
Book Review

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Handbook of Social Tourism

by: Anya Diekmann and Scott McCabe (Editors)

Published 2020

by Edward Elgar Publishing, 328pp

ISBN: 978 1 78811 242 0

The eBook version is priced from £22/\$31 from Google Play, ebooks.com and other eBook vendors, while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website

In 2020, we have witnessed a resurgence of the social in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures required to manage it and address its impacts. The timing for the publication of *the Handbook of Social Tourism* in 2020 could not be better, as it is clear we need greater thinking on the social value of tourism and the role of social tourism in building better societies. The editors, Professor Anya Diekmann and Professor Scott McCabe, are well known authorities on social tourism and they have attracted a number of expert contributors to this volume.

The research on social tourism is a growing body of work that has worked rigorously to demonstrate the breadth of initiatives that contribute to individual, community and societal betterment and well-being through tourism. Social tourism refers to programs and products that seek to secure tourism for all by overcoming barriers to participation in tourism. These barriers may include poverty, unemployment, caring responsibilities, disability, age, single parent status and other obstacles that impede people's access to and enjoyment of travel and holidays.

This Handbook brings together cutting-edge work that addresses experiences from around the globe and examines social tourism from many angles and at many levels. The editors have an agenda to advance social tourism research through this handbook, through sharing best practices, building the network of researchers engaged in social tourism research and to underscore the social value of social tourism as a positive force in society. Through this work they also argue that social tourism has the potential to influence the development of the wider tourism phenomenon in terms of models of better planning and greater sustainability.

The book offers 25 chapters, divided into five sections, considering: the historical and socio-political context; social tourism in context; benefits and challenges; the beneficiaries; and national case studies. The chapters offering a history of the formation and evolution of social tourism are very important for building a greater understanding of how we arrived at the great variety of initiatives and the different types of social tourism approaches we find in different nations and contexts. It is not possible within these word

limits to address each chapter individually, but instead I will identify some key highlights found in this work.

One key finding in this edited volume is that while social tourism has its own specific justifications, it is clear also that social tourism contributes to wider efforts to gear the tourism industry to be more sustainable. In their analysis of the economic benefits of social tourism, Joana Lima & Celeste Usébio cite the International Social Tourism Organization (ISTO) who present social tourism as tourism best practice. Specifically, Lima and Usébio argue that social tourism should aim to improve the quality of life for local communities, respect local tourism workers, appreciate local culture, and contribute to sustainable local development (Chapter 5). Chapter 7 by Cisneros-Martinez and Fernandez-Morales considers social tourism in Spain and indicates how social tourism programmes help address the problems of seasonality in tourism by bringing social tourists to destinations in the off-peak periods. These and other insights in the volume help clarify the way social tourism initiatives make invaluable contributions to the development of sustainable tourism in destinations.

This Handbook also supports an expansion of our understanding of social tourism. For instance, the chapter by Diekmann, Smith and Ceron (Chapter 10) considers the significance of transformations in policy focus from social welfare to wellness policies with attention to the future of thermal spa destinations in Western and Eastern Europe. Yael Ram takes an unusual focus in Chapter 12, examining the wellness benefits of nature and considering how some demographics have limited access through an analysis of the case of Israel. Ram argues that public transport to Israel's natural areas is essential to ensure that the benefits of access to nature are shared equitably in the society. The chapter on Aotearoa/New Zealand (Chapter 21), suggests that social tourism as it is usually conceptualised in its public-provided form does not exist in this antipodean country; however, it can be found in the bonds of Polynesian hospitality that are held by the Indigenous Māori population as well by resident and migrant Polynesians and Pacific Islanders. In this work, Carr and Schanzel explain: "The Polynesian community in Auckland provide a subsidised form of tourism to New Zealand for disadvantaged Pacific Islanders to increase their social and family capital, just as the literature identifies social tourism" (p.259). The chapter by Joanne and Sarah Pyke (Chapter 22) addresses social tourism provision to First Nations Canadians, through surveying participants in an organised daytrip to a nearby colonial fort to assess their change in subjective well-being afterwards. In this case, some greater employment of critical analysis and considerations of author positionality in the research would have been welcome here; this is becoming essential in research on Indigenous topics and experiences (see Smith, 2012).

The *Handbook of Social Tourism* advances our understanding of the conceptualisation of social tourism and how it is applied in practice at various points around the world. The chapters in this book contribute to building an argument that social tourism advances not only social inclusion, social equity and social justice through the capacities of tourism and tourism stakeholders, but also wider sustainability in tourism. It is hard to find faults in this comprehensive and valuable work. The only lack this work demonstrated was a concluding chapter that could have been used to identify research gaps for future attention. I would also make this point; the analysis of social tourism would benefit from greater criticality in the work. This includes an acknowledgement of the limits of social tourism in contributing to wider sustainability. With its dual emphases, the social and tourism, social tourism to date fails to fully consider the interconnected issue of ecological limits and how efforts to expand tourism to the

marginalised does present an ecological justice conundrum that must be eventually faced. It also includes a consideration of how social tourism advocacy potentially can be paternalistic and limited due to the humanitarian perspectives of many of its advocates, rather than being grounded in a rigorous justice approach (see Guia, 2021).

References

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