

Investigation into the Contribution of Social Tourism Programmes to the Satisfaction of Entrepreneurs in the Hospitality Sector



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Abstract Social tourism, as a form of special interest tourism, gives the opportunity not only to members of society who are unable to meet their tourist needs by their own means but also to entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector to participate in social tourism programmes aiming at the financial growth of their businesses. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the value of the contribution of Greek Social Tourism programmes given to the hospitality sector by evaluating the level of satisfaction of entrepreneurs according to the effectiveness of their implementation and with respect to both their socio-demographic and business' profile. The empirical research of this study was conducted among all entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector of Greece, who have implemented social tourism programmes during the last ten years. The inventory method was used for the collection of the data, and a sampling in proportion to the population was collected, i.e., 287 questionnaires. Descriptive (numerical data summaries) and inductive statistics (cluster analysis, chi-square test) were used for data analysis. Through this research, the significance of the implementation of social tourism programmes in hospitality businesses was highlighted. This is because according to the respondents, social tourism contributes both to financial development and to the mitigation of seasonality. The majority of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with both the implementation of the programmes and the benefits and conditions of their participation. This research is the springboard for future planning of social tourism programmes not only in Greece but also worldwide. In several cases, in which Greece faced crises, such as the refugee crisis or the more recent health crisis (COVID-19), social tourism has been considered to be a "panacea" for tourism development.

Keywords Social tourism · Hospitality sector · Entrepreneurs' satisfaction · Greece

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1 Introduction

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. Despite the fact that tourism has been recognized as a human right, there are members of society who are unable to meet tourist needs by their own means; therefore, social tourism could be considered as an extension of the right to rest and holidays with pay.

The European Economic and Social Commission, in its declaration in Barcelona (2006), refers to the set of advantages resulting from the implementation of social tourism, which include the improvement of well-being, the social development of the beneficiaries, the socio-economic development of the host society's (social tourists), improving the mental health of participants as well as increasing employment. In the same declaration, the positive contribution that the form of social tourism can have to a more sustainable tourism was emphasized.

Social tourism programmes contribute to the country's wider economy and sustainable tourism development. The benefits of tourism can be wide ranging, extending to benefits to the economy, social life for people living in tourist destinations as well as personal benefits to tourists (Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; World Tourism Organization (WTO), 1999). Furthermore, social tourism has a humanitarian character and contributes to social stability as it gives the opportunity to vulnerable social groups who are unable for various reasons such as health, financial or social, to be able to enjoy the benefits of a vacation (Diekmann, McCabe & Ferreira, 2018). Consequentially, there is now much greater evidence on the importance of social tourism which is providing significant benefits for the people supported through social tourism schemes. These benefits have also been shown to extend to wider sections of society as well as to destinations, businesses, governments and communities, who welcome social tourists and the resulting increase in income they bring.

In this article, the contribution of social tourism programmes to the satisfaction of entrepreneurs in the hospitality sector will be studied. The article aims to highlight the significance of the implementation of social tourism programmes in hospitality businesses according to their socio-demographic and business profile. The paper presents findings from application of social tourism to businesses in the hospitality sector in North Greece who are contracted with social tourism programmes and specifically the degree of entrepreneurs' satisfaction resulting from their implementing of these programmes.

2 Literature Review

The milestone year of the global development of social tourism was 1920 when the International Labour Organization (ILO) organized the first conference concerning the advantage of worker's leisure time, recognizing the right of vacation (Kokkosis, Tsartas & Griba 2011; Sfakianakis, 2000; Lytras, 1998).

According to the main institution of social tourism, the International Bureau of Social Tourism (BITS), which was founded in 1963, and renamed as International Organization of Social Tourism (ISTO), in 2010 (Belanger & Jolin, 2011, p.475) and the pioneer of Social Tourism who was the first president of ISTO, Professor W. Hunziker, the social tourism referred to "the set of relationships and phenomena with touristic elements facilitating the participation of weaker economic classes in tourism" (Hunziker, 1951:1).

Social tourism in Greece was implemented for the first time in 1982 with the cooperation of the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO), the Worker's Social Benefits Organization and the General Secretariat for Youth (Board Resolution 7631/3-11-1982). Over the years, many other institutions have implemented social tourism programmes:

- 1995: The Legal Insurance (Presidential Degree: 225/1995).
- 2002: The Organization of Agricultural Insurance (Law Number 3050/2002).
- 2013: Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization "OAED" (Law Number: 4144/2013).

