

**Towards an understanding of the drivers of commercialisation
in the volunteer tourism sector.**

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Abstract

Well-meaning volunteer tourism organisations, involving international volunteers in local community and environmental development projects, have been increasingly criticised for increasingly commercialised business models. This conceptual paper reviews important organisational drivers that influence the commercialisation of the volunteer tourism sector. It posits a number of predictive measures based upon the internal and external drivers that will determine a volunteer tourism organisation's position along a philanthropic-commercial continuum. It achieves this by building on lessons from the broader nonprofit sector, including research in social entrepreneurship. It also suggests topics for further research based upon this literature and current knowledge gaps within volunteer tourism. Further research in this area will assist organisations engaged in, or considering, volunteer tourism to think pragmatically about issues of commercialisation within this sector.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, social entrepreneurship.

Introduction

In this conceptual paper, we look at how the volunteer tourism sector, as one approach to sustainable tourism, has had to evolve within the broader tourism system and consider drivers and constraints that shape organisations within this system. As a form of alternative or responsible tourism that seeks to differentiate itself from mass/commodified tourism, volunteer tourism providers are nonetheless forced to face the economic realities of “doing business” whether they operate within the nonprofit or for-profit business space. Volunteer tourism is broadly defined as “utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need” (McGehee and Santos 2005, p.760). We consider some of the misgivings regarding the increasingly commodified and commercialised nature of volunteer tourism (e.g. Coren & Gray 2011; Cousins, Evans & Sadler 2009; Devereux 2008; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Tomazos & Cooper, 2012). We draw on the broader literature on commercialisation within the nonprofit sector and the social economy, to identify drivers that may influence the development and commercial orientation within volunteer tourism providers. To date, no existing research has questioned why volunteer tourism organisations adopt a particular commercial approach, and what are the processes and organisational drivers that need to be considered alongside social value approaches and project outcomes. We remind readers of the philanthropic/commercialisation continuum that exists for most nonprofit organisations, and we link our proposed drivers to a preliminary volunteer tourism philanthropic/commercialisation continuum through a set of measurable and qualitative indicators.

The commercialisation process:

We define commercialisation as the process whereby nonprofit organisations decide to produce goods and services with the explicit intent of earning a profit (Tuckman 1998). This process is often a result of increasing competition within a sector and an attempt to secure financial sustainability through commercial revenue sources and lessen the dependency that may accompany charitable activities (Dees, 1988). A substantial body of literature in the nonprofit sector has focused on “balancing money and mission”, albeit in a fragmented and relatively underdeveloped manner (Weerawardena, McDonald and Mort, 2010). Indeed, Morris, Webb and Franklin (2011) propose that entrepreneurial behaviour in nonprofits, including commercialisation, is prompted by the desire to meet more pressing

social needs than is possible with existing organisational resources, suggesting a laudable rational for adopting a commercialisation strategy.

Whilst nonprofits may engage in commercialisation to cope with increasing competition, the risks of this approach should not be underestimated. First and foremost, there is a general concern that commercial strategies and activities can pull a nonprofit organisation away from its original mission (Tuckman 1998). The nonprofit's multiple roles may also make it more difficult to determine how effectively they are performing their social missions, as the social value outcomes (already less tangible and quantifiable than those of for-profit organisations) of their commercial activity may not be readily apparent to the general public. A commercial orientation may also undermine the role that a nonprofit plays in a community, particularly where it serves as an outlet for concerned citizens to act on their philanthropic values (Dees 1998). As a result, nonprofits that have commercialised may meet with resistance and perhaps even lose support of donors. This loss of support can threaten access to revenue, access to networks, employee support, volunteerism, public legitimacy, political support, and favourable publicity. According to Morris *et al.* (2011) the ultimate risk may be an inability, or reduced ability, to achieve social purpose, a situation that may already be occurring in volunteer tourism. Finally, Dees (1998) argues that seeking financial revenue from others for whom the organisation can create value (e.g. volunteer tourists) requires creativity; because this source of earned income is the one least directly related to mission performance, it can risk pulling the organisation off course and may even divert valuable management resources away from activities related to the organisation's core mission. There are therefore genuine concerns around adopting a commercialised business model within the nonprofit sector.

