VOLUNTEER TOURISM

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Abstract: *The phrase volunteer tourism renders the two phrases volunteer tourism and voluntourism, this being a form of niche tourism in which tourists participate in volunteer activities, depending on the needs of the community in which they are on vacation. It is considered a combination of leisure travel and voluntary work, being a form of niche tourism, closely linked to social tourism. Volunteer tourists who practice this form of tourism are subject to several types of constraints related of age, intra-personal constraints, inter-personal and structural constraints. Volunteer tourism through its sustainable forms can contribute to the production of changes at the individual and social level of consumers, the volunteer journey as a niche market, being a major factor in the sustainable development of some areas. The factors that influence the decision to practice volunteer tourism are, the commitments made and the financial scale of the action, safety and health issues, the period of the volunteering and the reputation of the organizer of such volunteer activities. The practice of volunteer tourism in conditions of maximum efficiency depends on the managerial measures taken, by the volunteers involved, who must provide key services to visitors to, attractions, destinations, events, especially when the emphasis is on ecological education and projects focused on activities for young people.*
Keywords: *Tourism, volunteer tourists, volunteer tourism, types of constraints*

INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism has been defined as "the use of time and income in a discretionary manner to get out of the ordinary sphere of activity to help those in need" (13,14), "a combination of leisure travel and voluntary work" (2), but also as a "form of moral consumption" (23). Volunteer tourism is considered to be "a serious form of leisure" and "a growing segment of alternative tourism" (23).

According to some researchers (1), volunteer tourism is closely correlated with social tourism and others (9) in their studies have made the portrait of volunteer tourism starting from two aspects:

a. the constraints regarding the practice of this type of tourism;

b. the age of the tourists who dedicate themselves to this type of activity

From a managerial point of view, volunteer tourism can be organized by the following actors on the tourism market: governments, charities and travel agencies. In 2001, the United Nations and the World Tourism Organization adopted the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism, which refers to:

a. the contribution of tourism to mutual understanding and respect between peoples and

companies;

b. tourism as a vehicle of individual and collective fulfillment;

c. tourism as a factor of sustainable development;

d. tourism as a user of the cultural heritage of humanity and contributor to its improvement;

e. tourism as a beneficial activity for host countries and communities;

f. the obligations of the interested parties for the development of tourism;

g. the right to practice tourism;

h. freedom of movement in tourism;

i. the rights of workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry;

j. implementation of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism.

Like any type or sub-type of tourism and the practice of volunteer tourism faces the following issues regarding the volunteer tourist and residents:

- positive:

a. economic and financial benefits (4.26);

b. social benefits (4,14,26);

c. strengthening individual capacities;

d. building a global culture of peace (22);

e. increasing the level of awareness of the importance of environmental conservation (4,14,20);

f. personal growth and development (11);

g. career development (16);

h. development of cross-cultural understanding (4,10,12,21);

i. acquiring intercultural competence (6.16);

j. acquiring new knowledge (5);

k. the aestheticization of poverty by presenting it as authentic and cultural. (15);

l. global involvement (16);

m. improving relationships (11);

n. sharing the renewed faith (22);

o. a new perspective on life (11,22);

p. promoting the creative arts (6);

q. promoting mutual relations (4,6);

r. reducing the level of poverty;

s. solving labor problems (26);

t. the feeling of being a global citizen;

u. psychological support (16);

v. establishing new relationships (22);

- negative:

a. lack of cross-cultural understanding (21);

b. strengthening the rationalization of poverty (7);

c. increasing the degree of differentiation of the main actors of volunteer tourism - "self" and "other/the other" (4,7);

d. increasing the level of dependency (22);

e. increasing the level of cultural sensitivity (10,22);

f. identifying volunteering with development aid (16);

g. instigation of cultural change (7);

h. impeding the progress of work and the completion of unsatisfactory work (7);

i. neglecting the wishes of the resident population;

j. non-promotion of tolerance (12);

k. the danger of "neo-colonialism" (16);

l. disruption of local economies (7);

m. lowering the efficiency level (22);

n. decreased sustainability;

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Practicing this form of tourism, volunteer tourism faces with positive and negative aspects, because it is on the border with social tourism. For these reasons, in this scientific approach, depending on the type of volunteer tourists, we analyzed the negative aspects faced by volunteer tourism to find solutions that contribute to the level of organizations, stakeholders through the proposed programs to reduce the issues that determine disruption of local economies and thus progress at the community level, by decreasing the level of efficiency and sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Volunteer tourists (9,13) who practice this form of tourism are subject to several types of age constraints:

a. Intra-personal constraints:
- young people: restrictions related to employment, education, disability;
- middle-aged people: education restrictions;
- the elderly: education and employment restrictions.

b. Inter-personal constraints:
- young people: language restrictions;
- middle-aged people: number of children;
- the elderly: language restrictions.

c. Structural constraints:
- young people: location, inactivity on the labor market;
- middle-aged people: location:
- the elderly: labor market initiatives, location.

