The Sustainable Development Goals: The Contribution of Tourism Volunteering

Abstract

The tourism workforce is diverse and the literature exploring workforce issues, whilst limited, largely focuses on remunerated workers. There is recognition that volunteering has a significant role to play in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); however, there is limited literature exploring the role of volunteering relative to the SDGs' architecture. With reference to the tourism workforce, there is also a noticeable lack of studies exploring how tourism volunteering contributes to realisation of the SDGs. In a first, using the lens of critical tourism, this conceptual paper seeks to holistically explore how tourism volunteering can contribute to SDG realisation from the perspectives of host volunteering and (guest) volunteer tourism. This study maps the potential of both forms relative to the volunteering activities that United Nations Volunteers (UNV) has identified as means by which volunteers can support the SDGs. The findings revealed common areas through which host volunteering and volunteer tourism contribute but taken on the whole, volunteer tourism has the greater potential to contribute to the SDGs as a development agenda. Informed by these findings, we develop six propositions to advance recognition and research relating to the contribution of tourism volunteering to the SDGs.

Keywords: host volunteering; volunteer tourism; Sustainable Development Goals, tourism workforce, sustainable tourism

Introduction

Coming into effect in January 2016, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), offer a transformational vision and agenda for global sustainable development to the year 2030 (UNGA, 2015a). Universal and interrelated in nature, applying to developed and developing countries alike, the 17 SDGs are intended to guide the policy-making of Member States of the United Nations (UN) (UNGA, 2015a). This transcendence of geographic borders is undoubtedly tethered to various governments' and sectors' combined abilities to track progress "in all countries, for all people." (UN Volunteers, n.d., p. 5).

The transcendence of geographical borders parallels tourism's ability to bring people together in interactions that produce lasting impacts. While much research has examined tourism through the perspective of hosts and guests – largely in consumptive settings – host and guest perspectives of tourism volunteering have yet to be widely explored (Holmes & Smith, 2009) and not holistically in respect of SDG realisation. To address this gap, and through the lens of critical tourism, we examine the SDGs in relation to the tourism volunteering workforce from the perspectives of host volunteering and (guest) volunteer tourism. Critical tourism is a commitment to tourism enquiry in ways that promote social justice, equality and anti-oppression (Ateljevic et al., 2007) – a lens which is highly applicable to the stated goals of the SDGs. Through this lens, we interrogate the wide-ranging nature of the SDGs and their applicability to tourism's volunteering workforce, especially in light of criticisms levelled at tourism work as being an ineffective conduit for achieving decent work and the SDGs (Baum & Nguyen, 2019). In order to understand the potential of tourism volunteering to contribute to the SDGs, we need take the first important step towards conceptualising the means by which it can do so. Therefore, the aim of this study is to conceptually explore how tourism volunteering can meaningfully contribute to the SDGs, vis-à-vis the act of volunteering in local and international contexts. The focus of this study affords practical implications for the limitations and delimitations of tourism volunteering's contributions to the SDGs, as well as the potential pitfalls different forms of tourism volunteering may present into a future irrevocably changed by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

To achieve this aim, we performed a review in respect to the role of host volunteering and volunteer tourism as part of the tourism workforce, particularly in relation to the defining characteristics and nature of tourism work. In February 2020, a search was conducted of academic literature, voluntary sector reports and other material produced by relevant organisations using a combination of the search terms "tourism", "volunteering" and "sustainable development goals". An integrative review specific to advancing understanding of the ways host volunteering and volunteer tourism can contribute to the SDGs was conducted (Furunes, 2019; Haver, Akerjordet & Furunes, 2013). In particular, focus in this critical review was placed on the published literature in respect to the potential of both forms of tourism volunteering to contribute against a matrix of the 17 SDGs and the set of volunteering activities that the United Nation Volunteers (UNV) programme has identified as providing scope for volunteers to contribute across the SDG framework (UNV, 2015). This review served to clarify existing knowledge and practice relative to the SDGs and various volunteering activities officially sanctioned by the UN.

This analysis revealed that as part of the tourism workforce, volunteering tourism has greater scope to contribute to a wider range of SDGs than host volunteering and a wider range of UNV activities including, amongst others, awareness raising, provision of technical expertise to deliver essential services abroad and the modelling of behaviours and attitudes in support

of Agenda 2030. In terms of specific SDGs, Quality Education (Goal 4) was found to offer the greatest potential of the 17 Goals for both forms to contribute to the global sustainability agenda, aligned with the capacity of the tourism volunteering workforce to educate tourists at home and abroad about the history and culture of destinations, issues relating to physical and social environments, as well as more traditional educational topics such as English in the case of volunteer tourists. Consequently, emanating from this mapping exercise, propositions aimed at advancing recognition and research on the contribution of tourism volunteering to the SDGs are proposed and an associated research agenda is advanced.

The Tourism Workforce and Volunteering

Baum and colleagues have argued over a concerted period that there is a dearth of research attention in the tourism academy focused on the tourism workforce (Baum, 2007, 2015, 2018; Baum et al., 2016a). Critiques of this limited extant body of research have highlighted its piecemeal nature, repetition of topics, an overly managerialist focus, a lack of methodological innovation and a general failure to study the tourism workforce holistically. More recently, the extent to which tourism employment contributes to sustainable tourism and the SDGs has been questioned by this collective (Baum et al., 2016b; Baum & Nguyen, 2019), with it highlighted that "in terms of sustainable tourism, workforce themes do not feature as a prominent consideration" (Baum, 2018, p. 879).