Volunteer tourism – a form of alternative tourism

As a niche sector within the tourism industry, volunteer tourism can be considered an expansion of (deep) ecotourism; it consists of a type of alternative tourism that seeks to minimise its impacts on local environments (social, cultural as well as natural), bring about personal development in participants through meaningful interactions with hosts and the natural setting, as well as benefit the local setting through volunteer labour. Once described as the “poster child” for sustainable tourism (Lyons and Wearing, 2008, p.6), the prevailing discourse within volunteer tourism has been to create a win-win situation for the post-modern

tourist seeking an enlightening experience, the local community who can gain financially (amongst other benefits) from tourism, and the project organisers (non-government organisations (NGO's), scientists, community activists, rangers and so forth) who are able to implement their projects and reach out to the public, raising awareness of their work.

However, many academics are increasingly criticising the “commercialised” nature of volunteer tourism, implicitly conveying that volunteer tourism should resist this apparent commercialisation process. For example, Lyons and Wearing (2008) argue that as NGOs begin to develop partnerships with corporate entities, they run the risk of losing sight of their core activity of supporting local communities at all costs and instead become engaged in the process of commodification of the volunteer tourism experience. Other concerns are volunteer tourism makes inappropriate use of out-dated development paradigms, and that commercial agendas for tourism brokers who recruit and place volunteer tourists have come to displace well-intentioned original development agendas of philanthropic host organisations to improve the livelihoods of local communities in poor economic circumstances (e.g. Devereux 2008; Palacios 2010; Simpson 2004).

There is evidence that the commodification of volunteer tourism is occurring with large tour operators competing for a share of this new market. Certainly, there does appear to be a move towards the commercialisation of volunteer tourism organisations. In a survey of over 300 volunteer tourism organisations worldwide mostly based in the advanced economies (ATLAS 2008), over 50% of the organisations were identified as being in the not-for-profit sector and a rapid increase in for-profit commercial providers entering the competitive marketplace was observed. The report noted the substantial growth and diversity in the sector in less than 20 years, estimating the overall market of 1.6 million volunteer tourists a year moving from the rich parts of the world to the poorer regions, having a value of between £832m and £1.3bn (US\$1.7bn - \$2.6bn). The growth was based on the more traditional combining of travel and voluntary work as well as new forms of volunteer tourism such as combinations of work and leisure. This has become evident in the dominant volunteer tourism destinations in Latin America, Asia and Africa where there is a trend for young people to pre-book via a volunteer service organisation or finding volunteer activities once they have arrived in their chosen destination.

The growth of the volunteer tourism sector, the emergence of commercial “sending” organisations, and the increasing selection of available packages in terms of both duration

and type of work makes volunteer tourism more comparable with mainstream conventional mass tourism. It has become an increasingly competitive sector, requiring new, more sophisticated approaches to marketing and service management. Moreover, we are witnessing the rise of cross sector partnerships that join nonprofit social ventures with for-profit tourism businesses or even mixed-unit operations with both nonprofit and for-profit programs. Many projects recruit their volunteer tourists through a combination of organised programs and structured self-funded approaches, although the growing commercialisation within the sector may be forcing organisations to adopt one or the other approach, with the former, that is organised volunteer tourism programs, catering to the bulk of the industry. This trend appears to be increasing throughout the volunteer tourism subsector, as hosting organisations seek financial sustainability to carry out their social missions. It is likely that this trend is also responsible for the growing backlash against the “commercialisation of this sector”. However, the issues are not unique to volunteer tourism, and already in 1998, Dees was reporting that “when nonprofits become more business-like, they may run afoul of public values” (Dees 1998; 58).

