Volunteer Tourism and Host Community

Dr Ranbir Singh
Institute of Hotel & Tourism Management
M.D.University Rohtak Haryana-India
E-mail:ranbirtourism@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper examines the status of volunteer tourism by providing an analysis of its conceptualization, development, cross-cultural misunderstanding and impacts on host society. Findings indicate the requirement of sustainable approach in order to maximize positive and minimize negative impacts on community. Existence of cross-cultural misunderstanding in volunteer tourism to be addressed adequately, research related to influences on host should be initiated and focused for development of impact measurement tools are some of the key findings of this paper.

Keyword: Volunteer, tourism, development, cultural, misunderstanding, impacts, indicators

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly expending dimension of tourism industry and same is true not only for developed but also for developing countries (Young (2008). The growth of volunteer tourism has been witnessed by number of researchers (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wickens, 2010). Nestora, Yeung, & Calderon, (2009) found that this development in traffic is a result of improvement in disposable income of middle class, desire to enjoy more unusual travelling and reduction in barriers in international travelling. Literature suggests that research on volunteer tourism has grown rapidly between 2001 and 2010. The studies (Broad, 2003; Brown, 2005; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Holmes & Smith, 2009; Lyons, 2003; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; 2009; McGehee & Santos, 2005; McIntosh & Zahra, 2005; Mustonen, 2005; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Singh, 2002, 2004; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004) are quite helpful to support the existence of volunteer tourism. The expansion of volunteer tourism also followed the four phase of development like mainstream tourism ((Jafari, 2001). Advocacy being first phase defines the process and highlights its contribution with a discussion of few negative impacts (Broad, 2003; Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Brown & Morrison, 2003; McGehee, 2002; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004). Brown (2003), Conran (2011), Palacios (2010) , Sin (2009) and Guttentag (2009) revealed that self development, participation in community development and cultural interaction with host community were some of the major motivations of volunteer

tourists at this stage. The second phase of development i.e. cautionary emerged with exploration of some negative effects. Dependency on developed word and exploration of host country were some of the issues studies by researchers (Caton & Santos, 2009; Guttentag, 2009; Vrasti, 2013, Palacios, 2010; Theerapappisit, 2009). The third phase of adaptancy which is continued till date investigated the strategies to maximize positive impact and to reduce negative impacts (Benson & Blackman, 2011; Broad, 2003; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Ledwith, 2005; Sin, 2010; Theerapappisit, 2009; Wickens, 2010). This phase of development requires more empirical research statistically tested by advanced techniques. Fourth phase i.e. scientific in nature is based an examination of process in systematic way with inclusion of structured, trans-disciplinary, multidisciplinary transnational approaches. For macro-analysis of empirical data use of various methodological approaches is another characteristic of this phase and same has been witnessed by a number of studies (McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Norman, 2002; Wearing, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; Wearing & Neil, 2000, 2003; Weiler & Richins, 1995). Significant role in development of host civil society and de-comodification of its products promise bright future for its development.

Impacts of volunteer tourism on community

Locals get comparatively less chance to be included in process of volunteer tourism because of economic, socio-cultural and languages problems (McGehee & Andereck, 2008). Sometimes locals do not have full understanding of programs initiated by guest country. Researcher have also focused objectives of their studies on tourists' demographic and psychographic characteristics (Holmes, Smith, Lockstone-Binney, & Baum, 2010; Uriely & Reichel, 2000; Uriely et al., 2003) because these factors effects habit of sparing time for these activities. McGehee & Andereck,(2009) studied about resident's benefits from volunteer tourism and found that individual benefits of locals decides their level of participation in activities of volunteer tourism.

Like any other form of tourism, volunteer tourism also creates a number of benefits like. employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, revenue generation for governance at every level improvement in handicraft and handloom industries, improvement in infrastructure, exposure of outer-world among locals, improvement in literacy rate, awareness about conservation of heritage and environment. Volunteer tourism also creates some negative impacts on host community such as over dependency on volunteer tourists (Guttentag 2009), underestimation of locals' dignity and use of local resources beyond carrying capacity (Devereux, 2008; Guttentag, 2009; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Palacios, 2010; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Simpson, 2004; Sin, 2009). The difference between the orientation of host and volunteer tourist sending Organizations can effect tourist attitude and direct him/her to act as a worker of commodified setting (Raymond & Hall, (2008). Simpson (2004) also advocates that tourists' strong orientation towards their native country's development strategy can undermine the

functioning and work done by local NGO (Non Government Organization). Negative effects of volunteer tourism on child refuge in California have been discussed in depth by Tomazos and Butler (2010).

