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TOURISM AS A FORM OF SOCIAL INTERVENTION: THE HOLIDAY PARTICIPATION CENTRE IN FLANDERS

ABSTRACT

Tourism as a form of social intervention: the Holiday Participation Centre in Flanders
This article presents the concept of social tourism as a form of social intervention. Tourism is
seen by the European Economic and Social Committee as an opportunity for relation building,

personal development and social integration. Social tourism initiatives offer holiday opportunities for persons who are otherwise prohibited from taking holidays, because of emotional, financial or health reasons. These mostly take the form of domestic breaks or day trips. In several countries of mainland Europe, the public sector supports these initiatives via involvement in public-private partnerships. One of these partnerships is the Holiday Participation Centre in Flanders, Belgium.

This article will frame the initiative within social tourism provision in Flanders, Belgium, present the basic principles upon which the system operates, and give an overview of quantitative research findings regarding its outcomes as a form of social intervention.

Keywords

Social tourism, holidays, leisure, social exclusion, inclusion, participation, social network

SAMENVATTING

Toerisme als sociale interventie: het Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie van Toerisme Vlaanderen
In dit artikel wordt sociaal toerisme gepresenteerd als een sociale interventie. Het Europees Economisch en Sociaal Comité beschouwt toerisme als een middel tot het opbouwen van netwerken, persoonlijke ontwikkeling en sociale integratie. Mensen die normaliter door emotionele, financiële of gezondheidsredenen niet op vakantie kunnen, worden door sociaal toerisme in staat gesteld wel op vakantie te gaan. Dit sociaal toerisme heeft veelal de vorm van dagtripjes en binnenlandse vakanties. De publieke sector van diverse Europese landen ondersteunt deze initiatieven voor sociaal toerisme, en doet dat door publiek-private samenwerkingsverbanden op te richten. Een van deze samenwerkingsverbanden is het Steunpunt Vakantieparticipatie van Toerisme Vlaanderen, België.

Dit artikel beschrijft een initiatief tot sociaal toerisme in Vlaanderen, presenteert de grondslagen van dergelijke initiatieven tot sociaal toerisme en geeft een overzicht van onderzoeksbevindingen naar het sociaal toerisme als sociale interventie.

Trefwoorden

Sociaal toerisme, vakantie, vrije tijd, sociale uitsluiting, sociale insluiting, participatie, sociaal netwerk

INTRODUCTION

In Europe, between 48% and 77% of the population take a yearly holiday of at least 4 days (Vanhove, 2005, p. 65). Although there are persons who do not travel because they simply do not want to, or because their health or lack of mobility does not permit participation in tourism, the most common reason for non-participation is the inability to afford a holiday (Smith & Hughes, 1999, p. 124). Holiday taking has been linked to a range of benefits, that have been summarized by Hazel (2005) as a break from routine, increased social interaction, better mental health, the broadening of experiences, the strengthening of family relationships and the development of independence. Socially excluded groups are likely to be excluded from holidays and their benefits.

In some countries holidays are not seen as a luxury, but as an answer to a human need, and an opportunity for relation building, personal development and social integration. These countries support holiday opportunities for low-income groups, often in the form of domestic breaks or day trips, with specific government initiatives. This form of tourism is called *Social Tourism*. Social Tourism encompasses a variety of different initiatives, commercial and non-commercial, governmental and private, that aim to offer holiday experiences to groups that would not otherwise have them. It has been defined as "tourism with an added moral value, which aims to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange" (Minnaert, Maitland & Miller, 2007, p. 9). Examples of Social Tourism range from holiday initiatives for people with disabilities and charity holidays for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to the development of community-based tourism in economically underdeveloped areas. In several countries of mainland Europe (for example France, Belgium, Spain), Social Tourism is supported by public funding, and mostly takes the form of low-cost domestic holidays. In these countries, the basis for provision is the perceived right of all to enjoy tourism (European Economic and Social Committee [EESC], 2006). Social Tourism is provided on the grounds that it increases equality between groups of society. In other countries, including the UK and USA, Social Tourism is a less well-known phenomenon, and rarely publicly funded, since tourism is seen as a discretionary activity, to which no right exists (Minnaert *et al.*, 2007, 2009).

