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Inquiry into Social Tourism: Call for Evidence

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Defining social tourism

How do you understand the concept of social tourism? How does it relate to the work of your organisations?

- Social tourism is interpreted and implemented in various ways across Europe. To incorporate these different perspectives, we have defined it in our work¹²³ as **‘tourism with an added moral value, of which the primary aim is to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange’**. This definition highlights the social benefits of social tourism for the tourist themselves, and the economic benefits for destinations and society more broadly.
- The three authors of this submission have been active in practicing and researching social tourism since 2000. We have published extensively in academic, as well as industry journals on social tourism. In 2010, we were awarded a grant by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to create a network of academics, industry practitioners, government and non-governmental workers to investigate the potential value of social tourism. The University of Surrey and the University of Westminster are two of the principle centres for the study and research of tourism in the UK.

Benefits of social tourism

What improvements to an individual's or family's general welfare can be delivered by having access to a holiday?

¹ Minnaert, L., Maitland, R. & Miller, G. (2007), ‘Social tourism and its ethical foundations’, *Tourism Culture & Communication*, Vol. 7, 7-17

² Minnaert, L., Maitland, R. & Miller, G. (2009), ‘Tourism and social policy – The value of social tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 36 nr. 2, 316-334

³ Minnaert L., Maitland R. & Miller G. (2011), *What is social tourism?*, Editorial, Special Issue on Social Tourism, *Current Issues in Tourism*, nr 5

Research conducted by the authors shows three main types of benefits to the tourists⁴:

- **Individual benefits:** social tourism led to increase in self-esteem, expansion of social networks, skills development and improvements in mental health
- **Family benefits:** closer family ties, changing parenting styles, adaptation to new family structures
- **Societal benefits:** as a result, participation in social tourism can lead to participation in education and paid work, and to more pro-active and positive attitudes towards other forms of social intervention, such as marriage counselling and encouragement to attend school.

What specific welfare issues could be more effectively tackled through social tourism?

- Our research evidence⁵ has shown that social tourism can be a cost-effective form of intervention – to be used independently or supported by other interventions - to tackle a wide range of welfare issues. It can further the integration of dysfunctional families, reduce mental health problems (which often lead to joblessness), reduce social isolation, increase independence, and enhance willingness to participate in other programmes. In doing so it can reduce welfare spending elsewhere, for example on payment of Employment and Support Allowance⁶ or treatment for depression. As such it could be justified as a part of welfare policy.

How could social tourism be incorporated into welfare policy?

- In several countries of mainland Europe (France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy) social tourism is part of public policy. Implementation forms vary and include voucher schemes, subsidies for the construction of holiday facilities, public-private partnerships and subsidies for targeted disadvantaged groups. In the UK, no specific social tourism policy exists, although some Councils provide holiday grants on an individual basis, and public funding is available for respite breaks.
- Incorporating social tourism into UK welfare policy will require more extensive evidence that social tourism can consistently deliver the range of benefits our research to date has shown are possible.
- The term ‘social tourism’ will make policy makers nervous of receiving unwanted and unwarranted criticism for supporting ‘holidays for the poor’. Work is required to overcome these presentational challenges. The ESRC funded project we are currently working on has the specific aim of working with welfare policy specialists to establish how social tourism can take its place as a potential welfare policy tool.

⁴ Minnaert, L., Maitland, R. & Miller, G. (2009), ‘Tourism and social policy – The value of social tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 36 nr. 2, 316-334

⁵ Minnaert, L., Maitland, R. & Miller, G. (2009), ‘Tourism and social policy – The value of social tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 36 nr. 2, 316-334

⁶ Previously Incapacity Benefit

What are broad economic benefits that can be obtained through social tourism?

Social tourism produces a range of economic benefits:

- It can bring new customer groups to declining domestic destinations, extend the season to increase revenue and so lengthen labour contracts - simultaneously reducing dependency on benefits outside of the main tourism season and increasing tax revenue. This could be of particular interest to declining coastal destinations, which often experience high unemployment levels and are affected by disproportionate levels of social exclusion, reflecting an influx of weaker socio-economic groups. As the tourism industry relies heavily on low skilled labour, social tourism could produce accessible employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed – combining social and economic benefits.
- The nature of tourism means that a range of industry sectors benefit from the introduction of social tourism. They include not only accommodation facilities and attractions but also transport providers (trains, buses, coaches, taxis), the hospitality and retail sector, and cultural industries (museums, theatres, festivals). The health and social care sectors can also be involved (for example via specialised convalescence and respite holidays).

