

VOLUNTEER TOURISM: THE NEW ECOTOURISM?

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ABSTRACT

One of the more recent forms of tourism to emerge is what has become known as Volunteer Tourism, the practice of individuals going on a working holiday, volunteering their labour for worthy causes. While volunteering is a well-established activity, the combination with tourism is relatively new and has already changed considerably over a very short period. This paper reviews the process by which volunteer tourism has developed, focusing on its transformation from an individual altruistic endeavour to a more commercial form of conventional tourism. The paper reviews the growth in number of websites devoted to volunteer tourism, and discusses the changes that have taken place in the content and focus of these websites, the locations used as destinations and the organisations they represent over the last two decades. It is apparent that over the last two decades the organisations offering volunteer tourist vacations have increasingly focused their attention on conventional commercial tourism markets which is a similar pattern of evolution to that of ecotourism. The paper concludes that volunteer tourism is likely to become increasingly diverse in scale, distribution and focus in the future, in the same way as ecotourism has broadened its market and appeal, but in so doing, will lose more of the distinctive features that characterized its initial form.

Keywords: volunteer, altruism, opportunities, commercialisation, organisations

INTRODUCTION

According to Wearing, the term volunteer tourist applies to those tourists who “...for various reasons volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing, 2001: p1)

Volunteer tourists should not be confused with ‘working tourists’, who are generally travellers undertaking a ‘gap year’, and not all ‘working tourists’ are volunteers as some find paid employment while travelling. A key element in the definition of a volunteer tourist is the absence of pay. Volunteer tourists do not get remunerated while on their trip. Instead they pay in a variety of ways for the privilege of volunteering (Wearing, 2001; Ellis, 2003). In terms of this payment, volunteers often pay relatively more than what they would have had paid for a ‘normal’ holiday to the same destination (Wearing, 2001) with the extra cost ideally being for the benefit of the cause or project the volunteer will work for.

By its nature volunteer tourism is sporadic and episodic (Cnaan and Handy, 2005) and volunteer experiences offered at the time of writing can extend from short-term projects of a few weeks to extended periods of many months (but less than a year). There is now a growing market offering volunteer experiences, which in their packaging and timeline, have become similar to the commercially successful model of mass tourism packaged holidays (Brown and Morrison, 2003).

It is difficult to say precisely how widespread volunteer tourism is. Travel is often officially considered only either business or pleasure, and international volunteers may avoid stating their purpose to border authorities for fear of complicated paperwork. An estimate of its size by means of internet research using the key term ‘volunteer abroad’ yields over one million hits, with a vast range of opportunities for such experiences. Currently there are many tour operators, environmental and humanitarian NGOs, and academic groups who offer travellers the opportunity to participate in projects that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological and cultural restoration (Wearing, 2004; Wight, 2003).

This paper explores how the growth of interest in volunteer tourism and the large scale expansion of opportunities have altered the nature of the activity. Tourism has grown rapidly and extensively in the last century and criticism and reaction to mass tourism has resulted in the emergence of new ‘forms’ of tourism , some reflecting specialised interests, others reflecting a desire for an alternative approach, such as sustainable tourism. The turn towards ‘green’, less harmful products has had a great impact in the field of tourism with the development and increasing popularity of alternative tourism and ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Butler, 1990; O’Neil, 1991; Wheeler, 1992; Kamaro, 1996; Honey, 1999). It might appear to a cynic that tour operators have taken advantage of a new and exciting field to exploit, from which to make even larger profits by providing new experiences in less developed areas (Wheeller, 1993). As a result, alternative tourism and ecotourism on the one hand provide the customer with a feeling of having the moral ‘high ground’ while being sensitive, exclusive and ‘fashionable’, and on the other hand give the operators a ‘licence’ to print money.

The debate about such forms of tourism and their merits, motives and beneficiaries is ongoing and this paper contributes to an analogous debate, focusing on volunteer tourism, examining if it is becoming the ‘new ecotourism’.

