

Social Tourism: Tourism Students' Perception of the Phenomenon

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The purpose of this paper is a presentation of the phenomenon of social tourism; its definition, different interpretations and models are presented; social tourism beneficiaries and the positions of social tourism in different societies, socio-economic impacts and benefits that social tourism brings for individuals and society are also revealed. An empirical study of tourism students' perception towards social tourism was conducted in order to understand whether their understanding and attitudes toward the phenomenon change through educational intervention. The objective of the study was to identify whether a short educational course could influence tourism students' perception and attitudes toward the social tourism phenomenon. In our experiment, although a better understanding of the non-commercial character of social tourism and its social goals and aims was indicated after the short educational course, students still displayed a prevailing orientation towards the business aspects of social tourism. From the tourism students' perspective, social tourism is primarily perceived as a promising market niche and opportunity for future tourism development.

Keywords: social tourism, tourism education, perception/attitude change

Introduction

Holidays have become an increasingly essential aspect of social life (McCabe, Minnaert, & Diekmann, 2012, p. 2) and “tourism has become regarded as such an essential part of contemporary lifestyles in affluent societies that to be excluded from tourism is to be excluded from the norms of everyday life” (Sedgley, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2012, p. 951); in essence, tourism has become a societal norm (Ylikännö, 2013). However, many people cannot, in fact, access or participate in travel, whether holidays, short breaks or even day trips (McCabe et al., 2012, p. 3). Sedgley et al. (2012, p. 951) argues that “non-participation in tourism therefore makes a contribution to social exclusion that goes far beyond the immediate experience of being denied participation in tourism activities”. Lack of participation in an annual holiday is a meaningful indicator of material deprivation in the EU and, as such, it is included in the EU-SILC survey

(Eurostat, 2012). However, social tourism is neither a well-known or well-understood concept in tourism studies or across large sections of the tourism industry (Minnaert, Diekmann, & McCabe, 2012).

It is evident that social tourism provides economic benefits (EESC, 2006), e.g. increased employment, reduced tourism seasonality and greater economic activity and growth are becoming widely recognized for the tourism industry (Calypso initiative, 2010). However, it is very difficult to estimate the economic impact of the social tourism since “it is apparent that a few countries in Europe collect statistics in a way that allows the disaggregation of social tourism activity from mainstream tourism” (Diekmann & McCabe, 2013, p. 22). In the same research, some data about social tourism is presented “that in France 12% of the 45.4 million people going on a holiday were social tourists using social tourism infrastructures” (ibid). In contrast, social tourism, if it is done well, is

certainly socially progressive: “The term ‘social tourism’ is sometimes used too liberally, to justify initiatives that are mainly concerned with the profits and employment levels in the tourism industry” (Minnaert, 2012).

Accordingly, why it is important to study social tourism? If one can better understand the social tourism phenomenon, its social character, ethical values/foundations and the social (and economic) benefits that it brings, one can, as Minnaert (2012) once said, “make a huge difference to people’s lives” and generate increases in that added moral value that (according to contemporary definitions) are the essence of social tourism.

Social Tourism: Definition, Beneficiaries and Interpretations

Social tourism is not a well understood phenomenon, and its meanings vary depending on the time periods and countries under discussion. First, it recognizes the fundamental right of all to have leave from work and take a vacation; second, it acknowledges the importance of leisure and holidays as an exceptional occasion in the physical and cultural development of individuals, promoting their socialization and integration into their community of workers, as well as broader society (Jafary, 2000, p. 542). A similar basis for the development of the social tourism concept is presented in the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on social tourism (EESC, 2006, p. 3) stating that “the right to tourism is a keystone of social tourism – everyone has the right to rest on a daily, weekly and yearly basis, and the right to leisure time that enables them to develop every aspect of their personality and their social integration.” The phenomenon of social tourism and non-participation in tourism by disadvantaged groups has recently started to receive increasing academic attention in Europe (McCabe, 2009; McCabe, Minnaert, & Diekmann, 2012; Minnaert, Maitland, & Miller, 2013) and, parallel to this, a group of leading researchers in the social tourism field has been formed from the above-named authors. Various aspects of social tourism and its different practices/initiatives have also been researched by many other authors: Smith & Hughes, 1999; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Puczko & Rätz, 2013; Carretero, Ferri, & Garcés, 2013, to name just a few.

