

The West in the East: Conflict in the Values of Volunteer Tourism

Angela M. Benson

University of Brighton, UK, amb16@brighton.ac.uk

Abstract

Concern for the degradation of the environment (Holden, 2000; Russo, 1999) has seen the emergence of a small but steadily increasing number of UK organisations, which are primarily situated in the third sector (Office of the Third Sector, 2008). These are increasingly cited (Benson, 2004; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Coghlan, 2006) in the emerging and growing niche of volunteer tourism (Wearing, 2001). The organisations bring paying volunteers (tourists) and scientists together to work on research projects, and offer similar services but the range of specific research projects available to volunteers is both complex and diverse. This allows the organisations to differentiate their portfolio based around the projects' destinations (the locations are often remote), the type of ecosystem involved (e.g. marine, terrestrial, rainforest) and the actual activity or purpose around which the project is based (e.g. diving coral reefs, or related to wildlife). Despite this diversity, the organisations all operate in essentially a common framework of sustainability, that involve notions of sustainable development (Holden, 2000; IUCN, 1980; Murphy, 1994; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), sustainable tourism (France, 1997; Hall & Lew, 1998; Holden, 2000; UNWTO, 2004) and the triple bottom line (Rogers & Ryan, 2001; Vanclay, 2004; Willard, 2002). The framework of sustainability is built on three pillars: economic, environmental and social. The literature clearly indicates that a balance between the three pillars is essential if sustainability is to be achieved (Burns & Holden, 1995; Clarke, 1997; Cronin, 1990; Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002; Ko, 2005; Swarbrooke, 1999; United Nations Development Programme, 2005). In order for this balance to be achieved and therefore, sustainable tourism development to be successful a range of stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Friedman & Miles, 2002; Phillips & Freeman, 2003) must be involved in the process. However, stakeholders are people and as such hold values (Rokeach, 1973) which drive their behaviour, both individuals and organisations adhere to values. Values or sets of values vary across groups and cultures as well as across individuals (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Consequently, the aim of this research was to explore the complexity of trying to work within a framework of sustainability, with a given number of stakeholders (in this case, a UK organisation, its customers (volunteers, primarily British) and the local community (Indonesian) where the project operates) that may hold different values and the extent to

which the values of the stakeholders affected interaction and behaviour and therefore the success of achieving sustainability.

This study was exploratory in nature and consequently required a qualitative approach (Creswell, 1994; Leedy & Ormond, 2005). The qualitative methods were designed in order to understand the interactions and relationships between the organisation, the volunteers and the community with the purpose of enabling the values to be captured, which could then be applied to the framework of sustainability. A case study approach was used for the organisation as it enabled an in-depth investigation into a specific set of circumstances in a particular context (Yin, 2003a; 2003b). The investigation of phenomena within a case is supported by Yin (2003b) who argues that case studies are particularly appropriate where the observer has access to a novel, previously unexplained phenomenon. A mixed-method approach (Stake, 1998; Yin, 2003 a and b) was adopted for the case study. The methods consisted of participant observation and semi-structured interviews; in addition material in the public domain and documents produced by the organisations was also examined such as final accounts, volunteer briefing documents, publicity articles and company websites. Participant observation was undertaken with the researcher's identity being revealed to all respondents. Consequently, the research took the role of *participant as observer* (Gill and Johnson, 2002). Descriptive observation (Robson, 2002) notes were kept which consisted of observations of the physical setting; diagrams were drawn of the main buildings which were used by the organisations. Key participants and activities were recorded. In this study only primary observations and secondary observation techniques were used (Delbridge and Kirkpatrick, 1994); consequently, recording consisted of keeping a diary (primary) and recording statements of what happened or was said (secondary). The other qualitative method used consisted of individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews thus allowing flexibility during the actual interview process. In total forty nine interviews were conducted with volunteers. All of the interviews were recorded, with the consent of each respondent, transcribed and imported into the qualitative software package NVivo 7. NVivo became the vehicle for working through the transcripts, thus allowing unstructured data to be analysed. Subsequently, the data was coded for themes, content and axial intersections (Panditt, 1996). The classifying and sorting of the data under themes enabled meaning or answers to be extracted. NVivo allows the generation of free nodes (stand alone themes); tree nodes (enabling sub coding under a theme) and case nodes (allowing socio-demographic characteristics to be generated). All three types of nodes were used in order to interrogate the data.

