

Current Issues in Tourism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t901682222>

To cite this Article Tomazos, Kostas and Butler, Richard(2010) 'The volunteer tourist as 'hero'', Current Issues in Tourism, 13: 4, 363 — 380, First published on: 05 February 2010 (iFirst)

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13683500903038863

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500903038863>

## **The volunteer tourist as ‘hero’**

Kostas Tomazos and Richard Butler\_

Hospitality and Tourism Management, Strathclyde University, Glasgow, UK

(Received 19 August 2008; final version received 11 May 2009)

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing form of tourism which has a weak conceptual basis and which is generally defined rather simply in terms of participants' actions while on holiday, ignoring elements such as reasons for participation, behaviour, and influencing forces. This article argues that an appropriate conceptual base for volunteer tourists is Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' and draws analogies between participants in volunteer tourism and the 'Hero' in Campbell's writings. The article discusses data on volunteer tourists, which reveals their self-expressed reasons for participating, and their specific situations. The data were collected by field research based on covert participation at an orphanage in Mexico. Volunteers interviewed revealed the traits explaining their participation in volunteer tourism that were similar to the characteristics and driving forces found in the participants on Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' and in medieval and classical myths. While participation in volunteer tourism may not match contemporary understanding of heroes and heroic behaviour, there is considerable similarity in reasons given by respondents for participating in the activity, and a conceptual model is developed to illustrate this.

Keywords: volunteer tourism; Campbell's 'Hero's Journey'; participation; behaviour; rite of passage

### **Introduction**

**(Note: The use of the term “Hero” refers to both male and female. The traditional feminine form “Heroine” is secondary and a diminutive form of “Hero” which the author finds anachronistic and inappropriate)**

Contemporary volunteer tourism has tended to suffer from a lack of differentiation from other forms of tourism or volunteering (Wearing, 2001). Instead it has been a 'nomad' concept wondering between the scope of alternative tourism and

international volunteering (Wearing, 2004; McGehee and Norman, 2002). 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)

By its nature volunteer tourism is sporadic and episodic, perhaps because of the high cost of participation (Cnaan and Handy, 2005). 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 normally less than a year). There is also a growing market of volunteer experience providers, which in their packaging and timeline, seem to have emulated the commercially successful model of mass tourism packaged holidays (Brown and Morrison, 2003). It is difficult to say precisely how widespread this phenomenon is. Travel is often officially considered only either business or pleasure and international volunteers may avoid stating their purpose to immigration and border authorities for fear of complicated paperwork and visa regulations.

Nevertheless, one can build an estimate of its size by means of internet research. A ‘Google’ search for ‘volunteer abroad’ yields over one million hits and a review of the “Volunteer Abroad Database” (<http://www.volunteerabroad.com>) (containing 2,822 volunteer projects demonstrates 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).

Volunteer Tourism has often been featured in the media but it is commonly accepted that relatively little is known about it as a phenomenon. In order to shed some light on the origins of such possibly altruistic acts this paper draws analogies with historical /mythical figures utilising the ‘Hero’s Journey’, an anthropological model devised by Joseph Campbell (1968). Through this process a common ground is established between heroes in myth and volunteer tourists who may see volunteer participation as a rite of passage before confronting the realities of adulthood.

### **The Hero’s Appeal**

Primitive man had no reason or desire to venture beyond his boundaries. Travel, being the privilege of people with means, became the basis for numerous legends, many of them about heroes who 'dared' to go beyond their home areas to seek new places and experiences. Celebrated myths such as the "*Argonaut Expedition*", "*Odysseus' Journey*" in ancient Greek mythology and the "*Epic Voyage of Gilgamesh*" in Asian folklore, are all indications that ordinary people were inspired by such travellers and perhaps dreamed of emulating the feats of these mythical 'pioneers'. However, very few dared or had the means to do so and occasional military endeavours provided the only opportunity to most people for travel. In Roman times the vastness of the Roman empire and its highly organised structure meant that legionnaires could combine their paid army employment with seeing the world and travelling ( A notion which does not go amiss today with military recruitment promotional drives urging young recruits to enlist and '*see the world*' (Royal Navy Promotional Material, 2007).)

Of course the conditions of travel and the dangers faced in ancient times have little to do with contemporary mainstream tourism, but still such examples could be seen as a very archaic form of tourism whose participants were simply brave and/or desperate men, the vast majority of whom were travelling out of necessity rather than choice. If they were lucky enough to return home, they brought with them exotic artefacts, scents, and food and they excited the imagination of their contemporaries with stories of pristine lands, exotic people and miraculous sights. Later the emergence and final victory of Christianity over paganism provided the contextual background for these 'mirages' that excited the imagination. The Biblical story of the 'Garden of Eden' presented a powerful mythological imagery of a paradise lost which preached that contemporary man was not always surrounded by chaos and misery, but instead had once belonged to something 'oneiric' and pristine, to which he was actually entitled. This yearning for a lost paradise fuelled the development of 'paradisiacal cults' (Eliade, 1969: 88-111) which arguably culminated with the crusades and subsequently the Great Voyages of Discovery, as western society moved from a religious to a mercantile focus.

Historical figures or fictional characters, who dared to venture beyond the limits of their every day lives have allured diachronically and catholically irrespective of nationality, religion or creed (Campbell, 1988). Freud, after studying the dreams of a large number of people, concluded that "...*in our dreams we are all heroes*" (Freud,

1932) and in terms of this study perhaps, volunteer tourists could be viewed as minor heroes. This analogy is developed below.

