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## Understanding Voluntourism: A Glaserian Grounded Theory Study

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand voluntourism using Glaser's grounded theory. The concept of 'all is data' guided the collection of data from ninety four questionnaires supplemented by field work, general conversations, current academic literature, books, articles, web-sites, talk shows, blogs, and media stories. What emerged to describe voluntourism is the key category of 'engagement', necessarily associated with two other emerging categories of 'volunteer work' and 'tourist'. These categories together provided the encompassing explanation of voluntourism as 'engagement in volunteer work as a tourist', pointing to a purposeful connection to particular peoples and places.

**Keywords:** Voluntourism, Volunteer Tourism, International Volunteering, Grounded Theory, Glaser.

### Introduction

Studies on voluntourism tend to focus on tourist motivation (Brown, 2005; Brown and Lehto, 2005; Coghlan, 2006a; Mathieson and Wall, 1982; McGehee and Andereck, 2008; Ross, 1994; Wearing, 2001); impacts on communities (Wearing and Lee, 2008) and the environment (Pezzullo, 2007); sustainability (McIntosh and Zahra, 2007); tourism marketing (Coghlan, 2006a, 2006b; Coghlan, 2007); tourist satisfaction (Brown, 2005; Coghlan, 2006b); and impacts on society generally (McGehee, 2005, 2008; McGehee and Santos, 2005; Pezzullo, 2007). However, there is no universal definition of voluntourism. Generally, voluntourism is a term that combines two elements: tourism<sup>1</sup> and volunteering<sup>2</sup> at the destination visited (Billington, Carter and Kayamba, 2008;

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism: both WTO and UNSTAT, 1994 define the concept as 'The activities of person's travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes' (Cooper et al, 2005:13).

<sup>2</sup> Volunteering: The definition of volunteering used by Volunteering England (2008), is any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal

Wearing, 2001). The tourism component itself is bedevilled by conceptual weakness and fuzziness (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert and Wanhill, 2005) due to its very broad nature (Gilbert, 1990) and the expanding spread of activities it covers including volunteering. Similarly, there is no universal definition for volunteering (Volunteering England, 2008). The word is used by different people and different sectors to mean different things. For instance government schemes whereby people have to work for charities in return for benefits are sometimes described as 'voluntary' but many people would argue that since people taking part have to do the work in return for benefits they are not 'volunteers'. Equally many people work unpaid in order to gain experience in very competitive areas like television or are students of language schools practicing their language skills, but most people would not describe them as volunteers. For the purpose of this research, participants of voluntourism will be considered volunteer tourists<sup>3</sup> and will be referred to as voluntourists for consistency. The lack of clarity of terms makes voluntourism an elusive concept which is exacerbated by the multitude of other terms it has become associated with. The concept of voluntourism can be found alongside: ecotourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism, participatory travel, international volunteering, charity tourism, niche market tourism, alternative tourism, responsible tourism and philanthropic travel (Wearing, 2001), as well as, cultural tourism and experiential tourism (Klicek, 2005).

## Method

Grounded theory is a popular method for collecting and analysing data in a new area of research (Allan, 2003; Bakir and Bakir, 2006; Dick, 2005; Patton, 1990). It was the natural choice for understanding voluntourism because there was no universal definition for it. The grounded theory methodology provided the tools to resolve this definitional problem and to generate a new explanation. Glaser's (1992) version of grounded theory (refer to Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1993; 1998; 2001), with its clearly defined steps, was used and data collected from sixty-seven web-based questionnaires supplemented by testimonials from voluntourists, academic literature, articles, general correspondence, web-sites, talk shows, blogs, and media stories. The data were reviewed, coded, compared and analysed, sentence by sentence, in an ongoing process whose aim was to allow themes to emerge. The emerged themes were categorised, categories were related to each other, and along with their properties created the core category. Data were collected until such a time that any new data added nothing to what already had been discovered, a theoretical saturation point (Glaser and Strauss 1967). During data collection, any ideas, thoughts, connections, theory or questions that emerged, were recorded as memos (Glaser, 1967, 1998) by way of pocket cards. The analysed data (the categories), along with the memos, were then sorted into a sequence such that a structure emerged which could then be described in words (refer to Glaser, 1993, for examples), providing a detailed definition of voluntourism. Glaser's approach

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activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.

<sup>3</sup> Tourist: Defined by UNSTAT 1994 as 'a person travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes' (Cooper et al, 2005:13)

was used over Strauss and Corbin's (1990; 1998) for its more intuitive and less complex analysis and coding techniques which involved identifying key points rather than individual words, it was also easier to understand and visualise for this research. Furthermore, grounded theory methodology was preferred over other methodologies because of its common sense approach to 'all is' data. This enabled the incorporation of the perceptions of tourists generally as well as the indirect experiences of others such as family members and voluntourism providers, and did not rely exclusively on the experiences of the voluntourists themselves.

## Findings

The term that emerged as an explanation of voluntourism is '*engagement in volunteer work as a tourist*'. As the term indicates it consists of three main categories: 'engagement', 'tourist', and 'volunteer work'. 'Engagement' further emerged as the core category which subsumed the other two categories and differentiated voluntourism from other forms of tourism and volunteering. In what follows we will provide a detailed discussion of the engagement category with less emphasis on the volunteer work and tourist categories. We will also apply Glaser's (1998) criteria to determine whether the term, 'engagement in volunteer work as a tourist' is valid, reliable, and can be of use in the substantive area.

