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GAP YEAR VOLUNTEER TOURISM
Myths of Global Citizenship?

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Abstract: The valorisation of cross-cultural understanding and promotion of an ethic of global citizenship are at the forefront of the recent development and proliferation of international 'gap year' travel programs and policies. Governments and industry alike promote gap year travel uncritically as a guaranteed pathway to the development of inclusive ideologies associated with global citizenship. In this paper we examine how the neoliberalist context in which gap year travel programs have proliferated does little to promote tolerance. We then consider the recent growth of 'volunteer tourism' as an alternative gap year youth travel experience and explore how the implied resistance to self-serving neoliberalist values that it engenders can become coopted by neoliberalism. **Keywords:** global citizenship, neoliberalism, gap year travel, volunteer tourism. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges posed by contemporary population flows, cross-border exchanges and the international mobilisation of human resources are undeniably global in scope and impact. These challenges correspond with important debates about the nature, values, attributes and efficacies of the shifting scales of citizenship most notably evident in discussions about cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and global citizenship (e.g., Carter, 2004; Dower, 2000). Emerging from this discourse is a meritorious viewpoint that suggests that global forms of belonging, responsibility, and political action counter the intolerance and ignorance that more provincial and parochial forms of citizenship encourage. Such a perspective has underpinned social policies and initiatives in developed nations such as Australia over the past few

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decades that, at least on the face of it, celebrate diversity and multiculturalism.

One such initiative designed to address intolerance promotes international tourism among young people, invoking the sentiments of Mark Twain who stated that ''[t]ravel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness''. Following Twain, it has been commonplace in the literature to argue that tourism can and does function as an important contributor to the development of the attributes of global citizenship. Much of this literature focuses on the role tourism plays in enhancing international and cross-cultural understanding, tolerance-building, disabusing of stereotypes, the exchange of values and the mutual benefits of a global citizenry (D'Amore, 1988; Ketabi, 1996; Matthews, 2008; Smith, 1989). Accounting for over one-twelfth of world trade and by far the largest movement of people across borders, international tourism is regarded by governments and the tourism industry as an important facilitator of global citizenship through the exchange of cultures accounting for 10% of global employment and global Gross Domestic Product (World Tourism Organization, 2007). Notwithstanding this global mobility, evidence of global citizenry and the tolerance it purportedly promotes is far from ubiquitous.

In this paper we argue that although engagement with other cultures is a central tenet of global citizenship, it is not an inherent outcome of tourism. This idea has long been of concern to scholars of the tourist experience. Some time ago, Krippendorf (1982, p. 142) raised concerns about the outcomes of tourist-host contact stating: ''Tourists demonstrate behaviour and attitudes which can evoke mistrust, resignation and aggressive dissatisfaction in the [host] population''. More recently, MacCannell (2001, p. 380) has noted ''the awkward and difficult quality of cross-cultural understanding in settings that are organized for tourist visits''. However, new 'ethical' tourism practices (Butcher & Smith, 2010) emerging from a greater global awareness and a motivation that is counter to mass tourism are, arguably, more cosmopolitan in basis. Volunteer tourism is one form of ethical tourism that is growing in popularity and has been presented in the literature as a form of alternative tourism that creates the kinds of encounters that foster mutual understanding and respect (Wearing, 2001).

There is a growing literature on international volunteer tourism, however, that questions its foundation on social consciousness and cross-cultural understanding. For Raymond and Hall (2008) cross-cultural understanding is by no means a given outcome. Similarly, Nyaupane, Teye, and Paris (2008, p. 652) state that ''contact alone will not necessarily provide a positive cross-cultural experience''. Simpson's work (2004, 2005) suggests that existing stereotypes may actually be reinforced thereby deepening dichotomies. Others question the reciprocal benefits of such cross-cultural interaction given the inherent complexities of significant cultural (and economic) divides and, more importantly, the dearth of research on host community experiences (see McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Woosnam & Lee, 2011). Sin (2009) argues that volunteer tourists are motivated more by a desire 'to travel' than by a desire 'to contribute', and that they often regard

aid-recipients as inferior. He found that ''many volunteer tourists are typically more interested in fulfilling objectives relating to the 'self''' (Sin, 2009, p. 497). This particular finding critiques the altruistic motivations that earlier research had claimed as a key foundation of volunteer tourism (see Wearing, 2001). Butcher and Smith (2010, p. 33), although more positive, have also explored the notion of the 'self' in volunteer tourism, finding that ''the 'desire to make a difference' ... [has become] connected to lifestyle ... [and] closely linked to a narrative of personal growth''.

