

THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STATE FOR THE SOCIAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SERBIA

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Vuk Garača

Svetlana Vukosav

Milan Bradić

Jelena Tepavčević

University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Science, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, **Serbia**

ABSTRACT

In every society there are sensitive social communities, which the state recognizes and in various ways stimulates their inclusion in social life. One of the ways of including such layers of society in social flows is social tourism. The methods of such stimulation differ from historical time and from each country. They generally come down to the existence of specialized closed or semi-closed hospitality establishments, whose activities and work are co-financed by the state or society. Vouchers are another, modern form of social and state assistance for the sensitive categories of the population inclusion in tourism. It is a direct form of giving to each individual, who meets certain criteria to choose the place and time of it's realization. The aim of the paper is to show the Republic Serbia Government's role in the development of social tourism and its importance for the overall tourism development of the country. Using the method of correlative analysis, certain significances of the state vouchers's use were determined for domestic tourism in Serbia during the period from 2015 to 2022..

Keywords: social tourism, state, vouchers, Republic of Serbia

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of tourism as an economic activity can be very broad, referring to benefits for the economy, social life for people living in destinations, as well as personal benefits for tourists [1]; [2]. These personal benefits were found to include: rest and recovery from work; provision of new experiences leading to broadening of horizons and opportunities for learning and intercultural communication; promotion of peace and understanding; personal and social development; visiting friends and relatives; religious pilgrimage and health; and subjective well-being [3]; [4]; [5]. However, all these important advantages and benefits of tourism, which refer to the individual as a member of the wider social community, are not used by everyone, especially those who do not have enough financial resources to travel and/or those who are unable to do so for health reasons. Therefore, social tourism is emerging, which should enable the inclusion of all members of society in tourism. Such participation is made possible through the provision of some form of social support system [6]. Social tourism refers to: all activities and phenomena in the field of tourism that result from the inclusion of otherwise vulnerable and excluded groups in participation in tourism. "The inclusion of these groups in tourism is made possible by financial or other interventions of a well-defined and social nature" [7]. Social tourism is an area in which those who are at risk of poverty could get the opportunity to vacation at

affordable prices or such prices, the amount of which is subsidized by the state/society. Defined as „tourism with added moral value, the primary objective of which is to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange“ [6] social tourism provides tourism opportunities for those who would otherwise not be able to participate due to certain disadvantages, such as lack of money, their a full-time carer role or a health problem or disability. Social tourism includes a range of activities and programs across Europe and elsewhere that provide social and economic benefits, stimulate tourism development or promote understanding between guests and hosts in tourist destinations [7]; [8]; [9]; [6]. But neither the general public nor potential recipients are usually aware of such a possibility [10].

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of research on social justice and welfare issues in tourism [11]; [12]; [13]. including the concept of social tourism. Haulot [14] defines social tourism as „the totality of relations and phenomena arising from the participation of those social groups with modest incomes - participation that is enabled or facilitated by measures of a well-defined social character“. Although there are different interpretations of what constitutes social tourism and how it can be implemented, Minnaert et al. [15] distinguish forms of social tourism related to visitors and hosts. Social visitor-related tourism includes measures to combat social exclusion through support programs for low-income and other excluded groups. The main underlying justification for social tourism initiatives aimed at visitors is the fight against social exclusion and that these types of interventions require a special ethical orientation either at the level of government or society. Host-related forms of social tourism are more easily reconciled within ethical issues because they focus on redistributive practices between host and guest communities. Richards [16] argues that there are many culturally specific and historical factors that shape the structures and policies of the welfare state and their orientation towards tourism promotion more for „beneficial economic externalities than for the health and social benefits that justified the extension of holiday rights in the past“. This is likely to create more variation in how social tourism is understood as a social policy problem depending on the national context [17].

The origin of social tourism lies in the idea that tourism provides positive and important recuperative and educational benefits for ordinary people, and that such opportunities should be extended to all people in society. However, Tourism has become an industrialized system, an important pillar of the European economy, and therefore the basis for the participation of tourism has been fundamentally reconfigured [18] and is increasingly becoming a luxury and unaffordable need for a large number of people. In addition, since the global financial crisis, which began in 2007, there has been a further process of economic restructuring across Europe with high levels of unemployment, growing inequalities in the distribution of income/wealth and severe pressure on health and social care systems [18], therefore , general long-term economic growth and development has not trickled down to all members of society, which is why an increasing number of poorer members of society will feel excluded from travel and leisure opportunities as people did almost a century ago [19]. At the same time, many Europeans now consider the right to travel and tourism a social right [20], so many Europeans have recognized the important restorative function that tourism has for workers and reinforced the idea that there is a social right to travel and rest from work, making provisions that allow the majority of their population to enjoy access to leisure [21]. However, these interventions should have a well-defined social purpose, such as combating isolation and loneliness in older people, or encouraging family cohesion among low-income families,

or supporting accessible tourism for people with disabilities. Although social tourism is not a new concept and represents an important pillar of the European tourism system, there is still a widespread lack of awareness about the practices, policies and activities that make up this phenomenon [19], it has attracted more attention from researchers in recent years [22].

