The Future of Volunteer Tourism in the Asia Pacific Region: Alternative Prospects

Abstract

Volunteer tourism has attracted increasing attention amongst tourism industry practitioners and researchers. As an indication of the scale and scope of the phenomenon, most volunteer tourists have been residents of developed countries visiting developing countries to participate in community development initiatives, scientific research and ecological restoration projects (Wearing 2001). The researchers have reviewed the literature to determine the drivers of growth that have shaped volunteer tourism and have examined the trends affecting tourism and economic growth in the Asia Pacific region over the medium- to longer term. These exploratory inputs serve to inform three scenarios about the likely shape of volunteer tourism within the region leading to 2050: the first scenario predicts a steady state, the second growing participation and the final proposition, one of diminishing viability. The prospective implications for volunteer tourism arising from these various scenarios are discussed, together with a concluding agenda for future research.

Keywords: Asia Pacific, future prospects, volunteer tourism

Introduction

Participation in volunteer tourism offers contemporary travelers an opportunity to combine their recreational and leisure interests with an impetus to help others through volunteering. Understanding these two motives draws from the parent fields of tourism and volunteerism research respectively. Sometimes described as a form of 'alternative tourism' (Weaver 2006), volunteer tourism has been estimated to contribute in excess of US$2 billion annually to the world economy (TRAM 2008).

The various stakeholders involved in the delivery of volunteer tourism programs include the volunteer tourists, host destinations, and "sending organizations" such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions and for-profit operators. Archetypal volunteer tourism projects include community welfare initiatives, environmental regeneration and social and/or environmental research investigations (Callanan and Thomas 2005). The continuing growth of the volunteer tourism phenomenon is reflective of the prevailing desire amongst a growing cohort of consumers to avoid conventional mass tourism with its negative connotations and to connect pleasure-oriented travel with a conscious search for meaning, thereby supplementing consumption with a tangible contribution (Zahra and McIntosh 2007). The dominant motive for conventional mass tourists is frequently characterized as the desire for escape from the pressures and routines of everyday life (Uriely 2005). Volunteer tourism adds an altruistic dimension to this established concept by incorporating prospective host community benefits into the tourist's consideration set. Participants frequently cite "giving back" and "making a difference" as reasons for participating in volunteer tourism (Lyons and Wearing 2008).

While the uptake of volunteer tourism has benefited from the availability of a wide range of program alternatives and the anti-materialist drive towards social responsibility, its

long term endurance as a tourism phenomenon is untested. The survival of volunteer tourism over the coming decades will be influenced by global trends relating to consumption patterns, technological advancements and social goals. This paper examines trends reported within the scholarly literature as affecting the parent fields of tourism and volunteerism, with particular reference to the drivers of growth in volunteer tourism, and explores prospective future directions with particular reference to the Asia-Pacific region. The various insights inform three scenarios about the likely shape of volunteer tourism within the region leading to 2050. The first scenario predicts a steady state, the second a pattern of growing participation and the final proposition, one of diminishing viability.

The scale and scope of volunteer tourism

The volunteer tourism phenomenon has attracted increasing attention from tourism industry practitioners and researchers (Wearing 2001). A number of researchers have explored the relationship between volunteer tourism and associated phenomena such as 'social tourism' (Relph 1976), 'moral tourism' (Butcher 2003) and 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 2004). Most of the recent definitions have been consumer oriented and adopt the individual volunteer tourist as the starting point. The seminal work of Stephen Wearing exemplifies this orientation. He has described volunteer tourists as those who volunteer "in an organized way to undertake holidays that invoke the aiding or alleviating of the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing 2001, p. 1). Much of the volunteer tourism related research has also had a strong emphasis on the consumer. Recent investigations have considered a range of dimensions including motivations (Brown 2005; Campbell and Smith 2006; Grimm and Needham 2012; Lyons and Wearing 2008; Söderman and Snead 2008), how experience

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influences participation (Matthews 2008; Stoddart and Rogerson 2004) and the search for self-discovery (Wearing and Wearing 2001; Wearing 2002).

Research has established that the primary motive for participating in volunteer tourism programs is altruism (Brown 2005; Grimm and Needham 2012; Lyons and Wearing 2008; Söderman and Snead 2008; Wearing 2001; Weaver 2013). When altruism is considered in isolation, it has generally positive connotations. It is however more ambiguous when it is combined with an impulse for self-discovery (Wearing and McGehee 2013a). Altruism is a powerful push factor within the belief systems of many volunteer tourists and amplifies their focus on destination activities that provide evidence of such altruistic objectives (Grimm and Needham 2012). Many volunteer tourist choices about destinations or expenditures are influenced by the anticipation and expectation of helping others (Wearing and McGehee 2013b).