A response to the concerns regarding commercialisation and commodification has been a number of best practice guidelines designed for the supply-side of the sector. Codes of practice have been established by Comhlámh, the Irish development organisation, by The Year Out Group, an association of UK gap year organisations, by Tourism Concern, a UK-based charity who campaign on tourism issues, and by FairTrade Volunteering, an independent group of volunteer tourism organisations. These are primarily concerned with how projects are set-up, their social and economic benefits to local communities, and the level of support, preparation and debriefing given to volunteers. Whilst these are designed to raise the performance and positive outcomes of volunteer tourism organisations, and increase transparency for stakeholders (local community, funding agencies, tourists and so forth), they do less to identify and address the drivers and constraints that might shape volunteer tourism’s organisation development.

Drivers and constraints in volunteer tourism

There are a number of issues faced by volunteer tourism that are likely to be affecting their organisational behaviour with regards to commercialisation. These suggestions are based upon our reading of the academic literature, our perceptions of popular media reports

of volunteer tourism, and personal experience in the sector. We suggest that the issues include a combination of the types of social missions and project work engaged in by these organisations, their financial and other resource constraints and adaption strategies, their organisational structure, the characteristics of their target donor market (i.e. the volunteer tourists) and the characteristics of the tourism system within which they operate. Broadly, we suggest that some of these drivers relate to the volunteering aspect of the sector, whilst others relate to the tourism aspect of the sector, presenting a series of unique challenges for volunteer tourism. Within the first category, we propose that volunteer tourism organisations attempt to address highly complex areas, whilst operating within an increasingly competitive sector where organisations must manage multiple stakeholder relationships. Within the second category, we suggest that volunteer tourism organisations source their market from highly individualised and materialistic cultures, and commonly operate within a broader commercial tourism system. Taking each of these in turn, we can build a better understanding of the commercialisation issue within volunteer tourism.

Volunteer Tourism organisations attempt to address highly complex areas

Many of the major humanitarian, social and environmental problems the globe faces are ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel 1972). Issues of conservation, environmental planning, community development, health, education, poverty alleviation and gender equality are all immensely complicated areas, all unique with innumerable causes, difficult to describe and with no single answer. They require not only innovative policy responses but also innovative methods of arriving at responses, crossing disciplinary boundaries and a broad understanding of how economic and social factors interweave with ecological and evolutionary science. As a general rule, wicked problems are difficult or impossible to solve because of a lack of timely information, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to identify and where, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems (Rittel and Webber 1973; Buchanan 1992).

Within aid discourse, there is a general consensus that these issues are better tackled by large institutions with significant scale, impact and financial resources behind them. Small organisations constantly struggle for resources and reach and may end up marginalised. The areas addressed by volunteer tourism operators from both the not-for-profit and for-profit sectors often constitute ‘wicked problems’ as opposed to ‘tame problems’ which are easy to manipulate and control (Ibid 1972). Addressing wicked problems generally requires access to

greater resources than addressing simple problems. These resources are not limited to financial resources, but can include networks, knowledge and information banks, and human resources. However, having access to a sustainable, regular source of revenue will greatly assist volunteer tourism organisations working with wicked problems to invest in the other resources that they require to tackle their chosen social and/or environmental issues. As we have seen from the nonprofit literature, commercialisation provides one mechanism to achieve financial sustainability.

Volunteer tourism organisations operate within an increasingly competitive sector.

With the nonprofit world, organisations vie with each other for revenue, board members, customers, contracts and grants, donations, gifts and bequests, prestige, political power, and volunteers (Tuckman 1998). As the number of nonprofits increase, competition for resources, and in particular funding becomes more intense. The decision to commercialise normally leads a nonprofit to a mixed-mode marketplace where it competes with for-profit organisations, particularly where nonprofits enter a market already dominated by for-profits or if nonprofits are successful in creating a product that for-profits later choose to offer (Tuckman 1998). In some cases, nonprofits may form strategic alliances with for-profits in undeveloped markets where the former are well-established and the trust they have earned can be complemented by the financial resources of the for-profit firms in serving the local market's social needs (Morris *et al.* 2011).

