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Volunteer Tourism: Altruism, Empathy or Self Enhancement ?

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Abstract

Volunteer tourism being an ambiguous concept could be seen equally as an expression of social conscience and civil duty but also as cynical exploitation of human qualities like altruism and empathy. Still it is recognised that volunteer participants may also gain from their involvement but that should not raise questions about the purity of their motives. It is much less clear where, on a continuum from altruism to self enhancement, volunteer tourism falls, and it is likely that this varies greatly from individual to individual. To some it clearly a holiday, to others a commitment with real costs, and to others something in between, an enjoyable experience with anticipated benefits in terms of career advancement at some point in the future. This paper looks at both altruism and empathy in a theoretical context in an attempt to deconstruct their role in the development and expansion of volunteer tourism opportunities.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of the volunteer tourism market is now a global phenomenon. The typical scene of volunteer tourists working on a variety of projects with the aim of helping a cause, protecting flora or fauna, alleviating human suffering from poverty and disease, building or restoring infrastructure, is repeated over and over in different parts of the world. Inevitably the growth of volunteer tourism has prompted researchers to try and deconstruct the motivations of volunteer participants in terms of what drives them to presumably forgo their hedonistic needs by choosing a more typical holiday activity and instead follow their social obligations and opt for volunteer work instead. Many studies have focused on the benefits of participation, peer pressure and other factors that may influence the decision of an individual to become a volunteer tourist (see for example, Brown and Morrison 2003; Callanan and Thomas 2003; Sebbins and Graham 2004; Wearing 2001. This paper focuses on human nature and investigates the potential role that altruism at one extent or empathy play in influencing the actions of potential volunteer tourists and to what degree the media play a part in shaping responses to calls for help.

Volunteer Tourism In Context

Volunteer tourism has become increasingly popular under a variety of names: "volunteer tourism" (Henderson, 1981), "volunteer vacation" (McMillon, Cutchines, and Geissinger,

2006), "mini mission" (Brown and Morrison, 2003), "mission-lite", "pro-poor tourism" (Ashley, Roe and Goodwin, 2001; Hall, 2007), "vacation volunteering", "altruistic tourism" (Singh, 2002), "service based vacation", "participatory environmental research (PERT)" (Ellis, 2003), and "voluntourism" (The Guardian, 2007).

The studies of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (2008) demonstrate that the volunteer tourism market has grown rapidly, with a current yearly total of 1.6 million volunteer tourists, contributing a value between U.S D 1.7-2.6 billion. The significant growth and the uniqueness of the volunteer tourism model have attracted many researchers and practitioners.

From the titles listed above, volunteer tourism can be viewed as a tourism activity incorporating volunteer services. As a sector it combines environmental, cultural and humanitarian issues with an intention to benefit, not only the participants (the tourist element), but also the locals (the volunteer element). It could be said that volunteer tourism meets the needs of tourists who prefer to travel with a purpose (Brown and Lehto, 2005) and to make a difference during their holiday (Coghlan, 2006), thus enjoying a tourist experience while gaining the benefit of contributing to others.

What has captured the interest of a number of researchers in particular is the motivation behind the choice of such a type of holiday (McGeehee and Norman, 2002; Ellis, 2003; Lyons, 2003; Broad, 2003; Brown and Lehto, 2005; Campbell and Smith, 2006; McIntosh and Zahra, 2007; Mustonen, 2007; Broad and Jenkins, 2008; Lepp, 2008; Lyons and Wearing, 2008; McGeehee and Andereck, 2008). Four reasons why people travel with a purpose identified by Brown and Lehto (2005) are:cultural immersion, the desire to give something back (altruism), camaraderie (friendship), and family. The key motives of volunteer tourists emerging from Caissie and Hallpenny's (2003) study about a nature and conservation program included: pleasure seeking, program "perks", place and nature based context, leaving a legacy, and altruism. Those researchers found that the participants focused more on self than altruistic reasons and expected their trip not only to fulfil a higher need such as self-actualization, but also the basic needs of relaxation and stimulation (Caissie and Halpenny, 2003). Mustonen (2007) suggested that four similar interactive dimensions, altruism, egoism, socializing, and individuality, motivated volunteer tourists, based on his research. Researchers have tended to divide volunteer tourists into volunteer-minded and vacation-minded participants (Wearing, 2001; Brown and Lehto, 2005; Mustonen, 2007), but it can be argued that the true volunteer tourist exists in a continuum dimension somewhere in between these two extremes. To draw any conclusions on the role altruism and empathy in

the development of volunteer tourism it is necessary to examine these related concepts in some detail.

