

Social tourism for seniors in Slovenia

JANJA GABRUČ * [janja.gabruc@fts.upr.si]

ZORANA MEDARIČ ** [zorana.medaric@fts.upr.si]

MATEJA SEDMAK *** [mateja.sedmak@zrs.upr.si]

Keywords | Seniors, social tourism, Slovenia, benefits

Objectives | This work discusses the situation in the emerging field of social tourism for seniors in Slovenia. In this regard, we will analyse developmental needs and the potential of social tourism products in Slovenia as well as discuss guidelines for systemic measures for the future social tourism development in the national context. In doing so we will reflect on various topics, such as views of social tourism programmes development and the research of existing social tourism programmes in Slovenia, their beneficiaries, the extent and duration of programmes, organisation and financing of programmes. Finally, we will analyse the main benefits social tourism brings for older people in Slovenia, as perceived by the stakeholders involved in social tourism for seniors.

Methodology | This work presents the preliminary results of the on-going (October 2015 – September 2017) project entitled *“Identification, classification and potential of development of social tourism products in Slovenia, with an emphasis on programs for seniors”*. We will present the results of the analytical stage as well as the empirical qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) among different actors dealing with social tourism for elderly in Slovenia. For the empirical research, representatives of various institutions that deal with different groups of senior beneficiaries were interviewed: (i) older people with low socio-economic status who would not be able to afford holidays by themselves and that are thus mainly involved in humanitarian programs; (ii) elderly people who need specific infrastructural adjustments, such as elderly people with disabilities, who use facilities and services tailored to their needs; (iii) seniors as one of the target groups of tourists for whom special offer is designed and adjusted in terms of price, payment terms, content, animation; and (iv) seniors as tourists – where there are no special adjustments for them.

Main Results and Contributions | The findings of the study indicate that different/diverse social tourism products for senior exist in Slovenia and they could be classified according to existing models

* **PhD in Tourism** from the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). **Assistant Professor** at the Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica of the University of Primorska (Slovenia).

** **MSc in Sociology** from the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). **Assistant** at the Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica of the University of Primorska (Slovenia)

*** **PhD in Sociology** from the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). **Research Councillor** at the Science and Research Centre of Koper (Slovenia)

of social tourism (Minnaert, et al., 2013) – inclusion model, participation model, adaptation model and stimulation model. Importantly, these models are interconnected and difficult to separate one from another, so some new hybrid models are formed on a basis of public-private long-term partnerships and collaborations between different organizations. The research has also highlighted the importance of the adjustments mostly according to the seniors (poor) socio-economic and health/mobility circumstances. Adjustments are made mostly in terms of length, costs (funding) and special services of the different social tourism product to suit specific circumstances of the beneficiaries – research shows that “affordability” and “accessibility” of the senior social tourism products are two main dimensions of the adjustments that social tourism providers must take an account of. Research shows that adjustments of social tourism products are necessary to attract, include and/or retain seniors for holidaying and also to reinforce/intensify the benefits that social tourism brings for individuals and society – “management of uncertainty” introduced by Minnaert (2014) is an important concept in this area linked to both the willingness to participate in social tourism, and also the potential outcomes of the holiday. The findings of the study also expose numerous of benefits that holidays bring for the elderly. As recognised by the stakeholders benefits are various and can be generally grouped in three clusters: 1) sociability and social inclusion; 2) health and 3) education and horizon broadening. Nevertheless, these aspects are also interconnected and difficult to separate one from another.

Limitations | The study presents the views of stakeholders working with senior, therefore including interviews or focus – groups with seniors would help deepening the study. The presentation discusses the results of the Slovenian case study not allowing the generalization of the conclusions. Nevertheless, the results of our empirical research could be comparable with similar socio-cultural contexts and social-policy systems.

Conclusions | The research has highlighted the importance of the adjustments of the different social tourism products to suit specific circumstances of the beneficiaries such as: (i) affordability of the product in terms of price - cost-effective social tourism product - such as cheap domestic day trips or discounted annual (week to two-week) holidays with favorable payment terms organized in low season; (ii) accessibility of the products in terms of (co)funding of the social tourism products through humanitarian programs, follow up/social rehabilitation programs and pensioners association programs; (iii) accessibility of the products in terms of special services to reduce levels of uncertainty such as traveling companion, bus-transportation adjustment and program adjustments; and (iv) accessibility of the product in terms of specially adjusted accommodation. Besides other social and economic benefits, social tourism programmes for seniors can present an important form of social intervention diminishing cost for social care and healthcare (Minnaert & Schapman, 2009), therefore it would be significant that these initiatives would be recognised systematically also by the Slovenian government as well as policy makers and to join existing European social tourism programmes. Moreover, more systematic development and regulation of social tourism for seniors in Slovenia ought to be one of the national priorities also due to ongoing social changes - the ageing society and increasing number of seniors. Within this context, there is a need for future research of social tourism from the perspective of seniors as well as for economic and social value analyses in this field.

Acknowledgments | This work is based on preliminary results of the on-going project “*Identification,*

classification and potential of development of social tourism products in Slovenia, with an emphasis on programs for seniors", run by the Faculty of Tourism Studies of the University of Primorska, in cooperation with the Science and Research Centre of the University of Primorska and Faculty of Design, and financed by the Slovenian Research Agency and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology.

References |

- Minnaert, L., Maitland, R., & Miller, G. (2013). *Social tourism: Perspectives and potential*. London: Routledge.
- Minnaert, L. (2014). Social tourism participation: The role of tourism inexperience and uncertainty. *Tourism Management*, 40, 282-289. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.07.002>
- Minnaert, L. & Schapman, M. (2009). Tourism as a form of social intervention: the holiday participation centre in Flanders. *Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice*, 18 (3), 42-61. <http://doi.org/10.18352/jsi.171>