ORGANISED VOLUNTEERING

According to the National Centre for Volunteering in the UK, Volunteering is “...*any activity which involves spending time unpaid doing something which aims to benefit someone (individual or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives, or to benefit the environment*” (Davis Smith, 1992: 16)

Volunteering is a very old activity with the earliest discussions dating from ancient times. Some researchers place volunteerism within the spheres of religion and class, suggesting that volunteerism emerged from the church connections of the aristocracy and was manifested as acts of ‘altruistic’ duty to help relieve poverty (Stebbins and Graham, 2004) or to educate poor children. The notion of ‘noblesse oblige’, which dictated the lives of the nobility in past times, was generally used to imply that with wealth, power and prestige came a duty towards the weak and unprivileged (The Free Dictionary.com). This was also reflected in the ‘Knightly Virtues’ which included courage, justice, mercy, generosity, faith, nobility and hope (Howard, 1964). The

‘Elite’ supported charities evolved into the ‘Friendly Societies’ and the ‘Voluntary Anglican Schools’ that continue to this day (Graham, 1995). Others have argued that volunteerism and community spirit took its present form in the ‘New World’ with assistance from indigenous peoples to new colonists during the struggles of the first North American settlers (Johnson, 1997).

In Europe the First World War revealed a new form of misery and total destruction which had a considerable impact on the psyche of ordinary people and paved the way for the birth of the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. In 1919 The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (an organisation of Christian pacifists) organised an international conference in the Netherlands during which a Swiss man, Pierre Ceresole, presented the idea of an international team of volunteers who would work together to repair the damage from the war which had just finished. The idea was based on the premise that working together in a spirit of friendship would be an expression of solidarity which could heal the wounds of hate (Ceresole, 1954 cited in SCI, 2007). The values determined by society in these times, such as pacifism and to “help the wounded”, became the instigation behind the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. Ceresole put his vision into action and during the summer of 1920 a small group of volunteers lead by Ceresole himself, set out to work rebuilding a village near Verdun. Similar motives of compassion drove Dunant to found the Red Cross a few years earlier (Boissier, 1985).

Table 1: Examples of Volunteer Activities

1920
First work camp in the village of Esnes near Verdun
1924
First voluntary work-camp of conscientious objectors in Switzerland to clear rubble after avalanches
1928
Volunteers clear the Rhine Valley in Liechtenstein after heavy floods
1930
Voluntary work camp in Lagarde (France) to clear up flood devastation
1931
Work camps to restore self-confidence in mining towns in England during depression
1934

Rebuilding villages in the area of Bihar (India) after a devastating earthquake
1937
Assistance to civilians during the Spanish Civil War; evacuating refugees and feeding the population

(Source: SCI, 2007)

By the end of World War Two it became apparent that antagonism among nations was not to end with the defeat of the Axis. Instead the World gradually separated into two camps representing two complete different political ideologies and systems, lead by the United States on one side and the USSR on the other. A vital part of both sides' strategic planning was expanding their respective spheres of influence around the globe (Gaddis, 2006). The fear of more countries falling under Soviet influence drove the Americans into action and the US Peace Corps were formed in 1961 in order to win hearts and minds around the world. In his inaugural speech on 20th January 1961 President Kennedy issued a 'call to arms' for volunteers challenging a new generation of Americans "...to fight tyranny, poverty, disease, and war" and he also issued a pledge "...to those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery" to help them help themselves (JFK quotes, 2007).

Irrespective of the political agenda that lead to it, the founding of Peace Corps provided contemporary volunteer tourism with a blueprint of international expansion and involvement at a large scale. Despite the Cold War, Volunteer Tourism found extra impetus in the economic boom between 1945 and 1973 (energy crisis) which lead to a rise in spare time and travel-motivations. This economic boom, the rise of social security, and the reduction in working hours gave people the opportunity to seek self fulfilment and success in their spare time as well as at work (Rivlin, 1992). This change in attitude and goal setting meant that perspective volunteers were not prepared to settle for working in a camp to achieve a specific goal. Instead they started showing an inclination towards striving to expand their horizons and raise their levels of conscience, and this meant that volunteer tourism had to be transformed in order to meet these new needs.