### **The Hero's Journey**

A construct of celebrated anthropologist, Joseph Campbell, is the "Hero's Journey". After studying the myths and legends of many cultures, Campbell (1968; 1988), argued that there is a common 'motif' which underlines heroic stories and adventures. Intrinsic to this motif is a "*cycle of going and returning*" (Campbell, 1988: 123), which sees the hero undertake a venture that is bound to bring danger, challenges, and, at the same time, allows the hero to fulfil his/her human potential. The journey is comprised of three phases, departure, initiation, and return, which are further broken down by Campbell into 17 steps (Table 1). These 17 steps are not included in every myth but they are representative of the motif that underlines various myths from different regions of the world.

#### **Table 1: The Hero's Journey's Steps**

- |  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1- The call to adventure               | 9- Atonement with father       |
| 2- Refusal of the call                 | 10- Apotheosis                 |
| 3- Supernatural Aid                    | 11- The Ultimate Boon          |
| 4- The crossing of the first threshold | 12- Refusal of return          |
| 5- The Belly of the Whale (Rebirth)    | 13- The Magic Flight           |
| 6- The Road of Trials                  | 14- Rescue form without        |
| 7- Marriage                            | 15- The crossing of the return |
| 8- Woman as temptress                  | 16- Master of two worlds       |
|  | 17- Freedom to live            |

**(Compiled from: Campbell, 1968)**

Summarising the journey, the call to adventure (1) is the point in a person's life when they are given notice that everything in their life is going to change, whether they are aware of it or not. Often when this call is given, the future hero refuses to heed it (2). This could be for a variety of reasons including fear, insecurity, a sense of inadequacy, a sense of duty or any other reason that may hold the hero back. In the "Matrix" film trilogy the hero (Nemo) is given the choice of two pills, red and blue. The red represents refusal of the call and continuing with routine life and the blue means change (Warner Bros, 1999). Of course the hero chooses the second. Once the

hero has committed to the quest, his or her guide and super-natural aid (3) will appear or become known. With this personification of his/her destiny to guide and aid him the hero goes forward until he/she comes to the point where his/her known world ends and adventure, danger and the unknown begin (4). What follows is the road of trials (4) which is a series of tests, tasks and ordeals that the hero must undergo. Often he/she fails one or more tests which often occur in threes. One of the tests the hero has to face is that of the meeting with the Goddess which is presented by Campbell as a mystical marriage (7) of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World (who is incarnate in every woman). The hero in this instance attempts to enter sacred ground and win the boon of love (Campbell, 1968:118) from the Goddess. In some instances the hero fails and his punishment is horrible (Actaeon-Artemis), or succeeds and enjoys the love of the Goddess (Odysseus-Calypso). In the case of a female hero, the maiden is the one who, by her qualities and her yearning has to prove she is fit to become the consort of an immortal (Psyche- Cupid). During these trials the hero is always tempted to abandon or stay away from his-her quest. The “woman as temptress” (8) is a metaphor for the physical or material temptations of life, since the hero was always tempted by lust away from his spiritual quest. Having overcome temptation and trials, the hero then reaches the centre stage of his journey which often is a meeting with a being of incredible power (9). This being is usually a father figure, a patriarch who represents, according to Campbell, the “ogre aspect of the father” (Campbell, 1988:126). This ‘dark’ side of the father figure is present in the myths of Zeus-Cronus and Cronus-Uranus where the father figure must be defeated or emasculated in order for the old cycle to come to a close and a new one to commence. During this encounter the hero’s old self is “killed” and he is reborn as a hero. This transformation leads to the apotheosis (10) which means that the hero achieves a god-like status, not unlike Hercules in Greek mythology, who was accepted into the Pantheon of the Olympian Gods upon completion of his labours. The reward for the hero is generally something ethereal and transcendent such as the elixir of life or the Holy Grail (11) (Campbell, 1988). Following this the hero has to choose between returning or not. Once success has been tasted and the nectar and ambrosia drunk will the hero leave it all behind and return to his/hers old mundane, routine life? There are many instances of heroes who decided to remain forever in the land of their quest (12). As Campbell put it; “*Numerous indeed are the heroes fabled to have taken up residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of immortal beings*”

(Campbell, 1968:193). In Hindu mythology the Lord Muchukanda, instead of returning, decided to retreat further from the world (see Campbell, 1968:193-196). If the hero decides to return immediately, sometimes he/she has to escape to the normal world and struggle for a long time before he/she makes his/her eventual return (13). Odysseus, in Greek mythology, wandered for three years after he left Troy and stayed in the arms of the 'unaging' goddess Calypso for a further seven years before giving it all up in order to return to his beloved Penelope in Ithaca. In other cases the hero might just need to be 'rescued from without' (14), in simple terms the world must come to him and ask for his/her return (Lord Muchukanda). In many cases he/she needs more time to realise that there are other people who need the boon and so he/she has no choice but to return to his/her former world. What follows is the crossing of the return threshold (15), where the hero finally realises that the two worlds are in reality one, merely a forgotten dimension of the world he/she knew. Upon arrival the hero must learn to retain the wisdom gained from the quest and integrate it in his/her everyday life. This will eventually give the hero a perfect balance between the material and the spiritual and will make him/her the master of two worlds (16) and wise enough to live the moment (17), neither anticipating the future nor regretting the past (Campbell, 1988).

