

# SOCIAL TOURISM AS A BREATH OF THE CRISIS IN GREECE: RESEARCH ON SOCIAL TOURISM INSTITUTIONS

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## Abstract

*In Greece of financial depression Social Tourism is a breath for the citizens of the country providing them with the opportunity for economic holidays. Social Tourism programmes contribute to the country's wider economy and sustainable tourism development. Social tourism, as a form of Special Interest Tourism is a part of Experiential Tourism by giving the opportunity to members of society who are unable for various reasons to meet tourist needs by their own means, to do tourism. Through their participation in social tourism, people feel less excluded from society. It has both a humanitarian character and contributes to social stability. In this article the need to implement Social Tourism programmes, will be studied through the research of institutional framework and interviews of Greek Social Tourism Institutions. The aim is to highlight the importance of Social Tourism which implements holidays for low - income workers, youngsters, unemployed, farmers, large families etc.*

## Introduction

In modern, socially and financially developed societies, tourism is no longer regarded as a luxury or a privilege of few "noble" and rich. Instead, relaxation and recreation in the form of vacation is considered to be, especially for workers, the vital counterweight to their ever-accelerating working pace, the alienation caused by their unvaried work as well as the mental and physical discomfort caused to city residents in the degraded environment (WTO, 1999). The contribution of social tourism to diminish exclusion is reflected in the phrase "Not to exclude to segregate but to include and integrate" (English Tourism Board, 1989).

Compress of wages and incomes, austerity policy, rising unemployment rates and the increasing tax burden has led Greek consumers to the pursuit of combinations which ensure the lowest holiday prices. According to this, in Greece, social tourism helps individuals, families and generally vulnerable social groups with low incomes to be able to enjoy the goods of vacation, signing agreements, and making offers for the financial distressed people. In this way it could be argued that even in Greece social tourism assists to eliminate the phenomenon of social exclusion and social inequality (Sfakianakis, 2000, Kokkosis,

Tsartas, Griba, 2011, Venetsanopoulou, 2006, GNTO, 1985) and contributes to tourist development (Gilbert, Abdullah, 2004).

## **The Concept of Social Tourism**

In 1936, the International Labour Convention (ILO) agreed on the Holiday with Pay Convention (Convention n°52) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) also refers to the right to rest and leisure and periodic holidays with pay so, social tourism could be considered as an extension to the right to rest and holidays with pay (Kokkosis, Tsartas, Griba, 2011, Venetsanopoulou, 2006, Lytras 1998, Sfakianakis 2000).

Social Tourism according to the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS), is the set of relations and processes derived from subsidies by the State, under certain programmes so that social groups with low incomes are able to participate in tourism. (Ilgoumenakis, Kravaritis, Lytras, 1998: 128-129).

The Social tourism refers (Aguiar Eusébio *et al.*, 2012):

- To the right to rest and leisure with financial benefits.
- To programmes that enable all social groups and particularly youth, families, retirees, individuals with modest incomes and individuals with restricted physical capacity.
- To measures taken by governments to encourage holidays for specific groups with clear objectives.
- To tourism for people of a country or region with equal access to quality tourism.

Social tourism also refers to measures taken by governments to encourage holiday travel for specific groups with clear objectives. Tourism for people of a country or region with equal access to quality tourism (McCabe, 2009).

## **Research Methodology**

The methodology of this study was based on standardized structured interview because it (Howard, Sharp, 1996):

- offers valuable data which the researcher would not have the opportunity to uncover with other ways,
- contributes to investigate and record experiences, views, trends, attitudes, knowledge and historical material.

Interviews made on Social Tourism Bodies of Greece by census method (Annex 1). The structure of the interview is as follows. The first unit includes questions regarding the

legislation of the social tourism programmes. The second unit includes questions that have to do with the criteria for selection of beneficiaries. The third unit includes questions that concern the economic, regional and social development from social tourism programmes. The completion of the interview took place by direct contact. The time of completion was the same for all subjects and varied from 15 to 20 minutes. The research took place in a steady pace and was completed in November of 2014.

