



Motives for young people to volunteer abroad: A case study of AIESEC interns from the perspective of volunteer tourism

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Abstract

This study focuses on volunteering in the context of tourism and its main objective is to reveal the motives of students and recent graduates in voluntary projects. Qualitative research methods were used to get deeper insight and better understanding of the studied topic. This research evaluated data from semi-structured and unstructured interviews with ongoing and former interns of Global Citizen internship mediated by the AIESEC organization (students' non-profit organization). The analytical software Atlas.ti was utilized to analyse and process gained data when content analysis and open coding were applied. Results of the research show five noteworthy volunteers' motivations: travelling and leisure, experiencing new culture and people, acquiring advantage at the labour market, gaining experience from abroad, and altruism. Mentioned motivations encompass thirteen single motives. Significant prevalence of the volunteers' self-motivation over their altruistic motives was revealed. The findings of this study provide insight into volunteers' motives and a deeper understanding of volunteer tourism. Provided information can be useful for both sending and receiving/hosting organizations in terms of aiming on and selecting appropriate volunteers.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, motivation, AIESEC, volunteering, tourism

Introduction

"Why do people go far away from their homes to work for free?" Answers to this question may discover volunteers' motives for voluntary work abroad. This study aimed to contribute to previous research focused on this topic investigating the particular case in volunteer tourism. Even though there have been researches done in this area earlier (Callanan and Thomas, 2005; Esmond and Dunlop, 2004; Lyons and Wearing, 2012; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a). There are still some questions that do not have clear answers. For example, Lyons and Wearing (2012) pointed out that volunteer tourism is generally understood in an ambiguous way and can be identified as volunteering or tourism or both. One of the criteria for distinguishing between volunteering and tourism is the participants' motivation (Lyons, 2003). Another question may consider determinants of volunteers' motives, whether motives are influenced by demographic differences or if there are other variables to consider (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Therefore, investigation of volunteers' motives can contribute to the understanding of volunteer tourism. In addition, an insight into volunteers' motives can positively affect the promotion of voluntary programmes of sending organizations and help them to attract and select appropriate volunteers. At the same time, understanding of volunteers' motives can help hosting organizations and communities to decide whether to accept or refuse certain volunteers.

Volunteering

Even though volunteering has always been part of society, there are some important milestones that have been achieved in recent years. For instance, in 2001 at the 16th World Volunteer Conference in Amsterdam a document was adopted, namely, the Universal Declaration on Volunteering (The International Association for Volunteer Effort, 2016), which



describes volunteering as “a fundamental building block of civil society. It brings to life the noblest aspirations of humankind - the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety, and justice for all people” (IAVE, 2001). In the publication ‘*Dobrovolníci pro kulturu*’ (Volunteers for the culture), dedicated to the European Year of Volunteering – 2011, Müllerová (2011), defines volunteering as an intentional, freely chosen activity for the good of others done by citizens for free, when the volunteers intentionally offer part of their time, energy and abilities in favour of society. Another characteristic also considers the benefits for volunteers, which are the acquisition of new skills and gaining experience and also the personal growth of volunteers (Tošner & Sozanská, 2006). Gjuričová (2010) states that the general objective of volunteering is to altruistically contribute to the well-being of societies.

Volunteer tourism

In the text above, I have introduced the terms ‘volunteering’ and ‘volunteer’; for better understanding of the context let us have a look at the relationship between volunteering and tourism.

For an explanation of the connection between volunteering and tourism, use was made of a philosophy from Explorations in Travel portal which totally describes this theme:

Travelling is a way to discover new things about ourselves and learn to see ourselves more clearly. Volunteering abroad is a way to spend time within another culture, to become part of a new community, to experience life from a different perspective.

Every community needs people willing to volunteer their time, energy and money to projects that will improve the living conditions for its inhabitants. No one needs to travel around the world to find a good and worthy cause to dedicate their efforts to. Volunteering should be something we do as a regular part of our lives, not just when we can take a month or two off, or when we have extra money to spend on travel. Your actions are your voice in the world, saying loudly and clearly what you think is important, what you believe to be right, what you support (Exploring in Travel, 2008).