The purpose of this paper is to add another critical perspective to this debate by examining the valorisation of cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect through volunteer tourism particularly as it manifests in the recent development of gap year volunteer tourism programs and policies for young people in the Australian context. We critically explore gap year volunteer tourism and the hegemony of a neoliberal ethos that has coopted it that is inimical to broadening cross-cultural understanding and global citizenry.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP, COSMOPOLITANISM AND MORALISM IN TOURISM

Global citizenship is regarded as a 'product' of globalisation and is closely related to the concept of cosmopolitanism (Carter, 2004). Cosmopolitanism has its roots in ancient Greece and is underpinned by the central goal of harmonious relations between the people of the world. It has long described a moral position that celebrates cultural diversity and human rights and an active concern for the needs of others (Carter, 2004). Thus, a 'cosmopolitan'—inherently outward-looking—''maintains a global perspective upon obligations owed to others, whatever their race, religion, ethnicity, social status, or their connection to a nation-state'' (Stokes, 2008, p. 3). It is little wonder that travel to other cultures—to learn about them—is a strong underpinning of the cosmopolitan sensibility and perhaps the best way for individuals to outwardly demonstrate their claims to global citizenship.

Cosmopolitanism, understood in this sense as the celebration of cultural distinction, is, however, somewhat at odds with tourism because of tourism's well-established acculturation effect. That is, the inevitable ''adaptation [which occurs] under the influence of commercialization'' (Krippendorf, 1982, p. 142) and the domination of the touring cultures over traditional ones. The rise of politically correct 'new tourism' or Butcher and Smith (2010) 'New Moral Tourist' signals the widespread recognition that tourism is damaging to host cultures and their environments. For the touring nations this means that tourism is no longer an innocent pleasure, hence the emergence of tourism that attempts to minimise negative impacts or somehow 'give back', such as volunteer tourism. Butcher and Smith (2010) have linked volunteering, in general, with the development of citizenship and international volunteering with a sense of global citizenship. Indeed, such a link is also being made at national policy levels particularly in developed nations around the

world. In this paper we consider how this has played out in Australia where global citizenship has sat awkwardly alongside a dominant neoliberal political ideology during the past two decades.

COMPETING IDEOLOGIES: COSMOPOLITANISM AND NEOLIBERALISM IN AUSTRALIA

Cosmopolitanism, and the global citizenship it infers, requires that an individual be able to negotiate a world full of diverse interests while developing a personal narrative that is inclusive of the 'other', thus internalising a sense of global homogeneity and shared humanity (Kramer, 1997). Acceptance of cultural diversity is an ideology that has underpinned Australia's multiculturalism policies for several decades now (Ozdowsky, 2003). Those who espouse this ideal argue that it is central to the development of a culture of tolerance that enhances community safety, and by extension, national security, and enables Australians to engage fully in a globalised market economy (Ozdowsky, 2003). However, some social theorists argue that such inclusiveness is at odds with a number of nation-states, including Australia, where neoliberalist ideology thwarts the development of cultural empathy and acceptance which is at the core of global citizenship (Davies, 2005). Neoliberalism refers to the privileged position certain governments have given to 'the market' in determining economic, political, and social policies (Davies, 2005).

According to Davies (2005, p. 10), survival in a market-driven, and therefore competitive, neoliberal world reinforces fear and distance from others and creates a world of ''multiple eyes spying on each other ... [where] ... Trust is no longer realistic or relevant''. Indeed, in Australia violent incidents associated with race, ethnicity and cultural relations call into question whether the officially espoused ideals of inclusiveness and tolerance are empty rhetoric which masks embedded intolerances that flow from neoliberalism. Such developments have led some to argue that Australia's multicultural policy is outdated and long overdue for review (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, 2008; Georgiou, 2008).

