In summary, it is possible to state that social tourism can become powerful means of encouragement of information, mutual understanding of people and solidarity of nations. It can help to create civil Europe by spending leisure pleasantly, travelling, and vacating without any sacrifices and misery (EU Parliament, 2001).

Situation of social tourism in Lithuania. According to the data of Lithuanian Department of Statistics for 2008, residents of Lithuania didn't take a journey through their country due to high workload (30 %), insufficient income (20 %), health problems (18 %) or family obligations (5 %). Only 5 % of respondents refused a journey due to their reluctance to travel. The remaining part of respondents, who wants to travel, but due to certain obstacles cannot do it, is the object of social tourism in Lithuania. It would be expedient to analyze problems of social tourism by parts, i.e. situation of youth social tourism, social tourism of elderly people, and social tourism of disabled people in Lithuania.

The EU brought out its opinion several times that tourism is especially important for young people as cultural exchange, which occurs during it, has an influence upon their world view and formation of personality. Activity of youth tourism is pursued by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania, Youth Department under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, private organizations and youth tourist centre. Youth tourism in Lithuania is pursued in two directions:

1. As a social tourism;
2. As cognitive, educational, socialization activity.

Youth tourism in educational sense is mostly pursued at the level of schools and higher educational institutions; it is an acknowledged means to solve matters of tolerance and engagement training. Within the territory of Lithuania a significant consideration is given to youth tourism, however, less attention is drawn to youth social tourism, when young people cannot travel due to financial or other reasons.

Disabled people, protecting their rights and interests, and their organizations can rely upon the Law on Social Integration of Disabled People of the Republic of Lithuania with supplements. According to it, conditions are to be provided for integration of disabled people into society; it is obligatory to guarantee their rights and equal socialization opportunities (one of them – development of social tourism). However, tourism of disabled people encounter certain problems:

- maladjustment of environment, public buildings, transport and provision of accommodation services for needs of disabled people;
- problem of access to information;

- communication problem.

General programming document provides the information that almost all tourist objects and objects of cultural heritage in Lithuania are not adjusted for disabled people – there are no necessary platforms, wheel-chair ramps, lifts, and etc. Situation is likely to improve as for application of EU support it is required to adjust projects for needs of disabled people.

Social tourism is especially related to elderly age group. The main reason of impossibility to use tourism for this group is their lack of finances. According to the data of Lithuanian Department of Statistics for 2008, almost half (43 %) of all consumer spendings were spent by households of elderly people to buy food, and as many as 22 % of residents of this age group live below poverty line.

EU tourism policy turns to social tourism in 1996 and since then a constant attention is drawn to this tourism direction in all important documents, and in regulatory enactments of Lithuania social tourism is rarely mentioned. According to the Law on Charity and Sponsorship of the Republic of Lithuania, financing of social tourism can be provided. Though the law is not perfect, it is stipulated in it, when and for whom state tax credit, customs tax credit, and state duty credit are to be applied. Disabled people, afflicted persons, lonely elderly people and those, whose income cannot guarantee subsistence minimum and doesn't allow full integration into the society.

Similar statement is made in the Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania that social services and aid can be provided to people by various non-monetary forms and custodial money. The aim of social services is to satisfy living needs of a person and to provide living conditions, which would not violate person's dignity, if a person itself is not able to do it, and also to return to people ability to take care of themselves and self-integrate into society. One of methods of social integration could be development of social tourism services.

Hence, it is possible to state that social tourism in Lithuania is more a social or political problem than a deliberately developed form of alternative tourism. Little attention drawn to opportunities of social tourism development from political, economic and social aspect. Social tourism is not even mentioned in main tourism policy planning documents: National Program of Tourism Development for 2007 -2013, Law on Tourism of the Republic of Lithuania, and etc.

5. CONCLUSIONS

At the moment social tourism in various European countries is understood differently, however, there are three main features: the presence of free time for holiday, financial resources to travel, the existence of a network, structure or means which these rights become available in reality.

Social tourism in Europe is developed by different specialists, there are developmental forms, objective groups, financial means and so on. All this enriches it, determines diversity, helps to create it and develop. The activity of social tourism can be used by all European local communities because it helps to protect cultural and country heritage. For groups using different services of social tourism especially disabled people or people with limited mobility such programs have a very high importance for them as personalities in order to integrate them fully to life.

Lithuanian social tourism is not developed and meets with a lot of disadvantageous reasons for that: a lack of popularity, disfavor of legal base, different financial and even psychological reasons of consumers of social tourism. It can be stated that social tourism in Lithuania is more a social problem rather than a branch of tourism which is being developed consciously.

Development of social tourism in Europe is based on such criteria: the right of the majority to use tourism, the contribution of social tourism to social integration, the

creation of structures of stable tourism, the contribution to employment and economical growth, the contribution of social tourism to the development of the world. The criteria mentioned above contributes to the creation of the valuable roles in the society: social tourism is “the former of the society”, the one who encourages the economical growth, a participant of the regional development and a partner of programs of global development.

It is economically beneficial and socially desired to create an international European platform of social tourism. Its implementation would ensure the economical growth and employment, it would create a possibility to create a model of European tourism. Social tourism can be a powerful means of promotion of information, people’s mutual understanding and solidarity of nations. It can help to create civil Europe not sacrificing or suffering, but spending free time, traveling or having a holiday with pleasure. Finally, at the moment social tourism is full-rate activity, which is developed in the majority of European countries and which has good managerial and organizational structures. So, social tourism can be developed in all countries and can render services in other countries, it means it is a moment when everything is ready for the qualitative and quantitative change.

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