The findings of the study suggest that the underpinning ethos for the organisation was Conservation, Education and Research which if managed and implemented by the

organisation had the potential to have far reaching implications at a local and potentially global level (the organisation runs other projects worldwide). The cornerstones of sustainability highlight the interdependence of the economic system, the social system and the environmental system and there is much evidence to suggest that the organisation work within these boundaries. The volunteers whilst engaging in rhetoric that subscribes to the values of the community had some difficulties in demonstrating this in terms of their behaviour. The community has strong traditional values, which are underpinned by their religion, however, the need for economic benefits clearly challenge the hierarchy of some community values. Conflict within the stakeholder groups was evident, but the willingness by all actors to work towards mutual benefit was clearly becoming a conscious albeit emerging value.

References

- Benson, A. M. (2004). Research Tourism: professional travelling versus useful discovery. In M. Novelli (Ed.), *Niche Tourism: Contemporary Issues, Trends and Cases*: Elsevier: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Burns, P. M., & Holden, A. (1995). *Tourism: A New Perspective*. Hitchin: Prentice-Hall.
- Clarke, J. (1997). A Framework of Approaches to Sustainable Tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5(3), 224-233.
- Clifton, J., & Benson, A. M. (2006). Planning for Sustainable Ecotourism: The Case of Research Ecotourism in Developing Country Destinations. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(3), 238-254.
- Coghlan, A. (2006). Volunteer tourism as an emerging trend or an expansion of ecotourism? A look at potential clients' perceptions of volunteer tourism organisations. *International Journal Nonprofit Volunteer Sector Marketing*, 11(3), 225-237.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cronin, L. (1990). A Strategy for Tourism and Sustainable Developments. *World Leisure and Recreation*, 32(3), 12-18.
- France, L. (1997). *The Earthscan Reader In Sustainable Tourism*. Guildford: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.

- Friedman, A. L., & Miles, S. (2002). Developing Stakeholder Theory. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(1), 1-21.
- Hall, C. M., & Lew, A. A. (Eds.). (1998). *Sustainable Tourism: A Geographical Perspective* (First ed.). Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd.
- Hardy, A., Beeton, R. J. S., & Pearson, L. (2002). Sustainable Tourism: An Overview of the Concept and its Position in Relation to Conceptualisations of Tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10(6), 475-496.
- Hogg, M., & Vaughan, G. (2002). *Social Psychology* (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.
- Holden, A. (2000). *Environment and Tourism*. London: Routledge.
- IUCN. (1980). *World Conservation Strategy*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.
- Ko, T. G. (2005). Development of a tourism sustainability assessment procedure: a conceptual approach. *Tourism Management*, 26, 431-445.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormond, J. E. (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NY: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Murphy, P. E. (1994). Tourism and Sustainable Development. In W. F. Theobald (Ed.), *Global Tourism: The Next Decade*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd.
- Office of the Third Sector. (2008). What is the third sector? , from http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/about_us.aspx
- Panditt, N. R. (1996). The Creation of Theory: A Recent Application of the Grounded Theory Method [Electronic Version]. *The Qualitative Report*, 2 from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR2-4/pandit.html>.
- Phillips, R., & Freeman, R. E. (2003). *Stakeholder Theory and Organisational Ethics*: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Rogers, M., & Ryan, R. (2001). The Triple Bottom Line for Sustainable Community Development. *Local Environment*, 6(3), 227-289.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press.
- Russo, M. V. (Ed.). (1999). *Environmental Management: Readings and Cases*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Swarbrooke, J. (1999). *Sustainable Tourism Management*. Oxford: CABI Publishing.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2005). *The Sustainable Difference: Energy and Environment to Achieve the MDGs*. New York: United National Development

Programme, Energy Environment Bureau for Development Policy, Energy and Environment Group.

UNWTO. (2004). Conceptual Definition of Sustainable Tourism. from <http://www.unwto.org/sdt/mission/en/mission.php>

Vanclay, F. (2004). The Triple Bottom Line and Impact Assessment: How do TBL, EIA, SIA, SEA and EMS relate to each other? *Journal of Environmental Assessment Policy and Management*, 6(3), 265-288.

Wearing, S. (2001). *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that make a Difference*. Wallingford: CABI Publishing.

Willard, B. (2002). *The Sustainability Advantage: Seven Business Case Benefits of a Triple Bottom Line*: New Society Publishers.

World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.