The term “social tourism” is not well known, and research by the Family Holiday Association conducted in the UK in 2006 showed that 68% of 273 respondents had never heard the term (McCabe et al., 2012, p. 19). There is also a lack of a single and precise definition of what social tourism is (Minnaert et al., 2013, p. 5). In the same research (p. 6), we can follow the progress of the definition of social tourism from the earliest definition by Hunziker (1971) as “the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements of society”, to Hunziker’s (1975) second definition of social tourism as “a particular type of tourism characterized by the participation of people with the low income, providing them with special services, recognized as such”, which brings us to the contemporary definition of social tourism (p. 16) 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”. Couveia (1995 in Diekmann & McCabe, 2013, p. 21) suggests that social tourism should be understood as a type of tourism whose primary or exclusive characteristic should be a non-commercial goal. Some other researchers follow very similar paths in explanations of the definition of social tourism (Diekmann & McCabe, 2013, p. 21), and it seems that a certain level of academic agreement exists in relation to the ethical improvement to the scope of the definition, as well in practical expressions of the social tourism phenomenon. However, it must be emphasized that social tourism research still needs further research before an accepted definition of the concept by the academic and research establishment can take place (Minnaert et al., 2013, p. 16).

A debate remains about who the beneficiaries of social tourism are. Social tourism has changed its focus from factory workers and manual labourers to youths, families, seniors and the disabled who represent the four principal targeted groups across the European context (Diekmann, McCabe, & Minnaert, 2012, p. 35). The Calypso Initiative (2010) defines those target groups more precisely by describing them as consisting of underprivileged young adults (aged 18–30), families facing financial or other pressures, people with disabilities, over-65s and pensioners who cannot afford travel or are overwhelmed by the challenges of organizing a journey. The same

research by Diekmann et al. (2012) states that consideration of these target groups is required, arguing that “not all young people, senior citizens, families and persons with disabilities are excluded from tourism and should therefore be beneficiaries of social tourism and, secondly, these target groups do not cover all social groups that are excluded from tourism”; for example, single people between 30 and 65, midlife single women (Heimtum, 2012), single parents (Diekmann & McCabe, 2013), children living in poverty (Sedgley et al., 2012), children with chronic illnesses (Öneş et al., 2005) or terminal illnesses (Hunter-Jones, 2004). Diekmann and McCabe (2013, p. 26) distinguished between two major segments: working people and the unemployed; the first group benefits from social tourism through their unions or employers, and the second group mainly from state-backed schemes. It is indicated in the same research that in Germany and the UK, families mainly are targeted, including single parent families, adoptive and carer families, while Poland focuses mainly on youth and child holiday programs, and Spain mainly on seniors. Hall (2005, in Griffin & Stacey, 2013, p. 33) identifies several (previously mentioned) groups of beneficiaries when he states that, “tourism for all involves the extension of the benefits of holidays to economically marginal groups, such as the unemployed, single parents families, pensioners and the handicapped.” In this manner, the question arises as to who the target groups or beneficiaries of social tourism actually are? There is no single answer to this question, and European practice shows that different countries define groups of beneficiaries differently. Diekmann et al. (2012, p. 37) states that “there are also ideological differences between countries regarding the treatment of these groups; they could be targeted specifically for funding, to promote social accessibility or to increase holiday participation regarding the demographic or income criteria.”

The complexity of the concept of social tourism and its beneficiaries are also presented in a four-way model of different ‘interpretations’ of social tourism (Minnaert et al., 2013). This is the first attempt in contemporary research in developing a classification and interpreting different forms and beneficiaries of the social tourism phenomenon. The model is based on two main categories “tourist” and “product”, each with two different sub-categories. Social