The emergence of Youth Challenge International (YCI) as an organisation devoted to providing volunteer travel experiences for young people who wished to take part in projects that helped local communities internationally (YCI, 2006) was a natural evolution of the Peace Corps model (Wearing, 2001). At the same time similar

ventures in the UK were ‘Operations Drake (1978-1980) and Raleigh (1984-1989), which, under the patronage of Prince Charles, provided the opportunity to young people to assist in a variety of projects (Wearing, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

A broad examination of the organizations offering volunteer projects via the internet was undertaken to gain a richer understanding of the diversity of projects offered across the globe, including the nature of the growth of volunteer tourism, the relationship between purpose of projects, their location and potential need, and the nature (origins, focus and status) of organisations offering volunteer tourism opportunities. The desk study discussed in this paper does not claim to be representative of all organizations providing volunteer tourism experiences, however, it does aim to be comprehensive in terms of the proliferation of projects offered, the destinations promoted, the appeal to different types of volunteers, and the continuous segmentation and diversification which characterizes the market.

Building on Callannan and Thomas, (2003) the researchers utilised the “Volunteer Abroad” database for two different dates (2005 and 2007) in order to test the assumption that volunteer tourism projects were growing rapidly. In 2007 this database held information on 3,441 projects spanning 150 countries. While there are other organizations, such as Responsible Travel or Do it Overseas that also provide databases, Volunteer Abroad was preferred for comparison purposes as it provides a detailed and extensive list of projects. A database was compiled using Excel to store information retrieved from Volunteer Abroad. In order to select appropriate information to transfer onto this database, a framework was developed. The organization’s name and contact details were recorded, along with the year of establishment, and the founder, followed by the name, nature, duration and destination of each project. The focus was on the organizations offering projects, in terms of their screening of volunteers, the extras they offered, their policies and their financial contribution, if any and this information was transferred to the database.

VOLUNTEER DESTINATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The first aspect examined was the growth in number of projects and their locations. The ten destination countries with the highest number of projects are listed in table 2. All countries in the list are categorized as developing countries, with India having 241 projects listed. Compared to Callannan and Thomas' (2003) count of 51, there was an increase of 190 projects in India within a period of four years. The second country on the list, Costa Rica had seen an increase of 158 projects, and Peru 192 projects. Overall in four years, the number of projects examined in 2003 (698) on the Volunteer Abroad database has increased to 3,441 in 2007, which is an increase of approximately 492 per cent in four years, which confirms the rapid expansion anticipated

Table 2: Volunteer Tourism Expansion (2003-2007)-Top 10 Countries

Country	Projects 2007	Projects 2005	Projects in 2003
India	241	185	51
Costa Rica	201	133	43
Peru	193	122	1
Ecuador	188	150	47
Kenya	183	102	21
Thailand	176	138	3
Ghana	171	149	37
South Africa	148	135	3
Nepal	144	117	2
Brazil	96	91	15
Totals	1741	1322	223

It might reasonably be expected that because volunteer tourism projects are essentially to provide assistance and support to communities needing help, there would be a close relationship between need and numbers of projects. In order to see if this was the case, the 150 countries were categorised by their current Human Development Index (HDI) score in order to examine the extent to which the level of human development influences the presence of volunteer projects within each country. The HDI is a tool developed by UNDP to illustrate the total life quality in a country. Factors like GDP per capita, life expectancy, the quality of education and the literacy rate are used to create a value where 1.0 is the highest possible score. Countries with an index above 0.8 are called 'high human development' countries; countries with indices between 0.799 and 0.5 are considered medium, while countries below 0.5 are categorized as low human development countries. (UNDP.org)

Table 3: The Most ‘Needy Countries’

Country	HDI SCORE	No of Projects in 2007	No of Projects in 2005	No of Projects in 2003
Afghanistan	0.229	1	1	1
Sierra Leone	0.336	1	0	0
Burkina Faso	0.37	3	2	4
Niger	0.374	3	2	0
Mali	0.38	2	0	0
Mozambique	0.384	10	7	1
Ethiopia	0.406	7	7	5
Congo Dem Rep	0.411	1	0	0
Ivory Coast	0.432	1	1	4
Zambia	0.434	13	13	2
Total		42	33	17

Table 4: The Least ‘Needy Countries’

Country	HDI SCORE	No of Projects in 2007	No of Projects in 2005	No of Projects in 2003
Iceland	0.968	9	5	6
Norway	0.968	1	1	1
Australia	0.962	25	29	12
Canada	0.961	14	28	11
Ireland	0.959	6	5	2
Sweden	0.956	2	3	1
Switzerland	0.955	3	3	1
Japan	0.953	12	11	8
Netherlands	0.953	2	3	2
Finland	0.952	3	3	7
Total		77	91	51

Of the 3,441 projects listed, 905 were based in countries with a high HDI score, 2,357 were based in medium HDI countries and only 147 projects were based in countries with a low HDI score. To illustrate this point further the top ten most ‘needy countries’ (see table 3) and the top ten least ‘needy countries’ (see table 4) were examined. It was found that there were more projects (77) based in countries with high HDIs than in countries with lower HDIs and thus a greater need for support (42). If the presumption that volunteer tourism projects are fuelled by need is correct the greater presence in highly developed countries is a contradiction.

