



# The social tourism of the 21st century: a policy for the consumers or the service providers? Analysis of Argentine policy over the period 2000-2015<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract.* Given the international expansion of a new conception of social tourism, since the 2000s the Argentine government has been reformulating its approach to social tourism as public policy, allying its historical distributive virtues with economic virtues linked to job and income creation through articulation with the private sector. Focusing on policy analysis, in this study we assess the policy outcomes more than a decade on from their implementation, paying special attention to the actors that have benefitted.

*Keywords:* social tourism; tourism policy; public policy; economic activity; tourism development; Argentina.

## *Acronyms*

AFIP	Federal Agency of Public Revenues (Agencia Federal de Ingresos Públicos)
AGN	Office of the National Auditor General (Auditoría General de la Nación)
CGN	National Accounting Office (Contaduría General de la Nación)
DPT	National Directorate of Tourist Services (Dirección Nacional de Prestaciones Turísticas)
EGH	Household Spending Survey (Encuesta de Gastos de Hogares)

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1 This study was carried out as part of the author's postdoctoral research at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

JGM	Office of the Chief of Cabinet of Ministers (Jefatura de Gabinete de Ministros)
MECON	Finance Ministry
MINTUR	Ministry of Tourism
SECTUR	Secretariat of Tourism
SIGEN	Office of the National General Comptroller (Sindicatura General de la Nación)
UTCH	Chapadmalal Tourism Unit (Unidad Turística de Chapadmalal)
UTE	Embalse Tourism Unit (Unidad Turística de Embalse)
VAT	Value added tax

## Introduction

At the same time that social tourism was beginning in Europe, the Juan Domingo Perón administration placed this activity on Argentina's public agenda as a distributive policy aimed at reducing unequal access to leisure between the different social sectors. The state became the main promoter and coordinator of social tourism initiatives, which included the construction of tourist resorts for marginalized sectors of the population. So began a period of almost six decades in which the policy of social tourism was articulated solely on the basis of these resorts, primarily through the Chapadmalal Tourism Unit (Unidad Turística de Chapadmalal, UTCH; Buenos Aires) and the Embalse Tourism Unit (Unidad Turística Embalse, UTE; Córdoba), both of which survived different privatization processes.

This centralized, consumer-driven system, which had sought to facilitate access for vulnerable sectors based on a social conception of tourism, was transformed on the eve of the 21st century when the then Secretariat of Tourism (later the Ministry of Tourism, Mintur) reformulated social tourism policy, combining the historical distributive values of the first Perón administration with other, economic aims linked to job and wealth creation. Following these guidelines, successive governments strengthened articulation with the tourism sector by expanding the concessions system, which the tourism units had overseen since the end of the 1970s, and promoting the Federal Social Tourism Program, whereby the hotel sector became involved in service provision.

This policy reformulation meant incorporating the interests of service providers into social tourism, and considered boosting demand through subsidization as a way of sustaining tourism economies during the off season in particular. Social tourism was thus established as both an instrument of social justice for vulnerable sectors and an economic opportunity for entrepreneurs, reconciling two logics that, in theory, might appear to be at odds: the logic of **universalism**, which regards tourism as a right for all; and the logic of **restrictivism**, associated with service providers who, in common with all economic agents, seek to maximize their earnings.

Through social tourism, successive Argentine governments claimed to have reconciled both logics by giving marginalized sectors access to tourism opportunities while supporting the sector and the economy by subsidizing demand. But, once implemented, what was the outcome of this policy? Can social tourism guarantee a right and a business interest at the same time? How do the two logics interact? Do they complement or compete with each other?

This study considers social tourism as a public policy that reflects the various problematizations circumscribing its inclusion in the government agenda as well as the government's ideas, needs, and relationships with private actors who, according to the political environment, feature prominently in decision-making processes (Schenkel, 2017).

While the origins of social tourism may have been associated with attempts to consolidate paid vacation entitlement through welfare policies at a time when social justice was high on the public agenda, the policy's endurance over recent decades is founded on the valuable economic benefits it brings amid the new tenets of neoliberalism (Muñiz, 2001).

In the words of Richards, "Tourism is currently promoted more for its beneficial economic externalities than for the health and social benefits which have justified an extension of holiday right as an element of welfare in the past" (1998, p. 158).

During this new stage, national administrations gave way to private actors and subnational authorities. The policy of social tourism centered on infrastructure construction was sidelined, while private hospitality displaced state-run tourist resorts as the primary form of service provision (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Minnaert, 2007).

This study covers the period 2000-2015,<sup>2</sup> and shows that more than a decade on from its implementation, Argentine policy had yet to overcome the enormous challenge of reconciling the dimensions that circumscribe its actions: **tourism as a right** and **tourism as an economic activity**. Our analysis proves that the new economic underpinnings of social tourism policy have relegated the key social values that once framed the issue as a public problem associated with welfare, justice, and inclusion, diverting these principles for the ends of service providers. The restructuring of social tourism over the last few decades has contributed above all to strengthening the tourism sector, to the detriment of its distributive function.