These debates are framed relative to the nature of tourism work and how it can be precarious, prone to high staff turnover, unsocial working hours and low pay, amongst other negatives. Baum and Nguyen (2019) demonstrate how tourism employment impinges human rights at an individual, within family and community level. As such, they contend that it is fundamentally misaligned with the notion of "decent work" enshrined in SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) stated commitments to decent work. Robinson et al. (2019), based on a secondary analysis of precarious employment in national (Australian), regional and global industry reports, and mapping the findings relative to the SDGs, is damning in suggesting that the precarious nature of tourism employment is working against the achievement of the SDGs. The authors go on to note that their findings run counter to the prevailing view that tourism is a significant instrument for achieving the SDGs. In an earlier paper, Baum et al. (2016b, p. 5) bemoan "a lack of planning and engagement on the part of the tourism academy, tourism organizations and host communities to commit to the development of a sustainable tourism workforce that will enjoy the benefits associated with the UN's ideals of decent work". Sustainable human resource management (Enhert & Harry, 2012) has been suggested as a way forward on this front (Baum, 2018).

Explicit acknowledgement of volunteering in tourism workforce debates is further limited. Baum et al. (2016a) include volunteers in their definition of the tourism workforce. They find that volunteering studies are scant in their systematic review of workforce papers published in eight of the leading tourism and hospitality journals from 2005 to 2014. Robinson et al. (2019) suggests that the ascription of volunteering as a form of work furthers the precariousness of tourism employment. There is a body of literature debating whether volunteering is a form of unpaid work or leisure (Holmes et al., 2010; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2010). Whilst it is beyond the scope of the current study to fully argue these debates, they generally highlight that the key factors differentiating both perspectives are the level of obligation associated with the volunteering effort, the extent to which volunteers develop skills as a result of volunteering and the time commitment required on the part of the

volunteer (Holmes et al., 2010). For our purposes, in alignment with seminal volunteering definitions (Cnaan et al., 1996; Handy et al., 2000), we view volunteering as part of the tourism workforce if the activity is freely undertaken by the volunteer, under the auspices of a formal tourism organisation and with the intention of advantaging beneficiaries other than, and in addition to, the volunteer. We note that despite the emerging debates regarding the tourism workforce and SDG realisation, studies have been silent to date in respect of how volunteering fits into this agenda.

Tourism volunteering encompasses individuals volunteering in their own community as host volunteers and tourists travelling to a destination as guests to volunteer in the form of volunteer tourism. Research on host volunteering and volunteer tourism has escalated significantly in recent decades however these two streams have generally been siloed with minimal attempts to consider tourism volunteering more broadly (Holmes & Smith, 2009). Holmes et al. (2010) is one of the few studies to holistically examine tourism volunteering and look for the commonalities and differences based on the dimensions of setting (origin – destination), time commitment (regular – episodic) and renumeration (reimbursed – paying). The authors note that "definitive distinctions between these two groups" cannot be drawn (p. 267). Qi (2020, p. 3) likewise contends that despite studies having investigated "certain aspects of volunteering in tourism, the fundamental conceptualization of the phenomenon has baffled scholars for years". Qi's study examines the suitability of Western conceptualisations of tourism volunteering in China and confirms the fuzzy interplay between host volunteering and volunteer tourism, whilst also highlighting that various activities classified as volunteering in China do not align with Western definitions. Interestingly, the transferability of volunteers contributing across host and guest settings has yet to be widely explored (Ong et al., 2018).

Research on host volunteers has considered volunteering in museums and heritage attractions; visitor information centres; parks and recreation; and event volunteering. Studies largely focus on singular settings with volunteer profiles (Fyffe & Wister, 2016; Skirstad, & Hanstad, 2013), motivations (Chen et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2018) and expectations; experiences and satisfaction (Giannoulakis et al., 2015; Bachman et al., 2016); commitment (Cuskelly et al., 2004; Pauline, 2011); comparisons between paid staff and volunteers (Smith & Holmes, 2012); and trends and management issues (Kwiatkowski et al., 2020; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2015), popular topics of study.

While volunteering during all or part of a travel experience has a long history, volunteer tourism has only attracted significant academic attention since the late 1990s. Brown and Lehto (2005) segmented volunteer tourism based on the mindset of participants: the volunteer-minded mission where most or the entire trip is devoted to volunteering at the destination, and vacation-minded where the volunteering is only a small portion of a predominantly leisure experience. Considering the parties involved in volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists have been the primary focus of research mainly through establishing their profiles, motivations, attitudes, behaviours, and experiences; their interactions with host communities (Andereck et al., 2012; Han et al., 2019; Tomazos & Butler, 2010); and aspects of self and cultural identity (Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Ong et al., 2018; Sin & He, 2018). The literature has until relatively recently been idealistic by focusing on benefits of volunteer tourism but there is increasing recognition of negative outcomes (Guttentag, 2009; Wearing & McGehee, 2013) and reframing of volunteer tourism towards intercultural mutuality (Wearing et al., 2017). The role of intermediary organisations, such as sending organisations, tour operators, environmental and humanitarian non-government organisations (NGOs) and

academic groups, has also emerged in this reframing, particularly as commercial volunteer tourism has attracted increasing criticism around commodification (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