Altruism is the primary motive, followed closely by the prospect of traveling to areas that are not available through conventional distribution channels (Benson and Seibert 2009; Sin 2009; Wearing 2004). Research has shown that travelers are attracted by a desire to differentiate themselves from others within their reference group by acquiring the "bragging rights" that are associated with travel to unfamiliar places (Pearce and Coghlan 2007). Sin (2009) found that participation in volunteer tourism is influenced by the desire to visit alternative and more exotic destinations. Similar motives have been evident in the case of volunteer projects that have been reported by Broad (2003), Grimm and Needham (2012) and Tomazos and Butler (2010). Volunteer tourists commonly seek out authentic representations by immersing themselves in unfamiliar cultures. The experience of spending an extended period within a host community allows volunteer tourists to acquire greater insights than those that are available in more staged tourism settings. In the latter case, visitors live apart

from the host community, particularly where the levels of affluence of the visitors and the visited are disparate (Brown 2005).

The prevalence of mass commodified tourism has led some researchers to lament the widespread staging of over-dramatized representations of culture and traditions (Dodman and Rhiney 2008; Kelleher 2004; Wang 1999). Some proponents have identified volunteer tourism as a prospective means of lessening the prevalence of inauthentic performances (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Mustonen 2007). The volunteer tourism phenomenon may also provide participants with experiences that are craved by many tourists, namely camaraderie with like-minded travelers and with the host community. Volunteer tourists appear to develop deeper and more satisfying connections by forging bonds with the host community (McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Barbieri et al. 2012). They are also accompanied by travelers who share similar concerns about development. Researchers have also noted that the prospect of developing career enhancing skills provides a rationale for younger volunteer tourists (Lyons and Wearing 2008; Lyons et al. 2012). Various dimensions of the volunteer tourism experience may assist participants to strengthen their Curriculum Vitae as they take advantage of the opportunity to apply specialized skills within unfamiliar environments (Blackman and Benson 2010; Brown 2005; Stebbins 2009; Stone and Petrick 2013)..

The initial body of literature was replete with the allegedly positive attributes of volunteer tourism, although this has been balanced out by the emergence of a more critical stance in recent years (Wearing and McGehee 2013b). This apparent initial consensus may have contributed to the widely held view that volunteer tourists are idealistic and altruistic (Guttentag 2009). Recent critiques of volunteer tourism have drawn attention to its role in distorting local economies, reinforcing income disparities, rationalizing poverty and bringing about undesirable cultural changes (Guttentag 2009; Palacios 2010; Sin 2010). With its roots traceable to religious missions and to exploratory colonial expeditions, some have

characterized volunteer tourism as a form of neocolonialism in its perpetuation of unequal power relations (Conran 2011; Sin 2010). Furthermore, it has been suggested that not all programs epitomize mutually beneficial tourism and that the benefits accruing tend to favor tourists over host community needs (Raymond 2008). The harshest critics have characterized volunteer tourism as a self-serving desire to engage in altruistic displays, rather than with the provision of genuine community benefits. However, as a reminder that advocacy for or against the phenomenon may represent partisanship rather than the truth, it is evident that altruism and self-interest are rarely mutually exclusive. There are numerous examples within the wider volunteering literature of the complementarities of the two motives (Batson and Shaw 1991; Hustinx 2001; Penner et al. 2005). Despite the widely held characterization of tourism as self-centered and as focused on personal wellbeing (Cohen and Taylor 1976), when a genuine balance is achieved between the self and the other, enlightened self-interest may be a socially acceptable motivation for volunteer tourists that does not compromise community related outcomes (Mustonen 2007).

The existing volunteer tourism literature has been characterized by case studies with a profusion of investigations focusing on specialist volunteer tourism organizations, individual projects, or location specific styles of volunteering (e.g., kibbutzim). Other than the various volunteer focused studies, few have investigated the perspectives of stakeholders such as host communities (Andereck et al. 2005; Guttentag 2009; McIntosh and Zahra 2007; Zahra and McGehee 2013) or of sending organizations (Holmes and Smith 2009; Ong, Pearlman, and Lockstone-Binney 2011). The dominant paradigm has attracted the widest coverage, namely visits by volunteer tourists from developed to developing countries to participate in community, environmental or cultural development projects. Less attention has been given to volunteers travelling between or from developing nations (Sherraden, Lough, and Moore McBride 2008). The phenomenon of volunteer tourism between developed countries has also

been neglected (e.g., Lyons 2003). The focus on the dominant paradigm may be shortsighted, given the changing geopolitical realities that impact substantially on the Asia Pacific region. As China and India evolve progressively from "developing" country status to global powers and the Asia-Pacific's most populous nations become net exporters of aid funding, the relationship between volunteer tourism sending and receiving countries is likely to change. More research and insights about volunteer tourism originating in the developing countries context is therefore needed in anticipation of these global shifts.

Method

Addressing the need for a better understanding of volunteer tourism movements both between and within developed and developing countries through the conduct of systematic research, this paper adopts an exploratory approach to envisage the prospective forms of volunteer tourism leading to 2050 in the Asia-Pacific region.