Altruism

An interesting aspect of social living is that people and animals sometimes perform acts which seem to serve the needs of others, even to the detriment of themselves. Such acts are called altruistic. The word "altruism" (derived from French *autre* "another", in its turn derived from Latin *alter* "other") was coined by August Comte, the French founder of positivism, in order to describe the ethical doctrine he supported (Comte, 1852). Altruism is usually defined as self-destructive behavior performed for the benefit of others (Wispe, 1978). There are many different acts that could be deemed altruistic, from helping an old lady cross the street to sacrificing one's life for the greater good. Research suggests that altruistic behavior is as old as the human race and it is a primal instinct since it has been observed in animal behaviour too (Oliner and Oliner, 1988). However, the question of whether human beings are by nature cooperative and altruistic, or intrinsically egoistic and competitive, is as old as the Western tradition of political theory (Wispe, 1978). It is a traditional virtue in many cultures, and central to many religious traditions.

There are two opposing schools of thought about the nature and origin of altruism. The pre-Socratic philosophers argued that men are naturally oriented to individual gain and that altruistic behavior is a cultural trait that humans are taught to display. One of the more recent champions of this egoistic theory was Nietzsche. He asserted that altruism is predicated on the assumption that others are more important than one's self, and that such a position is degrading and demeaning (Nietzsche et al, 2009). On the other side of the debate are Plato, Aristotle and Marx, who argue that 'Man is a political animal' and thus by instinct human beings are willing to sacrifice themselves for the common good (Aristotle et al, 2003; Marx in Kain, 1991).

Before taking sides in this diachronic 'battle', it is necessary to look more extensively into altruistic behaviour and its traits. Altruism depends wholly on the individual involved knowing and caring about the needs of others and their satisfaction. In order to be altruistic, the act of the benefactor should be gratuitous with no gain in mind; the act itself is the only reward. Thus early on in the discussion three elements have been identified that constitute the altruistic act; the desire to give, empathy and absence of motive for reward.

However, these three elements are criticised by psychologists who argue that altruism has no strong foundations, logically or empirically. They call this phenomenon the 'hedonistic paradox' (Gide, 1960) because according to it, a truly gratuitous act is impossible as even the most unselfish act may produce a psychological reward for the actor. To others (Becker, 1974; Margolis, 1982; Mancur, 1965), altruism is a complex result of socio-cultural evolution and it could not be understood by using psychological criteria alone. It is a part of human development and a product of human civilization and the argument is proposed that altruistic behaviour is revered and celebrated catholically. For supporters of this view this common idolization means that altruism, like morality and decency, has a survival value in the popular psyche and thus comes naturally to humans (Wispe, 1978; Sigmund, 1994; Plomin et al, 2002; Turner and Chao, 2003; Griffin et al, 2004).

Given the ever-present character of altruism it would not be prudent to form an opinion solely by adhering to sociological and psychological theories. According to Alexander (1987), in general moral philosophers and sociologists have not paid adequate attention to biology and have not taken into account biological knowledge. The science of biology has, for almost two centuries now been trying to solve the enigma that is human altruistic behaviour.