### **The 'Journey' as a 'rite of passage'**

In a sense the journey duplicates a 'rite of passage' comprised of different phases and tests. Throughout this 'process' the hero undergoes transformation, leaving behind his old ways of thinking and acting, and displays a new level of consciousness, skills and freedom. The importance of the 'Journey' as a rite of passage should not be overlooked. Campbell's work echoes the work of another anthropologist, Arnold Van Gennep who saw rites of passage from cultures around the world as a three phase process (Van Gennep, 1960). These three stages are separation, liminality and incorporation. In the first phase, people withdraw from the group and begin moving from one status to another. In the third stage they re-enter society having completed the rite. The liminal phase is the transition period in between, where the individual has left one phase but has not yet entered or joined the next (Van Gennep, 1960). In the Bible, Jesus of Nazareth withdraws for a period in the desert before returning as the accomplished article prepared to start His work. In nature, a caterpillar goes into a

cocoon state (chrysalis), before transforming into a butterfly. In human societies a rite of passage is often a ritual that marks a change in a person's social or sexual status. There are often ceremonies surrounding events such as childbirth, menarche, or other milestones within puberty, coming of age, marriage or death (Van Gennep, 1960). There are numerous initiation ceremonies in contemporary societies such as baptism, confirmation and bar or bar-mitzvahs that are considered as important rites of passage (Turner, 1969). As such, rites are in general diverse and may not be recognised as such in the culture in which they occur (Cushing, 1999). In Greece conscription is mandatory and has historically been linked with the maturing of man. The army was perceived as the 'natural way to go' and as a final school of socialisation and maturing for young men before they came into the real world. In practical terms this made a lot of sense because it was, in general, the first time a young man would find himself on his own, and away from home. Consequently, men unwilling or unable to serve, encountered prejudice and were often deemed 'useless' in conservative societies (Joenniemi, 2006), or treated as outcasts or cowards (cf. "white feathers" in the First World War) and forced to take exile, as did Vietnam draft dodgers in the 1960s and 1970s..

Recently, adventure education programs such as "Outward Bound" have been studied as potential rites of passage (Bell, 2003; Cushing, 1999) and the diversity of rites of passage perhaps gives us the 'licence' to see, for the purposes of this paper, volunteer travel as a contemporary rite of passage for young people. The Gap year has for a long time played this role, as a period between two major life stages (childhood-adulthood), or as Van Gennep may have put it, the liminal phase of a young adult's life (see earlier). The individual is clearly in transition and he/she is undoubtedly going through changes, not unlike the chrysalis in the cocoon. The intent is to become a complete adult ready to face whatever life has to throw at him/her; the journey has already begun.

### **Methodology**

This paper stems from a larger study which involved an examination of the motivation of volunteer tourists at an orphanage in Mexico. As part of the preliminary research the author collected information on the orphanage and constructed a portfolio on the orphanage and its activities. The '*Refugio Infantil Santa Esperanza*' (RISE) is a

non-profit shelter that currently houses 55 abandoned children under the age of 14 under the care of three nuns from the order of Carmelites of Jesus of Nazareth. The 'refugio' opened its doors in March 2001 thanks to donations from the Children's Shelter of Hope Foundation, which since then has solicited cash and contributions of equipment that have improved the lives of the children and the Madres at the refugio. RISE is technically not an orphanage. It is a refuge or shelter for families who are struggling and not able to care for their children due to emigration for work purposes or poverty. Very few of the children are available for adoption, as they still have ties and contacts with their families and relatives. RISE receives a subsidy of \$3,000 pesos (\$270 USD) monthly from the Mexican government which inevitably is not sufficient for its operational costs and thus the management of the refugio are constantly seeking new contributions in any shape or form.

It was decided that the Orphanage would be suitable in terms of numbers of participating volunteers, and also in terms of destination characteristics. The intention was to construct a volunteer vacation assisting children, while being surrounded by volunteers in a developing country. A total of 40 volunteers were encountered during a three week stay in the summer of 2007 with the lead author taking the role of a fully participating volunteer. There was no sample selection, the researcher strived to engage in conversation and observe, through participation, all the volunteers within the field work period.

### **Timescale**

The study took place over a period of three weeks during August 2007. This was in order to ensure the maximum number of participant volunteers (high season). A large number of participants represents a larger population and would also provide the experience of interacting, sharing and living with a greater number of volunteers. Carrying out the observations within a relatively short period of time was justified by the generally episodic nature of volunteer tourism, and because the study was self-funded. During field work the time was spread between working at the orphanage and socializing with the volunteers, in order to permit transcription of notes which comprise the research journal. For the purposes of this paper the discussion on volunteers and heroes is supported from extracts from the research journal kept during field work.

Ethical approval for the methodology involving covert participant observation was applied for and received. The field notes have been edited and the data presented in

such a way that the anonymity of individuals has been preserved. In line with covert participation, confidentiality was not promised but presumably expected.

### **The “Hero” volunteer tourist**

It was not difficult to find a formula to fit this ‘pattern’ or ‘mono-myth’ (Campbell, 1988) within the scope of volunteer tourism because the ‘Hero’s Journey’ is eternal and all encompassing. For Campbell, the journey is not just a pattern manifested in myths but it is a pattern of human experience. Every obstacle, every challenge we face endows us with experiences which contribute to the building of a new perspective, a new insight and spiritual growth (Campbell, 1988). This clear link with human experience and the three stage motif of departure, initiation and return, fit perfectly with what may be regarded as four basic components of the volunteer tourist experience:

- Ordinary Life
- Episodic Task
- Challenges
- Personal Development

In the ‘Hero’s Journey’ the hero starts his journey at the entrance to a new domain. The hero stands at the limits of his/her present sphere or life horizon (Campbell, 1968:77). Beyond lies the darkness of the unknown and danger which ordinary people are content and happy to avoid, but through which the hero dares to tread. This region could be a desert, a jungle, deep sea, or alien lands, and it provides context to the adventure as a passage beyond the veil of the known to the unknown. The volunteer tourist participants encountered in this study also stood at a threshold at one point in their lives. Behind them lay everything familiar and their daily routine life, and in front of them a trip to a developing country where they intended to carry out their mission, in this case to assist in an orphanage. At that point new participants had no clear idea of what to expect or what they were going to find upon arrival. At this point the hero enjoys the benefit of the appearance of his/her magical helpers (above) who are instrumental in guiding the hero with his/her first uncertain steps into the unknown. Just as the hero gets assistance, so the participants also have their own

