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# Tourism Sector and the Social and Solidarity Economy

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## Abstract

Social and solidarity economy tourism seeks both to propose a tourism that is a factor of human development accessible to the greatest number of people, and to contribute to the sustainable development of destinations. This requires taking into account the financial means of the working classes, the types of activities offered, the tourism workers, the economic spin-offs for the host territories, and the cultural and environmental impacts of tourists. To do this, social and solidarity tourism organisations, mainly in the form of associations and foundations, and more rarely mutual or cooperative organisations, combine non-monetary, non-market, and market resources. The growth of social inequalities, working conditions in the sector, criticism of mass tourism, and the phenomena of institutional isomorphism are the main current issues.

## Keywords

social and solidarity economy tourism; social tourism; solidarity tourism; hospitality; SDO; human development; institutional isomorphism

## **Introduction**

To make a better world, social and solidarity economy (SSE) questions tourism in terms of its socio-economic and environmental impacts, the relationship between producers of tourist services and consumer-tourists, and the ways in which decisions are made in partnership with the inhabitants of the host territories.

Social and solidarity economy tourism (SSET) aims to be the bearer of a ‘different kind of tourism’, one that is open, respectful, supportive, responsible, qualitative and, in short, more human. The International Social Tourism Organisation (ISTO), created in 1963 and bringing together 159 member organisations from 40 countries, has two ambitions: the social one of ‘tourism for all’, aiming to ‘make holidays accessible to the greatest number of people’, and the solidarity one of ‘responsible tourism, that benefits people, communities and local areas. These include responsible, solidarity, fair and community tourism’ (ISTO 2020).

### **1. An alternative view of tourism**

According to the United Nations Tourism Statistical System, ‘tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation.’ SSET is concerned with all dimensions of this definition and aims to contribute, at its level, to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### *1.1 Social dimension*

Regarding the social dimension, SSE concerns the population practising tourism and workers of the tourism sector. The population practising tourism is still a minority, probably no more than one in three of the planet's inhabitants. Travel, an element of the right to leisure included in the Declaration of Human Rights (art. 24), is inaccessible to the vast majority of people in poor countries, due to a lack of financial means and paid holidays. But this is also the case for a significant proportion of disadvantaged people in rich countries. In the European Union, for example, more than one in three people do not go on holiday, half of them for financial reasons. The ambition of SSET is first and foremost to contribute to the reduction of inequalities within and between countries (SDG 10) by facilitating access to tourism.

In many countries, the working conditions and incomes of tourism workers, whether salaried or self-employed, are more unfavourable in tourism than in other economic sectors. Precarious working conditions and poorly-paid work; long working hours, and tight work schedules raise the issue of reconciling family and professional life; the prevalence of informal or undeclared work, and therefore lack of social security coverage; and child labour. The second ambition of SSET is to contribute to decent work (SDG 8) in the tourism sector.

#### *1.2 Cultural and democratic dimension*

On the cultural side, the encounter between tourists and host populations can be conflictual due to a range of issues such as inappropriate behaviour disrespecting local values, laxity and commercialization of folklore customs or traditions of hospitality. Being rooted in the local context, SSET takes into account the opinions of local people and respects their beliefs and ways of life and consequently contributes to democratic decision-making and mutual cultural understanding (SDG 16).

### *1.3 Economic dimension*

Tourist spending at a destination may destabilize food prices and local rents. Moreover, tourism revenues are very unevenly distributed among local people, in particular those involved in the tourism sector, depending on their place in the value chain (tour operator, carrier, accommodation provider, restaurant operator, activity provider, etc.), their market weight, their gender, and their location. SSET seeks shared growth (SDG 8) in tourism revenues, gender equality (SDG 5) in the sector, and community empowerment (SDG 11) in host territories.

### *1.4 Environmental dimension*

Travel, which is an integral part of tourism, also poses a major problem of environmental sustainability, both at the local level (over-frequentation of natural areas, damage to biodiversity, soil artificialisation, water and waste management, etc.) and at the global level, as with the effects of air transport on global warming. SSET aims to establish sustainable production and consumption patterns (SDG 12) through environmentally friendly tourism, by favouring soft modes of transport, waste sorting and energy saving.