Where Social Tourism is an established part of public policy, its benefits are strongly asserted. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) for example, in its Barcelona declaration, describes an improvement in well-being and personal development as benefits for the beneficiaries. At the same time, it mentions an extended season, stable employment opportunities and sustainability as benefits for the tourism industry (EESC, 2006, p. 12). Social tourism is not

seen as "just a holiday", but as a form of social intervention, and a way to achieve social goals. At the same time, it is considered to be a contribution to employment and economic development. In other words, social tourism initiatives usually aim to combine social benefits with economic stimulation of the tourism industry in a way that is cost-effective for the tax payer, which is often achieved via public-private partnerships. This article will give an overview of one of these partnership projects – *The Holiday Participation Centre* – in Flanders, Belgium's northern and Dutch-speaking region. It will frame the initiative within social tourism provision in Belgium, present the basic principles upon which the system operates, and give an overview of quantitative research findings regarding its outcomes as a form of social intervention.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AS A DEFICIENCY IN SOCIAL AND FAMILY CAPITAL

The term "social exclusion" was originally coined in France in 1974 to refer to various categories of people who were unprotected by social insurance at the time but labelled as "social problems", for example: the disabled, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, aged invalids et cetera. However, in the 1980's, this stigmatising and narrowly social view was superseded as the term became central to French debates about the nature of the "new poverty" associated with technological change and economic restructuring (Rodgers, Gore & Figueiredo, 1995, p. 1). Since then, the term is widely used internationally, and the range of definitions attached to it have become more diverse over time. The literature shows that, despite the growing use and apparent acceptance of the term social exclusion, there are still many (contested) definitions of what it means exactly and confusion about the relationship between social exclusion and poverty (Hodgson & Turner, 2003, p. 266).

Walker and Walker define social exclusion very generally as "a dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society" (Walker & Walker in Hodgson & Turner, 2003, p. 266). Another general definition is the one by Burchhardt: "An individual is socially excluded if (a) he or she is geographically resident in a society and (b) he or she does not participate in the normal activities of citizens in that society" (Burchardt *et al*., in Hodgson & Turner, 2003, p. 267). Rodgers et al. opt for a more sociological and psychological definition: "Social exclusion refers, in particular, to inability to enjoy social rights without help, suffering from low self-esteem, inadequacy in their capacity to meet their obligations, the risk of long-term relegation to the rank of those on social benefits, and stigmatisation" (Rodgers *et al.,* 1995, p. 45). Often definitions of social exclusion

also stress a geographical or spatial factor, and concentrate on neighbourhoods where many problems are related to social exclusion. An example is this definition by Madanipour, describing social exclusion as "a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision-making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods" (Madanipour *et al*., in Hodgson & Turner, 2003, p. 267). The UK Index of Multiple Deprivation, developed by the University of Oxford, also includes this geographical aspect of social exclusion. It measures exclusion in terms of 6 "dimensions": income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education and training, housing, and finally the geographical access to services (Miller, 2003, p. 5).

Social and family capital are valuable concepts in the discussion of social exclusion because of the fact that they are more strictly defined (even though also for these concepts different definitions exist). Social exclusion can then be seen as a deficiency in social and family capital.

Different definitions of social capital exist, but the consensus is growing that *social capital* stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures (Portes, 1998, p. 6). Coleman contrasts social capital with two other forms of capital: Physical capital on the one hand (machines, tools, productive equipment), and human capital on the other hand (training). If physical capital is wholly tangible, being embodied in observable material form, and human capital is less tangible, being embodied in the skills and knowledge acquired by an individual, social capital is less tangible yet, for it exists in the relations among persons (Coleman, 1998, p. 100).

According to Coleman, there are three forms of social capital (Coleman, 1998). Firstly there is the form of social capital that consists mainly of obligations, expectations and the trustworthiness of structures. This form ideally leads to co-operation and a smooth solving of collective problems. Connected to this form is the second one: norms and effective sanctions. These norms regulate the co-operation and punish actions that go against the set obligations and expectations. The third and last form of social capital are information channels, as a network of close contacts can provide access to the network of information each of these contacts possesses.

