

Moving Beyond the “I” in Motivation: Attributes and Perceptions of Conservation Volunteer Tourists

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Abstract

Much research has examined why volunteer tourists volunteer abroad. However, little work has explored (1) if and how destination and organization attributes motivate volunteers or (2) manager perceptions of volunteer motivations. We identified attributes that pulled conservation volunteer tourists to the country, organization, and volunteer project. We compared these motivations and reasons for volunteering abroad with manager and volunteer coordinator perceptions of volunteer motivations. To collect data, we engaged in participant observation and conducted interviews with 36 volunteer tourists, 2 managers, and 3 volunteer coordinators at an Ecuadorian conservation volunteer project. Volunteers listed a range of motivations for their choices (e.g., reserve mission, price). Managers and coordinators correctly identified some motivations for volunteering abroad and selecting the destination, organization, and project (e.g., travel, price). However, they mentioned fewer reasons than volunteers and overlooked several major factors, especially altruistic and project-specific reasons. We discuss implications for managers and organizations, tourism theory, and future research.

Keywords

conservation volunteer tourism, push/pull motivation, destination attributes, manager perceptions, Ecuador

The concept of motivations has received substantial attention in the tourism and recreation literature. Motivations are internal or external reasons for visiting an area or participating in an activity at a given time (Dann 1981; Manfredi, Driver, and Tarrant 1996). Interest has grown in understanding why tourists visit destinations to engage in some form of volunteering (Brown and Lehto 2005; Campbell and Smith 2005; Chen and Chen 2010; Wearing 2001), which is considered an “alternative” form of tourism (McGehee and Andereck 2009; Wearing 2004). Volunteer tourism “makes use of holiday-makers who volunteer to fund and work on social or conservation projects around the world and aims to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration” (Wearing 2004, 217). These tourists utilize “discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need” (McGehee and Santos 2005, 760). For a detailed discussion of volunteer tourism and various definitions, see Wearing (2004) and Guttentag (2009).

Despite interest in volunteer tourist motivations, researchers have primarily explored internal psychological reasons for why individuals volunteer abroad (e.g., learn, contribute; Brown and Lehto 2005; Campbell and Smith 2005; Galley and Clifton 2004; Sin 2009; Wearing 2001). Attention to individuals’ internal motivations has left several knowledge gaps in volunteer tourism research. Few researchers have addressed if and what specific characteristics of a country,

continent, organization, and project motivated volunteers in their decisions (e.g., Söderman and Snead 2008). Managers and organizations often cannot encourage volunteers to make the initial choice to volunteer abroad, but knowing what factors draw or detract potential volunteers to a destination, organization, or project could help in recruiting volunteers. Most scholars examining volunteer tourist motivations have also focused on self-reported motivations. Although this approach follows trends in tourism, recreation, and volunteerism research, comparatively less research has examined how others (e.g., managers, organization volunteer coordinators) perceive volunteer motivations (e.g., Coghlan 2008). Volunteers are only one group involved with the volunteer tourism experience, and differences between actual motivations and perceived motivations can result in volunteer and manager dissatisfaction as well as irrelevant marketing (Coghlan 2008).

To address these knowledge gaps, we conducted participant observation and interviewed volunteer tourists, reserve managers, and volunteer coordinators at a conservation volunteer project in Ecuador.¹ Our study moves research on conservation volunteer tourist motivations beyond individual

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internal reasons and explores the role of destination, organization, and project attributes in motivating volunteers as well as manager and coordinator perceptions of these factors.

Conceptual Background

Tourism, Recreation, and Volunteerism Motivations

Wearing (2004) stated that researchers could examine volunteer tourist motivations with approaches from tourism, recreation, and volunteerism fields (e.g., Driver and Knopf 1977; Stebbins 1996). Although many approaches exist for measuring tourist motivations (see Fodness 1994), one popular approach is the push/pull method. It suggests that people are “pushed” to travel by internal psychological motivations (e.g., reduce stress) and “pulled” to a destination by its attributes—both tangible resources (e.g., beaches) and traveler perceptions and expectations of what the site provides (e.g., novelty; Crompton 1979; Uysal and Jurowski 1994). Dann (1981) claimed that push and pull factors are essential in motivating tourists, and Crompton (1979) identified seven push factors (e.g., facilitation of social interaction) and two pull factors (e.g., cultural). Many researchers have applied this approach when examining tourist motivations (e.g., Fodness 1994; Uysal and Jurowski 1994).

Destinations play a central role in tourism. They are a means to satisfy push motivations, as tourists with particular push motivations are drawn to specific locations or destinations by settings (e.g., wilderness) that fulfill these motivations (e.g., solitude; Needham, Wood, and Rollins 2004; Uysal and Jurowski 1994). Klenosky (2002) suggested that single pull factors (e.g., beaches) could satisfy multiple motivations (e.g., self-esteem, fun), whereas multiple pull factors (e.g., skiing, new or unique location) could also serve the same motivation (e.g., excitement). Wearing (2004, 217) argued that in ecotourism, to describe the physical location “as a ‘pull’ phenomena is to overlook the importance . . . of the destination communities’ surrounding natural environment as a motivator.” Therefore, either push factors (e.g., enjoy scenery) or pull factors (e.g., tropical forests) can be primary motivations of ecotourists (Eagles 1992).

The broader field of volunteerism also helps in understanding volunteer tourist motivations. Volunteering usually contains both altruistic and self-interested motives (e.g., to help, to learn; Ryan, Kaplan, and Grese 2001), although some studies have emphasized either one or the other. Stebbins (1996), for example, contended that volunteering is a form of serious leisure in which self-interestedness is more influential than altruistic motivations because volunteers expect personal and social rewards for their efforts. By designing and applying the Volunteer Functions Index (VFI), Clary, Snyder, and Stukas (1996) uncovered six altruistic and self-interested reasons for volunteering (e.g., values, career). Silverberg et al. (1999) identified three additional functions for parks and recreation volunteers (e.g., department

and community need me). Researchers studying environmental volunteering recognized extra motivations were needed, such as to help environment and work with specific animals (Bruyere and Rappe 2007; Markus and Blackshaw 1998). Given that motivations are dynamic, people may initially volunteer for altruistic motives (e.g., help environment) but shift to self-interested motives (e.g., social interactions; Ryan, Kaplan, and Grese 2001).