### *1.5 Human dimension*

Finally, pleasure, a substantial element of tourism, is deeply linked to the human character of the search for connections, discoveries of other places and other people, freedom, emancipation, relaxation, and couple and family life. Emotions, imagination, play, joy, rest, social ties, and contact with nature, all of which are possible thanks to tourism, are constituent elements of human development, elements of the 'good human life' as defined by Martha Nussbaum (2000). To this end, the various forms of SSET will offer a wide range of sports, cultural and leisure activities, with an emphasis on group, diversity, nature, participation and discovery.

## **2. Six historical forms of SSE tourism**

This search for an 'other tourism' has historically been built around six major moments, leading today to a plural SSET in terms of the audiences received social objectives, and institutional forms (Caire 2012).

### *2.1 The tradition of traveller hospitality*

Most religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) and many customary practices around the world consider hospitality as a virtue. Travellers and foreigners, especially pilgrims, must be welcomed with food and shelter.

The Hospice du Grand Saint Bernard, founded in 1050, the many hostels on the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, and even certain forms of backpacker tourism based on free hospitality, are one of the examples based on a non-monetary economy based on mutual aid, solidarity, selflessness, and commitment.

### *2.2 Holiday camps for children*

One of the first modern forms of SSET can be found in Switzerland. In 1876, Herman Walter Bion, a pastor in Zurich, created the first-holiday camp ('Ferien-Kolonie', in reference to the settler seeking a new and better life). With a dual intention of hygiene ('a breath of fresh air') and education, Bion took some 60 underprivileged children from working-class neighbourhoods to the mountains. Dispersed among peasant families, who were compensated to cover the costs incurred, these children were brought together several times a week to organise games, songs, and hikes supervised by educators.

Very quickly, from the 1880s onwards, holiday camps expanded considerably, first in Europe (in Germany, Italy, France, Russia, Holland, Belgium, etc.) and then, after the First World War, in the United States, Canada, Japan, etc. The first international holiday camp congress was held in Zurich in 1888 under the presidency of Bion. Initially, it was a philanthropic, religious or secular model, financed by subscriptions and private donations, and based on voluntary work (except for the hosts), with unpaid staff. Quite quickly, these holiday camps were to benefit from public authority subsidies and were then subject to increasing regulation and a gradual professionalisation of the staff (Downs 2002).

Today, depending on the country, these holiday camps can be based on non-monetary models (such as the scout movement), non-market models (such as camps organised by charitable organisations or municipalities), market non-profit models (associative organisations) or market profit models (particularly for language trips). But in almost all cases, the dual health and educational dimension remain central.

### *2.3 Youth hostels*

Also in the spirit of youth education, Richard Schirmann, a German teacher, founded the first youth hostel in Altena in 1912, on the principle that 'It is impossible to squeeze the limitless world into a crowded classroom. So the school must go out into the world' (Hostelling International 2021).

The model developed very quickly throughout Europe, then after the Second World War on other continents. As early as 1932, representatives of 11 European associations founded the International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF, which has operated as Hostelling International (HI) since 2006), of which Schirmann became President. The mission has remained the same since 1932:

To promote the education of all young people of all nations, but especially young people of limited means, by encouraging in them a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside and an appreciation of the cultural values from towns and cities in all parts of the world, and as ancillary thereto provide hostels or other accommodation in which there shall be no distinction of origin, nationality, colour, religion, sex, class or political opinions and thereby to develop a better understanding of their fellow men, both at home and abroad (Hostelling International 2021).

These values of accessibility, non-discrimination, social and gender diversity, peace, learning and understanding, authenticity, and contact with nature and heritage are today carried by an international movement of over 4000 youth hostels in 75 countries, with 4 million members and over 1.5 billion annual overnight stays. Although there are some youth hostels run on a for-profit basis, most organisations in the sector are not-for-profit.

Since 1947, the international federation has had a consultative seat at UNESCO. And during the 1980s, the HI network implemented standardised environmental commitments, resulting in an Environmental Charter in 1992 and a Sustainable Tourism Charter in line with the SDGs in 2016 (Hostelling International 2021).