#### **Annex 1: List of Interviewees**

<b>Name &amp; surname</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Katerina Kousouri	Directorate of Social Benefits	Legal Office	11/11/2014
Anastasios Pechlivanidis	Directorate of Insurance Workforce –Dept.A6	Manpower Employment Organization (OAED)	12/11/2014
Glykeria Terzi	Legal Adviser	Worker’s Social Fund (OEE)	12/11/2014
Xenofon Verginis	Commander Agricultural Insurance Organization	Agricultural Insurance Organization (OGA)	13/11/2014
Athanasia Christou	Directorate of Social Participation Dept. of Educational, Political and Social Participation	General Secretariat for Youth Public Youth	18/11/2014
Anastasia Lekani	Directorate of Social Participation Dept. of Alternative Forms of Tourism	General Secretariat for Youth Public Youth	19/11/2014
Paraskevi Golfi	Directorate of Quality Control & Market Supervision GNTO	Greek National Tourism (GNTO) Organization	24/11/2014

## **Results**

### **Institutional Evolution of Social Tourism in Greece**

In Greece, the vacation allowance was introduced in 1962. In 1976 Greek National Tourism Organization under the Direction of Domestic and Social Tourism formed sections Domestic Tourism and Social Tourism (Presidential Decree 884/1976). The Worker's Social Fund organized trips and excursions for employees, for first time in 1977 (Law n: 678/1977 it was replaced by the Law: 2639/1998).

Social tourism as was first implemented in 1982, initially from the Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), the Worker's Social Benefits Organization and the General Secretariat for Youth (Board Resolution 7631/3-11-1982). In that first pilot programme 10,000 workers and pensioners took part in accomplishing a 7-day vacation by paying on average 250 GRD per person/day half board included (GNTO, 1985). Initially the GNTO served up to 200,000 tourists in contrast to the following years when this number significantly decreased and finally minimized in 1993. In 1983 the General Secretariat for Youth formed sections of Director of Leisure and Cultural Activities - Department of Leisure (Presidential Degree: 140/1983 it was replaced by Presidential Degree 274/1989).

With the passage of time many other institutions have implemented social tourism programmes. In 1995 legislated the holiday subsidy for pensioners of Legal Insurance who not receive pension from any other social fund (Presidential Degree: 225-1995 as it has been modified by the Presidential Degree: 176/2008). Also the Organization of Agricultural Insurance started to implement the Social Tourism for farmers and pensioners farmers in 2002 (Law Number 3050/2002). Finally social tourism programmes were introduced by Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) and they concern holiday subsidy for workers, unemployed and their families (Law Number: 4144/2013).

The biggest wound in the institution of social tourism came in 2012 with the abolition of Social Tourism programs from the Workers' Social Fund (OEE) as a result of the first memorandum for reducing public debt (Law Number:4046/2012). The Workers' Social Fund was one of the institutions with the greatest involvement in social tourism programs from 1982 where the funding for the implementation of social tourism was exclusively provided by employers' and workers' contributions. In these programmes were involved 1,154 hotels and 1,477 room rentals. As a result of the interruption 6,320 jobs were lost only in the accommodation area and approximately 150.000 beneficiaries lost the opportunity to participate in tourism with low cost.

### **Beneficiaries of Social Tourism**

The main criteria according to the Greek institutions for participation in social tourism programs are the following:

- Financial (taxable income)
- Marital status
- Age
- Main Insurance
- Rate of disability
- Not have participated in the program last year

The different groups of beneficiaries of social tourism programs are divided into the following social categories:

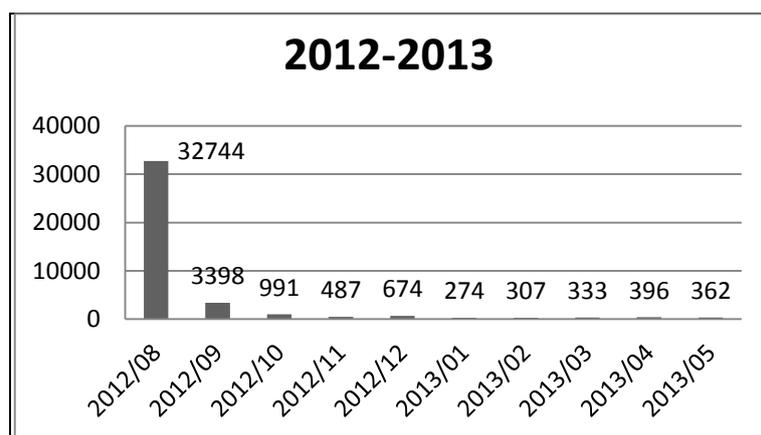
- Employees and their dependents with low taxable income
- Senior citizens
- Unemployed
- Farmers
- Individuals who are insured in Providence
- People with disabilities over 67% regardless of income
- Families with 4 children and more