In the decade before 2007 a potent form of neoliberalism was promoted under the leadership of the long-serving former Australian Prime Minister John Howard. The dominance of what has been called 'Howardism', a combination of economic liberalism and social conservatism, saw a rise in fervent nationalism, a preoccupation with 'border security', and a correspondent 'othering' of many in Australian society (Manne, 2004). This narrowing of tolerance is well-evidenced by the 2005 Cronulla race riots and the increasing use, by white Australian youths, of the national flag—with its Union Jack symbolising the country's historic Anglo dominance—as ''a rallying point for racism'' (Huxley, 2009, p. 6).

With the 2007 defeat of Howard's Coalition government, Labor's Kevin Rudd gained power and despite prioritising the long-awaited 'apology' to the country's indigenous people for two centuries of

displacement and mistreatment under official policy, his leadership did little to stem the tide of ethnic and racial tension. Media debate on recent racially motivated attacks on international students, particularly those from India, suggests that Australia continues to struggle with finding ways to equip its young people with the empathy, skills and knowledge necessary to engage with others who are perceived as culturally different.

Australia's young adults, those people who are currently in their late teens and twenties (perhaps best categorised as the Generation Y cohort), came of age during the Howard years, and thereby have developed their political and ideological beliefs, indeed their global consciousness, under his conservative doctrine. It is this same group, also sometimes referred to as the Net Generation, that through the use of new technology and global media has been afforded unprecedented knowledge of the world (McMillin, 2007), its diverse peoples and cultures and the problems that the citizens of different countries face. Furthermore, with the growth of tourism and the opening up of new markets, this generation has also been granted unprecedented access to the world with vast opportunities to ''encounter geographically distant others'' (Simpson, 2005, p. 55). And it is this same generation that has embraced a gap year as a desirable and acceptable path to personal and career development.

Generation Y has been characterised as confident, well-educated, open-minded, and challenge-seeking multi-taskers who possess a strong work ethic, although employer loyalty is limited, and a hunger for overseas travel (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007; Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Cairncross and Buultjens (2007) suggest that as a cohort they respect lifestyle, cultural, and ethnic diversity and are themselves an 'ethnically diverse' generation. The question needs to be asked, therefore, as to the extent that neoliberalism plays in the life choices of this generational cohort. To this end, the following discussion critically explores how the neoliberal agenda has become entwined in the dominant discourse surrounding gap year tourism and considers the degree to which volunteer tourism as a specific form of gap year tourism embraces or is resistant to neoliberalist ideology.

GAP YEAR TOURISM

Recently, political and community leaders have begun promoting the benefits of cultural exchange, including gap year tourism, as a de facto form of civics education that promulgates an acceptance and tolerance of cultural diversity and engenders the development of global citizenship (see, e.g., Cummings, 2002; Netanyahu, 1998). A gap year has been defined as a nominal period during which a person delays further education or employment in order to travel (Millington, 2005). Although this interlude may be experienced at any point across the lifespan, it is within the period of early adulthood that the gap year phenomenon has become most popular and commonly it involves a year off after completing secondary school or tertiary studies. At the

same time the flexibility associated with the post-Fordist employment context has created the conditions for 'career breaks' (O'Reilly, 2006; Simpson, 2004). Interestingly, the recent Global Financial Crisis appears not to have curbed gap year tourism. Indeed, taking a gap year break is a far more attractive option to joining the rising tide of the unemployed (Dixon & Chesshyre, 2008).

Gap year tourism describes a wide array of activities. Some of these activities have been criticised as hedonistic (O'Reilly, 2006; Simpson, 2005) such as the popular and sometimes infamous budget coach-touring through Europe. Other forms of gap year tourism such as longer-term independent travel have been equally criticised as a form of escapism and dropping out (Rojek, 1993; West, 2005). Indeed, one major commercial travel service provider has evocatively branded a gap year as the 'Big Year Off'.

Despite these criticisms, there is a growing view that taking a nominal 'year off' to travel may not be wasted time and what is notable about gap year marketing more typically is its promotion as something more than a break. In Australia, for example, where school education runs from Kindergarten to Year 12, some promoters have gone as far as calling a gap year, 'Year 13' (www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au). One Australian university has suggested that a gap year ''should not be treated as a year off. It will be of most benefit if it is used to gain a wider experience of the world and of work, to get to know yourself better; your interests, values, strengths and work-related preferences'' (www.careers.usyd.edu.au). Another has launched a program that offers prospective students academic credit for demonstrated learning (using a reflective journal) during their gap year (www.canberra.edu.au/gap-year-plus/home).

