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## 5. Economic benefits of social tourism: theoretical reflections and insights for management

*Joana Lima and Celeste Eusébio*

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### INTRODUCTION

Social tourism has become popular in recent years due to the recognition of the significant socio-economic benefits to participants, destinations, businesses, governments and wider society (Diekmann et al. 2018; Eusébio et al. 2016; Kakoudakis & McCabe 2018; Lima & Moura 2017). Social tourism is an attempt to provide individuals who do not usually have access to tourism, the opportunity to participate in this widespread activity which contributes to quality of life (BITS 2009; Eusébio et al. 2017; Minnaert et al. 2009; Smith & Hughes 1999). This kind of offer makes sense in a context where social inequalities are visible within both developing and developed countries and concerns about poverty and social exclusion have increased.

Various studies suggest several economic benefits of social tourism for destination areas, such as the return of revenues for governments, generation of employment and the economic growth of host communities, particularly those that suffer from seasonality (Cisneros-Martínez et al. 2018; Eusébio et al. 2013a, 2016; Kakoudakis & McCabe 2018; Lima & Moura 2017). However, the literature also highlights the lack of direct evidence linking social tourism programmes to these outcomes and a very limited number of studies have analysed the economic impacts of social tourism initiatives (e.g. Carneiro et al. 2013; Eusébio et al. 2013b, 2016).

In order to extend the literature in this field, this chapter theoretically examines the potential role of social tourism in the economic development of local communities. To accomplish this objective, the chapter is organized in five sections. In the first section, the most important economic impacts of social tourism for local communities will be explained. Further, a brief description of the more frequent methodologies used to quantify the economic impacts of tourism on destinations will be presented. The third section makes clear the factors that influence the magnitude and nature of economic impact of social tourism on the local community. Finally, the chapter ends with some guidelines for maximizing the economic benefits of social tourism initiatives to tourism destinations.