tourists may be distinguished from other tourists and seen as a segregated group of “social tourism users only” or may be an integrative part of the mainstream tourism, i.e. “social tourism users and other users”. The second category is product, taking the form of a “standard product” or “specific provision”. Combining different sub-categories allows four different models to be introduced: the *inclusion* model, the *participation* model, the *adaptation* model and the *stimulation* model. The *inclusion* model encourages participation for many and most members of society, according to the principle “tourism for all”, while in the *participation* model, the disadvantaged are especially and actively targeted to encourage participation; social tourism initiatives in the *adaptation* model are specifically designed for persons who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged; in the *stimulation* model, social tourism is interpreted “as tourism that provides economic opportunities via travel and tourism for persons who are economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged (Minnaert et al., 2013, p. 7). Highly similar to the *stimulation* model is the phenomenon of ‘solidarity tourism’ which aims to introduce the tourist to concrete forms of solidarity with the host community; this solidarity can take two forms: the tourist may support a local development project or contribute to a fundraising initiative (Bélanger & Jolin, 2013, p. 106). In addition, the important role of underlying the ethical values that shape social tourism forms was revealed in research by Minnaert, Maitland and Miller (2006, p. 16), which not only helps to categorize different initiatives of social tourism, but also challenges its practitioners to assess the success of these initiatives on this ethical basis.

From the perspective of the ‘typical’ tourism consumer, probably no product labelled as ‘social tourism’ is appealing, since participation in social tourism activities is possible (mainly) via identification as ‘economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged person’. In this context, the Calypso Initiative (2010a) also explicitly claims that “Calypso shall be a concept, but not that of tourism for the poor” (p. 3). Within the Calypso document focusing on good practice, Inatel of Portugal, emphasized that the primary concern of their “tourism program for all” was to not stigmatize the participants of the project. Furthermore, in other countries, notably the Nordic ones,

there has been a hesitance towards the term “social tourism”; for example, “tourism for all” is the terminology used in Sweden. Therefore, one can surmise semantic and practical movements in social tourism from specialized supply towards more mainstream supply. The ‘tourism for all’ philosophy is often mentioned in order to minimize the ‘incriminating’ contexts of social tourism. Its goal is to include as many people as possible into tourism and leisure and, as cited by Bélanger & Jolin (2013, p. 106), “it is the role of the public sector to encourage and support holiday participation in the different layers of society and to develop strategies that are tailored to different target groups.” Semantically, the aim of such an initiative is to include and further open access to the wider population, not just for specifically targeted groups. However, the case is “that the countries with the most developed social tourism systems can actually be argued as less inclusive than they could be for unemployed and other marginalized members of society who remain excluded” (Diekman & McCabe, 2013, p. 28); that is true of countries where social tourism has been conducted under the umbrella of labour (union) organizations; for example, social tourism in France is very well developed but fails to reach and adapt to new forms of poverty and social exclusion (McCabe, 2009).

Social Tourism: Status and Social Benefits

The position of social tourism also differs according to different ideological and political/economic developments in European countries. Minnaert et al. (2009, p. 317) argues that the position of social tourism is different: while in several countries of continental Europe (e.g. France, Belgium, Spain) social tourism is supported by public funding and mostly takes the form of low-cost domestic holidays, in other countries (UK and USA) social tourism is a less well-known phenomenon, and rarely public funded. The basis for the provision in the first case is the perceived right of all to enjoy tourism (Minnaert et al., 2006), and social tourism is provided on the grounds that it increases equality between societal groupings. In the second case, social tourism is seen as discretionary activity, to which no right exists and any public funding in these circumstances depends upon utilitarian consideration, i.e. whether social tourism can confer net benefits to society as a whole. Accord-

ing to Ylikännö (2013), research re-emphasizes that holidaying can be dismissed lightly as a frivolous and hedonistic pursuit, something that people may enjoy in their lives, like expensive designer clothing or jewellery. Once, again holidays are understood to be a luxury and the access to them is not open to all.

The predominant ethical principles in different societies are the criterion for dividing societies into “socialized societies” and “individualized societies” (Minnaert et al., 2013, p.11): in socialized societies, the fact that “the stronger strata support the weaker will reduce the inequality between their members and thus become stronger overall”; individualized societies, in contrast, “do not support a priori duty of the stronger strata towards the weaker, but instead emphasize that the opportunities offered to one person should not limit the opportunities of another – every member of the society should receive equal opportunities, but this does not mean that the inequality between members should be reduced per se.” According to Minnaert et al. (2009), research on three discourses of Levitas (1998) on reducing social exclusion are presented: the redistribution discourse (RED), the social integrationist discourse (SID) and the moral underclass discourse (MUD). The role of social tourism within these discourses is different; from the RED point of view, social tourism provides low-income groups with holidays that they would not otherwise have; from the SID perspective, one can recognize that social tourism aims to increase participation in paid work for the host community (the author does not acknowledge this aspect); from the MUD perspective, social tourism increases social and family capital and reduces the presence of a number of behaviours that hinder the individual’s integration in society. Diekmann and McCabe’s (2013, p. 29) conclusion on the historical development social tourism and its present position is that “social tourism, although having been born out of an era dominated by social ideals and the worker movement, has elided into a policy framework driven by neoliberal social democratic principles”.

