

Chapter 6

Volunteer Tourism: Is it Benign?

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Context

This chapter, comprising three research probes, examines whether volunteer tourism (VT) is genuinely a beneficial, altruistic form of tourism. The majority of the research on VT has promoted the sector's benefits without much rigorous critical analysis, so the articles in this research probe are intended to inject an increased level of critical debate into discussions about the sector. Guttentag's initial paper questions the purported benefits of VT (the work that the volunteers achieve, the personal changes that the volunteers experience and the cross-cultural exchange that transpires) to demonstrate that such benefits are merely potential, not inevitable, consequences of VT. Butcher's paper then takes a broader look at the 'small is beautiful' philosophy that is behind much VT, arguing that this mindset prevents VT projects from making substantial contributions in the communities where the projects are based. Finally, Raymond's paper offers a variety of recommendations and a table of guidelines to assist VT organizations in creating projects that avoid some of VT's recognized shortcomings.

6.1

Volunteer Tourism: As Good as it Seems?

Daniel Guttentag

Volunteer tourism (VT) has been widely praised as an optimal form of tourism that is beneficial for everyone involved. In VT, tourists supposedly are no longer uncaring hedonists, but rather compassionate ambassadors of goodwill, and host communities supposedly are no longer objects of exploitation and commodification, but rather respected equals and grateful recipients of needed assistance. In other words, VT has been positioned as the antithesis of mass tourism and all of the problems frequently associated with it. As Brown (2005) stated, 'The volunteer vacation purports an infusion of an ideological divergence from the market-driven priorities of mass tourism' (p. 493). Although alternative tourism has been assailed by numerous critiques (e.g. Cohen, 1989; Butler, 1990; Wheeler, 2003), the subsector of VT has remained mostly unblemished, maintaining its image as tourism at its very best – tourism that encompasses such buzzword ideals as sustainability, empowerment, local development, community participation, environmental conservation and cross-cultural exchange.

Numerous studies have identified and described various benefits that can be derived from VT (e.g. Crabtree, 1998; Wearing, 2001; Broad, 2003; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Ellis, 2003; Singh & Singh, 2004; Brown, 2005; Jones, 2005; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Lepp, 2008; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Ruhanen *et al.*, 2008; Wearing *et al.*, 2008), but these benefits often have been accepted unquestioningly, with VT receiving meagre critical assessment. The apparent benefits of VT certainly should not be disregarded, but it is vital to recognize that such benefits are potential – not inevitable – consequences of VT. In fact, there is reason to believe that such benefits may be far less common than much of the VT research suggests. Furthermore, VT even has the potential to produce negative impacts on the individuals and communities involved (Guttentag, 2009). The predominant focus on VT's benefits in existing research has, therefore, resulted in a troublingly incomplete image of VT that may be used to encourage it in host communities. A more

complete and accurate image of VT can be provided through a critical analysis of the benefits that VT purportedly offers: the work that the volunteers achieve, the personal changes that the volunteers experience and the cross-cultural exchange that occurs among the volunteers and the hosts.

The Work That the Volunteers Achieve

The work that the volunteers accomplish represents a seemingly intrinsic benefit of VT. Because VT often involves volunteers from developed countries working in underdeveloped countries (Higgins-Desbiolles & Russell-Mundine, 2008: 187; Sin, 2009: 495–496), VT projects seem to offer a wonderful form of charity for underprivileged communities. Nevertheless, for a form of tourism alleged to be particularly sustainable, the long-term impacts and potential unintended consequences of VT projects have received scant attention.

For example, VT projects may foment dependency, as host communities learn to rely on external sources of assistance, meaning immediate gains can end up subverting a community's capacity to develop sustainably. Dependency also renders host communities extremely vulnerable because VT projects may be discontinued at any time. McGehee and Andereck (2008) found dependency was a major concern for local organizations that the authors researched in West Virginia and Tijuana, and the organizations experienced varying levels of success convincing volunteer tourists not to give free handouts.