The study is underpinned by a comprehensive literature review. The qualitative method that has been deployed is used widely in conducting foresight studies (Popper 2008) and has been supplemented where possible with relevant quantitative data (Karlsen and Karlsen 2013). A lack of reliable statistics on the global volunteer tourism market and the Asia-Pacific market in particular prompted the researchers to avoid a purely quantitative approach. The scale and scope of the volunteer tourism phenomenon is outlined in the first section of the paper. The researchers reviewed the relevant academic and industry literatures on volunteer tourism and its parent fields of tourism and volunteering, using search terms such as "volunteer tourism", "voluntourism", "volunteer travel", "overseas volunteering" and "volunteer vacations". The results were used to determine the key drivers affecting its growth to date, with a view to assessing their impacts. The review is supplemented by an

examination of the trends that are likely to affect tourism and economic growth in the Asia Pacific region over the medium- to longer term using the search terms "tourism", "trends" and "future". Evidence of these trends is provided by the relevant academic literature and in various industry and government reports, including existing tourism forecasts to the year 2020. The researchers initially reviewed the various volunteer tourism drivers that were identified in the literature along with the identifiable trends with a view to formulating a draft set of 2050 scenarios. The team agreed on a set of assumptions prior to conducting the initial coding exercise. These assumptions were that: 1) the global population will increase, 2) tourism growth will continue, and 3) the world economy will continue its shift from west to east.

The scenarios were further analyzed over several iterations to enhance their credibility (DeCrop 2004) until agreement was reached on the final set of alternative prospects. Through prolonged engagement with the interpretations, the three key assumptions and on the basis of these inputs, the researchers propose three Asia-Pacific region volunteer tourism scenarios. This number is within the range of three to six alternative scenarios that has been recommended by futurists (Amer, Daim, and Jetter 2013).

The researchers do not assess the likelihood that any one scenario will dominate the others. In practice, different configurations of the three scenarios may eventuate and possibilities that have not been considered should not be excluded from consideration. The scenarios provide alternative pictures and narratives leading to the year 2050, though the researchers do not propose precise timeframes. In particular the authors accept Yeoman's contention (2012) that the future becomes increasingly indeterminate when imagined over an extended timeframe to 2050, with scenarios for the distant future akin to Bergman, Karlsson and Axelson's (2010) science fiction paradigm. This is consistent with Turner and Witt's view (2012) that accurate longer-term tourism forecasts cannot be generated more than five

years ahead of time due to the unreliability of the current available methods (though newer, more reliable methods may emerge in the future).

The authors acknowledge the limitations of this exploratory method. As a means of providing foresight, a literature review is frequently used to accompany other techniques. This is commonly the case at the preliminary stage as an input into later stages of the foresight process, with more complex methods involving the collection of primary data. Popper (2008), for example, proposed an alignment of the literature review with the first stage of the foresight generation process, namely an 'exploration' phase to "identify and understand important issues, trends and drivers" (p. 68). The successive stages of 'analysis' and 'anticipation' establish the links between drivers and map out future scenarios using techniques such as expert panels, extrapolation, modeling and scenarios. Though the terminology of 'scenarios' is used in this paper to discuss three prospective views of volunteer tourism, based on the literature review method applied they cannot be considered as true scenarios in the context of futures/foresights literature. Noting this caveat, the exploration detailed in this paper provides a grounding that should benefit researchers who wish to proceed to the subsequent stages of analysis and anticipation and to develop such scenarios.

As groundwork for the presentation of the three scenarios, the researchers now discuss the key forces that the literature has identified as influencing the growth of volunteer tourism.

Forces affecting volunteer tourism

The following drivers that have been evidenced in the literature are now considered: changing consumer expectations, concepts of social responsibility and social justice, and

lifestyle and technology related trends that have shaped the emergence of volunteer tourism patterns.

Tourism consumption behaviors have been encountering intensifying criticism, particularly in the case of western developed countries where they are viewed as excessively materialistic and symptomatic of a shallow consumer culture. Products or experiences that are purchased and consumed by status conscious consumers with a view to conferring benefits are widely viewed as "materialistic", even where the benefits are largely symbolic (Goldsmith and Clark 2012). Various authors have criticized the growing prevalence of such materialistic consumption behaviors (Cherrier 2007; Kasser 2002). Awareness of such critiques may have prompted some consumers to distance themselves from materialism by consciously avoiding choices that lead to heightened status. The desire to distance oneself from materialism may be the prompt for enlightened behaviors (Kzinets and Handelman 2004) among volunteer tourists, leading to a greater likelihood that benefits will flow to other parties such as host communities.