### *2.4 Holidays for working-class families*

After the Second World War, paid holidays became widespread in rich countries, in particular with the adoption in 1936 of International Labour Organization Convention No. 52 on paid holidays, according to which every employee is entitled, after one year's continuous service, to at least one week paid annual leave (increased to two weeks in 1970 by Convention No. 132). From then on, political and trade union leaders sought to

democratise holidays in a context, in the aftermath of the Second World War, where the tourist offer was almost exclusively aimed at the upper classes.

The problems were quantitative, with the absence of accommodation for large numbers of people, financial, with prices higher than the purchasing power of the working classes, and qualitative, with activities not adapted to families with children.

Depending on the country, popular education movements, mutual societies, political parties (particularly Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Communists), workers' unions, joint institutions (such as works councils in France), and charitable organisations tried to respond to these problems, based on two models that were sometimes combined (Diekman and McCabe 2020).

The first model is the construction of collective tourist accommodation aimed in particular at workers and employees, offering all-inclusive packages (accommodation, catering, and activities including childcare) at accessible rates, which are sometimes adjusted according to family income. In several countries, these accommodation facilities also benefit from subsidies from the national or local authorities, as part of social policies and policies to support areas that have not been industrialised (coastline, mountains, countryside). From the 1960s to the 1980s, the number of these facilities, often called holiday centres, were continuously growing in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal, Morocco, Brazil, etc. Many of these centres were linked to both public and private sectors where unionisation and/or company paternalism were strong (gas and electricity companies, railways, banks, aeronautics, mines, etc.). Funding is based on a combination of market resources from customer payments, and non-market, public, union, and company resources. This sometimes leads to a distinction between ownership of the facilities, owned by public authorities or companies, and management delegated to an association.

The second model is that of social action, with the subsidisation of holidays of people facing monetary, cultural (people not used to going away), social (isolation), or physical (disability, illness, and age) obstacles. These subsidized holidays were usually made in for-profit tourism accommodation or in the non-profit accommodation mentioned above. This model is based on the full or almost full financial coverage of transport and accommodation costs, but also on social and cultural support. In this case, the support is provided by foundations, associations specialising in disability, or charities.

### *2.5 North-South and North-North fair, solidarity and community tourism*

At the end of the 1970s, as post-decolonisation development models were being questioned, North-South tourism was criticised for being isolated, for having a little local economic impact, for being culturally distorted, and for dismantling community lifestyles. Following on from these first experiences, solidarity tourism really emerged at the end of the 1990s - particularly in Africa and Latin America - in conjunction with the debates on international aid, fair trade, and ecotourism. It takes the form of small group travel, far from the major tourist infrastructures, favouring encounters and exchanges with local populations. Tourist groups are hosted by local people or in accommodation run by the local population (small hotels, family-run gites, campsites, etc.). The aim is to promote the local economy (guides, meals, transport, handicrafts, etc.) and to travel with respect for the local people, their culture, and their environment. In addition, part of the price of the trip is donated to development projects, decided and managed by the host communities. The organization of these trips generally relies on the collaboration of associations in the northern sending countries and village associations, community groups, or cooperatives in the southern receiving countries.

In a similar vein, some northern countries will also develop forms of internal solidarity tourism. In Quebec, more than 200 tourist cooperatives are part of a long tradition of social economy. Half of them have adopted the status of multi-party solidarity cooperatives, introduced by the 1997 Cooperatives Act. Anchored territorially, these tourism cooperatives focus on creating local jobs, pooling the means of production, and financing the tourism development of their territory (Salamero 2018).

### *2.6 Share tourism*

From the 2000s onwards, digital technologies and the collaborative economy have led to the emergence of platforms offering accommodation with local people, home exchange, carpooling, visits to non-touristy urban areas, etc. The principles are that the service is free or very low cost, it is user-friendly and involves direct contact with the host, and the computer system used to establish contact is not for profit.

With the rise of these systems, some platforms will evolve towards the profit-making model of start-ups. For example, couchsurfing.com was initially established in 2004 as a non-profit association but became a joint-stock company in 2011 financed by advertisement. Since 2020 it has charged a flat fee to all its users. Other platforms, on the other hand, has chosen to keep the non-profit model, such as BeWelcome or the Greeters movement, or 'les Oiseaux de passage'. These matchmaking systems thus operate, in an updated form, according to the traditional principles of hospitality without charge mentioned above.