Misunderstanding about Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism develops feelings of global citizenship in host as well as in guest community (Crabtree, 1998; McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005) and it improves cultural understanding in world (Broad, 2003; Brown & Lehto, 2005; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Lewis, 2005; Wearing, 2001). Reconciliation tourism seems synonymous of volunteer tourism in a study conducted by Higgins-Desbiolles, (2003).The president and CEO of reputed Global volunteers unit stated that 'Volunteer service engenders hope and friendship, both of which are critical to waging peace . . . The more people volunteer all over the world and make friends with local people, the more peaceful the world will be' (Morrison (2003). United Planet, (2007).also stated that their agenda as 'to foster cross-cultural understanding and friendship, support communities in need, and promote social & economic prosperity among cultures in order to unite the world in a community beyond borders'. But Simpson (2004; (2005b) noted some feeling or sense of "others" among volunteer tourist for host community. This sense can travel through promotional material or by lack of active and desired level of participation (Griffin, 2004; Simpson, 2005b). Further functioning of volunteer tourist never guarantees his or her understanding about host culture. According to Simpson

(2005b), the process also provides an opportunity to confirm tourists' perceived images about host society. Tourists coming from developed world sometime seem unable to create genuine awareness in host community. The statement of a volunteer tourist recorded in a study conducted by Simpson, (2005b) follow as 'They don't have TV's but it doesn't bother them because they don't expect one' and confirm above mentioned misunderstanding. Arranged interaction with 'others' (i.e. host) do not guarantee mutual understanding, respect and long term relationship. The stereotypes of observer's mind that "seeing equates to knowing" strengthened the previously perceived assumptions (Griffin, 2004) and leaves a very small option to challenge the situation. This assumption also works in process of host and guest interaction.

Need of indicator identification for impact assessment

Indicators make information manageable, help in decision making process and simplify the complex phenomena (Budruk & Phillips, 2011; Miller & Twining- Ward, 2005; Sirakaya, Jamal, & Choi, 2001; WTO, 2004). The WTO (2004) described the indicators as "measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming situations or problems, measures of risk and potential need for action, and means to identify and measure the results of our actions". Indicators are very important for understanding of the relationship between poverty, economic benefits and environmental conservations in order to estimate and monitor socio-cultural, environmental and economic condition of host

community (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005). These should be logical framed in measuring scales so that unrelated variables can be reduced (Miller & Twining-Ward, 2005; Reed, Fraser, & Dougill, 2005). Furthermore interrelation between these indicators should be given due care and should be considered in all-inclusive manner instead of individualist approach (Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005). Schianetz and Kavanagh (2008) also suggested that identification of indicators should take natural and social system as non-linear and interdependent. Extensive literature indicates that a comprehensive approach should be adopted which can cover all elements of system with its sustainability for identification of impact indicators.

Conclusion

The paper attained its objective by providing a detailed description of the issues of volunteer tourism and its development. The findings indicate the evolution of volunteer tourism has been witnessed a rapid growth in last decade. Misunderstanding of its impacts are because of cultural differences and can be checked by creating and spreading awareness about the objectives of volunteer programs in order to avoid any issue or challenge in the way of development. Like any other form of tourism, volunteer tourism also showed its positive and negative impacts on host community. Analysis of secondary sources indicates a need to maximize its benefits and to minimize the adverse impacts. Furthermore, need of indicator identification for impact assessment was also discussed and requirement was felt for accurate measurement of intensity.

References

Benson, A., & Blackman, D. (2011). To distribute leadership or not? A lesson from the islands. Tourism Management, 32(5), 1141e1149.

Broad, S. (2003). Living the Thai life e a case study of volunteer tourism at the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, Thailand. Tourism Recreation Research, 28(3), 63e72

Broad, S., & Jenkins, J. (2008). Gibbons in their midst? Conservation volunteers' motivations at the Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, Phuket, Thailand. In K. Lyon, & S. Wearing (Eds.), Journeys of discovery in volunteer tourism: International case study perspectives (pp. 72e85). Cambridge, MA: CABI Publishing.

Brown, P. (2003). Mind the gap: Why student year out may do more harm than good. Retrieved November 12, 2008, from The Guardian. Web site: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2003/sep/06/highereducation.gapyears.

Brown, S. (2005). Travelling with a purpose: understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers. Current Issues in Tourism, 8(6), 479e496.