The boom in the gap year industry is most evident in the United Kingdom, where 'taking a gap year' was first popularised. The gap year tourism sector has grown steadily to become a major form of outbound tourism supported by an industry of commercial and Non-Government Organisation (NGO) providers (Simpson, 2004). In 2005 the gap year in the United Kingdom was valued at £5bn and has been predicted to rise to £20bn by 2010 (Ward, 2007). Gap years have also become popular elsewhere in the world, such as in North America, Australia and New Zealand, with plenty of evidence on the Internet that business is booming. In the U.S., for example, 2011 will see thirty 'gap year fair' events run in major cities across the country (www.usagapyearfairs.org). The gap year market in Australia has only gained traction in recent years with gap year products and programs beginning to populate the websites and brochures of travel, government and non-government agencies.

Simpson (2005) suggests that proponents of gap year programs encourage young people to develop their global citizenry by 'broadening their horizons' through travel. As one Australian internet resource tells its audience 'get out of the suburbs and into the global village' (www.launchpadaustralia.com). Jones (2005, p. 87) argues, gap year tourism can be transformative and participants can benefit from the ''wider learning associated with cross-cultural experience'' gaining

skills which develop them as a global citizen with an embedded cosmopolitan identity.

Generation Y are well recognised as being avid consumers and the emergent gap year industry is fast capitalising on providing a range of travel experiences which appeal to this market. In particular, gap year programs are marketed to youth tourists who are seeking unusual and adventurous 'experiences', products and destinations (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Desforges (1998) suggests that in some cases the cultural capital young people gain from these experiences is converted into economic capital when they return home. Heath (2007) believes that in this highly competitive context the 'economy of experience' works as an important means to 'gaining the edge' over others in a competitive marketplace thereby reinforcing 'otherness' and intolerance. Paradoxically, it is from within Generation Y that there are growing numbers of young people choosing to use the gap year to undertake travel for the purpose of volunteering (Tulgan & Martin, 2001).

THE GAP YEAR AND VOLUNTEER TOURISM

Volunteer tourism undertaken during a gap year is a fast growing phenomena (Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Söderman & Snead, 2008). Indeed, most gap year websites emphasise volunteer placements, often in the global South, as a key option during the 'time out' period. Volunteer tourists undertake holidays in an organized way that involve projects designed to alleviate the material poverty of certain groups (Wearing, 2001); through what Butcher and Smith (2010, p. 29) refer to as ''community well-being and conservation'' work. In keeping with this growth in interest in volunteering there has been a proliferation of volunteer projects. In a survey of one Internet database, Callanan and Thomas (2005) noted 698 projects representing 289 organisations across 156 countries. Volunteer projects may be short, medium or long in duration and might include, for example, building infrastructure, business development, environmental regeneration, teaching or journalism (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Wildlife conservation projects are also increasingly common (see Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Lepp, 2008). Whilst many volunteer tourists travel overseas in order to satisfy their interest in experiencing other places and cultures there are also cases of domestic volunteer tourism.

Not surprisingly, the countries producing volunteer tourists are those same countries where the gap year has become popular, including Canada and the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and certain western European nations, especially the United Kingdom. Gap year tourists are a key target market of charities and NGOs seeking volunteers because not only are they young and 'able-bodied' but typically they are seeking novelty and authenticity in exotic places (Söderman & Snead, 2008). Pearce and Coghlan (2008) argue that the phenomenon is linked to Western society and based on particular historical views; understood perhaps as being a product of what Callanan and Thomas

(2005) refer to as a 'guilt-conscious' society. Altruism is a common explanation used by volunteer tourists but self-development and adventure are also cited as strong motivators (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Pearce & Coghlan, 2008; Sin, 2009; Wearing, 2001). Pearce and Coghlan (2008, p. 134) attribute the increasing popularity of volunteer tourism to several features of the Generation Y cohort; including, an extended adolescence facilitated by longer financial support from their parents, the expansion of ''travel opportunities fostered by Internet services'', less concern over the ''long-term or career consequences of their choices'', and their ''heightened awareness of global problems''.