### The concept of engagement

Engagement emerged as the essential, key component of voluntourism; it encompassed the concepts of: participation, action, integration, penetration, interaction, involvement and immersion. A voluntourist retorted: "*You go and help where ever you may be needed with various different things, for example, I helped out with some teaching and then in surrounding villages I put up fences*". What this respondent did while volunteering was that s/he 'acted', 'interacted'; 'helped', engaged in '*teaching*' and '*put[ing] up fences*', For this respondent, voluntourism was a participatory travel experience (Billington et al, 2008; Coghlan, 2006a; McGehee, 2005) which went beyond the need of tourists to gaze, day-dream and fantasize, as suggested by Urry (1990), to being active participants wanting to, as another respondent relayed, "*give time to others to improve their lives*". Engagement in voluntary work as a tourist is a new emerging type of tourism, a niche tourism, which contrasts with the concept of 'the gaze', characteristic of the more traditional and homogenous mass tourism (Philbrook, 2007). The 'need' of the voluntourist to be involved, to engage, characterizes the modern tourist's desire to experience a place and its culture rather than merely stand back and gaze: "*it is about helping others whilst you enjoy the culture and climate of another country usually hotter than the UK but more disadvantaged*", "*a big piece of it is cultural immersion*". It is this concept of cultural immersion which prompted some authors to draw parallels between voluntourism and cultural tourism (see, for example, Brown, 2005). To one voluntourist, "*it [voluntourism] was about being able to physically and emotionally immerse oneself in the local culture and community*"; a kind of 'integration' and 'penetration' where the tourist seeks a natural and authentic experience (see MacCannell, 1989; and Cohen, 1988) rather than a contrived experience reported by Boorstin (1961). However, as Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) points out in his study of tourists in Thailand, authenticity means different things to different people, nevertheless, it is an individual's desire for

cultural authenticity that differentiates voluntourism from traditional mass tourism, and confers on it the term “alternative form of tourism” (see Wearing, 2001).

Engagement is a more comprehensive term than that of ‘interaction’ proposed by Wearing (2001). Many tourism activities involve interaction with the ‘other’ (Wearing, 2001) which may result in some impacts on the few individuals concerned, but it does not necessarily result in ‘connecting’ with one another. Engagement, on the other hand, usually involving a larger number of people, is about connecting with the ‘other’ in some kind of meaningful action. It is associated with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975) ‘flow experience’ which has been used more recently by Ryan (1996) to describe the role of guides in white-water rafting; flow experience, Csikszentmihalyi posits, is “complete *involvement* of the actor with his activity” (p. 36). Geoff Brown, a Community Partnership Coordinator at Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, uses the term ‘connection’ rather than ‘interaction’ in describing what voluntourists do: “*perhaps I should set up some activities here in Florida to recruit the breed of folks [travellers] who want a 'connection'. They may be interested to find projects like these [litter pick up/ invasive non-native pest-plant removal] during a visit or vacation to help them feel connected to the destination in a way that a 'tourist' would not*”. The engagement themes of connection, commitment, and immersion recurred in many respondents’ perception and description of voluntourism: “*I will be assisting workers in the children’s home and tending to the children’s needs, I will be helping the project reach its objectives*”; “it is a type of tourism which involves *engaging* in activities to further a charitable cause”.

Although the concept of engagement is found in this study to conceptualise the voluntourism experience; it is nevertheless not peculiar to voluntourism. In the last decade or so, a body of literature has sprung around what has come to be known as Engagement Theory. Engagement Theory has emerged formally in technology-based teaching and learning environments (see Shneiderman, 1994, 1998; Shneiderman, Alavi, Norman and Borkowski, 1995; Kearsley, 1997). The idea underlying Engagement Theory is that students optimise their learning by being meaningfully engaged in activities through interaction with others and doing worthwhile tasks (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1999). The concept itself has also been applied to business environments: in engaging employees to increase job performance and job satisfaction (Mayo, 1998); in marketing, engaging consumers (see Spillman, 2006); in conflict negotiation (see Coleman, Hacking, Stover, Fisher-Yoshida & Nowak, 2008); in tourism planning, stakeholder engagement to create and execute strategy (Cooper et al); and in psychology, engagement with everyday life to enhance well being (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Kearsley and Schneiderman’s (1998) Engagement Theory is predicated on three interrelated components: ‘Relate-Create-Donate’; these components are seen to optimise learning through collaborative teamwork and project-based work which have an outside “authentic” focus. Kearsley and Schneiderman use the term ‘Relate’ to refer to team efforts that involve communication, planning, management and social skills. This collaborative process, they argue, forces students to clarify and verbalise their problems, thereby facilitating solutions; it also offers an opportunity to work with others from quite different backgrounds, thus facilitating an understanding of diversity and multiple perspectives. The second component, ‘Create’, involves making learning moments creative and purposeful. Kearsley and Shneiderman see this as a process where students define a project and then concentrate their efforts on applying their ideas in a specific

context; not only do students define their own project (even if the topic has been chosen by the instructor), they also have a sense of control over their learning. ‘Donate’, the third component, stresses the importance of making a contribution to an outside ‘customer’ (e.g. individuals, community groups, campus organisations, local businesses and government agencies). Kearsley and Shneiderman point out that this component makes the project ‘authentic’. This view of engagement is not dissimilar to the one found in this study, and emerged as central to understanding voluntourism. Voluntourists ‘Relate’ and collaborate by interacting and integrating with other volunteers and the communities themselves. They ‘Donate’ to an outside customer, the community where the project is located. However, the concept of engagement in voluntourism differs from Kearsley and Shneiderman’s theorisation of engagement in that voluntourists do not ‘Create’ projects to address problems, rather, they ‘Dedicate’ themselves by participating in purposeful work and applying their knowledge and skills to existing worthwhile projects. To draw parallels and contrasts with Kearsley and Shneiderman’s engagement components of ‘Relate-Create-Donate’, this study suggests that engagement in voluntourism is predicated on the components of ‘Relate-Dedicate-Donate’. The application of Engagement Theory to voluntourism offers an opportunity for further research because “Engagement Theory has only been investigated by a few authors, explained in a small number of articles, and therefore, is not yet clearly defined nor comprehensively theorised” (Hughey, 2002:4).

### **The concept of volunteer work**

As mentioned above, a summarised account of the concept ‘volunteer work’, another category of voluntourism, will be presented here. The components of this emerging category included the concepts of: choice, range of work, payment (to a provider), period of time and specific purpose. The concept of ‘choice’ was significant in its frequent appearance in respondents’ narratives; one voluntourist who sent notes about her ‘do-it-yourself’ volunteer trips stated:

“How, doing what, and where you choose to volunteer is entirely up to you. Do you prefer a specific area of the world? Will you survive without running water and flush toilets? Can you get by in a foreign language? What do you want to do? Teach English? Dig ditches? Restore narrow-gauge train tracks? For one week? Or one year?”