In addition, different social tourism initiatives/programs have different social benefits for their beneficiaries. For example, in the ‘tourism for all’ program (Calypso Report, 2010a), the social benefits of the program are highlighted and presented as ones that lead to greater social cohesion, offer experienc-

es between the different segments of society and do not stigmatize the participants of the project. In the literature, families with children especially are taken into consideration (McCabe, 2009; Sedgley et al., 2012). Nottingham University research shows that 77% of families were happier after a holiday, 70% were more optimistic and 74% had a more positive outlook on life (FHA, 2013). Recently, people with disabilities have also been recognized as an important market niche and different accessibility issues and/or tourism service provider/employee attitudes towards them are discussed (Ozturk, Yayli, & Yesiltas, 2008; Bizjak, Knežević, & Cvetrežnik, 2011), particularly in terms of better service, greater social inclusion and social benefits that they can gain from inclusion in tourism. Minnaert et al. (2009), Minnaert (2008) and McCabe (2009) have conducted research on the social impact of participation in social tourism by low-income beneficiaries and found evidence of benefits ranging from increases in self-esteem, improvement in family relations and widening of travel horizons to more pro-active attitudes to life and participation in education or employment. On an economic level, there is evidence that the development of social tourism can help to sustain jobs in the low season and generate income for host communities.

In addition to the previously mentioned benefits of holidays, other social benefits are presented in the study by Griffin and Stacey (2013, p. 34), including an essential break from (often stressful) routine and home environments; opportunities for social mixing by interaction with new people; higher life satisfaction; subjective well-being and enhanced quality of life (McCabe, Joldersma, & Chunxiao, 2010; McCabe & Johnson, 2013); improved mental and physical health and well-being; opportunities for personal development through new experiences in new environments; improved self-image and self-esteem; refreshment and improvement of relationships and establishing feelings of normalcy.

There is also evidence suggesting broader benefits, impacting individual and family well-being, and contributing financial and social benefits for society in general. Minnaert et al. (2009) claim that in countries where social tourism is an established part of public policy, its benefits are strongly asserted, while in countries where it is not established on a correct

basis, evidence that it confers benefits to participants and wider society is needed; furthermore, if such benefits exist, research is needed to investigate how they can be maximized cost-efficiently.

The development of social tourism in the EU faces significant constraints and, as stated above, has elided into a policy framework driven by neoliberal social democratic principles. Research emphasizes that "for social tourism to work" there needs to be, among factors, a focus on defining the social function/purpose and goals of social tourism, including identification of the benefits for supporting social tourism (Diekmann and McCabe, 2013, p. 29). It is crucial for future social tourism development to acknowledge that social benefits should be a core concern for all parties involved, public or private. Nevertheless, the boundaries between social and commercial tourism have become increasingly blurred, since traditional social tourism providers have to adapt to commercial demand and attract new customers, and commercial businesses turn to social tourism to attract business in the low season (Minnaert et al., 2013).

The aim of this research is twofold. First, to draw together literature on social tourism; second, to test the idea empirically through a study of how tourism students' perception and attitudes towards social tourism change during their period of study. The study was carried out using students from undergraduate tourism study programs. It is experimental, and it examines whether short educational, social tourism courses influence the tourism students' perception and attitudes towards the social tourism phenomenon. More specifically, the objectives of the study are: (i) to identify how tourism students perceive the different dimensions of social tourism before and after imposing the independent variable of a social tourism educational study course; (ii) to identify whether such a short educational intervention could influence tourism students' attitudes.

According to our aims, a hypothesis was derived:

Hypothesis 1: Short educational courses can influence tourism students' perception and attitude towards social tourism.

Due to the poor pre-knowledge of social tourism, the students did not understand the phenomenon well or had misconceptions about it; this actually represents the central assumption of our research,

and the research question was formed around it. It was expected that after a short educational intervention, the students' perception would be different and that their attitude towards the phenomenon would change.