The work that the volunteers perform also may reduce local job opportunities. By definition, volunteers provide labour freely, so naturally they may undermine locals competing to offer those same labour services. This essential phenomenon has been observed on a larger scale in Africa where food aid (Dugger, 2007) and donated clothing (Matheson, 2000; Frazer, 2008) have sometimes destroyed local markets for those same products, thereby impairing development. Although huge aid shipments clearly differ from the work achieved in VT projects, the similarities are close enough that it would be unwise for the VT sector to ignore such lessons and risk repeating the same mistakes. It is undoubtedly possible, for instance, that local English teachers, construction labourers or other workers could encounter a decreased demand for their services in the face of a steady supply of volunteers eager to perform the same jobs for free.

Furthermore, volunteers may be incapable of performing their jobs adequately. Many projects have no prerequisite skills (Brown & Morrison, 2003: 77) and it is incorrect to assume that volunteers possess some innate ability to perform jobs like teaching English or constructing houses. This issue is further exacerbated because volunteers may remain for only a brief duration, may be unable to communicate in the local language and may be

unfamiliar with the local culture. As the coordinator of a VT project in Argentina explained, 'When we bring an intern without strong Spanish skills, it is unavoidably going to be a burden rather than an asset to the organization' (Raymond, 2008: 55).

Such potential issues with VT projects are not inevitable, yet the issues should not be dismissed as merely improbable outcomes associated with poorly planned projects that exhibit obvious deficiencies. For example, even when tourists perform volunteer medical work, which many would see as having unassailable merit, it should not be viewed as inherently beneficial. This work may provide short-term benefits, but the efforts may also engender dependency on outside personnel and resources, undermine confidence in local healthcare providers and compete directly with such local providers (Montgomery, 1993; Bishop & Litch, 2000; DeCamp, 2007; Bradke, 2009). Moreover, the quality of care that these volunteers provide has been criticized for a variety of reasons: the volunteers often possess little knowledge of the local culture and language; volunteer groups sometimes permit individuals without appropriate medical training to dispense basic medical care; the volunteers have no accountability; the volunteers may put their egos above the best interests of the patients, feeling that the normal standards of care do not apply; the volunteers cannot provide the long-term care that is sometimes necessary (e.g. after certain surgeries); and volunteer groups often do not associate with local healthcare providers, which increases the chances that inappropriate care will be given either by the volunteers or subsequently by the local providers (Bishop & Litch, 2000; Roberts, 2006; Wall *et al.*, 2006).

Despite such concerns, projects like those providing free medical care likely will receive strong local support. In fact, the limited research examining the attitudes of host communities has generally found that they view VT fairly positively (e.g. Clifton & Benson, 2006; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; McGehee & Andereck, 2009). Nevertheless, it is erroneous to assume that VT projects inherently enjoy widespread local support.

Myriad studies have investigated volunteer tourists' motivations (e.g. Wearing, 2001; Broad, 2003; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Rehberg, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Pike & Beames, 2007; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Söderman & Snead, 2008), and the studies have repeatedly found that the volunteers are motivated by personal reasons in addition to altruism. These studies generally have accepted this finding without much concern, as volunteers' motivations are irrelevant when evaluating the impacts of the projects. However, such reasoning ignores the idea that volunteers' motivations influence volunteers' preferences, and these preferences influence the selection and design of projects as project operators strive to attract volunteers. As Lorimer (2008) found during interviews with managers of VT conservation projects,

'Managers know from past experience which projects work and sell well, they continuously gauge and channel volunteer enthusiasms and then seek to establish or solicit similar ventures' (p. 9). In this scenario, a host community's needs may be superseded by the desires of the volunteers. Such a situation is worrisome because the volunteers may hold opinions on relevant issues like development and conservation that are inconsistent with the needs and wishes of the host communities. For example, when participating in a Guatemalan VT project, Vrasti (2009) found, 'Never is the rhetoric of "small is beautiful" questioned. Never does it cross the minds of volunteer tourists that their ideals may be at odds with those of locals' (p. 21).