According to the above legislations of social tourism institutions adapted the following table in which, the main criteria for the participation of the beneficiaries and the social groups who benefit are described (Table 1).

The biggest upset in the history of Greek Social Tourism came in 2012 with the abolition of social tourism programmes from the Workers' Social Fund (OEE), which was one of the institutions with the greatest involvement in social tourism programmes, as a result of the first memorandum for reducing public debt (Law Number:4046/2012, 2022). In these programmes, 1,154 hotels and 1,477 room rentals were involved, and its abolition resulted to the loss of more than 6,320

Table 1 The criteria for the participation in social tourism and the social groups who benefit

Participation criteria	Beneficiaries
Financial (taxable income)	Employees and their dependents with low taxable income
Age	Senior citizens
Duration of unemployment	Unemployed
Main insurance	Farmers
Rate of disability	People with a disability of more than 67%
Marital status	Families with four or more children, single-parent families

jobs in the accommodation area (Despotaki, Tsartas & Doumi, 2015). In Greece during a financial depression, social tourism is a breath of fresh air for the citizens of the country, not only for the vulnerable social groups, by providing them with the opportunity for economical holidays, but also for the hospitality businesses that implemented the said social tourism programmes. The solution to the problem came in 2013 with the welcomed implementation of social tourism by the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization “OAED”.

Apart from the economic crisis, Greece was faced with other forms of crisis which had a significant impact on the development and operation of tourist accommodations. The most important ones are the refugee crisis and the COVID-19 crisis.

In 2015, the regions of the Northern and Southern Aegean received an unprecedented wave of immigration and an influx of refugees (Tsartas et al, 2020, UNCHR, 2015). The significance of this phenomenon, which still exists today, greatly affected the economic activities of these areas, and its impact on the tourism industry became evident at a very early stage, most importantly concerning cancellations of overnight stays in tourist accommodations. The social tourism institutions of OAED and the Organization of Agricultural Insurance, showing a sense of social responsibility towards the residents and businesses that are on the front line of managing refugee flows, specifically the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos Leros, Kos as well as in the Prefecture of Evros, proceeded with a series of changes regarding the social tourism programmes offered in these areas. The aim was to strengthen the tourism businesses and to increase the tourism demand in the affected areas (Hellenic Public Employment Service “OAED”, 2022, OPEKA, 2021). The changes made by the respective social tourism institutions concern:

- Increase in the number of overnight stays from 5 to 10.
- Zero private financial participation of the beneficiaries
- Increase in the accommodation subsidy.

Finally, in the context of strengthening tourism, due to the reduced tourist demand caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the institutions of Greek Social Tourism (Hellenic Public Employment Service OAED, 2020, 2021, OGA, 2021) implemented the following:

- Subsidy of ferry tickets.
- Tripling of the budget from 10 million euros until 2019 (Hellenic Public Employment Service “OAED”, 2019) to 30 million euros for the years 2020 and 2021.
- Double points and free ferry tickets for people with disabilities.
- Increase in subsidy in 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-star hotels with breakfast.
- Reduction of private participation in all accommodations.
- More than doubling of the number of beneficiaries, from 140,000 to 300,000.
- Increasing the length of overnight stays from 5 to 6 nights, except the islands of Chios, Samos, Lesbos, Leros and Kos, where the overnights remain at 10.
- Reduction of mandatory bed availability to 25 from 40%.

Social tourism, in whether or not in times of crisis, has been used as a panacea to boost tourism in general and specifically the tourist accommodation businesses that have contracts with social tourism institutions.