The independent variable was the social tourism-based instruction. The experimental procedure planned for the group of students was tested on two different occasions: before and after the educational intervention. The group members were students of similar age and levels of education.

The dependent variable was students' perception/attitude towards social tourism. It was expected that social tourism education would affect students' perception of social tourism and would change their attitudes towards social tourism.

Research Methodology

The design of the study was experimental; A simple experimental design (a one-group pre-test-post-test design) was used. Similar experimental research among tourism students was also conducted by Bizjak, Knežević and Cvetrežnik (2010). At the beginning of the experiment, students were invited to volunteer for the research project. According to the study programme two groups of students were included: students of the undergraduate professional study programme and students of the undergraduate university study programme. Students of Turistica, the Faculty for Tourism Studies, University of Primorska, were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire on their perceptions of social tourism. After completing the questionnaire, they attended an 80-minute (first) lecture on the definition of social tourism and different interpretation/models of social tourism. Over a three week period, smaller groups of three to five students conducted independent studies on pre-selected topics about different aspect/topics of social tourism, including social tourism participation, families/children and social tourism, benefits of social tourism, holiday as a societal norm, subjective well-being and social tourism, social tourism and social policy, ethical foundations of social tourism, and charities and social tourism. In two additional 80-minute lectures (organized one week apart), the main findings of the individual group studies were presented to the entire group of students; comments were then elicited by a moder-

ator familiar with the experiment. At the end of the classes (three 80-minute classes; the total experiment period lasted one month from 17 December 2013 to 14 January 2014), the students were re-tested (with the same questionnaire). The data were computed using the SPSS statistical package. A Pearson correlation coefficient was used to analyze the perception of social tourism before and after the applying the independent variable of education; different correlations between indicators were expected before and after the testing. The t-test was also used to analyze the differences between these the two different occasions, i.e. pre and post-test situations.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the demographic questions in the first part (gender, age, study program); 13 statements about social tourism were presented to measure the perception of students towards the phenomenon of social tourism in the second part. All the statements were theory-driven (Minnaert et al., 2006; Minnaert et al., 2013; Diekmann & McCabe, 2013; Ylikännö, 2013) and chosen according to their relevance in relation to the definition, beneficiaries, economic and social benefits, funding and organization, moral/ethical dimension and future development of social tourism products. According to contemporary social tourism theory, those are key research/academic topics. Twelve statements were formed as six pairs of opposite meanings (to assess the meaning of one specific indicator two statements were formed) and one additional non-pair/independent statement was added to the questionnaire:

1. Pair – definition: (1) “Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to social tourism users/beneficiaries” and (2) “Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to providers of social programs”;
2. Pair – beneficiaries: (3) “The aim of social tourism is to offer holidays to the major part of society, since holiday are now the societal norm or right of an individual” and (4) “The aim of social tourism is to offer holidays to eligible groups who cannot afford one for various reasons (financial and/or health)”;
3. Pair – economic and social benefits: (6) “The purpose of social tourism is essentially to generate

economic growth, reduce seasonality, create and sustain jobs in the tourism sector employment and assist in the development of regions” and (7) “The aim of social tourism is primarily related to non-commercial goals, such as enhancing equality and independence, increasing social inclusion and obtaining benefits for social tourism beneficiaries”;

4. Pair – funding: (8) “Social tourism organization and funding is primarily the domain of humanitarian and non-profit organizations” and (9) “Social tourism organization and funding is primarily the domain of the state (as a part of social/health policy)”;
5. Pair – moral/ethical dimension: (10) “Social tourism sees holidays simply as a tourism product” and (11) “Social tourism products include certain moral beliefs”;
6. Pair – future development: (12) “Social tourism is, within existing business systems, a good market niche for the tourism industry” and (13) “Social tourism represents an opportunity for the development of social entrepreneurship in tourism”;

The independent statement – different models/interpretations of social tourism: (5) “Certain programs of social tourism are more justified than others; some of the social tourism models are more important for the development of this area than others”.

Respondents were asked to rank their answers on a five-point Likert-type scale (1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree). The questionnaire (i.e. dependent variables) were tested for normal distribution (Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients) they were all normally distributed, except for one exception (statement no. (4) excluded from the further statistical analysis due to the high Kurtosis coefficient (3.764)). These statements were analyzed using the Pearson correlation and t-test analysis.

