

Reviewing social tourism for future research

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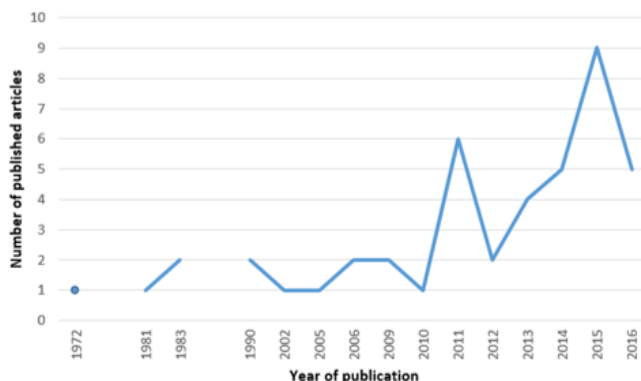
Objectives | The purpose of this work is to review the scientific literature (journal articles) that analyses social tourism, with the objective of identifying the evolution of the concept, the methodologies adopted and the main results of the empirical work in this field. The review of literature undertaken provides an analysis of the evolution of published research and also permits the identification of future research pathways.

Methodology | This paper reviews scientific literature, emphasizing the empirical studies, on social tourism. To undertake this objective, electronic searches were conducted using the specialist research database SCOPUS. During one day of December 2016, the searches were performed using the term “social tourism”, as keyword. This keyword was searched on “Title, Abstract and Keywords”, in the all the available scientific areas. Results were then restricted to “Articles” or “Articles in press”, using as only source “Journals”. The period covered was from 1960 to 2016, the widest permitted by the SCOPUS. Only documents written in English, Spanish, French or Portuguese were fully analyzed. A total of 66 results were found.

Main Results and Contributions | After filtering the results through abstract reading by the authors, only 44 scientific articles were considered as directly relevant to the subject matter of this paper (three of which were not available for full text downloading or sharing, even contacting publisher or authors). We observed this is a topic that only in recent years has received more attention from researchers (since 2011, with 2015 being the year with more published articles), even though the first published article corresponding to our search is dated from 1972 (Figure 1).

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Source: Authors

Figure 1 | Temporal evolution of published scientific articles directly relevant to the subject matter of the paper

The author with more published articles is Scott McCabe, with 8 published articles about this topic. Lynn Minnaert (6), Celeste Eusébio and Elisabeth Kastenholz (4) are other relevant authors with published articles that correspond to the conducted searches. *Annals of Tourism Research*, with 7 of the analyzed articles, was the journal with more articles on the topic, followed by *Tourism Management* (6) and *Current Issues in Tourism* (6).

The first important result to highlight from the analysis of the articles is that there is no consensual definition of Social Tourism. However, in the 44 analyzed articles, the notion of social tourism is consensually related to initiatives that aim to include into tourism experiences groups otherwise excluded from it, is common. Most of the articles also recognized the need for public intervention in these initiatives and the challenges this may represent in an era with significant budget restrictions for most of the governments, particularly in the EU economies.

Table 1 shows that there are both conceptual and empirical studies discussing the theme. The empirical studies (24) analyze mainly the segment low-income families with children (9), but there are also studies analyzing seniors (8), children and youth, disabled people and more than one of these segments. The majority of the studies choose qualitative methodologies (17) because of the exploratory nature of the research and the particular features of the studied population (Table 1).

Table 1 | Typology of the analyzed studies

Study Type	Citation reference	Study Methodology
Conceptual	Assipova & Minnaert (2014); Bélanger & Jolin (2011); Bruno (2015); de Almeida (2011); Diekmann & McCabe (2011); Haukeland (1990); Haulot (1981); Higgins-Desbiolles (2006); La Placa & Corlyon (2014); Lundberg (1972); Martin (1983); McCabe & Diekmann (2015); Minnaert (2015); Minnaert, Maitland & Miller (2006); Minnaert, Maitland & Miller (2011); Papadogiannis (2016); Pearlman (1990); Puczko & Rätz (2011); Ryan (2002); Teuscher (1983); Walton (2013)	Literature review/ Documental analysis
Empirical	Alén, Losada & de Carlos (2015); Carneiro, Eusébio, Kastenholz & Alvelos (2013); McCabe, Joldersma & Li (2010); McCabe & Johnson (2013)	Quantitative
	Bos, McCabe & Johnson (2015); Brougère (2013); Eusébio, Carneiro, Kastenholz & Alvelos (2015); Eusébio, Carneiro, Kastenholz & Alvelos (2016); Ferrer et al. (2016); Foster & McCabe (2015); Hazel (2005); Hunter-Jones (2011); Kastenholz, Eusébio & Figueiredo (2015); Morgan, Pritchard & Sedgley (2015); Minnaert (2012); Minnaert (2014); Minnaert, Maitland & Miller (2009); Sedgley, Pritchard & Morgan (2012); Tchoukarine (2016); Vinogradova et al. (2015); Valenzuela, Ramirez & Zúñiga (2014)	Qualitative
	Komppula, Ilves & Airey (2016); McCabe (2009); Zenko & Sardi (2014)	Mixed

Source: Authors

The results of these studies stress out the importance of social tourism for its participants, in terms of well-being and quality of life improvement, emphasizing its benefits also within learning and social behavior development. These results seem to indicate that the encouragement of tourism for disadvantaged groups may facilitate social inclusion, encouraging social solidarity and collective cohesion, leading to the decrease of poverty and exclusion. Existing research provides a solid ground to develop further research, but there is indeed a window of opportunity for improving knowledge on this topic.

Limitations | This research has a number of limitations, since its scope is restricted to one keyword “social tourism” and its search is limited to one database: SCOPUS. Moreover, the data collected were constrained to “Articles” or “Articles in press”. In this vein, it seems relevant to get a more in-depth and exhaustive picture of social tourism considering a more widen or broaden scope.

Conclusions | The literature review conducted in this study systematizes the research that has been done regarding social tourism. From the review it is possible to derive some conclusions and directions for future research. One first conclusion from the review relies on the difficulty of defining social tourism. Several concepts have been adopted and there is no consensus on one and only definition. The systematization made by Minnaert, Maitland and Miller (2006) is a notable contribution as it intended to organize the existing definitions into two groups – the supply and demand side definitions.

A second conclusion is related with the scope of the empirical research. The majority of the studies focus on the effects of social tourism using those positive effects to justify tourism as a human right in today’s developed society. Results suggest social tourism enhances significant benefits for individuals in disadvantaged groups, enabling skills improvement and inspiring positive behaviour changing towards social inclusion.

In this sense, it is important to stress again, that further research work is required, calling for a more wide-ranging and transnationally comparable data. Almost all of the studies are based on small samples, that represent often just a specific grouping (e.g. only one nationality, one social group). Hence, it is difficult to generalize their conclusions. As the effects of social tourism are one of the aspects more highlighted, other two important pathways for further research would be: first to study the effects of holidays on tourists in each phase of the tourism experience (before, during and after); and second, to reflect on alternative ways of making these programs sustainable, both financially and in terms of capturing public interest.

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