Social capital has been linked to general well-being. The New economics foundation (Nef) researches methods and policies to improve quality of life by promoting innovative solutions that challenge mainstream thinking on economic, environmental and social issues (New economics

foundation [Nef], 2004, p. 1). The focus is on the concept of well-being, which is described as more than just happiness. "As well as feeling satisfied and happy, well-being means developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the society" (Nef, 2004, p. 4). Nef suggests there are three main sources for well-being, the first of which being our parents, through our genes and upbringing. This sources influences well-being for about 50%. A second influence comes from our circumstances such as income, where we live, the climate etc. This source only accounts for 10% of our happiness, suggesting that money, after our basic needs are met, does not make us fundamentally happier. The reason for this low percentage is that a person adapts very quickly to material gains which come from increases in income and we also compare ourselves to others who have more, which can lead to dissatisfaction. The remaining 40% of our well-being is influenced by our outlook and activities, like our friendships, being involved in our community, sport, hobbies as well as our outlook on life. Social capital is thus an area where big differences to well-being can be made (Nef, 2004, p. 4).

In recent studies, mainly in the field of education and learning, the terms "*family capital*" and "family social capital" have been used to define the nature and value of social capital within the family. Parcel and Dufur describe the concept as "the bonds between parents and children that are useful in promoting child socialization. (It) reflects the time and attention parents spend in interaction with children, in monitoring their activities, and in promoting child well-being, including academic achievement." As such it refers to parental resources used in the socialization process. These parental resources are distinguished from "parental financial capital such as family financial resources, and from human capital such as parental years of schooling" (Parcel & Dufur, 2001, p. 882–883). This means that families on low incomes or parents with limited schooling are not necessarily low on family capital. Family capital is determined by the stability of the family on the one hand, and the social contacts of the parents on the other hand.

> (Family capital) is greater when the family system is characterized by time-closure; when the parents' commitment to each other is long term, children benefit from the stability of the union. In addition, children benefit from continued exposure to the social connections parents have with others outside the family group, such as neighbours, school personnel or work colleagues. (Parcel & Dufur, 2001, p. 882–883)

For socially excluded families, both stability within the family unit and social contacts can be particularly problematic. In families where the family capital is particularly low, this can affect the children in their academic development. Two studies by Marjoribanks have shown that "family

environmental contexts are moderately to largely associated with children's academic performances and adolescents' aspirations" (Marjoribanks, 1998, p. 328).

Although mainly used in the context of education and learning, the concept is not only applicable to the children's development. The level of family capital can also affect the resilience of the family as a whole, and thus influence (being part of social capital) each member of that family. Belsey describes the concept of family capital from this angle, as having three dimensions:

> relations and the family network; family resources (knowledge, skills and material resources); and resilience. Resilience has much in common with the more widely understood concept of social capital, which, when applied to the family, includes one or a combination of the following: a sense of personal security, religious affiliation/practice, and social and moral points of reference. (Belsey, 2003, p. 3)

SOCIAL TOURISM AS A GENERATOR OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY CAPITAL

Putnam argues that "precisely because poor people (by definition) have little economic capital and face formidable obstacles in acquiring human capital (that is: education), social capital is disproportionately important to their welfare" (Putnam, 2000, p. 318). Lacking the valuable connections and relationships between people can thus have an added detrimental affect of people living in poverty or on low incomes, making them not only financially poor, but also literally "socially excluded". Not only their psychological well-being is hereby affected; economists have developed an impressive body of research suggesting that social ties can influence who gets a job, a bonus, a promotion and other employment benefits (Putnam, 2000). This means that social networks are often absent for people who need them the most.

A deficiency in family capital, as described above, can also result in increased exclusion and reduced opportunities to do well in life. It is highly influential in the educational achievements of children – with education being one of the six dimensions on the UK Index of Multiple Deprivation. Generally one can thus state that persons who have high levels of social and family capital to their disposal increase their chances of doing better in life. Hence it can be stated that increasing the social and family capital of persons who are deficient in these areas, can increase their inclusion levels or at least help to reduce certain aspects of social exclusion. This article proposes social tourism as a potential aid in increasing social, family and cultural capital, and will underpin this suggestion with primary research findings.

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SOCIAL TOURISM IN FLANDERS, BELGIUM

The introduction of the annual holiday and holiday pay are at the basis of social tourism. This goes back to 1936 when trade unions linked the right to paid holidays with the possibility for labourers to escape their hard daily life. The establishment of vacation centres thus allowed labourers to go on holiday outside the commercial circuit at an affordable price. One's first holiday experience was, in those days, usually a group holiday.

