



Exploring The Expectations And Satisfaction Derived From Volunteer Tourism Experiences

By: Karla Boluk, **Carol Kline**, & Alicia Stroobach

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Boluk, K., et al. (2016). "Exploring the expectations and satisfaction derived from volunteer tourism experiences." *Tourism and Hospitality Research* 17(3): 272-285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1467358415600212>. Publisher version of record available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1467358415600212>

Exploring the expectations and satisfaction derived from volunteer tourism experiences

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The aim of this paper was to examine the satisfaction of voluntourists derived from various aspects of their trip. Framed within the Existence, Relatedness and Growth Theory, the paper examines volunteers' motivations, expectations and satisfaction based on their financial and time investment volunteering with Volunteer Eco Students Abroad (VESA), the interactions they had on the trip, and the extent to which travellers felt as though they contributed to community goals. In 2012, the researchers carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 16 Canadian voluntourists following their time in St. Lucia, South Africa. A thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, resulting in three themes: 'Evaluating Investment', 'Contribution to Community' and 'Opportunities and Reaffirmations'; sub-themes were matched with aspects of Existence, Relatedness and Growth Theory. Findings elicited several levels of expectations of voluntourists revealed through their feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. On the lowest level, voluntourists expect adequate food and water whilst volunteering. Informants highlighted the various ways they raised funds for the trip, and this impacted their level of accountability for contributing to the community. Volunteers also expect volunteer organizations to be transparent regarding the use of funds and expressed dissatisfaction when this did not occur. Volunteers anticipated a feeling of connection between the hosts and themselves and were frustrated if they felt more time could have been allotted to working with community residents. Lastly, informants expected the experience to provide an opportunity for self-learning and professional development and overall were satisfied with this element of the trip.

Keywords

Voluntourism, expectations, satisfaction, VESA, South Africa, ERG theory

Introduction

Voluntourism emerged as an alternative form of tourism (see Barbieri et al., 2012) in the 1990s. The growth of voluntourism stems from International Voluntary Services, a Non-Profit Organisation sending volunteers overseas to aid development projects in the 1950s and Earthwatch which emerged in 1971. Although a number of definitions have surfaced classifying voluntourism, Wearing's (2001: 1) is by far the

most cited: 'an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of

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society or environment'. Accordingly, voluntourism has been argued to be coupled with sustainable tourism principles (e.g. McIntosh and Zahra, 2007), and in its ideal form fostering mutual exchange between hosts and guests. Thus, voluntourism is a mechanism purporting a symbiotic relationship between resources, local people and tourists that/who could all gain from the tourism process.

A majority of the voluntourism literature supports a *different* kind of tourism and tourist, in stark contrast to mass tourism. For example, voluntourism experiences have created opportunities for those interested in 'traveling with a purpose' (Brown and Lehto, 2005) engaging in either conservation or humanitarian activities, social movement participation and activism (McGehee and Santos, 2005), nurturing transformational change (McIntosh and Zahra, 2007), self-development (Callanan and Thomas, 2004; Simpson, 2004), self-expression (Stebbins, 1992), encouraging deeper encounters (GlobeAware, 2010), enhancing global citizenship (McGehee and Santos, 2005; Morgan, 2009), and/or embodying a *good* neo-liberal citizen (Lyons et al., 2012) which supports sustainable development ideals. Such individuals are described as altruistically motivated (Singh, 2002) and willing to refl which could result in transformative learning (Knollenberg et al., 2014) opportunities for the volunteer and positive changes to the lives of communities (Singh and Singh, 2004) in the Majority World. Thus, voluntourism is positioned as challenging inequality and economic control commonly brought on by multinational companies (Wearing, 2001) through mass tourism. While voluntourism is not without its criticisms, the sustainability of the market is dependent upon the satisfaction level of volunteers. This study responds to Barbieri et al.'s (2012) call for further research investigating the satisfaction levels of volunteers as high levels may warrant sustained volunteerism. Specifically, the aim of this paper is to examine the expectations of volunteer tourists and their derived satisfaction level from volunteering.

Volunteer tourism criticism

Research in the area of voluntourism has been focused on developing definitions (e.g. Chen and Chen, 2011; McGehee and Santos, 2005; Singh and Singh, 2004; Wearing, 2001) and theoretical frameworks (McGehee, 2012), exploring motivations to volunteer (e.g. Weaver, 2015; Boluk and Ranjbar, 2014; Wearing and McGehee, 2013; Wearing, 2001, 2004), experiences (e.g. McIntosh and Zahra, 2007; Tomazos and Butler, 2008; Wearing, 2001) the benefits created (e.g. Brown and Letho, 2005; McGehee and Santos, 2005; Singh and Singh, 2004), as well as the shortcomings (e.g. Mostafanezhad, 2013; Sin, 2009).

Substantial research demonstrates that voluntourism has been recognized as a benevolent form of tourism similar to just, Pro, Poor and Fair Trade Tourism; however, researchers have begun to question this. For example, Sin's (2009: 497) study found that common motivations among the 11 volunteer tourists he interviewed were 'to travel rather than to contribute or volunteer'. Mustonen's (2005) research explores the blurred line between the altruistic intentions of voluntourists and their ego-centric motives. Coghlan (2008: 189) concurs suggesting that self-gratification is often stronger than the altruistic motives that drive voluntourism participation. Boluk and Ranjbar (2014) found that demonstrating one's ethical self to one's significant reference groups is a significant motivator for some volunteers; challenging the dominant altruistic characteristics established in the research.