The SDGs and Volunteering

Contrasting with its marginalisation in the tourism workforce literature, volunteering has been pushed to the forefront of the international agenda for realising the SDGs, in rhetoric at least. The Agenda 2030 resolution (UNGA, 2015a, p. 11) notes "volunteer groups" are one of the key stakeholder groups that governments must work with on SDG implementation, together with regional authorities, international institutions, academia and philantrophic organisations, amongst others. This is deserved recognition of the contribution volunteers make globally, with the 2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report highlighting 1 billion people volunteer to assist causes and their local communities (UNV, 2018). The UN Secretary-General's synthesis report on the post-2015 development agenda goes further to note that volunteering can be a "powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation. Volunteerism can help to expand and mobilize constituencies, and to engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable solutions" (UNGA, 2014, p. 36). The UNV toolkit for volunteer-involving organisations on the SDGs also notes the pervasiveness of volunteering action in supporting all SDGs and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) in particular. Concomitantly, the profile of volunteering representative groups has been raised through participation in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the forum for engaging the 197 Member States in monitoring SDG progress on behalf of the UN (UNGA, 2013, p. 6). This representation was initially through the collective Post-2015 Volunteering Working Group, which has transitioned to become the Volunteer Groups Alliance (VGA).

Whilst this global focus on volunteering throws the contributions of the voluntary sector into sharp focus, problematically Haddock and Devereux (2016, p. 70) note that UN Member States and the HLPF have to date failed to "articulate concrete steps to translate the recognition of the role of volunteers in achieving the SDGs" and to include volunteer groups in national planning processes. They also go on to highlight that at the time of their study, volunteering was not mentioned in the proposed indicators for monitoring the SDGs. Indeed, inspection of the final Global Indicator Framework confirms that there is no mention of volunteers and volunteering in the indicators, even in relation to Goal 17, with the closest potential indicator (in terms of intent) being 17.17.1 "Amount of US dollars committed to civil society partnerships" (UNGA 2019, p., 21). Progress towards embedding volunteering into the reporting of SDG performance by Member States, through the Voluntary Nation Review (VNR) process, has also been slow. Reporting to the HLPF in 2019, the VGA noted that of those countries electing to self-select to submit a VNR, 45% (21 VNRs) of these highlighted the contribution of volunteers to varying degrees (VGA, 2019).

Mirroring the silence regarding the contribution of volunteers to the SDGs in the tourism field, there is limited academic work examining volunteering and the SDGs more broadly. Almost exclusively what has been written views volunteering from an international development lens, despite the SDGs being universal in scope (Devereux & Holmes, 2018; Howard & Burns, 2015). Scheinert et al. (2019), for example, mapped the activity of a German run international volunteer service program in relation to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and found that the program enabled equal access for diverse cohorts of volunteers aligned to

SDG 4.5 (eliminate gender disparities, provide equal access for the vulnerable) and promoted skills and knowledge relating to sustainable development aligned to SDG 4.7 (provide knowledge and skills for the promotion of sustainable development). Scheinert et al.'s (2019, p. 5) study supported the conduct of such mapping exercises for leading "to the identification of practices that have the potential to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs".

There has been a critical tone in much of these writings. Hawksley and Georgeou (2019) argue that the neoliberal turn inherent in much of the discourse on volunteering in Western societies negates the involvement of volunteers in SDG realisation to the role of cheap labour in response to the withdrawal of government in the provision of core essential services. As such, volunteering is viewed as less of a form of meaningful community empowerment. Howard and Burns (2015) share this view and further argue for a post-colonial approach to be taken to international volunteering in the Post-2015 Agenda, which would overcome the privileging of Northern perspectives of volunteering as a form of work. Using a large-scale study of volunteering in South Africa, Russell (2016) clearly demonstrates that due to varying cultural understandings of volunteering, certain forms such as informal volunteering for and between disadvantaged communities, may be ineffectively captured in international measurement exercises (ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work, ILO, 2011) to monitor volunteering and the SDGs. As Russell goes onto highlight "we are contributing to undermining, by hiding and silencing, the very practices we are aiming to understand, while privileging the usual formal, advantaged volunteers who least need recognition and policy support" (p. 15).

Less than a handful of studies have discussed tourism volunteering and the SDGs. These have exclusively focused on volunteer tourism with its links to international development (Devereux et al., 2017). Devereux and Holmes (2018, p. 97) recently argued there are five rationales for relating volunteer tourism to the SDGs in a "symbiotic relationship". Briefly, these included acknowledgement of the cross-cutting role of volunteering in the 2030 Agenda, the universality of the SDGs ensuring that volunteer tourism applies both nationally and internationally, SDG target 4.7 (noted above) for which volunteer tourism is well placed to contribute, explicit acknowledgement of tourism as a mechanism for sustainable development and SDG 17, for which volunteer tourism can promote partnerships and collaborations within and between nations. We argue that these rationales apply equally to all forms of tourism volunteering.