Volunteer tourism has been conceptualised as a form of alternative experience that moves the tourist beyond simply visiting or 'passing through' a place as an 'outsider'. Instead, the volunteer tourist spends time living in and contributing in positive ways to a community; an experience in keeping with a belief in the notion of 'mutual benefit' (Matthews, 2008). But some authors question whether volunteers have sufficient skills or indeed stay long enough to really make a difference (e.g., Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Raymond and Hall (2008, p. 530) argue that volunteer tourism projects need to be carefully managed in order to avoid ''cross-cultural misunderstanding and the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes''. The establishment of commercial interests offering volunteer tourism packages further problematizes such issues (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

Despite these important criticisms, it can be argued that the recent growth of 'volunteer tourism' as an alternative gap year tourism experience suggests that a pathway to global citizenry may exist within neoliberal contexts. However, in the remainder of this paper we explore how the hegemonic processes of neoliberalism have begun to coopt gap year volunteering which developed as a form of resistance and subversion to neoliberalist ideologies.

FROM RESISTANCE TO HEGEMONY

It is typical in any era of repression, such as life under a neoliberal economic and political regime, for young people to rebel (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2000). Although as Strickland (2002, p.13) cautions in the introduction to *Growing Up Postmodern*, in the contemporary ''the discourses of youth culture are already so thoroughly saturated with the ideology of consumerism that it is increasingly difficult to imagine alternatives ... [but that it is important for them] to resist the subsumption of an ever-increasing proportion of social consciousness under the logic of neoliberalism''. While discriminant privilege exists, young people will find ways to exercise change through activities available to them. For example, in the rural town of Albany in Western Australia researchers interviewed gap year volunteer English language tutors working with Hazara refugees. One volunteer who participated in the study was quoted as saying: ''For the vast part of my life, I've been very proud to be Australian. Unfortunately, we have a

government that has made me very distressed about being Australian'' (Lange, Kamalkhani, & Baldassar, 2007, p. 37). Here, the volunteer is referring to the government's rigid policies on refugees, including long periods of incarceration. Volunteering from this perspective becomes an act of revolution. In Anderson's (1991) terms, volunteering thus becomes a resistance movement and a cultural narrative that forges an intangible but stable solidarity between members of a group of like-minded volunteers who might never meet or know each other.

Interestingly, a less conscious process of resistance has been reported in a number of studies that examine gap year volunteering. Even those individuals who find their way into gap year volunteer tourism experiences by happenstance (Lyons, 2003) find the experience so radically different from the self-serving experiences of life under neoliberalism that it produces in them personal epiphanies that change their world view (Leigh, 2006). Others have suggested that the exposure to other cultures facilitated through volunteer tourism can also lead individuals to re-evaluate life and career trajectories (Lyons, 2005). In some instances this can manifest as a form of reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000) where volunteer tourists find it difficult to re-assimilate into their home cultures (Leigh, 2006). Such awakenings lead individuals to join the 'imagined community' of volunteers described by Anderson (1991).

While these epiphanies may indeed subvert a neoliberalist agenda, Simpson (2005) argues that the 'extra-ordinary' experiences, or what Giddens (1991) might have included under his notion of 'fateful moments', occur in the context of neoliberal forms of self-regulatory citizenship. So even where individuals are determined to resist the market-mindedness of neoliberalism they are bound to run headlong into its hegemonic processes.

The following discussion examines how the hegemonic processes of neoliberalism have emerged in gap year volunteering in three ways: through a growing emphasis placed upon skill development and career enhancement through volunteer tourism; through a socio-demographic privileging that renders the experience available only to the cultural elite and which, by extension, exposes the vast differences in status and power between those privileged volunteers and their host communities; and, through the commodification of gap year volunteer programs. These are summarised here by drawing on recent research and examples that illustrate the tenets of each.

Skills Development Emphasis

Neoliberalism is palpable in the gap year tourism phenomena. This is particularly evident in the way that such experiences are often promoted as a means by which young people can further develop skills which enable them to compete in the marketplace. Simpson (2005, p. 54) refers to this phenomenon as the 'professionalisation' of the gap year, whereby ''neoliberal values are increasingly being applied to young people's travel, leisure and educational practices''.