A seminal paper written by Guttentag (2009) identified several *imaginable* negative impacts of voluntourism including neglecting local needs, impeding work progress and the completion of unsatisfactory work. Raymond and Hall (2008: 541) encouraged the need for sending organizations to take a more active role in 'deliberately' facilitating 'cross-cultural understanding' through 'experiential learning techniques'. However, as Guttentag (2009: 548) established, no one single formula is going to create a benign industry; 'greater awareness of the sector's possible negative impacts' is required to ensure that voluntourism projects are created in a sustainable fashion.

Dhruvarajan (2000) critically purported that voluntourism is another form of post-colonialism and therefore surfaces as an additional exploitative form of tourism encouraging dependency (Sin, 2010) and misplaced generosity (Tallantire, 1993) in the Majority World. Mostafanezhad (2013: 332) established that voluntourism 'extends imperial legacies' similar to the work of Palacios (2010) and Lyons and Wearing (2008) who put forth that power relationships and oppression can be a negative influence of voluntourists on communities. Furthermore, Guttentag (2009) questioned the reinforcement of the 'other' through the demonstration effect influencing cultural change and the rationalization of poverty that can accompany voluntourism. Recently, Smith and Font (2014) put forth that unrealistic demand-led marketing (green-washing) is the potential culprit for the negative consequences on destinations and volunteers. Earlier work carried out by Simpson (2004) argues that gap year sending organizations impose simplistic views of difference in their promotional materials which are then sold as commodities and consumed. Such criticisms demonstrate both the commercialization of the market and perhaps the superficiality of some encounters that take place in voluntourism environments.

Therefore, although voluntourists may, in some circumstances, refrain from making some environmental and economic impacts similar to the participation in mass tourism, a social impact may be unavoidable.

Despite the body of work on voluntourism's dark side, there remains a gap in understanding what drives satisfaction among voluntourists. Satisfaction levels of tourists have been linked to their motivations for the trip, as well as their expectations. Limited research has explored expectations of voluntourists excepting Grimm and Needham's (2012) research in regard to how promotional material influenced volunteers' expectations and Smith and Font (2014: 958) who quantitatively demonstrated the need for financial transparency deciphering between donations and costs associated for a volunteer tourism trip. Lastly, Andereck et al. (2012) found potential voluntourists' lack knowledge regarding choosing the right voluntourism organization in line with their expectations, including a keenness to interact with the local community and appreciating the difference in physical or emotional demands. Furthermore, there is a lack of research exploring the specific offerings provided for volunteers and their preferences, albeit Agyeiwaah et al.'s (2014) study on accommodation preferences of volunteers in Ghana who found that homestays enhanced their experiences.

Sparse research explores the satisfaction levels of voluntourists directly. Some of the motivations literature and benefits created could be interpreted as a by-product of satisfaction. One example addressing it head on, Pizam et al. (2000) discovered that the satisfaction level of working tourists in Israel was correlated with the intensity of the social interaction between guests and hosts. Coghlan and Gooch (2011) suggested a method for applying a transformational learning framework to the experiences toward increasing the satisfaction of all stakeholders. McIntosh and Zahra (2007) also found voluntourists claiming satisfying, transformational experiences. Coghlan and Pearce (2010) explored on-site, the emotions of voluntourists as an antecedent to satisfaction; they found variability in emotions connected to daily activities and the personal characteristics of volunteers.

This study extends the research on satisfaction by qualitatively exploring the extent to which travellers felt as though they contributed to community goals, and their satisfaction based on their financial and time investment volunteering with Volunteer Eco Students Abroad (VESA) in St. Lucia, South Africa. VESA works closely with indigenous communities in Fiji, Ecuador and South Africa. The organizational aim is to create lasting change. They provide one week of volunteer and one week of adventure tourism opportunities for young people between the ages of 18

and 24. The South African Program called 'Africa Unearthed' offers three distinct volunteering opportunities including construction (of houses and bathrooms), conservation (via the maintenance and rehabilitation of crocodiles and feeding/building enclosures for cheetahs and leopards), and education (of young children in English, Math, sanitation practices in a local orphanage and grade school). The adventure aspect of the experience creates opportunities for travellers to stay in traditional villages, go on Safari and surf in the Indian Ocean.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) Theory. ERG is considered one of the motivation or 'need' theories based in psychology, which are designed to explain the range of human desires (e.g. love, friendship, achievement, altruism, enlightenment, security, chocolate cake). Motivation theories are applicable in personal and professional contexts, and capture complex drivers that can both be consistent and contrary across human beings. Because feelings of satisfaction are derived from successful outcomes in meeting a need or 'fulfilling' a motivational driver, satisfaction and motivation are closely linked. The satisfaction in an experience is tied directly to one's (intrinsically and extrinsically-stimulated) motivations for taking part in the experience (Basinger and Bartholomew, 2006; Fluker and Turner, 2000) and the expectations of the experience (Andereck et al., 2012; Basinger and Bartholomew, 2006; Fluker and Turner, 2000; Knollenberg et al., 2014). Moreover, motivations and expectations are often discussed within the context of whether they are 'met' or 'satisfied' (Chen and Chen, 2011); only when a need is satisfied can a person be at a state of equilibrium (Fluker and Turner, 2000). It is our assertion that asking voluntourists about their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with various aspects of a trip provides the forum for discovering their pre-trip notions, and the responses may provide unique insight into their motivations for and expectations about the trip. By examining retrospective impressions of the trip, we can gain a more nuanced view of their satisfaction as it relates to their underlying (conscious and subconscious) motivations and expectations.

