

Identity and “New Social Tourism”

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Abstract This work deals with the analysis of social tourism seen as a mean through which rediscovery a new identity, the identity of 21st century man, who is fragile and frustrated by the continuous stress brought by the quotidian life and by his or her job.

Keywords Accessibility · Identity · Wellbeing · Authenticity · Experience

1 Introduction

The BITS (International Bureau of Social Tourism) defined in 1963 social tourism as: *a combination of relations and phenomena which derive from the involvement in tourism of all those people who have a low income and whose participation is guaranteed or helped by social measures*. Nowadays Social Tourism is not a synonym of poor tourism anymore, but of a fair and ethical tourism that brings development whereas it is necessary. This kind of tourism is based now on a new dimension named “glocal”, from which “glocal tourism” a neologism that encompasses a touristic vision which is both a global and local vision oriented toward social equality. Social Tourism and related organizations should bring a deep renovation in this activity. Social Tourism product in the 50s and the 60s was characterized by a contained process which is not sufficient anymore. It is necessary a high professionalism of the tour operator that must be prepared to welcome an exacting custom in search for a new kind of journey or vacation in new places during different seasons of the year. The key points are originality, unconventionality of the vacation, authenticity of the experience, accessibility to everyone and the discovery and revaluation of localities.

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Nowadays, society gives a particular relevance to free time since man constantly perceives the need of having much more time to dedicate to himself and in this way tourism becomes one of the most diffused activity to use free time. Touristic activity puts individual in a dimension which is different from quotidian life and facilitates socialization and communication. These two factors are very relevant, in particular for those who have difficulties to access in the activity itself, among which there are old people, young and adolescent people, disabled people and who have no economic possibilities to spend for touristic expenses. It is possible to label a phenomenon as a “touristic phenomenon” when three main elements occur that is: (a) movement toward a place that is different from our own residence, (b) duration of the movement which must be not too much long, (c) reasons for the movement different from those of a change of residence. Cohen identifies five main reasons which could influence the movement of an individual as well as his/her travelling that are listed as follows:

1. recreation reasons;
2. escaping from quotidian life;
3. live new experiences;
4. discover other alternatives of travelling;
5. existentialism reasons, since man is in search for new spiritual centers to discover through the touristic activity (Cohen 1979). The main task of Social Tourism is that to give everybody the possibility to access to tourism for a full self-affirmation of the individual both as a person and as a citizen. Social Tourism is at the same time a right and a social service which has to be accessible physically and economically even to the people who are not capable to exercise the inalienable right of vacation.

It is a kind of touristic practice which privileges socialization, relations, the exchange of experiences, the introduction to different cultures and the recovery of one’s own identity in spaces and times that are different from those of the quotidian life (Cannas 2009). Social tourism is a kind of tourism which aims at socialization and which makes it its main practice. It is an actor of economic growth and promotes new territorial arrangement based on local development and it is a partner of the projects for world development.

Free time and vacation represent today the highest moment of psychophysical wellbeing and it is so strong the relation between tourism and the desire of feeling happy that it makes the touristic phenomenon more and more relevant at social and cultural level. Many are the expectations and the hopes concentrated on vacation that becomes symbol of the conquest of a new social identity through self-affirmation and the development of communicative relationships. Vacation should represent a mean to recover our identity which has been lost during the work life. It is a ritual, where everything must be perfect. This myth of vacation is not always as it seems in the concrete experience both because of the difficulty of taking a break from the quotidian life and of the touristic industry that has encompassed in consumerism even the vacation spaces and times, running the risk of creating new

“consumerism cathedrals” (Corvo 2007) and to not meet the needs of each tourist; in fact many initiatives have been promoted to improve the quality of the touristic offer through marketing advertising and different professional figures have been developed to improve the touristic services and structures in order to meet tourists’ needs and desires and not to make feel him an intruder. Social wellbeing should be promoted and intended at a collective level with the hypothesis of a new sense of identity and belonging.

La Cecla (2003) maintains that “the frontiers are a face to face between two realities, two cultures, two territories; a place where the comparison substitutes the conflict”. Social Tourism aims at giving back to travelling its authenticity, intending it as encounter, discovery and changing. The attention is focused not only on distant destinations, but also on community tourism which is based on hospitality by families, small hotels, high relational dimension agritourism, as well as walking in the woods or in little villages or sharing experiences with ecologist groups or communities which welcome disadvantaged people. The attention is focused on the individual with his or her needs, expectations and anxieties. Social Tourism represents an occasion to know the others better and become aware of ourselves, rediscovering the real values of life. Meeting other people helps to socialize and social operator’s task is to guarantee the access to tourism to everybody, with no prejudice and differences.