3 Methodology

3.1 Sampling Method

The objectives of the survey were carried out by using a quantitative research method, i.e. by developing a structured questionnaire to identify the satisfaction levels of owners of tourist accommodation facilities (hotels and rental apartments) derived from social tourism programmes and policies adopted in Greece. Hence, each questionnaire included closed-ended and scale questions, because they are credible in measuring people's perceptions (Oppenheim, 1992), while the participants ranked each of sixteen satisfaction items on a 5-point scale, with "1" indicating "strongly dissatisfied" and "5" indicating "strongly satisfied". The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section gathered information on the socio-demographic factors which were collected, including gender, age and educational level (Sánchez-Pérez et al., 2021). The second section aimed at obtaining information on the profile of the tourism businesses, hotel and rental apartments that implement social tourism programmes, including the type of the tourist accommodation and its category in stars for the hotels and keys for the rental apartments, the number of participations in social tourism programmes and the institutions with whom they are cooperating. The third section collected information on the degree of satisfaction of the respondents, with regard to the policies of social tourism adopted in Greece. A pilot survey was conducted among 20 participants, as piloting can help both with the wording of question sequences and the reduction of non-response rates (Oppenheim, 1992). Using stratified sampling by geographical region of Greece, 287 questionnaires were successfully completed by entrepreneurs adopting and promoting social tourism programmes and strategies. The study was conducted from February to May 2019, and the data collected were based on descriptive and inductive statistics analysed by SPSS v.26. The reliability of the Likert variables was controlled using Cronbach's alpha, which is a suitable method that can be used for Likert scale items (Ercan et al., 2007). The coefficient of reliability of the alpha Cronbach questionnaire was calculated and equalled 0.804, which means the results of the questionnaire were extremely reliable (Bonett & Wright, 2015).

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

For the purposes of the exploratory analysis, a K-means cluster analysis was employed to identify structures within the data. Cluster analysis is a statistical method that aims to classify existing observations into groups, using the information contained in some variables. In particular, it examines how similar some observations are in terms of a certain number of variables, with the aim of creating groups of observations that are similar to each other (Karlis, 2005). As the authors predefine the number of extracted clusters in advance, K-means cluster was deemed suitable due to the size of the sample and was carried out in order to display similar groups of observations among social tourism entrepreneurs' satisfaction levels.

A chi-square test was used to examine the significance of the differences between two separate samples regarding some particular characteristics. It should be noted that the main prerequisites for the use of this test are fulfilled (Angelis, 2009). The carrying out of specialized conclusions was completed with the creation of correlation tables, between the resulting clusters and the main demographic characteristics of the respondents (age and level of education), as well as between the characteristics of their business profile (type of tourist accommodation and its category in stars and keys, the number of participations in social tourism programmes and the institutions with whom they are cooperating).

4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Social Tourism Entrepreneurs' Profile

Based on their gender, social tourism entrepreneurs are equally represented in the sample, while 46.8% represent females and 53.20% refer to males. Regarding age, participants aged from 40 to 61 consist of the largest group accounting for 71.2% of the sample, followed by the group aged from 18 to 39 (28.8%). With regard to the level of education, it was observed that the majority (50.2%) have a university degree, while 28.7% were educated in vocational and technical institutions and one quarter has completed up to the level of secondary education (21.1%).

4.2 Social Tourism Accommodation Businesses' Profile

Based on the type of tourist accommodation that is contracted with social tourism programmes, the majority refers to hotels (55.2%), while 44.8% concerned the rental apartments. With respect to the classification of the accommodation facilities, hotels with 2* or 3* consist of the largest group accounting for 47.1% of the sample. Similarly, in the case of keys classification of rental apartments, the majority, i.e., 51.2%

of the sample, refer to 2 or 3 keys. With respect to the number of participated in social tourism programmes, the majority (87.2%) have participated more than 7 times and have collaborated with all social tourism institutions, but mainly with OAED (43.2%) and OGA (50.1%).

4.3 *The Satisfaction of Entrepreneurs in Hospitality Sector*

In order to investigate the degree of satisfaction of tourist accommodation entrepreneurs with the implementation and policies of social tourism programmes, we proceeded to apply cluster analysis. K-means analysis was based on sixteen satisfaction items, and its results are summarized in Table 2.

From the cluster analysis, three groups of entrepreneurs emerged:

- **Cluster A: “Pessimists”**. Despite their higher education and strong contact with social tourism programmes, the means of pessimists are below the mean scores of all satisfaction levels. Pessimists expressed a negative satisfaction level, mainly related to inability to reduce the own participation rate of tourists in the price of accommodation and to the limited options provided to tourists, so that they are able to choose accommodation from several tourist destinations.
- **Cluster B: “Realists”**. Realists tend to be more satisfied than pessimists, as eleven in sixteen satisfaction items displayed higher mean scores than the mean scores of the sample size. Realists expressed their satisfaction towards the reduction of bureaucracy regarding the participation of accommodations in social tourism programmes and highlighted the increase of subsidy into tourist accommodation.
- **Cluster B: “Supporters”**. Supporters presented higher mean scores than the means of sample size in all satisfaction categories. As the findings of the study revealed, supporters presented higher mean scores than those presented by realists, only in seven satisfaction statements, while “realists” and “supporters”, tend to express a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurs’ satisfaction.

