Social Tourism Inquiry
The social and economic benefits of social tourism

Submission of International Social Tourism Organisation

The International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO) has been invited to present its view on the social and economic benefits of social tourism within the framework of the inquiry into social tourism organised. ISTO is very pleased to see the interest of the British Parliament through the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Tourism for this issue and wishes to cooperate as much as possible in order to raise the profile of social tourism in the UK. As proposed in the document prepared for the inquiry, ISTO comments will deal with the definition, the benefits, the access to and the promotion of social tourism.

Defining social tourism

Although the concept of “social tourism” has been defined in different ways, it is worth to remind some basic definitions and principles recognised by the main stakeholders. In its new statutes adopted at its last General meeting in September 2010, ISTO states that social tourism can be defined as “the connections and phenomena related to the participation of people in the countries of destinations as well as of holidaymakers, of disadvantaged layers of society or those unable to participate in tourism, holidays and their advantages for whatever reason.” The statutes also mention that “this participation is made possible or facilitated by a combination of policies, clear social measures and the commitment of social players”.

This is a key point that has also been recognised by the World Tourism Organisation Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in its article 7 (right to tourism) where it is clearly specified that “social tourism, and in particular associative tourism, which facilitates widespread access to leisure, travel and holidays, should be developed with the support of the public authorities”.

In the opinion adopted in 2006 by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), it is interesting to note their approach to define social tourism. They mention “that an activity constitutes social tourism whenever these conditions are met:

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• Real-life circumstances are such that it is totally or partially impossible to fully exercise the right to tourism. This may be due to economic conditions, physical or mental disability, personal or family isolation, reduced mobility, geographical difficulties, and a wide variety of causes which ultimately constitute a real obstacle.

• Someone – be it a public or private institution, a company, a trade union, or simply an organised group of people – decides to take action to overcome or reduce the obstacle which prevents a person from exercising their right to tourism.

• This action is effective and actually helps a group of people to participate in tourism in a manner which respects the values of sustainability, accessibility and solidarity”.

ISTO’s work is precisely to promote access to leisure, holidays and travel for all, through information, research, projects and representation activities with the different stakeholders. With more than 170 member organisations in nearly 40 countries, ISTO is the main international organisation entirely devoted to this issue.

Benefits of Social Tourism

The benefits of social tourism have their roots in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that all human beings have the right to rest, leisure time, a limit to working hours and the right to paid holidays. ISTO has clearly identified them in its Montreal Declaration “Towards a humanist and social vision of tourism” adopted in 1996. These benefits are presented within four main axes:

• Social tourism is “a shaper of society”: it is clearly mentioned “that holidays and travel can provide particularly apt occasions for personal enrichment, through the discovery of new places, cultures and civilizations, through physical, artistic, sport and leisure activities, by meeting people across educational or generation divides, and by other responsibilities taken on freely by tourists”.

• Social tourism is a promoter of economic growth: “tourism for all is a key to economic strength which generates a continuous flow of people and investment, which contributes to regional development, produces national and international wealth and stimulates the transfer of resources from the richer economies to the poorer countries”.

• Social tourism participates to the regional and local development: “long before its promotion by international organisations, the concept of sustainable development had been adopted by social tourism and expressed in the following aims : reconcile tourism development, environmental protection and a respect for the identity of local communities; bring fresh resources into neglected resources; promote development without depletion of resources; generate local and economic, social and cultural benefits”.

• Social tourism is a partner in global development programs: “tourism, when it is controlled and when it respects the natural and cultural environment and local communities, constitutes one of the economic, social and cultural hopes of many developing countries”.

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Several studies based on good practices in this field have demonstrated these benefits. It is the case of the **Holiday Programmes for Seniors** launched in 1985 in Spain by the Institute for the Elderly and Social Services (IMSERSO). It gives the opportunity to seniors, under certain criteria linked to the age and the income level, to travel during the off season contributing to the well-being of seniors and to maintain employment level in tourist areas during low season.

It is also the case of the **Holiday Voucher** created in 1982 in France and managed by the National Agency for Holiday Vouchers (ANCV) which allows employees and civil servants to go on holiday with their family with several benefits for people and the tourism sector.

Another good practice which has been mentioned in the 2010 Determine Report entitled “Mobilising Action for Health Equity in the EU”, is the **Holiday Participation Centre** founded in 2001 by Tourism Flanders in Belgium which is working with public and private donors to enable low income families and other people who are usually unable to go on a day trip or holidays, to do so.

These benefits have now been recognised by the European institutions with the adoption in December 2008 by the European Parliament of a preparatory action on social tourism called “**Calypso**” with a budget of 3.5 million € for the period 2009-2011. The decision to launch this action is important and constitutes the first European initiative on social tourism, whose main goals are to generate economic activity and growth across Europe, improve seasonality patterns, create more and better jobs in the tourism sector, promote social cohesion and increase the European citizenship through tourists exchanges, mainly during the low season for four target groups: young and elderly people, people with reduced mobility, and low income families.