Volunteer tourism has grown significantly over recent years; for instance, Brown and Letho (2005) report that one of the longest published volunteer tourism guides, *Volunteer Vacations*, listed 75 organisations in its first edition in 1987, and 275 organisations in 2003. More recently, the database "Volunteer Abroad" held information on 3,441 projects spread across 150 countries in 2007 (Tomazos and Butler 2009). The increasing number of organisations operating in this space has undoubtedly led to increasing competition (for volunteers and funding) between nonprofits. Furthermore, as the success of this model has gained recognition from commercial tourism enterprises, the volunteer tourism sector has become a mixed-mode marketplace where nonprofits must also compete with for-profit organisations. Certainly, volunteer tourism as a whole is no longer dominated by nonprofits, but represents a mixed market with many for-profit organisations either offering volunteer tourism experiences or placing volunteer tourists with nonprofits. The largest chapter of the Lonely Planet's (2007) guide to volunteering around the world is dedicated to organised

volunteer tourism programs. Organised volunteer tourism programs are often run by large, for-profit organisations which belong to some of the world's leading travel companies, e.g. i-to-i Volunteering as part of TUI Travel. These act as a placement agency, connecting skilled or unskilled volunteers with on the ground projects and can place thousands of volunteer tourists in dozens of countries each year, on itinerised placements. Their fees usually include in-country transport and support as well as pre-departure training. As these placement agencies provide ready access to volunteer tourists and their funds, the so-called "do-it-yourself" placements that rely to a greater extent on word-of-mouth and personal networks to link in with local charities, and which have low placement costs, little pre-departure information and no in-country support have become less common within the competitive, mixed-mode marketplace.

Volunteer tourism organisations must manage multiple stakeholder relationships

As volunteer tourism faces increasing competitiveness and complexity through a mixed-market approach and cross-sectoral partnerships, so does the number, scope and diversity of stakeholders to whom they must answer. Donors, clients, staff, funding agencies, volunteers and others, may each be considered a stakeholder for the nonprofit, adding a layering of complexity to managing nonprofits not commonly encountered in the for-profit world. Weerawardena, McDonald and Mort (2010) point out that a nonprofit needs to fulfil its commitments to its clients, its patrons and the community in which it operates. Morris *et al.* (2011) describe how the motivations of each stakeholder group may be quite diverse, creating a complex set of linkages between, and influences from, the demands of their stakeholders. The various, often disparate and conflicting, interests of donors, clients, board members, the local community, regulatory authorities, managers, members, volunteers and others must all be balanced and carefully managed.

This issue of a diverse and complex area of stakeholders is further complicated for volunteer tourism organisations, as their projects are often located in developing nations. In these situations, additional 'actors' in the tourism system can often include the international donor community through a range of multinational and bilateral agencies, NGOs and volunteer tourism organisations who determine that tourism can be a strategic partner or means to achieve their respective and usually not-for-profit objectives. The complexity of managing such diversity, and the resources required to do so, can conceivably make a commercial approach to revenue generation an attractive proposition. The commercial

approach can somewhat reduce the number and influence of external stakeholders on the operations of the organisation. It does, however, create an added difficulty for volunteer tourism organisations, as those who pay for the goods (the volunteer tourists) may be different from those who receive them (e.g. the local community). This is an issue raised by Lumpkin *et al.* (2011) in the broader context of commercialised nonprofits. They argue that for the most part the social and environmental benefits accrue not to the company itself, the owners or consumers, but to society or the environment at large. This is an issue, discussed below, that may also have far reaching implications for volunteer tourism.

Volunteer tourism organisations draw their market from highly individualised and materialistic cultures.

At present, the majority of volunteer tourists are situated in Western, developed nations. These nations are typically characterised by individualistic and materialistic cultures, fostered by capitalist economic systems. Some researchers such as Eckersley (2009), Kassler (cited in Keeley, 2010) and Grouzet *et al.* (2005) have raised questions regarding the compatibility of individualistic and materialistic cultures with social responsibility. For example, Grouzet *et al.* (2005) found that consumption patterns based on purely materialistic values are fundamentally incompatible with our sense of “affiliation (having close interpersonal relationships), and community feeling (trying to benefit the larger world)” (Keeley 2010; 148). Eckersley (2010) further argues that the individualistic orientation that is characteristic of our culture “may serve individuals well [but], it may reduce social cohesion at the population (or societal) level, leading to more isolation and alienation” (Eckersley 2010; 79). Indeed, he argues that individualism – that is, the relaxation of social ties and regulation and the belief that people are independent of each other - impacts upon social trust, cohesion and engagement.