Eighty-eight students were invited to participate in this experiment. In pre- and post-testing, a total of 138 completed questionnaires were collected. In the first testing, before the lectures, 71 respondents participated: 41 students (57.7%) were undergraduate professional study programme students, the remaining 30 students (42.3%) were undergraduate university study programme students. In the second testing, after attending three lectures, 67 students par-

ticipated and the relationship between professional and university study program students was almost identical: 38 (56.7%) professional students versus 29 (43.3%) university program students. The participants represented a reliable sample of the students at Turistica, Faculty for Tourism Studies in Portorož, since the total number of university and professional students is 504 students. Almost two thirds (62.3%) of students were females in their twenties (mean = 20.7 years), and a little more than a third (37.7%) were men. In the table below, the essential characteristics of respondents are presented.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the sample

	Frequency	Percentage
GENDER		
Male	52	37.6
Female	86	62.3
AGE		
18	4	2.9
19	37	27.0
20	60	43.8
21	21	15.3
22	11	8.0
23	4	2.9
STUDY PROGRAM		
Undergraduate professional	79	57.2
Undergraduate university	59	42.8

Results and Discussion

Our first proposition was that tourism students’ perception of social tourism would be different before and after the short educational course. To test that proposition, an analysis of their perceptions before and after introducing an independent variable was made and, through comparison of the correlations between indicators (before and after the educational program), a change in the students’ perception towards the social tourism phenomenon was observed.

According to the contemporary definition of social tourism and its primary aim, two statements were developed and perceptions towards the phenomenon were tested: first, "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to providers of social programs"; and second, "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to social tourism users/beneficiaries". As expected, after the short educational programme, the correlation between these two statements was statistically significant and negative ($r = -0.264$, $p = 0.031$); before the educational programme, a statistically significant correlation did not exist ($r = -0.150$, $p = 0.213$). This indicates that the students perceived these two statements as opposite and, therefore, a negative correlation was indicated even before the social tourism lectures. It also means that the grounds, or the basis, for the primary aim of social tourism changed, and the students perceive social benefits to be the core benefits of social tourism and its products.

Before the participants were exposed to the stimulus of the independent variable, they naturally had certain conceptions and formed opinions about the phenomenon of social tourism; these are presented in following correlations. Those who agreed that "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to providers of social programs" (i.e. economic benefits) also:

- a) disagreed with the statement that "Social tourism aim is primarily related to the non-commercial goals such as enhancing equality and independence, increasing social inclusion and obtaining benefits for social tourism beneficiaries" ($r = -0.288$, $p = 0.015$);
- b) agreed with the statement that "Social tourism sees holidays simply as a tourism product" ($r = 0.257$, $p = 0.031$);
- c) agreed that "Certain programs of social tourism are more justified than others; some of the social tourism models are more important for the development of this area than others" ($r = 0.294$, $p = 0.013$);
- d) and agreed with the statement that "Social tourism represents an opportunity for the development of social entrepreneurship in tourism" ($r = 0.244$, $p = 0.41$).

This perception supports the idea of Minnaert et al. (2013, p. 13), claiming that "in recent interpretations of social tourism, the economic benefits of the phenomenon have started to play an ever more central role (correlation a): they offer a financial, rather than purely moral, argument for social tourism development and this has resulted in markedly increased interest in social tourism projects in the stimulation model", e.g. the Calypso program (correlations b, c, d). After the introductions of the independent variable, all the above-presented correlations were no longer statistically significant. This indicates that perceptions toward the social tourism phenomenon changed; the students gained some knowledge about the economic and social benefits of the social tourism, and their understanding of social-economic justifications and the potential impacts of social tourism is different than it was before.