Recognizing the economic importance of social tourism, many governments have begun to promote access to leisure travel as a positive social and economic activity. However, government provisions that ensure equality of access to tourism are not universal and range from tacit support to direct investment in providing services in the form of social tourism [23]. In this sense, an increased concentration of those travelers who belong to the category of social tourists has been observed, in the off-season [10], as is the case in Spain, where the "IMSERSO" program offers vacations for senior citizens (and companions) in domestic seaside resorts on the coast, which involved 10.5 million people, providing year-round employment for tourism workers and income, generating 13,000 direct and 85,000 indirect jobs and a return of €300 million to the Spanish government [24]; [25]. To encourage similar schemes across Europe, the European Commission launched the Calipso program in 2008, which aims to reduce seasonality by helping specifically defined social tourism groups to travel between different European countries [6]. This undoubtedly indicates that social tourism can contribute to greater sustainability of destinations, through a longer duration of the tourist season, equalizing the expansion of demand, ensuring more stable employment and increasing tax collection [26]. However, attention should be paid to the possible segregation of this already socially isolated group, as well as to the fact that these are low-paying groups, which is why low preferences for service providers may occur, often due to the cultural habits of vulnerable sections of the population, or in the case of persons with disabled for the needs of greater intensity of care for users [10].

While evidence is still emerging on the potential of social tourism to contribute to a more sustainable tourism industry [27], it is widely recognized that it has a positive psychological impact on older people, on their subjective well-being, quality of life, self-rated health and life satisfaction, without regardless of the type or duration of the trip [28]; [29]; [30]. Similarly, it plays a role in the creation and sharing of memories [31]; [32]; [33] and reminiscence is recognized as promoting and maintaining the mental well-being of older people as it involves memory and encourages social interaction [34]; [35]. Emotional and psychological well-being are vital to aging well, and while loneliness and isolation are not concomitants of aging, many older people lead rewarding and socially engaged lives [36]. Accordingly, studies of social tourism clearly demonstrate its positive impacts, particularly on families [37]; [25]. Minnaert et al. [9] argue that social tourism helps disadvantaged families to increase their family and social capital and expand their social networks and encourage positive behavior and self-esteem. Thus, tourism (read social tourism) provides opportunities for promoting social inclusion, expanding limited social domains, facilitating social interaction and networking, and "for reaffirming oneself and developing a new identity in later years" [38]. Studies show that tourism (read social tourism) has a positive impact on a number of economically or otherwise disadvantaged groups, including low-income families, teenage mothers, and people with health problems and disabilities and their caregivers [39].

In Europe, there are clear differences between the northern (e.g. Great Britain, Germany, Scandinavia) and the Mediterranean (e.g. France, Spain) models of social tourism, where the former is dominated by charitable organizations, and the latter is the intervention of

social services, trade unions, etc. [40]; [41]. Many European social tourism schemes are based on „inclusion“ and „stimulation“ models of social tourism that encourage participation for all [6]. In today's times of austerity, many governments have re-evaluated their social protection programs and the potential economic benefits of social tourism have received an increased level of attention [39], but it should be borne in mind that many European countries have a firmly defined structure of social tourism, in which way they encourage their own economy and positively affect the socioeconomic status of users of its services. Among them are some of the leading European economies: Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Great Britain, Spain, but also one Romania [42]. In addition, five European countries: France, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Switzerland, promote social tourism using a voucher scheme. The systems are quite similar and only apply to domestic tourism. There is a wide application of vouchers that varies from country to country: payment for travel, accommodation, tolls, activities or other benefits depends on the maturity and reach of the voucher program [43].

