



# Volunteer Tourism:

## Does it have a place in Development?

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signed:\_\_\_\_\_ Name:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_

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# Introduction

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Everywhere you look today people are being drawn, often unawares, into the trend of 'development': sponsored charity walks, pay per click internet fundraising, the donation of time and money, concerts and album recordings, 'Fairtrade' shopping.<sup>1</sup> Whilst living in the UK in the early 2000s it became increasingly noticeable to me that in the highly competitive charity and travel sectors alternatives were being sought to either assist in the development of poor communities or to attract customers via new products. Volunteering as part of a holiday was becoming the new 'fad'. Promoted as an opportunity to experience a different culture whilst doing something constructive and worthwhile for a developing community, it was the new fashionable way to 'do development'.

Like many other initiatives in development, concern has been raised as to whether volunteer tourism can truly add value to the development of poor communities. Is it, in fact, merely a tourism product? This thesis is an innovative attempt to call volunteer tourism to account. Through examination of the new phenomenon and an analysis of literature and examples in relation to development and volunteer tourism, it will consider whether volunteer tourism has a place in development.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. By requiring companies to pay sustainable prices (which must never fall lower than the market price), Fairtrade addresses the injustices of conventional trade, which traditionally discriminates against the poorest, weakest producers. It enables them to improve their position and have more control over their lives.'  
[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/faqs.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/faqs.aspx)

To do so, the first chapter will examine the ground breaking initiatives that have infiltrated the development cause in recent decades and assess the value they have provided in poverty alleviation and capacity building. Chapter Two, focuses on one ground breaking initiative in particular, volunteer tourism. The main interest of Chapter Two is to introduce the reader to the concept of volunteer tourism and to evaluate it as a niche tourism product in today's post modern world. Chapter Three provides an analysis of development initiatives of the past and what approaches have the greatest potential for success. This analysis forms the basis of an examination later in the chapter; assessing whether volunteer tourism fits within the framework of development. Finally, concluding remarks highlight the complexity of the volunteer tourism concept and call for further research into the new phenomenon – volunteer tourism.

# Chapter One

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## The Innovative Approach

### Poverty, Development and Innovation

Throughout the world millions of people live in extreme poverty, struggling each day to meet the bare necessities for survival while lacking access to education and employment. The plight of those living in poverty has been, and continues to be, a concern of governments, charities, non-government organisations (NGOs) and individuals world wide. As such, thousands of aid and development workers operating 'on the ground' are challenged daily as they seek solutions for poverty alleviation and the development of poor communities. A report by the South Commission defines development as:

a process which enables human beings to realise their potential, build self-confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfilment. It is a process which frees people from the fear of want and exploitation. It is a movement away from political, economic, or social oppression.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, gaining these freedoms is a distant reality for many. This does not mean, however, that the world has given up the struggle of development. In recent years new and innovative approaches and development initiatives have been implemented to improve conditions, gain greater assistance and to raise awareness of the predicament of those living in poverty. This chapter will introduce some of the innovative approaches that, although on first glance have no apparent link to people living in poverty, actually challenge conservative development thinking

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<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_, *The Challenge to the South: the report of the South Commission*. South Commission (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990),10.

by successfully making an impact on poverty alleviation and the development of struggling communities.

Arguably, the most famous example of an innovative approach is 'Live Aid'. In 1984, Bob Geldof, lead singer of Irish rock band *Boomtown Rats*, witnessed a devastating famine in Ethiopia. Appalled by the conditions people were facing, he returned to the United Kingdom determined to assist in the famine relief. This was the catalyst for several initiatives, starting with the release of the song, 'Do they know it's Christmas?' later that year.<sup>3</sup> A best seller, it raised more than US\$10 million for Ethiopian famine relief.<sup>4</sup> The famine continued, however, and by 1985, the crisis had spread further to neighbouring Sudan. It was at this time that Geldof proposed an innovative solution to raising relief funds as well as directing the world's attention to the plight of starving Africans:

On July 13, 1985, at Wembley Stadium in London, Prince Charles and Princess Diana officially open[ed] 'Live Aid', a worldwide rock concert organised to raise money for the relief of famine-stricken Africans. Continued at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia and at other arenas around the world, the 16-hour "superconcert" was globally linked by satellite to more than a billion viewers in 110 nations. In a triumph of technology and good will the event raised more than [US] \$125 million in famine relief.<sup>5</sup>

Live Aid had produced a new weapon in the fight against poverty: 'people power'. The innovation of using entertainment to gain mass publicity for poverty alleviation had created a momentum for change as people around the world were made aware of the plight of those living in poverty.

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<sup>3</sup> The song was performed by several leading pop artists united under the name 'Band Aid'.

<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_, "July 13, 1985 'Live Aid' concert." <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history.do?action=VideoArticle&id=6957>

<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_, "July 13, 1985 'Live Aid' concert."



The engagement of people power continues today. In 2005, Geldof again sought to raise awareness of global poverty through a series of concerts known as 'Live 8'. Scheduled to coincide with the annual G8 summit<sup>6</sup> and as a part of the 'Make Poverty History' campaign, the concerts were used as a vehicle for applying political pressure on the G8 nations to address the issues facing the poor of the world. It is estimated that 3 billion people watched these concerts worldwide.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Live Aid, however, the Live 8 concerts were not fundraisers but a means of gaining the collective voice of 'the people'. Consequently, Live 8 has been credited in part with successfully pressuring the G8 that year into agreeing to cancel the debt of 18 of the poorest nations and doubling levels of aid to Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Mass publicity and worldwide marketing have ensured that Make Poverty History is now a widely recognised slogan in western societies. The slogan signifies the obligation of greater action by developed countries to eliminate poverty, particularly through the areas of trade, debt and aid.<sup>9</sup> Following in the footsteps of Live Aid, the Make Poverty History campaign is using

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<sup>6</sup> The G8 consists of France, UK, US, Germany, Italy, Japan, Canada and Russia. The leaders of these countries meet annually with an aim to "boost cooperation over trade and finance, strengthen the global economy, promote peace and democracy [and] prevent and resolve conflicts". The implementation of any agreements made by the group is voluntary.

Profile G8. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country\\_profiles/3777557.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/country_profiles/3777557.stm)

<sup>7</sup> Make Poverty History. <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/2005/index.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> \_\_\_\_, "July 13, 1985 'Live Aid' concert" and Make Poverty History.  
<http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/2005/index.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> Make Poverty History. <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org>

people to initiate change. Promotional material used in the campaign, and in particular the 'white band', has been used to powerful effect.<sup>10</sup> For example, in 2005, the year white bands were introduced, 8 million people in the UK alone wore one on White Band Days to symbolise the global fight to end poverty.<sup>11</sup> Since then 'Stand Up Against Poverty', an annual event facilitated by the Make Poverty History campaign continues to grow. The event:

is a worldwide call for action against poverty and inequality and for the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>12</sup> In 2007, 43.7 million people worldwide participated [in the event]...setting a new Guinness World Record for the largest single coordinated movement of people in the history of the Guinness World Record.<sup>13</sup>

Innovative thinking has harnessed peoples' will and created a global energy for tackling poverty.

Yet not only does poverty still exist but the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' continues to widen:<sup>14</sup>

Over the last two decades global output has risen from \$4 trillion to \$23 trillion... and at the same time the numbers of the poor have increased by more than twenty percent.<sup>15</sup>

'Thinking outside the box', therefore, continues to be a necessity in the quest for solutions for poverty alleviation and the development of poor communities.

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<sup>10</sup> The 'white band' is used by the Make Poverty History campaign as the symbol of the global fight to end poverty. Introduced in 2005, it is an unfussy and flexible white band that people wear around their wrists; its simplicity allowing anyone, anywhere, to be able to wear one. Alternatively, on White Band Days people have also formed large human bands as well as wrapped trees, lamp posts and buildings with a white band; buildings including: St Paul's Cathedral and the European Parliament. <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/whiteband/>

<sup>11</sup> Make Poverty History. <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org>

<sup>12</sup> 'The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals to be achieved by 2015 that respond to the world's main development challenges. The MDGs are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration that was adopted ... during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000.' The eight MDGs are: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/Aids, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development . <http://www.undp.org/mdg/basics.shtml> Accessed 20 October 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Make Poverty History (Australia). <http://www.makepovertyhistory.com.au/standup.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2002), 45 – 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 47.

## On a Mission to be Innovative

The innovative potential intimated by 'thinking outside the box' has been used to effect, in a joint venture between World Vision and Channel Four in the UK. World Vision, an international aid and humanitarian organisation, is experienced in working with the complexities of development, aid and poverty, and yet, they acknowledge that they do not have all the answers.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, in 2006 World Vision, in conjunction with Channel Four, went in search of eight British self-made millionaires to participate in a television series, *Millionaires' Mission*. The underlying challenge of the series was whether or not 'lessons [could] be learned from giving a group of successful business people the opportunity to try and tackle some of the problems of poverty', and perhaps, create sustainable solutions not previously considered by charities.<sup>17</sup> The location for the series was Uganda, where the millionaires would work alongside communities in the Rukiga region close to the Rwandan border.<sup>18</sup> At the time of filming, World Vision had been working in the Rukiga region for 12 years and had built up an understanding of the issues local communities were facing. Some of these included: too many people and not enough land, little surplus from a primarily subsistence existence, a lack of easily accessible water, poorly funded medical services and difficulty in gaining fair prices for marketable goods.<sup>19</sup> These issues confronted the millionaires upon their arrival.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> World Vision, "Making the Series," [www.worldvision.com.au/millionaires/makingtheseries.aspx](http://www.worldvision.com.au/millionaires/makingtheseries.aspx)

<sup>17</sup> Channel 4 (UK). [www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa/index.html](http://www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa/index.html)

<sup>18</sup> World Vision, "Making the Series".

<sup>19</sup> World Vision, "Making the Series".