Tourist motivations have been researched for decades; some of the more prominent motivation frameworks used in the tourism literature include push-pull factors (Crompton, 1979), novelty-seeking and familiarity (Cohen, 1972), allocentricism and psychocentricism (Plog, 1973), anomie and ego-enhancement (Dann, 1977), Travel Career Ladder

(Pearce, 1982) and seeking and escaping (Iso-Ahola, 1980) among others. Many tourism motivation theories originated from psychological or socio-psychological principles, which encompass physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual essentials and desires. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) is a classic psychology theory often employed in tourism research (Kayat et al., 2013; Tikkanen, 2007; Tomljenovic and Faulkner, 2000). While not without criticism (Witt et al., 1992), Maslow's theory has been tested, adapted, and modified since its inception. The ERG Theory was proposed by Alderfer (1969) as a modification of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, reducing it from a five-stage theory to three (Table 1): *Existence* (physiological and safety needs), *Relatedness* (associated with Maslow's third and fourth levels regarding relationships), and *Growth* (related to Maslow's fourth and fifth levels regarding creativity, productivity and fulfilling responsibilities in order to build a person's self-esteem through personal achievement). The theory is less rigid than Maslow's, in that the three ERG areas are not stepped, and can be in play simultaneously. This flexibility, along with our perspective that ERG provides a more advanced understanding of the process of meeting these needs (see Table 1), was the basis for selecting ERG as our lens. Additionally, we wished to explore the applicability of ERG to the tourism context, given its scant prevalence in the literature.

Similar to Maslow's Hierarchy, ERG theory recognizes that once *Existence* needs are satisfied,

relatedness needs become more important (this is called *satisfaction-progression*). But ERG theory also includes a *frustration-regression* process in that the inability to satisfy a higher need causes frustration and a regression to the next lower need level. If the higher level need seems to be too difficult to fulfil, the person may regress to those that appear easier to satisfy. Unlike Maslow's, ERG Theory also recognizes that the importance of the three categories may vary depending on the circumstances experienced by the individual and how one perceives those circumstances. According to ERG theory, focusing exclusively on any one need at a time will not optimize effective motivation.

ERG has most often been used in leadership or management studies related to job satisfaction or employee motivation or managing change within an organization (Arnolds and Boshoff, 2002; Schneider and Snyder, 1975). Arnolds and Boshoff (2002), for example, used ERG to examine the connection of an employee's self-esteem to job performance. Their results showed that satisfaction of the *Relatedness* needs and *Growth* needs significantly influenced the self-esteem of frontline employees which influences the job performance of frontline employees. Leaders considering the implications of the theory should recognize that people have multiple needs to satisfy simultaneously. The identification of the processes of *satisfaction-progression* and *frustration-regression* offers a flexible and realistic explanation of why and how people's needs can change in varying circumstances.

Table 1. Comparison of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and ERG Theory.

Human need	Target	Process to satisfy need	Relates to Maslow's stage
Existence	Material objects (e.g. food, water, air, money, etc.)	"Getting enough is key to satisfy these needs. Existence needs may not even be noticed when there is no scarcity but set off win-lose competition when there are not enough to meet everyone's needs"	1) Physiological 2) Safety
Relatedness	Significant others (individuals or groups)	"The mutuality process consists of giving and receiving positive and negative affect and ideas. In contrast to existence needs, the process of satisfying relatedness needs is cooperative"	3) Love and belonging 4) Esteem
Growth	Concerned with ecological settings	"Individual growth proceeds in cycles of differentiation, during which people develop more complex awareness of themselves, and integration, during which people consolidate their many parts into a whole"	4) Esteem 5) Self-actualization

In relation to the current study, leaders (in this case VESA) can help provide a satisfying experience to volunteers by framing and communicating those circumstances.

ERG's application in tourism and leisure has primarily been targeted at employees and managers in hospitality (Bieger et al., 2005; Maroudas et al., 2008; Mingxian, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Zopiatis and Constanti, 2006); however, a study in China used ERG Theory as the underpinning for 'brain drain' in its rural areas (Liu and Zhang, 2008). Recently, ERG Theory has also been noted as a contributing theory in knowledge sharing (Li and Ah Pak, 2010; Van Canh and Zyngier, 2014); however, this has not yet been explored in a tourism context. For example, Hau and Kim (2011) developed a model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and ERG theory to investigate how individual motivations and social capital influence knowledge sharing behaviors in gamers. Van Canh and Zyngier (2014) employed ERG Theory, within the context of professional barriers, to explain lack of knowledge sharing of academic faculty at a Vietnamese university. Yang et al. (2011) used ERG Theory to explore customer satisfaction and desires when selecting mobile value-added services.

Because ERG is considered a theory of human behavior in its broadest form, it can be applied to tourist behavior (Blešić et al., 2008; Reisinger, 2010) as well. In their paper exploring the travel motives of tourists to Novi Sad, Serbia, Blešić et al. (2008) used ERG and Push-Pull motivations to learn more about the current tourist markets. They determined that their primary market, business travellers, were motivated by *Growth* needs and explained their findings this way: Business motives '... are referred to as status motives and they denote the need for respect, managing and prestige which create the feeling of self-confidence' (Blešić et al., 2008: 48). They continue that 'Due to professional structure of the visitors and dominant business motives it may be concluded that business people are mostly educated, well-situated and have significant status needs. It is not easy to entertain this type of visitors. Therefore, tourist workers should reconsider the level of services they offer, think about additional activities since those individuals own money but will not give it for something which is not of good quality' (48-49). They found the second largest market to Novi Sad visits to meet new people and make new contacts, which falls into the *Relatedness* needs stage. To date, this is the only study employing ERG to consider voluntourists' expectations and levels of satisfaction.

