Social tourism and self-efficacy: Exploring links between tourism participation, job-seeking and unemployment

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ABSTRACT

Social tourism is assumed to provide important psychological benefits for economically and socially disadvantaged populations. This study examines empirically whether these individual benefits are associated with socioeconomic benefits to society by focusing on unemployed individuals. Psychological benefits are addressed in terms of self-efficacy, and socioeconomic benefits, in terms of job-search behaviour. Findings from mixed-methods data reveal that holidays create enabling environments, which bring about positive changes in participants' self-efficacy, contributing to positive effects on their job-search behaviour. Positive effects are also identified with regard to behaviours towards alternative paths to employment, such as volunteering. Given that these behavioural changes comprise major determinants of reemployment, it is suggested that social tourism may hold potential for incorporation into existing unemployment policies.

Introduction

Social tourism research to date has tended to focus on the individual benefits arising from the participation in holiday tourism of economically and socially disadvantaged populations (e.g. McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Smith & Hughes, 1999). This population group falls into Haukeland's (1990) 'Type C Non-Travellers', encompassing those who "are constrained from travelling because they are placed in an unsatisfactory social situation (e.g. lack of economic means, health resources, personal freedom, etc.)" (p. 179). Therefore, there is an underlying assumption that social tourism is a positive activity, part of the 'social' good, reducing inequalities amongst different populations. However, there are equivocal interpretations on the outcomes of tourism in different country contexts. In Belgium and Spain, for instance, where social tourism has been long practiced and forms part of social policy (McCabe, Minnaert, & Diekmann, 2011), the wider benefits are recognised, such as its contribution to the generation of employment and to the economic sustainability of host communities that suffer from seasonality (European Commission, 2010). But in other countries, such as the UK and the USA, where social tourism is not publicly adopted, its wider socioeconomic benefits have yet to be fully acknowledged (Minnaert, Maitland, & Miller, 2009). Indicative of this, is that successive UK governments have seen social tourism as a form of welfare, and a burden on taxpayers (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Tourism, 2011).
Yet research on social tourism for low-income groups has been consistent in asserting that cost-effective social tourism programmes can yield positive psychological effects on participants and their families. Furthermore, research identifies that these effects, such as increases in family and social capital (e.g. Minnaert et al., 2009), self-esteem (e.g. Minnaert, Stacey, Quinn, & Griffin, 2010), quality of life and subjective well-being (SWB) (e.g. McCabe & Johnson, 2013), can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours, which could be linked to wider societal benefits. For example, enhanced psychological health can reduce public healthcare costs, which, together with improved family relations can contribute to the reduction of anti-social and other criminal behaviours, and boost one’s chances of securing employment (O’Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). However, the evidence, concerning direct linkages between individual and wider socioeconomic benefits accruing from social tourism participation, remains weak, which has limited the expansion of public support for social tourism in many countries.

The aim of this paper is to investigate linkages between potential psychological benefits of social tourism participation and socioeconomic benefits. In doing so the study contributes to knowledge on the multidimensional benefits of tourism, and to debates on the potential inclusion of social tourism in government policy agendas. The study focuses on unemployed individuals who were financially supported in taking a holiday break by the independent UK charity, the Family Holiday Association. Psychological benefits were examined through self-efficacy beliefs (SE), and socioeconomic benefits through job-search behaviour (JSB). These two constructs have not previously been studied within the context of tourism. However, SE is conceptually linked to constructs that have been found to be positively influenced by tourism participation, such as self-esteem (Minnaert et al., 2010) and SWB (McCabe & Johnson, 2013). Indeed, all three constructs have been related to positive psychology (Maddux, 2002). Self-efficacy, in turn, has been found to have positive effects on peoples’ JSB (e.g. Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014).

The focus on SE and JSB is crucial as they concern aspects of human cognition and behaviour, which are under-researched in social tourism studies. Whilst it has been argued that tourism can lead to transformation and self-development (e.g. White & White, 2004), few studies have applied psychological measures to understand the specific ways that tourism can impact on psychological states. SE comprises a major determinant of human motivation and functioning (Bandura, 1997), while JSB is a key antecedent of reemployment (Wanberg, Hough, & Song, 2002). The focus on unemployed individuals is critical for two main reasons: first, it concerns a large and vulnerable sub-group of the wider low-income population; and second, it addresses a current socioeconomic problem of high unemployment across Europe (Eurostat, 2016). In addition, and given that participants were adults with at least one dependent child, and, in the majority, were long-term unemployed (over 12 months) (Begum, 2004), the study also addresses the issue of prolonged unemployment in the UK (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2000), a factor which can have negative effects on the developmental trajectories of children, and their future life chances, including employment (D’Addio, 2007). Thus understanding key antecedents of reemployment does not only have an impact on job-seekers, but also on wider social issues relating to the future of their children, too (e.g. potentially breaking future unemployment cycles).

**Self-Efficacy beliefs**

The idea of SE has roots in philosophy and psychology (Gecas, 1989), but was first conceptualised in White’s (1959) theory of effectance motivation. White (1959, p. 329), asserted “the existence of an intrinsic motivation (effectance motive), which develops gradually through prolonged transactions with the environment” and described the experience produced as “a feeling of efficacy or competence.” Bandura (1977) later formalised this conceptualisation, defining SE as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives” (1989, p. 1175). Thus, SE can be regarded as “an optimistic and self-confident view of one’s capability to deal with certain life stressors” (Scholz, Dona, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002, p. 242).

The concept of SE is based on social cognitive theory’s postulate that a person operates within an interdependent causal structure, which Bandura (1986), Bandura (1997) calls ‘triadic reciprocal causation’. Thus, “interpersonal factors (cognitive, affective, and biological events); behaviour; and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally” (Bandura, 1997, pp. 6) (Fig. 1). In this structure, these influences are not of equal strength, and their relative importance is different under different circumstances (Bandura, 2012).

![Fig. 1. Reciprocal causation.](source: Bandura, A. (1997).)

Note: B=behaviour; P=internal personal factors; and E=external environment
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