Researchers have also examined why volunteers choose certain organizations or project locations. Volunteers wanting to work with specific animals, for example, selected organizations satisfying this need (Markus and Blackshaw 1998). Stewart and Weinstein (1997) reported that volunteer motivations (e.g., community concern, esteem enhancement) varied between three HIV/AIDS organizations differing in setting and focus (e.g., urban, community-based social change setting; suburban, individual support setting). Donald (1997) found that place-specific motivations were among the most common reasons volunteers mentioned for participating in an environmental stewardship group (e.g., “I joined because I knew about problems of the [area] and wanted to help”). This is significant because the survey included only three place-specific reasons compared to nine internal push motivations (e.g., sense of responsibility to environment, personal growth), suggesting that research should focus on place-specific reasons for volunteering.

Volunteer Tourism Motivations

Volunteer tourism researchers have studied volunteer tourist motivations, and many have employed the push/pull framework (e.g., Brown and Lehto 2005). As in volunteerism literature, push motivations for volunteering abroad include both altruistic (e.g., to help) and self-interested reasons (e.g., gain experience, camaraderie; Broad and Jenkins 2008; Campbell and Smith 2005; Chen and Chen 2010; Wearing 2001, 2004). Some researchers claimed altruistic reasons separate volunteer tourists and traditional tourists (e.g., Singh 2002). Most researchers have contended that individuals volunteer for both self-interested and altruistic motives, but some scholars have discussed primarily self-interested or altruistic motives (e.g., Galley and Clifton 2004; Singh 2002). Coghlan and Fennell (2009) stated that much literature has focused on altruistic reasons, but that in addition to many self-interested motivations, some “altruistic” ones could be classified as egoist. The altruistic/self-interested dichotomy has limitations, but because it is fairly well established, it provides a framework to compare manager perceptions to volunteer motivations. More recently, research on volunteer tourist motivations has expanded to examine the relationship to volunteer expectations and satisfaction (Coghlan and Pearce 2010); identify motivations of subpopulations, such as “gray nomads” and backpackers (Leonard and Onyx 2009; Ooi and Laing 2010); and employ other theories from the volunteer literature such as VFI (Leonard and Onyx 2009).

To a lesser extent, researchers (e.g., Söderman and Snead 2008) have explored attributes pulling volunteers to a specific country, continent, project, or organization, but findings have often been secondary to main research questions or mentioned in passing (e.g., Simpson 2005). Although the push/pull framework is fairly well established and often used to identify motivations, we worked within this framework because much literature on volunteer tourism has not studied in detail the pull angle, leaving a potentially incomplete understanding of how push/pull works in volunteer tourism. This is a significant knowledge gap because as Wearing (2004, 217) states,

The internal push motives of discovery, enlightenment, and personal growth are important to volunteer tourists, but features of a destination are more than simply pull motives to this group, for volunteer tourists see physical locations in developing countries as motivations in themselves.

Researchers have found that volunteers chose countries or continents because of the belief that “developing” countries need help, desire to learn languages and about cultures, the unknown, and personal recommendations (Simpson 2005; Söderman and Snead 2008; Wearing 2004). Specific organizations attracted volunteer tourists because of reputation, project opportunities (e.g., sea turtle work), marketing efforts, perceived safety, opportunity for independent research, and organization type (e.g., NGO; Campbell and Smith 2005; Coghlan 2007; Galley and Clifton 2004; Söderman and Snead 2008). Less work has examined attributes that pulled people to specific projects and sites, but some reasons included project opportunities, program benefits, location, and personal recommendations (e.g., Broad and Jenkins 2008; Campbell and Smith 2005).

More research should explicitly examine pull motivations related to destinations and projects because managers and operators can directly control these factors and recruit potential volunteers by advertising amenable attributes or altering projects. Söderman and Snead (2008) contributed to research on pull motivations, specifically examining why gap-year travelers (i.e., youth traveling or working between secondary school and university) chose organizations with programs that included additional benefits (e.g., excursions, language courses). Volunteer projects, however, can also include non-gap-year participants (e.g., college students, retirees) and are not always organized programs (e.g., Brown and Lehto 2005; Leonard and Onyx 2009); therefore, volunteer motives may differ among various project types. Söderman and Snead (2008) also did not examine why volunteers chose particular projects or sites, although they mentioned specific elements of the experience (e.g., conservation project) as a factor for selecting organizations. Some motivations that Söderman and Snead (2008) and Galley and Clifton (2004) listed for selecting an organization were general reasons for volunteering abroad or traveling with any organization (e.g., to do something new,

no confidence traveling independently), rather than factors specific to chosen organizations.

Perceptions of Volunteer Tourist Motivations

Measuring motivations has primarily involved asking recreationists, tourists, and volunteers to self-report their motives. Comparatively few studies have examined others’ (e.g., managers’) perceptions of individuals’ motivations. Wellman, Dawson, and Roggenbuck (1982) asked recreation managers to predict visitor motivations; managers incorrectly identified visitor motivations at one location but were generally correct at a second site. The authors speculated that once managers form an image of visitors, manager perceptions can confirm this image and resist change. Coghlan (2008) provided a rare example of examining perceptions of volunteer tourist motivation; she asked expedition leaders to speculate on why individuals volunteered abroad and compared their responses to volunteer answers. Few differences existed between volunteer motivations and those perceived by leaders, but leaders underestimated the importance of reasons, and some motivations differed significantly (e.g., develop personal interests, meet locals). Both studies suggested that visitors might be dissatisfied with their experience if managers misunderstand visitor motivations. By using qualitative methods and examining perceptions of push *and* pull motivations, we build on these studies that used surveys to examine perceptions of push factors.