What would be the best approach to maximising any economic benefits? Which industries, communities and organisations will benefit most from economic improvements delivered by social tourism?

The answers to these questions depend on the objectives of social tourism policy, which are not always clearly defined. Our research has revealed a wide range of initiatives internationally, with differing objectives. Whilst all have the potential to benefit destinations, individuals and the tourism industry, they have different emphases and thus a different range of benefits. For example some focus mainly on providing economic benefits to destinations, whilst others target disadvantaged groups.

We have devised a social tourism matrix, which is reproduced in Appendix A

Access to social tourism

How aware are you of the social tourism environment in the UK?

- The authors are well-aware of the UK social tourism environment, but have also studied alternative models of social tourism across the world⁷. We have included in Appendix A an outline of different schemes operated in France, Belgium, Hungary, Spain and Brazil.

⁷ Minnaert L., Maitland R. & Miller G. (2011), 'What is social tourism?'. Leading article, Special Issue on Social Tourism, *Current Issues in Tourism*, nr 5

How do you believe this may change in coming years?

- The requirement for austerity in public programmes encourages innovation. We believe social tourism can contribute to more inventive and cost-effective public policy, and one objective of our ESRC seminar series is to investigate how it could do so.

What factors affect people's abilities to access a holiday in Britain? What can be done to encourage access?

There are four main reasons affecting the uptake of social tourism in the UK:

- **Financial restrictions:** Despite the established benefits for individuals, tourism remains a discretionary product and one that many people are unable to afford. This means people are reliant on existing charities in the field to offer holidays at no cost (Family Holiday Association) or at a highly reduced cost (Break).
- **Lack of travel experience:** While the majority of the population are experienced at taking holidays⁸, for some, tourism can be an overwhelming prospect. For this group, it is not enough just to lower the financial threshold: they may require help packing their bags (they may not have suitable luggage for example), planning their travel and activities together, or making care arrangements for family members at home. If this support is not in place, they may not take up the holiday offer, even if all expenses are covered⁹. Some social groups, such as immigrants, may also have cultural barriers to overcome as they may not be used to the concept of leisure holidays – often all travel is to the home country where there may be a strong duty to help family members, and limited focus on relaxation. Participation in social tourism could play a role in the integration of immigrants into British society.
- **UK approach to social tourism:** Social tourism in the UK is offered through charities, which are small and reliant on donations. These charities are unable to significantly increase the scale of social tourism offered because of a lack of resources.
- **Awareness of social tourism:** Given the small scale of social tourism offered in the UK, it is of little surprise that there is low awareness amongst residents, industry, government, and policy makers. This level of awareness is particularly low when compared against mainland European countries. Several local authorities in the UK do provide forms of social tourism, but a disinclination to use the term 'social tourism' militates against wider recognition of its benefits.

What can be done to encourage access?

Again, a precise answer depends on the objectives; our model shows that different objectives require different approaches. However, two general points can be made:

- **A new business model for social tourism:** Through demonstrating the social welfare benefits to individuals and the economic benefits to the UK tourism industry and tourism-dependent destinations, social tourism is an ideal candidate for social

⁸ 58% of the EU population take a holiday of 4 days or more every year (Eurostat 2008).

⁹ Minnaert, L., Maitland, R. & Miller, G. (2009), 'Tourism and social policy – The value of social tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 36 nr. 2, 316-334

enterprise development. This radically different business model would allow social tourism organisations to utilise social welfare budgets instead of being dependent upon charitable donations. This use of the welfare budget would have benefits not just for the recipient of the support, but unlike other forms of welfare support, social tourism will ensure benefits to the destination in which the support is provided.