More studies are certainly needed in order to calculate the social benefits of social tourism and show the cost of not allowing citizens to go on holiday. With more figures on this aspect, governments would easily understand the importance to support “Tourism for all” through different mechanisms involving the public, the private and the social stakeholders. At the public level, social tourism requires the participation of different branches of the government since it is not only an issue for the tourism authorities but also for the social ones.

**Access to social tourism**

According to the latest Survey on the attitudes of European towards tourism (Flash Euro barometer) published by the European Commission in May 2011, 2/3 (68%) of the European citizens had travelled for private reasons in 2010 but only 56 % went on holidays (4 consecutive nights outside of their home). This confirms that, today, **44 % of the European citizens do not go on holidays, which represents an increase of 2% compared to the situation two years ago**. The situation is very different from one country to another. If in the Scandinavian countries like Sweden more than 85% of the population go on holiday, the rate is much lower in the new EU member states with departure rate of about 20% in countries like Bulgaria, Romania or the Baltic countries.

The reasons for not going on holidays may be quite different but roughly 4 out of 10 (41%) of EU citizens who had not gone on holidays in 2010 said this was due to financial reasons. The results of the survey also indicate that financial reasons as an obstacle for not having gone on holiday in 2010
were cited more frequently by 25-54 year olds, respondents with low and average levels of
education, manual workers and respondents living in urban areas. All other explanations for not
going on holidays were selected by considerably fewer respondents to the survey: 22% stated
personal or private reasons, 11 % said they had no time and 9 % had preferred to stay at home or be
with family and friends. A minority of respondents said they had not been motivated to take a
holiday in 2010 (3%) or preferred to just make short trips (3%).

It is interesting to note that the largest proportion of holidaymakers across EU (36%) said that the
major motivation for their main holiday in 2010 had been “rest and recreation”. A share of 18% had
wanted a sun/beach holiday and 17% said the main objective had been to visit friends and relatives.
City trips, nature and “culture and religion” as an objective, were each selected by less than a tenth
of holidaymakers (7%-8%).

With the recent economic crisis, we should expect that the proportion of EU citizens who will not be
able to go on holidays in the near future, should at least be the same or continue to increase if there
are no new measures or mechanisms implemented at the EU level or in the countries where there
are no social policies in tourism.

**Promoting social tourism**

An organised approach to social tourism at national, regional or local level should be based on the
two traditional types of initiatives existing in the traditional countries having social tourism policies.

The first one deals with the so called “infrastructure subsidies” or how infrastructures are built or
renovated with public or social support. In several countries, the impact of such support made it
possible to keep the cost of holidays as affordable as possible for the holidaymakers and to organise
cultural, educational, environmental and sport activities adapted to the need of the different groups
(families with young children, teenagers, seniors,). The *Holiday Villages for families* (VVF) in France,
the holiday centres of the Floreal Club in Belgium, those of the INATEL Foundation in Portugal, the
youth accommodation managed by the Centro Turistico Giovanile in Italy but also the whole youth
hostel movement operating not only in Europe but in more than 80 countries around the world are
good examples to be mentioned.

The second type of initiative which is today the most important one, deal with the “holiday support”
which refers to the way public and social bodies help individuals to go on holidays through specific
programs or systems. Examples of holiday voucher systems, not only in France but also in
Switzerland, Hungary and Italy are very well known as well as other good practices such as the “Sac à
dos” operation for young people used in different regions in France and others mentioned earlier.

The role of the public authorities in the promotion of social policies in tourism is fundamental.
Today, according to the study made within the framework of the Calypso project, there are 10
countries, at state level, that have for a long time or more recently developed a real policy in favour
of social tourism or social actions. These countries are Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary,
Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. In the other countries, whether they don’t have policies or
the policies are managed at regional level like in Germany through the “Länder”.

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At its last international conference in 2010, ISTO and its members called upon the public authorities “to adopt social tourism policies that include in their objectives the accessibility of tourism for all, that confirm the importance of social tourism, mainly in the development of domestic tourism and the regional development, that provide practical means of action and that favour the mobilisation of all tourism stakeholder, both public and private, in search of concrete innovative solutions in collaboration with large organisations of social tourism with the trade unions”.

To conclude, ISTO believes that in our societies, the impossibility for the citizens of going on holiday is part of the “social and health inequities” that must be reduced with the participation of all the stakeholders concerned by this issue. It includes the public authorities who should be more aware of the social and economic benefits of “Holidays for all” and the cost of not helping certain groups of the population to go on holiday.

Brussels, May 18th 2011

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