‘magical’ assistance in the form of their volunteer (or other) tourist organisation representatives who are there to help them settle in and adapt. The next step in the journey is the road of trials where the hero has to face certain challenges which he/she has to overcome. The volunteer participants also face certain challenges; they have to raise the cost of their trip, and also find the time to travel. In addition there is a linguistic challenge for those who did not speak the local language, and finally, the challenge to adapt and interact in a new environment. If the hero succeeds in his/her challenges, then comes the apotheosis, which means the hero is transformed to a god-like status, his/her ‘old self’ a thing of the past. During this study, at the end of the third week of participation at the orphanage, the volunteers (and the author) took part in the volunteers’ appreciation day, by the end of which all felt transformed. We were not just individuals from different places and different backgrounds, we were all volunteers.

*We were all given t-shirts and we had a welcoming lunch, which we all cooked, served, ate and cleaned afterwards. It was a bit surreal, I felt like a member of a commune, a close knit group of people who worked together, ate together and had fun together.*

*What was underlining this feeling was the uniformity in our appearance wearing the t-shirts. They brought a change of atmosphere. It seemed like if all of the volunteers gained a new sense of identity and we were all swept away by a wave of newly found enthusiasm, responsibility and energy.*  
**(Research diary: Excerpt 70)**

The next step inevitably is the return. The hero may choose to return or stay away from his/her former world. Of the participants encountered all but one returned home at the end of their trip (volunteer No 3 decided to prologue her stay for a further six months). The hero also then faces the challenge of making a good use of the ‘boon’ which he/she gets as a reward. There are numerous cases of former volunteer tourist participants who, on return from their experience, started up new volunteer tourism organisations, to some extent continuing their ‘journey’. Table 2 is a list of volunteer tourism organizations which, in their websites describe their founding and highlight the role of a single individual or group of individuals as key to their existence. One such example of a volunteer who used her experience and started her own organization is Deidre Bounds, who after volunteering abroad for a number of summers, decided to start her own volunteer tourism provider (i-to-i. com). Another is Jean Mark Arbeola who started Volunteer Adventures (Volunteer adventures.com).

**Table 2: Volunteer Organizations and their founders**

| <b>Organization</b>  | <b>Founder(s)</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Volunteers for Peace | Peter Coldwell    |

|                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Service Civil International | Pierre Ceresole               |
| Earthwatch                  | Max Nicholson                 |
| i-to-i                      | Deidre Bounds                 |
| Amigos de las Americas      | Guy Bevil                     |
| Global Vision International | Steve Gwenin                  |
|                             | Mel W. Slavick and Frank Cook |
| Helping Hand USA            | Alec and Mora Dickson         |
| Voluntary Service Overseas  | Dr Peter Slowe                |
| Projects Abroad             | Colin Salisbury               |
| Global Volunteers Network   | Johan Olar Koss               |
| Right to Play               | Michel Gran and Bud Philbrook |
| Global Volunteers           | Marcus Watts                  |
| Greenforce                  | Charles F. Clarke             |
| United Planet               | Michael Kremer                |
| World Teach                 | Dr James Robinson             |
| Operation Crossroads Africa | Jean-Marc Alberola            |
| Volunteer Adventures        | Adrian Yalland                |
| Different Travel            | Colin Carpenter               |
| Detours Abroad              | Brigadier Armstrong           |
| BTCV                        | Steve Rosenthal               |
| Cross-Cultural Solutions    | Haley Coleman                 |
| Global Aware                | Scott Burke                   |
| Cosmic Volunteers           | Rita Johnson                  |
| Global Citizens Network     | Michelle L. Anderson          |
| Global Youth Opportunity    | Anthony Lunch                 |
| Mondochallenge              |                               |

**(Compiled by the author after analysis of internet sites)**

This ‘boon’ carried by the Hero in many cases is seen as wisdom which allows the hero to live in harmony, having found the right balance between the spiritual and the material world. Wearing (2001) found that for the young volunteers he studied in St Helena, their participation was a wake up call which made them realise what is important in life:

*“ It puts you in such a radically different environment. Over the years, you’ve got used to the environment and it does not change much, like what car you drive, what clothes you wear, etc. You get there and that all shrinks in because there is none of that there, it is just you, and no one really gives a stuff what car you drive back home”* (Mic, SERR participant as quoted in Wearing, 2001: 128). This elevation above materialism could also be the result of a reality check which some of the volunteers received when they were confronted with the realities of the lives of the children. A very good example of that is a child volunteer who followed her mother to

the orphanage. She had a change of perspective and attitude, even though, as her mother put it, she had been a difficult child:

*“X is twelve years old and she really enjoys playing with the orphanage’s children. According to her mum she brought her here in order to really appreciate how lucky she is and she seems to have already become less demanding and she does not mind sharing her things anymore”*

**(Research Diary: Excerpt 43)**

Of course, just like the Hero, who is after all human, some of the participants showed certain weaknesses, for example, in missing creature comforts from home. It is not automatic that three weeks participating on a volunteer project will make a young person renounce their ‘former’ world. One example was Volunteer 27, an art performer, who volunteered in order to *“loose her inner princess”* (Research Diary: Excerpt 49) as she put it, but by the end of the trip admitted that she was on her way to New York for a spa treatment. Most of the volunteers showed a great affection and nostalgia for small creature comforts they had left behind and to which they had no access while volunteering:

*The rain keeps us all in and the effects of spending a lot of hours in a confined space with a group of people start to appear. Inevitably the conversations revolve around what the volunteers have missed the most. The girls have missed having baths, their beds and their favourite soap operas and TV shows, which they could not follow while here and the guys mostly, have missed watching football and their friends.*