Evidently, there is more choice in voluntourism than there is in traditional volunteering. Voluntourists can choose where they want to go and how long they stay (O’Connor, 2008); Voluntourism can be tailored to the individual’s interests and knowledge base (Selva, 2008). Voluntourists can head to far-flung parts of the world to build walls, dig fields and care for animals in wildlife sanctuaries, working by day and partying by night (Maxwell, 2006). So numerous are the volunteer options, said Michelle Peluso, chief executive of Travelocity, that many people are confused by the choice. Although the concept of choice is central to the definition of traditional volunteering, this choice is between doing volunteering or not, rather than the choice between destination, project, time period and tourism activities, as in voluntourism. The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO, 2007; 2008) indicated that voluntourists are increasingly approaching them and other similar organisations “as if it was a holiday” and choosing safe destinations. This

choice is made possible because of the 'range of projects' available. In traditional volunteering, although there is a wide range of fields such as health and social care, sport and employer supported volunteering; projects are limited by their aim to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives (Volunteering England, 2008). However in voluntourism, especially where the provider is a travel company rather than a non-profit organisation or charity, the projects are travel products (Miller, 2007) and clients 'pay' for the services and in return are given access to an infrastructure and a placement to suit the traveller, taking into consideration 'time' restrictions and 'specific purpose' or requirements. The purpose may therefore extend to satisfying the self (the customer) and therefore voluntourism aims to benefit multiple parties (Clemmons, 2008b).

### **The concept of tourist**

The concept of 'tourist', a category of voluntourism, was found to encompass the diverse components of expectations, assumptions, issues, motives and awareness of impacts, reflecting the very broad nature of voluntourism.

Responding voluntourists expected to pay the provider, take a trip for a limited period of time, experience something unique and special, as well as do some tourism activities in addition to the volunteer work: *"I think trips are usually between two and six weeks long. The voluntourists pay a lump sum which covers their travel expenses, food, accommodation, etc."* Furthermore, voluntourists expected to be in the hands of responsible providers and to carry out meaningful volunteer work: *"People want purpose and meaning in their lives and to feel that they're doing something that matters"*. Voluntourists have certain assumptions and issues about voluntourism. They assume that voluntourism is available to everyone because web-sites such as Globeaware (2007) state that "programmes are equally appropriate for the solo traveller to multigenerational family travel, corporate groups and more"; that the volunteer work itself is unpaid; that it involves travel to a less developed country; and that the experience will have an impact on self. A respondent stated: *"It is about helping others and growing from the experience"*. Voluntourists were also concerned with certain issues such as the confusion around finding a reputable trip and what work will be required: *"Weeding through the myriad of volunteer options can be daunting, it was for me"*. Voluntourists had numerous motives for participating in voluntourism. These range from 'spreading personal beliefs', 'doing something different', 'networking', 'visiting a warmer climate', 'experiencing another culture' through to altruism and 'the desire to give back' and 'help others'. One voluntourist who travelled to Ethiopia said, *"It was my desire to serve God by going out to do some of this type of work"* and another said, *"It is the desire to do something good while at the same time experiencing new places and challenges in locales one might otherwise not visit"*. Voluntourists were impacted by their experience and there was evidence that voluntourism impacts the projects and community too: *"I came away as a passionate advocate and long-term donor of the community"*; *"I have a heightened awareness of how our actions have consequences for people even thousands of miles away"*. The impacts on the voluntourist range from changes in: behaviour, attitudes, confidence, capabilities, emotions and even physical.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand voluntourism using Glaser's grounded theory. The theoretical explanation that emerged from the data holds up to Glaser's (1998) criteria for judging the adequacy of the emerging theory: fitness to the situation, workability, and modifiability. The explanation and the concepts that gave rise to it were grounded in the experiences of voluntourists, voluntourism providers and other stakeholders, the perceptions of tourists, and research into the different aspects of voluntourism such as motives, experiences and impacts; it thus '*fits*' the situation. It also '*works*' because it helps people make sense of their experience and to manage the situation better. For example, one voluntourism provider reviewed its web-based project sheets to include the voluntourist's financial contribution to the project. The theory's validity was also checked against the results of another study about the experiences of voluntourists in India in 2008 (Wickens' working paper). There will be further data collected in the future so that the theory can be improved upon and amended as situations change. In this respect, it will be readily '*modifiable*' as new data emerges. What has so far emerged to describe voluntourism is the key category of 'engagement', necessarily associated with two other emerging categories of 'volunteer work' and 'tourist'. These categories together provided the encompassing explanation of voluntourism as 'engagement in volunteer work as a tourist', pointing to a purposeful connection to particular peoples and places. The categories and concepts generated from this research have highlighted diverse concepts within voluntourism and in this respect have also highlighted the limitations of the research; it is general and does not focus on a specific area in any detail. Furthermore, the researcher played a major role in arriving at this explanation as the concepts were determined by the researcher systematically searching for themes within the data. This limitation is partially addressed by the extensive data collected and the visibility of the systematic and detailed process in arriving at the explanation. Glaser's grounded theory provided an explanation of voluntourism and, at the same time, allowed its deconstruction into its constituent elements. The core category, engagement, was discussed in relation to the theoretical codes found in traditional volunteering and traditional tourism. It is deconstructed into its constituent lower concepts thereby offering a significant contribution to knowledge; it provided a theorization of the concept of 'touristic engagement', previously under theorized, thus filling a gap in the tourism literature. The study has also the potential to contribute to government life-long learning strategy, as an informal learning tool.

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## **Journeys of the Self: Volunteer Tourists in Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents some results from an ethnographic study of volunteers working in social and education projects within the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Fieldwork was carried out in the summer months of 2008. The majority of participants referred to in this paper were either university students or graduates, mainly from Western countries. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 volunteers. The analysis of qualitative data shows that they are drawn to Nepal for a number of reasons, but largely for the experience of living ‘authentically’ in a developing country that is a world away from their own culture. They are attracted to the fact that whereas tourists are confined to the tourist route of hotels, tour guides and the tourist bubble – volunteers get a ‘genuine experience’ of what it is like to live in the country and to be immersed in the culture and the society that they are visiting. A common theme amongst them was that volunteering is ‘challenging’, ‘meaningful’ and ‘self-fulfilling’, an experience that goes beyond the limitations of normal holidays.