<sup>20</sup> The entrepreneur millionaires were vital to the 'Mission'. All were successful self made millionaires selected for their entrepreneurial thinking as well as their diverse experiences. All had shown, through their experiences, they were innovative and had a drive to succeed: Dominic McVey, 22 years old, made his first million at the age of 15 by selling micro-scooters; Steve Morgan has accumulated a wealth of over 450 million through his involvement in the construction industry; Yvonne Thompson founded a public relations company and radio station; Pepita Diamond co-founded a wedding list service with a multi-million pound turnover; Shahid Azeem, expelled from school, established a business in the PC market which now turns over in excess of £10 million a year; Tony Callaghan started earning money from a mobile disco at 17 years of age, bought his first nightclub at 20, and founded a pub chain worth approximately £30 million; Deidre Bounds set up a leading travel company; Seb Bishop pioneered a pay-per click online advertising business that sold in 2004 for £200 million. Success for the millionaires had primarily been through determination and an ability to 'think outside the box' rather than a reliance on education and status. As World Vision acknowledges, bringing together eight strong personalities was a risk, yet given their

## Are Good Intentions Enough?

Despite the underlying good intentions of those involved in the making of the series, *Millionaires' Mission* has attracted controversy. Lucy Mangan of *The Guardian* (UK) criticised the series as an inappropriate reality TV show:

Here, the undertaking is less meaningless than most, but the time limit even more ludicrous than usual. Such a ridiculously short length of time to invent and execute a truly beneficial plan suggests that the need to help the village had always taken second place in the producers' minds to the need to make a watchable programme, which, added to the moral qualms about whether African poverty is a suitable subject for reality TV gimmickry in the first place, only added to the pervading sense of exploitation.<sup>21</sup>

*Millionaires' Mission* had used poverty as a spectacle. This raises the question of whether this approach is appropriate. Based on arguments put forward in relation to the growing niche market of slum tourism, there are arguments for and against its use. Like *Millionaires' Mission*, slum tourism utilises the spectacle of poverty, with the slums of Brazil, Africa and Asia becoming tourist destinations as tour companies offer tourists an opportunity to view the 'reality' of urban poverty.<sup>22</sup> Those offering the tours argue that slum tours provide an opportunity to raise awareness and for visitors to gain a greater understanding of the plight of those living in poverty. Critics, however, view this market as exploitative, accusing tour operators as providing

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entrepreneurial expertise, it was envisaged that there was a likelihood they would identify feasible options for building the capacity of the communities they would be working with.

<sup>21</sup> Lucy Mangan, "Last night's TV: Millionaires' Mission", [http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/tv/2007/09/last\\_nights\\_tv\\_millionaires\\_mi.html](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/tv/2007/09/last_nights_tv_millionaires_mi.html)

<sup>22</sup> As a new trend it is difficult to gauge the size and growth of this industry. At this stage the material available does not provide statistics, but rather broad information, largely through newspaper articles and editorials. Two relevant references are noted below in footnote 23.

mere voyeuristic entertainment, as poverty becomes the exhibit for all to see.<sup>23</sup> Putting aside the economic incentives to use poverty as a spectacle, there are also good intentions behind its use. This is evident in both *Millionaires' Mission* and slum tourism. Is voyeurism and spectacle, therefore, such a bad thing if there are positive impacts for those living in poverty?

It can be argued that to mobilise 'the masses', the masses need to be subjected to the reality of a situation. Live Aid, *Millionaires' Mission* and slum tourism are examples of how entertainment has been, and continues to be, used to provide people with information and greater understanding. Without this raised awareness, successes such as those achieved by Live Aid and Live 8 may never have been possible. Such approaches, however, challenge current development theory, which in turn, invites concern that they can not, and are not, assisting in the development of poor communities. After all, even if successful, the use of entertainment and mass publicity to harness people power for the purposes of both charity and social activism can only go so far towards meeting the objective of development.

## **Development and Capacity Building are Not Easy**

Theories of development are complicated. The series, *Millionaires' Mission*, highlights the difficulties faced in development work and how easy it is to misinterpret and misread situations when placed within a culture different from that which we are familiar. As Rudo Kwaramba, a development expert and advocacy campaigner working alongside the millionaires points out:

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<sup>23</sup> Eric Weiner, "Slum Visits: Tourism or Voyeurism?," *New York Times*, March 9, 2008 and Riddhi Shah, "Sun, Sand and Slums; with slum tourism becoming the latest exotica, India's poverty-ridden underbelly is getting dollar-rich visitors," *India Today*, October 9, 2006, 76.

I realised that the entrepreneurs might have even more work cut out for them than I imagined. They did not know the local people, culture or politicians, solutions that make sense in the UK may not work here... So my first words of advice were: listen a lot, work alongside people, do not try to lead and always peel back the layers to get to the root of the problem. There will always be a root cause that must be tackled.<sup>24</sup>

This advice fits in with World Vision's approach to development, in that, World Vision works in partnership with local communities to identify community needs, to determine long term solutions, and to enable local people to control their own destinies.<sup>25</sup> The objective of *Millionaires' Mission* was to assist in this process by working with local communities to identify projects that have the capacity for future growth. Although the millionaire entrepreneurs considered several options, three key projects were the focus of the television series; providing electricity to the local maternity hospital, a crop store, and the Teach Inn Hotel.

From the outset, providing electricity to the local hospital had an ominous tone to it. As already pointed out, *Millionaires' Mission* illustrates how easy it is to misinterpret situations through a lack of understanding. This project is an example of how good intentions can result in unintended consequences if the level of understanding is inadequate. For reasons not evident in the film, some of the millionaire entrepreneurs ignored their brief and Kwaramba's advice by going ahead with wiring the maternity hospital. What the millionaires had failed to do, however, was to identify the root cause as to why the hospital had, up to that time, been without electricity.

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<sup>24</sup> World Vision, "Making the Series".

<sup>25</sup> World Vision, "What is development".

If they had done so, they would have discovered that the Ugandan health system was in crisis, and did not have the capacity to fund the ongoing provision of electricity to the hospital. The project, therefore, was doomed to fail and set the community up for disappointment when the electricity was cut due to unpaid bills.<sup>26</sup>

The second project was far more successful. The idea behind the crop store was to incorporate 'collective bargaining' to provide villagers with greater power when negotiating a price for their produce. A subsistence farmer lacks the resources to demand high prices for the small surplus he/she produces. The crop store would allow farmers from two villages to collectively pool their produce, storing it until a time of high demand. By selling the produce out of season, and in large quantities, the farmers were better placed to negotiate higher prices. Once backed by the community, the project could easily be owned and carried on by a cooperative, thus offering a sustainable solution to overcoming the issues of poverty and development in the area.<sup>27</sup> Three months after the crop store was built the community had 396 members in the cooperative and had 'sold 40 bags of potatoes at a 15% premium to a buyer from Kampala'.<sup>28</sup> The crop store has the potential for long term investment by the cooperative and to demonstrate a business model that can be replicated in neighbouring villages. This project, therefore, is an example which follows good development principles and the resulting success of the project lies solely in the hands of the local community; they were consulted throughout the process, and have been provided with the information and capacity to ensure the project can reap future rewards for the community.

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<sup>26</sup> Channel 4 (UK), *Millionaires Mission* (2007), Television Series.

<sup>27</sup> Channel 4 (UK). *Millionaires Mission*.

<sup>28</sup> Channel 4 (UK), "The Projects". [www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa](http://www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa)

## Challenging conservative development thinking

Of the three projects, the Teach Inn Hotel was recognised as the project that had the greatest potential for generating significant income.<sup>29</sup> The objective was to draw tourists into the region to participate in volunteer holidays. Identifying a derelict building, the millionaire entrepreneurs set about converting it into a guesthouse to accommodate international volunteers, who would come to the village to teach English and mentor local school children. Six months after the opening of the hotel, three locals had been employed fulltime to ensure the smooth running of the hotel, 300 students had benefited from English and sports lessons, and it was estimated that by the end of its first year the hotel would generate £15000 for the community.<sup>30</sup> On face value this project appears to have all the hallmarks of success.

The Millionaire entrepreneurs implemented two initiatives that have the potential to provide ongoing income for communities in the Rukiga region and to become models for future expansion. Rudo Kwaramba acknowledged that the ideas generated by the entrepreneurs were innovative and, particularly in the case of the Teach Inn Hotel, it was unlikely that World Vision would have considered such an undertaking.<sup>31</sup> As alluded to already, however, development is not straight forward. Initiatives through innovation can challenge conservative development thinking and increase the possibilities for poverty alleviation. Yet just like their conservative cousins, innovative initiatives may not always be appropriate and, therefore, should also be challenged before being accepted and adopted.

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<sup>29</sup> Refer to the *Millionaires Mission*.

<sup>30</sup> Channel 4(UK), "The Projects". [www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa](http://www.channel4.com/news/microsites/A/Africa)

<sup>31</sup> Channel 4 (UK). *Millionaires Mission*.



The idea of the Teach Inn Hotel is one that falls within the new global trend of volunteer tourism. Reminiscent of innovative undertakings like Live Aid, volunteer tourism is challenging conservative development thinking. As a new trend, however, the potential impacts upon host communities are yet to be realised. Although the Teach Inn Hotel has the capacity to generate ongoing income for the community, introducing tourism into the area sets other dynamics at play. To fully understand the ramifications of an idea like the Teach Inn Hotel, and to consider whether, it and other volunteer tourism projects are appropriate initiatives in the development struggle, further research into volunteer tourism is, therefore, needed.

## Chapter Two

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### 'Next holiday idea - Why not volunteer overseas??'<sup>32</sup>

In 2004, following the lead of his older brother Prince William<sup>33</sup>, Prince Harry joined the legions of young people participating in gap years and international volunteer tourism projects. During a two month stay in Lesotho, Southern Africa, Prince Harry worked as a volunteer: participating in building projects, playing with school children and working in the fields.<sup>34</sup>

In recent years there has been a massive rise in 'gap year' travel.<sup>35</sup> In the United Kingdom alone it has been estimated that in 2003 around 250,000 people aged between 18 and 25 set out for a year's break. High profile cases such as those of Prince William and Prince Harry have assisted in the promotion and appeal of the 'gap year' phenomenon:

If you, like Prince Harry, fancy roughing it for a few months while doing something more useful with your time than getting stoned in Thailand (not that we're ever suggesting that Prince Harry would do that!) then SPW (Student Partnership Worldwide) might be the answer. SPW's gap year schemes offer young people the opportunity to spend up to a year in countries across the Third World.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *STA Travel Academic Newsletter*, September 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Prince William participated in gap year travel in 2000, including voluntary work in Chile.

<sup>34</sup> Seeking to highlight the plight of people in Lesotho, particularly the number of children orphaned because of Aids, Prince Harry also devised a television documentary during his visit, 'The Forgotten Kingdom: Prince Harry in Lesotho', which raised over £500,000 for a fund in Lesotho.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Mind the Gap," <http://www.positivenation.co.uk/issue101/features/feature3/feature3.htm>

<sup>35</sup> Gap years can involve many activities though they generally incorporate an element of travel as well as periods of work, either voluntary or paid.

<sup>36</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. "Mind the Gap," <http://www.positivenation.co.uk/issue101/features/feature3/feature3.htm>

Promotions, like this one, are capturing the imagination of today's youth, and it is this market in particular that is the target of organisations offering volunteer tourism projects. This chapter will examine the concept of volunteer tourism and its place in today's postmodern world. In particular it will focus on its duality as both a tourism product and one of volunteering, and illustrate its complexity via examples.

