



An exploration of the motivations for volunteering: A study of international volunteer tourists to Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Many issues surrounding the motivations of volunteer tourists to developing countries remain unresolved. This paper investigates the motives of volunteer tourists to Ghana. A survey was undertaken of 410 volunteer tourists in Ghana and the results indicate that three key motivations: (altruism and learning, philanthropy, and socialization), influence the decision to volunteer in Ghana. However, for international volunteerism in Ghana, the main motivation is that of altruism and learning. Differences were found among the volunteer tourists due to past travel experience including duration of past trips, education, past volunteer activity and the amount of money committed to volunteering in Ghana.

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1. Introduction

The concept of volunteer tourism has seen growth in the past few decades because of its emphasis on helping alleviate the needs of others. Volunteer tourism occurs in various forms including travelling for internship (Billig & Root, 2006; Bringle & Hatcher, 2011; Simons & Cleary, 2005), study tour (Haloburdo & Thompson, 1998; Heron, 2005), international gap year (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012), student exchange programs (Lyons & Wearing, 2008), charity work, service-learning programs (Yates & Youniss, 1998) and career break (Gilmour & Saunders, 1995). Irrespective of the forms volunteer tourism takes, motivations are crucial for travel.

Over the decade, Ghana has been a key recipient of international volunteer tourists (Novelli, 2005; Tomazos & Butler, 2009). Statistical evidence of the subject however remains scanty even from government sources. Authors including Boakye (2012) observe that international students often travel to the villages in Ghana for voluntary work. There is however little empirical evidence to explain the motivations of these volunteers to the country.

Besides, researchers have varying conclusions regarding the issue of volunteer motivation. Brown and Lehto (2005) equally argue that no single motivational theory has yet fully connected with the hard facts of volunteer motivation consistently and with results that can be replicated. Harrison (2003) similarly noted that while the motivation to

travel for mainstream travellers is the same, specific market segments such as volunteer tourism lack such common motivation. Though general literature tends to support the notion that volunteers have a helping disposition towards host communities, emerging studies seem to suggest that the nature of volunteer tourism is more about the gains made by the volunteers rather than those being helped. Gilfillan (2006) and Simpson (2004) highlight that benefits to host organizations and communities are less clear particularly as volunteers become the focus rather than host communities. Dumélie, Kunze, Pankhurst, Potter, and Van Bruene (2006) also hold the view that short-term placements may be less cost-effective and may interrupt continuity of service. Smith (1981) suggests that volunteering is essentially motivated by the expectation of psychic benefits of some kind as a result of activities that have a market value greater than any remuneration received for such activities.

This paper is a response to calls for more empirical examination of the motivations of volunteer tourists using a large-scale survey (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Chen & Chen, 2011). Suffice to say, it is only in understanding volunteers' motivations that satisfaction, longer stay and repeat visit can be guaranteed. This study therefore explores the motivation of volunteer tourists to Ghana.

1.1. Context of the study

There is an important body of research dealing with the motives and desires of tourists as well as their planning procedures. Nonetheless, Fodness (1994) has stated that empirical research concerning the motives of tourists is an important area in tourism that has yielded few existing results. Similarly, Kozak (2001) also rationalize that it is imperative for empirical examination of tourist motivation to be undertaken, since this will help to identify the attributes that are to be promoted,

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so as to match tourist motivations, or identify markets in which tourist motivations and destination features and resources match. As stated by Moscardo, Morrison, Pearce, Lang, and O'Leary (1996), analyzing motivation and activities is important in understanding choice of destinations. This understanding will enable destinations enhance their image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Trauer & Ryan, 2005) and increase satisfaction and loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

More specifically, Zhang and Marcussen (2007) have stated that understanding the perceptions and motivations of volunteer tourists is principal for retaining these volunteers. The retention, in their opinion, will influence destination choice and image, and its interplay with tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Equally, Rose and Vitartas (2007) have studied that when volunteers perceive that their motivations for wanting to volunteer are matched by the benefits they are gaining, the outcome of volunteering is more positive and satisfying. Subsequently, the motivation of volunteer tourists has an influential role in their decision and enjoyment of Ghana as a destination.

1.2. Motivations of volunteer tourists

Though a plethora of motivations exists for volunteering, two main motivations of volunteering are identified in the literature (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Simpson, 2004). In its basic form, volunteering has been explained as people wanting to help others. This motive has been described as an altruistic motive. The volunteer in this regard partakes in the placement for 'selfless' reasons and the desire to help others in need of their services. However, there has also been significant research which suggests that although altruism may be present in many types of volunteering, there is a second broad group of egotistic factors (for example Hibbert, Piacentini, & Al Dajan, 2003). That is, by the benefits volunteers receive from being involved in the placement such as career development, and strengthening relationship with friends and families. Smith, Macauley, and Associates (1980) challenge the notion of altruism suggesting that volunteers are motivated solely by their own interests rather than any form of altruism.