One might argue that total aggregate need reflecting population of a country rather than only the simple HDI score might influence distribution more (see table 5). India has a vast population and hosts a total of 241 projects, so at a first glance this assumption seemed reasonable. However, China, the most populated country in the world, hosts only 89 projects and Indonesia, despite having a large population also, hosts only 25 projects, while Pakistan, with a population of 165 million, is host to only 2 projects. It becomes apparent that there are countries with far smaller populations than India or Pakistan that have a high volunteer project presence like Costa Rica, Ecuador and Nepal. As result the possible population / project number relationship collapses.

Table 5: Top ten Countries by population and number of projects

Country	Population in Millions	No of Projects
1-China	1,320	89 (3)
2-India	1,290	241 (1)
3-USA	301	47 (4)
4-Indonesia	234	25 (5)
5-Brazil	190	96 (2)
6-Pakistan	165	2 (10)
7-Bangladesh	150	6 (9)
8-Russia	141	19 (6)
9-Nigeria	135	8 (8)
10-Japan	129	12 (7)

Having ruled out population and need as possible influences on expansion, the researchers considered whether the number of projects in a country might reflect a response to catastrophic events, or what might be termed ‘emergency need’.

The Boxing Day tsunami in 2004 was a very high profile catastrophe which touched the hearts of millions over that holiday season. In 2003 Thailand was host only to 3 volunteer projects (Callannan and Thomas, 2003) while in 2005 there were 138 projects, increasing to 176 in 2007 (see Table 2). Examining the other tsunami affected countries (see Table 6), the same rapid increase is noted for Sri Lanka, jumping from 2 projects in 2003 to 35 in 2005 and for Indonesia increasing from 13 to 27. The countries most affected by the tsunami clearly showed an almost immediate increase in the number of projects. Even though the effect everywhere is not as dramatic as in the case of Thailand, it is clear that there might be a connection between the 2004 tsunami and the increase in volunteer tourism projects in affected countries because of global exposure.

Table 6: The 2004 “Tsunami Effect”

Countries	Projects in 2007	Projects in 2005	Projects in 2003
Thailand	176	138	3
Indonesia	25	27	13
Malaysia	11	5	1
Myanmar	1	2	0
Bangladesh	6	5	4
Sri Lanka	48	35	2
Seychelles	1	1	0

The United States also showed a dramatic increase in projects between 2003 and 2007 (+47), during which period it suffered from Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane hit the United States in September 2005, at which time there were 77 projects in the country, but in 2007 these had decreased to 48. Thus it would appear that Hurricane Katrina had no effect compared to the tsunami of 2004. Clearly other factors affect project location beyond emergency need response. There were other countries which displayed rapid expansion also between 2003 and 2007 which were not affected by extreme events. South Africa went from 3 projects in 2003 to 135 in 2005, further growing to 148 in 2007. Ecuador also followed a similar pattern as did Peru, Kenya and Ghana (see table 2). This raises the possibility that more conventional market forces may drive the development of volunteer tourism rather than a response to the need for assistance. In order to answer this question the types of projects were examined.

VOLUNTEER TOURISM PROJECTS

The 3,441 project entries in the database have a number of activities attached to them. After closer scrutiny it became apparent that of the 3,441 project opportunities advertised, 995 did not meet the criteria for volunteer tourism, in that they either exceeded a year in duration or involved internships or paid employment. Thus the researchers were left with 2,446 'pure' (in terms of this research) projects to analyse further. For ease of examination the projects have been categorised into nine activity groups based on the work by Callannan and Thomas (2003). Table 7 illustrates the numbers of cases identified within each group. The most frequent cited group was community welfare (805 cases) followed by teaching (572 cases). The next category in prominence was Environmental (502), followed by Medical (236). Next category in prominence was Cultural (131), followed by Business Development, followed by Building (54) and Research (47) with the least popular category of activities being 'other' (28 cases) which included specialised catastrophe relief projects and Olympic Games related volunteer support opportunities.