There is a plethora of evolutionary theories (Thorpe, 1974; 1978; Lorenz, 1977; Armstrong, 1981; Stadler and Kruse, 1990) concerned with altruistic behavior and they all seem to stem from a basic scenario and an accepted hypothesis that there is an altruistic gene. The argument revolves around the daily life of prehistoric humans. The following situation is used as the basis for the discussion. Caveman X shows signs of altruistic behavior and shares his food with caveman Y. On the other hand caveman Y does not share his food with caveman X. This scenario is plausible since sharing food is common even amongst animals, as for example vampire bats who donate food to other members of their group (Okasha, 2003). Who of these two cavemen will be more successful in surviving and procreating and thus passing on their genes? If Darwin and his theory of natural selection (Darwin, 1871) are to prevail, then caveman X is at a disadvantage compared to caveman Y and thus caveman X does not get to pass on his "noble" genes. Thus according to Darwin the altruistic gene dies along with its carrier and since humans are still behaving altruistically, altruism cannot be genetically inherited, because it would not have been possible for it to be transferred from generation to generation. This Darwinian theory of natural selection and the survival of the fittest was

challenged in the 20th century by Hamilton in 1964 and his theory of kin selection (Hamilton, 1964).

The solution to the obstacle posed by Darwinism was simple and it opened the gate for more discussion and debate over the existence of the altruistic gene. What if caveman X does not share food with just anybody, but only with his relatives? Relatives share genes with one another, so when the caveman carrying the altruistic gene shares his food, there is a higher probability that the recipients of the food will also carry copies of that gene. The overall effect may be the increase of the altruistic gene within the next generation and thus the trait is passed on (efficient altruism, Sober and Wilson, 1998). Another possible scenario that rises from the same episode is the free-rider scenario. Caveman X shares his food with Caveman Y at a time of need but when the situation is reversed caveman Y refuses to share his food with Caveman X. This free-riding happens today and it is safe to assume that it also took place in earlier times so it was imperative for generous cavemen to avoid being cheated. Over many generations, one obvious solution would be for cavemen X to evolve a way of spotting potential Cavemen Y, the consequence of this would inevitably beCavevmen Y evolving a way of convincing Cavemen X that they do have good intentions. This kind of evolutionary stand off could have only one result; more sophisticated disguises by Cavemen Y and more sophisticated detectors by Cavemen X. This evolutionary "arms race" could have only one end result according to evolution scientists. Cavemen Y were forced to actually become genuine co-operators by erecting psychological barriers to promise-breaking (Batson, 1991) and to become sincerely moral and helping individuals- in short Cavemen Y developed a conscience and became more like Cavemen X.

More recent research (Rilling et al, 2002) postulates that human beings have neural representations of emotions which clearly derive specific rewards from mutual cooperation and which punish norm violators. Further support for this scenario comes from the work of Boehm (2000) who deduced from the study of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies that altruistic punishment could have been common during the first 100,000 years of human existence. This evolution based scenario cements its legitimacy thanks to a recent medical research breakthrough in the United States. It was found that the lower area of the brain became aroused when the subject performed helping acts (Duke Medical News, 2007).

The above, combined with ideas of kin selection, may explain how a fundamentally selfish process (survival) can produce a genuinely non-cynical form of altruism that gives rise to human conscience. However, this technical game theory analysis (Binmore, 1994) seems to ignore the fact that human beings are both rational and emotional. It would have been very disappointing for the human race if biology had a simple answer for such a complex aspect of human behaviour. Homo sapiens is an evolved species and thus general evolutionary principles apply to us but human behaviour is obviously influenced by culture to a far greater extent than it is in the case of animals and is often the product of conscious beliefs and desires (Trivers, 1985), i.e. the nature versus nurture debate. At least some human behaviour does seem to follow the above theories. For instance, humans tend to behave more altruistically towards their close kin than towards non- relatives (as kin selection theories suggest), but they also display anomalies in their behaviour such as adoption, which is contradictory to theories of both natural and kin selection (Sober, 1994)

Thus it becomes apparent that the two theories that have dominated the literature for the past century do not completely resolve an issue that spans the board of human behaviour.