**(Research Diary: Excerpt 77)**

From the above it can be argued that it is clear that we can draw strong analogies between the Hero’s Journey and participation in volunteer tourism. Table 3 lists selected stages from Campbell’s ‘Journey’ and compares them to the realities of volunteer tourism participation. It did not seem appropriate to make the obvious simplistic analogy between the ‘Magic Flight’ and flying to a destination or the value of the stage of ‘Marriage’ even though the possibility that some of the volunteers encountered get married in the future can not be discounted. This brings the discussion to the issue of the stage of ‘Woman as temptress’, with its deodological implications. It could be argued that Campbell was being allegoric and ‘woman’ represents all temptations, or he could literally mean lust. During the study there was inevitably interaction among the volunteers and even some tension caused by ‘lust’

*“It is also becoming clear that there is tension between two of the volunteers who seem to be competing for the affection of one of the girls. It is quite interesting to see that even though we are all so far away from home, the same rules apply”*

**(Research Diary: Excerpt 55)**

Of course it is not surprising that young people sharing the same areas and socializing for three weeks may pair off, so it was decided to keep that stage in the table below on the basis that competing for the affection of the same girl could be destructive.

**Table 3: The Volunteer as a Campbellian ‘Hero’**

| <b>Campbell’s Hero</b>                 | <b>Volunteer Tourist</b>   |
|--|--|
| Starting point-Familiar World          | Routine-Mundane life   |
| A call to adventure or a new challenge | Becoming aware of volunteer tourism projects and deciding to answer the call   |
| Challenges and trials along the way    | Raising funds for travel-Long flight- Adapting to new surroundings   |
| Woman as temptress                     | Social interaction may lead to romance while on the volunteer trip, other temptations of the flesh while in the field      |
| Supernatural Aid                       | Volunteers receive assistance from volunteer tourism representatives who help them adapt and give support in any emergency |
| Apotheosis                             | Volunteers complete their tasks trying to make a difference while overcoming the challenges presented to them.             |
| Rebirth                                | Volunteers’ lives are transformed by their experience- The turning point (Starr, 1994)                                     |
| Return carrying the ultimate boon      | Volunteers return to their old routine bringing with them their experiences and perhaps a new life perspective             |
| Master of two worlds                   | Volunteers having experienced real hardship, real misfortunes and are now more content with their life.                    |

(Devised from Campbell, 1968)

### **The ‘Hero’ Volunteer Tourist Model: The Call and the Individual**

The call to adventure is the first of Campbell’s steps in the Hero’s Journey and it is the one that invites the hero into adventure offering an opportunity to face the unknown. The hero may choose willingly to undertake the quest or he/she may be dragged into it unwillingly. The choice on behalf of the hero may be determined by a variety of factors which this paper will try to fit within a tourist motivation framework.

#### **The Call**

On a psychological level the call could be just a realisation that something is missing from the life of an individual and he/she must find out what is missing. That feeling of emptiness in the modern world could be associated with boredom or stress accumulated through always having the same routine and surroundings. Humans have a drive to explore new environments, and in the tourism literature this has been

defined as ‘wander-lust’ and in simple terms it is a desire to travel, or having an itch to see the world (Mansfeld, 1992). In addition individuals may feel trapped in their routine life and they may just want to escape and leave it all behind. Krippendorf (1999) suggested that travel is motivated by going away from, rather than going towards, something, and the travel needs of modern society have been largely created by society and the demands of modern life. Escape and wander-lust influencing factors feature prominently in the finding of this study. The volunteers encountered were escaping from their daily routine:

*“I needed to get away; I deserve a break from it all”* **V1: Excerpt 11**

*“I needed to escape the rat race of the legal profession”* **V8: Excerpt 20**

*“I was fed up with the ‘dog-eat-dog’ world and I wanted to breathe again”* **V10: Excerpt 22**

*“I wanted to escape the plastic world of Miami”* **V22: Excerpt 41**

*“I am here to escape London and the pressures of all the rehearsals”* **V27: Excerpt 49**

*“The trip is helping me unwind from the hectic rhythms of my profession”* **V29: Excerpt 52**

or a situation that caused them a lot of distress:

*“I was stressed with a re-sit exam and I wanted to let-off some steam”* **V15: Excerpt 34**

*“I recently broke up with my boyfriend of three years and I wanted to get as far away from the UK as possible”* **V29: Excerpt 52**

*“Just settled a custody and divorce battle and needed to relax”* **V10: Excerpt 22**

Wanderlust was expressed as follows:

*“I wanted to see the world”* **V2: Excerpt 12**

*“Needed another stop in my Gap Year travel”* **V40: Excerpt 16**

*“I wanted to experience something different”* **V18: Excerpt 37**

*“I always wanted to see the Pacific”* **V20: Excerpt 39**

The above direct quotes from volunteers may just be a simple answer to “why are you here” which was the question they were asked within the context of an informal conversation, (see methodology section) but they could also mean that they undertook their quest because for one reason or another they felt that their life story was no longer matching who they were; they felt constricted and sought change, and change is central within the story of ‘the journey’.

Different individuals felt the need to change something in their lives but the method of their escape, volunteer work, leaves room for further ‘heroic’ analogies. The participants in question decided to combine their escape with assisting at an orphanage, thus there may be something truly ‘heroic’ about them that makes them more receptive to a call to a cause.