### Indicative Statistics of Organizations Who Operate Social Tourism Programs

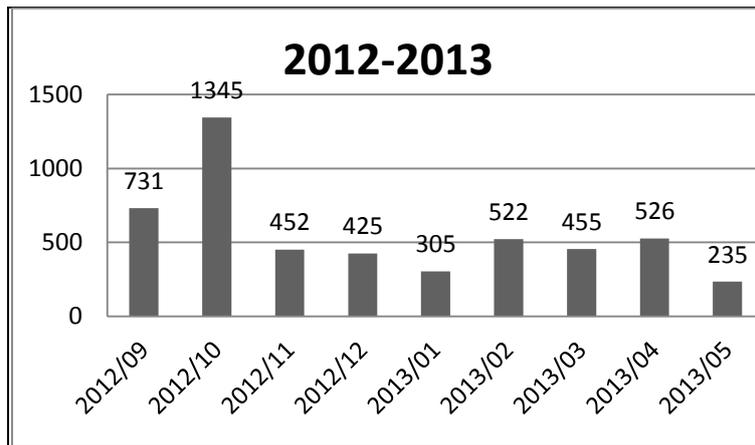
The Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO) is the main public stakeholder in social tourism sector. GNTO is the ruling State agency for the tourism sector in Greece and is a public entity supervised by the Ministry of Civilization and Tourism.

Specifically on social tourism, GNTO is in charge of the planning and the implementation of social tourism programs, such as:

- Tourism for All – 6 days holiday program (Figure 1)
- Tourism for All - program for senior citizens (Figure 2)



**Figure 1:** Example of the participation in Subprogram “Tourism for All” – 6 days holiday program per month



**Figure 2:** Example of the participation in Subprogram “Tourism for All” – senior citizens program per month

The most recent institution which implemented social tourism is the Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) in 2013. The program concerns the subsidy of holiday from one to five nights. Beneficiaries of the program are either employees with 50 days employment or unemployed who received 50 daily regular subsidies for unemployment benefits either registered unemployed in the Special Registers Unemployed Disabled of Manpower Employment Organization (OAED). At the following table it is depicted the number of vouchers which were accepted and used by the beneficiaries.

**Table 1:** applications and vouchers of the beneficiaries in social tourism of OAED

2013		
Applications	Accepted vouchers	Used vouchers
125.526	52.864	16.627

### The value of social tourism in the development of Greece

In Greece of financial depression social tourism is a breath for the citizens of the country providing them with the opportunity for low cost holidays. However, these programmes of social tourism contribute to the country’s wider economy and sustainable tourism development, helping to extend the tourist season and the regional tourist development. It contributes to social, regional and economic development.

*Social development:* Social tourism has a fundamental social content enabling vulnerable groups to participate in tourism. It enables individuals, families and generally vulnerable groups with low incomes to enjoy the goods of vacation due to the signing of agreements, and approval of offers in favor of the financially distressed people. In this way it could be

argued that in Greece, social tourism give to many people the opportunity to join holidays with low cost.

*Regional development:* social tourism favors regional development since it develops in areas far from the mainstream of economic activity and large cities. The choice of destinations in Greece is based on the geographical balance by focusing on destinations that are not crowded, including islands, mountains, rural places, less favored regions. Despite the activation of social tourism in distant areas, it depends on local factors to exploit the characteristics of each region, creating new job opportunities in areas far from the city centers, helping to increase decentralization and strengthen the Greek countryside and the province which has begun to be deserted.

*Economic development:* social tourism concerns 7-day vacation programmes and beneficiaries exercise this right during the middle and low season. This results in the elimination of seasonality and the extension of the season. Thus, the operation of tourism businesses, and tourism-affected businesses, has led to increased national income and consequently the improvement of citizens' living standards who reside in areas where developing social tourism exists.

## **Conclusions**

Although the democratization of travel and tourism has allowed thousands of people to enjoy their holidays, tourism is still not enough inclusive in Greece and in many other parts of the world.

With the crisis, the holiday departure rate has decreased over the last few years. The cancellation of social tourism program of Workers' Social Fund (OEE) created serious and unsolved problems to a significant number of businesses and to low income Greek beneficiaries of the programs

The Greek institutions of social tourism have identified tourism as a social good and as a developmental action at a local, regional, and national level. The contribution of Social Tourism is essential to Greek society because it contributes regional, social, economic development by reducing the seasonality and unemployment, promoting non-popular tourist destinations and giving the opportunity for vacation to vulnerable social groups

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