## Methodology

This study starts by taking a broad approach to policy assessment and steering clear of deterministic criteria, seeks to explain public actions in the area and their effects on society; in so doing, we respond to the need for holistic perspectives that encompass quantitative and qualitative exploration techniques (Oszlak & O'Donnell, 1995; Martínez, 2006). We analyze the results by way of a **cross-sectional matrix** that combines a longitudinal

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2 The end point of this study is 2015, which marked of the end of the most recent administration of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

analysis of the policy cycle with a cross-sectional analysis of its three fundamental elements: actors, resources, and institutional rules (Knoepfel, Larrue, Varone, & Hinojosa, 2007; Subirats, Knoepfel, Larrue, & Varone, 2008).

Our research techniques include an analysis of laws, statistics, programs, plans, and documents prepared by specialists in the area. We complement this documentary analysis with a field study composed of interviews and questionnaires involving the main participating actors: state actors (officials from the National Directorate of Tourist Services [Dirección Nacional de Prestaciones Turísticas, DPT]); private actors (concessionaires and hoteliers responsible for service provision); and users (beneficiaries of the various government programs). In the case of the latter, we interviewed all tourists who were visiting the tourism units during our field visits; while in the specific case of the Federal Program, we interviewed the groups of beneficiaries identified by the hoteliers as the most recent tourists benefiting from the program. These testimonies allowed us to identify the ways in which services are accessed, the benefits, forms of transport, satisfaction levels, costs, and trip repetition rates: all fundamental variables for estimating the socioeconomic profile of users.

Finally, we applied participant observation techniques to the three main areas of Argentine social tourism: DPT, UTCH, and UTE. This included establishing the number of floors in each hotel, whether they were open-air or enclosed (hotel numbers 1 to 7 in the case of Embalse; and 1 to 9 in the case of Chapadmalal), as well as recreational areas and nearby businesses. During our visit to DTP we interviewed management, inspectors, consultants, and program staff as well as those interested in accessing the services (at the customer service section), allowing us to analyze its policy design, implementation, and assessment operations.

### **A theoretical-methodological approach to analyzing policies in the field of tourism**

The social and economic significance that tourism acquired over the 20th century did not translate into commensurate attention from political science. Unlike the other social sciences, political science has not, by and large, concerned itself with tourism in either practical or theoretical terms, regarding it as a field of study of limited depth. However, political science is a vital discipline for analyzing the phenomenon, providing methodological instruments and conceptions that aid in its understanding from a critical perspective (Hall, 1998). Indeed, the importance of determining the reasons for the success or failure of given tourism policies has led to increased interest in the study of this field (Scott, 2011).

The multidimensional character of policy analysis allows for a comprehensive perspective of the various public actions carried out in this realm (Hall & Jenkins, 1998; Jafari, 2002; Velasco, 2004). In the words of Scott, this involves an enormous challenge: to “provide useful insights into who gets what, when, and why in the tourism policy process, and might also make a contribution to better informed government decision-making and policymaking” (2011, p. 6).

Subirats, *et al.* state that policy analysis:

Endeavors to interpret politics and the state from the perspective of (the results of) their public policies. [It tries to] evaluate the pertinence, effectiveness, and efficiency of state interventions with respect to a social situation that is considered problematic and unacceptable. It seeks to explain public administration goods or services (outputs) and the effects that these have on the social groups concerned (outcomes), based on reconstruction of the causal relationship proposed by the state for the solution of the collective problem<sup>3</sup> (Subirats, *et al.*, 2008, p. 13).

Utilizing this perspective, the analysis provides an overview of the policy process as a whole, which begins when the issue arises; goes on to its incorporation onto the agenda, and the resultant policy formulation and implementation; and ends with assessment of the results obtained. This cycle should not be seen as a rigid sequential pattern but as a pedagogical tool for guiding analysis. Throughout these four stages, feedback and selection processes take place, characterized by screening and selection (DeLeon, 2011).

Knoepfel, *et al.* (2007) and Subirats, *et al.* (2008) point to the need to complement research on the policy process with a cross-sectional analysis of each stage. This analysis must include both a substantive dimension, linked to how to solve the public issue; and an institutional dimension, concerning which actors are involved, the existing institutional norms, and the resources available. The authors go on to identify six categories of analysis: the political definition of the issue to be resolved; the political-administrative program; the agreement on action; the action plans; the outputs; and the evaluations of impacts and outcomes.

This conceptualization of public policy analysis recognizes the competition that circumscribes the game played by the different actors taking part, in terms of the distribution of resources as well as the capacity to define norms

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<sup>3</sup> Translation by *Apuntes*.

throughout the process (Knoepfel *et al.*, 2007). An actor, whether public or private, that succeeds in directly or indirectly influencing the definition of the rules can shape public policy in their own interests, capitalizing upon the resources at stake. As Dente & Subirats argue, this interpretation attests to the effects of redistribution (among social groups) that all public policies generate, with winners and losers (2014).