Research Questions

Given limited research specifically focused on factors pulling volunteers to select a country, continent, organization, and volunteer project, as well as others’ perceptions of volunteer motivations, we pose three questions. First, what attributes pulled volunteers to select the country, continent, organization, and volunteer project? Second, for what reasons do other people involved in volunteer tourism (e.g., managers, volunteer coordinators) think individuals volunteered abroad and chose the country, continent, organization, and project? Third, do differences exist between volunteer motivations and others’ perceptions of these motivations?

Method

Study Site

We conducted fieldwork for nine weeks (June–August) in 2008 at an Ecuadorian reserve offering conservation, sustainability, and social development volunteer opportunities.² A family owns the reserve, lives on-site, manages the project, and works closely with the local community. Although small at 814 ha, the reserve’s elevation range of 1,100 m to 2,040 m and location in the Inter-Andean cloud forest affords it high biodiversity. The reserve resides in the Rio Toachi-Chiriboga Important Bird Area and two of the

world's top 25 biological hotspots: Tropical Andes and Choco Darien.

At the time of our research, the reserve listed on its website that its goals were to protect existing forest, restore degraded areas, work toward sustainable development, foster community development, and educate about conservation. To help achieve these goals, volunteers chose from three programs: (1) "Conservation in the Cloud Forest" (e.g., reforestation, wildlife monitoring), (2) "In the Way to Sustainability" (e.g., sustainable wood and animal production, organic agriculture), and (3) "Social Development" (e.g., teaching). Volunteers applied to the reserve, an Ecuadorian NGO with which the reserve had an agreement, or through international intermediary organizations (e.g., Working Abroad).³ The NGO also worked with intermediaries, causing some volunteers to be funneled through several organizations (e.g., intermediary to nonprofit to reserve). We selected this site because (1) Ecuador offers numerous conservation volunteer opportunities (Cousins 2007); (2) many volunteers select the reserve, allowing for diverse opinions and reducing the chance of obtaining a small sample, which can be common with on-site investigations of this nature (e.g., Chen and Chen 2010); and (3) one of us volunteered at the reserve in 2005, affording credibility to gain participant trust.⁴

Data Collection

We used a qualitative case study approach that employed interviews and participant observation. Qualitative research addresses questions concerning interpretations of meanings, concepts, symbols, metaphors, and ways humans make sense of their surroundings (Berg 2004). Qualitative research can involve a case study, which is "an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" and employs multiple sources of evidence for triangulation (Yin 2003, 13). Results from case studies cannot be generalized to all situations, but they can provide a general understanding of similar groups or phenomena because human behavior is rarely unique to a single group (Berg 2004). We conducted fieldwork for an extended period of time to observe people's lives and employed various methods to gather information (i.e., triangulation), such as participant observation, informal and formal interviews, and document retrieval. These actions helped enhance our trustworthiness, specifically credibility (Decrop 2004; Lincoln and Guba 1985). We also kept an audit trail consisting of raw data; reconstruction and synthesis products; analysis, process, and personal notes; and preliminary developmental information (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This information was shared with doctoral committee members in informal and formal meetings.

We audiotaped semi-structured interviews with 36 volunteer tourists, 2 Ecuadorian reserve managers, and 3 volunteer

coordinators (1 from the reserve and 2 from the NGO). This included all volunteers present during our stay, except who arrived shortly before we left. All participants were fluent or native English speakers. By conducting interviews during summer, which according to demographic research collected by the NGO is their most popular time for volunteers, we could sample from subgroups that volunteer throughout the year (e.g., students on vacation, career-break adults). Consistent with past research (e.g., Campbell and Smith 2006), we interviewed volunteers after they had been at the reserve for at least two weeks to ensure they were settled.⁵ Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 4 hours, with most between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, we assigned a code to each participant (e.g., VF12 = volunteer female 12, RMM = reserve manager male, VC1 = volunteer coordinator 1).

Typical of semi-structured interviews, we had an initial set of questions to provide consistency across interviews and search for patterns, but we expanded on individual responses and explored unexpected topics in greater detail (Berg 2004). To formulate interview questions, we relied on previous literature and an exploratory study that we conducted at the reserve in 2007.⁶ That study suggested that volunteers were pulled to the country, organization, and site by various attributes and differences between volunteer motivations and manager perceptions of motivations existed. Examples of questions for the current study include "Why did you select this reserve?" and "Why do volunteers volunteer abroad?" Given that volunteers might have forgotten some initial reasons, after asking them to recollect their motivations, we provided printed copies of the Internet promotional materials (i.e., organization, project websites) at which they looked when deciding. This prompt reminded them of any additional attributes influencing their choices. We used websites, rather than other promotional material (e.g., brochures), given the popularity of this method for finding information (Cousins 2007; Grimm 2010). To have relevant material, we asked managers and coordinators which organizations volunteers used.

We also employed participant observation, which (1) allows collection of greater types of data; (2) minimizes reactivity; (3) helps ask reasonable and culturally appropriate questions; (4) provides intuitive comprehension of a culture, which allows greater confidence in data meaning; and (5) addresses research questions that can seldom be examined with other techniques (Bernard 2006). We immersed ourselves in the volunteer tourist culture. We lived, ate, and spent free time with volunteers, as well as completed daily tasks and engaged in informal conversations with volunteers and staff about volunteering, the reserve, and motivations. To increase trust, we conducted overt participant observation, allowing participants to know we recorded observations. Since we interviewed volunteers, they were aware of our research intentions and not being transparent could have resulted in suspicions about our actions. Overall, trust

was not an issue; our previous experience at the reserve led volunteers to feel a sense of camaraderie and desire to share their opinions, and managers were familiar with and supportive of our study. Also, given that a major motivation of volunteers is to meet people, they were open with relative strangers. We regularly logged our methodological, descriptive, and analytic notes, thereby having a record of field descriptions, conversations and interactions, and personal reflections (Bernard 2006). These reflections helped us understand our opinions and reactions in a neutral venue. Given the continuous nature of observation and reflection, we could also identify unclear information and ask participants for clarification.