In order to investigate the satisfaction of entrepreneurs resulting from the effectiveness of their implementation, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were made between the cluster analysis data and the data collected from the respondents’ demographic profile and their business profile.

Table 3 contains the cluster data as obtained in the previous section and two of the main demographic characteristics of the respondents regarding age and education level.

The socio-demographic profile of three exacted clusters is of particular interest, as females and males are almost equally represented in each group, and respondents from 40 to 61 consist of the largest group for each cluster (62.0, 58.8 and 65.7%). The majorities of entrepreneurs in each cluster have university degree (54.6, 48.7 and 38.7%).

The chi-square tests show a correlation between the demographic data and the resulting data from the cluster analysis.

Table 2 K-means cluster analysis

Variables ^a	Total	Cluster			F ^b
	n:287	A	B	C	
Facilities of social tourism programmes	3.13	2.94	2.46	3.87	149.832
Cooperation with social tourism stakeholders	3.54	3.35	2.81	4.34	101.093
Educational and training levels of social tourism stakeholders	3.47	3.40	2.58	4.31	103.968
Terms and conditions for the participation of property accommodation in social tourism programmes	3.23	3.02	2.66	3.91	68.354
Subsidy into property accommodation	3.08	2.88	2.49	3.74	71.728
Increase of subsidy into tourist accommodation	4.35	3.69	4.73	4.53	74.884
Reduce of bureaucracy for the participation of property accommodation in social tourism programmes	4.23	3.51	4.86	4.25	12.569
Organization of programmes, seminars for the education and training of social tourism entrepreneurs	3.71	2.78	4.33	3.92	68.233
Promotion of social tourism programmes through media	4.10	3.14	4.51	4.49	101.864
Discounts on transfer tickets	3.68	2.72	4.06	4.10	46.865
Discounts on tickets/granting of vouchers of cultural interest	3.58	2.45	4.04	4.07	80.536
Inclusion and participation of persons accompanying beneficiaries with disabilities who participate in social tourism programmes	4.12	3.12	4.58	4.50	100.234
Reduce the own participation rate of tourists in the price of accommodation	2.08	1.65	2.41	2.14	12.569
Options provided to tourists, so that they can choose accommodation from a wider range of tourist destinations	3.10	2.14	3.53	3.48	64.469
Increase overnight stays	3.25	2.51	3.61	3.53	28.045
Provision of BB/HB	2.73	1.76	3.23	3.05	36.190

^adf = 361, level of probability 0.05, sig < 0.05

^bVariables were measured on a 5-point scale from 1: Strongly Dissatisfied 5: Strongly Satisfied

However, the table reveals that the respondents aged between 40 and 61 tend to be more supportive, while the younger aged between 18 and 39 are more realistic and less supportive. Respectively, the 40 and 61 age group is almost evenly distributed between the groups of pessimists, realists and supporters. Also, based on the analysis of the above table, it is found that the people who have completed higher education in the largest percentage declare themselves to be pessimists and realists. Therefore, respondents who hold university degrees and are aged between 18 and 61 do not express a high degree of satisfaction regarding the implementation of social tourism programmes and tend to be more pessimistic.

Table 3 Cross-tabulations and chi-square test among the demographic data and the cluster data
Cross-tabulations and Chi-square test

	Clusters				Chi Square Test*
	%				
	A: "Pessimists"	B: "Realists"	C: "Supporters"		
Age	18-39	36.1	21.9		X ² = 15.654, p = 0,114
	40-61	62.0	65.7		
	> 62	7.4	5.0	12.4	
Education level	Secondary level	19.4	18.5	32.8	X ² = 10.317, p = 0,135
	Technical institution	25.9	32.8	28.5	
	University degree	54.7	48.7	38.7	

*a = 0.05

Table 4 contains the cluster data and the profile characteristics of the respondents with respect to the type of the tourism business they own and its classification, the number of the participations in social tourism programmes and the institutions with which they cooperated.