Another element to take into consideration is population average age which is continuously rising thanks to the technological and scientific development announcing a more and more old population in the next future. Therefore it is necessary to abandon the welfare policy or attitude toward Social Tourism and to change the direction in favor of an autonomy culture, recognizing the value which the independence has for a person. Welfare culture should be substitute by normality culture (Fantini 2002), so that free time and recreation become a right of everyone, even of those people who have economic or health problems. Furth more vacation for disabled people should not be considered anymore a form of therapy, but a moment of socialization, of encounter with the other, of recreation and psychophysical wellbeing. Many tour operators have not entered in the logic of the social tourism yet and have difficulties to consider the disabled or people with whatever kind of problem useful consumers. In the end we must not forget the Manila Declaration of 1980 which stated the right of the disabled tourist or of the tourist in particular and difficult conditions to have the same possibilities of touristic fruition of the others. At the end of the 90s, marketing begun to reevaluate the figure of the disabled in the perspective of the touristic fruition since it would have been able to attract also its chaperons so to become a new marketing reality which could invert the trend. The 11 % of adult population, according to an Eurostat research carried out by Touch Ross, is disabled and to this percentage are added the children, the old people and pregnant women, so that the market of social tourism reaches a total of 60 millions of people. Social tourism is an actor of the territorial arrangement and of the local development since tourism has an impact on the territory which can be both positive and negative.

It is important to preserve the territory through a responsible behavior in the full respect of the identity of the local population and environment. Scholars have identified the three “s” of social tourism which are

- (a) social,
- (b) sustainable,
- (c) solidarity.

The key points of sustainable social tourism are:

1. the respect of environment and local identities
2. to offer new means to regions to reevaluate abandoned territories and to replenish these territories without the exploitation of the resources
3. to generate economic, social and cultural benefits for the local inhabitants.

Sustainable tourism is defined as “tourism that respects both local people and the traveler, cultural heritage and the environment” (UNESCO 2006). It seeks to provide people with an exciting and educational holiday that is also of benefit to the people of the host country. Sustainable tourism produces a series of variations which are the following:

Responsible tourism is any form of tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way. It is tourism which:

1. minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts;
2. generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities;
3. improves working conditions and access to the industry;
4. involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
5. makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage embracing diversity;
6. provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
7. provides access for physically challenged people;
8. is culturally sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence (*Cape Town Declaration, 2002*).

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism—all forms of tourism can become more sustainable but not all forms of tourism can be ecotourism.

“Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy, study and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features—both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (*Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993*). (*The official definition adopted by the IUCN in 1996*).

Geotourism

Geotourism is a touristic practice which sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place, its environment, culture, aesthetics and the well-being of its residents.

Voluntourism

Voluntourism is a form of travel where one volunteers on projects which give back to the community.

Solidarity Tourism

Social tourism tries to promote also the poor territories and the developing countries and in that case it can be identified as “solidarity tourism”. Community based tourism is known as a tourism in which the local populations control the tourist activity, from the methods of reception of the participants to the generated incomes. It offers better perspectives to poor regions, on an economic as well as human level. In this perspective, it is the village communities that organize themselves to create tourist visits adapted to local realities, develop the culture and the human exchange, and respect the environment. They also manage the complementary incomes resulting from this activity. Thus, the rural populations can both defend their patrimony and their rights as well as assert themselves as economic actors, able to diversify their incomes in order to improve their living conditions (Šimková and Kasal 2012).

2 Research Project

The methodology of research applied to this work is circumscribed within Abruzzo region in Italy and it is based on four stages:

1. identifying the field of research;
2. identifying the privileged witnesses job and who is oppressed by the social position he holds during the year;
3. semi structured interviews;
4. Delphi analysis.

Mapping the field of research has the aim of choosing and defining the active corporations in the territory and the social actors involved in Abruzzo social tourism. Moreover it helps to find out the characteristics of the territory useful for the development of Social Tourism in the region. Privileged witnesses will be selected within the field of tourism activity and to them will be administered a semi-structured interview to understand the system. A semi-structured interview has a rigorous set of questions which does not allow one to divert; it is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored and the specific topic or topics that the interviewer wants to

explore during the interview should usually be thought about well in advance. Then through Delphi method, will be gathered all the behaviors and opinions of the professionals toward the future sceneries of social tourism in Abruzzo. The Delphi method is a structured communication method, which relies on a panel of experts who answer questionnaires in two or more rounds and after each round, a facilitator provides an anonymous summary of the experts' forecasts from the previous round as well as the reasons of their judgments. During this process the range of the answers will decrease and converge towards the "correct" answer. A number of Delphi forecasts are conducted using web sites that allow the process to be conducted in real time such as Tech Cast Project and Horizon Project (Talhofer et al. 2012).

3 Discussion and Conclusion

The main task of social Tourism is to consent everyone the access to tourism for a full self-fulfillment of the individual both as a person and a citizen. It represents at the same time a right and a social service, accessible to everyone, since it is an alienable right. It is an actor of economic growth and promotes new territorial arrangement based on local development and a partner of the projects for world. This touristic practice allows the tourist to feel not a stranger but a friend of the local hosts and through this new way of accommodation to make authentic experiences through which rediscover one self's identity and priorities. Besides it creates also the opportunity for the birth of new professions in tourism field thus hindering in part the problem of unemployment. In this way it is possible to assert that Social Tourism as a way to rediscover the new identity of 21st century man.

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