Data Analysis

We began transcribing interviews in the field, allowing us to discover emerging themes, or “labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles and Huberman 1994, 56), and address them in subsequent interviews. To identify recurring themes related to motivations, we analyzed and coded each transcript line by line and categorized codes into themes. We conducted multiple close readings of each transcript to inductively develop a coding scheme where we condensed and expanded initial themes (Miles and Huberman 1994). This reiterative process provided us with familiarity of the data and confidence in final codes. We then organized coded data by thematic categories to retrieve relevant quotes (Berg 2004). Verbatim quotes illustrate either representative examples of or exceptions to themes; we altered quotes slightly only if removing unnecessary words improved readability.

We analyzed our field notes in a similar fashion (i.e., coding, reiteration, thematic categorization). We report some observational findings in this article, but rely primarily on quotes from interviews. However, as other researchers employing qualitative research have noted, observations supplemented and supported semi-structured interviews, revealed any changing opinions, and informed findings in this article (e.g., Gray and Campbell 2007). Interacting with volunteers, managers, and the reserve volunteer coordinator for a longer time further increased comfort with disclosure, which was substantiated by consistently longer interviews with volunteers whose stays overlapped more with ours.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Demographics of volunteer tourists were consistent with previous research at long-term volunteer projects (i.e., longer than one or two weeks; Galley and Clifton 2004; Wearing 2001). Ages ranged from 17 to 43, although 70% were younger than 25 ($n = 25$). There were almost twice as many females ($n = 23$, 64%) as males ($n = 13$, 36%). Volunteers were

primarily American, Canadian, and English, although some were from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Wales, France, and Holland. Most volunteers came through the Ecuadorian NGO ($n = 14$, 39%), the reserve ($n = 6$, 17%), or the intermediary organization, Global Volunteer Network (GVN; $n = 5$, 14%). Volunteers used eight intermediary organizations, although one of these, Volunteer Latin America, provided contact details for the reserve, through which volunteers applied directly. Volunteers had a mix of educational backgrounds, but almost all had attended, were attending, or were planning to attend college. In all, 21 volunteers studied or planned to study the environment or related natural science (e.g., biology). Previously, 25 respondents had volunteered at home and 9 had volunteered abroad. Stays ranged from 2 to 10 weeks, with 1 volunteer staying 7 months; the average stay was 4.5 weeks.

Managers and the reserve volunteer coordinator (VC3) were in their mid-30s, and the NGO volunteer coordinators were in their mid-20s; all were Ecuadorian. All five had attended university and studied various fields (e.g., administration and marketing, natural resource management). Although the reserve had been in RMM and VC3's family since 1970, it did not start receiving volunteers until 2003. VC3 worked primarily in the Quito office coordinating volunteer logistics, but she also spent time at the reserve. The NGO volunteer coordinators were involved with the project less than a year; VC1 had been to the reserve once and VC2 had never visited.

Volunteer Motivations

Volunteers listed numerous attributes that pulled them to the country, continent, organization, and volunteer project and site (see Table 1). They also discussed internal push factors for choosing to volunteer abroad (see Table 2). Given that reasons were consistent with those in other studies (e.g., escape stress, make a difference; Brown and Lehto 2005; Campbell and Smith 2005), we discuss them in detail only when comparing them to manager and volunteer coordinator perceptions. Volunteers were not homogenous; motivations discussed here illustrate general trends and were not mentioned by all volunteers.

Country and continent. Volunteers often chose South America and Ecuador because of geographical location, including place characteristics (e.g., culture, nature). Volunteers selected South America because they had not visited the continent. VF12 admitted, “It’s one of the continents I’ve never seen. . . . I’ve been to four of them. This is the last one.” At times, Ecuador was a stopping point on a larger trip around the world or continent. North Americans mentioned that Ecuador was accessible and relatively cheap to visit compared to other places (e.g., Asia). Its biodiversity and numerous ecosystems such as rainforest, cloud forest, coast, and *páramo* (high elevation neotropical ecosystem) attracted volunteers. This diversity is found in a small area, which, as

Table 1. Volunteer Motivations for Selecting Country, Continent, Organization, and Volunteer Project; Manager and Coordinator Perceptions of Volunteer Motivations (Unranked)

	Volunteers	Managers and coordinators
Country or continent	Learn, practice Spanish Travel Unvisited Small, diverse Developing countries need help Safety Familiarity Culture Proximity Chance	Learn, practice Spanish Travel Different Small, diverse Developing countries need help Safety
Organization	Price Program variety Legitimate Recommendation Organization type Business practices, professionalism Chance Promotional material	Price Program variety Legitimate
Project	Recommendation Project variety, activities Location Amenities, services Ecosystem (environment, species) Mission, goals No skills needed Practical, hands-on knowledge Family owned Promotional material Flexibility (dates, length)	Recommendation Project variety, activities Location Amenities, services Natural, ecological setting

VF8 stated, allowed volunteers to see much: “Ecuador is compact . . . I see it in the three sections [coast, highlands, rainforest] and it just seems more manageable to get around . . . than in a bigger country.” The location also appealed to volunteers interested in Andean culture and meeting “friendly” Ecuadorians.

Other destination attributes made South America and Ecuador appealing. Volunteers wanted to learn or practice Spanish, and VM6 believed “There’s no better way to learn Spanish than to be thrown into a country that mainly speaks it and have to get around.” Volunteers also selected the country because they believed “developing” countries such as Ecuador needed more help. VF1 explained, “I wanted to help people and . . . in the developed world there is less help needed. . . . [D]eveloping countries . . . need a lot more help. . . . [T]hat’s why I chose . . . a developing country.” The country’s relative safety also attracted volunteers, including the stable economy, nonviolent political situation, and non-aggressive males. VF14 chose Ecuador because some other countries are “clearly unsafe . . . also racist and sexist.”