Even more troublesome, the project operators' goals – as unrelated to the volunteers' motivations – similarly may contrast with host communities' goals. This concern seems particularly germane for conservation projects, and especially those run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which is ironic because NGO VT operators are often perceived as superior to commercial operators (e.g. Lyons & Wearing, 2008). However, sometimes NGOs unwaveringly promote conservation against the wishes of local communities (e.g. Kinan & Dalzell, 2005; Butcher, 2007: 70–71). As Butcher (2007) described when discussing NGOs and ecotourism development, in some cases 'community participation amounts to participation in a pre-existing agenda, rather than in determining the agenda' (p. 74). This limited community participation was experienced first-hand by Matthews (2008) as she participated in a VT sea turtle conservation project in Costa Rica and found that many locals expressed little support or even resentment towards the project. Such attitudes certainly do not signify that conservation efforts should be abandoned, but the situation clearly refutes the idea that VT projects invariably receive high levels of community participation and support.

The Personal Changes that the Volunteers Experience

Regardless of what volunteer tourists actually accomplish, many researchers have praised VT for providing the volunteers with an opportunity to experience positive personal transformations. As Wearing (2001) stated, 'The most important development that may occur in the volunteer tourist experience is that of a personal nature, that of a greater awareness of self' (p. 2). The diverse personal changes that volunteers may experience include enhanced personal awareness, increased confidence, greater self-contentment (Wearing, 2001), personal growth, a rejection of materialism (Brown, 2005), increased interpersonal skills, increased problem-solving skills, increased communication skills (Jones, 2005), a broadened perspective on life, a greater sense of social justice and responsibility (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007), identity

development (Matthews, 2008), a discovery of self (Lepp, 2008), and a development of self (Wearing *et al.*, 2008). However, it is only sensible to focus on these forms of personal development after the benefits of the volunteer work itself have been established. If the work is somehow detrimental to a host community, then the volunteers' personal transformations become benefits earned at the expense of the host community. In other words, VT ends up producing the exact situation its proponents oppose – tourists exploiting locals for the tourists' own personal gains.

Moreover, the significant personal transformations that volunteers may experience should not be perceived as inevitable. In fact, the very idea that personal traits are flexible enough to be transformed by brief tourist experiences, yet persistent enough to be maintained thereafter, is somewhat contradictory (Brookes, 2003). Furthermore, personal traits are not necessarily absolute, but rather situational (Brookes, 2003). In other words, it is incorrect to assume the personal changes that volunteers experience during a project will inevitably remain once the tourists return to their previous lives. For example, Sin (2009) researched volunteer tourists working in South Africa and found, 'While there was a sense amongst respondents. . . that they felt a greater consciousness towards particular societal issues, respondents were not necessarily able or willing to commit to further volunteering activities in other contexts' (p. 494).

The Cross-Cultural Exchange

Volunteers' personal transformations may result in part from the cross-cultural exchanges enabled by VT, which are perceived as beneficial to both the volunteers and the hosts. For example, McIntosh and Zahra (2008) stated, 'With volunteer tourism, more intense rather than superficial social interaction can occur; a new narrative between host and guest is created; a narrative that is engaging, genuine, creative and mutually beneficial' (p. 179). VT is perceived as an effective catalyst for such favourable intercultural interaction partly because VT can create an environment in which power is shared equally between tourists and hosts. As Wearing (2001) explained, 'The power balance between tourist and host can be destabilized. . . and tourists spaces constructed for genuine exchange which will benefit all the selves involved' (p. 172). However, in actuality, an environment in which one privileged group is donating their time and another underprivileged group is receiving assistance is not particularly conducive to producing an equal-power relationship. In fact, this aspect of VT has even led some to posit the activity as a form of neo-colonialism. For instance, one sending organization's director criticized, '[Some] providers reinforce a colonial attitude that development is something that educated people from rich countries do to poor people who know no better. They perpetuate the

notion that Africa, Asia and Latin America are playgrounds for young people to experience “real life” (Brodie, 2006).

Additionally, the impacts of the cross-cultural exchange may not always be desirable. For example, volunteers may observe poverty and suffering up close, and it is suggested that this experience can offer the volunteers a better perspective on their own lives and possibly inspire action against global inequalities (e.g. McGehee & Santos, 2005; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Lepp, 2008). However, many volunteers actually appear to rationalize or even romanticize their surrounding poverty by focusing on the happiness that the hosts exhibit (e.g. Simpson, 2004; Pike & Beames, 2007; Raymond & Hall, 2008). As one volunteer working in Ghana commented, ‘These people lack of lot of things financially, but the riches they’ve got inside themselves is priceless’ (Pike & Beames, 2007: 152). Unfortunately, this ‘poor-but-happy’ mentality can excuse poverty instead of inspiring opposition to it (Simpson, 2004).