As O'Reilly (2006, p. 1012) suggests, the skills and qualities gained during lengthy, independently organized travel are transferable and ''particularly suited to the current context of flexible employment conditions''. In a qualitative study of gap year participants and industry stakeholders, Jones (2004) found that gap year participation may enhance a variety of skills that employers consider important. Heath (2007) conceptualises the gap year experience as serving to build 'soft skills' in personal development to create a 'personality package' which builds 'identity' and is instrumental to being competitive in the workplace—adding to an individual's CV in a meaningful and useful way. This aspect could be interpreted as a way in which an individual might embrace the self through the market under the guise of a global consciousness.

Söderman and Snead (2008) found that volunteering overseas was frequently regarded by volunteers as 'useful' for further study or their future careers, particularly in terms of developing language skills and providing contacts. They argue that a 'reciprocal altruism', whereby the volunteer also receives benefit from their volunteering, is at work here. Roberts' (2004) qualitative study of returned volunteers shows that it is not unreasonable for participants in gap year volunteer tourism to expect a tangible return on their investment to be gained in the employment marketplace upon their homecoming. He cites results from a poll taken in 1999 which revealed that only 25% of UK graduates who took a gap year identified 'a desire to contribute to society' as their main motivation for taking the time out (Moser Report, 1999 cited in Roberts, 2004).

While the traditional view of cosmopolitanism requires one to become conversant with other cultures while maintaining a level of reflexivity about one's own culture, neoliberal interpretations do not require such reflexivity. Rather, gap year tourism might be regarded as little more than a series of both self-, and by extension, market-serving consumer travel activities. Sin (2009) has explored notions of the self in volunteer tourism. In his study of volunteer tourists from Singapore, Sin (2009, p. 489) found that the dominance of 'wanting to travel' over 'wanting to contribute' was a clear indicator that volunteering was a way for participants ''to gain cultural capital through the collection of knowledge and experience'' and through the performance of a 'well-travelled' identity. Self-development, he suggests, overlays with leisure-seeking and altruism in a complex set of motivations. Callanan and Thomas (2005) have categorised volunteer tourists into three groups, including shallow, intermediate and deep volunteers. They argue, the shorter the time devoted to a project, the more likely self-interest has come into play and, in such cases, destination is far more important than project. In contrast, for the 'deep' volunteer tourist, those individuals with project-specific skills who spend many months working to improve conditions in host communities, ''self-interest motives are secondary to altruistic ones'' (Callanan & Thomas, 2005, p. 196). Not coincidentally, it is the short term gap year volunteer tourism activities that are most popular (Lyons & Wearing, 2008).

Privileging Processes in Volunteer Tourism

We argue that by enhancing one's skills and thereby one's employment prospects one's social position might also be improved. Simpson (2005, p. 56) highlights the elitism embedded in gap year volunteering phenomena by using Prince William as an example: ''No longer are gap years for rebels, dropouts and 'people with nothing better to do'; now they are for hopeful professionals and future kings''. According to Callanan and Thomas (2005), both Prince William and his brother Prince Harry performed volunteer work in developing countries during their gap years; a fact that helped promote volunteering as not only worthwhile but also as an elite activity. Mowforth and Munt (2009, p. 120) argue that travel has long played a symbolic role ''as social classes seek to define and distinguish themselves''. The notions of cultural and symbolic capital as well as Bourdieu's (1986) 'habitus', as the shared place of distinction that one inhabits in the world, are useful here. The cost of many volunteer tourism placements ensure that they are only for those classes with a disposable income.

Tourism is not simply a neutral exercise involving someone taking a break but must instead be understood in terms of a power relationship, particularly when this tourism involves a privileged, 'first world' tourist visiting and volunteering in a developing country. As a major report on volunteer tourism notes volunteers are mostly travelling from the global North to work on projects in the global South; a fact that highlights the unequal nature of host-volunteer interactions (ATLAS/TRAM, 2008).