SOCIAL TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Recognizing the importance of tourism as an economic activity and the possibility of stimulating domestic tourism through support for disadvantaged population groups, the Government of the Republic of Serbia started issuing vacation vouchers in 2015 and thus began to develop one of the forms of social tourism. In June 2015, the Government of the Republic of Serbia decided to further encourage domestic tourism through the scheme of awarding vacation vouchers for subsidized accommodation services of a minimum of five nights in Serbia, outside the place of residence of the voucher beneficiary. Accommodation services are provided by business entities and other legal entities. This includes institutions for medical rehabilitation (special hospitals in the spas of Serbia) that provide prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services. Also, there are natural persons who provide accommodation services in categorized domestic and rural tourist households, where catering activities are carried out in accordance with the Law on Tourism. The value of the voucher is 5,000 dinars (approx. 42 EUR) and that is the maximum amount that the user can use once a year, regardless of the value of the accommodation service, except in 2021, when the value of the voucher is increased to 15,000 dinars (approx. 125 EUR). The list of accommodation service providers is updated weekly and published on the website of the competent ministry. The number of voucher applications is limited by available budget funds. Vouchers can be used in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, excluding the territory of Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš and Kragujevac (because it is estimated that these cities achieve an increase in tourist traffic without incentives). Vacation vouchers can be used by: 1. pensioners; 2. unemployed persons on the records of the National Employment Service and other persons on the records of the National Employment Service (beneficiaries of special benefits and temporary benefits); 3. beneficiaries of allowance for assistance and care of another person, who are entitled to that right in accordance with the law governing social protection of citizens; 4. Beneficiaries of the right to an allowance for assistance and care of another person, who exercise that right in accordance with the law regulating pension and disability insurance; 5. employees with a monthly income of up to RSD 60,000 (about EUR 488); 6. disabled war veterans and civilian disabled veterans with a monthly income of up to 60,000 dinars (about 488 euros); 7. Family pension holders in case of death of a soldier; 8. owners of rural households, registered in the Register in accordance with the Law on Agriculture and Rural Affairs [43].

This practice continued continuously until 2022, with a constant increase in the amount and number of vouchers, which are determined to be issued, which proved to be beneficial to the domestic tourism economy, the increased number of domestic tourists and overnight stays, and the increased revenue of local self-governments from collection. tourist tax and the state budget from the collection of VAT. The subject of this paper is the role and importance of the state for the development of social tourism, through a case study on the example of the Republic of Serbia. The aim of the paper is to show the role of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the development of social tourism and its importance for the overall tourism development of the country.

METHODOLOGY

During the research process, several different methods were used: research of primary and secondary materials, statistical method, but also synthetic, comparative, critical and descriptive method.

Research at the table implies the study of primary and secondary material [44]. This method was used to obtain statistical data on tourist traffic and the number of overnight stays in Serbia in the period from 2010-2022. year, obtained using the official publications of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, as well as data on the number of issued vacation vouchers, their value and the number of nights spent using vacation vouchers in the period from 2015-2022. year, at the personal request of the Ministry of Tourism. At the same time, domestic and foreign literature in the field dealt with in this paper was reviewed.

Statistical data collected in the first phase, the so-called research at the table, were processed using different statistical methods. First of all, it is a method of correlation analysis, which is used to investigate the strength, that is, the intensity of the quantitative agreement of observed phenomena. In other words, correlation represents the connection of observed phenomena, where the existence of the influence of one phenomenon on another is examined, that is, the influence of an independent function on a dependent function. The indicators of linear or Person's correlation are: coefficient of determination, coefficient of indeterminacy and coefficient of linear correlation, and for the purposes of this paper, the last one will be used [45].

The linear correlation coefficient ($r_{1,2}$) shows the strength, that is, the intensity of the linear correlation between the variables X_1 and X_2 , where:

$$r_{1,2} = \pm\sqrt{r_{1,2}^2}$$

The value of this coefficient is in the interval $-1 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 1$, when there is a statistical correlation between the observed phenomena. If $r_{1,2}=0$ between the variables X_1 and X_2 there is no connection, while in the other case, when $r_{1,2}=\pm 1$ there is a connection and it is functional. In statistical theory and practice, there are several degrees of correlation strength:

if $0,0 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 0,5$, the correlation relationship is weak,
 if $0,5 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 0,7$, the correlation relationship is significant,
 if $0,7 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 0,9$, the correlation relationship is strong,
 if $0,9 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 1,0$, the correlation relationship is very strong.

In this case, the number of vacation vouchers issued, their value and the number of nights spent using vacation vouchers were observed, as an independent function of X_1 and the

number of nights (domestic and total) and tourists (domestic and total) realized in the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2015-2022 year, since the action of issuing vacation vouchers, as a form of social tourism, as a dependent function of X_2 .

RESULTS

In the phase of research at the table, during the collection of primary and secondary material, statistical data on tourist traffic in the Republic of Serbia for the multi-year period from 2010-2022 was obtained. year, on the basis of which statistical series of data were formed, which will be used in the next phase of the research, i.e. methodological data processing to be used (Table 1.) [47].