Cross-cultural exchange also has been lauded as a way to foment greater cultural respect and reduce stereotypes (e.g. Jones, 2005; Lepp, 2008). This outcome appears logical and it is supported by studies on ‘intergroup contact theory’, which generally have found that intergroup contact reduces prejudices (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Likewise, in tourism it has been found that the closer interactions provided by ecotourism can improve tourists’ attitudes toward their hosts (Pizam *et al.*, 2002), even though mass tourism may have the opposite effect (e.g. Milman *et al.*, 1990; Anastasopoulos, 1992). However, several VT studies have found that the experience actually may lead volunteers to reinforce their pre-existing cultural stereotypes (e.g. Raymond & Hall, 2008; Sin, 2009). Such reinforcement may occur if the volunteers witness behaviours confirming pre-existing stereotypes, and even disconfirming observations may be discounted. For instance, Raymond and Hall (2008) found, ‘Several [volunteers] implied that the positive relationships they had developed with individuals from different countries were simply “exceptions to the rule”’ (p. 536).

Moreover, VT has been posed as conducive to cross-cultural exchange because of the close contact between volunteers and hosts, but this close contact may also produce undesirable cultural changes. For example, changes may occur inadvertently through the ‘demonstration effect’ as hosts are influenced by affluent foreign tourists exhibiting their own customs and items of wealth (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). On the other hand, short-term missionary trips, which are growing in popularity and represent a significant subset of VT, may be specifically intended to invoke changes in the host culture. Degrees of evangelism certainly vary between different groups, but there is little question that many groups see proselytizing as a key feature of their trips (Fanning, 2009). Unsurprisingly, many host communities appear to resent being submitted to such proselytizing (e.g. Rohde, 2005; McGehee & Andereck, 2008).

Research Biases

The purported benefits of VT have received considerable praise and comparatively little scepticism in part because of apparent biases in the VT research. Numerous studies have investigated the motivations of the volunteers or examined the benefits of the projects, but far fewer studies have examined VT from a host perspective or submitted VT to a high level of critical scrutiny. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the research primarily has found reasons to support VT.

Furthermore, much of the VT research has relied on evaluations made by volunteers, yet these evaluations are extremely vulnerable to biases. As Vittersø *et al.* (2000) explained, tourists' vacation assessments can be influenced by cognitive dissonance because, 'Having used a considerable amount of time and money to visit an attraction, it might for example be difficult for some persons to admit that the visit was a failure' (p. 433). For instance, on a Southeast Asian adventure tour, Bowen (2001) found, 'Tourists sought to justify and re-justify the decision to undertake the tour in question' (p. 55). Applied to VT, and combined with potential social desirability biases, is it really surprising that volunteers being interviewed or surveyed often state that they have experienced positive personal transformations or developed meaningful connections with their hosts?

Although far fewer studies have evaluated VT from the perspective of host communities, such studies also may be influenced by biased evaluations. For instance, Daly (2009) participated in an El Salvadorian project and found that host community leaders involved in the project exhibited positive attitudes towards it, but her own observations and those of a local project facilitator indicated that some significant concerns were being overlooked. Daly offered various possible explanations for such oversights, including that locals may be wary of criticizing a project to foreign researchers who resemble the volunteers, or that hosts who benefit in any way from a project may fear that criticisms could cause the project to be terminated.

Conclusion

The benefits of VT clearly are not inevitable, yet neither is it inevitable that VT will fail to provide benefits. For example, some problems with VT originate with sending organizations, so improvements made by such organizations could produce significant improvements throughout the sector (e.g. Raymond, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Moreover, there is no question that VT already has offered many benefits to volunteers and host communities around the globe, and sometimes these benefits trump all other concerns. For instance, it would be extremely unfortunate if medical assistance that could be offered by volunteer tourists was withheld because of outsiders' fears of potential problems like dependency formation. In other words, the issues this paper has raised are not a complete rejection of VT's

possible benefits, but rather a caution that these benefits cannot be taken for granted. VT requires no less critical evaluation than any other form of tourism and advocating it as inherently beneficial denies the opportunity for potential issues to be identified and corrected. On the other hand, by recognizing the potential benefits of VT as possibilities and not inevitabilities, these benefits can hopefully be made more common.