Volunteer tourists, in their quest to find new places to visit, new 'others' to meet, and who often claim to oppose the privileging processes of neoliberalism may, in fact, help to drive it. McGehee and Andereck (2008, p. 18) explain that ''cultural and geographic distance and difference create an atmosphere ripe for the 'othering' of the voluntoured by the volunteer tourists''. According to Sin (2009), volunteer tourism almost invariably involves the 'better off' providing aid in the some way to the 'worse off'; a situation that creates an unequal relationship whereby the giver might appear superior to the receiver. There is potential, therefore, for reinforcing negative stereotypes about the developing world. Moreover, the giving, he argues, might relieve the guilt that comes with privilege but does little to change the *status quo*. Pearce and Coghlan (2008, pp. 132, 141) suggest that although there is a desire among volunteer tourists to correct or attempt to ameliorate ''the historical exploitation and environmental mistakes on which their society has been built'', ''individuals also have their own needs to fulfil ... and [as a result] will approach the volunteer tourism experience with a particular set of expectations and general imperatives that will influence their actions and interpretation of the volunteering experience''. Although these imperatives may not be based on status there is recognition that the ensuing cultural capital the volunteer tourist inadvertently collects may be an added bonus (Matthews, 2008). Indeed, Simpson (2004) argues, a pedagogy for social justice is growing increasingly absent from the cultural capital derived from volunteer tourism,

thus producing an impoverished notion of global citizenship amongst young gap year volunteer tourists.

The Commodification of Volunteer Tourism

Butcher and Smith (2010, p. 30) view volunteer tourism as a product of contemporary 'life politics' and the creation of ''morally justifiable lifestyles''. They argue that given the ''decline of political alternatives to the market ... aspects of our lives that were previously unproblematic (shopping or holidays, e.g.) become politicized (or moralized)'' (Butcher & Smith, 2010, p. 33). By viewing international volunteer tourism as a form of social action through consumption, Butcher and Smith (2010) point to a dimension of this sector which may play on the desire of volunteering individuals to 'buy out' the guilt associated with their privilege.

Volunteer tourism is often viewed as not fitting into the commodified regime of mass and packaged tourism because its focus is not on the exchange value in the tourism system (see Ponting, McDonald, & Wearing, 2005). However, the growth of packaged volunteer tourism experiences questions such an ideological proposition that volunteer tourism is a sustainable alternative to mass tourism.

The relatively simplistic notion that views volunteer tourism as a relationship between host community and volunteer becomes far more complex when examining the role of the volunteer tourism provider/operator. Accompanying the rising popularity of gap year volunteer tourism participation is a fast developing range of volunteer tourism programs and 'products' that provide interested young people with a wide array of volunteer opportunities in countries across the globe. While many of the volunteer programs available have traditionally been developed and offered by NGOs and other non-profit organisations which have direct relationships with volunteer host communities, increasingly, commercial providers are developing volunteer tourism products and services that do little to serve the needs of either the volunteer tourists or the host communities they seek to serve (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Simpson, 2004). Despite the success of some initiatives, as well as the obvious advantages for the tourism industry to develop volunteer tourism practices, the main priority of a growing number of commercial tourism operators who provide 'packaged' volunteer experiences is to make a profit and therefore to provide a commodified experience. There is no guarantee that profit driven interests will act according to any principles if profit may be lost. This also suggests that if an evaluation of the implementation of these tourism practices by a company lead to the conclusion that the practices are not economically viable then they would cease to continue, with serious implications for host communities.

A central question that emerges then is whether a philosophy and practice of gap year volunteer tourism that extends beyond neoliberal-driven market priorities can be sustained in the global tourism marketplace. Evidence of a move toward the commodification of

volunteer tourism is already at-hand with large tour operators competing for a share of this new market. Lyons and Wearing (2008, p. 153) argue that the commodification of volunteer tourism raises a number of questions that have yet to be answered in the volunteer tourism literature: ''Does it matter if volunteer tourism becomes commodified as long as it still provides assistance to various projects and communities? Can a commodified experience of tourism satisfy both the need to consume and the desire to assist others? Will the experience become a tranquilliser rather than an awareness-raising experience that prioritizes escape over giving? Will the communities that volunteer tourists visit become 'consumables' that are made palatable under the guise of a 'legitimate' altruistic activity?''. As the swift rise in number of commercial operators who offer volunteer tourism products continues, answering these questions becomes central in understanding the future of volunteer tourism.

