# Young non-institutionalised volunteer tourists in Guatemala: Exploring youth and self-development

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## Introduction

This chapter extends the research on the development of the self as an aspect of volunteer tourism experiences by presenting findings from a study of young non-institutionalised volunteer tourists in a developing country. The research builds on earlier work by Wearing (2001; 2002) and Wearing & Deane (2003) which examined the impact of the volunteer tourism experience on the volunteer tourist. In his research with Australian Youth Challenge International volunteer tourists engaged in environmentally focused projects in Costa Rica, Wearing (2001) identified self-development to be one of the outcomes reported by volunteer tourists as a result of the experience. In addition to highlighting the significance of personal development experienced by these volunteers, he also illustrated a few such experiences and classified them into four clusters of self-development. However, to further our understanding of volunteer tourism and volunteer tourists more specifically, there is a need to examine the experiences of volunteer tourists by taking account of contextual factors (Pearce & Coghlan 2008) and to explore the complexity of volunteer tourist motivation (Söderman & Snead 2008). It has also been acknowledged that 'volunteer tourism' encompasses many different types of volunteer experiences (Callanan & Thomas, 2005), and that volunteer tourists are not a homogeneous group; different volunteers or groups of volunteers seek experiences according to their personal preoccupations and ambitions (Pearce & Coghlan, 2008).

This chapter then seeks to both widen and deepen our understanding of volunteer tourists by exploring the motivations and experiences relevant to the development of the self in the context of a group of volunteers that has not received much academic attention, young non-institutionalised volunteer tourists. This group of volunteer tourists is different to most previous studies on this topic due to a number of factors: the organisation that the individuals volunteered for is a locally run orphanage in Guatemala that is entirely independent of international sending organisations (Casa Guatemala), the respondents stayed at the orphanage for relatively long periods of time (3-12 months), were aged between 18 and 25, represent a range of nationalities, and all volunteered at the

orphanage on their own. As such this (presumably less common) group of volunteers could be described as the volunteer tourism equivalent of Cohen's non-institutionalised travellers (Cohen, 1972) because they are independent of sending organisations, volunteer on their own and have committed to live and work in a poverty stricken developing country. Attempting to position this group in Callanan & Thomas' (2005) classification framework according to the 'project' characteristics, the volunteering experience at the orphanage is best described as a deep volunteer tourism project; however some of the classification criteria are debatable.

**Volunteer Tourism and Personal Development**

The literature on volunteer tourism has expanded rapidly in the years since Wearing published the first book on Volunteer Tourism in 2001. The literature now discusses many different facets of volunteer tourism, for example, volunteer tourism as a force for peace (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003), different stakeholder perspectives on volunteer tourism (Gray & Campbell, 2007; McGehee & Andereck, 2009), volunteer tourism as a sustainable form of cultural tourism (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007), a classification framework of volunteer tourism projects (Callanan & Thomson, 2005), the structure of the volunteer tourism industry (Ellis, 2003; Raymond, 2008), the relationship between volunteer tourism participation and interest in social movements (Gard McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005), highly institutionalised forms of volunteer tourism (Brown & Morrison, 2003), as well as numerous case-studies of different volunteer tourism projects. This overview of the literature is of course not comprehensive, but merely a snapshot, with the most notable omission being the chapters and articles focusing on the volunteer tourist; a topic that needs to be discussed with more than a fleeting mention. Since the early publications on volunteer tourism, the motivation and the volunteer tourists' perspective on the experience has been of great interest to researchers: in the context of 'mini missions' on structured holidays (Brown, 2005), in the context of the British Gap year (Simpson, 2004, 2005; Söderman & Snead, 2008), as a reflective study of volunteer tourism experiences earlier in life (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007), in the form of motivational research of wildlife volunteers (Broad, 2003; Broad & Jenkins, 2008), exploring the motivational differences between community and wildlife volunteers (Lepp, 2008), as conceptually focused discussions about altruism and post modern theory (Matthews, 2008; Mustonen, 2005, 2007; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003), and most extensively by exploring perspectives on the development of the self by positioning research findings in the sociology literature (Stephen Wearing, 2001; 2002; S Wearing & Deane, 2003; Stephen Wearing, DeVille, & Lyons, 2008).