Volunteers admitted that their parents had similar sentiments and favored Ecuador over countries like Columbia. In some cases, volunteers admitted the country was circumstantial; they had found a greater number of affordable volunteer opportunities in Ecuador. VF11 recalled, “My initial location had been Peru . . . but . . . looking at . . . prices, [the Ecuadorian NGO] . . . was the most feasible.”

Volunteers mentioned familiarity or comfort with the country or continent. In some cases, they previously visited the continent and wanted to see more. In other situations, such as with VF6, volunteers felt safer returning to an area they already had experienced and liked: “I’ve been to Peru. . . . I kind of know a little bit about South America and that area. . . . I was like, that’s a good idea.” VF13 mentioned that she would not choose a country about which she had no understanding of the language, culture, and issues. Other volunteers believed that Ecuador was not unlike their country, either because Ecuador used the U.S. dollar or did not seem too exotic that they “wouldn’t be able to handle it” (VF14). In this sense, volunteering in Ecuador was seen as a

Table 2. Volunteer Motivations for Volunteering Abroad; Manager and Coordinator Perceptions of Volunteer Motivations (Unranked)

	Volunteers	Managers and coordinators
Self-Interested	Learn (environment; culture; language; self) Travel (never traveled abroad; see world; be more than tourist; supported travel) Introspection Challenge Overall experience Meet people Professional development, CV Escape, relaxation New, different, adventure Health Have fun Rewarding Always wanted to Timing in life Not opportunity in my country	Learn (environment; culture; language; self) Travel (never traveled abroad; see world; be more than tourist; supported travel)
Altruistic	Help (people, developing country, environment) Make a difference Contribute, do something worthwhile Responsibility to people, environment Family (influence, values) Volunteer, work	Help (people, developing country, environment)

stepping-stone for longer travels (e.g., Africa). VM10 explained, “It’s still kinda American. I’m just stepping my way out of the house, onto the porch or the neighbor’s lawn.” This is not to say that all volunteers searched for comfort and familiarity, but those who expressed the unknown mentioned it in terms of being remote and away from civilization, as opposed to why they selected the country.

Organization. Overwhelmingly, volunteers mentioned price as a major reason for selecting the organization through which they came (e.g., reserve, NGO, intermediary organization). VM5’s frustration returned when he recounted, “[Volunteer programs] are all really expensive, some were US\$3,000–4,000, minus the plane ticket—that is just the volunteer work! . . . Who’s working for who!?” It makes sense that many volunteered through the reserve or NGO because these organizations charged US\$420 and \$450 per month, respectively—both cheaper than larger intermediary organizations. VM9, who had selected the NGO, sympathized, “I always feel bad for people who come through i-to-i and GVN . . . You know how much extra they’ve paid to have the exact same product. Those organizations I have problems with.” Volunteers who went through intermediaries believed organizations they chose were cheaper than other options. For example, GVN charged an additional US\$450 administrative fee, but this was good for two years at

any reserve with which they worked. Compared to thousands of dollars some organizations charged for one volunteer opportunity, volunteers felt that GVN was a reasonable option.

Volunteers emphasized that they trusted and chose organizations that appeared legitimate, and to some volunteers, intermediary organizations seemed more reputable than applying directly to the reserve. VF5 acknowledged, “I . . . never traveled abroad or volunteered abroad and so I thought, if there is a foundation that knows I am here and they help me do it and I have to pay a little extra just to make sure that it’s legitimate, then I should do that.” Volunteers traveling independently wanted more security but said that next time they would volunteer directly to save money and ensure their money went to the project. Cautious volunteers, such as VF18, admitted that initially they feared whether a project would actually exist: “I wanted to go through a company that was . . . verified, a lot of people had been through.” For this reason, people who volunteered through larger organizations were willing to pay more, even if they emphasized that price was a factor. Volunteers with friends who had volunteered abroad heeded recommendations to ensure selecting a reputable company. VF15 recalled,

I chose Volunteer Abroad because I had some friends who had done Volunteer Abroad. . . . [T]hey said their

experience had been incredible, life-changing. And they seemed like a really reputable company, an organization that really looked out for you . . . and gave . . . a lot of support and . . . information.

In all but one case, volunteers choosing to volunteer directly with the reserve received a recommendation from a friend who previously volunteered at the reserve or learned about it through Volunteer Latin America, thereby increasing trust in the reserve.

Administrative professionalism also heavily influenced organization choice. This included being helpful, being organized, and providing timely responses. Volunteers such as VM1 sometimes chose the first organization that responded:

[The NGO] did respond to my very first email very quickly, which also helped, 'cause . . . this was sort of an impulse thing for me. . . . I didn't know I was coming here 'til short notice, and if someone else had responded sooner, I may have ended up there.

VF23, who volunteered through the reserve, said, "[VC3] made time to meet with me because I couldn't meet with her on her hours. . . . [S]he spoke English, which was nice, and we emailed before I got to Ecuador." Volunteers, such as VF6, were impressed by an organization that appeared organized, whether on the company webpage or in subsequent information received: "[The NGO] just seemed put together, which I guess is a kinda shallow way to approach [it], but being a Westerner—they had a very well-organized website and were very quick to reply and helpful." Volunteers avoided organizations not meeting these requirements.

Organization type also attracted volunteers (e.g., local, nonprofit). Volunteers chose the NGO because it was nonprofit, the reserve because it was family-run, and both because they were Ecuadorian. VF13 believed, "I think it's a lot better to have the people working on their own land than having foreign groups doing it." Other volunteers, such as VM3, thought that volunteering directly through the reserve was more personal and it provided more accurate details: "I just liked the idea of . . . talking directly . . . to the reserve. . . . I felt I was getting the most accurate information. . . . I felt better hearing about it from someone who . . . had the interest of the reserve at heart as opposed to the interest of their middle man company."

Volunteers appreciated having choices and services with an organization. This included organizations that provided a variety of programs, such as an intermediary company with projects in several countries or the NGO's eight options in Ecuador. VF6 believed that different options "made [the NGO] seem a little bit more legitimate than just [having] one reserve." Volunteers also preferred flexibility with travel plans, such as unfixed start and end dates. Amenities and services also appealed to volunteers, including airport pickup, in-country support, and health insurance.