- **Raising awareness:** The expanded practice of social tourism would demonstrate its benefits and so lead to greater awareness, so increasing both the supply and demand of social tourism. Constrained by the current model of practice, social tourism is unlikely to ever be upscaled to the level necessary to penetrate general awareness.

Promotion of social tourism

How can we effectively measure the benefits and development of social tourism?

- **Current research:** Methodologies existing for calculating the economic benefits of conventional tourism and these could be applied to the study of the impacts of social tourism. The authors have conducted research into assessing the social impacts of social tourism, and although these benefits are qualitative in nature, they are no less significant or real. Measuring the benefits and development of social tourism would not present a problem.
- **Further research:** What is needed is a commitment to longitudinal studies about the social and economic outcomes of social tourism. This kind of research would demonstrate the value over time that comes to individuals, families, businesses and society from social tourism, and would do so in quantitative and qualitative terms. More established forms of social welfare policy have longer histories of assessing the benefits of the policy. Social tourism must produce similar evidence if it is to be accepted as a valid form of social policy. From an industry perspective, work needs to be done to establish the barriers and opportunities to the commercial tourism industry expanding its supply of social tourism, as well as for destinations to encourage social tourism.

How could an organised approach to social tourism be delivered at a national or local level?

- **Evaluate alternatives:** Our review of approaches to social tourism reveals many different alternatives. While the context of the scheme has also been shown to be important, devising the most appropriate approach to social tourism will require more detailed assessment of the alternatives. We present a model to understand some of these differences in Appendix A. Our social tourism model is the first to analyse and evaluate different implementation forms and link these explicitly to their most likely outcomes. It has identified implementations that can be most beneficial to achieve social outcomes (and could be candidates for integration into welfare policies), and those that can be most beneficial to achieve economic outcomes (and could thus be candidates for inclusion in regeneration policies).
- Our current seminar series (NET-STaR) brings together academics, practitioners and policy makers to investigate to what extent, and how, social tourism can be

implemented in the UK. It is intended to stimulate debate. We extend an invitation to this network to all members of the all party parliamentary group (www.westminster.ac.uk/net-star).

- **Determine objectives:** As noted above, one of the important factors in explaining the different social tourism schemes that have developed around the world is the different goals they seek to achieve. In creating an organised approach to social tourism in the UK, overall objectives would need to be established and clarified.

What would the benefits of an organised approach or framework be?

- **Clarity of objectives:** An organised approach would have clear, defined and agreed objectives. This will help with introducing social tourism to industry, destinations, potential tourists and social policy officials.
- **Clarity in use of the term:** By having a single, organised approach to social tourism, the term could be better understood as it would stand for one thing. In this way, awareness would be raised and not diluted. Work could begin on creating a positive image of social tourism, without the risk that this message would be confused by other organisations using the term differently. It would also be much easier to gather consistent information on the extent and scope of social tourism.

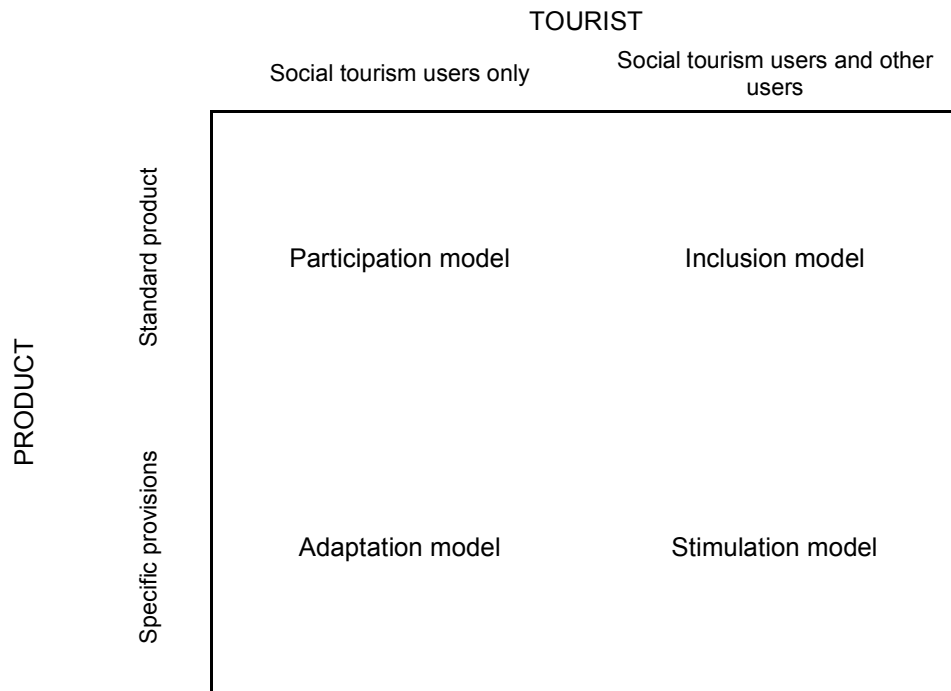
What role should the government play in the development of social tourism?