**Keywords:** Volunteering, cultural experiences, motives for volunteering, Nepal

### **Introduction**

The increasing interest in volunteering, and the benefits of participating in voluntary activities and projects in a local community are now well documented (e.g., Wearing, 2002, Simpson, 2004). There is also a growing body of literature on the value of volunteering to the host community. Often viewed as an essential part of modern life, international volunteering is increasingly recognised for its contribution to the welfare of communities. Volunteers are drawn to projects in third world countries, engaging in activities such as restoration of buildings, cultural preservation, or teaching in schools. Nepal provides a good example of this because there is a ballooning desire for English language teachers to help out in schools or hostels. Organisations have sprung up to recruit volunteers who can speak English fluently - and although there is a preference for native language speakers – such organisations accept volunteers from all over the world. Following a brief review of the literature on contemporary volunteer tourism and volunteers’ experiences, this paper presents some results from an ethnographic study of volunteers working in social and educational projects within the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Fieldwork shows that they are drawn to Nepal for a variety of reasons, but largely for the experience of living ‘authentically’ in a developing country that is a world away from their own culture. They are attracted to the fact that whereas tourists are confined to

the tourist route of hotels, tour guides and the tourist bubble – volunteers get a genuine experience of what it is like to live in and around Kathmandu.

The Kathmandu valley in Nepal is very popular destination for volunteer tourists. Firstly, there are many NGOs and other voluntary agencies offering the opportunity for volunteers to participate in a community-based project in the valley. Secondly Nepal, often described as the ‘land of Mount Everest’ and the ‘land of cultural diversity’, is known to draw visitors both because of its natural attractions and its cultural heritage. Nepal undoubtedly is one of the world’s greatest trekking and white-water rafting destinations attracting visitors interested in outdoor recreational activities. The Everest region is the main trekking destination east of Kathmandu and the most popular. Moreover, the Kathmandu valley has a plethora of heritage sites, including Newari traditional villages and Hindu and Buddhist holy places. The artistic richness of the valley is reflected in the Unesco World Heritage sites such as the ‘Monkey Temple’, the Durbar squares of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, Bodhnath, the Pashupatinath Temple. Visitors are attracted from all over the world, with most arrivals originating from India, UK, Germany, Holland, USA, South Korea, and Australia (Shrestha, 2002).

### **Literature Review**

Volunteer tourism has grown considerably over the last fifty years and projections indicate that this will continue for the foreseeable future (Wearing, 2002). As a phenomenon contemporary volunteer tourism has been approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including social work, sociology, psychology, anthropology, as well as being the subject of a number of multidisciplinary studies (Smith and Elkin, 1981, Caissie and Halpenny, 2003, Simpson, 2004). While there is a plethora of definitions, ‘volunteer tourism’ is often conceptualised as a genre of alternative and responsible tourism based on the search for and participation in socio-cultural experiences. A defining characteristic of alternative tourism is that it is small in scale and requires little specialised infrastructure (Wearing, 2002). However, unlike other responsible travellers, volunteers spend considerable amounts of time living and participating in a variety of social, educational and environmental projects. The choice of work undertaken is often morally driven and volunteers’ intentions and desires are to help less fortunate people (Stebbins and Graham, 2004). Consistent with these previous studies, this paper conceptualises volunteer tourism as a subtype of alternative/responsible tourism, which involves an international journey and a lengthy period of stay in a culture significantly different from that of the volunteer. The term ‘volunteer’ carries with it notions of ‘aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society’, and ‘the restoration of certain environments...’ (Wearing, 2001: 1). By conceptualising it in this way, this paper attempts to shed some light on the topic of how individual volunteers actually give meaning to their experience of the visited host community.

### **Study Methods**

The overall aim of this study, which was undertaken in the summer months of July and August 2008, was to gain an understanding of the experiences of volunteer tourists in Nepal. Fieldwork took the form of semi-structured interviews (between 0.5 and 2.0 in duration) with 30 volunteers.

Approximately half of the interviewees stayed in guest houses, or rented accommodation and the other half with local families. They were engaging in community – based projects, spending about 6-8 hours undertaking various activities, mainly teaching and looking after children in hostels, hospitals or orphanage. Interviews were conducted at a wide variety of sites (e.g., hospitals, hostels, hotels) within the Kathmandu Valley. The majority of the interviews were taped with the consent of the participant, and subsequently transcribed. A convenient sample was used for the purposes of this study. The qualitative data were analysed manually. When looking for differences and similarities in participants' responses to a given question, care was taken that responses to a specific question were analysed with due regard to the context and the conditions which produced them.

### **Motivations of Volunteers**

Existing studies on why one really wants to volunteer abroad emphasise several reasons including a desire to 'make a difference', for 'career development' and/or 'personal development', and the pursuit of 'fun and adventure' (Caissie and Halpenny, 2003; Galley and Clifton, 2004, Campbell and Smith 2006). It is also interesting to note that the word 'motive' has been variously interpreted by analysts when discussing motivations of travellers (including volunteers). Psychological studies (e.g., Iso-Ahola, 1982) tend to provide explanations that emphasize those motives which satisfy an individual's needs (and by implication volunteer tourists' needs). Other studies suggest that motivation is socially and psychologically determined in that an individual's home environment plays a key role in influencing his/her reasons for travelling (Dann, 1981). It is interesting to note that past research is based on the works of Dann (ibid.) who identified and developed the 'push and pull' framework. The consensus amongst many analysts is that the push factors, which are concerned with the socio-psychological status of an individual traveller, and the pull factors found in destinations are essential for understanding what motivates people (including volunteer tourists) to travel (Wearing, 2001, Cassie and Halpenny, 2003).

From the perspective of this research, the push and pull factors have to be inferred from qualitative data both conversational and observational. When asked why they wanted to volunteer in Nepal, one participant reported:

'I am interested in development work..... and because it is often said that Nepal is the poorest country in the world, and so my help will hopefully be worthwhile. Nepal's geography and beauty also attracted me. I wanted to experience a culture different from my own... One of the unique things about the SPW Nepal programme was that the volunteers are placed with host families... the idea of being in constant contact with Nepalese also appealed to me....'.

The themes of 'personal development', 'interest in development' and experiencing the Nepali culture are also evident in the following extract from an interview I had with this participant.

'Nepal.... is a destination which is rich in its culture and tradition.... a destination which is untouched by modernity... the country is beautiful and I was interested in the culture.....The wish to gain a personal experience, a general interest in volunteering and development work ... and to help with development in a poor country was my other reason....'