The centres for social tourism enjoyed their glory days in the post-war years. The period of economic growth was a period of hard work, but the average Belgian had little time and limited means for holidays. Social holidays were subsidised by the government, and more holiday homes saw the light of day in Belgium and abroad.

In 2008, 26.5% of Belgians were unable to afford a holiday. One out of seven Belgians is classified as poor. People living in poverty must make choices, and often not much is left over for leisure. They spend on average 75% less on tourist travel than average. (Tourism Flanders, 2008)

In 2003, the decree "Tourism for All" replaced the Royal Decree of 1980. It was a response to the changing societal context and gives a new interpretation to social tourism. "Tourism for All" refers to a non-commercial form of tourism and recreation, with the focus on objectives that differ from merely economic activities. On the one hand, a choice was made for a target-group focused approach to support the manner in which specific target groups experience holidays (Tourism Flanders, 2008, 2009).

"Tourism for All" implies a new structure for supporting the organizations that focus on these target groups: persons living in poverty, persons with disabilities, children and young people and the elderly and families. Persons living in poverty are the main focus of this article: because they cannot afford a holiday in the commercial tourism circuit, they can be seen as excluded from the social benefits holidays can bring. There are organizations that offer specialized holiday provision for this target group. The Holiday Participation Centre is fully focused on this group (see below).

A second target group is represented by persons with disabilities. The initiatives for this target group principally concern the quality of the accommodation infrastructure. The adaptation of the infrastructure for persons with disabilities also increases the accessibility of the accommodation for other groups, such as the elderly. In making the adaptations, requisite attention must be paid to

the four priority target groups, i.e. persons with a motor disability, the hearing-impaired, the blind and visually handicapped, and persons with an allergy or asthma. Accommodations that do what is required to make their premises accessible are awarded an accessibility label with which they can clearly advertise their services to the target group.

Children and young people constitute a third target group within "Tourism for All". Accommodations that are rented for youth holidays during the summer or other holidays must fulfil basic quality norms. The goal of the decree "Tourism for All" is to provide sufficient capacity, diversity and basic quality within the youth tourism sector, so that the youth work sector has a sufficiently extensive and diverse offerings at its disposal to develop its activity. Upgrading and continuously supporting the accommodation infrastructure that focuses on the individual international youth tourism market is also a key aim.

In addition, many families and senior citizens still fall by the wayside when it comes to experiencing holidays away from home. The existing social vacation centres continue to play a very important role in support of this target group. Their social pricing policy, the basic quality of their infrastructure and their offerings of themed activities meet the requirements of this target group (Tourism Flanders, 2008, 2009).

THE HOLIDAY PARTICIPATION CENTRE

The central organization in social tourism provision in Flanders is the Holiday Participation Centre, a publicly funded team within Tourism Flanders, the regional Tourist Board. It was established in May 2001 by Tourism Flanders & Brussels. Its activities are mainly: to contribute to social tourism policy; to search for tourism partners with a social vision; to engage in targeted promotion to persons with a low income; to organize training for social and tourism partners; to organize evaluation, consultation and exchange to optimize effectiveness; and to investigate the international context and make contacts.

The Holiday Participation Centre liaises between the public, private and social sectors. The private tourism sector plays an important role: accommodation providers and private attractions offer voluntary discounts and reduced tariffs for low-income groups. The Holiday participation centre communicates these reduced tariffs to the social sector and the holiday makers, via their website and yearly brochures. The system is designed as a win-win situation for all parties involved: the private sector gains access to a new target group and free marketing, and can use the initiative

as part of their Corporate Social responsibility policy; the social sector gains access to low-cost holiday opportunities; and the public sector can a social intervention method, reaching thousands of low-income and socially excluded citizens, at minimal cost. The project has proven a big success, which is illustrated by the rise in participation figures since its start in 2000, when it offered holiday places to 752 participants. Nowadays, the offer has been extended with individual holidays, group holidays, day trips and organized holidays for families, children and young persons. In 2008, almost 73,000 persons, most of whom would otherwise have not been able to enjoy a break away or day trip, used the offer of the Holiday Participation Centre to do just that (Tourism Flanders, 2008, p. 20).