Devereux et al. (2017), to our knowledge, is the only study to date that has sought to dissect the divide of national and international volunteering agendas in order to find common ground for all forms of volunteering to contribute to the SDGs. The authors note that different disciplinary foci (international development, volunteering, tourism and not-for-profit studies), methodological traditions and worldviews largely keep the academic study of volunteering at home and abroad separate. Commonalities they raise as providing opportunities for intersectional and collaborative work include, but are not limited to: volunteer impact on communities, equality and diversity considerations and issues of volunteer management. Both Devereux et al. (2017) and Devereux and Holmes (2018) contend that more research and practitioner effort is required to embed volunteering across the SDG framework. Devereux and Holmes (2018, p. 103) are also critical in noting that "the SDGs remain under promoted and lacking ownership globally, particularly in high income countries".

Set against the backdrop of limited tourism workforce studies, the paucity of research on tourism volunteering and the SDGs and the acknowledged global role of volunteers in

achieving the 2030 Agenda, this study aims to contribute with a conceptual exploration of the means by which tourism volunteering can contribute to the SDGs. To facilitate this, the tourism volunteering workforce is explored from two workforce perspectives – host destination volunteering and (guest) volunteer tourism. While host volunteering is typically regarded as a longer-term commitment over multiple shorter episodes, and is aligned to traditional forms of volunteering, volunteer tourism work necessitates a greater commitment per one-off episode, due in part to the travel component (Holmes et al., 2010). The latter encompasses both commercially available volunteer tourism trips as well as non-commercial conceptions such as international service volunteering, thus a diversity of projects and trip lengths are accepted in this conceptualisation, though primarily led by the characteristics described above. In underpinning a wide range of tourism services, as part of the broader contribution of tourism to the SDGs (UNGA, 2015a), the potential contributions of both forms of tourism volunteering to the SDGs has yet to be holistically examined.

Methodology

Due to the fragmented and complex nature of volunteering, few methodologies have been developed to aid the measurement and reporting of volunteering activities relative to the SDGs. Haddock and Devereux (2015, p. 82) developed a mapping system they refer to as a "crosswalk" to map "specific volunteer activities and projects against the SDG goals". They conceptualised this to map the activities of volunteering organisations, requiring that they list their key activities, with those likely to fulfil the SDGs subsequently mapped to each relevant SDG and SDG target. This process has the potential to capture the ability of singular volunteering activities to contribute to multiple SDGs thereby highlighting "the cross cutting nature of volunteerism and show that the SDGs can be achieved in many different ways" (Haddock & Devereux, 2015, p. 83), with the value of such mapping exercises supported by Scheinert et al. (2019). While Haddock and Devereux's (2015) organisation-focused methodology has limited application in the current paper, an adapted form, which focuses on individual volunteers' abilities to contribute, was used to explore the potential contributions of both forms of tourism volunteering to the SDGs. To our knowledge, such an undertaking has not been attempted to date.

In developing a crosswalk, Haddock and Devereux (2015, p. 83) note the "preparation of a listing of typical volunteering activities" is required. Departing from Haddock and Devereux's (2015) use of the *ILO Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer* Work (ILO, 2011) for this purpose, individual volunteering contributions were mapped relative to the UNV (2015) list of "potential activities for volunteers in the context of the SDGs" as outlined in its guidance for volunteer organisations document. UNV is at the forefront of global efforts by the UN to embed volunteering as part of the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015b, 2016). On this basis, it was appropriate to use these recommended activities to assess the different ways that tourism volunteering can contribute to the SDGs. The UNV (2015) guide states that volunteers can:

- Raise awareness about the 2030 agenda through local campaigns and creative approaches;
- Deliver technical expertise to complement essential basic services, such as SDG Goals 1 to 5;
- Model behaviours and attitudes, helping the agenda to be truly transformational;
- Mobilise people to develop a sense of opportunity and ownership;
- Develop skills across different goal areas through transfer of knowledge and experience; and

- Collect data, assess SDG progress and leverage local expertise.

For each form of tourism volunteering, a matrix consisting of the 17 SDGs and the UNV activities was constructed. This matrix was then populated in consideration of the activities typically associated with host volunteering and volunteer tourism, as informed by the literature review and the nominated definition of tourism volunteering referred to earlier in the paper (an activity freely undertaken, for a formal tourism organisation, with the intention of advantaging beneficiaries beyond the volunteer). We do note that tourism volunteering involves reciprocal benefits that align with the SDGs for both the volunteer (e.g., skill development, increased socialisation) and beneficiaries of their services (Holmes & Smith, 2009). However, only contributions to beneficiaries (service to others) was considered for the purposes of the mapping. For host volunteering, these included volunteering by the resident population at attractions, museums, visitor information centres, events and national parks/reserves (Holmes et al., 2010). For volunteer tourism, these included activities that alleviate material poverty, environmental restoration and research into any aspect of society or the environment in a destination for which the volunteer is a visitor (Wearing, 2001).

Given an indicative coding scheme was absent in Haddock and Devereux's suggested methodology, one developed by the authors was applied to facilitate the mapping process. The potential contribution of each volunteer workforce towards the SDGs was evaluated on the following three non-hierarchical levels:

(0) Low/none, indicating that typical forms of the tourism volunteering activity were highly unlikely to contribute to the SDGs in the proposed ways. This is represented by '0' in the matrix.
(1) Yes, but only for specialised activities. Akin to skilled volunteering (Brayley et al., 2014), the use of one's specialised professional skills, such as medical expertise, were required for forms of the tourism volunteering activity to contribute to the SDGs in the proposed ways. This is represented by '1' in the matrix.
(2) Yes, indicating that most forms of the tourism volunteering activity are likely to contribute to the SDGs in the proposed ways. This is represented by '2' in the matrix.