### **The restructuring of social tourism in Argentina**

Fernando de la Rúa – who won the presidency in 1999 at the head of a coalition of parties – and Hernán Lombardi, his Secretary of Tourism, embarked upon a series of substantial modifications to existing policies, arguing that the concentration of services provided at tourism units since 1950 were “high cost,” “low quality,” and “low impact” in comparison with other local destinations, and that the sector was thus in need of restructuring. Hence, for the first time, social tourism was given an economic foundation through an alliance with the hospitality sector for the provision of services (Contaduría General de la Nación-Ministerio de Economía, CGN-Mecon, 2001; Jefatura de Gabinete de Ministros, JGM, 2000, 2001).

With a view to gradually replacing state provision with that of private enterprises, the Federal Social Tourism Program (Programa Federal de Turismo Social, 2000) was established to compliment the Tourism Units Program and diversify the offer through new destinations, foster job creation, attenuate the problems of seasonality, promote an increase in SME activity, and receive private-sector proposals and contributions (“Resolución 427,” 2000).

Tourism units began to be run on the basis of a new service concession system which, according to the Argentine government, would yield an annual saving of 10 million pesos. The Secretariat entrusted the formulation of the UTCH and UTE master plans (2000) to the universities of Mar del Plata and Córdoba in order to evaluate different possibilities of usage and transfer. However, none of these were implemented (JGM, 2001).

Following the outbreak of the December 2001 crisis, the government decided to halt tourism provision through both programs, suspended agreements with private providers, and closed hotels in tourism units, leaving in operation just four of the seven establishments in Embalse (hotel numbers 1, 4, 6, and 7) and five of the nine in Chapadmalal (numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 7).

After a return to economic stability, Néstor Kirchner’s administration resurrected part of the model, retaining the economic underpinnings put in place by the previous government – and required by then-existing conditions – while also reasserting the historical social focus that sustained the

policy during the first Perón administration, and restoring the tourism units to their emblematic position.

As part of this framework, the Secretariat of Tourism (Sectur, 2010) formulated a policy that conceived of social tourism “as a vehicle of economic and social development oriented towards counteracting seasonality, redistributing internal demand, and assuring the whole population the right to tourism (Sectur, 2005, unpublished). The New National Tourism Law (Ley 25997, 2005) defined tourism as “a person’s social and economic right” given its contribution to comprehensive development in the productive use of free time, and stated that the state has ultimate responsibility for its fulfillment through specific actions to promote the inclusion of those who face obstacles in enjoying this right, largely because they lack the income required for consumption (Sectur, 2006).

The DPT, under the auspices of SECTUR, is the body tasked with actions in the area, with responsibility for: “Fostering social tourism aimed at vulnerable groups in society, by executing actions related to service provision”<sup>4</sup> (“Decreto 1227/03,” 2003). the DPT runs social tourism programs on the basis of these guidelines, with the primary aim of providing **low-income citizens throughout the country** with access to accommodation, recreation, and catering services at a subsidized rate. This sector constitutes the main target group of the policy, which promotes equality in socioeconomic and federal terms (Sectur, 2004, 2009; Mintur, 2014).

Provisions are structured around the traditional Tourism Units Program, which offers subsidized week-long vacations at resorts in Chapadmalal and Embalse with accommodation, catering, and recreation services included; and the Federal Tourism Program, which creates links with private providers and diversifies the social tourism offer through five-night stays, with meals included, at one-, two-, and three-star hotels in various destinations throughout the country. This latter program, intended to combat seasonality in mature locations and introduced on the eve of the crisis, incorporated emerging tourist destinations that had yet to be consolidated as part of the national structure.

In order to base selection priorities on specific target groups, both programs were initially broken down into three specific plans (School Student, Senior, and Family), and two more plans were later added (Events, and Study and Research). The Tourism Units Program encompasses Senior, School Student, Family, and Events plans; while the Federal Program covers

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4 Translations from texts of laws are by *Apuntes*.



Elderly, Family, and Study and Research plans (“Resolución 248/00,” 2000; “Resolución 481/13,” 2013b).

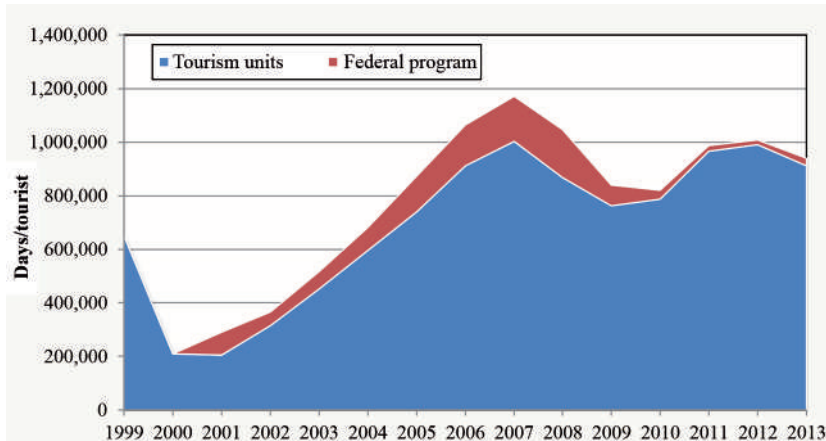
Units are run by concessionaires selected through tenders for the provision of catering, housekeeping, building maintenance, and resort management services. The price per day/per tourist that each concessionaire receives in subsidies for service provision are set by way of the tenders. These sums are transferred directly from state coffers, and the tourists themselves or public and private-sector intermediaries make up the difference.