Students' perception and understanding of social tourism (before the short educational programme) primarily as an industry with "commercial" character could be observed through the several correlations indicated below. The indicator "Social tourism today can be seen primarily as a tourist product" correlated significantly with:

- e) As previously mentioned "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to providers of social programs" ($r = 0.257$, $p = 0.031$);
- f) "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to social tourism users/beneficiaries" ($p = 0.313$, $p = 0.008$);
- g) "The aim of social tourism is to offer holidays to eligible groups who cannot afford one for various reasons (financial and/or health)" ($r = 0.324$, $p = 0.006$);
- h) "The purpose of social tourism is essentially to generate economic growth, reduce seasonality, create and sustain jobs in the tourism sector employment and assist in the development of regions" ($r = 0.489$, $p = 0.000$);
- i) "Social tourism is, within existing business systems, a good market niche for the tourism industry" ($r = 0.542$, $p = 0.000$);

- j) "Social tourism represents an opportunity for the development of social entrepreneurship in tourism" ($r = 0.466, p = 0.000$)

The perception of social tourism and its economic benefits/impacts are again highlighted and confirmed through almost all presented correlations (correlations e, g, h, i, j). It is obvious that students' commercial understanding and perception of social tourism prevails. Social tourism is seen merely as a tourist product that should bring benefits for both the social tourism providers and users (economic and social benefits) (correlations e, f); In order to bring (economic) benefits to the providers, the product should contain (social) benefits/values recognized by customers and, as such, are offered to (social) tourism users (correlation g). According to modern theories of consumer behaviour in tourism, tourism products should be tailored to the needs and desires of guests (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2005) and, according to Peter and Olson (2005), consumers' product knowledge and perception of the product "consequences and end values" (i.e. benefits or risks) are the critical issues for the development personally relevant meanings of products and brands for the consumers. Furthermore, the concept of "memorable tourism experiences" (Kim, 2014, p. 36) and its dimensions (hedonism, refreshment, social interaction and local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement and novelty) highlights the benefits that tourism products could have for its users and should be developed and justified in order for organizations to develop and maintain competitive advantage. In the second testing, after the short educational course, almost all correlation becomes statistically insignificant (correlations e, g, h, i, j) and one correlation changed from positive to negative (correlation f; $r = -0.424, p = 0.049$). In addition, some new correlations appeared in the second testing where a non-commercial aim of social tourism could be observed. After the short course, the indicator "Social tourism today can be seen primarily as a tourist product" correlated significantly and negatively with:

- k) "The aim of social tourism is primarily related to non-commercial goals such as enhancing equality and independence, increasing social inclusion and obtaining benefits for social tourism beneficiaries" ($r = -0.322, p = 0.008$).

Obviously, those students who agreed with the "non-commercial goal of social tourism" (and "refuse to see social tourism (only) as a product") perceive the social tourism product/phenomenon differently and also agree with:

- l) "Social tourism is related to and justified primarily by the benefits that it brings to social tourism users/beneficiaries" ($p = 0.286, p = 0.019$);
- m) "Social tourism today can be understood primarily as a product that includes certain moral beliefs" ($p = 0.471, p = 0.000$); even before the lectures, the statement was statistically significant ($p = 0.259, p = 0.029$) and the statements l & m have a statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.301, p = 0.013$).

This again means that perceptions toward the social tourism phenomenon changed from understanding the phenomenon as primarily commercial and its impacts as primarily economic to a phenomenon in which non-commercial goals and aims exist, in which social tourism products promote benefits for social tourism users, and which include certain moral beliefs and values. This is completely in line with the modern understanding and interpretation of social tourism as "tourism with an added moral value, of which the primary aim is to benefit either the host or the visitor in tourism exchange" (Minnaert et al., 2013). Participation in social tourism is also significantly determined by tourism inexperience and uncertainty of the social tourism beneficiaries (Minnaert, 2014). Therefore, there are some specific characteristics of social tourism products that are not yet well-researched in the contemporary social tourism literature.

Despite students' more ethical understanding of the phenomenon, the perception of social tourism phenomenon and/or products as a business opportunity remains even after the introducing the social tourism education (which is anticipated according to our business oriented tourism study programs) and could be observed through several correlations in the second testing:

- n) "Social tourism products include certain moral beliefs" in correlation with "Social tourism represents an opportunity for the development of social entrepreneurship in tourism" ($r = 0.352, p =$

0.003); the moral basis for social tourism includes the potential for the development of social entrepreneurship;

- o) In relation to the “Social tourism as a good market niche for the tourism industry” positive correlations were found with:
- “The aim of social tourism is to offer holidays to the major part of society since holiday are now the societal norm or right of an individual” ($r = 0.246$, $p = 0.046$), which means that the social tourism niche is recognized and could be developed and justified through the interpretation of social tourism as a societal norm or individual right;
 - “The purpose of social tourism is essentially to generate economic growth, reduce seasonality, create and sustain jobs in the tourism sector employment and assist in the development of regions” ($r = 0.397$, $p = 0.001$);
 - “Social tourism represents an opportunity for the development of social entrepreneurship in tourism” ($r = 0.435$, $p = 0.000$).