As with country selection, volunteers admitted that chance played a role in selecting the organization. They may have been unaware of other options, such as volunteering directly through the reserve. VF12 said, "If I had known there was three parties involved in my transaction, then I maybe would have cut out one of the parties, because it's more cost-effective." Other volunteers mentioned the chosen organization was well advertised or listed among the first on Google's search engine. In other cases, volunteers first found the reserve, but because they were uncomfortable volunteering directly, they searched for organizations working with the reserve.

Volunteer project. Volunteers recounted extensive deliberation when selecting a project, indicating the reserve itself played an important role in pulling volunteers to the site. Volunteers, such as VF20, felt passionate about the reserve's mission and wanted to help with meeting its goals: "The whole aim was intriguing to me, because in school they always threw those words out, 'conservation,' 'sustainability,' so I wanted to help out with that." The variety of volunteer tasks and types of activities (e.g., garden, reforestation) also pulled people to the project. VF15 recounted, "This place sounded more comprehensive than some of the other conservation projects and I thought it would be a really great experience to get an overall, encompassing volunteer experience, as opposed to focusing on one aspect and maybe not liking it." Interestingly, few volunteers mentioned choosing the reserve to work with the local community; these volunteers tended to be more interested in community development than conservation. Volunteers also appreciated the flexibility of their length of stay and arrival and departure dates. Most labor at the reserve required no special skills, which appealed to volunteers such as VF5: "I could come here and do physical work and manual labor and . . . make a difference doing that, whereas if I tried to go somewhere else, I don't think I'd have the skills to help." In other cases, as with organization choice, volunteers who knew former volunteers chose the project based on personal recommendations. VM3 said, "My friend had a great time here and I knew I could try somewhere else, but I'm not a particularly adventurous person."

Environmental and conservation issues also motivated volunteers to choose the reserve and more generally a conservation project. The ecosystem attracted them, as most volunteers had never been in a cloud forest. VF15 admitted, "Living in a cloud forest is pretty cool. I would be lying if I said that wasn't a part of the reason I chose it here." More generally, volunteers wanted to be in nature and believed a cloud forest would be beautiful and contain species they wanted to see (e.g., monkeys). Volunteers with an interest in conservation, sustainability, or reforestation thought the reserve afforded opportunities to expand their practical knowledge. VF13 articulated, "I expect to continue studying conservation and environmental science in college, and I expect that this will . . . be good field experience."

Volunteers liked that the site was private and family owned because the managers might have a better understanding of local conservation and be more passionate about the mission. However, a few volunteers not knowing originally that it was a private reserve worried how this would affect conservation work (e.g., the next generation continuing work, the reserve taking advantage of volunteers). VF4 fretted, "I didn't know [the reserve] was a private reserve until I arrived in Ecuador, which I reckon frightened me a bit. . . . I feel I work for a private cause."

The reserve's location was important to volunteers for a variety of reasons. First, being centrally located and close to Quito, the capital, made it easy for volunteers to arrive at the reserve and travel on weekends. VM9 recalled, "I knew I would want to go see Ecuador and here we are right in the middle and it's easy to get to everywhere." Some volunteers chose the site because they wanted a remote experience, whereas others wanted to be close to civilization. When one volunteer joked that the reserve needed an Internet café, another person mentioned that civilization was what they were trying to escape. Interestingly, volunteers expressed that the reserve fulfilled both needs, depending on their motivation; the closeness to Quito made the site not seem remote, whereas other volunteers commonly stated that it was "in the middle of nowhere" given the ecosystem. In addition, volunteers expressing that they enjoyed the remoteness often revealed through their actions that they appreciated being able to use iPods and enjoy other comforts. This is unsurprising because volunteers also selected the reserve because of amenities and services such as showers, electricity, a home base while traveling, English-speaking managers, and informative lectures. Other volunteers, however, believed that they received too many luxuries and felt like regular tourists.

Manager and Coordinator Perceptions of Volunteer Motivations

Volunteer abroad. We asked managers and coordinators about volunteer motivations to compare these perceptions to actual motivations. They accurately identified both self-interested and altruistic motivations for why volunteers chose to volunteer abroad but focused primarily on self-interested motivations (see Table 2). Specifically, they emphasized travel, believing that individuals viewed volunteering abroad as both a cheap way to travel and a chance to know a place more intimately than typical tourists. RMM explained, "I think the main reason is to travel . . . to have a different way of traveling . . . to feel . . . the roots of the communities or the cultures that they want to visit." Managers and coordinators recognized that another primary motivation of volunteers was to learn a new language, about the culture, or about the environment, particularly conservation and sustainability efforts. RMF stated that volunteers searched for personal perspective, hoping that the experience helped them

learn about themselves. Inconsistent with what many volunteers mentioned, managers and coordinators noted that the desire to help (e.g., environment, developing country, and people) did not apply to all volunteers and was often a secondary reason. For example, VC3 believed, "I really think that few people . . . [are] really concerned about conservation and . . . really want to make a difference." As illustrated in Table 2, managers identified far fewer reasons for why people volunteer abroad and neglected some common motivations (e.g., contribute, escape stress).

Country and continent. Managers and coordinators correctly believed that volunteers selected Ecuador for travel, adventure, exploration, safety, and its label as a "developing country." Unlike volunteers, however, RMM thought that volunteers believed "Ecuador is still . . . an exotic country, something that is not very known and most of the people . . . want to know what is unknown . . . to explore." Managers and coordinators accurately assumed that volunteers chose Ecuador because of its diversity and beauty, and given its size, volunteers could see much with little travel. Ecuador is also a good starting place for volunteers traveling through the rest of South America; it is one of the northernmost politically stable countries. VC3 explained, "Ecuador is not like Peru or Columbia. [It's a] more polished country. . . . [T]he person who . . . decides to come to Ecuador . . . understand[s] that Ecuador is a very safe country." They also recognized that volunteers chose Ecuador because it was a developing country and needed help. RMF lamented that volunteers assumed Ecuador had one of the most corrupt governments and among the highest levels of poverty and deforestation in the Latin America; she mentioned that some intermediary organizations depicted those figures so it appeared as though the country needed help desperately.