This realization subsequently demands a more contingent approach, adding to biology some practical realities of human behaviour. The act of sharing food may be reciprocated by the same gesture in return at a different time. This means that the motive behind sharing food could have been to get food in return when the circumstances changed and the benefactor was in need of his beneficiary. This type of altruistic behaviour has been identified in the literature as reciprocal altruism (Hamilton, 1964; Trivers, 1971; Chalmers, 1979; Fairbanks, 1980; Seyfarth and Cheney, 1984; Tucker, 2004) and, along with natural selection and kin selection, comprises the evolutionary approach to human behaviour. It also fits with the historic religious belief that doing good deeds and behaving unselfishly while alive will gain redemption from sin and entrance into heaven after death.

Having briefly reviewed theories concerning the evolutionary approach in explaining altruistic behaviour, it can be concluded that there is no evidence to support the argument that evolution would have made humans into egoistic, self centred individuals, nor there is any evidence to support the idea that evolution would have made humans self sacrificing, altruistic individuals (Sober, 1994).

Undoubtedly, biology can point to parallels between much human behaviour and that of other species, arguing that much of what humans do has its origins in behaviour that serves reproductive goals in many species. However, it is imperative to remember that being able to draw some parallels does not mean that science has understood or is able to explain all human behaviour. Human beings, unlike other species, have control over their urges or instincts, otherwise infanticide would be as common amongst humans as it is amongst lions. It makes sense in a genetically explained fashion but it does not happen. The larger brain and the unique hypothalamus give humans a control and adaptability which other species appear to lack.

The secret to this failure of biology to explain altruism with complete satisfaction lies in philosophy, with the simple fact that there is no solitary person. "*One person is no person*" (Palmer, 1919: p9) or as Aristotle put it in the 4th century BC, someone who lives alone is either more than human (a god) or less than human (an animal). No human arrives in the world alone; relations encompass humans from birth because humans are social beings, members of a family, a community, a state, or at least members of human kind and few go their grave (or equivalent) alone.

Living in communities means that members sometimes put the interests of others first; acceptance within any group depends upon individuals acting according to their obligations towards the group. This duty to fulfil obligations towards the whole may clash with an individual's hopes, desires or even their welfare and it has evolved within human societies into satisfying the need to protect the weak, fight wars or sustain the status quo throughout history. The emphasis on the individual to put the whole first is evident in the 'opium of the people', religion. The great religions of the world have urged that an unconditional concern for the welfare of others is one of the highest ideals that humans can pursue and they offer rewards such as a clear conscience in this life and rich rewards in the next, as noted above. The result is that generosity, sympathy and self sacrifice are judged good and worthy of cultivation, accepting that people possess these traits to different extents. There are individuals who put other people's welfare before themselves and there are those who place their emphasis on looking after themselves. The intriguing challenge is to establish why this difference occurs.

From a psychology point of view, altruism is not in a strong position, logically or empirically. This is because of the so called 'hedonistic paradox' (Gide, 1960) which points out that a truly gratuitous act is impossible; good or bad, rewarding or punishing effects will always result for the actor. Thus when somebody acts altruistically, they hinder or help themselves. Cognitive psychology has identified factors in the upbringing of an individual that may hinder or promote altruistic behaviour (Wright, 1971). The learning principles in psychology (Bandura, 1969) suggest that altruistic behaviour can be taught in three ways: by reward, by punishment and by example. For instance, parents who think that their children should learn to share their toys with other children tend to systematically reward them for doing so. In the literature there is much empirical research that deals with the acquisition of generous habits through reward (Donald and Adelberg, 1967; Fischer, 1963; Midlarsky and Brian, 1967). Teaching altruism by example also features heavily in the literature with various experiments proving that humans tend to act altruistically once they have been 'stimulated' by the example of another altruistic act (Bryan and Test, 1967; Hartup and Coates, 1967). Finally another way of teaching altruism is by applying the principles of social group theories (Berkowitz and Daniels, 1963). According to these theories, altruistic behaviour is affected by the norms and morals of the group to which the individual belongs. If altruistic behaviour is generally acceptable then the individual is motivated to act accordingly.