6.2

Volunteer Tourism May Not be as Good as it Seems

Jim Butcher

Much volunteer tourism is characterized by a highly circumspect view of economic development in parts of the world in which it is most needed. As Guttentag mentions, 'small is beautiful' is all too often taken as gospel, and a hostility to big business is meat and drink to some of the foremost academic advocates of volunteer tourism.

Volunteer tourism projects often seek to combine conservation and development at the level of the village or villages, in the name of sustainable development. Tourism is seen as able to achieve this 'symbiosis' as people will come to enjoy nature, and local people will be able to benefit from living 'sustainably' without too much change to their environment and way of life.

Yet this vision of development all too often precludes, or is hostile to, forms of economic development that might alter people's relationship to their environment in any substantial way. I have yet to read of volunteers helping in the building of big dam projects to facilitate electrification of towns and villages, or in the construction of cement works so that shanty towns can be replaced with safer buildings.

So the development politics behind much volunteering are important – what the purpose of the volunteering is and the wider conception of development adopted are key issues. I would argue, in similar vein to the lead article, that volunteering and the debates around it are often

characterized by a romantic view of poverty and, in the academic discussion, a strong post-development outlook.

Also, it is striking that there is a discussion about 'volunteer tourism' at all. Although one or two academics have suggested differently, there is little chance that Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteers from the UK or US Peace Corps volunteers in the 1960s would have seen themselves or been seen as tourists in any sense. One commentary even draws a parallel between volunteer tourists and volunteers in the Spanish Civil War! Yet such comparisons only serve to show what is distinctive about today's volunteer tourism and today's politics.

In the past, political views of the developing world from the political Left and Right had the shared ambition to transform poverty into prosperity. Economic development, technology and societal transformation, be it through the dynamism of the market or the collective strength of socialism, were seen as the way forward. Post-colonial societies generally shared this ambition. Volunteering in the past was likely to be connected to a wider perspective on development in this way.

Volunteer tourism today is a personal and lifestyle strategy to make a difference to the world. It eschews politics in the sense previously understood. Indeed, it is part of a retreat from politics into the realm of lifestyle. The personal transformation of the tourist is often deemed as important as the benefits to the host population. This is an individualistic, narcissistic and incredibly limited approach to politics.

Yet, in a sense, volunteer tourism is just at the principled extreme in a wider debate about 'ethical tourism' – how we can 'make a difference' through what we buy, in this case on holiday, has been part of the political scene for two decades. Volunteer tourism just takes this to its logical conclusion and structures a holiday directly around helping conservation or the local community.

Modern theories of 'life politics', 'lifestyle politics' and 'ethical consumption' talk up the possibilities for aspects of lifestyle and consumption to provide a new point of connection between the individual and the political sphere. The lack of any substantial benefit for the hosts from the large majority of volunteer tourists suggests that this is illusory. The lack of any expectation of much benefit, of much change, suggests such approaches are incredibly limited as moral or political strategies to change things for the better.

Having said this, one danger in this discussion is that the desire to make a difference itself is dismissed as naive, self-centred or arrogant. It is important to distinguish between the impulse to act upon the world, 'agency' if you like, and the political and ethical climate that shapes the understanding of and responses to social problems. To criticize the latter is not a slight on the former impulse.

This bears mentioning as there is a great deal of cynicism mixed in with the commentaries on different types of tourism. Mass tourism has long

been subject to a degree of cynicism, and what I would call an ‘anti-people’ perspective. This sees human beings, and their mobility, pessimistically, as an environmental and cultural burden, rather than seeing holiday-making and mobility in general as a part of human progress and worthy of celebration. This critique is premised on the view that too many people do too much travelling, and that this, and the businesses that provide it, are ultimately damaging to people, cultures and environments. It is a view that is highly circumspect as to the ability of societies to develop economically – cultures and environments are characterized as fragile in the face of too many people or too many of the wrong sort. Such a view tends to lead to a pessimistic attitude towards all types of tourism.