The potential of host volunteering and volunteer tourism to contribute to each SDG was evaluated on this basis by the researchers over iterative rounds of review (Saldaña, 2016). This process was conducted separately in the first instance. Based on their respective areas of research expertise (20 years in host volunteering and 10 years in volunteer tourism), each researcher was charged with mapping one form initially, then the researchers came together to share their findings, compare commonalities and discuss areas of divergence. Whilst most of initial codes were common across the researcher's assessments, some diverged. For example, while the ability for volunteer tourism (Table 2) to deliver technical expertise for Goal 6 was coded as '0' initially, this was revised after discussion. In light of programs where trained engineers improved water access and sanitation solutions per their area of professional expertise, such as Engineers Without Borders Australia, the code was revised to '1'. Following, a further round of review and discussion, the researchers ultimately arrived at the evaluations presented below.

We acknowledge that this study was conducted prior to widespread effects of COVID-19 pandemic being felt globally, which has severely curbed all forms of tourism volunteering and reversed progress towards achieving the SDGs (UN, 2020). As such our study is positioned relative to the pre-COVID era and an envisioned post-COVID future in which

tourism volunteering opportunities resume, albeit with adaptions to accommodate social distancing and other containment and management measures.

Results

Host volunteering

Table 1 Matrix of SDGs and means of contribution for host volunteering

	Ways volunteering activities can contribute (UNV, 2015) / Goals (UNGA, 2015a)	Raise awareness	Deliver technical expertise	Model behaviours	Mobilise people	Develop skills	Collect data
1	No poverty	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Zero hunger	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	Good health and wellbeing	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	Quality education	2	2	2	2	2	0
5	Gender equality	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	Clean water and sanitation	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	Affordable and clean energy	0	0	0	0	0	0
8	Decent work and economic growth	2	2	0	0	0	0
9	Industry innovation and infrastructure	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	Reduce inequalities	0	2	2	2	2	0
11	Sustainable cities and communities	2	2	2	2	2	0
12	Responsible consumption and production	2	2	2	2	2	0
13	Climate action	2	0	2	2	2	2
14	Life below water	2	0	2	2	2	2
15	Life on land	2	0	2	2	2	2
16	Peace, justice and strong institutions	2	2	2	2	2	0

17	Partnerships for the goals	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 1 shows the matrix as evaluated for host volunteering, dominated by '0's (low/no contribution to the SDGs) and '2's (likely to contribute to the SDGs). Reading the matrix horizontally from the perspective of each SDG, host volunteering was evaluated to have limited potential to directly contribute to Goals 1 to 5, which focus on essential basic services. An exception was made for Goal 4, as it related to quality education, a goal which was considered compatible with the informational functions host volunteers may play in explaining the history and cultural significance of tourism sites and attractions (Holmes & Smith, 2009). This informational component was also vital to host destination volunteering being coded as having significant potential to contribute to Goals 11 to 16, as they encompassed educational elements that could significantly improve visitors' knowledge and practices relating to these goals. These could take the form of demonstrating elements of the design of sustainable cities, which could include systems set up for responsible consumption or best practice in production. By volunteering as guides to nature sites, on land and water, as well as explaining the histories of destinations, host volunteers can reinforce everyday messages of conservation and social justice.

Reading the matrix vertically from the perspective of various UNV volunteering activities, the evaluation of host volunteering resulted in fewer areas of potential contribution in comparison to the volunteer tourism matrix, which will be discussed below. Notably, when viewed in terms of the ways volunteering activities can contribute, this form of volunteering was less likely to contribute to the SDGs in terms of *data collection*. The exception however was the potential of host volunteers to collect data in their local communities (e.g., host conservation volunteers collecting observational data on trail usage in national parks) in support of monitoring SDG progress aligned to Goal 17 and its data, monitoring and accountability targets. In terms of UNV activity *raising awareness*, there was greater potential for a contribution. The work of host volunteers, which might include guiding in areas of cultural and environmental significance, especially those affected by climate change, can help to raise awareness of pro-environmental issues. By bringing their *technical expertise* into volunteer roles with local tourism organisations, host volunteers can also use their expertise to *model behaviours* that encourage tourists to adopt responsible consumption through greater understanding of local practices and challenges. This transfer of knowledge can inspire tourists and volunteers alike to make choices to consume locally and empower local communities in the process. The dissemination of this knowledge can also be proliferated amongst volunteers to encourage the *development of skills* related to understanding how sustainability can be incorporated into the growth of cities and communities.