The increasing interest in volunteer tourism may be influenced by the growing tendency of consumers to "co-opt" resources to express themselves (Cherrier 2007; Schau 2000). Such practices extend to the purchase of items and services such as tourism experiences that are congruent with actual or aspirational self-image (Boksberger et al. 2011; Beerli 2007). The concept of the travel career ladder (Pearce 1988) suggests a capacity to fulfill various types of need that are encountered at different stages of the lifecycle. The various levels (or rungs) apply to the current context with those that are higher order (eg self-esteem and self-actualization) figuring prominently as volunteer tourist motives (Schau 2000; Zavestoski 2002). Tourists are increasingly seeking authentic experiences which prompt them to identify with tourism service providers that are consciously providing an authentic experience. This trend is occurring at the same time as mainstream tourism provision

becomes increasingly commodified and staged and is pandering to tourist beliefs, expectations, preferences and stereotypical images (Wang 1999). The extended trip durations and more spontaneous community interactions that characterize volunteer tourism are partially a response to the demand for authenticity (Coren and Gray 2012; Andereck et al. 2012).

The intensifying coverage that is being given to the plight of the world's most disadvantaged through social media and other communication channels is another consumer trend that is stimulating volunteer tourism . Such imagery may induce guilt amongst more affluent consumers, thereby prompting forms of remedial consumption. The juxtaposition in volunteer tourism settings of haves (volunteer tourists) and have-nots (the intended beneficiaries of largesse) has, however, led to questions about its propriety (Mustonen 2007; Sin 2010). In an environment where concepts such as social responsibility and social enterprise are gaining currency (Cherrier 2007; Porter and Kramer 2006), the evolution of advanced capitalist economies is epitomized by an increasing emphasis on ethical consumption. The celebration of socially responsible consumption behaviors has gone global as a result of highly publicized campaigns such as advocacy of a living wage in less developed countries and Fair Trade (Grodnik and Conroy 2007; Harrison and Scorse 2010). Scrutiny over working conditions and the distribution of benefits has progressively extended to tourism generally and to volunteer tourism in particular. Critics have asserted that placing demands on host communities to accommodate the needs of volunteer tourists resembles the conditions that were prevalent during the colonial era when representatives of paternalistic countries were present (Raymond and Hall 2008; Palacios 2010). This post-colonial view may have contributed to the popularity of volunteer tourism by prompting a desire to "give back" to the less fortunate. Consistent with Tomazos and Cooper (2011), the present researchers argue that there are parallels between these practices and volunteer tourism, the

latter with its appeal to those who wish to "give back" but not deviate too far from their more familiar consumer activities.

Volunteer tourism has also been stimulated by global efforts to achieve social goals such as equality and poverty eradication. The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals committed to eight objectives, namely ending poverty and hunger, universal education, gender equality, child health, maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and global partnerships (United Nations 2010). Since gaining United Nations agency status in 2001, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has adopted the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*. This code refers to ten articles that seek to mobilize tourism-specific support for the Millennium Development Goals (UNWTO 2001). The International Ecotourism Society has recently published the *International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators*, a tool for sending organizations to manage their volunteer tourism programs responsibly and sustainably (TIES 2012). With an emphasis on sustainable management, monitoring outcomes, transparent reporting, benefits maximization and harm minimization, the *Guidelines* were designed as an aid for sending organizations to translate good intentions into best practices. Such guidelines provide a starting point to address the calls for greater organizational accountability (Fee and Mdee 2011; Wearing and McGehee 2013a) and signal that the objectives of the volunteer tourism sector are consistent with those that have been established by international agencies for the broader tourism industry. They could serve to strengthen confidence in the volunteer tourism phenomenon amongst consumers and other stakeholders.

Popular dissemination of the social justice concept is also pertinent to the growth of volunteer tourism. The increasing ubiquity of mobile technologies and of social media has stimulated mass online activism (Rotman et al. 2011). The ease of engaging in online activism has widened the activist base that provides a pool of prospective volunteer tourists.

Such activism extends to signing online petitions that favor particular political causes or advocating crowd-sourcing "microloans" for community projects (Black 2009). This wider activist base is raising consciousness about international causes and constitutes a potential audience for volunteer tourism (Micheletti and Stolle 2008; Tatarchevskiy 2011; Val Aelst and Walgrave 2004). The effectiveness of such campaigns has, however, been questioned because of the prevalence of passive involvement (Walsh 2012) prompting the pejorative term, "slacktivism" (Karpf 2010). Critics maintain that the online generation has hijacked a word traditionally associated with activity, namely, "activism" in favor of the more passive "slacktivism". In some respects the latter is the antithesis of direct involvement. Confronted by this critique, volunteer tourism benefits by demanding an active form of participation, in contrast to online activism which requires only a few mouse clicks. Having fulfilled their tourist related expectations, participants in volunteer tourism experiences may be stimulated to engage in other forms of activism, thereby benefiting local communities or global causes (McGehee and Santos 2005; McGehee 2012).

Technological advances have progressively diminished the physical and metaphorical distance between communities, thereby prompting action from prospective volunteer tourists. Meanwhile the increasing prevalence of long haul travel has enhanced accessibility to remote areas of the world for those with the means, thereby providing an impetus for more unusual and exotic travel (Jurowski and Olsen 1995). The shrinking of distances is also metaphorical because a vast body of knowledge is accessible online through search engines and Internet-based encyclopedias. By encouraging a deeper understanding of prevailing development issues and how to address them, distance has been metaphorically diminished thereby contributing to a sense of humankind as neighbors in a shrinking global community, with an obligation to assist one another (Marsella 1998). The enhanced development of a global sensibility has provided an impetus for volunteer tourism by raising awareness of the

disparities between living conditions in the richer and poorer countries (Allan, Adam, and Carter 2000).