In the ‘Journey’ the Hero finds him/herself in a situation where he/she has to make a choice which will determine their future and in many cases, the future of others. The

call could come in a variety of shapes or forms regardless of whether the hero is ready to answer it or not. It could be that something was taken from the hero or the hero's family, and the quest is to reclaim it. In the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, the hero's quest is to kill the monster and relieve his citizens from the heavy debt of blood they had to pay to King Minos (Campbell, 1968:58). In other cases, the hero wants to save or restore his/her honour, which is why they undertake a quest. Again in Greek mythology there is the example of the son of Agamemnon, Horestes, who sets out to avenge his father's death and suffers the consequences. The hero may realise that his people need something and quests to get it for them regardless of the consequences. Prometheus is a good example of this, stealing fire from the Gods in order to assist humanity but suffering the wrath of Zeus. The above motifs or scenarios could be replicated although, of course not as dramatically, when it comes to the 'Call' the volunteer tourists receive. The hero in most myths is expected to behave with honour and selflessness, often to protect and defend the weak by resisting the forces of evil, even if putting him/her self in danger. This 'hero code' of conduct is prominent also in knight's tales and stories such as the seven pillars of knighthood (courage, justice, mercy, generosity, faith, nobility and hope) (Howard, 1964). This code of honour survived down the centuries and became the cornerstone of the notion of '*noblesse oblige*' which underlay early charity and volunteering efforts by the aristocracy (Kendal and Knapp, 1996). The concept in simple terms means that with wealth, power and prestige come responsibilities, in a sense a form of moral economy which dictates that privilege must be balanced by a duty towards those who lack such privilege, mainly the weak and the poor. This notion should not be discounted in terms of this study, as some of the volunteers stated that they felt privileged by the relative ease and comfort of their western lives and they felt that they were giving something back by volunteering.

*"I want to help women who have nothing...these women have been exploited and abused for their whole lives"* **V4 (Local prison): Excerpt 13**

*"I wanted to combine a holiday with doing something worthwhile"* **V9: Excerpt 21**

*"Just wanted to offer some help where it is really needed"* **V14: Excerpt 31**

*"I was not doing anything with my life at the moment, so I decided to do something worthwhile"* **V18: Excerpt 37**

The main theme of most conversations with the volunteers revolved around the feeling that if they do not do something, no-one else would, which is the opposite of

the phenomenon of responsibility detachment (Latane and Darlane, 1970), a tendency people may have to distance themselves from responsibility by assuming, or even convincing themselves, that somebody else more capable or professional will provide help. The current generation of young people may be disillusioned with what is going on in the world, and media coverage of high profile scandals in relation to charities and humanitarian organisations may be argued to reinforce this disillusionment. In the aftermath of 9/11 in America many people became frustrated with the Red Cross's handling of the donations (USA Today, 2001). They had believed that their donations would go to the families of the victims, while the Liberty Fund only paid out approximately one third of its receipts to families, dedicating the rest to long term planning (CNN news, Nov 2001). More recently the United Nations oil-for-food program was under investigation over allegations that the son of the UN Secretary General received illegal payments from an external party, indirectly discrediting the UN (CNN News, Dec 2004). Such frustration perhaps may have persuaded the volunteers that they had to do something and that they could make a difference.

*“One should be thankful to the people who devote their time and energy making this kind of thing happens. One should also recognise that in this respect at least, race religion, gender and age are immaterial. While governments squabble, self-promoted social leaders fan racial prejudice and religious groups proclaim that only they represent the true faith, ‘ordinary people’ provide the evidence that people can work in harmony and for a good cause. While others talk, they take action”*  
**(Excerpt 72).**

Are these volunteers different? Are they genetically programmed to be more generous, more tolerant, more affected by the needs of their fellow human beings? Science postulates that acts of generosity are just part of an evolutionary mechanism that helps to ensure that our species survives, and altruism is still an enigma, with scientific research revealing more questions than answers about it (Cambridge University News, 2007). In terms of volunteering, altruism has been identified as a motivating factor (Howard, 1976; Henderson, 1981; Gittman, 1975; Moskos, 1971; Chapman, 1980). It has been argued that altruism is manifested in many shapes or forms such as helping people (Howard, 1976), benefiting children (Henderson, 1981), working for a cause (Gittman, 1975), patriotism (Moskos, 1971) and serving the community (Chapman, 1980). What is in common is the realisation that altruism, as a concept, can neither be observed nor studied as a motivation, but only as manifested behaviour. In terms of the volunteers encountered in this study, “altruistic” may be too strong a term to use to describe them. They were doing something worthwhile,

and they could have chosen not to, but like the hero in Campbell's Journey, they all gained from their volunteering, intentionally or not. Some were certainly aware that they would benefit in some way from participating, which makes their participation not altruistic, as the essence of this concept is action for no intended gain (Axelrod, 1984)

### **The Boon: Benefits from volunteering**

In the Hero's Journey, the hero gets a boon for his effort, an ethereal, transcended gift (Campbell, 1968) which he/she takes with him/her on his return. This gift must be kept and used for the benefit of him/herself and others. Volunteer tourist participants also return to their former lives carrying a 'boon', the experience that has helped their personal development. According to Broad, (2003), volunteer participation has long-term effects on participants. He suggested that volunteers became more broad-minded, contented and relaxed, and less psycho-centric. In addition, retrospective studies suggest that a majority of volunteers considered that their assignment had influenced their personal development or careers positively (Reark Research, 1998). In a longitudinal qualitative study, Starr, (1994) considered the lives of 21 Peace Corps volunteers twenty years after their assignments. The volunteer experience was viewed as a turning point in their life course (Starr, 1994:137). To most volunteers their participation acted as a baptism of fire before they had to confront the reality of adult commitments. The volunteers encountered felt that they were going to get something out of their participation.