Volunteer tourism

Table 2 Matrix of SDGs and means of contribution for volunteer tourism

	Ways volunteering activities can contribute (UNV, 2015)	Raise awareness	Deliver technical expertise	Model behaviours	Mobilise people	Develop skills	Collect data

	Goals (UNGA, 2015a)						
1	No poverty	2	0	0	2	2	2
2	Zero hunger	2	1	0	2	2	2
3	Good health and wellbeing	2	1	1	2	2	2
4	Quality education	2	2	2	2	2	2
5	Gender equality	2	0	2	2	0	0
6	Clean water and sanitation	2	1	0	2	1	2
7	Affordable and clean energy	0	1	0	2	1	2
8	Decent work and economic growth	2	2	2	2	2	2
9	Industry innovation and infrastructure	0	1	2	2	1	0
10	Reduce inequalities	2	0	0	2	2	0
11	Sustainable cities and communities	2	0	0	2	0	2
12	Responsible consumption and production	2	1	2	2	1	1
13	Climate action	2	1	2	2	1	1
14	Life below water	2	1	2	2	1	1
15	Life on land	2	1	2	2	1	1
16	Peace, justice and strong institutions	2	0	0	2	0	0
17	Partnerships for the goals	0	0	0	0	0	2

As a form of activity, volunteer tourism naturally encompasses many characteristics related to tourism, while simultaneously exhibiting general volunteering characteristics as conceptualised by UNV, especially in terms of the latter's development focus. Therefore, the matrix shown in Table 2 illustrates greater scope for volunteer tourism to contribute in nuanced ways to the SDGs through the lens of the UNV volunteering activities. This is exemplified by the areas coded as '2' (likely to contribute to the SDGs) and '1' (likely to contribute to the SDGs, but only for those with specialised skills), in contrast to the dominance of '0's and '2's coded in Table 1.

Reading horizontally across Table 2, the variety of volunteer tourism programs allow for most of the 17 SDGs to be coded as '1' or '2' against activities specified in the matrix. The ability for volunteer tourism to contribute to Goals 1 to 6 is generally higher in potential, as much volunteer tourism activity retains the international developmental focus which these goals engender (UN Development Programme, 2016). As English-teaching is a common activity for volunteer tourists to engage in (Palacios, 2010), the potential of volunteer tourism to contribute to quality education outcomes (Goal 4) was assessed as high. Furthermore, when organised in collaboration with local organisations and with appropriate consideration of local labour capacities, volunteer tourism has the ability to contribute to Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). There was slightly more potential for volunteer tourism to contribute to Goals 12-15, taking into consideration the types of specialised programs that could be offered. As with host volunteering, at the level of the individual, volunteer tourism could not contribute in of itself much to building partnerships for the goals (Goal 17), with the exception of collecting data for SDG monitoring.

Reading the matrix vertically from the perspective of various UNV volunteering activities, the nature of volunteer tourism allows participants to *raise awareness* through the missions, causes or various programs they associate with during their volunteer tourism trips, and the act of participating in volunteer tourism represents a form of mobilisation towards the different Goals (Devereux & Holmes, 2018). Given research project *data collection* is an explicitly recognised form of volunteer tourism (Wearing, 2001), the potential for volunteer tourism to contribute to this activity was also judged to be much higher than that of host volunteering.

Some volunteer tourism programs require that participants possess particular skills in order to contribute meaningfully to host communities. Indeed, the volunteer tourism literature has been critical of well meaning but unskilled volunteers placing an added burden on local host organisations managing them (Graham et al., 2012). Such skilled programs include engineering expertise for bringing clean water access to rural locations or medical expertise/training to provide medical services to remote regions. By their nature, these programs lend themselves to the *deliver technical expertise* activities that volunteer tourism can contribute to the SDGs. Furthermore, with more programs teaching English and delivering other educational training components, these characteristics lend themselves to volunteer tourism being more likely to contribute to the SDGs via *develop skills* volunteering activities.

Tourism volunteer workforce

As a combined workforce, tourism volunteering possesses potential to contribute to a number of goals, via a number of activities. Across both Tables 1 and 2, collectively, the activities of *raise awareness, model behaviours,* and *mobilise people* have the greatest potential to contribute to the SDGs across both forms of tourism volunteering. This potential is boosted as these forms of volunteering operate in diverse environments, interact with a variety of communities and provide opportunities for volunteers in both settings to model the pro-social behaviours inherent in volunteering. Notably, Quality Education (Goal 4) can be enhanced by tourism volunteering through a number of activities, reflecting the potential of the tourism volunteering workforce to educate tourists about issues relating to physical and social environments, as well as more traditional educational topics such as English in the case of

volunteer tourists. For both forms of tourism volunteering, a notable limitation lies in their capacity to contribute to Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), with the exception of data collection efforts in support of SDG monitoring. This limitation is less a reflection of the tourism volunteer workforce's capacity but rather its fragmented nature; Goal 17 relates more to organisational and governmental partnerships and cooperation in achieving action, and therefore is not within the purview of the tourism volunteer workforce at the individual level to fully action.

Discussion

The findings of the conceptual mapping exercise reveal the potential of the tourism volunteer workforce to contribute to the SDGs as part of this global development effort. Based on this analysis and supported by the literature review, we propose (in no particular order) six propositions regarding the extent to which the tourism volunteering workforce can contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We acknowledge that these propositions need empirical support and so to that end, we detail an accompanying research agenda in the conclusion following.

Proposition 1: The development-focused nature of volunteer tourism implies that this cohort of the tourism workforce is the most predisposed to fulfilling a broader range of SDGs.

Having evolved from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN Development Programme, 2016), the SDG's stronger focus on international development was perhaps inevitable, despite claims of universality (Howard & Burns, 2015). Whilst not without its critiques, relative to this framing, our results suggest that volunteer tourism has greater potential to contribute to a broader range of SDGs than host volunteering. There are however commonalities between both forms with Goal 4 appearing to provide the greatest scope for host volunteering and volunteer tourism to contribute to global development through the provision of quality education outcomes. We further speculate based on the limited available research evidence on paid tourism work (Robinson et al., 2019), that all forms of tourism volunteering may provide greater scope to realise decent work opportunities across the SDGs, although not at the expense of paid work opportunities (in relation to Proposition 5 below).