Other participants reported similar motivations, for example:

‘I am interested in development work but to see Nepal....Nepal specifically because less emphasis is put on its development than other places especially Africa. I had four months free during the summer in between my 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years at uni.... and I have always wanted to visit Nepal and experience the culture and I saw an opportunity to go and teach there, but also help in a hostel when the charity was advertised at uni’.

Fieldwork clearly shows that for these participants the push factors for volunteering their labour was ‘learning about development work in Nepal’ and ‘personal development’. This finding is consistent with that of other studies (e.g., Galley and Clifton, 2004). However, ‘experiencing the Nepali culture’ was the dominant pull factor for the majority of volunteers and as the following discussion shows they wanted to work and live ‘authentically’ in a developing country that is a world away from their own. This finding challenges the view that all gap-year volunteers are in pursuit of fun and adventure (Caissie and Halpenny, 2003).

### **Volunteering as a Cultural Experience**

While the information obtained from each participant varied considerably, in that each interview captures a unique story, nonetheless, it is the case that many participants ‘go native’ in Nepal, by experiencing first-hand the day-to-day life of their hosts. Consequently, volunteer tourists are more likely than other tourist types to learn something about the Nepali way of life, its customs and some of its traditions. The following interview extracts, each from a different respondent, illustrate this:

‘Nepal is so rich in its culture and tradition... life for many is extremely hard..., but Nepali people are honest, genuine, and so friendly it is a unique place’.

‘it is a splendid country with diverse culture and nature ...I also had the opportunity to be immersed in the Nepali culture... eating with the children, and breathing their entire life everyday’.

Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered participants who stated that they had made an attempt to learn the Nepali language. Conversing with their hosts, using a few Nepali words, certainly facilitates encounters between volunteer tourists and their hosts. The following quotations (each from a different interviewee) illustrate this:

‘It is important to learn the language so you can understand the traditional lifestyle, the culture and the Nepali people’.

‘You can get more out of your visit by learning Nepali, it is the only means by which you can connect yourself to people’.

When asked how they would describe the overall experience as a volunteer common responses were:

‘It is a wicked place; Nepal has so much to offer.....; and yes I would recommend a working visit to anyone who is willing to work hard to achieve things there ... anybody can volunteer. I think international volunteering is a great way to contribute to populations outside your own community. It allows the volunteer to expand themselves personally while helping others in need.... you also learn about others cultures...; and this can be a rewarding experience’.

‘Immensely rewarding, I loved it....great opportunity to put something back into the community; it has made me more culturally aware and adaptable possibly more

independent as well; it has been enjoyable - though also frustrating as there is so much that needs doing’.

‘It was the right choice for me... teaching the hostel children gave me more satisfaction than anything else in my life.....a great experience, and you learn so much more about Nepal and its people by actually immersing yourself in their lives.... Challenging but in a good way. Uncomfortable, but rewarding. One of the steepest learning curves of my life so far. Something I would love to do again’.

### **Culture Shock**

Although participants reported that, you get a genuine experience of what it is like to live in Nepal, many volunteers also experience culture shock and in particular when they first arrive. This is what a volunteer said:

‘Yes to begin with, but I quickly became used to the streets, buses and shops and traditions. I witnessed cultural differences.... such as women are viewed as inferior to men and, as a result, are expected to adopt subservient attitudes... we are expected to wear clothes that cover our shoulders and legs whilst working in villages’

Similarly:

‘Just when I first arrived, and witnessed all of the sights and sounds after the long journey there ....cows intersperse with the people, the traffic and the dust... spitting by everyone and everywhere and nose picking again by everyone... ’

Throughout my fieldwork, the theme of culture shock was commonly encountered in conversations with participants. This theme is illustrated in the following extract from a recorded interview with another volunteer:

‘The traffic is unbelievable... sitting on the top of the buses is not a safe way to travel but it is often our only option...it did feel rather strange, coming from a multicultural place like England. I was working in a small village and I did feel like I was a source of curiosity for many of the villagers and didn’t feel prepared for the many curious looks I got during my walks around the village... I recall feeling quite insecure and lonely during my first couple of weeks in Nepal’.

Although there were numerous other stories about volunteers experiencing culture shock the general consensus amongst participants was that they experience the ‘real life’ of their host community. These findings give empirical support to the view that volunteers can achieve an authentic experience in less developed countries such as Nepal (Emmons, 2006).

### **Journey of Self-discovery**

Embarking on a journey of self-discovery, all participants agree that they learnt something about other cultures in the purer and simpler lifestyles of their hosts. However, fieldwork also shows that they learn something about ‘themselves’. How the experience of volunteering impacted upon the self was a frequent topic in my discussions with these participants:

‘Being a long way from home and friends while experiencing a different culture has definitely taught me more about myself, learned to work in team with people I did not know well before and got to know them better... Nepal has been a great experience and

definitely I would recommend anyone to come here and change their life as mine has changed’

Or again:

‘The volunteer programme strengthened my own identity and made me more aware of who I was and where I came from. I certainly felt like that by the end of the programme. By the end of this complete immersion into Nepali village life I could also see much more clearly the constructed nature of identities. I could see how easy, with a few more years volunteering, it would have been to ‘become Nepali’! I suppose rather than losing something I would say I gained an insight into what makes me ‘me’.’

These findings concerning the impact of volunteering on tourists are consistent with other studies (Wearing, 2001).

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented and discussed the motivations and experiences of a number of gap-year volunteer tourists interviewed in Nepal. Fieldwork shows that participants are drawn to Nepal for a number of reasons but largely for the experience of living authentically in a developing country that is a world away from their own. They are attracted to the fact that whereas tourists are confined to the tourist bubble, volunteers get a ‘genuine experience’ of what it is like to live in the country. A common theme amongst them was that volunteering is meaningful and self-fulfilling experience that goes beyond the limitations of normal holidays. Fieldwork supports the view that volunteer tourists can achieve an authentic experience and insights into the lives of their hosts. It should be noted that this paper reports preliminary conclusions drawn from the analysis of a subset of all of the data obtained during this field trip. Further reports should be anticipated.