	Day trips	Group stays	Organized holidays	Individual holidays	Total
2001	0	0	752	0	752
2002	170	107	1,570	412	2,259
2003	6,500	718	2,216	526	9,960
2004	12,629	503	2,433	774	16,339
2005	14,865	1,238	3,183	1,567	20,853
2006	13,906	1,341	3,478	1,887	20,612
2007	44,523	1,693	2,854	1,910	50,980
2008	65,014	1,426	3,994	2,478	72,912

Source: Holiday Participation Centre (2008)

Figure 1: Number of beneficiaries of the Holiday Participation Centre (2001–2008).

METHOD

Although the European Economic and Social Committee has identified a range of social benefits related to tourism, such as an improvement to well-being, increased citizenship and personal development (EESC, 2006), evidence of these benefits have until recently been rather scarce. Minnaert *et al.* (2009) have recently presented the first evidence that the participation of socially excluded groups in social tourism activities can lead to increases in the social and family capital of the participants. This study, based on semi-longitudinal qualitative research, has linked holiday participation to improvements in family relations (family capital), increases in confidence and self-esteem, an extension of social networks (social capital), and more pro-active forms attitudes to life. These benefits were noted for the majority of participants in the first round of fieldwork (one month after the holiday), and in most cases they were sustained in the second round of fieldwork (six months later). It also became apparent that six months after the holiday

about half of the participants had begun to make measurable changes to their lives: some had started a course, others had started to budget better, others still had started their own business. These improvements had the most chance of materializing if the participants were appropriately supported by social support organizations (Minnaert *et al.*, 2009).

This initial evidence was the basis for a quantitative, larger-scale study with the stakeholder groups of the Holiday Participation Centre. This was achieved via an extended version of the yearly user satisfaction survey, which was sent out to the following stakeholder groups: the social organizations, the accommodation providers, the attractions and the holidaymakers themselves.

- The social organizations are the social partners of the Holiday Participation Centre. This group is comprised of a variety of organizations, from the public (for example OCMW – Social Services) as well as the charity and voluntary sector. The size of the organizations differs considerably, as does their target group. Some organizations work with children, others with adults or families. Possible target groups are underprivileged, refugees, young people in difficult family situations, et cetera.
- The accommodation providers are those lodgings that make a part of their offerings available to the target groups at a reduced rate via the Holiday Participation Centre. Some do this for specific months of the year, others all year round.
- The attractions are, for example, amusement parks, museums, cultural activities and zoos that offer tickets to the target group at a reduced price via the Holiday Participation Centre.
- The holidaymakers are those who have made use of the holiday offerings for a holiday or day trip.

1522 questionnaires were sent out in November 2007. The participants were given three weeks to respond. As an incentive, a contest with a number of prizes was linked to the survey. Across the four target groups, a 66% response rate was recorded, with 1010 returned questionnaires. None of the target groups recorded a response rate of less than 60%.

The following paragraphs present the findings of this study with regards to the value of tourism as a social intervention. The holiday motivations of the respondents are examined, as are the outcomes of the holiday as perceived by the participants and their social support workers. The full study also investigates the satisfaction of the stakeholders with the operations of the Holiday Participation Centre, and the motivations of the private sector to voluntarily participate in the scheme (Tourism Flanders, 2008). The private sector perspective is also explained in more detail in Minnaert (2008).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Profile of the holidaymaker

At the beginning of the survey, the holidaymakers were asked a number of questions concerning their personal profile. This indicated that 50% of those surveyed were between 31 and 45 years of age. 34% were between 46 and 60. The youngest (between 18 and 30) and the eldest group (60+) were the least represented with 8% each. Families account for the greatest share of participation in the Centre's holidays: 82% of those surveyed had children. These are generally families with up to three children, this group constituting 73% of the holidaymakers surveyed.

39% of those surveyed had a paid job. The remaining 61% were unemployed and the most common reason for this was disability or sick leave (46% of the 61%). Job seekers (23%) and (early) retired employees (14%) are also part of this group. The average net household income of the holidaymakers is just under €1,000 per month. The largest group (31%) earns between €800 and €1,000 per month. 52% of those surveyed earn less than €1,000 per month, for 5% this is even less than €600 per month. 48% earn more than €1,000 per month and 7% earn more than €1,500 per month.