### To Niche or Not to Niche? That is the Question

Tourism is big business. Since the 1950's international tourism has exploded with worldwide international arrivals increasing from just over 25 million in 1950 to approximately 625 million in 1988. Today it is one of the world's largest industries, accounting for over 11% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing approximately 200 million people worldwide. A combination of increased mobility, leisure time and disposable income has facilitated this massive growth, moving tourism from an activity of a privileged few to mass consumerism.<sup>37</sup> Accompanying this growth is also an increase in the interests and pursuits of tourists, where 'it seems that nearly every dimension of human culture now has the potential to become a form of tourism' and leading many tourists to search out alternatives to the mass produced tourist products; alternatives such as backpacking, ecotourism and gap year travel.<sup>38</sup> With a desire for alternatives and a desire to mark difference, niche markets have appeared, offering new

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Wearing, *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that make a difference* (Wallingford and Cambridge: CABI Publishing, 2001), 5 and Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 50 – 58.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Sutton and Joanna House, *The New Age of Tourism: Postmodern Tourism for Postmodern People?* <http://www.arasite.org/pspage2.htm> and Michelle Callanan and Sarah Thomas, "Volunteer Tourism – Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment" in *Niche Tourism: Contemporary issues, trends and cases*, ed. Marina Novelli (Oxford and Burlington: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, 2005), 185.

experiences that accommodate the needs and desires of the post-modern tourist.<sup>39</sup> In a highly competitive and crowded market place, tourism organisations are recognising that niche markets are the means to gaining a competitive advantage. What is more, in a world where mass tourism is viewed by many as negatively impacting the environment and socio-cultural interactions, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) advocates niche tourism as less intrusive and more likely to offer benefits to host communities when compared to traditional forms of tourism.<sup>40</sup> There has been concern, however, that niche tourism may in fact encourage the spread of mass tourism as large numbers follow in the footsteps of those who have found new and more exciting destinations and environments.<sup>41</sup> Two examples that demonstrate this are backpacker and trekking tourism. These two niche markets have developed into what could be interpreted as 'mass' niche markets and have had negative impacts on host communities.

The backpacker market is having a detrimental impact on communities in Asia. Researchers distinguish backpackers from mainstream tourists as people who are, engaged in a lifestyle activity, travelling on an extended journey, staying in cheap accommodation, utilising public transport, and eating local food, so as to achieve 'authentic' local experiences.<sup>42</sup> In addition,

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<sup>39</sup> Wearing, *Volunteer Tourism*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Mike Robinson and Marina Novelli, "Niche tourism: an Introduction," in *Niche Tourism: Contemporary issues, trends and cases*, ed. Marina Novelli (Oxford and Burlington: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann, 2005), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Tony Griffin and Nicolette Boek, "Alternative paths to sustainable tourism: Problems, prospects, panaceas and pipe dreams" in *Tourism and Economic Development in Asia and Australasia*, eds. Frank M. Go and Carson L. Jenkins (London: Pinter, 1997): 327.

<sup>42</sup> Hamzah Muzaini, "Backpacking Southeast Asia: Strategies of 'Looking Local'," *Annals of Tourism Research* 33, 1 (2006): 145 – 152 and Camille Caprioglio O'Reilly, "From Drifter to Gap Year Tourist: Mainstreaming Backpacker Travel," *Annals of Tourism Research* 33, 4 (2006): 999.

they tend to be in constant search for the 'newest, the most remote, the most exotic.'<sup>43</sup> Muzaini

cites an Israeli backpacker who confirms the need to live like a local:

...when I was in Phnom Penh, I actually ate exotic food such as bugs. In Vietnam I had the heart of a snake which is supposed to be a very good aphrodisiac...Of course I cringed at first, but then I thought since the locals could do it, why not I? I came to Asia to do what the Asians do, and so I did (Diary 2003).<sup>44</sup>

This desire to experience local life, however, is often superficial, with many backpackers gravitating towards backpacker enclaves. Today Asia, South East Asia in particular, is the 'preferred habitat' of backpackers. Places such as Khao San Road in Bangkok and Thamel in Kathmandu are no longer recognisable as 'local', as they have been taken over by the western backpacker. What is more, many backpackers form national cliques. For example, certain beaches in Thailand are catering to 'Little Sweden' or 'Little Germany', as nationals huddle together to form their own safe paradises, or what Klaus Westerhausen terms 'sub-cultural playgrounds.'<sup>45</sup> In such cases, 'there are enough commonalities in broad terms to suggest the formation of at least a nascent imagined community.'<sup>46</sup> The backpacker market is, therefore, disrupting local community life in areas of Asia, and in some cases, changing the entire framework of places, as backpackers demand an environment catering to their needs and imaginations.

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<sup>43</sup> Annabel Biles, Kate Lloyd, and William S. Logan, "Romancing Vietnam: The Formation and Function of Tourist Images of Vietnam" in *Converging Interests: Traders, Travelers, and Tourists in Southeast Asia*, eds. Jill Forshee, Christina Fink and Sandra Cate (Berkeley: University of California, 1999): 220.

<sup>44</sup> Muzaini, "Backpacking Southeast Asia: Strategies of 'Looking Local'," 152.

<sup>45</sup> Muzaini, "Backpacking Southeast Asia: Strategies of 'Looking Local'," 159 and Klaus Westerhausen, *Beyond the Beach: An Ethnography of Modern Travellers in Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2002), 165 – 167.

<sup>46</sup> O'Reilly, "From Drifter to Gap Year Tourist: Mainstreaming Backpacker Travel," 999.

Like backpacking, trekking tourism is also having negative impacts on local communities. Nepal, a leading trekking destination, has witnessed a massive increase in trekkers over the years with an estimated increase of 255% since 1980. This inundation of trekkers has created several challenges for locals as mountain paths have been strewn with litter and are eroding from the number of people utilising them.<sup>47</sup> Of further concern is the impact on forest and alpine vegetation. Trekking tourism has increased the demand for firewood in inns and the felling of trees to construct lodges, resulting in the thinning of forests and the depletion of juniper bushes, which in turn has resulted in soil erosion. Trekking tourism, therefore, although providing economic prosperity to Nepal's mountain regions, is also cause for concern for the indigenous communities.<sup>48</sup>

As with all tourism products, it is not only the economic impacts that should be acknowledged but also the cultural importance. Due to the far reaching nature of tourism today, it 'has become an intrinsic part of both global and local culture.'<sup>49</sup> While niche tourism is generally promoted and understood to provide alternatives that have a minimal impact on the culture of host communities, the examples above demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. Similar concern can be raised in relation to volunteer tourism, another niche market. Although marketed

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<sup>47</sup> Tracey C. Rembert, "Going Green: Walkabout; Walking tours are a great way to see the world, at your own pace," *The Environment Magazine* 13, 4 (Jul/Aug 2002): 46.

<sup>48</sup> Stan Stevens, "Tourism and deforestation in the Mt Everest region of Nepal," *The Geographical Journal* 169, 3 (Sept 2003): 255 and 274.

<sup>49</sup> Robert E. Wood, "Tourism and the State: Ethnic Options and Constructions of Otherness," in *Tourism, Ethnicity and the State in Asian and Pacific Societies*, eds. Michel Picard and Robert E. Wood (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 1.

as 'making a difference', evidence is required to back this up. As already revealed, the impacts of niche tourism are not necessarily positive, and with this in mind we need to consider whether volunteer tourism, like the Teach Inn Hotel project as outlined in Chapter One, is truly making a positive difference to host communities. Before the impacts of volunteer tourism can be considered, however, first it is necessary to understand definitions within volunteer tourism.

### **Altruistic Motivated Travel?**

Volunteering can be defined as 'un-coerced help offered either formally or informally with no or, at most, token pay done for the benefit of both the people and the volunteer.'<sup>50</sup> What is more, it can be viewed as, 'a form of civic engagement through which individuals can make meaningful contributions to their own visions of societal well-being.'<sup>51</sup> What we are seeing today is a combination of this 'un-coerced help' with some form of leisure travel, where the two significantly overlap to form an alternative tourism product considered 'altruistically motivated travel', or volunteer tourism.<sup>52</sup> This product can be summarised as:

A form of tourism that makes use of holiday-makers who volunteer to fund and work on conservation projects around the world and which aims to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Sally Brown, "Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers," *Current Issues in Tourism* 8, 6 (2005): 483.

<sup>51</sup> Eleanor Brown, "Assessing the value of volunteer activity," *Non profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 28, 3 (1999): 3.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Wearing, "Examining Best Practice in Volunteer Tourism" in *Volunteering as Leisure/Leisure as Volunteering: An International Assessment*, eds. R. A. Stebbins and M. Graham (Wallingford: CABI Publishing, 2004): 210.

<sup>53</sup> Wearing, "Examining Best Practice in Volunteer Tourism," 217.

The origins of what is considered volunteer tourism today can be traced to the 1980s,<sup>54</sup> when the media of the world turned their attention to the plight of people suffering from poverty and starvation, particularly exposing the exploitation of poor people worldwide and highlighting the vast division, within and across societies, between those who 'have' and those who 'have not'. As already discussed, this division gained prominent exposure through initiatives such as Band Aid and Live Aid, initiatives that effectively utilised society's fashionable icons to popularise involvement in charities and to create a new avenue for the voluntary and charity sector in obtaining contributions. Such popularisation allowed charities to take advantage of opportunities opened up to them to advance their cause. This was critical in the growing competitive environment in which they were operating, particularly for the limited financial resources that were becoming increasingly stretched, as more and more charities appeared. As such, charities became involved with tour operators, to offer volunteer projects as a means of diversifying their income stream.<sup>55</sup>

Tour operators have also been keen to operate in partnership with charities to offer alternative tourist experiences. These partnerships have enabled them to offer experiences that appeal to

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<sup>54</sup> While volunteer tourism is a recent phenomenon, volunteerism is not. People have been travelling overseas with the aim of helping others long before the 1980s; the missionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries worked towards both the conversion and education of people they considered needed to be 'saved', while modern volunteerism is considered to have begun around 1915, when many organisations started to become involved in sending groups of people around the world to assist others in need, particularly people in underdeveloped countries. These organisations included the US Peace Corps and Australian Volunteers Abroad. For further reading refer to: Brian Holmes, ed., *Educational policy and the mission schools: case studies from the British Empire*, (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1967), Norman Etherington, *Missions and Empire*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998) and Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *All you need is love: The Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Callanan and Thomas, "Volunteer Tourism – Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment," 185.