Most of the authors who discuss the volunteer as the focus of their work acknowledge that volunteer tourism experiences present outcomes to the volunteers that can be categorised as personal development or development of the self. As such it is now widely recognised that most forms of volunteer tourism are not just about 'doing good for others' but also about 'doing good for self' (Matthews, 2008:111). Conversely, while recognising that benefits of a self-directed nature occur, the depth and breadth of outcomes that relate to development of the self have not been fully explored. Wearing who examined the construct of self in some depth in a variety of single and co-authored publications has contributed the best insight into this topic to date. As such, his key findings and propositions regarding the concept of self-development in the context of the volunteer tourism experience will be reviewed briefly to contextualise the research presented in this chapter. However, it should be noted that this chapter does not seek to engage in the discussion around the complex construct of 'self'; for an insightful interdisciplinary approach to this debate see Wearing & Wearing (2001).

Wearing (2001) analysed his research with Australian volunteers who had participated in a Costa Rican ecotourism project organised through an Australian sending organisation at two levels; the motivations for volunteering as well as the aspects of the experience that relate to the development of the self. The motivational categories he identified are altruism, travel/adventure, personal growth, cultural exchange/learning, professional development, the YCI (Youth Challenge International) programme, and right time/right place. Apparent from this list is that the motivations for these individuals to volunteer abroad are wide-ranging and encompass motives that relate to others as well as to the self. Wearing then narrows his focus to the aspects of the volunteer tourism experience that relate to the development of the self and formulates four clusters: personal awareness and learning, interpersonal awareness and learning, confidence, and self contentment. However, whether these interesting findings are relevant to other groups of volunteer tourists, and whether the self development aspects observed represent motivations or serendipitous by-products of the volunteer tourism experience is unclear.

The specific aims of this research then are to examine the self-development motivations and experiences of a group of young solo volunteer tourists at an orphanage in the Guatemalan rainforest (Casa Guatemala), and to explore whether a self development process is actively sought or merely a by-product of the experience. To deepen our understanding of self development, this chapter also explores the diversity and complexity of self-development motivation and experiences, and as such highlights what specifically it is that is developed or sought to be developed in relation to the volunteer self. This discussion will be contextualised in two ways. First, by exploring which

stage or 'space' in life the volunteers consider themselves to be in, as a measure of attaining whether the individuals are indeed 'youth', not just as classified by age but also in terms of the life stage 'youth'. And secondly, by establishing how the volunteers frame the 'trip', in other words what the trip represents or means to the individual.

For the purpose of this chapter, which does not seek to engage in a detailed analysis of discipline-defined terminology, the terms self-development and personal development will be used interchangeably referring to the development of the individual as opposed to the development of 'other'. It should also be noted that the term 'trip' will be used to refer to the entire volunteer tourism experience, including the time at the orphanage as well as travel before, during, or after volunteering at Casa Guatemala.

**Methodology**

To gain an understanding of the deeper-lying thought processes and motivations behind the decision to volunteer and the experience itself, semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate research method. Interviewees were recruited from a group of roughly 45 volunteers living at Casa Guatemala at the time of the research, according to their availability to participate in the project (depending on work commitments and leave arrangements) and their English language ability. The interviews were conducted in an informal face-to-face setting at the orphanage. Prior to commencing the interviews the volunteers were given information about the nature of the research and advised that the project had been reviewed and approved by a university ethics committee. A total of nine in-depth interviews were conducted with volunteers from six different countries (Belgium, Canada, Germany, Israel, UK, USA), with each interview lasting between one and two hours.

The nine interviewed volunteer tourists had all arrived at the orphanage on their own with an expectation of staying for periods ranging from three months to a full year. At the time of the interview only minor variations from the originally anticipated length of stay were mentioned. All nine were intending to travel around Central America either before, during, or after their time at the orphanage. The age profile positions the respondents in an age category that can best be described as youth because they were aged 18 (1), 20 (2), 22 (4), 23 (1) and 25 (1) at the time of the interviews. The respondents' background in terms of nationality was Belgian (1), Canadian (1), German (2), Israeli (1), US American (3), and British (1). Six of the respondents are female and three male.