The Federal Program is thus implemented through hotel companies (with SMEs prioritized) that enter into specific agreements with SECTUR and the corresponding municipality. These public-private agreements formalize the rate per day/per tourist to be received by each hotel, while the hotels allocate a certain number of places to the social tourism system, generally inside low season (Dirección Nacional de Prestaciones Turísticas, DPT, 2014a).

### **Once implemented, what was the outcome of the policy?**

Following minimal uptake at the height of the 2001 crisis, the government restored provision, reopening tourism units and adding new destinations to the Federal Program. As a result, by 2007 the maximum levels of the 1990s had been exceeded, with a total of 1,170,956 annual days per tourist. This represented an increase of 450% from 2000 (Figure 1). Thus, in the period 2001-2007, both programs underwent sustained growth: while the tourism units broke the million day/per tourist per year barrier, the Federal Program recorded a 250% increase in numbers (2002 to 2008), attaining a record of 180,425 days/per tourist on the strength of a network of 125 establishments across 50 destinations (Contaduría General de la Nación-Ministerio de Economía, CGN-Mecon, 1993-2013).

Figure 1  
Provisions of social tourism programs, 1999-2013 (total days/tourist per year)



Source: Contaduría General de la Nación-Ministerio de Economía, CGN-Mecon (1993-2013); compiled by author.

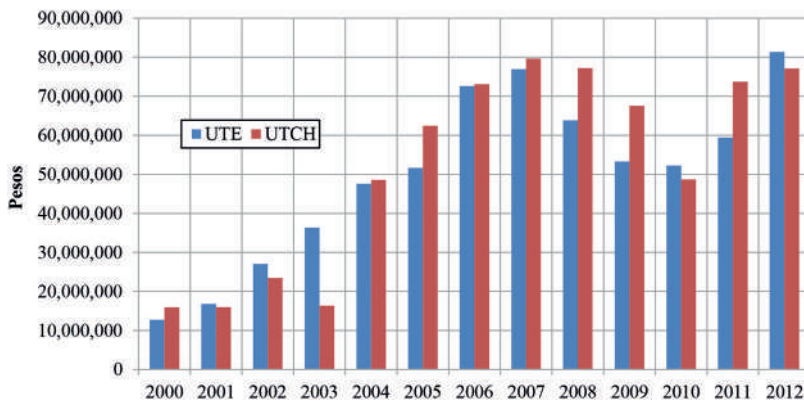
In 2008, a conflict with the concessionaires, who claimed that the current rate was “loss-making” and sought an improved price per day/per tourist, resulted in a 24% fall in service provision at the resorts (between 2007 and 2009), before a new round of negotiations settled on the retroactive application of an additional payment. Following this budgetary adjustment, the DPT suspended subsidies associated with the Federal Program, which precipitated a 90% collapse in provisions and a fall in the number of associated hotel firms (Figure 1). This budgetary predicament was aggravated by the spread of the H1N1 pandemic (2009-2010), commonly known as Influenza A, prompting the government to suspend provision.

Once the agreement with the concessionaires was adjusted and the pandemic alert ended, provision at the units began to increase again, with overall figures nearing one million days/tourist in total. Federal Program subsidies were also reestablished (Contaduría General de la Nación-Ministerio de Economía, CGN-Mecon (1993-2013)), and provision and establishments gradually recovered to reach a total of 40 hotels across 28 localities. The period closed at a 350% growth rate, with an average of 10,000 beneficiaries per year based on an increase of 730,809 total days/tourist between 2000 and 2013 (Figure 1).

This expansion in social tourism helped to combat the sector’s economic instability, thus accomplishing one of the policy’s stated aims. The four concessionaires (two per tourist unit) that have overseen the service for the past decade receive close to 35 million pesos per year following the most recent

update (“Decisión administrativa 785/13”, 2013a; “Decisión administrativa 787/13”). Twenty-one percent is deducted from these payments in value added tax (VAT) and returned to the state coffers by way of the Federal Agency of Public Revenues (Agencia Federal de Ingresos Públicos, AFIP), in addition to other associated costs, chiefly inputs and wages (Figure 2). These amounts also include any additional income from renting out establishments for recreational, cultural, and social events, for which Ministry authorization is required.

Figure 2  
Annual income from provision based on the most recent price adjustment, 2000-2012 (in pesos)



Source: compiled by author based on days per firm.