'an increasing 'guilt-conscious' society', as well as, allowing them to project themselves as socially and ethically responsible.<sup>56</sup> Tour operators are conscious of the buzz word 'sustainability' as an important aspect of today's tourism. Many 'post-modern tourists' seek a meaningful experience that has minimal impact on the environments and resources of the host community in which they are visiting; volunteer tourism, an option promoted as 'fitting this bill' and helping to 'make a difference'.<sup>57</sup> The combination of work and leisure in volunteer tourism suggests, however, a contradiction and the likelihood of tensions, particularly as the two appear to be complete opposites. Yet people have warmed to the product, even when it relies on the undertaking of unpaid work whilst on holiday. The answer to why this is lies within the complexities of the post-modern world.

### **The Blurring of Boundaries: When is it Work? When is it Leisure?**

A characteristic of post-modernism is that it blurs and dissolves boundaries. Such blurring has created a world of fragmented identities and anxiety, as people lack a clear sense of whom they are, and what their place is in the world. This anxiety is increasing ego-centricity and individualism in the West, and is fuelling people's desires to search out an authenticity they feel is missing in their lives.<sup>58</sup> The demands and constraints on modern societies are immense and, in general, create an environment that works for individuals and against family cohesion. The

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<sup>56</sup> Callanan and Thomas, "Volunteer Tourism – Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment," 183.

<sup>57</sup> Wearing, *Volunteer Tourism*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), 102 – 103.

opportunities or risks that had previously been predetermined by family, class, or community now require interpretation and processing by individuals; 'the ethic of individual self fulfilment and achievement is [thus] the most powerful current in modern society.'<sup>59</sup> This need to search out 'truths' to override individual insecurities has led to a growth in tourism linked to pre-modern cultures and the 'discovery' of places imagined to be 'untouched' by modern society. Seeking out primitive places in the world and experiencing the 'whole', that is, people and geographical place, is a way people are soothing their feelings of fragmentation.<sup>60</sup> Feelings of fragmentation that can, in part, be attributed to the workplace.

Today the boundary between professional and personal spaces has become vague as globalisation and deregulation have transformed the way people work. Flexible working arrangements and an 'individualisation of labour', organised around integrated communication systems, have become workplace standards in the West.<sup>61</sup> Coinciding with these standards is the accepted culture of long working hours, a culture that is being fuelled by a combination of: the changed nature of peoples' careers, downsizing and the subsequent increase in peoples' workloads and advances in technology that have enabled people to work outside the traditional office space and the regular pattern of nine to five, Monday to Friday. These changes have

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<sup>59</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation*, 2 – 4 and 22.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Blom, "Morbid Tourism – A postmodern market niche with an example from Althorp," *Norwegian Journal of Geography* 54 (2000): 32 – 35 and Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds*, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Manuel Castells, "Materials for an exploratory theory of the network society," *British Journal of Sociology* 51, 1 (Jan/Mar 2000): 11 – 12.

culminated in an expectation that, today, all time should be productive.<sup>62</sup> Evidence indicates that not only are people working longer hours but they are also finding it more and more difficult to holiday without having some contact with work. A poll of Canadian workers found that 17% of respondents never stop working, while 23% admitted to checking their emails and phone messages whilst on holidays.<sup>63</sup> In America the statistics were even more alarming with 47% of a group of advertising executives admitting to checking in with the office at least once a day whilst on holiday, and 27%, in another poll, indicating they planned to work while on holiday. The notion of work/life balance has become a buzzword yet it is increasingly unachievable as people are spending long hours at work, as well as, having contact with the workplace on their holidays. Advances in technology have moved the office to the beach, ski resort and cruise liner, creating an expectation that, because it is now easy to keep in touch, workers should do so. Psychologists have also put this phenomenon down to some people feeling threatened over job security while others see themselves as irreplaceable.<sup>64</sup> What ever the reason, however, the boundary between work and leisure time is becoming indistinguishable.

Not only are the pressures of the workplace creating a need for people to carry out work outside traditional hours but competition within employment markets dictate that people need to be constantly considering their skills and abilities, and seeking opportunities to increase their

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas W. H. Ng and Daniel C. Feldman, "Long work hours: a social identity perspective on meta-analysis data," *Journal of Organizational Behaviour* 29 (2008): 853 – 854.

<sup>63</sup> Jody White, "Vacate on Vacation," *Benefits Canada* 32, 8 (Aug 2008): 9.

<sup>64</sup> Elwin Green, "Many taking work with them on vacation," *Deseret News (Salt Lake City)*, August 26, 2007, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4188/is\\_20070826/ai\\_n19490663](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20070826/ai_n19490663) and \_\_\_\_, "Workers struggle to escape work while on holiday," June 9, 2006, <http://www.management-issues.com/2006/8/24/research/workers-struggle-to-escape-work-while-on-holiday.asp>

marketability.<sup>65</sup> This is no more so than for the latest generation to enter the workforce. In a survey commissioned by Robert Half International and Yahoo Hotjobs, Gen Y (those born between 1984 and 2000) came across as a generation of worriers when asked about their major career concerns. Of those polled, 26% cited a concern in relation to finding and retaining a job.<sup>66</sup> For this reason young people in particular are taking increasing responsibility in developing their own careers and building their curriculum vitae (CV). This has contributed towards the rise in gap year travel and volunteer tourism. A major stimulus for young people to take a gap year is the opportunity the experience provides for self discovery; improving oneself and the enrichment of their CV.<sup>67</sup> In increasingly competitive employment markets, international work and volunteer experience can assist individuals to take a lead in the competition, as employers progressively place greater significance on such experiences.<sup>68</sup> It could be said, therefore, that work has colonised the post-modern world to the extent that work and leisure, in the form of volunteering and tourism, are not a contradiction, but a rational match.

### **Altruism or Ego-Centric?**

Although travelling overseas as a part of modern volunteerism has origins dating back to the early twentieth century, the niche market of volunteer tourism is considered a recent trend, whereby the focus has shifted away from volunteerism in the direction of tourism.<sup>69</sup> As a recent

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<sup>65</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> \_\_\_\_, "What Really Matters Most to Generation Y Employees?" *HR Focus* 85, 8 (August 2008): 5.

<sup>67</sup> Callanan and Thomas, "Volunteer Tourism – Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment," 186.

<sup>68</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualisation*, 25 – 33.

<sup>69</sup> Wearing, "Examining Best Practice in Volunteer Tourism," 210.

trend, therefore, research relating to the field is minimal. Much of the literature and research, to date, neglects the impacts of volunteer tourism on host communities, preferring to concentrate on the volunteer; their motives and outcomes. A key focus of the literature, in particular, is the prospect of growing as an individual through participation in a volunteer project, participation providing individuals with an opportunity to re-evaluate their core beliefs and values, as well as, the intrinsic rewards gained from the volunteering experience.<sup>70</sup>

One study into why people volunteer on their holidays reveals that a strong motivational factor, aside from wanting to do something for those less fortunate, is the opportunity the experience provides in being able to immerse oneself in the 'authenticity' of a place, experiencing the local culture and interacting with people from elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> These findings indicate that 'volunteer tourism [has been] recast within the context of postmodern tourism and the growing attractiveness of the 'other'.<sup>72</sup> Such motives demonstrate that although volunteer tourism is considered a form of altruistically motivated tourism, there is also an element of ego-centricity, as volunteers seek cultural engagements and a variety of experiences from their participation. The volunteer tourist experience is, thus, marketed as beneficial to both host and guest, as the guest provides assistance to the host community via a holiday with meaning;<sup>73</sup> 'the volunteer vacation phenomenon, appear[ing] to bridge the altruistic motives of volunteering with the general commodified tourism experience.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Wearing, *Volunteer Tourism*, 2 and Alexandra Coghlan, "Volunteer tourism as an emerging trend or an expansion of ecotourism? A look at potential clients' perceptions of volunteer tourism organizations," *International Journal of Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 11 (2006): 226.

<sup>71</sup> Brown, "Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers," 484 – 485.

<sup>72</sup> Alexandra Coghlan, "Exploring the role of expedition staff in volunteer tourism," *International Journal of Tourism Research* 10 (2008): 184.

<sup>73</sup> Alison McIntosh and Anne Zahra, "A Cultural Encounter through Volunteer Tourism: Towards the Ideals of Sustainable Tourism?" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 15, 5 (2007): 543.

<sup>74</sup> Brown, "Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers," 494.

In reality, volunteer tourism attracts a wide spectrum of volunteers, ranging from those with genuine altruistic motives, to those interested purely in themselves. A distinction to be made in relation to volunteer tourism is that it moves a person from consumer to participant. On some level those participating have altruistic motives whereby they place consideration for the needs of others above their own.<sup>75</sup> As a niche tourism product, however, it is also a form of consumption where people participating are seeking a leisure component. Volunteer tourism, therefore, is an example of the post-modern pastiche, where like work and leisure, egoism and altruism come together.<sup>76</sup>

### **An Option to Suit Everyone**

Callanan and Thomas deconstruct the volunteer tourism concept by suggesting that a three tier framework exists for categorising the volunteer tourist. The first tier, 'shallow volunteer tourist', applies to tourists predominantly interested in self discovery and enhancing their academic credentials. It is likely the volunteer participating has few, if any, specific skills or qualifications to offer the project and only participates in the project for a short period of time. It is also suggested that the 'shallow volunteer tourist' places greatest importance on the destination and activities available beyond the volunteer project, thus, being clearly 'vacation minded'. The second tier is known as 'intermediate volunteer tourist'. As the title suggests, the participant is driven by both altruistic and self discovery motives, and is likely to commit to a sufficient duration of time, usually between two to four months, so that he/she may contribute towards the volunteer project.

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<sup>75</sup> Mustonen, "Volunteer Tourism – Altruism or mere tourism?" *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research* 18, 1 (2007): 98.

<sup>76</sup> Mustonen, "Volunteer Tourism – Altruism or mere tourism?": 105 – 106.

This said, the 'intermediate volunteer tourist' still factors in some holiday time in which to enjoy the destination. As would be expected, the last tier is where altruistic motives dominate. Participants of this tier are known as 'deep volunteer tourists'. Altruistic motives are the primary concern, with self interest a distant second. It is also likely that the participant will have acquired relevant skills and/or qualifications required by the project and will commit a minimum of six months to the project.<sup>77</sup> The concern of categorising volunteer tourism in this way is that it appears to insinuate that people who volunteer for short periods of time are superficial volunteers, in comparison to those who volunteer for long periods. Is the time spent volunteering a defining indicator of the contribution made? Can people contribute in a meaningful way without the large consumption of time?