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## **Carrying the Gift of Water, a Voluntourism Event**

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### **Abstract**

The proposed presentation will describe a case study that exemplifies the power of volunteerism in the creation of a week-long cultural event with opportunities for visitors to become involved. The type of tourism in the case study can be described as alternative cultural tourism. According to McIntosh and Zahra (2007) alternative cultural tourism experiences are authentic, interactive, meaningful and experiential. Volunteer tourism has been described similarly. A number of researchers have proposed that volunteer tourism is the key component of alternative tourism largely because of the feelings of altruism, accomplishment and self-development that result from such participation (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2001, 2002). Under the leadership of the Institute of Ecotourism, five volunteer organizations coordinated activities for the Carrying the Gift of Water event. Elements of cultural tourism, agri-tourism, geotourism, heritage tourism, culinary tourism, adventure tourism and voluntourism were incorporated into the event. Local and tourist volunteers were joined by celebrities including Lindsay Wagner and Dr. Masaru Emoto who volunteered their talents in support of the event. A detailed and colorful description of the Carrying the Gift of Water Event will be presented.

**Keywords:** Cultural voluntourism, alternative tourism, events

### **Introduction**

The case study described in this paper exemplifies the power of volunteerism in the creation of a week-long cultural event with opportunities for visitors to become involved. The type of tourism in the case study can be described as alternative cultural tourism. According to McIntosh and Zahra (2007) alternative cultural tourism experiences are authentic, interactive, meaningful and experiential. Volunteer tourism has been described similarly. A number of researchers have proposed that volunteer tourism is the key component of alternative tourism largely because of the feelings of altruism, accomplishment and self-development that result from such participation (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2001, 2002).

Volunteer tourism has been defined as an activity that combines travel with voluntary work (Raymond and Hall 2008). In this book on volunteer tourism, Wearing (2001) describes it as a field of tourism in which people volunteer to undertake projects in support of local communities while they are on vacation. He suggests that volunteer tourism involves assisting in the alleviation of poverty, the restoration of environments or research. While much of the research on volunteer tourism has focused on one of the three previously mentioned areas, the concept should not be limited by this narrow definition. Volunteer tourism does not need to be the main goal of a holiday, nor does it need to be the sole purpose. Tourists who go to a destination for other purposes may find that volunteer activities enrich their experience while on vacation. For example, many of the visitors come to Sedona Arizona for one to two weeks to enjoy the beautiful scenic area. After they have taken their hike, enjoyed their spa treatments, ridden the jeeps on the red rocks and shopped, they need something meaningful to do. Providing meaningful activities for the visitors endears them to the community and increases the likelihood that they will be drawn back to the community they helped.

Numerous authors have described today's tourists as seeking more active, meaningful, enduring and worthwhile experiences than traditional tourism offers (Chambers, 2008; McIntosh, 2004; McIntosh & Bonneman, 2006; Phelps, 2001; Trauer, 2006; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Richards 2001; Richards & Wilson, 2006). The *Carrying the Gift of Water* event described in this paper is an example of the type of tourism sought after by today's high end market segments who search for experiences that allow them to satisfy their desire for altruism, self-change, and self-confirmation.

### **Background**

The case study described herein is a story of an event that fulfills the needs of these visitors and contributes significantly to the community. The *Carrying the Gift of Water* event is inspiring because it takes place in a rather hedonistic tourist destination full of resorts, golf courses, and self indulging spas. The market is seriously upscale. Often the upscale visitor is viewed as shallow but research on experiential tourism has shown that people, especially those in the upper income brackets (certainly not all but a significant enough proportion) are seeking something more than hedonistic pleasures. They want active, meaning, enduring and worthwhile experiences while on vacation. A large number of visitors to Sedona either own or have swapped time share weeks. The first days are very exciting; they go for a hike, take the jeep tour, have their spa treatment and play a round of golf. But then the visitors are looking for a fulfilling experience to fill the remainder of their vacation days. This is especially true of the repeat visitors who have grown tired of the traditional activities.

Under the leadership of the Institute of Ecotourism in Sedona, Arizona, five volunteer organizations coordinated activities for the *Carrying the Gift of Water* event. Elements of cultural tourism, agri-tourism, geotourism, heritage tourism, culinary tourism, adventure tourism and voluntourism were incorporated into the event. Local and tourist volunteers were joined by celebrities including Lindsay Wagner and Dr. Masaru Emoto who volunteered their talents in support of the event.

The Hopi believe that everything should begin with the children. Consequently, a pre-event activity that involved school children was held one month prior to the event. The program for children of two very different communities was designed to help the

children learn the values of another culture and to appreciate and attach importance to their own culture. Students from Sedona's public and charter schools first went to visit the Hopi children on the reservation. Then the Hopi children came to Sedona to learn about a culture very different from their own. One of the cultural exchange activities was for the children from Sedona to make planting sticks and learn how to work the dry-farm gardens. The Sedona children also learned how to make traditional Hopi meals and were shown the ancient rock art created by early ancestors. In the evening, they sat around a campfire and listened to traditional Hopi stories.

When the Hopi children came to Sedona the two groups of students worked side by side to create murals depicting their experiences on each others lands. The display of the children's art work in local grocery stores and the library brought the event into the community. The children also prepared for events that would take place a month later by planting seeds that grew in a green house until it was time to plant in April. In addition, they made stepping stones for the garden they would plant the following month. Numerous volunteers from a number of partnering organizations made the children's experience possible. The value of the event to the children is evident but most importantly, it set the stage for the main event and created the necessary bridge between the cultures. It was the first opportunity for volunteer engagement. The murals, plants and stepping stones became important components of the main event. The involvement of the children is likely to create a new generation of volunteers who may teach similar values to the next generation.

## **Discussion**

The actual event began on Earth Day with the H<sub>2</sub>OPI run, a 130 mile, two-day journey from the mesas on the Hopi Reservation to the banks of Oak Creek Canyon. Runners carried sacred water gathered from significant places on the reservation in ancestral water gourds. They also brought seeds, and ears of corn for planting along with their planting sticks – all of which symbolize what is important in Hopi life. The runners ran for two days and were supported by numerous volunteers from businesses, schools, city officials, the forest service, local citizens and volunteer visitors. The opening ceremony that followed the arrival of the runners included a screening of a film documenting the 1500-mile run by Hopi Water Messengers from the Hopi Mesas to Mexico City for the World Forum on Water. A strong support of Indigenous people, Lindsay Wagner, joined the Hopi elders in a dialogue following the film.

