

Chapter 11:

Social tourism for low-income families: challenges and practical implications in pursuing social innovation

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11.1 Introduction

Households in developed countries, and particularly in the Portuguese context, suffered significant impacts in the global economic recession after 2008 and are once again experiencing similar impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these impacts can be highlighted a decrease in demand for work resulting in reduced working hours and increased unemployment, decreased ability to manage income in the face of rising living costs and debts incurred, and increased uncertainty and fear about the future. These circumstances place greater emphasis on the need to develop social policies that provide mechanisms for social innovation, such as the access of families to tourism.

In this context, the recognition of the benefits which tourism may have and the growth of tourism in recent decades, does not prevent the existence of several constraints to tourism. Low income is considered the greatest of those constraints, making tourism inaccessible for many groups in society, even in developed economies. Thus, social tourism appears as an attempt to restore equal access to tourism.

Including social tourism programmes targeted at low-income families in social policy arises as one possible measure to combat the inequality of access to tourism. However, this measure requires research on the actual level of participation in social tourism programmes, on the interest that the low-income families may have in these initiatives and on the guidelines these programmes should respect in order to both be attractive for this segment and maximise the benefits for the families and society. Notwithstanding, few studies analysing tourism for low-income groups have been undertaken, this gap being more obvious if social tourism for low-income families is considered.

The present chapter aims to reduce the identified gap, discussing the importance of social tourism programmes for families and giving an analysis of the Portuguese situation. Concretely, this chapter presents an analysis of the visions of a sample of Portuguese families regarding this kind of offer and ends with a discussion regarding guidelines that social tourism programmes for

families should follow in order to combine the maximisation of its benefits and its attractiveness as a tourism product.