Table 7: Project Groups and their Activities

Group	Activities	Total of Cases
Community Welfare	Community Development Children Care Elderly Disability Peace Human Right/ Legal	805
Teaching	Teaching a Foreign Language Sports Coaching	572
Environmental	Nature Conservation Wildlife Protection Global Warming	502
Medical	Hospital Support Pandemic (HIV, Ebola) Support Drug Rehabilitation	236
Cultural	Arts Cultural Exchange Empowerment of Women Heritage Conservation Museum Support	131
Business Development	IT Support Accounting Support Farming/ Organic	91
Building	Construction Renovation Water Management	54
Research	Wildlife Monitoring Land-mapping/Zoning	47
Other/ Miscellaneous	Catastrophe Relief Olympic Games	28

(Based on Callannan and Thomas, 2003)

The most prominent of the groups includes projects designed to support and improve the lives of local communities at a grass roots level. Examples of such projects include working in orphanages, elderly homes or clinics for the disabled. It may also include raising awareness for a cause, like peace, human rights and providing legal support. It has to be said that the spectrum and proliferation of community welfare related projects changes continuously and most of the internet based organisations cite such projects as community development without making clear what the project entails.

Teaching projects are also prominent in the list of project activities. Many organizations offer teaching qualifications (via TEFL tests) a priori to departure to volunteers who then reach their destination with a qualification that in the future could provide them with paid employment. Sports coaching is also popular, especially football coaches in African countries.

Another prominent category, environmental projects, is comprised of activities with a 'green' remit and outlook. They include nature conservation activities such as

protecting rainforests, flora, or cleaning beaches; wildlife conservation includes activities such as volunteering to assist new born turtles reach the water or help in animal refuges and hospitals.

Medical related projects involve providing support in hospitals or clinics. They also vary from assisting with eye surgery to raising awareness about sex education and STDs, especially in the HIV pandemic stricken countries of Africa. Drug rehabilitation projects are also included with the volunteers providing support to communities that have such problems.

The cultural category is comprised of projects designed with an emphasis on cultural celebration and preservation. Societal reform is also on this agenda with female empowerment projects, such as the 'revolutionary women of Afghanistan' project which aims to 'free' women from the Taliban's beliefs and oppression. Heritage conservation is also very popular with volunteers assisting at archaeological sites with excavations or providing support at museums or cultural centres.

Business development projects include activities designed to attract western business experts to assist developing communities with building websites, balancing their books or giving advice. It also includes support for farming communities e.g. those that grow organic products. These farmers also benefit from marketing advice.

The building category relates to projects involving construction or renovation. It also includes water management projects with the construction of sand dams etc.

The research category encompasses projects involving wildlife monitoring and measuring ice sheets in Antarctica. The volunteers on such projects provide support to scientists or follow an expedition.

The final category involves projects that by their remit are related to a specific occasion. Catastrophe relief projects are few and this might be because catastrophe relief may be included in many of the above activities. There are only 12 explicitly catastrophe relief projects listed in the database. Olympic Games projects on the database compiled in 2007 were exclusively designed to provide volunteer support for the Beijing Olympics of 2008.

Community development and teaching may top the list because of limited investment in social services and weaknesses in the educational systems of the countries listed. Increasing demand on these systems reflects increased birth rates, refugees from neighbouring war torn countries, orphaned children due to pandemics like AIDS, and low number of experts and skilled professionals to deal with these problems

The data raises a number of unanswered questions. India has a low number (8) of environmental projects in comparison to Costa Rica or Ecuador who have 55 and 47 projects. Is the physical environment of Costa Rica or Ecuador more at risk than India's, or is it because Costa Rica and Ecuador are established eco-tourism destinations? One element that needs further consideration is the popularity of project areas as tourist destinations and thus whether volunteer organizations are guilty of glamorizing volunteer tourism projects by selecting areas for projects that are popular tourist destination? Have they turned volunteer tourism into a product, a "macdonaldised" sibling of mass tourism with green and ethical undertones?