**Findings**

All nine respondents had very different 'stories', both in terms of their backgrounds as well as reasons for volunteering at the orphanage. For example the respondents' culture in addition to several other contextual factors appeared to have some bearing on the findings (as suggested by Pearce & Coghlan 2008), however, to protect the respondents' identity the findings will be presented without attributing quotes to particular individuals or identifying their distinctive background. Rather, this section will build an understanding of commonalities and differences between responses and examine and illustrate the range of aspects discussed in the context of development of the individual. Initially, the chapter will present how and 'where' the volunteers' view the self in the context of their life journey, which will be followed by exploring how the nine individuals frame the trip. The examination of the respondents' narratives in the context of self-development will then be presented. This discussion will be supported by applying the four themes (personal awareness and learning, interpersonal awareness and learning, confidence, self contentment) developed by Wearing (2001) to structure the analysis and assess whether this group of volunteer tourists reports similar experiences.

**Volunteers' Life Stage**

Asked to discuss 'where' the individuals would position themselves in terms of their life journey from birth to death, in other words which life stage they considered themselves to be in, and how they would explain and characterise this stage, all nine volunteers appeared to be in a transitionary stage in life. The manners in which the volunteers described the life stage varied in terminology, including quarter-life crisis, time to live, finding identity, a time 'pre responsibilities', a time for independence, a time for liberation, etc. However, in connotation all the descriptions are characteristic of 'youth', or late adolescence as a time between childhood and adulthood (Roberts 1983), as,

> *"youth is seen as a stage in the life course where individuals have the freedom to find out about the world and themselves as part of a transition into full adulthood of making responsibilities and commitments to others"* p190 (Desforges, 1998)

The volunteers' narratives also had strong associations with Erikson's (1968) construct of psychosocial moratorium, a delay of adult commitments to 'experiment' and explore, which further supports the notion that the nine individuals presented in this chapter are young volunteers in both age and life stage.

**Volunteers' Framing of the Trip**

The interviewees were also asked what the volunteer tourism trip meant to them in terms of its significance and role in their lives. This question sought to draw out broader framing themes rather than detailed multi-motivational constructs. Apart from the clearly stated desire to help those that need help the most and to 'give back', a common theme mentioned was 'challenge', in that the experience represented an opportunity to challenge the self. Interestingly, respondents with less experience of travel abroad saw the trip as an opportunity to learn about the individual's response to the challenge per se, while those with previous overseas experience framed the trip in the context of a desire to seek out and 'conquer' new challenges in a continuous quest to "see what I am made of" and refine character traits and skills. Aspects related to the notion of challenge were also mentioned, such as the trip representing a catalyst in the desire to build greater self-confidence and self-reliance. However, other profound ways of framing the experience were also noted, such as the search to understand one's identity better by returning to the country and place from where the volunteer had been adopted. Also, a space for reflection, orientation and searching of (new) perspectives on life away from the home environment was mentioned by some volunteers. Evidence of the trip representing an opportunity to obtain cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) by collecting 'good stories' to take home was also noted. Indeed, the desire to be away from their home environment and many of the things that it represented was a key theme underlying the ways in which the respondents framed the trip in that the trip symbolised unchartered and unprejudiced space. Not only did this take on the form of a desire to 'escape' significant others (referring to people with influence on an individual's self-evaluation) and the familiar support networks available at home, but also to escape political and societal factors in search of something to really believe in. This brief insight into how the volunteers framed the trip provides a clear indication that not only the development of others but also the development of the self were indeed reasons for the trip from the outset. And the framing of the trip is consistent with the life stage discussed, in that in personal terms the trip appears to be an extension or an expression of this transitional life stage.