While the above outlines the extent to which ERG Theory has been employed in the literature, it indicates the gap in its application to tourists, and to

satisfaction of the visitor experience. The current study explores satisfaction levels of volunteer tourists relative to their investment, expectations and feelings regarding their contribution and personal growth. ERG Theory provides a workable explanation of the dynamics of human needs as experienced and expressed in organizational situations. The application to voluntourism provides a new context, and an innovative and dynamic framework for interpreting the tourist experience. The leadership implications can help community leaders, as well as voluntourism organizations to recognize that people have multiple needs to satisfy simultaneously.

Methods

The epistemological view adopted by the authors for this paper perceives knowledge as an attainable goal. This research is grounded in the subjective worldviews of one specific stakeholder within voluntourism; the traveller. An interpretivist approach was adopted attempting to view the world from the perspectives of the informants (Wilson, 2010). Thus, the emphasis is on understanding individual interpretations of their situation and behavior (Weber, 2005). The researchers upon making contact with a VESA manager were provided access to a database of 20 volunteers, who participated on a volunteer holiday together to St. Lucia, South Africa in 2011. Sixteen of the VESA volunteers responded to an initial email (12 females, 4 males) and agreed to participate in the study including one semi-structured interview and follow-up communication. Three phases of coding were used by the researchers for the analysis of the data. Initially, researchers 1 and 3 categorized the data (open coding); interconnecting categories were then created by all of the researchers (axial coding). Member checks (DeCorp, 2004) were carried out in this second phase providing participants access to their transcript and our analysis. Thirdly, researcher 2 in liaising with researcher 1 carried out selective coding connecting the categories to the ERG stages and the *satisfaction-progression* and *frustration-regression* elements of the ERG Theory.

Results and discussion

Of the 16 volunteers who participated in this study, 7 had never volunteered in any capacity before registering with VESA whilst 9 had prior volunteer experience (working in animal related projects, school programs, Children's Aid, city council). Several of the informants iterated similar motivations for participating on the trip to St. Lucia. Among the most common motivations was to 'try and make a difference in a community' which was cited by all of the informants in some

Table 2. Informant details.

Informant	Gender	Age	Education	Employment status
1	M	19	BCOMM Undergrad (second year)	Part-time
2	M	19	Current Undergrad (second year)	Unwaged
3	F	20	Current Undergrad (third year)	Unwaged
4	F	21	Undergrad (final year)	Unwaged
5	F	25	A-Levels	Full-time waged
6	M	23	Final year of undergrad and diploma in International Trade and Human Resource Management	Unwaged
7	M	22	University graduate	Full-time waged
8	F	20	Undergraduate student	Part-time employment
9	F	20	Undergrad third year	Unwaged
10	F	21	Undergrad fourth year	Unwaged
11	F	20	Undergrad third year	Unwaged
12	F	31	Graduated	Full-time waged
13	F	20	Undergrad second year	Unwaged
14	F	19	Undergrad second year	Part-time (full-time seasonal)
15	F	19	Student	Part-time
16	F	19	Undergrad second year	Part-time

capacity. Taking advantage of an opportunity to visit South Africa was described by several informants. Some informants discussed an element of timing in their responses such as informant 11 who said ‘I thought it was now or never’ and informant 6 who participated ‘mainly as a graduation present for myself’. Furthermore, informant 12 mentioned the collateral she would acquire from volunteering with VESA as it would be a ‘good experience to add to my resume’. Many of the motivations listed above reconfirm the findings that have been published suggesting that volunteer travelers are propelled by a mix of self-interest (e.g. Sin, 2009), professional development (e.g. Simpson, 2004), and altruistic motives (e.g. Singh, 2002).

Participants chose VESA based on price, perceived safety in South Africa, positive evaluations of VESA, and the persuasive marketing messages presented by VESA recruiters on their university campuses. Three overarching themes and several sub-themes emerged from the analysis: evaluating investment, contribution to community, and opportunities and reaffirmations.

Evaluating investment

The first theme reflects the overall satisfaction in return for the amount of time, effort, and money the informants devoted to the trip. The theme was divided into three sub-categories including: funding the trip, trip costs, and accommodation and food, positioning it

in the *Existence* and *Relatedness* needs stages of ERG Theory.

Funding the volunteer experience was elicited through part-time work during school, full-time, and/or working on holidays; seeking financial support from parents, family, or friends fundraising (four informants); savings (three informants); and scholarships (two informants). All the informants had to acquire additional funds to afford the \$1995CAD trip cost +\$1800CAD airfare (VESA, 2012); the \$3795CAD cost was well above the average price highlighted by TRAM in 2007. Nine informants felt that the cost was worth the experiences gained. Some described the cost as ‘fair’ as they assumed that the money would assist communities with required resources. Informant 14 said, for example, ‘I think the cost was reasonable. The money goes back into the community and I think compared to some other companies that have the same idea they charge a lot more’. Informant 8 also gave a positive review, ‘We did a lot and the donations made on our behalf ensure that more groups will be welcomed in the future’. This informant felt that the tangible resources provided to the community may determine if other groups will be permitted to visit in the future. As such, the financial donations were recognized as a significant aspect of the volunteering experience, and to the sustainability of the efforts in the community.