If we accept this proposition by Eckersley (2009, 2010), Kassler (cited in Keeley 2010), and Grouzet *et al.* (2005), we may question the perceptions and insight into the nature of social value creation for volunteer tourism participants. Evidence exists that suggests that Gen Y (i.e. individuals born in the 1980s and 1990’s) who represent the majority of volunteer tourists, are more than ever engaged in social movements, charitable giving, and civil society (Bhagat, Loeb and Rovner 2010). Yet, a number of studies have noted that volunteer tourists have high expectations of personal benefits from their experience (Gray and Campbell 2007;

McGehee and Andereck 2008; Zavitz and Butz 2011). It is interesting to note that this rise in social engagement in Generation Y corresponds with Dees' (1998) increasing alignment between the third sector and commercialised activities. It may be that the commercialisation of social enterprises has blurred the boundaries of the second and third sectors of society for this generation. As a result, we may find that many volunteer tourists have not paused to consider their role as donors in creating value for volunteer tourism's beneficiaries, but instead seek a personal return for their engagement as a valued client, i.e. experiences that are personally rewarding, perhaps at the expense of social value creation (c.f. Coghlan and Fennell 2009; Mustonen 2007).

Volunteer Tourism organisations operate within a broader commercial tourism system

Tourism is generally considered to be a global, complex and (partially) industrialised sector. Given the complexity of the system which now extends over a global scale, tourism related enterprises generally operate within the private sector system that is flexible and responsive enough to meet the changes and challenges of this complexity. In most cases, various intermediaries can be involved in a transaction that sees a consumer in a source market eventually experience a tourism service in a destination. This can involve 'traditional' distribution networks such as retail travel agents, tour wholesalers, inbound tourism organisations, destination management companies, financial services/transactions providers, online direct bookings or even face-to-face purchase of a tourism or travel service at point of delivery or experience. Mostly, the 'players' within the distribution systems will be for-profit business entities, some of whom will have embraced corporate social responsibility or policies and practices relating to the environmental performance of their operations into their business ethos.

A number of studies have noted the role of volunteer tourism sending organisations to facilitate the placement of volunteer tourists with receiving organisations (Cousins 2007; Raymond 2008). Some of those for-profit businesses will be targets to support the efforts of volunteer tourism organisations and some will not be as obliging but are still essential for the business transactions to take place. The realities of operating within this broader commercial system often means that volunteer tourism organisations must submit to a neo-liberal free market regime, whereby the preferences of the consumer (now the paying volunteer tourists) will over-ride the social value creation goals of the nonprofit. Anecdotally, nonprofit volunteer tourism organisations describe how they no longer receive placements by for-profit

organisations as their “customer satisfaction” scores were too low, and they cannot match the motivations of the volunteer tourism market. This leads to the commodified product described by Wearing *et al.* (2005), which is perhaps of greater concern than the commercialisation of the volunteer tourism sector per se.

Understanding the commercial-philanthropic continuum

As nonprofits seek sustainability, and in particular financial sustainability, by adopting commercialisation strategies, a number of researchers in this field have described philanthropic-commercial continua for entire mixed-forms markets as well individual organisations. For instance, Dees (1998) refers to a social enterprise spectrum, and suggests that few social enterprises can, or ought, to be either entirely philanthropic or entirely commercial, most “should combine commercial and philanthropic elements in a productive manner” (1998: 60). Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern (2006) and Weerawardena *et al.* (2010) refer to continua ranging “purely social to purely economic” in the former, and “primarily donor-funding based to a variety of earned-income oriented activities” in the latter. None of these studies suggest guidelines to identify where organisations may be located along these continua. They are however, useful to consider and bear in mind when addressing issues of commercialisation within volunteer tourism, as they remind us that most nonprofits are making some compromises between “money” and “mission”, and that the ensuing trade-offs are characterised by degrees, not absolutes.