On the following day, Gardens for Humanity partnered with the Hopis and the Institute of Ecotourism to create a meaningful cultural event where heritage seeds were planted using traditional planting sticks. A one acre plot on Crescent Moon Ranch was set aside for this historic planting ceremony. The children who planted the seeds in March, helped to plant the seedlings that had grown in the greenhouse. This event welcomed many volunteers. Visitors not only helped preserve Hopi culture, but they also became personally involved in learning about traditional dry farming.

On the third day, The Twilight Water Concert where volunteers contributed their talents was held creek side in an upscale resort. Ancient and contemporary rituals, myths and stories about water were presented through music, poetry and dance. Specially created gourd water drums filled with the water brought by the runners played for the

first time that evening. The audience was led in an especially meaningful meditation honoring the water vessel within them.

The following day, the Institute of Ecotourism was turned into a traditional Hopi village. Visitors observed demonstrations of traditional Hopi methods for weaving baskets and rugs as well as demonstrations of the preparation of piki bread and parched corn, traditional foods of the ancient tribes. The volunteer demonstrators from the Hopi Nation were assisted by local and visiting volunteers who provided assistance. Along with the cultural demonstrations, volunteers helped with the production of a Hopi and Indigenous Art Market that was supported by a grant from the Arizona Commission of the Arts.

On day 5, Sedona students, the local community, and guest elders from Hopi Nation participated in an art and poetry exhibition on the future of water in the library. Dr. Masaru Emoto, author of 15 books on water, offered a free 90 minute seminar on the consciousness of water. Dr. Emoto has conducted extensive research into the properties of water. He postulates that water shows its true nature in its frozen crystal form. He is well known for his experiments with water where he put various types of water in glass containers, froze the water and examined the crystals that formed. The most beautiful crystals were found on containers that had positive emotions written on the outside of the jar – love, peace, etc. The crystallized water in the containers that had fear, hate and other negative emotions on the outside of their jar was distorted. His theory has been questioned by a number of scientists but he believes that water is deeply connected to our individual and collective consciousness, a concept that is shared by indigenous cultures all around the world. Vernon Masayeva, former Hopi chairman augmented Dr. Emoto presentation with an explanation of the meaning of water in Hopi tradition.

On the final day, members of Hopi, Havasu, Supai, Yavapai, Apache and the strange WhaTaWe tribe came together to celebrate their connection to water and their common and diverse heritage. Hopi water maidens danced; local musicians and poets shared their art. The closing ceremony performed by Dr. Emoto was followed by a community potluck dinner to which each tribe brought a dish that represented their tribe's traditional food. The dinner was followed by traditional and modern dancing and singing.

## **Findings**

The *Carrying the Gift of Water* event demonstrates how volunteer tourism can play an important role in visitors' self development as well as the development of the local community. The participation of volunteers made this unique event meaningful to all involved. It was especially valuable for the tourists who were given the opportunity to actively participate in learning from the local community. Those who volunteered came away with feelings of being a good citizen and of making a difference. The richness of the cultural experience cannot be surpassed when visitors work side by side with local volunteers.

The community gained significant benefits outside the economic benefits provided by the visitors. By demonstrating their culture to others, the local residents gained an increased value for their own culture as well as a value for a different culture. A new generation of volunteers was created through the participation of the children in the event. Community networks were built and strengthened. Members of each

community developed an attachment to their community and to each others community. And of course, the purpose of the event was fulfilled. All participants – volunteers, participants, and visitors came away with an increased value for water.

Additionally, the tourism industry benefits greatly from an event such as this. From a tourism marketing perspective, the event, while not designed for promotional purposes, was successful because it created a new venue for visitors who had completed the sightseeing aspects of their vacation. The richness of the experience created feelings of attachment and a desire to return to a community to which they made a contribution. Visitors may have extended their stay to participate in the next day's event especially if they had volunteered in an earlier event. Events such as this attract new markets interested in authentic cultural enrichment. However, the event was not and maybe should not be designed as a tourist attraction. In order to maintain its integrity and purpose, the event must be a community activity in which visitors are allowed to participate. Participation should be made available to visitors but it should not be marketed as a tourist attraction but rather as a volunteer tourism activity.

### **Conclusion**

In contrast to the type of tourism that exploits a community's resources for profit maximization, volunteer tourism is the ultimate form of sustainable tourism. As suggested by Wearing (2001) voluntourism may reduce inequality and empower local communities to perpetuate their values. As the highest level of sustainable tourism, voluntourism offers a means of creating economic vitality, social equity, cultural stability and environmental preservation for the current generation while preserving and enhancing resources for future generations.

The strongest component of voluntourism is the value on which the volunteer activity is based. For example, volunteers who have a high value for the natural environment apply their energy, talents and financial resources to environmental restoration or preservation projects. In a similar manner, a value for scientific knowledge is expressed through participation in scientific research projects. While voluntourism gives people an outlet for expressing their values, it also may be an experience that can cause value change that will influence a person's actions. This was the case of the *Carrying the Gift of Water* event, the purpose of which was to heighten the value for water. Visitors and residents equally gained a intensified appreciation of and value for water.

An analysis of the event reveals two important components in designing a volunteer activity that changes or enhances values for a natural or cultural resource. First, the event must have a clear value focus with activities that enhance the participants' value for the intended resource. Second, a value driven event is strengthened by the participation of volunteers that include both local and non-local participants.

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## **The Sport Voluntourism Experience: Case Studies of Volunteers at the Olympics**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to provide an overview of the sport voluntourism experience at the Athens Olympic Games, and (2) to provide suggestions for administrators of mega sport events for sport volunteer tourism management. Three case studies of sport volunteer tourists at the Athens Olympics Games are presented. These case studies depicted a number of commonalities and differences with respect to the evaluation of the voluntourism experience. The commonalities focused on the overcoming of language, cultural and structural barriers, and the enhancement of communication channels between the voluntourist and Olympic Games administrators; whereas, the differences focused on the self-evaluation of sport volunteer training approaches and the perceived benefits of the voluntourism experience. Based on the aforementioned, it is suggested that administrators of mega sport events: (1) address the unique tourism concerns of voluntourists in training and preparation courses, (2) aid in overcoming barriers that may hinder the volunteer and tourism experience, and (3) bridge the gap between voluntourists and administrators by enhancing channels of communication.