Brown, S. and Lehto, X. (2005) Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers. *Current Issues in Tourism* 8 (6), 479–496.

Brown, S., & Morrison, A. (2003). Expanding volunteer vacation participation e an exploratory study on the mini-mission concept. Tourism Recreation Research,

Budruk, M., & Phillips, R. (2011). Quality-of-life community indicators for parks, recreation and

tourism management. London: Springer ScienceþBusiness Media.

Callanan, M., & Thomas, S. (2005). Volunteer tourism: deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment. In M. Novelli (Ed.), Niche Tourism: Contemporary issues, trends and cases (pp. 183e200). Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Campbell, L., & Smith, C. (2006). What makes them pay? Values of volunteer tourists working for Sea Turtle Conservation. Environmental Management, 38(1),

Caton, K., & Santos, C. (2009). Images of the other: selling study abroad in a postcolonial world. Journal of Travel Research, 48(2), 191e204.

Clifton, J., & Benson, A. M. (2006). Planning for sustainable ecotourism: the case of research ecotourism in developing country destinations. Journal of Sustainable

Coghlan, A., & Gooch, M. (2011). Applying a transformative learning framework to volunteer tourism. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 19(6), 713e728.

Conran, M. (2011). They really love me! Intimacy in volunteer tourism. Annals of Tourism Research, 38(4), 1454e1473

Crabtree, R.D. (1998) Mutual empowerment in cross-cultural participatory development and service learning: Lessons in communication and social justice from projects in El Salvador and Nicaragua. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 26 (2), 182– 209.

Devereux, P. (2008). International volunteering for development and sustainability: outdated

paternalism or a radical response to globalisation? Development in Practice, 18(3), 357e370.

Galley, G., & Clifton, J. (2004). The motivational and demographic characteristics of research ecotourists: operation Wallacea volunteers in South-east Sulawesi,

Griffin, T. (2004) A discourse analysis of UK sourced gap year overseas projects. Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of theWest of England.

Guttentag, D. A. (2009). The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism. International Journal of Tourism Research, 11(6), 537e551.

Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2003) Reconciliation tourism: Tourism healing divided societies! *Tourism Recreation Research* 28 (3), 35–44.

Holmes, K., & Smith, K. (2009). Managing volunteers in tourism: Attractions, destinations and events. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Holmes, K., Smith, K. A., Lockstone-Binney, L., & Baum, T. (2010). Developing the dimensions of tourism volunteering. Leisure Sciences, 32(3), 255e269. Indonesia. Journal of Ecotourism, 3(1), 69e82.

Jafari, J. (2001). The scientification of tourism. In V. L. Smith, & M. Brent (Eds.), Hosts and guests revisited: Issues of the 21st century (pp. 28e41). Elmsford, NY: Cognizant.

Ledwith, M. (2005). Personal narratives/political lives: personal reflection as a tool for collective change. Reflective Practice, 6(2). London: Taylor & Francis

Lewis, D. (2005) Globalisation and international service: A development perspective. *Voluntary Action* 7 (2), 13–25.

Lyons, K. (2003). Ambiguities in volunteer tourism: a case study of Australians participating

in a J-1 visitor exchange programme. Tourism Recreation Research,

Lyons, K. D., & Wearing, S. (2008). Volunteer tourism as alternative tourism: journeys beyond otherness. In K. D. Lyons, & S. Wearing (Eds.), Journeys of discovery in volunteer tourism: International case study perspectives (pp. 3e12). London, UK: CABI

McGehee, N. (2002). Alternative tourism and social movements. Annals of Tourism Research, 29, 124e143

McGehee, N. G., & Norman, W. (2002). Alternative tourism as impetus for consciousness-raising. Tourism Analysis, 6, 239e251

McGehee, N., & Andereck, K. (2008). 'Pettin' the critters': exploring the complex relationship between volunteers and the voluntoured in McDowell County, WV, USA and Tijuana, Mexico.

McGehee, N., & Andereck, K. (2009). Volunteer tourism and the "voluntoured": the case of Tijuana, Mexico. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 17(1), 39e51.

McGehee, N., & Santos, C. (2005). Social change, discourse, and volunteer tourism. Annals of Tourism Research, 32(3), 760e779.

McIntosh, A. J., & Zahra, A. (2005). Alternative cultural experiences through volunteer tourism. Paper presented at the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), Catalonia, Spain.

Miller, G., & Twining-Ward, L. (2005). Monitoring for a sustainable tourism transition. Wallingford: CABI Publishing.

Mustonen, P. (2005). Volunteer tourism: postmodern pilgrimage? Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, 3(3), 160e177.