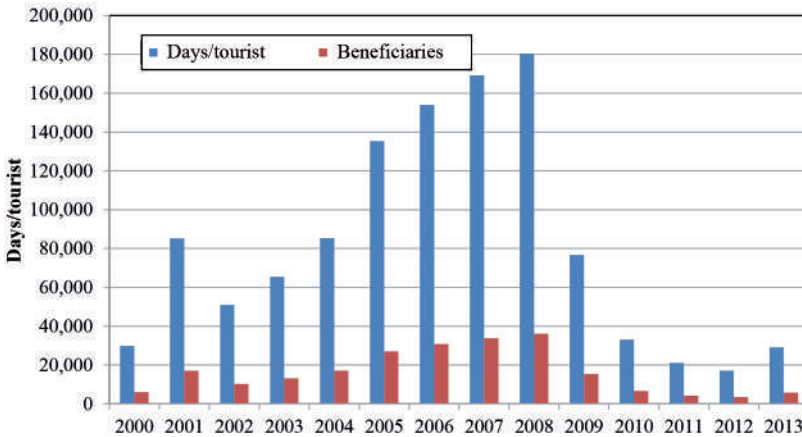
These concessionaires are companies that provide cleaning and catering services through their contractual relationship with the units. Clients include national, provincial, and municipal ministries and secretariats, as well as private firms ranging from medical clinics to mining companies. Concessionaires cite the units as one of the many sources of income that make up their varied business portfolios, for which it is “vital” that the per day/per tourist rate be kept up to date so as not to “end up with losses,” and to increase the average occupancy rate per establishment in order to “stimulate more income” (interviews with concessionaires, 2015).

The length of time that these firms have been in charge of service provision explains their ever-increasing importance in the social tourism system, and in decision-making processes. The firms have achieved significant modifications to the terms of the tenders – having cited increases in the costs of labor, inputs, and other commitments – through various internal agreements, buoyed up in many cases by local media campaigns (*La Voz del*

*Interior*, 2007, 2009; *La Mañana de Córdoba*, 2013). With the most recent tender, these firms secured an increase in the tourist/day rate of more than 160% over four years. As such, they now account for 80% of the budget for social tourism, not including investment in infrastructure works (Ministerio de Turismo de la Nación, MINTUR, 2012a, 2012b) necessitated by a clause intended to improve state-run resorts.

Another primary group of social tourism beneficiaries, the hotels associated with the Federal Program, present additional demands during the low season given the need to sustain significant fixed costs amid limited income streams. Unlike the case of the concessionaires, the participating hotels have been renewed periodically; their numbers peaked at 125 establishments in 2009, but after elimination of the subsidy in 2014, dwindled to a fifth of this total: just 40 hotels. The demand per establishment was similarly dynamic, with a first stage between 2001-2007 marked by an average of 1,443 days/tourist per year and almost 288 new tourists per hotel (DPT, 2014b); followed by a second stage in which demand dropped off, to pick back up in 2013 to 729 days/tourist annually and 146 new beneficiaries per hotel (Figure 3).

Figure 3  
Demand per hotel during low season, 2000-2013 (days/tourist)



Source: DPT (2014b); compiled by author.

The hoteliers interviewed all stressed the importance of the flow of social tourism in the “deseasonalization” of their businesses, allowing significant fixed costs to be paid and jobs to be sustained. However, they pointed to the need to increase the number of arrivals to consolidate these benefits: “The more that come, the better.” They explained that even though the profit

margins per space fell in comparison with commercial demand, social tourism still brought in income that would not otherwise have been obtained. Hotels in emerging destinations, such as Huerta Grande in Córdoba, Wanda in Misiones, Santa María in Catamarca, and Santa Lucía in San Juan cited benefits associated with “knowledge of the location,” stating that most of the tourists who arrived would not otherwise have chosen that destination: “they didn’t know we existed” (interviews with hoteliers, 2015).

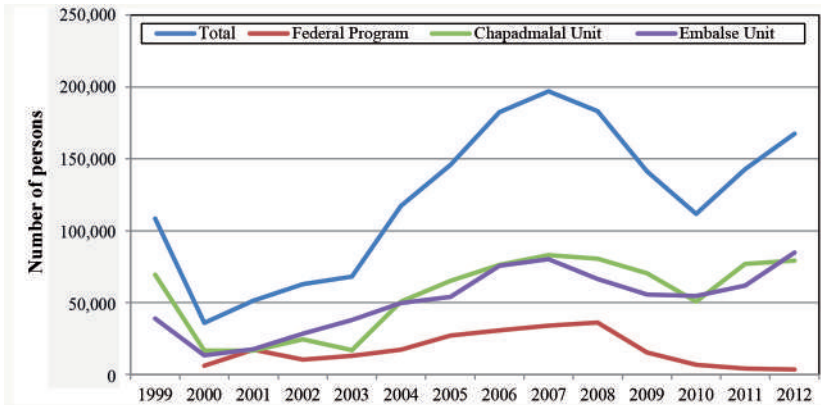
At the same time, the benefits associated with concessionaires and hoteliers favor host communities through the creation of jobs and income. In the case of the tourism units, Chapadmalal and Embalse added almost 500 direct jobs per resort, distributed among administrative and concessionaire staff and, in the case of the UTE, those assigned to the Argentina Works Program (Programa de Argentina Trabaja) under the Ministry of Social Development. Although most of these jobs were temporary, the total was significant given the small populations of these locations: 4,112 and 8,793 inhabitants, respectively (observation sheet, 2014).