From the above discussion it becomes clear that altruism is a very complicated aspect of human behaviour. It may stem from the early days of humans on earth and their quest for survival in a wild and unforgiving environment, even though it could be conceded that as a concept, altruism goes against one of the most basic instincts of man, self- preservation. Nevertheless, altruism has evolved as society has changed in order to serve its purpose, promoting the importance of the whole over the individual, a notion that has been reinforced by religious and moral codes. This was made possible by the need of humans to be accepted and altruistic behaviour was an example set by local heroes (Tomazos and Butler 2010) or characters in religious scripts. This idealistic behaviour then was used by parents who tried to bestow this model behaviour on their children. This simple process reflected the norms and mores of societies at a time when information was a rare and exclusive commodity and education was a privilege of the few, and survival in a hostile environment depended heavily on community self-support.

Admittedly none of the sciences examined clearly have the answer in terms of human behaviour or altruism. Further evidence is the fact that recently a new paradigm has been adopted by researchers, combining genetics, medicine and psychology in order to investigate human behaviour more rigorously (Cambridge University News, 2008). Thus the scientific community is conceding that to date there is neither a definitive nor satisfactory answer to the debate on altruism and human behaviour. This realisation turns the focus of this paper to empathy as a potentially instrumental factor in volunteer participation.

Empathy

There are many studies on volunteerism that have highlighted altruism as a motivating factor (Howard, 1976; Henderson, 1981 Gittman, 1975; Moskos, 1971; Chapman, 1980). In these, altruism can manifest in many shapes or forms, such as helping people (Howard, 1976), benefiting children (Henderson, 1981), working for a cause (Gitman, 1975), patriotism (Moskos, 1971) and serving the community (Chapman, 1980). What all these studies have in common is the realisation that altruism as a concept can neither be observed nor studied as motivation, but only as manifested behaviour. It has been argued that empathy should be examined as a crucial influence on pro-social or altruistic behaviour (Chlopan et al, 1985).

The root of the term empathy comes from the Greek word 'empatheia' which means 'to make suffer'. In modern terms empathy is defined as the ability to recognize, perceive and directly experientially feel the emotion of another (Hoffman, 2000). To put it in more simple terms, empathy is the ability to tune into another human being's emotions, or as is commonly said "put oneself into another's shoes". Before discussing empathy in more detail, it is useful to clarify that empathy should not be confused with sympathy. Sympathy is the feeling of compassion for another, which could be based on empathy (Corazza, 2004).

Since its inception, the term empathy and its meaning have wandered among the theoretical contexts of philosophy, religion and psychology. The concept of empathy has a long history; Aristotle used it three millennia ago, but the term empathy is quite recent. Empathy as a term started its life in Germany where the word "einfuhlung" was used to describe the aesthetic effect of a work of art. The literal translation of that word is "feeling into" and it signifies the ability to comprehend another's state without actually experiencing it (Goldman, 2000). Over the last century, perhaps due to the attempt to understand the interaction between self and society, empathy has replaced sympathy to signify compassion for others. It gradually

became a standard part of psychoanalytical and psychological terminology and migrated to analysis of prejudice and inhumane actions (Batson et al, 1983; Davis, 1983; Duan and Hill, 1996).

Thus empathy then is the spark of human concern, an affective response upon viewing others in distress. This can be expressed in different ways; sympathetic distress, empathic anger, empathic feelings of injustice or guilt (Hoffman, 2000). Science has no clear answer yet as to how these feelings develop and how they affect humans physically, but recent research in the University of California appears to have established an inherent characteristic in humans which may explain why some people are more empathic and stress reactive than others (The Times, 2009)

The concept's staying power lies in its self-evident importance for social organisation and the fact that people resolve the inevitable conflicts between their egoistic needs and the needs of others (Hoffman, 2000). Over time various opinions have been expressed about empathy, with Rousseau suggesting that empathy comes naturally to children who are innately good and sensitive to others, but is vulnerable to corruption by society, a point carried forward by Piaget who postulated that the relation of children to adults produces a heteronymous respect for rules and authority which interferes with moral development (2008). The above points are reinforced by Freud (1981) who suggested that morality can be taught by parents through reward and punishment, especially by giving and taking away affection (Hoffman, 2000).