Nestora, A., Yeung, P., & Calderon, H. (2009). Volunteer travel insights 2009. Bradt travel guides, Lasso communications. GeckoGo. Report can be found online at:http://www.geckogo.com/volunteer/report2009

Palacios, C. (2010). Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: conceiving global connections beyond aid. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 18(7), 861e878.

Raymond, E.,&Hall, C. (2008). The development of cross-cultural (mis)understanding through volunteer tourism. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 16(5), 530e543.

Reed, M., Fraser, E., & Dougill, A. (2005). An adaptive learning process for developing and applying sustainability indicators with local communities. Ecological Economics, 59, 406–418.

Routledge.

Schianetz, K., & Kavanagh, L. (2008). Sustainability indicators for tourism destinations: A complex adaptive systems approach using systemic indicator systems. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 16(6), 601–628.

Simpson, K. (2004) 'Doing development': The gap year, volunteer-tourists and a popular practice of development. *Journal of International Development* 16 (5), 681–692.

Simpson, K. (2005a) Dropping out or signing up? The professionalisation of youth travel. *Antipode* 37 (3), 447–469.

Simpson, K. (2005b) Broad horizons? Geographies and pedagogies of the gap year. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Newcastle.

Sin, H. L. (2009). Volunteer tourism: "Involve me and I will learn"? Annals of Tourism Research, 36(3), 480e501.

Singh, T. V. (2002). Altruistic tourism: another shade of sustainable tourism: the case of Kanda community. Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 50(4), 371e381.

Singh, T. V. (2004). New horizons in tourism: Strange experiences and stranger practices. Wallingford: CABI Publishing.

Sirakaya, E., Jamal, T.B., & Choi, H.S. (2001). Developing indicators for destination sustainability. In D. Weaver (Ed.), The encyclopedia of ecotourism (pp. 411–429). Wallingford: CABI Publishing.

Söderman, N., & Snead, S. (2008). Opening the gap: the motivation of gap year travellers to volunteer in Latin America. In K. D. Lyons, & S. Wearing (Eds.),

Stoddart, H., & Rogerson, C. M. (2004). Volunteer tourism: the case of Habitat for Humanity South Africa. GeoJournal, 60(3), 311e318

Theerapappisit, P. (2009). Pro-poor ethnic tourism in the Mekong: a study of three approaches in Northern Thailand. Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 14(2), 201e221

Tomazos, K., & Butler, R. (2010). The volunteer tourist as 'hero'. Current Issues in Tourism, 13(4), 363e380

United Planet (2007) Mission. OnWWWat http://www.unitedplanet.org/mission.html. Accessed 26.2.07.

Uriely, N., & Reichel, A. (2000). Working tourists and their attitudes to hosts. Annals of Tourism Research, 27(2), 267e283.

Uriely, N., Reichel, A., & Ron, A. (2003). Volunteering in tourism: additional thinking. Tourism Recreation Research, 28(3), 57e62.

Vrasti, W. (2013). Volunteer tourism in the global south: Giving back in neoliberal times. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Wearing, S. (2001) *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*. Oxon: CABI.

Wearing, S. (2001). Volunteer tourism: Experiences that make a difference. Wallingford: CABI.

Wearing, S. (2002). Re-centering the self in volunteer tourism. In G. M. S. Dann (Ed.), The tourist as a metaphor of the social world (pp. 237e262). New York: CABI Publishing.

Wearing, S. (2003). Volunteer tourism. Tourism Recreation Research, 28(3), 3e4.

Wearing, S. (2004). Examining best practice in volunteer tourism. In R. A. Stebbins, & M. Graham (Eds.), Volunteering as leisure/leisure as volunteering: An international assessment (pp. 209e224). Wallingford: CABI.

Wearing, S., & Neil, J. (2000). Refiguring self and identity through volunteer tourism. Society and Leisure, 23(2), 389e419.

Wearing, S., & Neil, J. (2003). Expanding sustainable tourism's conceptualization: ecotourism, volunteerism and serious leisure. In S. F. McCool, & R. N. Moisey (Eds.), Tourism, recreation and sustainability: Linking culture and the environment (pp. 233e254). Wallingford: CABI.

Wickens, E. (2010). Journeys of the self. Volunteer tourists in Nepal. In A. Benson (Ed.), Volunteer tourism. Theory framework to practical applications). Oxon, UK:

World Tourism Organization. (2004). Indicators of sustainable development for tourism destinations: A guidebook. Madrid: Author.