The testimonies given by residents of Embalse and Chapadmalal reveal a certain “dependence” on the tourism units. They pointed out that many of their peers arrived at the localities after finding work at the units, and that at present most families “live off” the resorts directly or indirectly. In some cases, they describe the units variously as “the industry of the town,” “the main source of work” and “the engine of the local economy” (questionnaires completed by residents, 2015).

These same impacts were felt in the locations included in the Federal Program, even if the magnitude varied according to demand in this case. There were 50 such destinations in 2008, but this number declined between 2009 and 2013 with the elimination of the subsidy, and there were only 28 in 2014. In the questionnaires, the tourism bodies with current agreements stated that the influx of social tourists “contributed” to boosting the tourism sector during low season, sustaining “income” and “jobs” and benefiting the “community” in general and the “commercial sector” in particular. The main advantages are enjoyed by the emerging destinations, generally small localities in the interior, which cited the program’s impact as a “promoter” of local activity.

Finally, the tourists who access the plans and travel at subsidized rates are also beneficiaries of social tourism’s expansion. During the period of analysis, the number of beneficiaries increased steadily to a record 196,949 tourists per year (2007), with a growth rate of 400% between 2000-2007. After a drop caused by budgetary adjustments and the flu pandemic, uptake increased anew before settling to around 150,000 tourists per year (Figure 4).

Figure 4.  
Number of persons who accessed social tourism programs, 1999-2012



Source: DPT (2014b); compiled by author.

To access the tourism services, users pay for transportation from their place of departure to the destination, as well as the amount set by the Ministry for food and accommodation; thus, costs vary according to the plan, service category, and distance to the destination. According to the 2014 rates (“Resolución 72/13,” 2013a; “Resolución 17/14,” 2014), a typical family required a minimum of 5,000 pesos to access the cheapest social tourism option (Figure 5).<sup>5</sup> This projection is calculated on the basis of the maximum subsidy targeted at family groups (50%); if not fully applied, then there will be a proportionate increase in the minimum spending necessary.

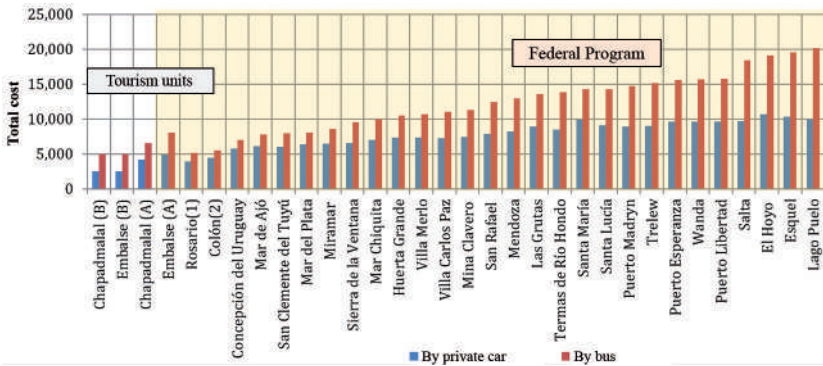
The minimum income necessary to access programs results in a user profile that differs from the intended target group: **low-income individuals throughout the country**. The packages offered and the rates agreed upon with providers through tenders and rate lists per region, far from “facilitating access to tourism for sectors of society with fewer assets or resources” (“Decreto 1297/06,” 2006, art. 32), ultimately limit access for this group.

5 In the calculation of expenses, it is considered that low-income households, the main program target group, have an average of five members; do not usually own a car (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, INDEC, 2013); and are generally from Buenos Aires and its outskirts, which applies to 75% of applications (“Resolución 14/12,” 2002). In the case of residents of the interior, costs increase significantly due to the greater distances and the more limited transport links.

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Figure 5

Total costs of social programs by family and by destination (rates current as of 2014)



Notes

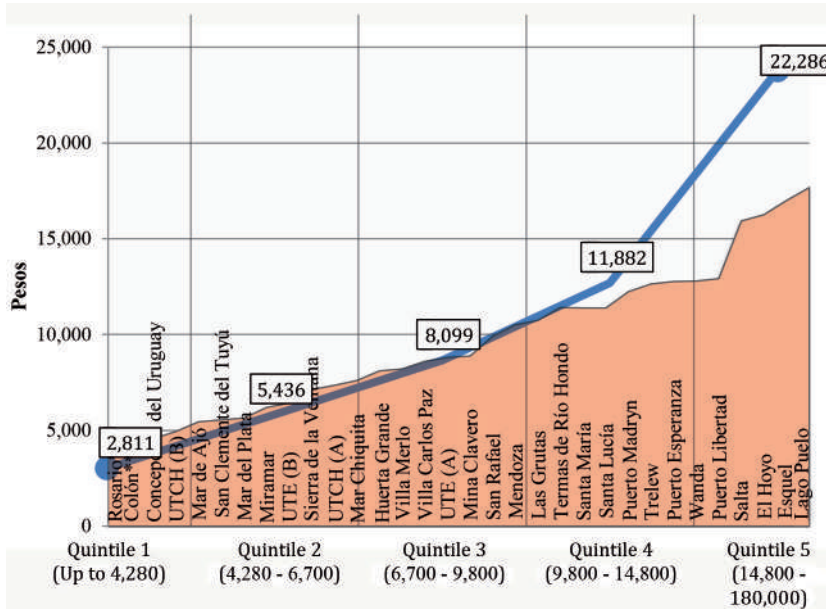
(1) Reduced rate for stays of three days.