Table 1. Tourist traffic in the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2010-2022

Year	Domestic overnight stays	Total overnights stays	Domestic tourists arrivals	Total tourist arrivals	
2010.	4.961.359	6.413.515	1.317.916	2.000.597	
2011.	5.001.684	6.644.738	1.304.443	2.068.610	
2012.	4.688.485	6.484.702	1.269.676	2.079.643	
2013.	4.579.067	6.567.460	1.270.667	2.192.435	
The lowest values of domestic tourism in the given sequence	2014.	3.925.221	6.086.275	1.163.536	2.192.268
	2015.	4.242.172	6.651.852	1.304.944	2.437.165
	2016.	4.794.741	7.533.739	1.472.165	2.753.591
	2017.	5.150.017	8.325.144	1.588.693	3.085.866
	2018.	5.678.235	9.336.103	1.720.008	3.430.522
	2019.	6.062.921	10.073.299	1.843.432	3.689.983
	2020.	4.936.732	6.201.290	1.374.310	1.820.021
	2021.	5.732.833	8.162.430	1.720.054	2.591.293
The highest values of domestic and tourism in the given sequence	2022.	7.306.219	12.245.613	2.096.472	3.869.235

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Serbia (2011-2023), Statistical Office of the republic of Serbia

By observing and analyzing the data in Table 1. it can be observed that in the five-year period from 2010-2014. domestic tourism is continuously decreasing, namely the number of domestic overnight stays by 20,1% and the number of domestic tourist arrivals by 11,7%. This was largely due to the drop in citizens' standards and the increase in the price of tourist services. On the other hand, tourist traffic from abroad varied, so in the same period the total number of overnight stays increased to approximately the same level, except for 2014, when, compared to the previous year, it decreased by 7,3%, while the total number of tourist arrivals increased by 9,6%. This could be explained by the fact that the number of tourists grew (read foreign ones), while their average length of stay fell, so in that sense the total number of overnight stays decreased by the aforementioned 7,3%. In the period from the beginning of the application of vacation vouchers as a Blade measure of the Republic of Serbia to support domestic tourism, from 2015-2022. the continuous growth of domestic tourist traffic is evident, namely the number of domestic overnight stays by 86% and the number of domestic tourists by 80%, while in the same period the number of foreign tourists also increased significantly, which is reflected in the significant increase in the total number of overnight stays by 101,2% and total values of the number of tourist arrivals by 76,5%.

As the reason for the increase in domestic tourism demand, the Government of the Republic of Serbia cites the implementation of the measure of issuing vacation vouchers,

which in 2015 appeared as a modest measure worth almost EUR 600.000, when just over 14.000 vouchers were distributed and about 155.000 overnight stays were registered on that basis.

Table 2. Issued vouchers, values and overnight stays for 2015-2022

Year	Vacation vouchers	Overnight stays based on vouchers	Voucher values (EYP)
2015.	14.087	154.325	596.907
2016.	46.000	342.700	1.949.153
2017.	91.078	626.133	3.859.237
2018.	99.076	559.186	4.198.136
2019.	119.025	652.552	5.043.432
2020.	272.856	1.235.104	11.561.695
2021.	148.850	742.660	6.307.203
2022.	354.623	2.224.373	34.220.169

Source: Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications.

This measure became very significant in 2022, reaching a value of EUR 34.220.169, which was realized through 353.623 vouchers and on the basis of which 2.224.373 nights of domestic citizens were realized in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. If we take into account the data of 7,3 million overnight stays by domestic citizens in 2022 and 2,2 million overnight stays by domestic citizens achieved through the measure of vacation vouchers, it will be clear that the entire 30,4% of overnight stays by domestic citizens in the Republic of Serbia was financed by the Government (Table 2.) [48]. It should also be noted that this measure of the Government of the Republic of Serbia has continuously grown in all segments, except in the first year after the COVID-19 crisis, when due to reduced economic growth in 2021 there was a reduction in budget allocations according to this principle by as much as 54,6 %, compared to the previous year.