Holiday motivation

The holidaymakers were asked about their motivation for applying for a holiday. For the first question, all applicable answers could be ticked. The results were as follows:

Table 1: Holiday motivations of participants (*N*=318).

Motivation	%
Rest and relaxation	61.0%
To leave behind problems for a few days	60.3%
To break the daily routine	40.0%
To spend time with family	39.0%
Last holiday was a long time ago	18.7%
To gain new experiences	11.7%
To take a fresh start	6.7%
Other	6.7%
Total	244.1%

This showed that relaxation and relief from daily problems are the top motivations for the holidaymakers. Interrupting the daily routine also belongs here. This is in line with the Minnaert *et al.* (2009) study, which showed that the daily problems and the daily routine sometimes make it difficult to deal with these problems or to look for a solution. A holiday, which brings with it new surroundings, can also bring with it the mental freedom that the participants need to muster the courage and do something about these problems. Spending time with the family also scored relatively high given that not all those surveyed went on holiday with family.

The next question in the survey aimed at studying which of these motivations played the biggest role. The results were as follows:

Table 2: Biggest holiday motivation for participants (*N*=318).

Biggest motivation	%
To leave behind problems for a few days	32%
Rest and relaxation	22%
To spend time with family	21%
To break the daily routine	13%
Last holiday was a long time ago	4%
To gain new experiences	4%
Other	3%
To take a fresh start	3%
Total	100%

The results for this question are similar, except perhaps for the fact that "spending time with the family" scores relatively higher here. This can point to the fact that this was a special motivation for holidaymakers who went on holiday with family members.

Effects of the holiday

This paragraph focuses on the effects of the holidays on the holidaymakers after their return. The European Economic and Social Committee described social tourism in the "Opinion on social tourism" (2006) as a "miracle" with positive effects on health, social circumstances and development of the holidaymakers. Examples of positive effects are increased confidence,

expanded social network, improved family ties, stronger mental health and a more proactive attitude to life (see also Minnaert *et al.*, 2009). While these effects are often attributed to social tourism, there is little scientific research that demonstrates these effects. This paragraph investigates which effects take place, how often they take place and what this means for the organization of social tourism.

The holidaymakers were surveyed concerning a series of potential effects of the holidays. These can be divided into four categories.

1. Social network: these propositions aimed to test the extent to which the holidaymakers found that their social network had been strengthened since the holiday. This section thus particularly focuses on social and family capital increases. Propositions that were related to this are:

• Since the holiday, family ties have been strengthened
• I feel closer to the people with whom I went on holiday
• Since the holiday, I like to meet new people
• Since the holiday, I socialize more often

2. Attitude to life: these propositions aimed at assessing the extent to which the holiday contributed to a change in attitude to life on the part of the holidaymakers. The propositions in this category ask about the view on life or a more active attitude after the holiday. Propositions that were related to this are:

• The holiday changed my view on a number of things
• The holiday was a new start for me
• I have been more active since the holiday
• I try new things more often since the holiday
• I have more contact with my social organization since the holiday

3. Mental strength: these propositions aimed at assessing the effect of the holiday on the emotional life and mental strength of the holidaymakers. Propositions that were related to this are:

• I feel mentally stronger since the holiday
• I have more confidence since the holiday

4. Public transport: this proposition aimed at assessing the extent to which the use of public transport while on holiday was an opportunity to also use public transport more often after the holiday. The proposition made in this regard is thus:

• I make use of public transport more often since the holiday

Below follows an overview of the reactions to these propositions. The proposed percentages represent those surveyed who ticked "tend to agree" or "entire agree".
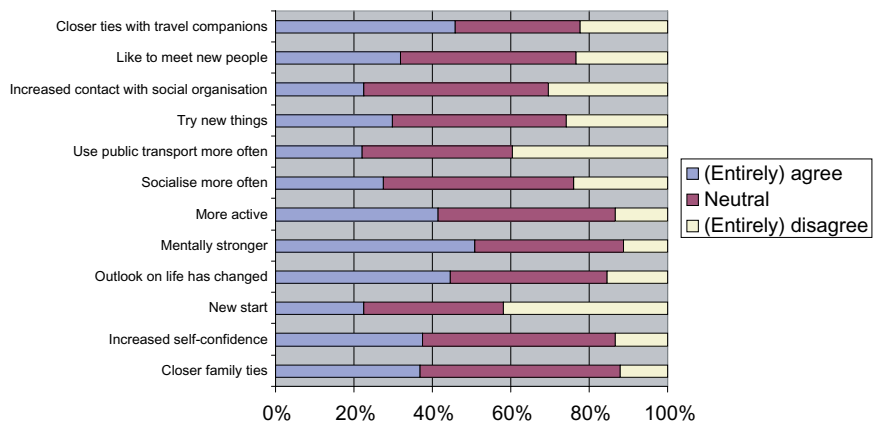

Figure 2: Benefits of social tourism as reported by beneficiaries.

The answers in the categories "tend to agree" or "entirely agree" vary between 22% and 51%. Circumstances that caused many of those surveyed to choose the "neutral" category were:

• Not all propositions were applicable to all those surveyed. For example, "strengthened family ties" were not applicable to the holidaymakers who had no children or went on holiday without family members. Holidaymakers who already used public transport were not influenced by the holiday.
• Some holidays were very brief, in a number of cases only two days. The duration of the holiday in these cases is perhaps too short to obtain specific effects.
• A number of effects require a longer "incubation period" and develop in the longer term. Negative holiday experiences are also inhibitors and sometimes prevent specific effects from developing.

Social network

The first four propositions refer to the social network of the holidaymakers and the effect of the holiday on this. The proposition that was most applicable to the holidaymakers was that they felt connected to the people with whom they had been on holiday. For a large group of these holidaymakers, this meant a strengthening of family ties. Wanting to meet new people and engaging socially more often were the other propositions in this category. Previous research (Minnaert *et al.*, 2009) shows that these effects are usually especially applicable to holidaymakers who participated in group holidays. The fact that more than 25% of the participants socialized more after the holiday is a surprising result: a holiday, often of a short duration, appears to increase the social network of the holidaymakers and stimulate the inclusion of the participants. It is important to emphasize again that not all holidaymakers needed a larger social network. Based on this, it is striking that a holiday had this effect for more than 25% of the participants. The following quote illustrates the importance of the holiday for the family: "It was really good for our family to get away and to enjoy life as a normal family. Our children were also able to tell about their holiday at school, just like all the other children."

Attitude to life

The following five propositions refer to personal development and a proactive attitude to life on the part of the holidaymakers after the holiday. The first three propositions in this group scored very high, each endorsed by more than 40% of the holidaymakers. This means that more than 40% of those surveyed experienced the holiday as an event that changed their view on some things, meant a new start and made them more active. This can be linked to previous research (Minnaert *et al*., 2009) in which it appeared that the holiday was a moment to leave behind stressful and problematic surroundings, so that holidaymakers could have a more positive experience and also reflect on how they could achieve these positive experiences at home. Other propositions in this category refer to doing new things more often and more frequent contact with the social organization. The number of holidaymakers who experienced these effects was lower but still sizeable. Again, it is important, as for all propositions, to understand that they did not apply to every holidaymaker. An example of how a holiday can affect the personal attitude to life of the holidaymakers is: "After the holiday that my wife and I spent at the hotel in September 2007, we felt healthy, cheerful and happy."

Mental strength

The following two propositions refer to the mental strength of the holidaymakers. More than half of the holidaymakers stated that they felt mentally stronger after the holiday. This is especially

important to the Holiday Participation Centre, since groups with a low income run a higher risk of suffering from mental problems such as depression, anxiety and stress. A substantial number of the holidaymakers also experience greater self-confidence after the holiday. Low self-confidence can be linked to a series of social and health problems such as loneliness, aggression, low work performance and depression. When people feel mentally stronger and have greater self-confidence, the chance is greater that they will take on a more positive attitude to life (see previous category). The following quote illustrates the effect of the holiday on both family ties and the mental strength of the holidaymakers: "The children were very happy and I also enjoyed it. I have five children, one grandchild and a second on the way. I hope that all of my children have it better than I did. I have been separated for a year and this week did me good, even after a severe depression."