In the modern world many of our feelings and responses are heavily influenced by the media and the way particular issues and people are represented. A starving, emaciated child staring at the reader from a magazine with their sad eyes full of despair is a good example. What effect does that image have on the observer? Is the child shouting help in the observer's head or it is just another page in another magazine? Will the same picture have the same effect on different people? Or even, would the same picture have the same effect on the same person at the second time of viewing? Is empathy dependent on circumstances or is it a consistent emotion? This question has considerable relevance to volunteering and volunteer tourism.

Empathy is the evocation of positive feelings towards human suffering even of a fictional character. Media depictions of human tragedies could be argued to have brief or long term impacts on human psyche and perhaps influence people's decisions to act in order to make a

difference. There are many theories regarding the process of the transference and construction of media meaning. The classic view on the transfer of meaning is the Shannon-Weaver model which suggests that the communication process has four stages, which culminate with the receiver decoding the message as the sender intended (Hall, 2004). This approach was particularly popular in the 19th century and it postulated that the media can be seen as an 'intravenous injection' of message. This 'hypodermic needle' model is based on the tacit assumption that any message conveyed by the media is bound to be willingly and unquestionably accepted for its preferred reading by the audience. The notorious 1938 broadcast of the 'War of the Worlds' by Orson Wells, is the archetypal example of 'hypodermic needle' effect. It's realistic tone and execution incited panic within audiences who actually believed that an alien invasion was underway, with consequential riots and mayhem (Ross, 2005).

In spite of this spectacular example, the 'hypodermic needle' theory can be discredited by the simple means of common sense and observation. If this theory held, then all individuals would react and respond to the same media stimuli simultaneously and identically. However, each person decodes messages, sometimes in a different way to that which the sender intended. The theory's main flaw lies in the vast number of intervening variables that influence a person's perception of media messages. In consequence the encoded meaning of media stimulation is dynamic, not fixed and it does not prescribe any 'magic bullet theories'. Hall (1994) postulates that people make the meaning of a message, but he also concedes that under certain circumstances, the content of a message may be arranged to produce 'preferred readings' or to produce a certain decoding on behalf of the audience. It could be argued that this reveals the real power of the media to shape and construct meaning and the social experience for their audiences. One might consider that the publicity given to,and the promotion of, volunteer tourism, now prevalent and the corresponding increase in numbers of participants (Tomazos and Butler 2009) illustrates the veracity of this argument. Whether the increase in coverage of the topic and the vastly increased numbers of organisations providing opportunities to engage in volunteer projects while on holiday is a response to genuine demand or a function of effective promotion by the suppliers is unresolved.

In relation to a verdict on the range and extent to which the media directly influence human behaviour, the jury is still out. Research conducted across various disciplines such as psychology and sociology has produced conflicting findings (Gauntlett, 2002). When the emphasis shifts, from effect and behaviour, to influence and perception, then the picture

becomes clearer (Gauntlett, 2002:9). The above argument does not necessarily reject the idea that behaviour could be traced back to media influences. The fact that research has not been yet able to establish a direct link does not mean that the interpretation of a message could not have an effect. As Hall puts it the media's power lies in the fact that they are *"... able to influence, entertain, instruct or persuade with very complex, perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences"* (Hall, 2004: 202).

Going back to the emaciated child image mentioned earlier, it is not always a given that an analogous cry for help will get an answer. One of the most documented incidents of indifference to human suffering took place in New York in 1963. Kitty Genovese was repeatedly stabbed by an assailant as she returned home from work. Thirty-eight people witnessed the attack, but not a single person came to help-even after the assailant left her to die. No one even called the police. This glaring incident received much publicity and it was interpreted as an indication of the growing apathy and indifference to human distress that had resulted from the impersonal complexities of modern life (Wainwright, 1964). Though dramatic and containing inaccuracies, the news article generated a useful research program by Darley and Latane (1970) who found that there might have been mitigating factors for the thirty eight people who failed to respond, since there are different factors that influence human response to a cry for help.