*"There is a very refreshing pragmatism about the volunteers. They do understand that it is a transaction and that on the balance of things they get more out of volunteering than what they offer. They also do not think themselves as altruists. They like reciprocity and they think there is nothing wrong with advertising the fact that they do volunteer work"* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 60**

*"Volunteer 30 believes that volunteering is reciprocal and he has no problem saying so. He is not hiding behind his finger. He openly admits that he gets some sort of satisfaction and validation that seems to fuel his volunteering ventures. He thinks there is nothing wrong with it. On the one hand he feels it might push other people to follow his example and on the other hand it makes him more and more committed to his volunteering efforts"* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 61**

*"When prompted today the volunteer workers with the exception of V10 and V11 openly admitted that such an experience would do wonders for their employment prospects. Very interestingly almost all of the volunteers used the same term 'personal development' to explain their rationale. Let's not forget that the volunteers encountered thus far are very well educated who for different reasons did not feel complete with their experiences and decided to do something different and challenging way outside their comfort zone. Perhaps Wearing (2001:11) is right to suggest that volunteer tourism is 'experiences that make a difference'"* **Research Diary Excerpt: 26**

The pragmatic volunteers encountered were very aware that on the one hand they were doing something worthwhile and commendable, but they were also ready to admit that they were not saving the world, unlike the Campbellian hero who in many cases prevents a large scale catastrophe or saves countless lives.

To the volunteers, reciprocity was the key theme of their participation. At first glance they visited an exotic place with amazing scenery and lovely beaches. In addition, as part of their fee they received cheap and relatively comfortable accommodation. Moreover, they had the opportunity to interact with a group of like minded individuals and have an enjoyable experience. That fun element in their participation was reinforced also by the orphanage rules which did not put any pressure on the volunteers with a demanding schedule or anything like that:

*“From the first discussions with volunteers it seems that there is a quite relaxed atmosphere around the orphanage. The volunteers according to the girls help out in any way they can. The only rule is that all volunteers have to work for 4 consecutive hours, 5 days a week. The rest of their time is devoted to leisure and other tourist pursuits”* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 7**

*At last some of the other volunteers have awoken and they are planning to go to the beach. As they said it is the weekend after all. Could it be that the volunteers refrain from working on the weekend? Could it be that on the weekends they take off their ‘volunteer cap’ and put on their ‘tourist’ one? But let me just quote V5; ‘This is what we do here, we work hard and we play hard’* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 14**

*“From what I have seen thus far in terms of shift delegation and organisation the orphanage refrains from putting any pressure on the volunteers. Yes there are structured shifts, but the volunteers can come and go as they see fit. The orphanage relies on the good faith and commitment of the volunteers to uphold discipline and complete their shifts. As I have mentioned already, it seems that weekend shifts are avoided, so it could be assumed that the people that do the weekend shifts are the more dedicated ones”* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 26**

Perhaps the tacit agreement between the orphanage and the volunteers that there is a reliance to volunteers’ responsibility was a tactical decision by management so that they would not deter future volunteer participants. However, this “gentleman’s” agreement was bound to be broken when one considers the nature of different volunteers. During the author’s stay the orphanage’s management patience was tested to breaking point and there was also an incidence that shows that even within a group of ‘heroes’ there is likely to be a few ‘bad apples’

*“Today the director of the orphanage had a few things to say about the volunteers. After gathering us all present in her office she listed her complaints. She said that the volunteers should put more effort into covering the early morning shifts, because the numbers of volunteers at that time are too low, and then during the day there are too many volunteers doing nothing”*

*“After that she said that she was very disappointed with two of the volunteers who left the previous morning (V6 and V40). Apparently they left without paying their rent for the 4 weeks they spent here. She said that now the orphanage has to cover the cost. Needless to say, we were all in shock. The common sentiment could be summed up as follows: “Ripping off a charity is the lowest of the low. Not a very gentleman thing to do” (Research Diary, Excerpt: 83)*

This breach of trust was new to the people running the orphanage and it showed its effect immediately. The director suggested that from that day onwards the volunteers should pay their rent upon arrival and not on departure as a defence against opportunistic individuals. As for the shift issue, it was decided that all volunteers should try and rotate their shifts so that there was better coverage.

The above situation arguably can be attributed to the weakness of human nature and to the fact that human beings face temptation which leads them astray. The hero's journey is never an easy path. Many heroes have been lead to the abyss and have given in to their weaknesses before rising above all, defeating their demons and fulfilling their potential. The two volunteers described above were distracted from their work and had surrendered to the hedonistic lure of the scenery, alcohol, and socialising:

*“Most of the volunteers have already taken advantage of the open bar and soon they will have trouble standing, never mind snorkelling. The boat is packed with young people who are getting louder and merrier by the minute. Perhaps they are not familiar with the fact that alcohol and heat are a formidable combination” Research Diary, Excerpt: 57*

In some cases, however, they showed great commitment and carried out their work even when the conditions did not favour this (e.g. extreme heat and rain).It could be said that their participation was a balancing act, juggling commitments with distractions, as in life generally. It may be argued that the volunteers do not by any means make a difference at a large scale, and as such they should not be compared to real heroes, but not all heroes save the world. Perseus, in rescuing Andromeda is considered a hero, even though he only saved one person. In knightly tails, the hero may fight for the honour of a single maiden and is revered for it, even though within the context of the greater scheme, such acts are minor. The volunteers in the microcosm of their ‘adventure’ can be considered heroes also, in that while they did not change the world they certainly improved the lot, and added colour to the lives of a group of children in a small orphanage.