VOLUNTEER TOURISM ORGANISATIONS

In the 1920s volunteer tourism was highly personal, very limited in scale, with little assistance available and volunteer opportunities were not marketed as they are now.

The projects noted above are rich in variety and diverse in terms of how demanding they are on participants. What is not always clear is the value of the projects in terms of output and added skills to the communities and causes they are supporting themselves. In order to get a clearer picture, an examination of the volunteer tourism organisations was undertaken. The 3,441 projects listed in the Volunteer Abroad database were provided by 146 volunteer tourism organisations. The organisations vary in terms of size, structure, mission and experience. In order to gain a better understanding of these organizations, the top forty in terms of growth were identified and examined in several key areas; diversification, cost and direct contribution, skill requirement and involvement of locals.

Volunteer organizations vary in terms of how widely they are active around the world. Some established humanitarian organizations such as Service Civil International, Volunteers for Peace, and Habitat for Humanity, run projects in 90, 99 and 100 countries respectively. However, the majority of volunteer organizations tend to operate at a much smaller scale. Forty-six out of the 146 organizations present in the database operate in a single country only, which may indicate local, specialised organizations working on attracting volunteer tourists to a single country.

In order to understand further how organizations gain and allocate their resources it is necessary to examine the status of the organizations and how they portray themselves.

Table 8: Declared Status

Status	Number of Organisations
Not for Profit	17
Operated by or working for non profit	6
Ethical NGO	6
Not Stated	6
Special Tour Operator	3
Charity	2

Table 8 shows that there are 17 of the 40 organizations studied with non-profit status. In addition there are 6 organizations that do not hold a non-profit status but instead make clear on their websites that they are operated by, or work for, non-profit organizations. Another 6 organizations call themselves “ethical NGOs” while a further 2 label themselves as charities. Different labels and different statuses involve different legal requirements, benefits and brand image. Three organizations made it clear on their website that they are ‘special’ tour operators organizing and packaging volunteer holidays. Finally there were 6 organizations that did not disclose their status on their website for reasons known only to them.

What emerges from the above is that the market is characterised by inconsistency in terms of structure, commitment and mission. Non-profit status means that such organizations have a tax status meaning that any donations towards their projects are in general tax deductible for the donor and this may include participation and travel costs. The brand and image value of being a non-profit or charitable organization is considerable. Organizations that are not recognised as such seem anxious to explain why they are making profits and why people should still choose them as their volunteer tourism provider. The general claim is that they only make an operating profit, which they argue enables them to continue to support the projects they are involved with. Other organizations refrain from declaring any status and thus do not have to explain or justify anything. However, all types of organizations claim to take

the necessary steps to price their products and conduct their business ethically. Such statements are important as prices charged by the organisations have raised concern in the media.

Best Practice: Long Term Viability and Value

Such variation in the market, in terms of size, ethos and business conduct, raises questions in relation to the value and utility of volunteer projects. Most organizations do their best to portray themselves as ethical improvers of communities and environments but the proliferation of approaches and ambiguity, plus the lack of control surrounding volunteer tourism leaves the door open for opportunists. There are some organizations that appear to have a clear mission and philosophy to international volunteering. Such commitment to their project and their impact is underlined by the fact that these conservation efforts are part of longer term programmes which may last up to five years.

According to the International Volunteer Program Association (IVPA) essential requirements are a clear structure and understanding of the participants' roles and what should be expected from them. To that end some organizations offer training to their volunteers prior to departure and appear to have in place a rigorous selection program. In general organizations with clearly stated practices put an emphasis on building their volunteering experiences upon the four elements (sensitivity, service, involvement, and long term viability) of good volunteer organization practice as prescribed by the IVPA code of ethics (ivpa.org) in order to maximise the impact of their projects. Sensitivity implies that organizations encourage their volunteers to be culturally sensitive and learn from their experience creating understanding and tolerance for other people and cultures.

The second element of good practice, service, implies that the volunteers are prepared and committed to provide good service to the project or cause of their choice. To this end there should be attempts to involve locals as extensively as possible, creating employment and the conditions for long term viability by ensuring that projects have the expertise and the infrastructure in place to enable them to continue, even without the contribution of volunteers. Employment of local drivers, cooks, guards, game guards and boat crews contributes to the successful running of projects. Involvement of local scientists and students creates knowledge and experience that will remain even if volunteer tourism projects cease in an area. This empowers the employees and

creates the right conditions for long term viability. Twenty-three organizations out of the 40 examined made no explicit claims or statements on their website that they utilize local staff, while 9 organizations, even though they imply using staff on location, fail to state whether the staff is local or imported. Only 8 organizations explicitly stated that they have as their policy the employment of local staff where possible.