At this stage, there are two main roles:

- **Facilitator:** There are organisations that are willing and able to make social tourism happen in the UK. However, bringing together academic researchers, industry practitioners and social policy experts is a difficult challenge. Having the support and commitment of government to this process would help enormously and enable social tourism to move from being a small scale, charitable initiative toward becoming a valuable social enterprise, fit for the current social and economic environment. The All Party Group's initiative in setting up the Inquiry and stimulating debate is most welcome.
- **Centralised information point:** Government can play the roles of both the acquirer of knowledge, and a repository of information.

Appendix A: Social Tourism Matrix¹⁰

This model analyses and evaluates different implementation forms and links them explicitly to their most likely outcomes



- **Participation model:** Social tourism initiatives in this category operate strict eligibility criteria and are only open to disadvantaged groups in society. The tourism product is standard: the social tourism experience is the same as the experience of non-social tourism customers. The Family Holiday association fits in this category: it operates a set of criteria to determine who is eligible for a holiday, and offers holidays to commercial operators.
- **Inclusion model:** This model is also based on tourism products and services that are standard, but the programme is not limited to disadvantaged target groups. An example of this interpretation of social tourism is the 'Chèques Vacances' scheme in France. Companies participating in this scheme give their employees the opportunity of making regular savings for their holiday, and these are supplemented by the employers and social organisations. The companies and social organisations benefit from reduced taxes and social contributions. The employee can redeem the total value in the form of

¹⁰ Minnaert L., Maitland R. & Miller G. (2011), 'What is social tourism?' Leading article, Special Issue on Social Tourism, *Current Issues in Tourism*, nr 5

holiday vouchers, which can be used on a wide variety of items including lodgings, dining, transport, leisure and culture in France (thus encouraging domestic tourism).

- **Adaptation model:** These programmes offer a product that is specifically adapted to the needs of disadvantaged target groups. An example of this form of social tourism is Break, a charity in the UK providing short breaks and holidays for families with children with learning difficulties. The charity has four holiday centres where care staff are available to provide specialist care, and the centres have facilities for children with associated physical disabilities and high level care needs. The holiday makers pay around half of the cost of the stay, and the charity's fundraising activities cover the other half.
- **Stimulation model:** In this model the social benefits created for the destination are a key motivation for provision. Destinations or providers in this category are often affected by a decline in popularity and faced with spare capacity, particularly during the shoulder season, resulting in a lack of revenue and the need to terminate employment contracts. By attracting social tourism customers with specialised products during the shoulder season, a new market is created. An example of such a scheme is the IMSERSO programme for senior citizens in Spain. This programme offers dedicated holidays for senior citizens in coastal areas during the shoulder season. The holidays are financed through contributions by beneficiaries (70 per cent in a single payment) and the public sector (30 per cent of cost). Around 300 hotels participate in the scheme, which has benefited around 1 million participants in the 2008-2009 season and has been estimated to generate or maintain 79300 jobs. The Spanish government claims that every Euro invested yields 4 Euro's in tax, spend and reduction in benefit payments.

Each of the above interpretations finds an expression in social tourism practices today.

Social tourism types on the left side of the matrix are most suitable to achieve social benefits, as they are targeted and specialised. Social tourism types on the right side of the model are most suitable to achieve economic benefits, as their potential market is bigger.