People contribute in many ways towards the alleviation of world poverty and the development of poor communities. As demonstrated in Chapter One, political activism and donating money are helping to make a difference. Not all people have a desire or the means to volunteer for extended periods of time in another country nevertheless they can still make a meaningful contribution from home or for short periods overseas. Taking an example from the recent trend of pay-per click donations via the internet, people are making a difference from the comfort of

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<sup>77</sup> Callanan and Thomas, "Volunteer Tourism – Deconstructing volunteer activities within a dynamic environment," 196.

their own homes. Freerice.com commenced in October 2007 with the goals of providing free education to everyone and to help bring an end to world hunger by providing hungry people with free rice.<sup>78</sup> This site offers people without the financial means or an ability to donate a large amount of time, the opportunity to make a charitable contribution; however, while it may be helping to provide temporary relief from hunger, it fails to tackle the underlying political and structural concerns which lead to hunger. Similarly, an examination of an example of short term volunteer tourism projects offered by World Expeditions highlights that while it is possible for short term volunteer projects to make a meaningful contribution, it is not always guaranteed.

Since 2005, World Expeditions, a company specialising in trekking and adventure travel holidays, have offered 'Community Project Travel' within a 'not-for-profit' wing of their company. Marketed as programmes offering, 'purposeful adventures for everyday travellers, where the main objective is to improve the lives of other people or the environment in a meaningful and sustainable way.'<sup>79</sup> The trips on offer combine what is predominantly a holiday with three to six days of volunteer work, no specific skills required. Examples of trips on offer in 2008 include: an 18 day trip in Nepal where 3 days are spent renovating a health clinic and 10 days trekking in the Himalayas; a 15 day trip in India where 3 days are spent repairing a school and 3 days on a

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<sup>78</sup> The way the website works is that people answer questions on the site, and for every correct answer, twenty grains of rice are donated through the United Nations World Food Program. The rice is paid for by sponsors whose names appear at the bottom of the screen each time a question is answered correctly. Since its inception on 7 October 2007, the people answering questions through the site have raised 47,167,467,790 grains of rice, which have been distributed to feed the hungry, including 27,000 refugees in Bangladesh for two weeks, 108,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal for three days, 41,000 Bhutanese children for eight days, 750,000 people affected by a cyclone in Myanmar for three days, and 13,500 pregnant and nursing women in Cambodia for two months. Free Rice, <http://www.freerice.com>

<sup>79</sup> World Expeditions, <http://www.worldexpeditions.com>



camel ride in the Rajasthan desert; a 12 day trip in Cambodia where 4 days are spent repairing a school and the remaining days left to explore Angkor and other sights of Cambodia.<sup>80</sup> The underlying pattern forming here is that the product on offer is little more than an adventure holiday marketed as offering participants an opportunity to make a difference, as well as, to gain cultural understanding. Does the short time spent volunteering, however, make the projects any less meaningful? While all the impacts on the host communities are not evident, it would seem likely that the repair and renovation work undertaken will have an immediate impact upon those who utilise the buildings. A concern, however, is whether the projects offer sustainability into the future. What is the underlying cause for the buildings to be in disrepair in the first place? Is it a case, much like the provision of electricity in *Millionaires' Mission*, where the local communities do not have the means to maintain the buildings? Perhaps, then, the defining indicator in valuing contribution is not the time spent volunteering but how a project is determined and set up.

Alexandra Coghlan has identified three key types of volunteer tourism trips. The first trip type is one that places greatest importance on the research or the work to be carried out ahead of the voluntary experience. These trips generally require long term commitment, a period of six months or more. The next is the trip that combines a volunteer project with tourism elements that offer activities that explore local culture and scenery. The third type of trip markets the outcomes for the volunteer, promoting self development through cross cultural interaction and adventure activities.<sup>81</sup> While Callanan and Thomas' categorisation of volunteer tourists, and

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<sup>80</sup> World Expeditions.

<sup>81</sup> Alexandra Coghlan, "Towards an integrated image-based typology of volunteer tourism organisations" *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 15, 3 (2007): 285.

Alexandra Coghlan's categorisation of volunteer tourism products, offer a means of categorisation, they do not provide an all encompassing framework which caters for the complexity of the niche product: the motivations of the volunteer, the skill level requirements, the required time commitment, the activities available, the level of consultation with the host community, the consideration of local needs, the likelihood of capacity building, the sector offering the product, the division of time between volunteer project and leisure activities; all challenge where one category starts and the other stops. An example illustrating this complexity is the travel organisation '*i-to-i*'.

*i-to-i* promote themselves as the world's leader in meaningful travel. Offered a wide array of opportunities, potential volunteers can sort projects via location: near a beach, in the mountains, in the jungle, near the city; suggesting that *i-to-i* is marketing to those interested more in the destination than the project itself. *i-to-i* are using the destination as a lure to draw in volunteers, yet, when looking at the projects themselves there are no leisure activities listed within the project specifications. There appears, therefore, to be a promise of something that is not being delivered. When it comes to the projects themselves, there are a number of options available: community development, wildlife, conservation, teaching, sports coaching, building and working with children.<sup>82</sup> In most cases, the volunteer has the option of participating anywhere from two to twelve weeks.<sup>83</sup> The confusion in categorising volunteer tourism becomes apparent, especially when two projects are compared.

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<sup>82</sup> Including teaching at the Teach Inn Hotel, Uganda, established through the Millionaires' Mission.

<sup>83</sup> *i-to-i*, <http://www.i-to-i.com>

Project	Teach English in Darjeeling, India	Teaching English at Buddhist Monasteries in Nepal
<b>Description (as per i-to-i's Website)</b>	Like a good curry, India is a blend of contrasts; slowly but surely international influences seep into the cities while remote hill tribes continue to thrive in the countryside. It's the rural side of India that you can explore on this project, teaching English in schools set amongst Darjeeling's rolling green hills. Based in the foothills of the Himalayas it's an inspiring setting that should hopefully rub off on your work in the classroom. The children, who are from disadvantaged backgrounds and aged from 5 to 18, will be eager to get involved in extra-curricular activities such as sport, drama and music. We'll include our online TEFL course which will provide you with all the skills you need to teach English abroad.	One thing we can promise you on this project is that your students will be well behaved! You're sure to learn as much as you teach in gorgeous Nepal and with well behaved and positive students ranging in age from 8 to 25 it's a great opportunity to gain a wide variety of experience and test your TEFL certification, which is included with the trip. Some schools are affected by pujas (festivals) which can give you some free time to fit in some trekking before school starts again. From your base it couldn't be easier to plot a route into the mountains and for those who don't fancy doing it alone, fear not, the city is full of travellers looking for walking buddies.
<b>Project Duration</b>	Minimum 3 weeks – Maximum 12 weeks	Minimum 2 weeks – Maximum 12 weeks
<b>Working Hours</b>	Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm (6 hours per day)	Sunday to Thursday 2 - 3 hours per day
<b>Requirements</b>	With or without formal teaching experience.	An interest in and some knowledge of Tibetan and Buddhist religious philosophy and culture an advantage.

Table 1 - Adapted from volunteer project details on <http://www.i-to-i.com>

How does one apply the categorisations to a person who participates for three weeks teaching English in Darjeeling, with a person who teaches English in a monastery in Nepal for twelve weeks? According to the categories suggested by Callanan and Thomas, the person teaching English for three weeks would be deemed a shallow volunteer tourist, while the person teaching English for twelve weeks would fall within the second tier of intermediate volunteer tourist. Yet

how does this measure up when, the three week volunteer is working six hours a day and the twelve week volunteer possibly only two hours a day. Furthermore, when referring to the trip descriptions, the Darjeeling project is focused primarily on teaching the children, while the Nepal project promotes a mix of teaching and trekking opportunities. These elements indicate that the Darjeeling project places greatest importance on the work to be carried out, while the Nepal project veers towards the shallow category, as importance is placed on the destination and activities beyond the volunteer project. Overall, therefore, determining where a volunteer tourism project fits within the frameworks suggested appears to be meaningless. They do not account for the complexities of the niche tourist product.

Putting aside the confusions surrounding volunteer tourism, the questions that still remain then, are whether volunteer tourism can make a difference to the host communities in which it is involved and if it should be taken seriously as an innovative development initiative. Chapter Three addresses the current thinking in effective development to enable consideration of these questions, as well as, whether volunteer tourism can fit within a development framework.

## Chapter Three

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### Doing Development

#### Helping is not Enough

Philanthropy is huge in the world today. With so many people living in abject poverty, those from wealthier societies are putting their hands up to help those less fortunate than themselves. Wanting to assist, however, is not necessarily enough. The documentary film, 'The Good Woman of Bangkok', is a good demonstration of this. The film follows Aoi, originally from a poor peasant village in Thailand, now working as a prostitute in Bangkok. Dennis O'Rourke, the documentary's Australian filmmaker, meets Aoi and over a period of nine months engages in a complex relationship as her client, lover and director. Wanting to 'rescue' Aoi from her seedy life, O'Rourke offers to buy Aoi and her family a rice farm. Although Aoi initially moves to the farm, the epilogue of the film shows Aoi back working the streets of Bangkok:<sup>84</sup>

I bought a rice farm for Aoi and I left Thailand. One year later I came back but she was not there. I found her working in Bangkok in a sleazy massage parlor called "The Happy House". I asked her why and she said, "it is my fate".<sup>85</sup>

While the release of the film in the early 1990s provoked controversy over O'Rourke's use of tensions between a heterosexual white Western male and an 'Asian, third world, female 'other'', and was condemned as 'an act of exploitative hypocrisy, of selfish posturing wrapped in

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<sup>84</sup> Dennis O'Rourke, *The Good Woman of Bangkok* (1990): Film and Lisa Hinrichsen, "Good Woman of Bangkok, The" in *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, <http://www.routledge-ny.com/ref/documentary/bangkok.html>

<sup>85</sup> Linda Williams, "The Ethics of Documentary Intervention: Dennis O'Rourke's *The Good Woman of Bangkok*" in *The Filmmaker and the Prostitute: Dennis O'Rourke's The Good Woman of Bangkok*, eds. Chris Berry, Annette Hamilton and Laleen Jayamanne (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997), 84.

bleeding heart white liberal guilt'<sup>86</sup>, it does highlight the complexities of attempting to draw people out of poverty and harm, and how a lack of understanding can ultimately lead to unexpected outcomes. O'Rourke failed to truly understand Aoi's situation and her motivations for living the way she did. As Rudo Kwaramba highlighted in the *Millionaires' Mission*, there is always a root cause to a problem and the layers need to be peeled away to find it. Theories of development have travelled a long way to arrive at today's position of recognising the importance of working alongside people to identify the root causes to problems and possible solutions, and that, wanting to help is not always enough. This chapter will outline the path to current development thinking and present examples of where approaches have been successful and not so successful; it is the examination of the various development approaches that will assist in determining whether volunteer tourism has a place within development.