Proposition 2: The greater the involvement of commercial interests, the less likely volunteer tourism efforts will contribute to fulfilling the SDGs.

There have been calls for a shift away from the "helping" model of volunteer tourism that has been criticised as a form of neo-colonialism (Palacios, 2010) to a "learning" model that encourages greater recognition of parity between cultures (Wearing et al., 2017). However, the propensity towards communicating what is easy rather than what is important (vis-à-vis responsible contributions to local communities) (Smith & Font, 2014), provides limited incentive for commercial volunteer tourism sending organisations to align with the SDGs. Acknowledging the important role intermediary organisations play in determining the positioning of volunteer tourism activities relative to the SDGs, the aforementioned NGOs and academic groups are more likely to pursue goals congruent with the SDGs than their commercial counterparts. To this end, in line with recommendations for a code of conduct for volunteer tourism (Ong et al., 2013), such guidelines now exist (see: TIES, 2012) but are not enforced. The lack of monitoring and evaluation (of markets, organisations and programs) (Taplin et al., 2014) remains a critical consideration affecting the volunteer tourism workforce's ability to contribute meaningfully to the SDGs. In the absence of such

guidelines, the propensity of commercial operations to prioritise volunteer tourists over host communities (APEC, 2018) may render projects less effective in regard to SDG fulfilment.

Proposition 3: The extent to which tourism volunteering can contribute to the SDGs is interrelated with the skill levels of volunteers.

From our analysis, it became apparent that the UNV's (2015) recommended volunteering activities could not be universally applied to tourism volunteering and the SDGs. The applicability of particular volunteering activities was limited, in part, due to requisite professional skills being needed in order to participate. Education is a stable predictor of volunteering with higher education levels correlated with higher rates of volunteering (Dury et al., 2015). A person is more likely to volunteer if they believe they have the skills and competencies required to do so in a specific role and/or organisation (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018). Whilst volunteering leads to skill development as the UNV (2015) framework acknowledges, imposing requirements for mandated skills associated with some volunteering activities also limits the pervasiveness with which tourism volunteering can contribute to the SDGs. Furthermore, this may continue the privileging of certain forms and cultural conceptions of volunteering (discussed below).

Proposition 4: The extent to which tourism volunteering is recognised as contributing to the SDGs is affected by cultural understandings of volunteering.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that formalised volunteering is a Global North-dominant concept (Hawksley & Georgeou, 2019). In light of this prevailing view of volunteering as a form of work, less visibility is afforded to informal volunteering and volunteering between alternative geographies (South-to-South and South-to-North) as means of SDG realisation. Russell (2016) highlights that in the collectivistic culture of South Africa, informal volunteering for and between disadvantaged communities dominates and that this generally is not viewed by participants as "volunteering". Qi (2020) highlights that for narrower, context-specific forms of volunteering such as tourism volunteering, these are also prone to cultural misconceptions, which complicate global understandings of host volunteering and volunteer tourism. Arguably, volunteering contributions to the SDGs could be enhanced if more diverse forms of community-building and social networks were considered.

Proposition 5: Tourism volunteering should not replace paid forms of tourism work in efforts to realise the SDGs.

It is a long-held tenet of best practice volunteer management that volunteers should not substitute for the work of paid staff (Cordingley, 2000). Increasingly in developed economies, essential community services are delivered by volunteers in response to the withdrawal of direct government action (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2016). Likewise, there is a risk that volunteering may substitute for decent paid work in the tourism sector, akin to Hawksley and Georgeou's (2019) contention that neoliberal forces could relegate volunteers to the role of cheap labour in SDG realisation. Volunteer tourism is not immune from claims that it has the potential to affect employment opportunities for locals in beneficiary host communities (Guttentag, 2009). There is scope also for host volunteering to replace paid employment but this has been less discussed. Tourism volunteering in contributing to the SDGs should not do so at the expense of the creation of decent paid tourism work with the social and economic benefits for individuals, communities and nations that it can generate. This is particularly important given the industry's need to recover from COVID-19, as higher

unemployment rates may have resulted in an increased willingness to accept volunteer positions as a means of developing one's skills in order to (re) enter the tourism workforce.

Proposition 6: Tourism volunteering will continue to be marginalised until indicator(s) are developed to measure the contribution of volunteers to the SDGs.