**Keywords:** Voluntourism, Olympic Games, evaluation, communication

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

The last four decades has witnessed a rapid growth in the volunteer sector (Karlis, 2006; Banting, 2000). Mega-sport events have come to rely more than ever on volunteer services (Larocque, Gravelle and Karlis, 2002). The notion of volunteerism is still quite new to mega sport events such as the Olympics. Indeed, the Organizing Committee of the Lake Placid Games in 1980 is largely credited for initiating the concept Olympic volunteer at the Olympic Games. From the time of the Lake Placid Games to the present, the reliance on the services of volunteers to administer the Olympic Games has increased tremendously as have the numbers of volunteers.

The number of Olympic Games volunteers that come from and reside outside of the host city has also increased as National Olympic Committees have used means such as the internet to recruit non-local volunteers. These volunteers are referred to as “sport voluntourists” or “sport volunteer tourists.”

Despite expanding research in the areas of sport tourism and sport volunteerism, the increased reliance on volunteer tourism by mega sport event administrators (Fairley, Kellett, and Green, 2007; Lyons and Wearing, 2008) and the growing number of sport volunteer tourists contributing to the success of mega sport events, minimal focus has been placed in research on sport volunteer tourism. In 2007, Fairley, Kellett and Green introduced the area of sport volunteer tourism by presenting the sport volunteer tourist as a unique type of volunteer that merits specific focus while also addressing the need to establish and conceptualize the notions sport volunteer tourism and sport volunteer tourists. Moreover, in a keynote address to the European Association of Sport Management Congress, Karlis (2006) posited that the conceptualization of the terms sport volunteer tourism and sport volunteer tourists will help mega sport event administrators recognize the uniqueness of this group while also acknowledging the important role played by sport volunteer tourists in implementing the services of the games.

Fairley et al.(2007) and Karlis (2006) introduce sport volunteer tourism as a new area of sport tourism yet do little to explore conceptual and theoretical dimensions of this notion. Both present only a scant conceptualization of sport volunteer tourism and its related notion of sport volunteer tourists to include people coming from abroad to volunteer services at a mega sport event. Moreover, Karlis (2006) argues that a well developed, refined conceptualization of sport volunteer tourism is needed to act as a basis for future research that will help improve the service environment of sport volunteer tourists, better understand this growing and unique group of volunteers, and better prepare mega sport administrators to work with sport volunteer tourists.

Minimal research however has been conducted on the experience of “sport volunteer tourists” in mega-sport events such as the Olympic Games. From existing research, little emphasis has been placed on the administrative processes and practices used to train “sport volunteer tourists.” The success of the Olympic Games relies heavily on the tasks carried out by volunteers, and since National Olympic Committees recruit the services of “sport volunteer tourists” to operate the games, it has now become paramount to understand the administrative process, management and training practices of Olympic Games volunteers.

In 2004, Greece became the smallest nation to host the modern day Olympic Games. The small size of this host nation posed some obvious and some not so obvious concerns for the administrative body of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. The obvious concerns focused on the management of fiscal resources, transportation to venues, security, etc. The not so obvious concerns arose from issues such as the high reliance on “sport volunteer tourists” to carry out the day-to-day operative tasks of the games. Large countries that have hosted the Olympic Games have relied primarily on volunteers from within their respective nations, whereas, Greece with a population of slightly over 10 million had little choice but to attract a *nouveau* form of volunteerism – the “sport volunteer tourist” - to help administer the games. This meant that the administrators of the Athens 2004 National Olympic Committee had to be aware of implications for the training of volunteers that considered the needs and concerns of “sport volunteer tourists.”

### **Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to provide an overview of the sport voluntourism experience at the Athens Olympic Games, and (2) to provide suggestions for administrators of mega sport events for sport volunteer tourism management. Three case studies of three sport volunteer tourists at the Athens Olympics Games were conducted by the principal researcher while he himself also served as a sport volunteer tourist. The demographic profile of the three participants is as follows: (1) 33 year old women lawyer from the USA, (2) 36 year old male academic from Europe, and (3) 44 year old public servant from Canada. During the 16 day duration of the games, the principle researcher had regular interactions and discussions with the three participants both individually and in round table sessions. The principle researcher recorded and transcribed notes while looking for reported commonalities and differences in respect to the sport voluntourism experience.

### **Results, Discussion and Conclusion**

The three participants depicted a number of commonalities and differences with respect to the evaluation of the sport voluntourism experience. The commonalities focused on the overcoming of language, cultural and structural barriers, and the enhancement of communication channels between the sport voluntourist and Olympic Games administrators. All three participants spoke Greek yet it was not their native tongue. As a result, they found difficulty at times communicating in Greek with Greeks from Greece. Moreover, although English was the native tongue of two of the three participants, it was found that all three had to put a consideration amount of effort into overcoming language barriers through the use of basic English while interacting with athletes and team officials. Thus a commonality identified was effort placed by all sport voluntourists to enhance communication channels through a better understanding of culture and social cultural traits and differences. Participants identified a link between culture and communication.

The differences focused on the self-evaluation of sport volunteer training approaches and the perceived benefits of the sport voluntourism experience. All three respondents participated in the crash training course offered prior to the commencement of the games. One participant reported that the experience was thorough and concise. The second evaluated the experience based on passed sessions as he had participants in previous volunteer sessions at other Games and commented how the session could have been more uniquely catered to Greece and Greek culture. The third participant felt that the handouts and the practical examples provided at the training session were of good use in enhancing the learning process.

Although all three participants felt positive about the sport voluntourism experience, each evaluated the experience in unique ways. The participant from the USA described it as a way to enhance her cultural roots. The participant from Europe perceived the sport voluntourism experience as a way to experience the Olympic Games first-hand. Whereas, the Canadian participant felt that the sport voluntourism experience was beneficial as it provided an arena of cultural exchange and interaction.

Based on the aforementioned, it is suggested that administrators of mega sport events: (1) address the unique tourism concerns of sport voluntourists in training and preparation courses, (2) aid in overcoming barriers that may hinder the volunteer and

tourism experience, and (3) bridge the gap between sport voluntourists and administrators by enhancing channels of communication.

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