## Evolving from Colonial Pasts to an Economic Future

Development is a Western concept and can be traced to 19th century European theories of social evolution. These theories identified stages of societal growth; moving societies progressively from primitive to civilised. Of the stages, Europeans saw themselves as the only populace to have fully evolved and, as such, used this Eurocentric view to justify European imperialism over societies seen as falling into the earlier stages of evolution, societies that had in the most part been colonised by Europeans.<sup>87</sup> The world at this time was, therefore,

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<sup>86</sup> Ien Ang, "Foreword" in *The Filmmaker and the Prostitute: Dennis O'Rourke's The Good Woman of Bangkok*, eds. Chris Berry, Annette Hamilton and Laleen Jayamanne (Sydney: Power Publications, 1997), 2.

<sup>87</sup> Georgia Kaufmann, "Watching the Developers: A Partial Ethnography" in *Discourse of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. R. D. Grillo & R. L. Stirrat (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), 107 and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Development Theory :Deconstructions / Reconstructions* (London, New Delhi and Singapore: Sage Publications, 2001), 19.

differentiated by the colonised and the coloniser, the two, poles apart from one another, and as such, the differences between them difficult to overcome.<sup>88</sup>

The post cold war era has seen a shift from colonialism to the establishment of global agencies and a new world view, a 'developed'/'underdeveloped' dichotomy. The term 'underdeveloped' was first introduced by US President Truman in 1947 and signified a shift in how development was considered.<sup>89</sup> As Gilbert Rist notes:

the term 'underdeveloped' evoked not only the idea of change in the direction of a final state but, above all, the possibility of bringing about such change. No longer was it just a question of things 'developing'; now it was possible to 'develop' a region.<sup>90</sup>

The 'developed'/'underdeveloped' dichotomy opened up a new development relationship, moving it away from an 'exploitative colonialism' towards cooperation between global agencies, to assist those in need and the alleviation of poverty. The term development became one of transition, whereby, one agency would act to assist another in their evolution.<sup>91</sup> This new view moved theory of social evolution away from one that was race based, to one based on the economic conditions of a society. Development, therefore, can be viewed, 'at best a dialogue, at worst the imposition of a set of ... processes and beliefs on the 'other'.'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 73 – 74.

<sup>89</sup> Kaufmann, "Watching the Developers: A Partial Ethnography," 107 and Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 73.

<sup>90</sup> Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 73.

<sup>91</sup> Kaufmann, "Watching the Developers: A Partial Ethnography," 107 and Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 73 – 75.

<sup>92</sup> Kaufmann, "Watching the Developers: A Partial Ethnography," 107.

The notion of development may have moved away from the politics of a colonial past but it continues to impose a requirement of 'modernisation', determined largely via economics. Having gained political independence, poorer nations seeking 'aid' for development are finding themselves having to give up their economic autonomy and follow a path decided for them by others.<sup>93</sup> Choice is taken away, as European cultural attitudes continue to infiltrate the world, with progress viewed through:

the mental models of the West (rationalism), the institutions of the West ( the market ), the goals of the West ( high mass consumption ), and the culture of the West ( worship of the commodity).<sup>94</sup>

As such, development could be viewed as a new form of colonialism, as it provides the West with an alternative power over the post-colonial world.

There is ambiguity in the concept development. Much like the South Commission, referred to in Chapter One, the United Nations has attempted to accurately pinpoint what development entails:

... the basic objective of human development is to enlarge the range of people's choices to make development more democratic and participatory. These choices should include access to income and employment opportunities, education and health, and a clean and safe physical environment. Each individual should also have the opportunity to participate fully in community decisions and to enjoy human, economic and political freedom.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> Richard Peet and Elaine Hartwick, *Theories of Development* (New York and London: Guilford Press, 1999), 85 - 86.

<sup>95</sup> \_\_\_\_, *Human Development Report 1991*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (New York and Oxford: Oxford University press, 1991), 1.



The difficulty with this definition, as with the South Commission's, is that it is based on the ideals and beliefs of one person (or a sum of people) in the conditions in which people should live. How does one determine a society's 'potential' or 'freedom'? What freedom is for one person may be a constraint for another. In Peet and Hartwick it is argued that, 'life expectancy and literacy could be quite high in a well managed prison. Basic physical needs are well met in a zoo.'<sup>96</sup> Everything works within a framework and, thus, is dependent on the context in which it is contained. Change does not occur in the same way everywhere, and in fact, just because it occurs in one place, does not necessarily mean, it will occur somewhere else.<sup>97</sup> The concept of development is, therefore, not straightforward.

## Development goes Awry

Despite the vagueness of the concept, there appears to be an acceptance in the West that humans have a moral duty to assist those in need and to help them progress and achieve abundance in life. Development, although a creation of society, now appears as 'a "natural" phenomenon with laws of its own that govern society.'<sup>98</sup> Yet even with ideals and good intentions, development can, and has, led to the creation of victims from the progress it seeks. An example of this, is what has been described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as 'the largest poisoning of a population in history'. An estimated 35 million to 77 million people Bangladesh are at risk of exposure from arsenic contaminated drinking water from tube wells.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Peet and Hartwick, *Theories of Development*, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Peet and Hartwick, *Theories of Development*, 2 and Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 9 – 13 and 101 – 102.

<sup>98</sup> Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 215.

<sup>99</sup> Allan H. Smith, Elena. O. Lingas and Mahfuzar Rahman "Contamination of drinking water by arsenic in Bangladesh: a public health emergency," *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation* 78, 9 (2000):1093.

Tube wells have existed in Bangladesh since the 1940s, yet, their prevalence did not start until the 1970s.<sup>100</sup> Although Bangladesh receives rainfall of approximately 80 inches per annum, finding safe drinking water is not easy. Due to monsoonal floods, a high population density and poor sanitary conditions, surface water is a carrier for water borne diseases, dysentery and cholera, causing widespread illness and death.<sup>101</sup> To combat the mortality rate from water-borne diseases, the Bangladeshi government, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), installed tube wells to provide what they believed to be safe drinking water.<sup>102</sup> Due to their low cost, installation of tube wells was further increased by the private sector, with the number in Bangladesh now estimated to be between 6 and 11 million.<sup>103</sup>

Bangladesh and West Bengal are located on the Bengal Basin. In 1978 arsenic contaminated groundwater was confirmed in West Bengal with the first cases of arsenic poisoning following five years later. It was another 10 years, however, before high arsenic levels were reported in Bangladesh. Since then several surveys have been carried out across the country to determine areas at risk. The 2000 British Geographical Survey Report identified that the vast majority of

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<sup>100</sup> Smith, Lingas and Rahman, "Contamination of drinking water by arsenic in Bangladesh: a public health emergency," 1093.

<sup>101</sup> David H. Kinley and Zabeed Hossain, "Poisoned Waters: Bangladesh, desperately seeking solutions," *World Watch* 6, 1 (Jan/Feb 2003): 22 – 27.

<sup>102</sup> Smith, Lingas and Rahman, "Contamination of drinking water by arsenic in Bangladesh: a public health emergency," 1093.

<sup>103</sup> British Geographical Survey Report, *Groundwater Studies for Arsenic Contamination in Bangladesh*, (30 March 2000): xvii. <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/arsenic/bangladesh/>

districts at risk were placed in the south and south-eastern plains of the country, with the northern districts the least affected.<sup>104 105</sup>

Although it is easy to identify the solution to the arsenic contamination problem, that is, to provide the Bangladeshi population with arsenic free drinking water, identifying an acceptable and affordable solution is not so easy. Bangladesh is a very poor country, lacking in resources, and facing overcrowding and high pollution. Gaining acceptance from the Bangladeshi population to use groundwater from tube wells, over polluted surface water, took many years. A message to abandon this major water supply needs to be highly convincing, with a substantiated safe alternative, before habits are likely to change yet again.<sup>106</sup> At this stage, no solution fits these requirements and investigations are continuing into the search for viable alternatives, alternatives such as; community removal and piped distribution, arsenic filtration devices, rainwater harvesting, deep tube wells, and treated surface water.<sup>107</sup> For now, however, millions of Bangladeshis continue to consume food and water contaminated with high concentrations of arsenic.

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<sup>104</sup> British Geographical Survey Report, 2000, xvii.

<sup>105</sup> While research is now starting to identify areas most at risk through tube well testing, it is difficult to determine to what extent people have been affected. The health effects from drinking arsenic contaminated water generally appear over a long period of time and are unpredictable. The majority of the information available in relation to the health effects of arsenic contamination is via cases researched in Taiwan and Chile. These cases indicate that skin lesions, particularly keratoses, take approximately ten years to appear from the first exposure, while the latency of cancers is twenty years or more. Further to this, 'increases in mortality continued for 40 years after the highest exposures began'. As most tube wells in Bangladesh have been installed within the last twenty years, it is unlikely that authorities will be in a position to assess the full health impacts for decades. In the meantime, and as research continues, the Bangladeshi government and NGOs have commenced programmes to try and mitigate the impacts of the problem. Such programmes include, the testing of tube wells to identify both safe and unsafe wells, along with, the education of well users to the potential risks, how to identify symptoms of arsenic poisoning, and to encourage the abandonment of unsafe wells. Refer to: Allan H. Smith, Elena O. Lingas and Mahfuzar Rahman, 2000, 1095-1096 and Bruce K. Caldwell, et. al., "Trends in water usage and knowledge of arsenicosis in Bangladesh: Findings from successive national surveys," *Population, Space and Place* 11 (2005): 211-223.

<sup>106</sup> Caldwell, Bruce K., et. al., "Searching for an optimum solution to the Bangladesh arsenic crisis," *Social Science and Medicine*, 56 (2003): 2089 - 2096.

<sup>107</sup> K. M. Ahmed, et. al., "Extent and severity of arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh" in *Managing Arsenic in the Environment: From soil to human health*, eds. Naidu, R., et. al. (Collingwood: CSIRO, 2006), 534 - 537.

This example illustrates how, even with the best intentions of government and NGOs, development can have detrimental impacts on communities. As in the case of the tube well project, local people have been excluded from making decisions that may have an impact upon their lives. In recent years, however, there has been a shift in development thinking towards capacity building, participation and empowerment, to enable local communities to have greater control of their destinies.<sup>108</sup>

### Capacity Building, Participation and Empowerment

Due to failings in top-down developmental programmes, the key practice promoted in development today is community participation and a focus on local development, as opposed to the macro level. Put another way, it is 'development from below'.<sup>109</sup> To make a difference, it is now advocated that capacity building actions, which 'enable...those out on the margins to represent and defend their interests more effectively', need to be tackled at the local level rather than on a global scale.<sup>110</sup> Supporters of this approach claim that greater ownership in projects occurs when people have command over the direction the project takes. 'Empowerment' of the people in development, therefore, incorporates greater democracy into the change process, with

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<sup>108</sup> Katy Gardner, "Mixed Messages: Contested 'Development' and the 'Plantation Rehabilitation Project'" in *Discourse of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. R. D. Grillo & R. L. Stirrat (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), 133 - 134.