Organization. Among many reasons for selecting specific organizations, managers and volunteer coordinators most commonly listed legitimacy and trust. Reserve staff recognized that many people did not volunteer directly and instead used an intermediary organization or the NGO because they or their parents trusted larger organizations or companies from home. VC3 stated, "They have more confidence in big organizations, probably they feel safe and if they find [the reserve] in the webpage, they probably say, 'Does it really exist?'" The NGO volunteer coordinators believed that volunteers chose the NGO because of its reputation; it began 25 years ago and was one of the largest Ecuadorian organizations offering volunteer opportunities. VC3 understood that people often selected to volunteer through the reserve because of its price. Only VC1 mentioned the number of programs for why volunteers selected an organization, although volunteers frequently mentioned this factor.

Volunteer project. Managers and coordinators emphasized factors that benefited volunteers as reasons pulling volunteers to a conservation reserve in general and this project in particular. Managers and coordinators believed that volunteers wanted to escape the city and spend time outside,

thereby selecting an activity and project involving nature. Similar to volunteers, managers and coordinators also stressed the importance of project variety, including activities offered and conservation, sustainability, and social development focus. RMF stated that volunteers were previously drawn to conservation, but recently many have also wanted to learn about sustainability. In addition, managers and coordinators all highlighted the reserve's amenities and services that afforded comfort, fun opportunities, and chances to learn (e.g., Spanish lessons). Being centrally located and close to Quito also allowed for easy travel to the site and around the country on weekends. Managers suggested that volunteers also selected the reserve for cultural interaction because it was operated by Ecuadorians and volunteers worked with Ecuadorian staff. Only RMF emphasized the cloud forest, recommendations of previous volunteers, and safety as additional factors, all of which were frequently mentioned by volunteers. Interestingly, managers and volunteer coordinators did not mention altruistic motivations for selecting the reserve, such as interest in and a desire to help accomplish reserve mission and goals.

Discussion

Using a qualitative approach, we examined attributes that pulled volunteer tourists to the continent, country, organization, and volunteer project, as well as manager and coordinator perceptions of these motivations. Although volunteers listed a range of motivations, general trends included learning the language, price, safety, project mission, and project variety. Pull factors often played a substantial role in volunteer decision making, even the desire to go abroad. Managers and volunteer coordinators correctly identified some volunteer motivations (e.g., travel, price, amenities, services) but mentioned far fewer reasons than did volunteers. Managers and coordinators also did not recognize some major factors such as project mission and especially overlooked altruistic reasons such as the desire to contribute to the reserve and project. Our findings contribute to filling knowledge gaps in volunteer tourism literature by providing a detailed examination of the motivating role of destination, organization, and project attributes motivations (i.e., pull factors) as well as how managers perceive volunteer tourist motivations. These results have implications for managers and future research.

Managerial Implications and Practical Applications

Knowing why volunteers choose an organization and project can help managers and organizations recruit potential volunteers. First, given the role of the Internet in locating volunteer opportunities, managers and organizations can highlight motivating factors in promotional material (e.g., amenities, mission; Cousins 2007; Grimm 2010). Managers

should be cautious, however, about creating materials that attract or recruit volunteers under false pretenses. Past research (Lyons 2003) has suggested that if promotional materials do not match expectations, dissatisfaction can occur. Second, knowing factors that are attractive to volunteers can help managers retain desired attributes (e.g., project variety, reasonable price). These results also may inform other managers and organizations of appealing attributes, which they may want to include. However, given that our study involved only one site and we cannot generalize to all volunteer projects, other managers and organizations should be cautious applying these findings. Volunteers not choosing this reserve or these organizations might be attracted to characteristics of other opportunities. More research on pull attributes would be helpful for those in the volunteer tourism industry and could contribute to understanding if motivations discussed in this article are unique to this setting and project or if they can be expanded to volunteer tourists in general. One method would be to create a survey instrument that measures pull motivations discussed in this article and implement it at a variety of volunteer tourism settings and projects.

Our research can also help smaller projects attract volunteers to help with conservation. With larger intermediary organizations, some money does not reach the reserve, leaking out to pay for administrative overhead (Weaver 2001). One intermediary organization stated on its webpage that it did not provide projects with funds other than for room and board. Although this organization explained it did not want projects to become dependent, this can place projects in a delicate position. This reserve used volunteer fees for staff salaries and project investment such as sustaining volunteers (e.g., volunteer house construction) and purchasing project supplies. By attracting more direct volunteers, a greater amount of money could be available for conservation initiatives. If smaller reserves know what pulls volunteers to certain organizations, they can replicate these qualities to attract volunteers directly. Although a reserve or project cannot change some factors, such as being from the volunteer's country, others they can. For instance, knowing that volunteers emphasized professional aspects, including being well organized and providing quick responses, can allow smaller projects to replicate these qualities.

It would also be helpful for managers and coordinators to know volunteer motivations ahead of time. They could ask volunteers in an opening orientation, as RMF did. A better approach would be to ask for this information in application materials and ensure it arrives at the reserve, allowing managers, if they desire, to prepare projects and tasks matching volunteer motivations. For instance, if volunteers indicate that they chose the reserve for sustainability work, managers can provide relevant tasks (e.g., renewable energy). We recognize that some tasks might not be possible because of timing (e.g., trees planting in dry season), managers might fear losing sight of program goals, and they may have to decide how to balance volunteer needs with project goals (e.g.,

learning vs. work). We also realize that volunteers may not know their motivations, feel pressure to offer socially acceptable answers, and change motivations throughout the experience. Despite these limitations, having a baseline understanding of motivations could help managers in project planning and satisfying volunteer motivations, which could increase volunteer recruitment through positive word of mouth (Coghlan 2007; Lyons 2003).