Many individuals in developed countries view themselves as "time-poor" and as being under stress (Sullivan and Gershuny 2004). Such lifestyle trends are likely to continue as productivity related pressures place greater demands on the time to be spent on work-related issues. There is an increasing desire for multi-functional and seamless activities and products (Kenyon 2008). This is evident in the design of modern consumer goods, such as smartphones that allow users to perform various tasks such as making calls, sending text and email messages and playing music that previously required multiple devices.

Whilst the traditional model of engaging in frequently recurring volunteering commitments remains important, there is increasing incidence of episodic forms of volunteering, reflective of the formation of more flexible relationships with relevant organizations (Macduff 1991). Hustinx and Lammertyn (2004) have conceptualized this emerging approach as reflexive volunteering, suitable for those who demand, "a high level of mobility and flexibility in their involvement, and are primarily functionally orientated" (p. 552). The distinctions between regular volunteering and emerging episodic volunteering are evident internationally (see, e.g., Grimm et al. 2006; Evans and Saxton 2005). Commentators have observed that participants are increasingly selective in their choice of volunteering activities (Evans and Saxton 2005) and are seeking new and more flexible approaches consistent with their interests and lifestyles. The availability of flexible volunteering options is of equal importance to younger and older age groups (Gaskin 2003; Evans and Saxton 2005). Furthermore, the competing demands of everyday life may have led to the supplanting of active participation in social- or community-based causes by virtual volunteering through Internet-based mechanisms (Hustinx, Handy, and Cnaan 2010). Volunteer tourism responds to the challenges of both multi-tasking and time-poor lifestyles. It demands a finite

commitment because of its episodic nature. It also satisfies multiple needs, including the impetus to travel and a desire to help host communities.

Having examined the drivers shaping the volunteer tourism phenomenon, discussion now turns to the contextual setting underpinning this exploration of likely future forms. The focus is the diverse and fast growing Asia Pacific region, which epitomizes the shifting balance between the developed and developing worlds.

The Asia-Pacific tourism outlook

The next section of the paper examines the Asia-Pacific tourism outlook towards 2050 as discerned by the literature review findings. Particular emphasis is given to the outlook for countries in Northeast Asia (e.g., Japan), Southeast Asia (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore), South Asia (e.g., India) and the Pacific (e.g., Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands). To ensure a manageable investigation, the Americas (Canada, Mexico and the USA) are excluded from consideration. This is despite their substantial role in the Asia-Pacific region through participation in organizations such as the intergovernmental Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and tourism-focused association, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

Rapid growth is an ongoing characteristic of the Asia-Pacific region. Driven by the growth trajectories of China and India as the world's most populous nations, Asia will have surpassed the combined economic output of Europe and North America by 2020 (Australian Government 2012). It has been forecast that four Asian nations - China, India, Japan and Indonesia – will be listed in the world's 10 largest economies by 2025. The nations of Southeast Asia are also expected to grow rapidly towards 2025, prompted by the forces of globalization and economic liberalization (Dwyer et al. 2008). Meanwhile the economies of

more developed nations such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea will grow more moderately, evidence of the diverse stages of economic growth that are prevalent across the region (Australian Government 2012). The modest scale of such growth is partly attributable to the declining productivity that is associated with ageing populations in these countries (OECD 2012). In contrast, the vast populations of China and India will continue to expand along with their respective middle classes, shifting the global economic center of gravity further towards the East (Quah 2011). Yeoman (2012) has highlighted demographics as a key driver of economic expansion globally and has observed that by 2050 developing regions across the world "will see their workforces expand by 1.5 billion people – while the labor force in developed areas will shrink by over 100 million workers" (p. 18). Developing countries within the Asia-Pacific region will progressively catch up with their more advanced counterparts.

Rising living standards and unprecedented increases in discretionary spending power will continue to fuel the demands of Asia's middle class consumers (Australian Government 2012; Parkinson 2011, Yeoman 2012). Urbanization is progressing rapidly in countries as diverse as China, India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Pakistan and Vietnam. The increasing proportion of the region's consumers residing in urban areas will have particular resonance in the case of tourism given travel propensities are highest in urban areas (Parkinson 2011). Meanwhile access to land will become increasingly fraught across the region leading to contested resource allocations and potential geopolitical conflicts. The fact that the global population growth to 2050 will require a 70% increase in global food production (FAO 2009) is a challenge in light of the annual loss of approximately 12 million hectares of agricultural land as a result of land degradation and deforestation (UNCCD 2011). A 2012-2014 outlook by tourism forecasters Turner and Witt (2012) highlighted that in world terms "Asia remains a leading driver of international tourism and this is reflected not only in terms of arrival

numbers, but also in terms of outbound travel beyond Asia Pacific to the rest of the world".