<sup>109</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory :Deconstructions / Reconstructions*, 74 and Peet and Hartwick, *Theories of Development*, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Chambers, "Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development" in *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice*, eds. Nici Nelson and Susan Wright (London: ITDG Publishing, 1995), 30 - 32.

the approach a people centred one, and in particular, a poor people centred one.<sup>111</sup> An example of where development has succeeded by putting poor people first at the micro level is that of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh.

Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi economist and founder of the Grameen Bank, notes that 'abject poverty is a creation of mankind, not of nature'. He claims that it is the failings of a world system that focuses on macroeconomics rather than on the micro-scale; a world system that works to alleviate poverty through increasing overall economic growth; that is, 'not only unhelpful in getting the poor out of poverty; it may even be a hindrance.'<sup>112</sup> Yunus advocates microcredit. He observes that because the poor have an inability to control capital and are unable to access credit without collateral, they are placed in a position where they have no means of escaping poverty. The poor work for the benefit of those in control of the capital: the moneylenders, employers and landlords. Recognising this, Yunus sought to provide the poorest of the poor with an opportunity to access credit, to place them in a position where they could take advantage of economic prospects. So began the seeds of the Grameen Bank.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Chambers, "Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development," 30 – 32 and Deborah Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?" *Development in Practice* 17, 4 (2007): 630 and Michael D. Woost, "Alternative vocabularies of Development? 'Community' and 'Participation' in Development Discourse in Sri Lanka" in *Discourse of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. R. D. Grillo & R. L. Stirrat (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), 229 – 230.

<sup>112</sup> Muhammad Yunus, "Poverty alleviation: is economics any help? Lessons from the Grameen Bank experience," *Journal of International Affairs* 52, 1 (1998): 48.

<sup>113</sup> Yunus, "Poverty alleviation: is economics any help? Lessons from the Grameen Bank experience," 48-53.

Since its inception, the Grameen Bank has aimed to provide loans to Bangladesh's poorest sector of the population; its target, the lowest 25%, and particularly, Bangladeshi women. The reason for targeting women has been two fold; women generally endure the most in poverty, and because it has been found through the experience of other development programmes, that involving women in development is often the key to success. Women have demonstrated a willingness to work hard, particularly for the well being of their children. Loans are allowing women to generate income through activities in which they are skilled, often activities that they are able to carry out from home, such as: growing and selling vegetables, making clothes and weaving baskets. Women are, therefore, able to improve the living conditions for the entire family.<sup>114</sup>

Key to the success of the Grameen Bank, both as a means of poverty alleviation and as a bank, is that it has strict credit discipline. The Grameen Bank was not established as a charity. Yunus recognised that charity can only offer temporary relief to poverty. He wanted to create an ongoing structure that would be sustainable into the future. The structure, therefore, relies on a system of 'social collateral'. Those wanting to borrow from the Grameen Bank must belong to a collective of five borrowers before they are able to receive loans. The bank relies on peer pressure and peer support to ensure that loans are repaid. The two poorest of the group receive loans first, and it is not until these two are making regular payments that the others receive their loans. The structure encourages both individual entrepreneurship plus group cooperation, consequently, representing 'a middle ground of capitalism based on both profit and social returns.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Yunus, "Poverty alleviation: is economics any help? Lessons from the Grameen Bank experience," 59.

<sup>115</sup> Yunus, "Poverty alleviation: is economics any help? Lessons from the Grameen Bank experience," 55 and 65.

The Grameen Bank has empowered the poor women of Bangladesh by providing them with opportunities for economic freedom, self development, and an awareness of their rights and responsibilities that protects them from being exploited by unscrupulous moneylenders and landlords.<sup>116</sup> A study that compared women who had joined the Grameen Bank with a group of women who had not, found that 57% of the Grameen members had escaped poverty, whereas only 18% from the other group had been able to do so.<sup>117</sup> This study indicates that the microcredit model advocated by the Grameen Bank provides the means for the poorest of the poor to escape poverty. With its success, the Grameen model has now been adopted elsewhere, including: Nepal, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India.<sup>118</sup>

Proponents of the capacity building approach stress that it requires an understanding and a focus on the entire network of social relations in a community. Understanding the nature of the intricate web is vital to avoid the possible negative repercussions of acting in isolation. In the case of the Grameen Bank, it has not been all plain sailing. On closer inspection, the microcredit system has not always benefited the women it set out to help. Negative impacts have been reported, impacts like: the beating of women by their male relatives because the men felt threatened by the women's financial independence, as well as, men using women as the means

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<sup>116</sup> Mohammad A. Auwal, "Promoting Microcapitalism in the service of the Poor: The Grameen Model and its cross-cultural adaptation," *The Journal of Business Communication* 33, 1 (Jan 1996): 32.

<sup>117</sup> Yunus, "Poverty alleviation: is economics any help? Lessons from the Grameen Bank experience," 59.

<sup>118</sup> Auwal, "Promoting Microcapitalism in the service of the Poor: The Grameen Model and its cross-cultural adaptation," 32.

for gaining credit for themselves.<sup>119</sup> These impacts highlight the importance of understanding the underlying dynamics existing within a community and ensuring that time is taken to consider the wider context, so as to pre-empt possible impacts of a proposed action. Even in the case of a development initiative that has been hailed as a huge success, the Grameen Bank reveals that by changing the economic paradigm of communities there can also be knock on effects that impact society overall. Empowering people makes the development process more dynamic, thus, the likelihood of power shifts taking place.<sup>120</sup>

## Working in Partnership

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), particularly over the past two decades, have played a vital role in assisting with the participative and capacity building approach to development. This in turn has led to a massive growth of international NGOs, recorded as having increased from 832 in 1951 to 16,208 in 1990.<sup>121</sup> Considered the answer to resolving many societal problems, particularly in 'developing' communities, it is estimated there are now more than 40,000 NGOs operating internationally today. The capacities in which NGOs seek to build are wide ranging; social, political, cultural, technical, financial, to mention a few.<sup>122</sup> Building capacity is not easy; however, NGOs are increasingly working in partnership with local communities to achieve this objective.

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<sup>119</sup> Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?" 632 – 634.

<sup>120</sup> Chambers, "Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development," 37 – 39.

<sup>121</sup> Yearbook of International Organization 1989–1990, in Ringo Ossewaarde, Andre Nijhof and Liesbet Heyse, "Dynamics of NGO Legitimacy: How organising betrays core missions of INGOs" *Public Administration and Development* 28 (2008): 42.

<sup>122</sup> Ringo Ossewaarde, Andre Nijhof and Liesbet Heyse, "Dynamics of NGO Legitimacy: How organising betrays core missions of INGOs," *Public Administration and Development* 28 (2008): 42.



A weakness that has been noted in development organisations is what is referred to as the 'salt and pepper syndrome'; where assistance achieves little if it is scattered like salt and pepper over food. Rather to be effective, it needs to be concentrated and carried out through long term partnership.<sup>123</sup> Advocates of the need to work in partnership note that partnership requires; mutual respect, trust and accountability. If capacity building is truly the objective, then NGOs need to be willing to alter their practices as required, so as to work alongside their partner. In particular, as Eade notes, a cooperative approach means NGOs need to 'get... out of the driving seat and learn... to trust their chosen partner's navigational skills. Just because they paid to fill up the tank does not give NGOs the right to determine the route.'<sup>124</sup> The move in development theory to one of partnership and participation, hence, requires NGOs to analyse and reflect on their role and actions. As the saying goes '...if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, if you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime', but as Eade points out, 'What if that fisher is not a man but a woman? And what if she doesn't own the water in which she is fishing?...[and] what if the NGO does not even know how to fish?'<sup>125</sup> NGOs have a responsibility to continually review and reflect on their role so that they are vigilant of any changes occurring within the communities and surrounds in which they are operating.<sup>126</sup> Current development theory

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<sup>123</sup> Robin Poulton, "On Theories and Strategies," in *Putting People First: Voluntary Organisations and Third World Organisations*, eds. Robin Poulton and Michael Harris (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 1988), 23 and Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?": 637.

<sup>124</sup> Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?": 637.

<sup>125</sup> Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?": 634.

<sup>126</sup> Eade, "Capacity building: who builds whose capacity?": 632 – 634.

advocates, therefore, that a combination of community participation and the cooperation between local groups and NGOs makes for the greater likelihood of success in assisting the underdeveloped areas of the world.

A World Bank Discussion Paper released in 1987 identified four levels of participation: information sharing, consultation, decision making and initiating action.<sup>127</sup> Each level is signified by an increase in the intensity of participation and by differences in the relationship between the outside agency and local beneficiaries. The lower level participation is whereby the outside agency 'shares information' with the local beneficiaries in relation to the project being undertaken. This level is very much a top-down approach and allows little input from the community being assisted. The 'consultation' level is still a top-down approach, however, because information flows are more equal, the outside agency factors in local knowledge when planning and implementing project(s). At the 'decision making' level, local communities do have some influence over projects, however it is the final stage, 'initiating action' which provides for the greatest participation from local beneficiaries. Under this level, information and influence over projects are largely a bottom-up approach with outside agencies retaining minimal control.<sup>128</sup> A review cited by Lane reveals that of various development projects examined, the

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<sup>127</sup> Samuel Paul, *Community Participation in Development Projects: The World Bank Experience*, World Bank Discussion Papers 6 (Washington: The World Bank, 1987), 4 - 5.

<sup>128</sup> Paul, *Community Participation in Development Projects: The World Bank Experience*, 4 – 5 and Jacqueline Lane, "Non-governmental organisations and participatory development: the concept in theory versus the concept in practice" in *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice*, eds. Nici Nelson and Susan Wright (London: ITDG Publishing, 1995), 83.

most common participation levels are those at the lower levels whereby outside agencies retain control over decision making and the resources involved. The common process at this stage looks to be more of an 'add on' to existing operations, than an organic one.<sup>129</sup> It appears, therefore, that participation in development has a long way to go in most cases before it reaches the participative level whereby locals are initiating actions.

There are three main ways in which participation is currently used in the development process. The first use is a cosmetic one, whereby outside agencies endorse a participative approach, stating they will use it and have used it, yet in reality have retained control via a top-down approach. The second use is one whereby outside agencies coopt contributions of both time and effort from local communities in the guise of a 'local project' when in reality, "they" (local people) participate in 'our' project'.<sup>130</sup> The third use is that promoted in development theory as the use most likely to improve project effectiveness, encourage self reliance and promote sustainable development. This use empowers local people to take control of projects where they are involved in analysis, decisions and implementation, or put another way, "we" participate in 'their' project, not 'they' in 'ours'.<sup>131</sup> An example of where this concept has been highly successful is Porters' Progress Nepal (PPN), a local non government organisation established in Nepal in 2002.