Theoretical Implications and Future Research

With this article, we hope to build on existing motivation research in recreation, tourism, and volunteerism in general and volunteer tourism in particular. Broadly, our study indicated the importance of pull motivations. We urge researchers investigating motivations to not only focus on internal psychological factors pushing people to volunteer abroad but also examine roles of destination and organization attributes in pulling people to make their selections. In some cases, people may first be pushed to go abroad, but we caution against relegating pull factors as secondary, especially in nature-based travel. As Wearing (2004) and we found, the environment and its unique characteristics factor into nature-based travel, and volunteer tourists might place greater emphasis on specific destination qualities than do traditional tourists. We discovered that volunteers thought carefully about the country and project, and pull factors played a substantial role in decisions. For some volunteers, the destination was the draw, as they had always wanted to go to South America for its environment or culture; volunteering abroad was an afterthought.

Our research also expands work on factors pulling volunteers to destinations, organizations, and projects. Although finding some similar motivations as Söderman and Snead (2008) (e.g., program variety, type of organization, linguistic), we discovered interesting differences. These could have resulted from their focus on three structured gap-year programs each with a different type of organizations (e.g., company, charity, nonprofit), as opposed to our study examining one project and multiple organizations, including organizations that also market to non-gap year volunteers. Söderman and Snead (2008) reported that volunteers emphasized the unknown and danger of visiting Latin America, whereas we found more volunteers mentioned safety and familiarity. Structured programs might have provided comfort and security. Ansell (2008) found larger organizations mediated risk by making the experience seem dangerous and exciting to gap-year volunteers while stressing safety to parents. The experience usually was not dangerous but rather embodied perceived risk and danger (Simpson 2005). Most volunteers we interviewed undertook this as independent travel or volunteered through an organization with little in-country support, perhaps causing them to seek security.

In addition, almost all volunteers we interviewed mentioned price as a primary factor in choosing an organization,

whereas program cost has not often been mentioned in other studies. Differences between our results and Söderman and Snead's (2008) findings might have resulted from program differences. The programs they examined provided extensive benefits (e.g., excursions), which usually cost more money; people selecting these options might not have similar concerns about expense.⁷ Given disparities between our study and Söderman and Snead's (2008), research should continue examining why volunteers are pulled to countries and organizations and examine a variety of volunteer programs to determine similarities and differences.

Few researchers have discussed scientific reasons for selecting organizations or projects. Exceptions usually involved opportunities with certain species or providing field experience (e.g., Campbell and Smith 2005; Galley and Clifton 2004). Volunteers we interviewed emphasized the importance of biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability initiatives at the reserve. The reserve's focus on conservation can also explain why most of these volunteers emphasized conservation-related motivations for choosing the reserve over reasons pertaining to the local community, which might be more prevalent in community-focused projects. It would be beneficial to know if volunteers involved in conservation work are generally strongly motivated by environmental factors as opposed to other factors (e.g., travel, social) since some scientists call for volunteer tourists to aid with funding and contributing to conservation research (e.g., Brightsmith, Stronza, and Holle 2008). If volunteers are not drawn to projects for conservation reasons, scientists might want to reconsider using volunteers or find ways to recruit conservation-minded volunteers.

Given that volunteer tourism involves multiple groups, broadening the field beyond the individual is necessary for understanding the complete volunteer tourism experience. With this article, we followed Coghlan's (2008) lead and examined how others perceive volunteer motivations and compared how closely these perceptions match volunteer self-reported motivations. We built on Coghlan (2008) by also including pull factors and using qualitative methods. Consistent with her findings, we discovered that volunteers held a greater range of motivations than staff (e.g., managers) identified and staff underestimated the importance of most of these motivations. Unlike leaders she studied, managers and coordinators we interviewed emphasized that volunteers came for a touristic experience. In fact, managers and coordinators overemphasized self-interested motivations such as travel and neglected to mention several motivations commonly revealed by volunteers, including the project goals and mission. Given the limited studies examining manager perceptions of volunteer tourist motivations, we encourage more research on this topic to explore additional manager responses. Future research can also determine if disparities in the number of motivations mentioned by managers and volunteers occur in other samples or if this is a characteristic of our specific case. If not unique, reasons for disparities should be explored. For instance, differences in

culture or attitudes toward work could account for the limited amount of motivations listed by managers. It could also be that volunteers can list more of their reasons than an external manager can recognize; managers might be able to base their responses only on volunteer actions and the most common motivations encountered.

Future studies should also continue broadening motivation research beyond the individual, such as identifying manager motivations for running a volunteer tourism project and volunteer perceptions of these motivations. Another area of research could include community perceptions of volunteer motivations. It would also be useful to know if differences between perceptions and actual motivations influence interactions among participants and if this leads to tensions (e.g., What occurs when volunteers are motivated to help and managers perceive them motivated by travel?).

The fact that these managers and coordinators mentioned far fewer motivations than leaders who Coghlan (2008) interviewed might also result from different research methods. With the survey, Coghlan may have prompted leaders to think of motivations that they had not previously considered. By engaging in interviews and not being prompted, managers and coordinators could share only motivations prevalent in their minds. We believe future research, if possible, should include and compare both qualitative and quantitative methods.

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Notes

1. This article is written in active, first-person voice, and *we* refers to both researchers. Only the lead author conducted fieldwork and analyzed data; the co-author, her doctoral advisor, was integral in study design, writing, and editing. For readability, we use *we* when discussing fieldwork and analysis.
2. At the managers' request, we do not disclose the reserve's name or include the website to protect the identity of the reserve and staff.
3. At the NGO's request, we do not disclose its name to protect the identities of NGO and coordinators.

4. The reserve received 49 volunteers during July–September 2007 and 40 volunteers during June–August 2008.
5. Given our upcoming departure, during our last week we interviewed five volunteers who were there for less than two weeks.
6. During the exploratory study, we interviewed 11 volunteers and engaged in participant observation. Interviews were primarily unstructured; respondents discussed motivations and experiences, revealing issues to pursue in research.
7. They did not provide organization names, so we could not verify prices.

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