



DISSEMINATING THE VOICE OF THE OTHER

A Case Study of Philanthropic Tourism

Gary Lacey, Vicki Peel

Monash University, Australia

Betty Weiler

Southern Cross University, Australia

Abstract: Using a constructivist ethnographic approach, this paper explores the extent to which philanthropic tourists visiting a school and orphanage in East Africa were able to hear and voice the concerns of their hosts. While some authors suggest that there is insufficient time during a holiday experience for tourists to become emotionally involved with host populations, other studies reveal that emotional connections can be made by philanthropically motivated individuals within a remarkably short space of time. This study suggests that motivation and opportunity are paramount in facilitating the dissemination of the local voice in the context of short tourism encounters. In this study, one major issue with a charitable project was successfully disseminated by philanthropic tourists who brought about change at the request of local people. Increased monitoring of philanthropic projects is required to heed the voice of the Other. **Keywords:** voice of the Other, Philanthropic Tourism, motivation, East Africa. © 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Taking account of the subjective voice of local people is widely regarded as vital to the enablement of self-identity in a society or sub-culture (see Akama, 2002; Bell, 1992; Zimmerman, 2008, chap. 3). In the context of tourism development, acknowledgement of the Other is understood to be an essential underpinning of sustainable planning, particularly in the community-based and volunteer tourism literatures (see Beeton, 2006; Wearing & Wearing, 2001). This research suggests that alternative forms of tourism have the potential to be more than commod-

Gary Lacey (4/77 Holden Street, North Fitzroy, 3068 Vic., Australia. Email <garylaceyl@hotmail.com, gary.lacey@monash.edu>) is an early career researcher born in Kenya and currently affiliated with the Department of Management and the Australian International Tourism Research Unit at Monash University. His main research interests are in poverty alleviation and local empowerment, especially within sub-Saharan Africa. **Vicki Peel** is an historian with the National Centre for Australian studies and the Australian International Tourism Research Unit at Monash University. She has interests in guidebooks, regional development and backpacking. **Betty Weiler** is a professor at the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Southern Cross University and has interests in interpretation, planning and voluntourism.

ified experiences based on superficial interactions between tourists and entrepreneurs or hosts. Yet, can holiday experiences which are of short duration be expected to facilitate the deep interactions that are presumably required for the voice of the Other to be heard and, if so, under what conditions (Aramberri, 2001; Bruner, 1991; Gallani-Moutafi, 2000)?

This paper seeks to answer these questions in relation to the under-researched genre of philanthropically motivated travel. An examination is made of the motivations, opportunities and time frames that might have an impact on the process of disseminating and acting upon the concerns of local people within a Philanthropic Tourism context. These conditions are explored through a focussed examination of the multi-layered engagement between four stakeholder groups of a philanthropic project in an East African country. These groups comprise philanthropic tourists, tour operators and owners of the mission, staff and students at the site, and local farmers and villagers. The study explores the role of each group in hindering or facilitating the dissemination of the host voice as a result of their engagement, offering insights into the role of short-stay tourists in responding to complaints of poor practices and alleged criminal behaviour, occurring in the destination.

An initial review of current research drawing on literature from both tourism anthropology and philanthropic behaviour informed by multiple disciplines addresses two leading themes of the research. Firstly, understanding of the voice of the Other as a component of guest–host relations is identified. Secondly, a review of the literature on philanthropic motivations focuses on the tourist drive to make personal or emotional connections and to act philanthropically in the tourism setting. These theoretical perspectives inform the study approach, research methods and sources of data used in the paper. A number of preconditions that appear to be necessary if philanthropic tourists are to play a role in giving a voice to local concerns are addressed in the conclusion.

THE VOICE OF THE OTHER IN TOURIST–HOST RELATIONS

Tourism studies have established the existence of a rift between tourist and host, a sense of Otherness blamed on the essentially commercial nature of social exchanges that occur in a tourism context (Aramberri, 2001). In addition, the tendency toward cross-cultural incompetence and neo-colonialism on the part of tourists (see Burns & Barrie, 2005) does not bode well for the establishment of meaningful relationships with host populations (Fopp, 2008). Much research has concentrated on the perceived socio-economic gap between the stereotypical wealthy Western tourist and impoverished Third World host as central to this division (Aramberri, 2001; Gallani-Moutafi, 2000; Graburn, 1983). It is in such engagements that the gap is most clearly expressed through the tendency of tourists to passively observe their hosts rather than to seek meaningful engagement with them (Urry, 1995). This tendency is believed to be exacerbated by the short dura-

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