Another financial aspect was raised by informant 11 who highlighted that volunteer tourism is ‘like any

other form of tourism but better for the fact that it is a source of economic income for the locals'. Similarly, informant 12 stated that 'funds are usually raised by the participants to cover travel, living and program costs' and informant 5 suggested that some people may 'need an incentive as money is hard to come by these days, so if it is going to go toward something it should really be worthwhile and rewarding'. This latter comment underscores the need for positive incentives to encourage a particular spending pattern and behavior among tourists.

Although many volunteers seemed to return home with a positive outlook of their trip, a few participants expressed negative views. Four informants demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the cost. Informant 6 stated: 'I thought the price was quite high considering we were there to volunteer, but someone has to pay for it'. Perhaps such dissatisfaction resulted from the effort put into acquiring funds. Informant 15 expressed mixed reviews regarding the cost derived from not comprehending how funds were distributed:

The cost was reasonable but, I'd like a more detailed description of where our money is going next time, because it's obvious VESA is making a killing off this program. I'd like to know whether or not they are benefitting from it a lot, or if they are donating the majority of the money as they claim to be.

Interestingly, because of the altruistic nature of volunteering, some volunteers had an expectation that VESA had an obligation to be transparent in how funds were allocated. The fact that VESA has not been transparent in regard to how funds were disbursed may impact informants' level of satisfaction, trust for the organization, and choice to return on another trip. Informant 5 expressed the significance of volunteer organizations to demonstrate positive incentives in encouraging individuals to choose their organization. As such, it could be argued that a volunteer organization that is transparent may respond to their volunteers' interests and needs as consumers. Accordingly, volunteer organizations occupy an interesting place, as they become more commercial, there are also commercial expectations placed on them by 'consumers' who have heightened expectations. Satisfaction of the *Relatedness* needs stage depends upon a mutuality and cooperative experience. As some informants felt that VESA had not met their expectations, a violation of this cooperative nature may have occurred in the informant's mind, resulting in dissatisfaction with VESA. The ambiguity in how the funds were allocated created a tension and disconnect with altruistic motives of the volunteer tourists.

The third sub-category established the significance of satisfaction derived from the lodging and food provided for the volunteers. Generally, the informants expressed that the accommodation and food were above their expectations, although some informants stated that their expectations were not high to begin with given their understanding of the community conditions. Informant 13 stated that the accommodation provided was clean and the food 'was good enough I was hungry, so however many sticks of butter were put in my sandwich didn't matter'! In a similar way, informant 16 stated that 'the food we were provided with was safe and well balanced [...] high standards don't really go along with the spirit of volunteerism'. Seemingly, the discourses put forth by the volunteers demonstrated lowered expectations; however, five informants elicited mixed reviews regarding the quality and quantity of food provided. Informant 15 said this:

The food was not good and it was very disorganized [...] there was not enough. No fresh water was provided at times [...] and there were multiple times when certain individuals did not get lunch, and two nights I recall people not getting dinner, or not getting enough dinner including myself.

Generally, expectations were lowered by volunteering in a resource constrained community; however, concerns regarding the quality/quantity of food could potentially influence the overall satisfaction of the volunteers, and perhaps have an influencing role in others choosing VESA. ERG Theory maintains that each type of need will vary among individuals depending on how the individual perceives their circumstances. Because informants expected the food and accommodation to be modest, most were somewhat satisfied. However, this issue underscores an action point for VESA to communicate such circumstances ahead of time as a way to help provide a more satisfying experience to volunteer tourists.

The *Evaluating Investment* theme elicited the funding efforts put forth by VESA volunteers. Accordingly, fundamental expectations were made explicit among the informants resulting in a critique of the organization. As such, a clearer understanding regarding the distribution of funds was strongly encouraged by volunteers. This argument strengthens Smith and Font's (2014) quantitative findings proving the need for financial transparency deciphering between donations and costs associated with volunteer tourism, and corresponds with feelings of *Relatedness* to both the community and to VESA. The other main criticism highlighted was the amount of food and water provided. The second theme emerged from informants'

overall impressions of their time volunteering and their general perception of their contributions.

Contribution to community

When asked why informants perceived St. Lucia to be in need of volunteers, the most common responses were related to poverty (informants 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14), the prevalence of HIV/AIDS (informants 7 and 8), malnutrition (10) and a lack of hygiene (8). As informant 1 put it, 'although South Africa is a country that is better off than most African nations it still shows a wide disparity between the rich and the poor. The region that we visited is far enough away that it may not receive adequate attention from authorities in the country'. Some volunteers commented on the value that their money brought to the community. For example, informant 14 said 'with the money the volunteers bring in, and their labour, it is a cost effective way to see results quickly and really gives the community what they need the most'. In terms of the labour provided by the volunteers, informant 3 said this: 'they needed the extra hands to jumpstart an initiative that would provide the community with the things that would fulfil their basic necessities'. Similarly, informant 6 referred to the opportunities volunteer organizations were able to cultivate by 'injecting capital and free labour into the community to help raise their quality of life'.