Distance was highlighted as one factor but it has to be said that distance could have two meanings. It could mean geographical distance and it could also mean personal distance, or a lack of affiliation or familiarity with the sufferer. In the case of Kitty Genovese, physical distance was not an issue thus it could be argued that other distance factors may have been at play such as the fact that she was a stranger to the witnesses. According to Latane and Darley (1970), the observers of an accident are less likely to aid the victim if they are complete strangers than if they are familiar with the victim. Observers are also likely to distance themselves at such a time from responsibility by assuming or convincing themselves that somebody else more capable (police or doctor for example) is responding. Finally population differences also appear to be important in determining willingness to help. People in urban areas are less likely to help than those from smaller towns or rural areas.

In a geographical sense distance and the response to human suffering have taxed some of the brightest minds in human history. From Aristotle to Diderot, and from Balzac to Marx, the

understanding has been that distance dictates human reaction to pain and suffering (Smith, 1982). In his "Letters to the Blind", Diderot poses the famous scenario of the Death of the Chinese Mandarin" and he argues that distance has the effect of inuring humans to the suffering of others by stating that no one in France will ever care about the death of a man in China, or a person in the West Indies will not really care about events in India (Ginzburg, 1980). Rousseau presumed that all natural human compassion has socio-historical limits determined by the extent of our likeness to others (Smith, 1982), meaning that compassion can be distorted by geographic, ethnic and social distance.

At the time of these philosophers geographical distance was a considerably bigger obstacle than it is today and news of events from China or India would take a long time to reach the heart of Europe. However, there were still cases where distance proved irrelevant and affluent Europeans rushed to the aid of the needy. In 1823 Eugene Delacroix revealed a painting that was to shock Europeans into action. His painting of the "Massacre of Chios" shows sick and dying Greeks civilians about to be slaughtered by Turks. The massacre of around 25,000 unarmed women and children had an enormous impact on European public opinion and increased its philhellenic mood. In this case distance was proven irrelevant due to the power of the medium which depicted the plight of the Greek people. The painting graphically showed what the Europeans already suspected was happening in Greece at the time and its realistic depiction shocked the public. Another painting that had a similar effect was "La Guernica" by Pablo Picasso, which depicted the result of Fascist bombings during the civil war in Spain. Distance becomes irrelevant when the medium that transfers the suffering is powerful enough, and none is more powerful than television, which has dominated the lives of Westerners for several decades.

Returning to the image of the emaciated child, how does that affect modern audiences? Does it cause them to spring them into action? In the case of volunteer tourism, did the image of catastrophe and suffering that dominated screens worldwide following the 2004 Tsunami push people towards volunteering to help? Or does the overexposure to such images render audiences incapable of feeling empathy?

In the case of volunteer tourism it has been shown (Tomazos and Butler 2009) that much of the activity takes place in locations far distant from the places of origin of the volunteers.

Indeed, travelling to distant, perhaps exotic locations is a powerful attraction to many tourists, especially the young who comprise the majority of volunteer tourists. From the above discussion one might argue that distance should not, in theory, be an issue in terms of the evocation of a humane response to human suffering. Ethnic differences and race issues should not be issues that inhibit help in an ideal world. Physical distance is less important now as people have the means to reach almost any country in the world within 30 hours. However, distancing from responsibility may still happen with individuals refusing to help on the premise that help will inevitably arrive from another source or organization which specializes in such assistance. It could be assumed that this conviction that help will arrive gives individuals an easy option of ignoring the plight of people in need, while at the same time not suffering a feeling of dissonance from not acting according to their cognitions. This clear conscience ploy, has according to researchers, found a sibling in the form of empathy fatigue or "compassion fatigue" in which numbness is explicitly conceived as a form of self-protective disassociation (Moeller, 1999).

In an attempt to explain the phenomenon of "compassion fatigue" many writers, journalists and reviewers have accused the mass media (especially television) of redefining the relationship of audiences with human suffering, by overusing icons of atrocity. According to them, modern visual media generate "moral habituation" in audiences (Zelizer, 2000), or to put it more simply: "*You see so much, you no longer notice it, and in seeing more, you may even feel less*" (Morris, 1996: 24).