Hence proposed ‘alternative’ forms of leisure travel originally put forward as ‘ethical’ options, are quickly problematized as they, too, contribute to and spread the ‘burden’ of international tourism. As Guttentag observes, whilst cynics have knocked ‘alternative tourism’ from its pedestal, volunteer tourism has emerged as an ethical option thus far beyond reproach.

Yet how long before it goes the way of alternative tourism, ecotourism and others, and becomes subject to an ‘anti-people’ critique? I think it is important that criticisms of volunteer tourism be clear about what is being criticized.

Volunteering is not the problem and neither is tourism. For me, it is the politics and political claims behind and around international volunteer tourism that are problematic and at times quite reactionary.

6.3

Volunteer Tourism: Looking Forward

Eliza Raymond

‘Volunteer Tourism: As Good as it Seems?’ provides an important critique of the often assumed benefits of volunteer tourism (VT). The author approaches these benefits as potential but not inevitable and thus provides

a much-needed deconstruction of the frequently cited advantages of VT. By bringing together research from a variety of projects and countries, the author is able to address the perception that VT is inherently 'good' and highlight the importance of VT receiving the same level of critical analysis as other forms of sustainable tourism.

I congratulate Guttentag for also addressing some of the unintended consequences of VT. If VT is to be perceived as a model of 'best practice' in tourism (Wearing, 2004), then I believe it is essential that such consequences are further unravelled. The author argues that 'if the work (of volunteers) is somehow detrimental to a host community, then the volunteers' personal transformations become benefits earned at the expense of the host community'. In my opinion this statement is central to the future of VT because if VT exploits locals for tourists' own personal gain, then it can no longer be seen as a benign and mutually beneficial form of tourism.

So how can we create a form of VT where the needs of the host communities, volunteers and VT organization are all met? In this article, I will give examples of measures which I believe need to be taken by VT organizations seeking to create a form of VT which is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable (for other examples, see also Comlámh, 2007; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Raymond, 2008; Wearing, 2001).

The Matching Process

It's about getting the volunteers to fit in and match their skills with the needs of the community rather than just as some companies do, getting the volunteers and then dumping them on a project.

Voluntour SA, Director

I would argue that the ideal approach to volunteer tourism is 'bottom-up', where VT organizations identify the needs of the host country and then find suitable volunteers to match these needs. However, Table 6.1 suggests that where VT organizations do take a 'top-down' approach, this can still benefit all stakeholders if volunteer tourists are carefully matched with appropriate work.

Another important step which can be taken by VT organizations is to find host organizations that will genuinely benefit from the presence of volunteer tourists. This can be a challenge because many organizations value the credibility or financial contributions that international volunteers bring and therefore may accept volunteers without considering what work the volunteers will be able to realistically contribute towards.

It is, therefore, important for VT organizations to develop strong, honest and equal relationships with host organizations (Comlámh, 2007; Simpson,

Table 6.1 The matching process

	<i>Project</i>		<i>Placement</i>	
	<i>Multi project</i>	<i>Single Project</i>	<i>Work-focused</i>	<i>Project-focused</i>
Description	Volunteers spend 1 or 2 days on a variety of different projects	Volunteers complete one specific project over a set period of time	Volunteers act as an extra member of staff within the host organization	Volunteers develop and implement a specific project with the host organization
Work Example	Manual work	Seasonal data collection	Assistants to staff	Project development and implementation
Programme Example	ISV – Volunteers involved in a variety of activities such as: beach clean-ups, potting seedlings, planting trees with local school children and constructing footpaths	Earthwatch – Volunteers assist scientists with data collection for their research	AVIVA – Volunteers work in a centre for seabirds, assisting staff with a variety of tasks e.g. cleaning, feeding and releasing birds	FSD – Volunteers are placed in a local NGO and develop and implement a specific project with the NGO
Suitable for short-term volunteers (0–4 weeks)	Yes	Yes (depending on specific project)	Generally no (due to training and ‘settling in’ time)	Generally no (due to training, ‘settling in’ time and time required to develop and implement an appropriate project)
Suitable for volunteers without specific skills	Yes	Yes (unless specific skills required which cannot be taught rapidly)	Knowledge of local language important. Other skill requirements should depend on the host organization and the job	Knowledge of local language important. Other skill requirements should depend on the host organization and the job
Suitable for groups (5+)	Yes	Yes (depending on specific project)	No (unless the host organization is large or run primarily by volunteers)	No (too many volunteers could disrupt the organization, appear imperialistic and/or be a burden to the organization)