On this basis, Asia will continue as a catalyst for tourism growth to 2050 both within the immediate Asia-Pacific region and globally.

Yeoman (2012) has noted that tourism will be a key beneficiary of discretionary spending by the new middle classes, driven by strong economic conditions in source markets. Travel times will diminish and increased airline capacity will extend the range of access points across the region due to new forms of long range aircraft, the liberalization of air services and the opening up of routes to new carriers (IATA 2011). According to Turner and Witt (2012), the Asia Pacific region will have "the largest increase in fleet size increasing by 7,030 from 3,370 to 10,400 over the next 20 years". This will particularly benefit certain nations. As noted by the authors, for example, small capacity increases significantly impact on overall arrival numbers in the case of the Pacific Islands.

Despite the bright outlook, a number of challenges and threats towards the year 2050 confront tourism generally and volunteer tourism in particular. One risk is the likelihood of reaching the "peak oil" tipping point (Yeoman 2012). This trend would see a significant diminution of oil supplies in the lead up to 2050 coinciding with an increase in demand. By 2050, for example, it has been anticipated that Asia will be 90% dependent on imported oil (Australia Government 2012). Though growth provides aspirational consumers with the economic power to travel on an unprecedented scale, Yeoman (2012) has proposed one scenario whereby "a reversal of fortunes occurs where ecotourism is an exclusive experience for the mega rich and tourism for the middle classes is restricted to an urban environment and mass tourism excursions" (p. 12). Growing concerns about climate change may compound future apprehensions about the nature of tourism products. It is forecast that rising sea levels will impact on low-lying areas across the region including the Pacific Islands, Bangladesh, India and Vietnam. This trend may coincide with desertification in other locales (Australian

Government 2012), exacerbated by increasing scarcity of potable water (IWMI 2007).

Climate change is irreparably altering the tourism appeal of many regional destinations

through its impact on natural resources and moderate temperatures. It is anticipated that

persistent climate change will impact on perceptions about the ethics, social acceptability and

environmental responsibility that is associated with distance travelled (Benson 2011).

Prospects for volunteer tourism to 2050

Based on the literature review findings of the drivers that have affected the growth of

volunteer tourism to date and the trends that are likely to affect tourism in the medium- to

longer term, the researchers propose three prospective scenarios for volunteer tourism in the

Asia-Pacific region. Each future scenario is now discussed in relation to the possible

situations of steady state, continued growth and collapse.

Stable and principled volunteer tourism

The first scenario proposes that volunteer tourism continues substantially in its current form,

following the established and predominantly western-based paradigm. As has been the case

previously, the major sources of volunteer tourism emanate from the region's more

developed westernized countries of Australia and New Zealand and from comparable nations

outside the region (e.g., in North America and Europe), travelling for the provision of

assistance to developing Asia-Pacific nations (e.g., Bangladesh, Laos, Timor-Leste). Though

its merits have been critiqued and vigorously debated, the phenomenon continues to be

viewed largely positively.

As prospective source markets, the emerging Asian middle classes will continue to

opt for more massified forms of tourism that are epitomized by participants in China's

Approved Destination Scheme (ADS) tours. The volunteer tourism alternative remains a minority pursuit (Weaver 2006). This trend is attributable to the relatively new-found nature of their travel experience, more conservative consumption preferences (Flatters, Foa, and Gill 2011) and difficulties of communicating in foreign languages. These characteristics will lead to a preference for packaged tours to satisfy lower order travel motives (based on the hierarchy of needs) such as relaxation (Pearce 1988), as opposed to more experienced travelers who opt for volunteer tourism programs to address their need for self-actualization (Schau 2000; Zavestoski 2002).

Within the more developed source markets, the concept of the "meaningful" gap year that benefits both consumers and the host community will continue to take root. Though the merits of a gap year for promoting cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship have been extensively debated (Lyons et al. 2012; Lyons and Wearing 2011), the young are undeterred from pursuing this option. At the other end of the spectrum, the ageing population profile in the more developed countries (Australian Government 2012) will see the emergence of older aged "grey nomads" who are interested in travel as a medium for self-expression, further driving volunteer tourism growth (Leonard and Onyx 2009). Meanwhile new technologies continue to accelerate the communication of world events, further shrinking the world community and facilitating global consciousness about developmental issues (Grimm and Needham 2012). These are actively addressed by volunteer tourism with its emphasis on virtuous consumption behaviors.

In the absence of radical changes within major source markets, this scenario suggests that the main interference with continuity in volunteer tourism will be the reduced range of product options. If rapid economic growth continues in previously popular destinations such as China and India the willingness to accommodate development projects that rely on contributions by volunteer tourism will be reduced. Adjustments will be needed by volunteer

tourism programs to accommodate evolving needs in these destinations and to maintain their appeal and relevance in traditional markets. There may also be a tendency to persist with the most deserving forms of volunteer tourism that make demonstrably positive community contributions and minimize the negatives (Wearing and McGehee 2013b).