This notion is based on the 'inoculation model' in media theory which postulates that previous and/or sustained exposure to a media message renders the audience immune to it. Thus, long term exposure to violent messages will result in desensitization of the viewer. This model perceives the audience as entirely passive and impressionable and has been discredited by some media theorists (Taylor and Harris, 2007).

However, if the above argument does have any validity, then modern audiences may have undergone a radical transformation in the range of their responsiveness to human suffering, with the traditional reliance on the power of words and images to provoke emotions trapped in a time warp of an era that is no more. Stanley Cohen demonstrated how possible donors for humanitarian causes have a tendency to be in a state of denial in relation to the suffering of others (Cohen, 2001) due to a large extent to the knowledge or suspicion that images or

stories may have been manipulated in a variety of ways. Thus, compassion fatigue can be seen also in the resistance of the general public to give money to charity or other good causes, perhaps due to this over-exposure. This arguably becomes amplified by some charities increasing the practice of requesting potential patrons' bank details for ongoing monthly donations rather than a one-off donation (Cohen, 2001).

The media, of course, have a responsibility to society by exposing and recycling stories and incidents which may validate and reinforce this apathy and fatigue. People become increasingly sceptical that most donations will ever reach the needy, feeling that they will instead be used for personal benefit by corrupt politicians or spent on unnecessary overheads. In the aftermath of 9/11 many people became frustrated with the Red Cross's handling of the donations. They believed that their donations would go to the families of the victims, while the Liberty Fund only paid out approximately one third of its receipts to families and dedicated the rest to long term planning (CNN news, Nov 2001).

More recently the United Nations' oil for food program has been under investigation over allegations that the son of the then UN Secretary General received illegal payments from an external party (CNN News, Dec 2004). Although the oil for food program may not be a registered charity, the message that comes out to an already disillusioned and cynical audience is that charity is often made ineffective due to fraudulent dealings and people have the right to follow the convenient route of ignoring charity calls without feeling guilty.

These phenomena should present a wakeup call to humanitarian activities worldwide because they indicate a perceived erosion of empathy which could prove detrimental to their causes. This cynicism could hurt charities but at the same time may present volunteer tourism with a great opportunity. Few of those disillusioned people who have empathy for a cause or were touched by a catastrophe, may still want to help and make a difference. Their mistrust of the agents of assistance leaves them only one course of action; Do-it-yourself charitable and humanitarian direct action- Volunteer participation.

Conclusion

Altruism remains an enigma and perhaps future research will be able to answer once and for all whether altruism exists as a motivating factor or not. Despite the research in a variety of fields from biology to sociology, altruism remains just observable actions of which volunteer tourism may be one. There is a clear connection between altruism and the evocation of

empathy, which in turn is influenced by a variety of stimuli in the media and also in an individual's immediate social environment. The media tend to influence the perception of individuals and may either intensify feelings of empathy or confirm and reinforce an individual's tendency towards psychological disassociation. Not only is there increased coverage of disaster and cases of need (earthquakes, tsunamis, conflict), but there is increased provision and promotion of opportunities to volunteer to help the disabled and suffering groups. It is clear however, that what began as an individual activity responding to apparently genuine empathy if not altruism on the part of those involved, has now become in general much less altruistic and more hedonistic in nature. This evolution appears to have occurred in both the demand (volunteers) and supply (volunteer tourism organisations) sectors. Volunteer tourism has undoubtedly moved from an empathetic activity in a non-profit making environment to a commercial tourism operation for suppliers and from volunteering to tourism among many participants.

Whether this reflects merely increased opportunities attracting a wider range of participants, some of whom are less empathetically driven than in earlier years, or whether compassion fatigue, disillusionment with organisations and a self-focused desire to improve their own CVs is dominant amongst participants is unclear and provides much scope for further research. As things stand, volunteer tourism is clearly a unique form of travel, combining both volunteering and tourism, but equally clearly moving away from the former towards the latter.

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