Table 6.1 Continued

	Project			Placement	
	Multi project	Single Project	Work-focused	Project-focused	Project-focused
Suitable for one-off volunteer projects	Preferable to have a regular flow of volunteers so that new volunteers can build on work of past volunteers	Yes (although with some projects it may be necessary to consider who will maintain it once it is completed)	No (regular flow of volunteers needed to maintain continuous numbers of staff)	Yes	
Key benefits for the host organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Energy, enthusiasm and motivation - Combined manpower (more work can be achieved) -Potential source of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy, enthusiasm and motivation - Combined manpower (more work can be achieved) -Potential source of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Energy, enthusiasm and motivation -Paid staff can work on other priorities - Potential source of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Energy, enthusiasm and motivation -New ideas (and skills) -Positive change through project implementation -Potential source of funding 	
Key benefits for the volunteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Interesting due to variety - Opportunity to learn a variety of skills superficially - Opportunity to learn about a variety of aspects relating to the host country - A good introduction to volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sense of achievement, especially where there is a visible, completed product - Opportunity to develop a strong connection with the project - Opportunity to develop a specific skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Opportunity to integrate into the host organization and culture -Opportunity to learn in detail about the way in which the host organization works and take part in a variety of work -Opportunity to develop durable relationships with members of the host organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Opportunity to integrate into the host organization and culture -Sense of achievement, especially where there is a visible, completed product - Opportunity to develop durable relationships with members of the host organization -Opportunity to develop a specific skill 	

Source: Raymond (2007)

2007). 'What we do with every project is go and evaluate it first. We won't just say "OK yeah sure, put it on the website, off you go". We actually go and visit them and do a proper evaluation' (personal communication, AVIVA Programme Director). Subsequently, when host organizations and VT organizations do decide to work together, it is crucial that they maintain frequent communication. Regular evaluations of the project can also be beneficial in order to ensure that the programme is meeting the expectations of all involved and to identify any changes that need to be made.

You Won't Save the World!

VT organizations can also play a central role in developing appropriate expectations amongst their volunteers. Simpson (2007) argues that the greatest source of dissatisfaction for volunteers usually occurs when they are not involved in the work which they planned and paid to do. VT organizations, therefore, not only need to ensure that volunteers are aware of what they will gain from the programme, but also of what they can expect to contribute. Otherwise, there is a risk that volunteer tourists will have an idealistic impression regarding what they will achieve during their programme and they may feel frustrated when they realize the limits of their ability to contribute. The following quote highlights the importance of preparing volunteers for the fact that they will not 'save the world':

The other issue is ideological. Here wanting to do something isn't the same as being able to achieve it. . .It was challenging for her [the volunteer] to adapt to the realities of being here. . .She had the belief that she could change the social situation but I explained to her: 'You will not change it. The State cannot change it. The country cannot change it. How are you going to change it in two months?'. (personal communication, Host Organization)

In addition to having realistic expectations, VT organizations can also help to shape volunteers' attitudes. Previous research has suggested that volunteers can sometimes inappropriately take on the role of 'expert' and this can be perceived as maintaining and reinforcing power inequalities between developed and developing countries (e.g. Griffin, 2004; Simpson, 2005a, 2005b; Roberts, 2004; Wearing, 2001, 2004). If volunteer tourism is to move away from such criticisms, existing literature argues that volunteer tourists should be encouraged to take on the roles of learner and guest (Butcher, 2005; Comlámh, 2007; IVPA, 2007; Simpson, 2007; Wearing, 2001).