The chi-square tests show a correlation between the profile business data and the resulting data from the cluster analysis.

According to the table above, an even distribution is observed between hotels and rooms for rent regarding their satisfaction with social tourism. Similarly, it shows an even distribution of pessimists, realists and supporters between hotels regardless of their star rating. A sharp differentiation appears among the participating rental apartments where those who own 4 keys in their largest percentage, 42.9%, are supporters, while those who have 2 keys accommodation facilities are more realistic

Table 4 Cross-tabulations and chi-square test among the profile business data and the cluster data

Cross-tabulations and chi-square test						
			Clusters			Chi-square test*
			%			
			A:“Pessimists”	B:“Realists”	C:“Supporters”	
Profile Business	Type of tourist accommodation	Hotel	47.9	51.6	45.3	$X^2 = 0.936, p = 0.626$
		Rental apartments	52.1	48.4	54.7	
	Star classification of hotels	5*	0.0	1.2	0.0	$X^2 = 4.911, p = 0.767$
		4*	14.0	13.4	8.1	
		3*	33.3	34.1	29.7	
		2*	43.9	42.7	43.2	
		1*	8.8	8.5	18.9	
	Keys classification of rental apartments	4	28.6	28.5	42.9	$X^2 = 10.942, p = 0,090$
		3	39.3	38.2	22.5	
		2	27.7	47.0	25.3	
	Number of participations in social tourism programmes	1–3	10.1	13.8	9.3	$X^2 = 7.155, p = 0,520$
		4–6	19.3	22.0	30.2	
		7–9	25.2	17.7	17.4	
		10–12	18.5	17.6	14.0	
		> 13	26.9	28.9	29.1	
	Cooperating social tourism institutions	OAED	37.4	40.4	44.0	$X^2 = 3.848, p = 0,664$
		Lawyer Insurance Fund	2.1	1.6	0.7	
		OGA	54.5	51.4	52.5	
		All the above	5.9	6.7	2.8	

*a = 0.05

(47%). On the other hand, three-key room rental owners tend to be more pessimistic (39.3%) and realistic (38.2%).

The number of participations of tourist accommodations in social tourism programmes affects the degree of satisfaction of their owners. Thus, those who have participated up to 6 times in the programmes are identified as supporters and realists, while those who have participated in the programmes between 7 and 12 times tend to be realistic and pessimistic. Finally, entrepreneurs who have participated in social tourism programmes more than 13 times tend to be more supportive of the programmes.

The policy of the social tourism programme of the Hellenic Manpower Employment Organization (OAED) enjoys a high level of satisfaction from the respondents, who declare themselves supporters (44%) unlike the programme of the Agricultural Insurance Organization (OGA), where the distribution among the respondents is even with the pessimists being slightly more (54.5%).

5 Conclusion and Implications

Through this research, the degree of satisfaction of tourist accommodation entrepreneurs who are contracted with social tourism programmes was highlighted. According to the research, factors such as demographic characteristics (age and level of education) as well as the characteristics of the profile of tourist accommodations contracting with social tourism (category of accommodation and its classifications, the number of participations in social tourism programmes and the contracted social tourism institutions) tend to influence the degree of satisfaction of the entrepreneurs of tourist accommodations regarding the implementation policy of social tourism programmes.

Through a cluster analysis, three groups of entrepreneurs emerged: the pessimists, the realists and the supporters of the social tourism programmes. Pessimists who expressed a negative satisfaction level mainly referred to inability to reduce the own participation rate of tourists in the price of accommodation and to the limited options provided to tourists, in order for them to choose their accommodation from several tourist destinations. “Realists” and “supporters” tend to express a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurs’ satisfaction. Thus, the perceptions of the aforementioned groups set a common ground that needs to be taken into account both for the segmentation of social tourism stakeholders and the planning of sustainable tourism development strategies.

This research is the springboard for future planning of social tourism programmes not only in Greece but also worldwide. In several cases, in which Greece faced crises, such as the financial crisis or the more recent health crisis (COVID-19), social tourism was used as a “panacea” for tourism development. For a more effective implementation of social tourism programmes, it is proposed to have a central coordination between institutions providing social tourism programmes and the Ministry of Tourism to cooperate directly with hospitality sector entrepreneurs.

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