In terms of involvement, many organizations strive to keep their participants active after their return. Most encourage strong alumni networking and make full use of social networking websites as Facebook or Bebo. They arrange reunions and their offices help past volunteers get in touch with each other. Organizations generally also tend to improve their 'product' by taking on board the feedback and constructive criticism of former participants, for example by volunteers providing written feedback on their experience.

Volunteers generally need to undergo certain training in order to be sensitive and effective volunteers. In terms of training provided for participants, out of 40 organizations, only 16 made it clear on their websites that they provide training to prepare volunteers for their projects. This training varies from language training for volunteers in order to teach English as a foreign language (TEFL certification) to just being taught a local language at 'survival' level, and leadership training. However, 24 of the organizations examined do not state clearly on their websites that they offer any pre-project training. Instead they offer the promise of pre-departure briefing material after registration with them. This lack of mandatory training may reflect the simplicity of most volunteer project tasks, or it might also suggest avoidance of potentially costly practices by the organisations

In terms of the screening of participants, organizations go to different lengths in order to ensure 'quality' volunteers. In general terms all organizations profess to be inclusive and democratic in their selection process. Volunteers between the ages of 18 to 90 are welcome. Of course some projects may require a certain level of mobility and fitness which may de facto exclude people over a certain age or these with physical limitations. Operations Crossroads, for example, requires a letter from an applicant's physician confirming fitness. Volunteers under 18 in general require the explicit written consent of their legal guardian. However the organisations appear to be widening their scope to attract even younger volunteers with family volunteering opportunities becoming increasingly available.

Different organizations have different requirements in terms of qualification and different quality control systems in place. Out of 40 organizations examined, only 11 request background checks in terms of CV, references or police, and criminal record checks. This can have far reaching implications in terms of volunteers working with the more vulnerable members of communities. This varied approach to requirements and screening of volunteers potentially has implications in terms of the contribution of different organizations and different projects.

CONCLUSIONS

It is impossible to overlook the role that individual initiative and business acumen has played in the development of structures and contemporary forms in volunteer tourism. Its transformation into a commercial business was probably inevitable due to the potential market appeal of volunteer tourism products. It could be argued that the mass-tourism model of packaging and segmentation now used in volunteer tourism was adopted because of its evident commercial success and popularity. Volunteer tourism has now been segmented and packaged into its contemporary form (see Ellis, 2003). Through purposefully designed websites volunteer organisations ensure that volunteers are portrayed as the archetype of a new kind of tourists who have compassion and empathy for the plight of the disadvantaged, the neglected, the endangered and the needy, irrespective of species, situation or destination, an approach that has proven very successful.

As discussed earlier, a significant segment of the volunteer organization sector labels itself as non-profit. Yet the market is becoming more and more prolific with many organizations diversifying and offering various extras as part of the volunteering experience. Recently, there have been media calls for the volunteer organizations to stop charging large amounts of money for their services using the argument that where there is a need, volunteering and assisting should be free of charge. Volunteer Organizations now find themselves facing a dilemma as to which should be the way forward. The organizations can be viewed as being on a continuum in terms of their priorities between profit and altruism, with some being closer to one end in terms of their practices and others closer to the other. It can be argued that a similar continuum applies to the volunteer participants themselves. Volunteers have to balance their participation between altruistic sacrifice and hedonistic pursuits when selecting and participating in a volunteer project.

It cannot be determined yet to what degree the organizations (supply) are creating and shaping demand (participants), nor whether the marketing of volunteer tourism is dominating the selection process of participants. One may suggest that organisations have always been influential (e.g. SCI, Red Cross) but in earlier years because they were the only way to access volunteer opportunities. Now organisations can offer much more than a simple opportunity to volunteer, they can and do offer holidays, and the balance is clearly shifting from altruism and commitment to hedonism and profit, in the same way that ecotourism has become a synonym to 'ego-tourism' and a form of mass conventional tourism.

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