Volunteer tourism at the vanguard

As the incidence of discerning travel outgrows more massified forms of tourism, the attractiveness of volunteer tourism will spread across the Asia-Pacific region encompassing the emerging middle classes of developing countries as well as established source markets. This second scenario proposes that rapid urbanization is prompting consumers to seek out more remote and exotic destinations (Sin 2009), precipitating an increase in intra-regional volunteer tourism and longer haul travel. Regional growth is however uneven, with volunteer tourism likely to be fostered in countries that have an existing volunteering culture. The limited cross-cultural comparative studies of volunteering highlight variable national rates of volunteering. The rates of volunteering in Japan, for example, are relatively low; Australia, India and Singapore have moderate levels of volunteering, with higher rates recorded in Korea, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China and Vietnam (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011; Musick and Wilson 2008). According to researchers, the most conducive populations for volunteering value self-expression, share similar education levels, represent younger societies (with lesser aged populations and high fertility rates) and are more supportive of democratic principles (Hustinx et al. 2010; Musick and Wilson 2008). The evidence is inconclusive about the link between volunteering rates and economic development, but Musick and Wilson (2008) have suggested that densely populated areas are less conducive to volunteering. Given the expected increase in urbanization and emergence of mega cities

across Asia, this relationship may constrain the more optimistic projections for volunteer tourism in fast growing Asian cities.

The role that Asian countries play in the volunteer tourism phenomenon will change from hosting overseas volunteers to providing a prospective source of outbound volunteer tourists to communities in the least developed locales in settings such as Africa. This is a manifestation of the continuing growth of Asian economies whereas the incidence of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa will remain stubbornly high (Bardhan 2007). The extensive Indian and Chinese diasporas that are resident across the Asia Pacific region will also drive volunteer tourism destination choices, whereby travelers assist those with whom they have the strongest cultural affinity. These connections are largely positive because they are evidence of connectedness, though they may be vulnerable to growing political assertiveness overseas particularly in the case of China. Fuelled by improvements in communication and transport technologies, there is an increasing tendency to reclaim diasporic roots. These enable dispersed groups to connect and travel on an unprecedented scale drawing upon "transnational networks" (Shuval 2000, p. 44). Butler has noted that such networks are "rooted in the broad concept of nation (not specifically the modern nation-state)" (2001, p. 208). Furthermore, there will be a greater incidence of domestic forms of Asian volunteer tourism with the residents of richer regions within countries such as China, Indonesia and India assisting their less prosperous rural counterparts. They may also seek to lessen the impact of income inequalities between rural and urban populations by supporting marginalized communities (Australian Government 2012).

Though the volunteer tourism destinations of the future may be unpredictable, demand for volunteer tourists will grow in aggregate because of the increased incidence of extreme weather and disasters, extending the focus from planned programs to disaster response or rebuilding efforts. Such conditions will lead to the incidence of spontaneous

volunteering, which has previously been a largely localized phenomenon operating independently from tourism (FaCHSIA 2010). The prospective growth of spontaneous volunteer tourism across the Region will depend on the capacity to address safety concerns and assurance that volunteer tourists will not impede ongoing recovery efforts. Such movements will benefit from easier accessibility through increasing Asia-Pacific airline capacity and by the introduction of biometric scanning methods (Yeoman 2012) that eliminate the need for visas and passports. In responding to the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels, volunteer tourism will extend into low lying Southeast Asia countries such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka and to the Pacific Islands.

In response to growing domestic and international volunteer tourism, the need for more stringent guidelines targeted at operators within this sector becomes imperative. The temptation to prioritize the source market wants over the needs of host communities may prove irresistible for commercially oriented operators who recognize the potential profitability of fulfilling such demands. This confirms the need for adoption of sector-wide guidelines by commercial and non-profit operators alike, ensuring an enduring emphasis on the core volunteer tourism objective of supporting the developmental needs of host communities. The increasing prevalence of disaster-driven volunteer tourism due to extreme weather events further reinforces this need, aiming to protect vulnerable host destinations from exploitation during times of stress and ensuring beneficial assistance from volunteer tourists when it is most needed. The pressure to develop stronger volunteer tourism operating guidelines may necessitate the development of a system akin to Fair Trade certification (Mdee and Emmott 2008) promoting good practice and accountability, helping potential volunteer tourists to make better choices. Asia-Pacific regional organizations and associations such APEC and PATA could champion the development and implementation of such guidelines and accreditation schemes.

Volunteer tourism is discredited and superseded

Within this third and final scenario, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing critical debate about claims surrounding volunteer tourism (Guttentag 2009; McGehee 2012; Lyons et al. 2012; Mdee and Emmott 2008; Palacios 2010; Raymond 2008; Sin 2010). These have persisted until the weight of evidence, including longitudinal studies, effectively demonstrates that volunteer tourism is causing more problems than it is alleviating when left to operate with inadequate regulation and guidance. Coupled with the public perception that "doing something" is inadequate as a response, the failure of sending organizations to undertake long-term project planning will exacerbate the empirical evidence that project interventions are not "making a difference" (Mdee and Emmott 2008; Simpson 2005). This widely held view dampens the popularity of volunteer tourism as an appropriate course of action in the journey towards global equality.