Identifying measures relating to the commercialisation process may assist us in determining where an organisation might sit along such a continuum. To date a range of sustainability indicators have been widely used in tourism to chart its progress from mass, conventional, unsustainable tourism towards more responsible tourism (WTO, 1992). Using both quantitative and qualitative data sets, indicators are described (Ibid p. 8) as ‘the measures of the existence or severity of current issues, signals of upcoming situations or problems, measures of risk and potential need for action, and means to identify and measure the results of our actions’. Being cautious not to be biased towards stakeholder values (Manning, 1999; Meadows, 1998), ‘good indicators’ provide meaningful measures of progress, facilitate a learning process, enable community capacity building and help identify the goals for sustainable development and appropriate strategies to manage the situation (Butler, 1999; Miller and Twining-Ward, 2005). Of those indicators currently developed to

measure progress towards sustainable tourism, few, if any, are specific to volunteer tourism. Some, however, may be usefully adapted to the volunteer tourism sector. For example, Schianetz and Kavanagh (2008) question of “How do the stakeholders connect and communicate?” (Ibid p.608) or Ceballos-Lascuráin’s (2001) best practice guideline whereby tourism enterprises should “Provide a means for guests to support local conservation and community development efforts” might be usefully turned into performance indicators for the volunteer tourism sector. However, they represent adaptive, retrospective measures that analyse organisational performance against a given benchmark. We argue that there is a need to better link organisational drivers to organisational performance constraints and therefore outcomes, as these will also determine where an organisation is situated along a commercial-philanthropic continuum.

Morris *et al.* (2011) go some way towards achieving this by adapting three elements of entrepreneurial orientation, i.e. innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking, to nonprofits. To some extent, this represents a measure of the internal environment of the organisation. They suggest that each of these three elements may be operationalised in three different ways in nonprofits (compared to their for-profit counterparts) to balance social mission and revenue generation. Thus innovativeness may refer to new ways of enacting core social mission, or generating new sources of revenue, or a combination of new revenue and social mission. Proactiveness may translate into an enactment of change of social purpose that is achieved relative to other nonprofits, or an enactment of change in how financial requirements are met relative to other nonprofits, or an enactment of change relative to stakeholder expectations. The third element of risk-taking may be exhibited as a willingness towards actions that might incur losses in social impact, or financial loss, or nonfinancial stakeholder support. Based on these nine criteria, it seems likely that a set of entrepreneurial orientation scales could be devised and applied to volunteer tourism organisations to determine their location within philanthropic-commercial “space”.

Returning to our argument to link organisational drivers to organisational performance constraints and therefore outcomes, we suggest that devising measures that might be associated with the important drivers of sector that have highlighted in this paper, might help us *predict* where volunteer tourism organisations will fall along a philanthropic-commercial continuum. Although not yet tested and/or quantified, such measures may include aspects of (i) the complexity of issue that the organisation is addressing (simple to

complex/wicked), (ii) the number of organisational stakeholders (few/homogeneous to many/diverse), (iii) the general availability of funding to address the issue (few/sporadic to multiple/recurring) and competition within the given operational space (low to high), (iv) the nature of the volunteer tourism market (individualistic/materialistic to collectivistic), and (v) the strength of the organisation's links to commercial tourism industry (independent to highly dependent). Some of the information required to assess organisations against such measures may be publically available through their websites and annual reports, whilst others may only be determined through interviews with key staff from each organisation.

It is also worth noting that Markwell and McInerney (2006) posit a temporal progression along a philanthropic-commercial continuum for whole sectors, determined by market identification, market growth, increased cost for goods and services, increased price for goods and services and finally cross-sector competition. Interestingly, they propose that their final stage, cross-sector competition might lead to one of three outcomes. These are (i) a stratified market, where both for-profits and nonprofits coexist based on a split in the consumer population; (ii) a displaced market where nonprofits are pushed out by for-profits who can attract more capital and be more flexible in their products and services; and (iii) a defended market, where nonprofits fight back using fundraising, regulatory, legitimacy or other defence strategies. Again, it would be fruitful to apply Markwell and McInerney's (2006) ideas to volunteer tourism, as it seems likely that we are currently entering the period of cross-sector competition, with important implications regarding which of the three outcomes we are likely to shape and/or witness.