## **3. Considerable challenges for the future**

Whatever form of organisation is chosen, SSET must now face the following challenges.

### *3.1 Social inequalities and tourism inequalities*

Inequalities in income and wealth are growing today, including within developed countries. At the same time, public budgets are increasingly constrained and social policies focus on housing, food, and access to employment. Leisure and holidays are not considered a priority by the public authorities. As a result, in many European countries for almost 20 years the proportion of people going on holiday has not increased or has even decreased.

However, numerous studies (Diekman and McCabe 2020) in France, Canada, Belgium, and the United Kingdom have shown the value of holidays for children and young people (confidence-building, empowerment, social openness, acquisition of knowledge, social skills and mobility, channelling of energies, development of citizenship, re-mobilisation, etc.); for families (reduction of intra-family conflicts, strengthening of ties, less stress, perspective on daily life, feeling of social normality, etc.); and for the elderly and people with disabilities (reduction of social isolation and feelings of loneliness, improvement of physiological and psychological health, etc.).

The challenge for SSE tourism is therefore to defend the social utility of holidays, to argue around the positive effects of travel for all categories of public, in order to regain public support.

### *3.2 The environmental unsustainability of tourism growth.*

When transport, food, accommodation, and traveller purchases are taken into account, 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions are due to tourism (Lenzen 2018). The growth rate of these emissions is close to 4% per year, and the majority of emissions comes from countries with the highest GDP per capita. Air transport is - by far - the most GHG-emitting mode of transport per passenger-km. However, as domestic tourism is largely

predominant in terms of a number of trips (representing 75% of total emissions), it is tourist trips by the car that are the most significant in volume. These effects of tourism on global warming and the problems of social and environmental pressure on the most popular destinations are added up to be a source of a growing critical discourse on mass tourism, often described as ‘tourism bashing’.

This context can generate two reactions leading to the exclusion of the ‘poor’ from tourism: the introduction of carbon taxes and access tolls to exceptional sites, and the prioritisation of highly profitable inbound tourism for destinations.

The challenge for SSE tourism is to make its social ambition of democratisation compatible with the growing environmental constraints. The development of ‘slow’ tourism (soft mobility, longer stays) and local (intra-regional) tourism, the search for a better distribution of flows in space and time to avoid the effects of overpopulation and seasonality, but also the defence of the right to travel for all, are therefore strategic elements for SSE tourism.

### *3.3 Social responsibility*

The tourism industry often offers insecure, temporary, and seasonal jobs with low wages and sometimes no access to social security. In addition, the threat of mass unemployment with the prolongation of the Covid-19 crisis affects the tourism sector in particular.

In rich countries, the challenge for SSET operators is to provide, in a highly competitive context, offers that remain accessible to the greatest number of people and collective agreements that are favourable to their employees in terms of wages, working conditions, and social security coverage.

In developing countries, the challenge for SSET is to contribute to a step-by-step formalisation of informal jobs that are still very present in the tourism sector.

### *3.4 Institutional isomorphism*

Institutional isomorphism (see the entry “SSE and Co-optation, isomorphism and instrumentalization and SSE) is a process that leads organisations to resemble other units facing the same set of constraints. In the first place, it takes place because of the pressure exerted by regulations and the conditions for the allocation of public funding. Within the government’s regulatory regime, standards of safety, supervision of minors, quality, contracts, etc. tend to be uniform for all operators. And these standards have a greater impact on low-cost holidays and small structures, which is often the case for SSET organisations.

Secondly, the influence of expertise and sectoral professionalisation leads to standardisation of practices, by copying the formulas that ‘work’, pushing for an upmarket approach and the same thought and management patterns.

The challenge for SSET is to avoid trivialising its offer, at the risk of having the same products, the same prices, the same audiences and, in the long term, the same values as the dominant tourism. It is also a question of knowing how to distinguish itself from the social washing and greenwashing of falsely responsible tourism. Social innovation and the need for differentiation, in a market that has become mature in many countries, are now crucial for the survival of the SSET sector.

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