With technological advances and the growing popularity of forms of international assistance which involve no physical involvement, mechanisms such as peer-to-peer lending, where lenders and borrowers are directly linked instead of channeling funds through an intermediary institution, become more accountable, thereby consolidating confidence in this form of assistance. The use of such technologies to assuage first world guilt lessens the attractiveness of volunteer tourism as a more active medium. Those who do partake in volunteer tourism will do so virtually, taking advantage of haptic technologies (Yeoman 2012). These provide the sensation of being there through touch and feel, whilst avoiding the need to leave the familiar and comfortable home.

Confronted by food and water shortages and by the impacts of more extreme weather events, Asia-Pacific consumers seek more conventionally hedonistic retreats from the pressures of daily life when pursuing their (mostly domestic) holiday "escapes" with a view

to avoiding unwelcome reminders of the associated problems. At the extreme, the exceeding of the peak oil tipping point and government levies of prohibitive taxes, renders air travel either anachronistic or what Yeoman (2012) has described as a privileged domain for the rich. In scenario three the volunteer tourism phenomenon will be substantially discredited and supplanted as a result of research-backed evidence about changing attitudes and new technologies, as prospective participants become more involved in domestic volunteering activities, either in person or virtually and/or donate money to charities that are better equipped to tackle the projects that were previously supported in a well-meaning but unprofessional way by volunteer tourists. Volunteer tourism has previously evolved from other forms of international travel such as religious mission trips. The further evolution of the phenomenon beyond its current manifestation as a physical form of helping will be assisted by future technologies. The development of "virtual volunteerism" will draw upon existing technologies such as augmented reality, which currently provides users with virtual information as a supplement and enhancement of existing surroundings (Yovcheva, Buhalis, and Gatzidis 2013). In this approach, experiencing volunteer activities from the comfort of one's home may be augmented with real-time images and host community updates.

Conclusions and recommendations for further research

In the period leading up to 2050, the future of Asia-Pacific tourism generally and of volunteer tourism in particular is highly uncertain. This paper has charted three prospective scenarios for volunteer tourism using information that has been sourced from a comprehensive literature review: two largely positive scenarios and a third more negative prospect.

A desire to help the disadvantaged is a fundamental appeal of volunteer tourism for prospective participants (Simpson 2005). This is unlikely to diminish in the lead up to 2050

as the world confronts major challenges such as climate change and shortages of water, food and oil. These circumstances will produce major global transformations, with greater disparities between the rich and poor along rural-urban, gender and ethnic divides (Australian Government 2012). The changing forms of future volunteer tourism will depend on the mix of emerging contextual circumstances. An extreme outcome will involve replacement of the current "real" phenomenon with its virtual equivalent. Until this possible extreme is reached, the generating markets for volunteer tourism will likely diversify, moving beyond traditional east-west, developed-developing, domestic-international divisions. Technological innovations will expand the reach and visibility of global development issues to a greater cohort of middle income, aspirational consumers. This will prompt an expansion of dispersal whether domestic or international and whether along the lines of disaster response, and/or diaspora.

It is probable that volunteering will increase in China and India, albeit in different forms. Whether volunteers pursue a more "nationalized" agenda, which involves domestic activity, will be influenced by attitudes to other countries. The recent disputes between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands have greatly diminished travel between these two important nations. This context would have greatly influenced the incidence of cross boundary volunteering in the case of incidents such as the Sichuan earthquake (in China) or the Fukushima tsunami disaster in Japan. These circumstances are a reminder that geopolitical concerns across the Asia-Pacific region will impact upon both government-led and popular attitudes. These factors will shape the desire to extend assistance to others.

Whilst many of the factors affecting the Asia-Pacific volunteer tourism outlook are beyond the immediate control of the tourism sector, it will be important for the reputation of volunteer tourism that sending organizations and the wider tourism industry adopt sustainable management practices. These could be guided by either voluntary codes such the *International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators* or by more

formalized accreditation schemes such as the "Fair Trade" approach. Academics should thoroughly investigate the phenomenon over the longer term to provide prospective consumers and host communities with robust evidence about the merit and value of volunteer tourism. They should address the negative impacts of this form of tourism, and partner with the industry to advocate for the role of volunteer tourism in promoting cross-cultural understandings and global citizenship. By taking these actions now, tourism industry practitioners and researchers can play an important role in safeguarding the future of volunteer tourism in the period leading up to 2050.

Finally, acknowledging the limitations of the literature review method underpinning the current study, researchers are encouraged to use this grounded exploration to test and refine the exploratory scenarios proposed, in the process establishing key links between the drivers affecting the growth of volunteer tourism and particular scenario outcomes using foresight methods such as expert panels, extrapolation, modeling and scenario planning.

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