**Development of the Self**

This part of the interview focused on the volunteer's narratives of self development and seeks to shed light on the range of aspects that the individuals were developing as a result of the volunteer tourism experience. It needs to be noted at the outset of this section that altruism was clearly a dominant reason for the respondents to volunteer at the orphanage. While this reason also has relevance to the discussion about personal development in that altruism is regarded as a personal reward in the context of personal enrichment (Stebbins, 1996), the analysis will focus more specifically on the concept of development of the self. In doing this, the chapter does not seek to

examine the strengths and weaknesses of Wearing's (2001) classification of clusters of self-development but will instead use the framework as a means of structuring and contextualising the findings section.

*Personal awareness and learning*

Wearing (2001) describes this theme to include personal beliefs, values, abilities, limitations, and aspects of professional development. The interviews revealed the majority of points discussed in the context of self development to fall into this theme. The developmental processes discussed encompassed different levels of significance to the volunteers' sense of self, including improvement of professionally focused skills as well as very profound processes that are central to the individual's core identity.

Fostering a language skill was mentioned as one of the benefits volunteers actively sought from the experience. The language skill was seen as something that could be beneficial to the individual's employability afterwards. However, numerous aspects that are more central to the individuals' sense of self were also mentioned and will be discussed now. These aspects included the desire to both test one's beliefs and assumptions in the context of the reality of humanity and to find and embrace an activity that the individual can '100% believe in' and thus fully support.

Foster Language skill
   *"Well I really wanted to use my Spanish…Improve my Spanish"*

Test one's beliefs
   *"Maybe this is also me getting my ass kicked period, where I go out with the ideals that are bred by (university education), and get them smashed to pieces a little bit. All given breath and give them air. Kind of the real world discovery period"*

Find something to believe in
   *"I want to work in something I do believe in. Give myself completely to that….My (previous) period, with myself was the hardest time that I had, because I was doing something I wasn't 100% sure of. I had political and moral problems with it. I wasn't as happy as a person as I am now. I believe 100% in what I'm doing now… I believe more in my goals, so I appreciate more what I'm doing now and where I am, than before"*

Being more tolerant and understanding of others and the self were also mentioned. The desire to be more supportive of the self in achieving the developmental goals set in order to become the individual one wants to be were discussed as something for which the experience was intended from the outset. The other perspective offered on developing greater tolerance, framed in the context of others and self, was also valued by the individual but identified as an outcome that was not consciously sought from the trip.

### Give self more time

*"one thing I wanted to do, is give myself more time for that (personal) growth and understanding, which for me meant more time to sit and more time to read. In doing it, is what I set out to do and about two hours a day of reading, which I love, and while I'm reading all I'm doing is considering new ideas"*

### More understanding and tolerant of self and others

*"Well I'd never been a good stress taker, I mean sometimes I'm still not but I think now I've learned that ok the world isn't going to end if things don't go this way, or if I get stressed out about this, its not going to help me at all, I mean I wasn't good with that at all but now I've grown from that......I'll be a lot more open to a lot of ideas, the cultural aspect has opened my eyes as how ignorant some of the people are"*

The notion of exploring one's self in terms of identifying strengths and weaknesses was discussed by several volunteers. There was a clear sense of wanting to explore "what kind of person I am". These aspects were generally mentioned as driving forces for wanting to take the volunteer tourism trip, as evidenced in the volunteer's framing of the trip. Those that had less experience of travelling and volunteering away from their home environment were interested in self development by learning about their strengths and weaknesses, whereas those volunteers with more travel and volunteering experience away from home focused this process on exploring the limits of what they were capable of; in the words of one of the respondents "a competition against myself". The trip as an opportunity to find one's limits was an important motivation for at least two volunteers and was strongly incorporated into the travel component of the experience. They both felt that solo travel was essential to shed ones' fears and insecurities and truly put the self to the test, which relates strongly not only to the framing of the trip but also the volunteers' life stage. One of the volunteers for example intended to walk back to the US from the Guatemalan rainforest alone; a distance of about 1200km, for which the individual allowed 6-8 weeks. The other intended to hitchhike from Guatemala to the East Coast of the US before returning to Europe, by relying exclusively on hitchhiking for transport and couch-surfing arrangements for accommodation.