(2) No half-board service.

Source: “Resolución 72/13” (2013a); “Resolución 17/14” (2014) and transportation firm and fuel supplier rates; compiled by author.

The Permanent Household Survey (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, Indec, 2014) found that low-income families in the first quintile have an average monthly income of 2,800 pesos and a maximum income of 4,280 pesos; thus, even if they were to allocate their entire income to a one-week vacation, they would be unable to afford even the most basic options. The same is true of the second quintile, where the monthly average is 5,400 pesos and the maximum is 6,700 pesos: enough to meet the basic needs of a family unit but not nearly enough to meet the average total costs at the destinations on offer: 9,580 pesos (Figure 6).

Figure 6  
Minimum cost of social tourism per destination in relation to average income, by monthly income quintiles, 2014 (in pesos)



Since these low wage earners are marginalized, the social tourism programs are effectively restricted to the middle and high quintiles of the population, which, in addition to possessing the necessary income and knowledge, mostly own their own cars, thereby reducing the cost of travel to the locations on offer (Indec, 2013).

This analysis, the product of a costs and income projection, is backed up by responses to the questionnaires: eight out of ten social tourism users considered the trip costs as “very inexpensive,” traveled to the destinations in their “own car,” and saw themselves as “frequent travelers” who engaged in tourism at least once each year (user questionnaires, 2015).

The authorities themselves acknowledged that despite the policy aimed at providing annual vacations to the low-income population throughout the country, the program characteristics “restrict” their access and chiefly favor middle-income groups from Buenos Aires. The officials argued that, as with participation in tourism in general, the “lower class” does not access the programs “because it is difficult, they have to pay for transport, live through the year, [...] they can’t.” (interviews with key actors, 2014).

The testimonies reveal that the main beneficiaries of social tourism are frequent users of the state-provided services who take advantage of their



knowledge of the programs to access the benefits frequently, in some cases taking up to three trips per year (interviews with users, 2014). The DPT authorities explained that although there are clauses in place intended to prevent such “occupancy abuse,” in practice there is a need to fill idle capacity with inflows of tourists, regardless of whether they are frequent visitors or not. This overuse by a specific population group is exacerbated by limited publicity for the programs, which amounts to no more than a link on the Ministry’s website to which not everyone has access, especially not the low-income individuals who constitute the main target beneficiaries.

Moreover, it is worth noting the centralization of the programs. In keeping with the official records (“Resolución 14/12,” 2012), the completed questionnaires show that seven out of every ten tourists live in the city of Buenos Aires or its outskirts and complete the necessary procedures themselves at the DPT headquarters. When asked about this apparent failure of federalism, the officials argued that it was simply a reflection of wider tourism trends in Argentine, given economic and cultural variables: “[Tourism] is concentrated among residents of the capital and Greater Buenos Aires, because that is where the economic capacity and the habit of traveling exists.”

Thus, the distributive goals of the programs, formulated in socioeconomic and federal terms and aimed at increasing access to tourism by segments of society that remain largely marginalized from travel, has become more diluted over the time of implementation (Table 1). The policy of social tourism, far from involving instruments and programs for the inclusion of all sectors in tourism (“Decreto 821/2012,” 2012; “Decreto 1067/13,” 2013), actually serves to reproduce the stratification of commercial consumption.

Table 1  
Cross-sectional matrix of social tourism policy

Stages	Content/outputs	Actors	Resources	Institutional regulations
Inclusion in the public agenda	Definition of the problem: socioeconomic inequality is an obstacle to the right to tourism.	Low-income individuals throughout the country SECTUR, later Ministry.	SECTUR and MINTUR budget	National Constitution Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (1999) Tourism Law 25997/05 Decree 1297/06.
Formulation	Tourism Units Program and Federal Program DPT	SECTUR, later Ministry. DPT	SECTUR and MINTUR budget Tourism units DPT human resources	Tourism Law 25997 Decreets 1297/06, 1635/04, 919/10, 821/2012, 1,067/13 Resolutions 195/05, 1587/05, 606/06, 1273/06, 175/2012
Implementation	Plans: School Student, Senior, Family, and Tertiary and University Students Agreements with public and private entities Tourism unit public tenders Agreements with municipalities and hotels	DPT Tourism unit management Concessionaires Hoteliers Intended and actual beneficiaries Public and private entities with current agreements Employees	Execution of budgetary appropriations Tourism units DPT human resources Tourism provision	Tourism Law 25997 Decree 1297/06. Resolutions 248/00, 1256/04, 72/13, 211/13, 481/13, 17/14 Administrative decisions 303/05 and 320/05; 67/10 and 68/10; 787/2013 and 785/2013 Resolutions of the General Secretariat of the Presidency 1011/04 and 1012/2004 Ministry of Production Resolutions 349/09 and 350/09 MINTUR Resolutions 196/12 and 197/12 (Mintur, 2012a, 2012b)