Table 3. Correlated values and coefficients for the period from 2015-2022

No.	Correlation X_1/X_2	Correlation coefficient $(r_{1,2})$
1.	Vacation vouchers/Domestic tourists arrivals	0,645*
2.	Vacation vouchers/Total tourist arrivals	0,278
3.	Vacation vouchers/Domestic overnight stays	0,765**
4.	Vacation vouchers/Total overnights stays	0,566*
5.	Voucher values/Domestic tourists arrivals	0,701**
6.	Voucher values/Total tourist arrivals	0,455
7.	Voucher values/Domestic overnight stays	0,802**
8.	Voucher values/Total overnights stays	0,712**
9.	Overnight stays based on vouchers/Domestic tourists arrivals	0,634*
10.	Overnight stays based on vouchers/Total tourist arrivals	0,359
11.	Overnight stays based on vouchers/Domestic overnight stays	0,731**
12.	Overnight stays based on vouchers/Total overnights stays	0,613*

* Relationship is significant; ** Relationship is strong; *** Relationship is very strong

Source: Own research.

Taking these data into account, there is no doubt that the measure of vacation vouchers significantly contributed to the growth and strengthening of the domestic tourism economy, but this should be brought into a statistical relationship and explained by the

existence of a clear and unambiguous correlation, as evidenced by the following table (Table 3.) [49].

Based on the calculations shown in Table 3. it can be clearly concluded that there is a clear and strong connection between the Government's measures to domestic tourism support through the distribution of vacation vouchers to vulnerable groups of the population and the realized tourist traffic in the mentioned period. It has already been said that around 30% of domestic citizens' overnight stays are subsidized by the state in 2022, which is a clear indicator of the influence of the Government's policy towards tourism through social tourism support. Seen in time series from 2015-2022. year, the strength of that influence can be described as strong when domestic tourist traffic is questionable, which means that the correlation coefficient was $0.7 \leq r_{1,2} \leq 0.9$. Thus, the number of issued vacation vouchers had a strong influence on the number of domestic overnight stays ($r_{1,2}=0.765$), the value of issued vacation vouchers had a strong influence on the number of domestic overnight stays and showed the highest value of the correlation coefficient ($r_{1,2}=0.802$). Also, the number of overnight stays based on vacation vouchers had a very clear and logical impact on the number of domestic overnight stays ($r_{1,2}=0.731$). A somewhat smaller connection (correlation: No. 4; No. 8 and No. 12) or a significantly smaller connection (correlation: No. 2; No. 6 and No. 10) was achieved in the relations in which the values of total tourist traffic are found (total tourist arrivals and total tourist overnight stays), because the Government's support measure was not intended for foreign tourists, who are in large numbers in the total values. However, the quality and strength of the relationship between the total value of vacation vouchers and the total number of overnight stays in the Republic of Serbia in the period from 2015-2022 ($r_{1,2}=0.712$) can be distinguished, which clearly indicates an increase in the number of domestic tourists in total and the amount of money with which the Government of the Republic of Serbia financed the policy of social tourism, better known as „tourism for all“, wanting to help the domestic tourism economy in the crisis years in the process of development both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Social tourism remains an important area for future research and policy. Increasing inequality in wealth and income, even in wealthier countries [46], means that access to tourism is becoming increasingly concentrated among the precarious in an era of systematic cuts in public sector funding. Further research is needed to provide evidence of the effects of exclusion on people, such as the effects of extended periods without access to holiday time away from home, research into the impact of breaks on emerging disadvantaged groups (such as new economic migrants, trans inebinary and intersex people). Research is needed on programs and policies for social tourism, how they can be expanded and the effects on destination sustainability. We need a better understanding of the health effects of tourism, both positive (relaxation, pleasure, learning, physical activity, relationships) and negative (breakdown of relationships, overindulgence, stress). We need to conduct interdisciplinary research with doctors, sociologists, gerontologists, social policy research and education to develop better measures and indicators of the effects of tourism, to ensure that social tourism programs lead to optimal outcomes for those most in need of support. Future research must assess the needs of people in developing countries, whose appetites for tourism opportunities and cultural and social norms are diverse, to ensure that social tourism policies and programs are relevant to their needs and create the greatest benefit [22].

Furthermore, the indirect effects of the vacation voucher scheme in Serbia are very strong and clear and can be described as follows: 1. Positive promotional results in the country through better recognition and increased awareness of Serbia's tourist offer; 2. Mobilization of domestic tourism actors, especially in new destinations, which are often in underdeveloped regions of the country; 3. Better positioning of tourism in the economic policy agenda of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and even 4. Setting a model for other countries in the region. The joint efforts of the promotional campaign of the Tourism Organization of Serbia „My Serbia“ and the ministry in charge of tourism helped to reverse the trend of falling domestic arrivals [43].

The Government of the Republic of Serbia has a clear vision of the development of tourism in Serbia, among other things, through the support of a wide spectrum of sensitive social groups. Therefore, it can be said that the policy of providing vacation vouchers, as a form of social tourism, has a positive and visible effect on domestic tourism and should be continued in that or a very similar way in the future.

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