### Identify character strengths and weaknesses

*"to realise what I am capable of, now, because I don't know what that is. I don't know what I am capable of...before time runs out and I get involved in something that I don't want to get involved in, and that is not worth my time. So I really want to search out what kind of person I am. What kind of things I am capable of now"*

*"I think I have just figured out a totally different part of myself, a totally different part...I knew that I was really really really challenged, but that's what I wanted, that I was challenged."*

Explore depth of personal abilities and identify limits

*"I know my own limits in a lot of respects. And I know my own social limits,.. at least I'm starting to understand my own limits. I mean we never know the full potential of ourselves, what we're capable of and what we are not capable of. Where, in the situations that I have been put in, I have made it a point trying to understand what I'm doing, and why I am reacting in certain ways...I'm here, I'm getting experience, I am seeing what I am made of, and seeing what I can and what I can't do. And seeing what effect I can have on an organisation and I am gaining real-world experience as they call it...I'm competing against myself, and it's a situation where I feel that I can test my potential.'*

*"I wanted to find out if I can bear loneliness that much, I knew that I can bear it before to some extent. Like I did not have to be with people to be happy, but I did not know whether I could bear to travel alone all throughout Mexico and the United States"*

The story of one volunteer was particularly profound in terms of the relevance of the experience to the individual's sense of self and identity. The person was born in Guatemala and lived in the orphanage before being adopted and growing up in the United States, "it was the sense of always knowing that made me feel that I needed to go and search". The person's journey to the orphanage had clearly self directed motivations in addition to strong altruistic motives. As illustrated in the quote below, the young volunteer was exposed to three highly emotional experiences that had significant implications for the self, understanding identity as being of Guatemalan birth parents, the reality for children of living in an orphanage, and what it 'means' to adopt a child.

Greater knowledge of roots and identity

*"I knew It'd be emotional for me to see the kids and see Casa and just come back to a country I'd never been to but I knew I was from, 'cause I didn't know anything about Guatemala really, that there was a civil war, that I was from there and that was pretty much it. But coming back I've learned a great deal more....I know I'd adopt a child, I've always known that even when from when I was, I don't know how old, but I've always thought that that's such a generous thing for a person to do."*

***Interpersonal awareness and learning***

This theme "relates to an awareness of other people and, through this, an appreciation of effective communication" (Wearing 2001:129). As previously identified by Wearing (2001) some of the developmental motives relate to more than one of the four themes. Such a case is presented in the quote below which illustrates a concern to understand how people perceive and subsequently respond to the individual coupled with a desire to be more aware of interpersonal dynamics and understand whether the individual "treats people the right way". Characteristic of the youth stage in life, a sense of 'benchmarking' the self is also expressed.

Improve interpersonal skills

*"it interests me what other people think of me, so that I can reflect about it. Is it how they see me, or is it how I am? or why I don't like this person?...I want to find out If I am treating people the right*

*way, if I handle people the right way and here I get to know so many people. For example I now know that I have been treating some people wrong before I came here... I want to find out about what is the difference between me and other people and what similarities there are"*

A deep curiosity about different attitudes to life and the fundamentals of happiness were also mentioned as a motivation to seek out this experience. Understanding how other people live and whether the individual would and could harmonize with that life-style was also discussed as an aspect that had implications for the development of the self.

Experience other perspectives on 'life'

*"I was curious about the Lonely Plant that said that people here have one eighth of what we have and usually have to spend almost all of the money they earn to feed the family and they are still happy even though they have to struggle for being alive every day. That made me curious because I knew before that we have way too much and are used to having way too much because we have grown up with a lot in our childhood. Like I know a lot of friends that had a lot in their childhood and the only thing they do in the rest of their life is to pursue that kind of status... and I knew that I wanted to know something completely different, I wanted to know why the people here are so happy even though they don't have anything."*

## *Self contentment*

This theme is formulated by Wearing (2001) to include a firmer belief in one's self, abilities and skills. A number of the volunteers talked about the experience as helping them to achieve an attitude change, a change to how they feel and view themselves. A greater sense of accepting who the individual is and coming to terms with strengths and weaknesses was reported by one respondent, which led them to be less concerned about the opinions of significant others. Another volunteer talked about a sense of unhappiness in life and a perceived need to go on a volunteer tourism trip to fulfill a dream and overcome this sense of unhappiness. The volunteer experience was also seen as an opportunity to search for a way of applying the self in a manner which would provide a strong sense of success. To the background of a long-standing sense of failure in an academic setting one of the volunteers sought out and embraced the experience as an opportunity to apply the skills that were not perceived as valued beforehand and to thus gain a strong sense of personal success. The applied nature of the tasks that the volunteer performed at the orphanage provided opportunities to generate results that were valued crucially by the children but also by the individual, which provided a long-sought sense of success and self-worth; "feel like a successful person".