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<sup>129</sup> Lane, "Non-governmental organisations and participatory development: the concept in theory versus the concept in practice," 186.

<sup>130</sup> Chambers, "Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development," 30.

<sup>131</sup> Chambers, "Paradigm shifts and the practice of participatory research and development," 30.

PPN was started by a group of committed porters wanting to improve the lives of mountain porters, particularly those involved in trekking tourism. Through collaboration with mountain porters, and assisted by volunteers, several programmes have been established to assist in the education and empowerment of porters, as well as advocacy programmes to tackle labour exploitation; the overall goal, to alleviate poverty by improving the living standards of porters.<sup>132</sup> While the organisation relies on volunteers, including non-Nepalis, this is very much a case of 'we' are participating in 'their' project; as the implementation and decisions are made by local people for local people.<sup>133</sup>

The example of PPN emphasises that the most effective participative approach is one that is undertaken from the inside, whereby individuals are empowered to influence the decisions affecting their lives, and outside agencies extract themselves from the 'doing'.<sup>134</sup> So where does this leave the Teach Inn Hotel and other volunteer tourism projects? If the most effective approach to development is a participative one where needs are determined by the community, can an initiative that evolved in the West, and combines both altruistic and ego-centric motivations, help make a difference?

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<sup>132</sup> Since 2002 the organisation has successfully clothed 5,000 porters, provided approximately 8,000 English and Empowerment classes, published a magazine containing the poetry, songs and artwork of porters, provided 2,200 porters with HIV/Aids education, established a cottage industry which provides porters with an opportunity to learn and produce crafts for a small income, and reconstructed seven rural schools. Porters' Progress Nepal, <http://www.portersprogressnepal.org>

<sup>133</sup> Porters' Progress Nepal, <http://www.portersprogressnepal.org>

<sup>134</sup> Jacqueline Lane, "Non-governmental organisations and participatory development: the concept in theory versus the concept in practice," 189.

## Creating a New Colonialism?

Volunteer tourism has made development fashionable. Organisations draw volunteers in with the promise of: 'make a difference while creating memorable experiences',<sup>135</sup> 'enrich your travels and benefit a small community',<sup>136</sup> 'there are people, places and creatures all over the world who could do with any time and effort that you are willing to give to help make their lives a little better.'<sup>137</sup> Coinciding with the extensive growth of volunteer tourism is the increase in the number of volunteer opportunities available as part of a holiday. Travel agencies, travel companies, schools, universities, charities and NGOs are just a few that promote such opportunities. Headlines like 'Next Holiday Idea – Why not Volunteer Overseas??'<sup>138</sup> are becoming common place. It is the internet that has significantly aided the growth of this niche market. An internet Google search of 'volunteer tourism projects' provides 319,000 hits.<sup>139</sup> Obtaining information and searching for projects is simple, particularly as many websites catering to this market allow prospective volunteers to search for opportunities via country, project type and project length. Two such websites, GoAbroad.com<sup>140</sup> and IndependentVolunteer.org<sup>141</sup> feature 3,852 and 138 volunteer abroad projects respectively.<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately the ease of obtaining this information has also drawn concern.

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<sup>135</sup> i-to-i, <http://www.i-to-i.com>

<sup>136</sup> Antipodeans Abroad, <http://www.antipodeans.com.au>

<sup>137</sup> Real gap experience, <http://www.realgap.co.uk>

<sup>138</sup> \_\_\_, "Next Holiday Idea – Why not Volunteer Overseas??," *STA Travel Academic Newsletter*, September 2008.

<sup>139</sup> Google search on 1 October 2008.

<sup>140</sup> The GoAbroad website provides comprehensive international alternative travel databases.

<sup>141</sup> The IndependentVolunteer website was established to assist in the bringing together of volunteers and independent groups seeking their services.

<sup>142</sup> [www.goabroad.com](http://www.goabroad.com) and [www.independentvolunteer.org](http://www.independentvolunteer.org)

With many organisations 'jumping on the bandwagon' to benefit from the appeal of volunteer tourism there is a wide variance in the quality of programmes on offer with some not providing a responsible product. A press release in 2007 by one of the world's leading independent, international development charities, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) warned against poorly planned and implemented schemes:

While there are many good gap year providers we are increasingly concerned about the number of badly planned and supported schemes that are spurious - ultimately benefiting no one apart from the travel companies that organise them...  
...gappers risk... becoming the new colonialists if attitudes to voluntary work in the developing world [does not] change... the gap year market [is] increasingly catering to the needs of volunteers, rather than the communities they claim to support. [VSO is calling] for a radical rethink of gap years and urge... providers to work with local communities to ensure young people are doing work that has a meaningful impact.<sup>143</sup>

While this warning is directed towards 'gappers' in particular, the same concerns apply to the entire volunteer tourism market, with the unregulated growth creating a generation of so-called 'development experts'. As Kate Simpson points out, the publicity literature of organisations offering volunteer experiences fails to identify the specific needs of the host community that the volunteers will assist in meeting, rather preferring to create a space where the volunteer is vital to the host community and that they have an expertise that will be appreciated.<sup>144</sup> Creating such a space, however, can lead to power imbalances between the host and volunteer.

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<sup>143</sup> \_\_\_\_, "Ditch (Un)Worthy Causes, VSO Advises Gap Year Students," *VSO Media Release*, August 14, 2007. <http://www.vso.org.uk/news/pressreleases/ditch-unworthy-causes.asp>

<sup>144</sup> Kate Simpson, "Dropping Out or Signing Up? The Professionalisation of Youth Travel," *Antipode* 37,3 (June 2005): 465.

The relationship that exists between the volunteer tourist and local can be viewed in several ways: guest and host, consumer and producer, expert and dependent. The way in which the volunteer tourist projects are presented can have a significant impact on how each views their position in the relationship. There is a danger that if volunteers consider themselves the expert then an exploitative relationship may form between volunteer and local - intentional or not. In turn, such an attitude may be interpreted by locals as 'colonial and imperialistic', fuelling the potential for negative outcomes.<sup>145</sup> Volunteer tourism organisations play a critical role in how a project is set up and how it is perceived: help, crutch, interference. As VSO points out, these organisations, therefore, need to work alongside communities to prevent the establishment of volunteer tourism becoming the 'new colonialism'.

This chapter has highlighted how community participation and empowerment are the foundations of capacity building and development. Without community involvement there is greater potential for decisions to be made without a full understanding of the social, cultural and environmental structures in place, which can lead to unexpected or negative impacts. If volunteer tourists are going to 'make a difference', then they need to align themselves with an organisation who is working in partnership with local communities, whereby the local communities are fully involved in identifying and implementing development and capacity building initiatives, and the volunteer is participating in 'their' project.

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<sup>145</sup> Kate Simpson, "Dropping Out or Signing Up? The Professionalisation of Youth Travel," 465 and So-Min Cheong and Marc L. Miller, "Power and Tourism: A Foucauldian Observation," *Annals of Tourism Research* 27, 2 (2000): 371 – 372.

## Conclusion

### Volunteer Tourism - Does it have a place in Development?

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Volunteer tourism is an innovative concept that combines both travel and a social conscience. The concept is a complex one, and because of this, it is difficult to assess the volunteer tourism market as a whole. As with any initiative that aims to assist people in capacity building, poverty alleviation, and development, it needs to follow good development principles. The extent to which this is happening in volunteer tourism is largely dependent on the type of organisation and the projects on offer. At its best, volunteer tourism can offer benefits to both the host community and the volunteer. Through volunteer projects, volunteers assist in meeting local needs (like building projects and teaching English), whilst for the volunteer it is an opportunity for self development and to enrich the CV. Alternatively, at its worst, volunteer tourism can have negative impacts similar to other niche markets (like the trekking and backpacker markets discussed). Volunteer tourism uses poverty as a spectacle and in some cases has created power imbalances between the host and volunteer. Within the volunteer paradigm, volunteers can view themselves as superior, there to offer the 'backward' poor their assistance and to pass on their knowledge as 'they know best.' This attitude can be viewed as colonial and imperialistic, hence leading to a 'one sided domination and exploitation of members of visited societies by the privileged classes.'<sup>146</sup> The complexity of volunteer tourism, therefore, requires that the merits of each project be assessed to determine the impacts of volunteer tourism.

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<sup>146</sup> So-Min Cheong and Marc L. Miller, "Power and Tourism: A Foucauldian Observation", 371-372.



Presently there is cause for concern in relation to volunteer tourism due to the lack of regulation of the new market. Wanting to help is not necessarily enough. Recent indications show that volunteer tourism is burgeoning, with a new academic journal focusing on the phenomenon, *Journal of International Volunteer Tourism and Social Development*,<sup>147</sup> due to be published, and codes of ethics being produced by individual organisations (like the one contained on the website, [www.ethicalvolunteering.org](http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org), established to provide advice and guidelines to ethical volunteering).<sup>148</sup> In the future it is possible we will see a volunteer tourism 'code of ethics' that regulates the industry as a whole, providing reassurance that both volunteer tourism organisations and volunteers are following practices to achieve the best outcome for all parties involved. Until then, however, the industry relies on self regulation that is having varied success, as implied in this thesis.

As a new field of study, there is currently a lack of research and literature available in relation to volunteer tourism.<sup>149</sup> As such, this thesis is breaking new ground. Volunteer tourism is a complex concept, trying to carry out leisure and altruism at the same time. But as revealed in this thesis, the concept does work. Volunteer tourism as an innovation takes risks; yet risks can pay out.

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<sup>147</sup> The first issue of this journal is due in 2009, published by Routledge. <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/1754-6362>

<sup>148</sup> This website was established by Dr. Kate Simpson who has been working in and researching international volunteering since 1998. <http://www.ethicalvolunteering.org/index.html>

<sup>149</sup> Key authors in the field are but a handful: Dr Kate Simpson, Stephen Wearing, Alexandra Coghlan, Michelle Callanan and Sarah Thomas.

The aim of this thesis, ultimately, was to determine whether volunteer tourism has a place in development. As discussed, this niche tourism product can assist in improving the lives of others and there are individual volunteer tourism projects that do have a place in development. Assessing the volunteer tourism market in its entirety, however, is difficult due to both a lack of evaluative research and the complexity of the product. Further research in the field, therefore, is required to assist in determining whether, overall, the volunteer tourism market has a place in development. Without this research, the niche market will find it difficult to substantiate its claim as offering a product that 'makes a difference', instead it will continue to be viewed with scepticism - new colonialism rather than 'doing development'.

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