Whilst progress has been made towards global measurement of volunteering, most notably through the efforts of the ILO (2011), several issues continue to confound this effort as the UN recognises (UNGA 2015b, p. 5). Definitional ambiguity continues to be an issue, with the UN's State of the World's Volunteerism Report (2018) highlighting that more quantitative and qualitative research is required to develop concepts and tools to reflect varying manifestations of volunteering. This ambiguity is further compounded by disparate understandings of volunteering across cultures, as alluded to in Proposition 4, and the need to capture more diverse and evolving forms of volunteering such as corporate volunteering and online volunteering, which are facilitated by social media and new technologies (Bimber et al., 2012). UN Member States have reported challenges in terms of whole-of-society data availability with volunteer efforts in national reporting mechanisms to date being based primarily on "qualitative examples rather than on a systematic analysis" (UNGA, 2018, p. 13). Additionally, the propensity to value volunteering contributions only in economic terms provides an easy but one-dimensional view of volunteering, which may stymie further effort to develop supplementary reporting mechanisms. These challenges are intensified in the SDG framework by the insistence that along with volunteers underpinning the mobilisation of effort across all SDGs, that they also underpin data collection efforts to monitor broader SDG progress (UNGA, 2015b). This dual role does not flow through to the inclusion of measures of volunteering capacity in the Global Indicator Framework used to monitor SDG progress. In the absence of such measures, which would hold Member States and tourism organisations to greater account, tourism volunteering is likely to continue to be marginalised in tourism workforce discourse, policy and practice.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study set out to address the manifest lack of research exploring how tourism volunteering contributes to realisation of the SDGs. Applying the lens of critical tourism, this conceptual paper has holistically explored how host volunteering and guest volunteer tourism can contribute to SDG realisation, shedding further light on the blurred boundaries between both forms of tourism volunteering (Qi, 2020). Having conducted an adapted version of Haddock and Devereux's (2015) crosswalk exercise, focused on the potential contributions of volunteers at the individual level, our findings revealed that volunteer tourism has greater potential to contribute to a broader range of SDGs and across a greater number of activities identified in UNV's (2015) SDG guidance for volunteer-involving organisations.

Taken at face value, this overarching finding is perhaps unsurprising given the SDG's stronger focus on international development (UN Development Programme, 2016). That said, as noted elsewhere in this paper, the SDGs are intended to be a universal framework (Devereux & Holmes, 2018) and so both forms of tourism volunteering should actively contribute to the SDGs. The lesser prominence afforded to host volunteering in our analysis may in fact reflect the greater alignment of these activities to Western dominant forms of volunteering undertaken in developed countries. As such, our results may mirror the development phase of these countries, rather than being a genuine reflection of the capacity

of this form of tourism volunteering to contribute to the SDGs. Our analysis is unable to tease out these nuances and as such, this is notable limitation of our study.

We acknowledge that our decision to code volunteer activities relative to the UNV's list potential activities for volunteers in the context of the SDGs (UNV, 2015) may have also biased our results towards volunteer tourism. UNV is at the forefront of the UN's global efforts to embed volunteering as part of the 2030 Agenda (UNGA, 2015b, 2016) and so its prominence in SDG realisation cannot be underestimated. UNV does however have a international development focus in promoting peace and development through volunteerism globally, which once again more strongly aligns with the activities of volunteer tourism. We justify this selection in light of the lack of globally accepted definitions of volunteering and volunteering activities relative to the SDG framework (UNGA, 2015b; UNV, 2018).

The results strongly suggest that holistically tourism volunteering has the greatest potential to contribute to Goal 4, Quality Education. This supports Devereux and Holmes (2018) argument for symbiotically relating volunteer tourism to the SDGs based on targets aligned to Goal 4. The current study extends this argument to support the relevance of Goal 4 for all forms of tourism volunteering. This reflects the capacity of host volunteers, through activities such as tour guiding and volunteering at information centres, to educate visitors on the history and cultural significance of tourism sites and attractions. In the case of volunteer tourists, the most visible alignment to Goal 4 is the teaching activities that tourists may undertake during volunteer tourism trips, with the intention of educating resident populations in guest communities. As part of the tourism workforce, prioritisation and promotion of tourism volunteering as a force for quality education should be heralded by tourism volunteer-involving organisations, industry bodies and governments in line with the 2030 Agenda to promote sustainable tourism (UNGA, 2015a).

Six conceptual propositions were developed to advance recognition and research relating to the contribution of tourism volunteering to the SDGs. These are tentative and require empirical study. We recommend that a Delphi study is conducted with academics and practitioners to validate the findings arrived at in the current study. This technique is particularly useful for obtaining "obtaining consensus of opinions of a group of experts (via) a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback" (Dalkey, & Helmer, 1963, p. 458). In support of Proposition 6, this exercise could potentially additionally refine the development of relevant indicators of volunteering activity for inclusion in the Global Indicator Framework (UNGA, 2019), inclusive of various cultural conceptualisations of volunteering in alignment with Proposition 4. In addressing Proposition 1, there would also be value in primary data collection with representative host volunteering and volunteer tourism organisations, which would also enable mapping of the activities of these organisations using Haddock and Devereux's (2015) crosswalk methodology, allowing for further practitioner insights. This research effort could extend to various forms of paid tourism work (e.g., full-time and ongoing versus casual and flexible) to assess how all forms of tourism work, paid or unpaid, commonly and differently contribute to the SDGs.

This research agenda will likely continue to be affected by various factors that have constrained the study of tourism volunteers and their role in SDG realisation to date, including the fragmented nature of host volunteering and volunteer tourism, issues of a lack comparative international data collection, varying cultural conceptions of volunteering and a lack of mandated commitment on the part of multiple stakeholders to ensure that the contribution of tourism volunteering to the SDGs is accurately assessed and monitored.

Despite these challenges, as this study highlights, both forms of tourism volunteering, as part of the wider tourism workforce, facilitate multiple ways of achieving the SDGs. Continued research and monitoring will shed light and further substantiate these contributions to the global 2030 Agenda.

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