Less vulnerability to other peoples' views of self

*"I think less of what other people think. I am less occupied with other people's opinions of myself...just to not be embarrassed for anything."*

Regaining sense of happiness

*"I just wanted to be happy again, and at the end I just wanted to feel like I learned about a place."*

Searching for a sense of success

*"I really wanted to succeed at the school (tertiary level), but I couldn't, and I stuck at it for a little too long. And it really hurt. And then what really pushed me to this trip was this other school that I tried to go to.....I really enjoy really working hard (at the orphanage) and knowing that I did a really good job at that. I have felt like such a failure in the past, and I can now take life and use it however I want and know that I can be successful in some things"*

### *Confidence*

In Wearing's (2001) framework this theme includes a person's sense of confidence in view of the individual's self assessment as well as in terms of how other people perceive the individual. As discussed, there is a strong interrelatedness underlying the themes confidence and self contentment. The following quotes show this interrelatedness as confidence often has a strong bearing on contentment, and vice versa. Directly related to the framing of the trip as a challenge, several volunteers commented that they sought to develop their level of confidence and were looking to become more at ease in terms of relying on themselves in the face of challenging situations. The notion of shedding support networks, or control networks in the eyes of some, was an important component of this process; and the youth life stage. This search for developing greater confidence in the self was linked to a quest for self-reliance and establishing a visible sense of independence. Illustrated by the quotes below, confidence and the related concepts were discussed in a number of different contexts. For example, one person was concerned about a perceived lack of self-confidence that was considered a limitation in view of the individual's chosen medical career. For this volunteer the trip, in its broadest sense, was framed as an opportunity to challenge a perceived lack of confidence and thus affirm confidence in the self by meeting the challenges of travelling and working in an orphanage without a support network. Another volunteer talked about a different sense of confidence; self empowerment. For this respondent the experience represented a desired process of change that was perceived as very difficult to achieve. Hence, accomplishing the change and shedding the dreaded 'routine' provided the individual with a strong sense of self control.

Build greater confidence

*"I think I always did not have very much self-confidence ...and in my profession (medical) you need to be sure, you need to take decisions right now, sometimes in an acute situation. And if you're not sure,*

*you go maybe this may be that, but you have to be sure ...it is something that I need to be better at, I need to get better at. I think it will be until I am dead, but I think it is better now than I was before"*

### Personal empowerment

*"Like, its like feeling like if I want to make a change its my decision to make a change, now if I get bogged down into any kind of routine I'll know that I can make a change, and I'll stop the routine whereas before I suppose I didn't feel like I had the power to do that"*

Another aspect of self development discussed was fostering a sense of independence. Independence was talked about in terms of a desire to be both independent from parents as well as viewed and treated as an independent individual by parents. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, a volunteer specifically discussed that independence and a desire to develop greater self confidence were considerations when arranging the volunteer tourism experience, which motivated the individual to seek a less institutionalised type of volunteer tourism experience.

### Establish personal independence from significant others

*"earlier this year I got more and more eager to get away mostly because of the fact that I was living at home ...it wasn't really working very well, me working and me living at home. My parents couldn't, it's strange, because they couldn't see me as completely independent but I wanted to be completely independent especially after living away from them during the summer. I came back and it was all slightly odd."*

### Develop independence by avoiding volunteer tourism institutionalisation

*"In the UK there is a big industry of gap year projects where you pay a lot of money and they sort out everything for you, like flight, accommodation and a project and you go in a group of people and I really didn't like that idea. First of all 'cause they rip you off and also you would spend all your time with a group of people from your country and your not as independent, you've got everything laid out for you."*

In seeking to specifically draw out aspects of self development in the thought processes and experiences of these young non-institutionalised volunteer tourists, the research identified a number of other aspects that appeared insufficiently explored if subsumed in the four themes discussed. These aspects were also clearly concerned with the self, but had a stronger focus on the future development of the individual. These points can best be summarised under the theme 'transitional and directional development needs'.