Further research

Despite the growing body of literature on volunteer tourism, there remain a number of research gaps pertinent to the question of commercialisation in this sector. First, the measures proposed here require refinement and testing so that they can be adapted to the volunteer tourism sector. Additional drivers and associated measures may also be proposed to analyse the trend towards commercialisation within the volunteer tourism sector. Regarding the supply-side of volunteer tourism, much of the research to date has focused on the motivations of volunteer tourism and to some extent, on their experiences. We know less about the demographic characteristics of volunteer tourists; with the exception of Pearce and Coghlan (2008), there has been little consideration of generational characteristics of volunteer tourists.

Much of the current work has focused on Gen Y, yet we do not know the exact market share represented by this cohort. This has important implications as Bhagat, Loeb and Rover (2010) found that Gen Y engages with charity and philanthropy in a very different manner to Gen X (born mid 1960's to 1980) and the babyboomers (born post WWII to early 1960s). The preferences of each generation may create drivers towards, or away from, the commercialisation of this sector.

We also know very little about the distribution channels by which potential volunteer tourists engage in project, expedition or site selection. Whilst some research suggests that most prospective volunteer tourists use the internet, the awareness of the product that prompts an internet search must be generated through other channels, such as word-of-mouth, or popular media. Furthermore, unpublished research by the first author also suggests that a number of first-time and in particular younger, volunteer tourists will seek recommendations and advice from travel agents to cement their choice of project and destination. This indicates an engagement with the tourism system's private sector which may also favour a commercial approach. Additionally, we know little about volunteer tourists' attitudes towards commercialisation; it may be that some volunteer tourists are more comfortable with commercialised forms of civic engagement, and may not have a poor attitude towards the commercialised nature of volunteer tourism. Similarly, we know little about volunteer tourism organisations' attitudes towards commercialisation and we have insufficient information about the extent of cross-sectoral partnerships, mixed-enterprise approaches and the extent of commercialisation across the industry as a whole. Finally, despite the research carried out by some volunteer tourism researchers (e.g. McGehee and Andereck 2009) we have yet to fully understand volunteer tourism's social value creation from the various stakeholder perspectives. These demand and supply-side questions have yet to be explored for the volunteer tourism sector.

Apart from the research gaps specific to volunteer tourism, there exist a number of questions that remain to be answered regarding the commercialisation of nonprofits. Austin *et al.* (2006) provide a useful summary of these questions, and we list some of those that appear most pertinent to volunteer tourism here. For instance, we might ask what are the effects of market forces on the formation and behaviour of social enterprises? For nonprofits that operate in mixed markets, e.g. many volunteer tourism organisations, what are the relative advantages, disadvantages, and interactive dynamics of these sorts of markets? Next, we may consider how the nonprofits' social mission affects their organisational strategy and resource

mobilisation, as well as what are the key drivers of philanthropic capital markets? It is also worthwhile reflecting upon the extent to which commercial activities create tension with mission or organisational values, and asking whether any new financial instruments could be designed to overcome some of the current deficiencies in the philanthropic capital markets. Moreover, how can one measure performance in terms of social value creation and these outcomes best be communicated to different stakeholders, as well as integrated into management systems? Finally, we may wish to consider how contextual forces shape opportunity creation for social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aims of alternative tourism are often laudable, however many face issues of sustainability within the tourism industry, for a number of reasons, some of which have been outlined here. For those nonprofit organisations, many are turning to commercialisation as a revenue-raising strategy that allows them to carry out their social mission. This trend is widely recognised in the third sector and volunteer tourism is no exception. We are witness to a growing number of critical studies on the topic of volunteer tourism. Our approach does not refute the findings of these prior studies, but does suggest that we carefully consider how we approach this issue. Here we suggested some trends and drivers within this sector that might shed some light on the controversial question of commercialisation within volunteer tourism.

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