Evaluation	<p>Impacts: increase in tourism provision.</p> <p>Outcomes: relative contribution to sector stability, without responding to tourism inequality.</p>	<p>Hoteliers</p> <p>Concessionaires</p> <p>DPT</p> <p>Employees</p> <p>Guests</p> <p>Public and private entities with current agreements.</p> <p>Local tourism authorities</p> <p>Intendants</p> <p>Users</p> <p>Office of the National General Comptroller, SIGEN</p> <p>AGN</p>	<p>Financial resources budgeted and executed.</p> <p>Budgeted and executed production</p>	<p>National Constitution</p> <p>Tourism Law 25997</p> <p>Decreets 1297/06, 1635/04, 8211/2012, 1067/13</p> <p>Resolutions 195/05, 1587/05, 606/06, 1273/06, 175/2012</p>
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Source: Subirats *et al.* (2008); adaption of model.

The rates agreed upon with the private sector compound a lack of formality and detail in the laws and procedures, as well as ineffectual application of the stipulated selection priorities; indeed, although the programs take into account low-income workers, school students from poorer population segments, and pensioners who receive no more than 50% of the minimum pension, the criteria of federal decentralization is only applied in the case of the school students (that is, only in this case are beneficiaries drawn from various provinces rather than being largely restricted to Buenos Aires). These, as program officials attest, are not “decisive” requirements at the time of selection, and there is a considerable scope for discretion in the approval of applications (interview with authorities, 2014).

Our cross-sectional analysis shows a social tourism policy that is: **pertinent**, in that it relates the problem of inequality in tourism consumption with the limited participation of low-income segments; **effective**, insofar as it facilitates the tourism practices of Argentines; but **inefficient**, in that it does not contribute to the main problematic formulated: facilitating tourism practices among low-income population segments (Table 1). The distributive function has been diluted and the gap between the intended recipients and the actual users has increased the longer the policy continues to be implemented, thus skewing the beneficiary profile.

This **implementation deficit** (Subirats *et al.*, 2008) is exacerbated by the scant control mechanisms that the Ministry applies in this area, which are limited to quantitative records of arrivals without exploring any aspects associated with goal attainment. In line with the evidence presented in different internal records (Sindicatura General de la Nación Sigen, 2010, 2012), as well as those issued by the National Auditor General (Auditoría General de la Nación, AGN) (“Resolución 14/12”, 2012), both hotel inspections and monitoring of agreement clauses suffer from significant deficiencies, which explains why to date no fines, sanctions, or warnings have been issued despite the various faults detected.

### **Final reflections**

The results show that the policy of social tourism in the 21st century has still not overcome the enormous challenge of reconciling the elements circumscribing its actions: tourism as a right and tourism as an economic activity. Although the authorities claim that social tourism reconciles these two opposing logics, facilitating access to tourism for marginalized segments while helping to sustain the sector’s economy, our cross-sectional analysis illustrates how economic objectives end up taking precedence over social objectives, thus proving our hypothesis: the restructuring of social tourism

as a public policy contributes principally to strengthening the tourism sector, to the detriment of its distributive function.

In fulfillment of one of the goals, the expansion of social tourism has contributed in relative terms to mitigating economic instability in the sector through the creation of additional income and jobs that, in principle, favor the concessionaires and hotels that provide the tourism services, and then diffuse out to the target communities. But this contribution is relative insofar as the impacts differ according to fluctuations in tourist flows throughout the year. These fluctuations are associated with the evolution of the budget, the behavior of the various participating actors, and external circumstances, such as Influenza A, all of which have a bearing on the number of arrivals. Moreover, the jobs created are largely temporary, coming at times of high occupancy.

These economic impacts contrast with the policy's meager social outcomes in terms of including marginalized segments in tourism. Despite the increase in the number of persons who access social tourism, the socioeconomic composition of the tourists has reduced the initiative's distributive impact. The quantitative aim, to increase the volume of tourist provision through a **tourism for all** approach, is imposed to the neglect of the qualitative aim, to include **the low-income population throughout Argentina**. As the policy has unfolded over time and the influence of the private actors has escalated, tourism as an economic activity has ultimately taken priority over the entitlement of the excluded masses to access tourist services.

This deviation can be seen in the makeup of the companies and locations involved in the Federal Program, few of which are the SME hotels or emerging destinations at which the initiative was initially targeted. Despite prioritizing the consolidation of emerging destinations, the program mainly features well-established tourist destinations, such as Miramar, Mar de Ajó, Mar del Plata, San Clemente del Tuyú, El Hoyo, Puerto Madryn, Esquel, Lago Puelo, Trelew, San Rafael, Mina Clavero, Villa Carlos Paz, Villa Merlo, Rosario, Las Grutas, Salta, and Termas de Río Hondo. As to the hotel companies, few SMEs end up being involved in the program. Most establishments are large hotels of at least three stars, and even include chains and business groups such as those found in the provinces of Chubut and San Luis, respectively (observation sheets, 2014).

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