In this context, it is interesting that before the lectures students perceived “social tourism and its non-commercial goals” “primarily as the (financial and organizational) domain of the state” ($r = 0.238$, $p = 0.046$) or “within the humanitarian and non-profit organization domain” ($r = 0.405$, $p = 0.000$), while after the lectures they perceived it differently (since both correlations were insignificant after the lectures), i.e. more as a opportunity/niche for the traditional commercial tourism providers and social entrepreneurs in tourism.

To support the perception of social tourism as a recognized potential market niche in the tourism industry, the Calypso Initiative, which was launched by European Commission in 2008, must be mentioned. As indicated in the research of Bizjak et al. (2011) and Ozturk et al. (2008), people with disabilities (which represent one of the major groups of social tourism beneficiaries) have become an important niche for tourism industry, and this market has become a highly significant economic and business factor in the tourism industry. Consistent with this is the students’ perception of social tourism; although they are evidently more sensitive to the ethical and

non-commercial goals of the phenomenon, their perception of social tourism and their study goals remain primarily business oriented.

The second proposition was that short educational program could influence tourism students’ attitudes towards social tourism. To test that proposition, a t-test between two groups of students that had different levels of knowledge/education about social tourism was made. The short educational course on the social tourism phenomenon produced statistically significant differences with respect to only one indicator, which states that “social tourism is a good market niche for the tourism industry” ($t = -2.800$, $p = 0.006$): the mean values in the second measurement (Mean = 3.28, St. dev = 0.997) are higher than in the first one/test (Mean = 2.82, St. dev = 0.961). This is an indication that awareness of social tourism as an important market niche increased after the short educational programme. This increased awareness is fundamental for the future development of social tourism (market niche), as an integral part of the tourism industry and within the operations of commercial tourism providers, or as a form of private-public co-operation/partnerships between commercial and social tourism providers.

In terms of successful development of social tourism, it is vital that tourism educational institutions provide their students with education relating to this particular form of tourism, so that they will understand the phenomenon and be able to “do it well”. Currently, the topic of social tourism is hardly ever mentioned during tourism studies in Slovenia.

Conclusion

Social tourism is an important niche for the tourism industry (Calypso Report, 2010). The development of social tourism and its organization and funding are still primarily the domain of non-profit and humanitarian organizations in Slovenia. In this context, this paper has contributed to better knowledge and understanding of tourism students’ perception of social tourism and the economic as well as social benefits that it brings to individuals and society as a whole. The empirical results imply that although the students understand the non-commercial character of social tourism and its social goals and aims, a business orientation remains and prevails; they perceive social tourism primarily as a good market niche/op-

portunity for future tourism development. In this respect, it is essential that students, during their tourism studies, obtain necessary information and knowledge of social tourism in order to “do social tourism well” (Minnaert, 2012), i.e. to develop products that are economically sustainable while the social benefits are at the forefront of these social tourism products. This research provided support for the conclusion that an integration and cooperation between the social/charitable sector and commercial tourism providers certainly has a future and, as such, represents a new niche for developing various forms of public-private or charitable-public (Hunter-Jones, 2013) partnerships as well as the development of social economy, for example cooperatives (Caire, 2012, p.73). Since there is tendency that the traditional social tourism providers have to adapt to commercial demand and attract new customers and, vice versa, commercial business turn to social tourism to attract business in the low season (Minnaert, 2013), such cooperation is even more likely. Including social tourism education into the tourism curriculum is crucial to developing this market niche successfully and appropriately. In fact, this research opens new possibilities for the tourism industry, for the hotel sector and as well for travel agencies, restaurants and the like.

For tourism students (i.e. future tourism providers), the contemporary understanding of social tourism can also be understood as a business activity generating a low(er) added economic value at the expense of higher added moral value, where “discounts are offered on a voluntary basis by the private sector in exchange for increased business, added publicity and in consideration of corporate social responsibility objectives” (Minnaert et al., 2013). Social tourism can be seen as an investment for the future success of a business in which short-term profits are exchanged for more long-term socio-economic benefits.

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