Public transport

The final proposition refers to increased use of public transport after the holiday. The answers indicate that the holidaymakers experience this effect the least, even though 22% of those surveyed still agreed with the proposition. Increased use of public transport can have different positive effects. The holidaymakers themselves may increase their action radius: they may choose for example to take the bus into town to meet up with their newly extended social network. But there are also wider possible effects on society: it can increase the mobility of groups with a low income (who are more likely not to have a car), decrease pressure on roads and parking areas and is a more environmentally friendly form of transport.

EFFECTS AS PERCEIVED BY SOCIAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

The social support organizations were also asked how they perceived the effects of the holiday on the holiday makers. As trained professionals, they were considered to have a good insight into the personal and family development of the holidaymakers after the holiday. Their views largely follow the effects indicated by the holidaymakers. 59% of the member organizations say that their clients are happier and more peaceful after the holiday, 33% say that the holidaymakers have more courage and 33% say that they have made more social contacts. Greater self-confidence is indicated by 24% of the member organizations and 21% say that the holidaymakers are more involved with the organization. Only 1% of the member organizations see no benefits after the return.

Table 3: Effects as perceived by social support organizations (*N*=594).

Greater self-esteem	23.76%
Increased social network	33.06%
More courage	33.26%
Happier, more peaceful	58.47%
A fresh start	11.16%
Closer family ties	18.19%
More involved with social organization	20.88%
Better health	5.17%
No difference after return	0.83%
I cannot judge this	17.15%
Other	4.34%
Total	226.27%

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study quantitatively support the qualitative findings that were proposed in Minnaert *et al.* (2009). On 4 dimensions of social exclusion – namely social networks, attitude to life, mental strength and mobility (public transport) – positive responses of between 22 and 51% of the respondents were recorded. The first of these categories, social networks, particularly refers to social and family capital increases. A quarter of the respondents met new people after the holiday, and almost half of them grew closer to the people they travelled with. A third of the social support organizations also indicated increased social networks as an important benefit of social tourism. Almost 40% agreed that family ties had become closer. These results are impressive considering the fact that many respondents only went on a day trip – indicating that a small investment in terms of time and money can trigger large increases in terms of social and family capital.

Apart from potentially increasing social and family capital, social tourism is also shown to have impacts on a number of other facets of social exclusion. Improvements in mental health are hereby the strongest benefit. This indicates that social tourism has profound impacts on the wellbeing of the participants, and this in the longer term (seeing that most holidays were taken in the summer, and the questionnaires were filled out in the late autumn – the reported benefits can thus be seen as more than just temporary changes in mood).

There are indications that an increase in social and family capital, combined with enhanced wellbeing, may cause a more positive attitude to life for the participants to social tourism. This is illustrated by the fact that about 40% of the responded reported to "see certain things differently" since the holiday. Social tourism is thus not only a widening of geographical horizons, but can also widen mental and psychological horizons.

Finally, it was shown that social tourism can positively affect mobility. In this study, the example of public transport was investigated for two reasons; on the one hand because socially excluded people are less likely to be car owners, and on the other hand because forms of green transport are being encouraged by a range of public initiatives. This proposition found the least support with the respondents, but even here 22% agreed to use public transport more often – again a worthy result considering the small public investment needed to provide the day trip or holiday.

CONCLUSION

These results show that social holidays can have a positive effect on various aspects of the daily life of the holidaymakers. The survey of the member organizations confirms these conclusions. (Only 1% of the surveyed member organizations noted no benefits after the return of the holidaymakers.) This does not mean social tourism is a panacea for all social problems, and that all other social interventions can simply be replaced by holidays. Nevertheless, the research clearly indicates that seeing the limited investment needed – for the government in financial terms and for the participants in time – large numbers of those surveyed report a wide range of effects. Social tourism is one of the few types of social intervention that can bring about a wide range of effects in a short period of time, in many cases in no more than a week. Compared to the cost of other social measures that aim for the same effects such as classes on parenthood, support for mental problems and awareness campaigns with respect to the use of public transport (which in some cases have less success), social tourism can be seen as cost effective. Again, this does not mean that the other programmes can be completely replaced, but rather that it can replace other initiatives and enhance their success. Further research in this area is needed to determine how social tourism can best economically complement other social interventions.

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