Moving Forward

I support Guttentag's call for more studies to examine VT from a host perspective. This will be essential in developing a stronger critique of VT and a better understanding of how VT organizations can take a more proactive role to ensure that VT develops appropriately. The author identifies some key challenges with such research including the reluctance of host communities to criticize VT to foreign researchers who resemble volunteers. Due to the fact that some VT organizations pay projects to host volunteers I believe this will add to such challenges as projects will not wish to criticize an organization which supports them financially. I would suggest that these challenges could be addressed by having a member of the local community conducting the research. Alternatively, a visiting researcher would need to take part in participant observation or extended research which would allow time for trust and relationships to develop.

I also suggest that further research into the role of VT organizations will be crucial to ensure that these organizations take responsibility for the impacts of their programmes. Some organizations (e.g. Comlámh) have begun to develop 'codes of conducts' for VT organizations and through further developing such ideas, we can place pressure on VT organizations to take an active role in creating mutually beneficial programmes.

Concluding Remarks

The three chapters that form this research probe critically analyze the volunteer tourism (VT) sector from unique perspectives, collectively contributing to a more complete picture of VT in which some of its shortcomings are given their due attention. All three papers concur with the general notion that, despite its allure, VT should not be perceived as 'beyond reproach'. Guttentag's paper illustrates that VT's supposed benefits cannot be taken for granted, and Butcher's paper highlights the limitations associated with the prevailing philosophy behind much VT. Raymond then looks toward the future by proposing recommendations that may help to avoid some of the sector's acknowledged shortcomings. This final step can only occur once the existence of problems has already been accepted, so together these probes underscore the importance of engaging in such critical analysis and discussion.

It is hoped that these probes will help to inspire and guide further critical examination of the VT sector, in which any assumptions about its benefits are spurned from the outset. The sector continues to steadily grow and diversify, so there will be myriad opportunities for valuable future research. In particular, the papers have underlined the importance of increased research on the host perspective, as any potential benefits derived from the sector should start with the host communities.

Increased critical examination of VT will inevitably beget disagreements about VT's shortcomings, including, even, what exactly these shortcomings are. For instance, Butcher criticizes the sector's impacts for being too limited, while simultaneously expecting that others will criticize the sector's impacts for being too substantial. Such looming debates will clearly raise some very challenging questions, but they are precisely the types of questions that researchers must grapple with when considering a form of tourism with such lofty ideals. Future research will undoubtedly allow for more precision and clarity within the discussions surrounding VT, but disagreements will surely remain. Nevertheless, of critical importance is not that a perfect consensus be reached but rather that VT continue to be treated as a subject for genuine critique, which will allow the necessary debates surrounding it to continue.

Discussion Questions

- (1) Guttentag describes three categories of potential benefits that volunteer tourism (VT) can provide: the work that is achieved, the personal changes that the volunteers experience and the cross-cultural exchange that occurs. Are any of these potential benefits more important than the others? If so, how should such differences be taken into account when VT projects are being planned?
- (2) Butcher points out that VT projects frequently blend development with conservation, but he argues that this approach can thwart meaningful economic development. Can VT genuinely serve as a tool for advancing substantial economic development? What, if anything, could be done to make VT more effective in this regard? If VT is incapable of fostering substantial economic development, is that a serious concern?
- (3) Raymond's table on 'The matching process' details the key benefits associated with four different types of VT projects. What would the potential key negative impacts associated with these four different types of projects be?
- (4) Should a VT project be undertaken, provided it enjoys widespread local support, even if research strongly suggests that the project will cause long-term negative impacts (e.g. dependency) in the host community? Alternatively, should a VT project be undertaken, despite being largely opposed by the local community, provided the project is working towards an ostensibly noble goal (e.g. protection of an endangered species)?
- (5) VT projects can be found all over the world in all different types of communities. What characteristics of a community or destination would make it a good or bad location for a VT project?

- (6) VT projects involve myriad types of work. What types of work, if any, are especially likely to result in either positive or negative impacts?
- (7) It is noted that a multitude of studies have investigated volunteer tourists' motivations, whereas far fewer studies have investigated VT from a host perspective. What are some possible reasons for this apparent imbalance?
- (8) As with other areas of tourism, the future of the VT sector will see continued evolution. What are the best-case and worst-case scenarios for this evolution? What are the most important steps that should be taken to ensure that VT's evolution is favourable?

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