Most informants thought that they made at least a small difference, such as informant 1 who said: 'I know that the number of people I personally helped out was small in numbers when comparing it to the country as a whole; however, I do feel as if I need to start somewhere'. Informant 14 agreed: 'I do think that I made a difference. It was the little things like feeding the children, or helping students with homework, or building an enclosure and planting a garden that gave me the feeling that the work I put in was making a difference'. Thus, many of the informants described making some form of positive contribution within the community; however, some informants seemed hesitant at times insisting that their contribution was 'small'. Working with children and/or constructing various tangible outputs were the two areas where the informants felt they made the most significant contribution. Alderfer (1969) reminds us that *Relatedness* needs are satisfied through a cooperative process consisting of giving and receiving positive affect and ideas. The volunteers therefore not only must feel that they received something from the local residents but that they provided something as well. Perhaps this is why some of the informants did not feel 'satisfied' with what the group contributed to the community because the volunteers felt they gained more from the experience than the

residents. However, the comments regarding their interactions with the children reinforced the notion of reciprocity as an element in satisfaction, as the children visibly showed their enjoyment in their interactions.

Informant 6 questioned his influence: 'I think individually, my being there made little difference, as there would be someone else ready to take my place'. However, informant 13 said 'I'd like to hope that I did [make a difference]. I definitely played a part in a larger project' and informant 6 agreed: 'collectively, all VESA groups for the entire year made a huge impact on the community, and injected a lot of money into their economy'. Therefore, while some informants appeared to be hesitant about their individual contribution, others saw their participation as important to the overall VESA mission. In this case, the *Relatedness* needs are addressed, as the informants saw their effort associated with community benefit.

A sentiment of insecurity was commonly referred to by informants in regard to 'not doing enough' and wishing they could stay longer to contribute more. Informant 2 relayed skepticism in the sustainability of his work: 'I feel like the things we have done are more temporary. It would have been better if we made a well which would give the community clean water'. Informant concerns reinforce unrealistic expectations; such disappointment could have been a consequence of not receiving adequate pre-trip information from VESA emphasizing the level of poverty within the community and the focus of the mission. Heightened pressure demonstrated by volunteers could be a result of how they funded their trip; if they were sponsored, they may have felt a sense of accountability to their supporters. Such concerns challenge McIntosh and Zahra's (2007) notion of volunteer tourism to be coupled with sustainable tourism principles. Here, 'sustainability' is challenged beyond the interactions between peoples, e.g. the host community and volunteers; it concerns the tangible contribution of the volunteers in the community. The final theme reflected the participant's most satisfying experiences and the benefits derived from them.

Opportunities and reaffirmations

The most satisfying experiences described were a result of the interactions informants had with locals, particularly the children at the orphanage. Many comments reflected the notion of 'self-learning' and feelings of tolerance and humbleness.

For some informants, it was hard to choose a 'favourite' experience. Informant 14 explained: 'I loved all of it including the construction, planting and covering the garden, working with the cats and the crocs was phenomenal and the children really are

the greatest'. Several others made clear reference to their interactions with the local people and children. Informant 8 reflected: 'working with the kids was so gratifying' and informant 4 elaborated 'I enjoyed interacting with the children at the orphanages and forming connections even though for the most part, we didn't speak the same language'. Further, informant 8 described her adoration for animals when she explained 'I'm an animal lover I really loved working with the large cats'. Some of the informants' *Relatedness* needs were met through the interaction with the community adults, children, and wildlife.

Learning and attempting to understand South African culture was a critical element of the experience. This was best said by informant 6: 'the best part was speaking with the locals. It was beneficial to better understand how they live and how they would like to live'. This is similar to the findings of Blesic et al (2008) in their study of motivations of tourists to Serbia. Additionally, it is illustrative of the *Growth* stage in ERG Theory, where individuals have a heightened awareness of themselves as complex beings, and where they negotiated how they (and others) fit into a complex world.

The time spent in South Africa created a space for reflection and personal development, resulting in an element of appreciation for living in a country (like Canada) that has access to resources, as well as a humbling experience recognizing the different meanings of possessions for South Africans and Canadians. A sense of appreciation emerged as a central concept for five informants. Informant 6 for example stated that 'there are many small things that I do not take for granted anymore such as drinkable tap water, I never used to drink tap water before, but now I refuse to buy bottled water. I also do not take hot water for granted and keep my showers to 5 minutes or under'. Such examples demonstrate the effect of volunteer tourism which has resulted in positive behavioral change. A comparable example was expressed by informant 1: 'I am aware of how lucky I am to be living in Canada and believe it has made me a more humble person'. Thus, as a result of volunteering away from home, participants realized a reality much different to their own which for some has resulted in a more sustainable lifestyle.

Volunteering in South Africa taught four informants to consider their judgements. Informant 4 stated: 'I realise more that when bad things happen to me, there are people who are going through a lot worse and are still happy. They were very independent and able to have fun without many toys at all'. Such sentiments were similarly reinforced by informant 2:

It made me consider how there are those who can be happy living a simpler life. I realized it does not make sense to compare your own life to theirs because what

they have for themselves, they may believe is sufficient. We live in two very different worlds in which I can't judge and say mine is any better than theirs. They may still be much happier than I am.

Informant 8 reflected on how the trip has helped her grow: 'I would say I am much more charitable and think of others much more [now]. I'm better at not judging as quickly and being aware that everyone has individual circumstances'. Informants stated that their time volunteering altered their outlook on their own life and the lives of others. Personal growth was referred to by eight informants. For instance, informant 9 said: 'I realized on the trip that the path that my life is going in is the right one for me and I know without a doubt now that this is what I want to do'. Reaffirming careers was also significant for informant 9 who confirmed her desire to pursue becoming a zoologist. Such findings endorse Simpson's (2004) research regarding the importance of a volunteering experience on one's career choice or confirmation of one's choice.