CONCLUSION

The points we raise in this paper challenge fundamental but largely untested assumptions about gap year travel in general and more specifically as it manifests as a form of volunteer tourism. It is evident that a number of questions remain unanswered: does an experience where gap year tourists interact with community members from different cultures actually change the tourist's world view? More specifically, does the use of direct volunteer tourism experiences create the basis for a less racist or stereotypical perception of other cultures? That is, does the gap year reduce the way we 'other' developing country cultures? We conclude here by suggesting that despite the rhetoric that links gap year tourism with global citizenship such an association remains empirically unsupported. The following highlights the limitations of the research conducted on gap year tourism and volunteer tourism specifically.

Gap year tourism has gained wide recognition and approval in developed countries, particularly in British society in recent years. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have predominately focused on the phenomenon in the British context (Heath, 2007; Jones, 2004, 2005; Simpson, 2004, 2005). As such, studies that have been conducted on gap year tourism so far are limited in size and scope and are almost exclusively based on data collected in the UK. Another major limitation of empirical research thus far conducted into gap year tourism is that where survey-based studies are used, they tend to use small sample sizes that do not support generalisable analyses of the relationships between participant backgrounds, the broader impact of their gap year experience and the nature and structure of the tourism activity undertaken.

Furthermore, there has been little academic investigation into whether gap year tourism, even when it incorporates volunteering, may actually hinder career development. Indeed, Jones' (2008) work on this issue questions whether medical students (such as junior

doctors) could be committing career suicide by taking this time off. Leigh's (2006) critical analysis of the process of reassimilation into home environments upon return from an overseas volunteering experience also suggests that the skill development advantages of the gap year is unfounded.

Volunteer tourism has been described as a powerful tool for social development and an agent for sustainable growth (McGehee & Santos, 2005), particularly in developing nations (Wearing, 2001). The existing research in this area is limited to examining the challenges and issues faced by NGOs that develop volunteer projects in developing countries. However, there is a dearth of research on the fast-growing supply of commercial volunteer tourism products. There is virtually no empirical data that describes the practices or impacts of commercial volunteer tourism activities outside of the anecdotal and critical/theoretical work that posits NGO-based volunteer tourism as 'all good' and corporate and commercial interests as 'all bad' (cf. Ponting et al., 2005; Wearing & McDonald, 2002). Moreover, there is insufficient research that explores the supply of gap year services as they manifest in specific cultural contexts (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). To date, research on host communities is still relatively limited and focuses primarily on the voices of NGOs and community leaders. We suggest that this research needs expanding and should explore the voices of under-represented stakeholders such as minority groups in villages where gap year tourists and volunteers may inadvertently act to further marginalise them. We also argue that host community impacts are under-researched. Little is known about the short and long term social, economic, and cultural benefits that gap year tourism and volunteer tourism brings.

It is evident that the little research which has emerged on gap year tourism is somewhat ad-hoc and currently lacks a coordinated framework for further development. Moreover, the qualitative case studies that dominate volunteer tourism research rely heavily upon snowball and convenience sampling rather than being driven by criterion-based purposive sampling. There is a need for research to be conducted that quantitatively analyses broad-based survey data for relationships between the range of variables that affect volunteer tourism experiences while providing a foundation for a criterion-driven qualitatively rich examination of how those relationships manifest.

Proponents of gap year volunteer tourism argue that it instils in participants an openness to and acceptance of other cultures, and fosters notions of cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness and empathy towards others that together enables them to develop capacities, attributes and values apposite to a global citizenry (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Matthews, 2008). We have argued here that while pathways to global citizenship may exist within the context of gap year tourism through volunteer programs, the cooptation of this form of travel by the neoliberal agenda is becoming increasingly evident. The current gap year volunteer industry does not address issues of Western privilege and power, and actively promotes the ''simplistic binaries of 'us and them'''(Simpson, 2004, p. 690) thereby perpetuating the inequalities associated with colonialism. We suggest that to disturb this *status quo*

it is of crucial importance that researchers develop empirical evidence that can provide a deep and critical understanding of gap year volunteer tourism. This evidence is essential for informing the best practices of NGOs, commercial service providers and governments that develop in gap year volunteer tourists competencies and capabilities of global citizenry. A

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