The most pertinent analysis of the aspects faced by volunteer tourism was made by several researchers (8, 24, 25) who investigated the ambiguity regarding:

- organizations - religious groups, social enterprises, NGOs, academic organizations, non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations that:
  • may be motivated by altruism (3), trade, religious beliefs (18), political goals (17);
  • can send or receive volunteer tourists;
  • can focus on religious activities, conservation of wild flora and fauna and the environment (19, 20), community service, community development, niche tourism, volunteer tourism;
- stakeholders - host communities, governments and government agencies, voluntary tourism organizations, volunteer tourists;
- markets, characterized by:
  • the necessary skills - none, moderate, special;
  • the flow of volunteer tourists;
  • the motivation of the trip - altruistic, selfish, pluralistic, religious;
  • type of trip;
  • age of volunteer tourists;
- programs which:
  • can be focused on conservation, learning, cultural exchanges, fundraising;

• may be individually placed in an organization, multi-project, part of other larger, single programs;
• can last a day, up to 3, 6 or 12 months;
• can last a good part of the vacation or almost the entire vacation;
• may contain types of niche tourism: archaeological, educational, recreational, leisure, water sports.

Volunteer tourism through its sustainable forms can lead to major changes at individual and social level, volunteer travel as a market niche can contribute to the sustainable development of protected areas. Transforming learning versus volunteer tourism is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Transforming learning vs. volunteer tourism

Transforming learning	Volunteer tourism
1. Confronting a disorienting dilemma	- Motivation to travel, to contribute to a social or natural environment - Culture shock and experiencing an environment
2. Self-examination	- The opportunity to reflect expressed in volunteer journals
3. An in-depth assessment of personal role assumptions and the alienation created by new roles	
4. Sharing and analyzing personal dissatisfaction and experiences similar to those of others	- Informal exchange of experience
5. Exploring options for new ways of acting	- Familiarization with the habits of the residents;
6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles	- The opportunity to contribute new skills, knowledge and ideas;
7. Development of an action plan	- Volunteer tourism programs
8. Acquiring the knowledge and skills to act	- Training of new skills;
9. Trying new roles and evaluating feedback	- Control of cultural and social values;
10. Reintegration into society with a new perspective	- Limited opportunities in existing volunteer tourism programs

Source: (3, 18)

It can be concluded that the nature of the interaction between volunteer tourists and host communities and the socio-cultural experiences gained in the practice of volunteer tourism are perceived as mutually beneficial and apparently different from those obtained from the consumption of traditional cultural products. Volunteer tourism in developing countries focuses on a wide range of issues and has a positive impact:

- on post-travel social movement activities;
- on supporting activism.

The implications must be analyzed in the context of the need for managerial measures to coordinate organizations in order to:

a. provide opportunities for establishing links;

b. involvement of young people in volunteer projects;

c. awareness experiences during and after the voluntary tourist experience;

d. calculation of benefits

We can appreciate that volunteer tourism is a joyful experience, especially in terms of self-development, connection with the local lifestyle and experiencing the local way of life by pushing the tourist product to the consumer by:

- his awareness at the point of sale;
- attracting the consumer by the producer;

The value perceived by volunteer tourists at destinations includes personal growth and development, improving relationships and changing the outlook on life. Factors influencing the decision to participate in volunteer tourism are the arrangements and scope of the action, financial capacity, safety and health issues, the reputation of the organizer and time. In many parts of the world volunteering tourism depends on volunteers who have to provide key services to visitors to attractions, destinations, events but they face a number of constraints as volunteer tourists which becomes stressful especially when the emphasis is on environmental education and projects focused activities on youth.

CONCLUSIONS

This form of tourism, volunteer tourism is considered a means of leisure and a growing segment and implementation of new alternative forms of tourism related to socio-cultural tourism. Volunteer tourism through its sustainable forms can lead to major changes at the individual and social level, volunteering travel as a niche market can contribute to the sustainable

development of protected areas, as volunteer tourism is a joyful experience, especially in terms of self-development, connection with the local lifestyle and experiencing the local way of life through pushing the tourist product towards the consumer by making him aware at the point of sale and attracting the consumer to the producer. The value perceived by volunteer tourists at destinations includes, personal growth and development, improving relations with the resident population and changing the perspective on life. Factors influencing the decision to participate in volunteer tourism are the arrangements and scope of the action, financial capacity, safety and health issues, time and reputation of the organizer of such actions, involving all social categories but with increased emphasis on young people.

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