*Transitional and directional development needs*

The points raised in this context are strongly related to the individual's stage in life as a period to explore, experiment and dream. They also resonate strongly with the individuals' framing of the trip and can thus be considered motivations for the trip rather than unexpected by-products of the experience. Several volunteers talked about the experience as a catalyst for gaining a stronger sense of clarity about 'what's next' in their life journey. This was discussed in the form of seeking clarity about the next phase in life, as well as a sense of readiness for the next life stage. The experience was discussed as important for some volunteers to reflect upon who they are, where they are in life and where they want to be. The removal of the self from the home environment and the aspects of personal awareness discussed earlier were crucial in these discussions. However, a story was also observed where a volunteer had a reasonably clear sense of what they wanted in terms of a place to life and a professional path, however, the person felt unhappy in starting on this path due to unfulfilled dreams leaving a void in person's sense of self - "*quarter-life crisis...you live in your dream stage*". The volunteer tourism experience at the orphanage in Guatemala represented this dream and thus the person felt fulfilled and 'ready' to start on the next stage in life.

Gain clarity on next phase in life

> "*that's one of the reasons why I came here, to find out what I'm going to do. Because I thought, maybe I will find it when I am somewhere else, you know…….I have drawn such a conclusion on life here, and that's really cool, I kind of figured out what I want to do and what my dreams are, you know*"

> "*No, a lot of my friends my really close friends they've all graduated and all got jobs now and a lot of them I've seen, they go into their first job and they're like, 'I hate this, I absolutely hate my first job, it's the worst job I've ever had', and in a lot of aspects that's very intimidating for me, I mean I'm jumping into that field and I want to make sure that I go into a job that I like, it's kinda like learning from their mistakes that they've made, cause they've jumped into the first job they got an offer for and I want to make sure I'm going into a field that I'll appreciate and like.*"

Gaining sense of readiness for next stage in life

> "*I can say definitely, it's the pre-step to the rest of my life. Because not only what I'm going to study, but also why I am studying it. Also what I'm going to do with it afterwards.*"

> "*I was really sad and then I realised that it was because of all these things that I wanted to do and so I wasn't happy because I wasn't doing them. But then I was making it like I don't like my job. And then I was like, do I really not like my job? And then I would realise I like those things, I just need to not do them right then*"

Aspects directly related to the development of the self in the context of pursuing or committing to a professional life path were also discussed; in the context of work with young children and becoming professionally involved in NGO work. For one volunteer the experience represented the final test to

confirm whether a passion for working with suffering children would survive the physical and mental demands of living and working in an orphanage; this test had critical implications for confirming or rejecting the respondent's tentatively chosen professional path. The other example had similarly critical implications for the volunteer, but in the context of NGO work more broadly. Both cases illustrate the importance that such an experience can have for the volunteer's professional development; undoubtedly in terms of the experience and skills gained, but crucially also in terms of critical personal decisions with long-term implications for the individual.

Confirmation for choice of work with children

> *"I was deciding do I really want to go into social work after, or do I want to go into a completely different field of work? I mean this is the test, can I really do this, do I have the will power? do I have the strength? Can I physically work with kids who I know may or may not have a future in another family"*

Confirmation for choice of work with NGOs

> *"My dream was actually to have my own NGO. So part of coming here was also to see how it works."*

## Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter has illustrated the profoundness and complexity of the self development experiences and motivations of a group of young volunteer tourists. By interviewing volunteer tourists who have largely been neglected by studies of personal development, this research has contributed both breadth, in examining young non-institutionalised volunteer tourists, and depth, in exploring the diversity of developmental processes sought and experienced, to the topic of development of the volunteer tourists' self. Framing the volunteer trip in the context of the individual's life stage added an additional layer of understanding (Pearce & Coghlan 2008) to this emerging field, as it assisted in positioning the desires, needs and experiences in that "ambiguous status betwixt and between, neither children nor full adults" p35(Roberts, 1983, p. 35). The relevance of the youth life stage as the backdrop to the motivations and experiences of these volunteer tourists may well explain why these volunteer tourists have chosen a less institutionalised form of volunteering and why they choose to face the experience on their own. The notion of challenge, personal development and life orientation are common themes in the findings presented and of crucial significance to young people in accomplishing the transition from youth to full adulthood. As the self is not static (Wilson in Wearing 2001) a continual process of change underlies the human condition and this process is of utmost importance to young people, of whom some are active seekers of personal development and self change and others are more passive recipients. A respondent who was very active and conscious in seeking personal development considered a sense of security as a significant

inhibitor to the development of the self, *"If there's one fear I have it is of security. I don't like to feel security because as soon as I feel security, I feel like I have stopped growing in certain respects"*. A similar sentiment was expressed by another volunteer who emphasized the benefit of travel and volunteering abroad in a more direct manner, *"when I'm in my home I like rot and don't do anything, but when I'm up against so many new things, cultures, people I'm just constantly realising that oh that's about yourself now that's pretty cool"*.

This then highlights the significance and important role of volunteer tourism to support and enhance some of the communities, species and environments that are most vulnerable and neglected while at the same time providing crucial opportunities for individuals and particularly young people to develop the self and explore their aspirations and direction for the remainder of their life journey, as "seeking out the new and unfamiliar and going beyond our daily concept of self is an essential step in the development of self'" (Wearing 2001:9). Both the exposure to the unfamiliar or unknown and the shedding of the safety networks and moulding expectations of significant others are commonly observed factors in this process. When considering, that the experience of 'youth' is changing as a result of continuous broader transformation in modern society (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997), new avenues of research on both self-development and youth travel are evident .

The profoundness of the developmental processes that are taking place is further support for the wide-ranging benefits of volunteer tourism. While young tourists do not always enjoy positive press coverage and public opinion (Schott, 2004) leisure and tourism are critical to the young person's personal development and sense of identity. As such, the young volunteer who went to Casa Guatemala to 'give back' and explore the person's roots to thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of the self, presented a very profound case of personal development with no hedonistic undertones. Indeed it would be interesting to examine this motivation for volunteering in greater depth; do many volunteers in overseas orphanages have a shared early childhood history with the orphanage? Similarly, what about other types of 'roots volunteer tourism' where a shared sense of identity with the project or cause plays an important role, such as in the study by Ari, Mansfeld & Mittelberg (2003).

Also noteworthy in the context of this research are the transitional and directional development needs discussed by the volunteers. While this type of non-institutionalised volunteer tourism experience would presumably be classified as project-based leisure in Stebbins (2005) theorisation of leisure as casual, serious or project-based, due to the absence of a leisure career trajectory, there

is evidence that this initially project-based leisure experience is converted into both a professional pursuit by some and into serious leisure by others.

Finally, the aim to explore to what extent the developmental processes discussed are a motivation for the trip rather than an unexpected by-product of the experience, has generated significant evidence that volunteers actively seek to develop the self as part of the volunteer tourism experience. The manner in which the volunteers framed the trip provided insight into the minds of the volunteers and thus the aspects they sought from the experience. It has to be noted that some respondents were very conscious and reflective of their self development needs and intentions, while other volunteers conceptualised their self development motivations in different contexts, or 'wrapped them up differently' so to speak, or commented that motivations focusing on the self were only becoming conscious to them while in the midst of the experience, but were subconscious at an earlier stage. There are undoubtedly also a number of self development processes experienced by the volunteers that were not intended outcomes from the experience, neither consciously nor subconsciously, as well as aspects of self development that were not discussed. While research on personal change and self development in the context of various facets of tourism has been conducted since the 1970s, more empirical work is needed to explore these concepts in the many different contexts of tourism; to examine the significance of tourism and particularly tourism by young people to personal welfare, social structures, and peace.

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