*“How would I describe the volunteers? Enthusiastic, willing, kind, sometimes loud, helpful...what can I say...they travelled for many hours, paid huge sums of money to come here and make my children smile. I am so grateful” Interview Excerpt Orphanage Director*

While it may be true that in general a single individual is rarely able to make a difference at a large scale, we should not overlook the power individuals have to make a considerable difference to the lives of those less fortunate, even if it is only for a few days. As Mahatma Gandhi put it: *“To the world you might be just one person, but to the eyes of one person you might be the world”* (Fischer, 2002)

### **The Hero-Volunteer Model**

The extent to which the volunteer participants are similar to Campbell’s hero can be clarified with the implementation of a model (figure 1) presenting what the hero and volunteer have in common in terms of the call, the journey and the return. In Figure 1, the hero or the volunteer (H/V in diagram) is central to this dynamic representation. Intrinsic to both the hero and the volunteer is the fact that both have goals and perceptions influenced by different factors. The common factor in this instance is ‘family’ (Figure1) which in many cases shapes personality and influences individuals at the earliest stages of human development (Mitchell, 1990). Modern volunteers are also influenced by the media, which did not exist in the time of the heroes described by Campbell, except in the form of myths and legends. The media play a very important part in shaping the consciousness of modern society since they are *“... able to influence, entertain, instruct or persuade with very complex, perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences”* (Hall, 2004: 202). In earlier times, there were stories and myths that played the same role. Rhapsodists like Homer, used to travel from city to city reiterating from memory the feats of legendary men. Their stories excited the imagination and they may have prompted younger generations to follow into the footsteps of their heroes. Alexander the Great was known to sleep with a copy of the Iliad under his pillow (Stoneman, 2008), much like youngsters today falling asleep reading the adventures of Superman or Harry Potter. Another influencing factor is the past of both the volunteers and the Campbellian hero. As argued earlier, healing past wounds could be a major factor in answering a call or erasing the past. Altruism, more as an expression of empathy, is also central to the psyche of both the volunteer and the hero. Empathy is the ability to relate to another human being’s emotions, or as is commonly said “put oneself into another’s

shoes” and could be key when it comes to understanding the ‘heroic’ actions of the hero and the volunteer

From a tourism perspective, the hero and the volunteer both have several push and pull factors that may influence their answering the ‘call’. These factors in the tourism literature are based on the interaction and interrelationship between socio-psychological motives (push factors) and the ‘charms’ of a destination (pull factors) in determining choice (Dann, 1981). As noted earlier, escape, wanderlust, social interaction and the destination itself are common motivators for both the volunteer and the hero, with the main difference being the fact that the hero is more likely to experience danger by answering his/her call.

The most influential factor in answering the call however, is the timing of the call. Where and how it finds the hero or the volunteer is central to acceptance or rejection of the call. As noted earlier, the hero’s response to the call depends to a large extent on their psychological disposition and circumstances. For those volunteers encountered in this study timing was paramount. As they put it, the time was right to travel and do volunteer work.

*“A topic that usually comes up in the discussions with the volunteers is the issue of timing. They all say the timing was right and so they chose to volunteer. When asked to elaborate, they could not say with any certainty why the time was right. The girls especially vaguely suggest that if not now that I am young, then when? Next year I may be home with a mortgage and a partner etc”* **Research Diary, Excerpt: 79**

Acceptance of the call in many cases demands some sort of sacrifice on behalf of the hero and the volunteer. They both leave everything they know behind; their loved ones and their material goods. Both also suffer the opportunity cost of departure. The hero in myths might miss the chance of ruling his/her kingdom or spending time with their loved ones, while the volunteers have to use their holiday allotment and also cover the cost of participation before enjoying the benefits described earlier (the boon).

### **Heroes and Villains**

Cambell’s (1968) hero is a positive character but in most heroic sagas there are villains as well as heroes. Some, like Launcelot in the Arthurian legends, move from hero to villain because of forces greater than they are capable of withstanding, and the consequences of their fall from grace are often catastrophic for all parties. Some are portrayed as fulfilling their part in a greater scenario, as Judas Iscariot, although in

such cases sympathetic treatment of the individual may vary with whoever is recounting the story. In many heroic sagas there is also the conversion of the villain to at least a neutral, if not finally heroic figure. In contemporary imagery, this is perhaps best revealed by the character of Darth Vader in the Star Wars films and stories (Campbell, 1997). The young knight is seduced by the Dark Side of the Force into becoming a villain, attacking his own brother Jedi knights, until the final meeting with his son. Thus the 'journey' of the hero, Luke Skywalker, involves not only great danger, but an ultimate confrontation with the evil father incarnate. This corresponds to the "ogre aspect of the father" (Campbell, 1988:126), stage 9 in Table 1 of the Journey. In the dénouement, George Lucas, the creator of the epics, has the villain finally commit a heroic and self sacrificing act to save his son, thus redeeming himself and saving civilisation (and his son) from the Dark Side. Lucas has noted his familiarity with Campbell's writings in interviews. In the context of volunteer tourism, villains may be those participants, such as described above, who take unfair and ignoble advantage of other volunteers or the intended recipients of their actions. In some cases there will be no conversion or redemption, and "the ugly tourist" character may remain a blot in the volunteer saga. In other cases, guilt, peer pressure or other forces may result in redemption and a return to the heroic status of the other participants.

## **Conclusion**

This model (illustrated in Figure 1) is a first step in portraying the volunteer tourist as a hero and could be seen as a conceptual hook on which to hang and build a theory and model of volunteer tourist participation and motivation. In the modern world the concept of heroism is normally confined to acts of bravery or sacrifice, such as would be rewarded with medals or trophies. It is perhaps typical of contemporary society that volunteer tourism is rapidly becoming commercialised, at least in terms of the provision of opportunities, with several thousand organisations now offering a volunteer experience, many for a very considerable price. Increasingly the marketing of such opportunities is stressing not only the beneficial aspects of the experience to recipients in host countries, but also the implied benefits to volunteer participants themselves. Altruism is being replaced with benefits in financial terms and reputation enhancement. On the basis of the participants in this study, however, the motives

seem to have remained more heroic than pecuniary, but whether that will be the situation in the future is perhaps unlikely, and remains to be seen.

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