Confronting challenge was established by informant 11 who articulated that volunteering abroad was a chance to step out of her comfort zone:

It opened my mind, made me think about things totally differently. I was a shy person didn't have much confidence and all the experiences and people I met along the way definitely helped with that. To be honest, I was seriously surprised when I actually got on the plane heading for a place I've never been, with people I've never met, let alone talked to I never thought I would ever do that.

Correspondingly, informant 8 said, 'I benefitted a lot from this experience! I'm a different person now. I feel good every day for what we did. I also got to go to my dream location which was incredible at such a young age. I am more comfortable traveling now'. Such sentiments demonstrate the potential positive impacts of volunteer tourism for satisfying *Growth* needs, and in particular, personal development, opportunities for self-realization, reflection, one's self-confidence and independence specifically in the context of travelling. Thus, volunteer tourism for some provided a resounding sense of satisfaction. The notion of satisfaction expressed here is contrasted with some of the sentiments expressed earlier regarding the significance of their contribution to the community. Accordingly, it seems as though volunteer participants will perceive their level of contribution differently based on their previous experiences, knowledge and expectations, a premise supported by ERG Theory. Table 3 summarizes the major and associated concepts revealed

Table 3. Coding concepts revealed.

Major categories	Associated concepts	Connection to ERG Theory
Evaluating investment	Acquiring funding for the trip (means procured)	N/A
	Trip costs: price point/ inclusion of donations ^a	Relatedness (+)
	Trip costs: transparency of how funds are used by VESA	Relatedness to VESA (-) ^b
Contributing to community	Satisfaction with accommodation and food (relative to cost)	Existence (-)
	Overall impressions: St. Lucia was in need of volunteers	Relatedness (+)
	Overall impressions: Contributions were small	Relatedness (+/-)
	Overall impressions: Contributions were moderate/sizeable	Relatedness (+)
	Overall impressions: Didn't do enough	Relatedness (-)
Opportunities and reaffirmation	How they perceived the residents received them	Relatedness (+/-)
	Most satisfying experiences/ benefits: general	Relatedness (+)
	Satisfying experiences/ benefits: interactions with community members	Relatedness (+)
	Satisfying experiences/ benefits: interactions with wildlife	Relatedness (+)
	Satisfying experiences/ benefits: learning culture	Growth (+)
	Space for reflection and appreciation	Growth (+)
	Personal change and revelation	Growth (+)
	Challenge/ stepping outside comfort zone	

Note: the '+' signifies an overall positive feeling and the '-' signifies an overall negative feeling of informants.

^aThis concept also relates to the major category Contributing to Community.

^bIn this instance, Relatedness refers to the relationship with VESA. In all other cases, Relatedness refers to the St. Lucia community.

through data analysis, along with their association with ERG Theory.

Satisfaction–progression and frustration–regression

The concepts of *satisfaction–progression* and *frustration–regression* are a hallmark of ERG Theory, and thus we wished to explore the presence of each within the data. Evidence of *satisfaction–progression* and *frustration–regression* is found in each of the informant's comments; however, because of the dynamic and contextual nature of feelings, and the fact that interviews were conducted after the trip versus in situ, we remind readers of the exploratory nature of this lens to the current study and suggest deeper inquiry into this phenomenon. We have illustrated the manner in which informant 14 experienced *satisfaction–progression* and informant 15 demonstrates *frustration–regression*.

Informant 14 was generally very positive about her experience in St. Lucia. She expressed very little dissatisfaction within the *Existence* and *Relatedness* stages, and was able to experience personal growth.

Existence

I'm a really picky eater, but their food was fantastic! And I have to say the hostel we stayed in was awesome! I hate spiders and there were a lot. And the pesky fire ant bites. Other than the bugs, I have no complaints.

Relatedness

I do think that I made a difference in the Duku-Duku community. It was the little things like feeding the children, or helping students with homework, or building an enclosure and planting a garden that gave me the feeling that the work I put in was making a difference.

I benefitted from the amazing bonds of friendship that I made and I learned a lot about how people interact on a global scale.

Growth

I changed my outlook on life. The way I approach situations, even if they are small day to day choices, I take the more challenging route and I know what I want to get out of life.

Informant 15 found the food and accommodations to be lacking. Additionally, her expectations of working at the local school were not met, severely limiting her *Relatedness* needs. No statements in her interview transcription indicated identification of *Growth* experiences, suggesting that her frustration in the first two levels of ERG prevented *Growth* from occurring.

Existence

I myself was even cooking food at the hotel on the reserve, and there was not near enough. No fresh water was

provided there, and they refused to buy a case. As I mentioned, VESA is making a lot of money off this program, there's no denying that, and they need to make sure that EVERYONE is well-fed. There were multiple times the second week when certain individuals did not get lunch, and 2 nights I recall people not getting enough dinner.

Relatedness

The overall disorganization of the trip [was disappointing], for instance, my group was never given any time to teach as we were supposed to. VESA was unaware that school was closed on Fridays. This is something they should've known ahead of time. We were then told to engage in double the construction, which I didn't mind, but I also didn't find fair as I spoke to many other individuals who absolutely loved the teaching part. One of the main reasons I wanted to go to Africa was for the children, and I definitely feel as if I missed out on that.

Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to examine the expectations of volunteer tourists and their derived satisfaction level from volunteering. The results illustrated that voluntourists have expectations and the delivery of such services have not entirely responded to their needs as paying customers. The satisfaction of the voluntourists was affected by multiple internal and external forces, but ultimately ties back to their expectations and/or needs. According to ERG Theory, 'getting enough' is key to satisfy *Existence* needs. The *Existence* needs were noted by volunteers when the quantity of food and/or water was limited (or absent), or when they criticized the lack of transparency regarding the cost of their trip. Our research provides qualitative support to Smith and Font's (2014) quantitative finding encouraging financial transparency deciphering between funds associated with donations and costs of the trip. In this case, VESA would benefit by increasing the transparency of its supply chain in its marketing materials, or at minimum pre-trip information to those who book and to the communities in which they work. One of the impetuses for demanding financial transparency (by four informants) was a consequence of the sweat equity carried out by the volunteers in order to fund the voluntourism trip (e.g. part-time or full-time work, fundraising/donations (from family or friends), savings and scholarships)). The lack of transparency regarding the disbursement of money impacted some of the volunteers' satisfaction levels as they questioned their trust in VESA. In conjunction with limited or not enough food and/or water, this can significantly

impede the satisfaction level of some of the voluntourists, potentially hampering their intent to return on another trip with VESA, and/or affecting how they represent the organization through word of mouth. All of the aforementioned factors could have an unfavourable impact on the sustainability of the voluntourism industry and specifically VESA as a sending organization. As such, the authors encourage further research responding to Barbieri et al.'s (2012) initial call for research exploring the satisfaction levels of voluntourists to support a sustained voluntourism industry. Efforts to improve the experience for the voluntourists should perhaps follow an assessment of how and if the local needs are being met via voluntourism; to avoid the various *imaginable* impacts outlined by Guttentag (2009) and again ensure the sustainability of the industry.

The results in this study demonstrate significant changes to one's life as a result of volunteering. Stebbins' (1992) notion of self-enrichment was apparent as informants' referred to learning not to judge and considering their use of resources. *Relatedness* needs came into play relative to interpersonal connections felt with the members of the local community and with each other. Wearing (2001) and McIntosh and Zahra's findings (2007) suggest that voluntourism can bring about a positive change in the lives of communities. Even though the research found that informants had mixed reviews on the *difference* their volunteering made, they agreed with the positive impact that their contributions were having on the community, satisfying to some level *Relatedness* needs. Finally, *Growth* needs of the voluntourists were addressed as they had time to reflect on internal changes felt as a result of the trip. To satisfy *Growth* needs, individuals must have the time and space that can foster an awareness of themselves, including the integration of their various selves into a whole, and how they fit into the world around them. As the volunteer tourists reflected on their personal growth, feelings of appreciation, perspective on life's challenges, a rearranging of priorities, and affirmation of career choice were all recounted. Ensuring time for individual reflection and small group discussion can foster a more explicit 'nurturing' of Growth-related contemplation. Additionally, formal 'interpretative' programs of the community history and culture, the needs of the community, social norms, perspectives on visitors, suggested tourist codes of conduct, would behoove the voluntourism experience.

As mentioned previously, ERG Theory implies that leaders must recognize that people have multiple needs to satisfy simultaneously. The identification of the processes of *satisfaction-progression* and *frustration-regression* offers a flexible and realistic explanation of why

and how people's needs can change in varying circumstances, and relevant to this study, how leaders (in this case VESA) can help facilitate a satisfying volunteer experience. Specifically, it was realized in this study the expectation for organizations to realistically frame and communicate the mission of the volunteer organization and remind volunteers that their contribution is part of a larger project. Further communication seemed important as volunteers felt accountable to those who helped support their trip. Perhaps a pre-trip information meeting could help to communicate the mission of the organization and help prepare volunteers. Additionally, an assessment of volunteer intentions and desired outcomes prior to the trip would provide VESA group leaders and community members a baseline of information regarding volunteer background and expectations. Had VESA been aware of the frustrations expressed by informants, representatives could have taken action to satisfy needs as problems arose in the *Existence* and *Relatedness* stages, thereby facilitating the progression to the highest stage of growth. Perhaps introducing the ERG model to voluntourists and community members would provide a mutual framework for individual, group (volunteer or resident groups), and joint (volunteer and residents together) reflection. Ultimately, our findings highlight the need for organizations to consider the dynamic nature of tourist expectations.

Our study has demonstrated the utility of ERG Theory in framing complex tourist experiences, such as the volunteer traveller. Future studies could combine ERG Theory with others such as Bles'ić et al (2008) and Hau and Kim (2011), respectively, with Push-Pull and Theory of Planned Behavior. Similarly, moderating factors such as self-esteem (Arnolds and Boshoff, 2002), social capital (Hau and Kim, 2011), and emotional variability (Coghlan and Pearce, 2010) among the volunteer tourists to see if it has an effect on the satisfaction of ERG needs. Psychographic segmentation of voluntourism may be warranted, and therefore exploratory studies in this regard are recommended. The authors call for further research exploring the motivations, expectations and satisfaction levels of volunteers as the market continues to grow and becomes increasingly competitive. In addition, we urge researchers to interrogate the sustainability of voluntourism as an alternative niche as the market grows and organizations seek competitive advantages.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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