Rehberg (2005) supports the view that volunteering motivations are multifaceted in that they occur in combination with each other rather than in isolation. Brown and Lehto (2005) found that volunteer tourists have four main motives: cultural immersion; giving back and making a difference; seeking camaraderie with fellow volunteers; and family bonding and education. In their study, participants wanted immersion in the local culture in hopes that it would lead to connections with the local people. According to these researchers, the immersion led to relationships with the hosts for some participants. Giving back and making a difference were the only motives that did not seem the tourist expected something in return. To the researchers, giving back and making a difference gave the volunteer tourist a sense of purpose.

Gilmour and Saunders (1995) also identified that people volunteer to take a break from the routine of their lives, to see countries with someone who knows how the country and its ecosystems work, to be active, to widen their horizons and to do something different, rather than a passive holiday which might focus on lying around on beaches. In the United States, Yates and Youniss (1998) aver that volunteering through service-learning programs and education courses serve as processed educational experiences and, therefore, broadens ones horizons.

Clary et al. (1998) also suggested six broad functions served by volunteering. These are the opportunities to express one's values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others (Values), opportunities for new learning experiences, and to exercise one's knowledge, skills, and abilities (Understanding), opportunities to be with one's friends or to engage in an activity viewed favorably by others (Social), experiences that may be obtained from participation in volunteer work (Career), reduced guilt over being more fortunate than others and addressing one's own personal problems (Protective), and the ego's growth and development (Enhancement). Clary et al. (1998) suggest that the extent to which the volunteering experiences fulfill

these functions relates to satisfaction with volunteer activities. Stoddart and Rogerson (2004), however, point out that motivations of volunteer tourists differ from the escapist travel motives of non-volunteer tourists, and do not generally pursue the typical international tourist itinerary.

Soderman and Snead (2008) found a variety of motivational factors, including helping others, developing careers and learning skills. Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) also found that the volunteer tourists were motivated to develop skills and relationships with other people, as well as to travel to a unique destination.

The commonly accepted terminologies for motivation in volunteer tourism are altruism, travel and adventure, personal growth, cultural exchange and learning, professional development, right time and place, and the individual program itself (Wearing, 2001). Pearce and Lee (2005) however caution that people may start with a different type of travel motivation which may shift over travel experience and life stages. Thus, it is conceivable that other factors including travel experience may have a strong interaction effect on travel motivation and intention (Lee, 2011).

1.3. Conceptual framework

As part of the effort to identify the factors that influence volunteer tourists' decision to volunteer their services in Ghana, a number of theories and models were reviewed. After an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of various models including the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), push-pull theory (Crompton, 1979), social movement theory (McGehee, 2002), optimal arousal theory (Iso-Ahola, 1982), and cost-benefit analysis (Handy & Mook, 2011) the researchers considered the push-pull theory (Crompton, 1979) as a suitable framework for developing an understanding of volunteer motivation to Ghana.

In the perspective of tourism, the push-pull model is the decomposition of a tourist's choice of destination into two forces. Push motives have been regarded useful for explaining the desire to go on a vacation while pull motives have been useful in explaining the choice of destination. Goossens (2000) argues that tourists are pushed away from home by emotional needs and pulled towards a destination because of the emotional benefits the destination offers.

Wearing (2001) mentions that push factors are the internal and psychological forces, which leads an individual to seek a volunteer tourism experience. For the purpose of this study, the push motives refers to the availability elsewhere of experiences that may not be found at the generating region. Push motivations appear to benefit the volunteer directly. Such push motivations may include variables as having a good time and establishing newer relations with host community and volunteer colleagues. Others include the quest to be knowledgeable about host culture. These motives reflect the influence of the destination in stirring volunteer tourists' desire to undertake the travel. Kozak (2001) acknowledges the usefulness of this concept to model the intangible, intrinsic desires of tourists who go on vacation.

The second force is of the 'pull' type, a region-specific lure that draws volunteer tourists towards a destination. This aspect comprises tangible characteristics or attributes of a destination that are primarily related to the perceived attractiveness of a destination. From Crompton (1979), these pull factors are influenced by the destination rather than emerging exclusively from within the traveller himself. For the purpose of this study, the pull forces depict the opportunities or gaps that necessitate the services of volunteer tourists. They appear to be the benefits volunteers render (or believe they render) to the host communities or organisations they visit. It includes such variables as opportunity to provide social development, financial and material donation, construction of social infrastructure and teaching in orphanages.

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