Additionally, Wearing and McGehee (2013a) consider the notion of volunteer tourism from the scientific perspective when they state that the development of volunteer tourism as a formal activity only took place about 30 years ago and the interest of the scientific community in this topic emerged only at the beginning of the 21st century (Wearing & McGehee, 2013a). However, nowadays volunteer tourism is recognized as being on the same level as alternative forms of tourism such as *inter-alia* medical tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism, dark tourism, agro-tourism, and eco-tourism and it plays an important role in tourism industry (Kotíková, 2013; Wearing, 2013). For a clear identification of volunteer tourism from other alternative forms of tourism, Singh and Singh (2004) make a useful contribution as they attribute it with the following features: sustainability, development, aid, humanity, sharing, learning, and coexistence. In addition to these features, Lyons and Wearing (2012) consider three questions that may help to understand volunteer tourism:

- 1) Is the main motive for students to volunteer abroad the idea of volunteering itself, or rather, is it in order to gain working experience?
- 2) Do the volunteer programs contribute to reduce the local problems and do these programs actually teach their participants to be more tolerant towards the different cultures and the environment?
- 3) Do the volunteers consider their voluntary activities as a work or rather adventure and entertainment?

To summarize, I will use characteristics from Zelenka and Pásková (2012) who state that participants of volunteer tourism are motivated by voluntary work for which they can get free



accommodation and/or pocket money. Volunteers can work in the manufacturing or non-manufacturing sectors all over the world, then also at the sport, cultural, and religion events, and at the places that were affected by environmental, ecological or humanitarian disasters. Furthermore, volunteer activities can also serve to enhance the environment, assist with archeological works and cooperate with foundations or NGOs, which provide educational and cultural programs. Zelenka and Pásková (2012) state that volunteer tourists are mainly young travelers for whom volunteering abroad is an opportunity to explore new countries and cultures.

Motives in volunteer tourism

This section describes volunteers' motives, which is the main focus of the objective in this research. In the characteristics of the volunteer tourism above it is mentioned that volunteers' motivation is the desire to conduct voluntary work. There might of course also be the question: What is behind this motivation? Among the researchers and the public are various debates about volunteering concerning the topics "whether self-interest or altruism" or "intrapersonal or interpersonal motives" are behind volunteers' motivation. For clarification of this matter, Callanan and Thomas (2005) defined three types of volunteer tourists: Shallow, Intermediate, and Deep motivated volunteer tourists. Shallow volunteer tourists are motivated mainly with self-interest motives such as self-development or "ego-enhancement". On the other hand, for Deep volunteer tourists the self-interest motives are not as important as the altruistic motives. Intermediate volunteer tourists stay between the previously mentioned two types and tend to focus on both self-interest and altruistic motives. Detailed characteristics are presented in the Table 1 which has been retrieved from Callanan and Thomas (2005:197). These characteristics are also supported by Wearing and McGehee (2013a). Moreover they state in their paper that volunteers' motivation has been developing throughout history from altruistic motives, which was considered to be very significant in the past, and ultimately to self-motivation which is more apparent in the present days. Likewise, Sin (2003) mentions in her research that volunteers demand the development of themselves rather than development of others.

Table 1: A conceptual framework for volunteer tourists (VT) (Callanan and Thomas (2005, 197))

	<i>Shallow VT</i>	<i>Intermediate VT</i>	<i>Deep VT</i>
Importance of the destination	The destination is important in the decision-making	Focuses on both the project and the destination	More attention is given to the project than the destination
Duration of participation	Short-term, typically less than 4 weeks in duration	Medium-term, typically less than 6 months in duration	Medium to long-term, 6 months or intensive shorter term projects
Focus of experience: altruistic v. self-interest	Self-interest motives are more important than altruistic ones	Self-interest motives are of similar importance to altruistic ones	Altruistic motives are more important than self-interest ones
Skills/Qualifications of participants	Offer minimal skills or qualifications	May offer generic skills	May offer some technical/professional skills and experience and/or time
Active/Passive participation	Tends to be more passive in nature	Mixture of passive and active participation	Tends to be more active in nature
Level of contribution to locals	Minimal direct contribution to local area	Moderate direct contribution to local area	High level of direct contribution to local area



Contrary to what was stated above, Esmond and Dunlop (2004) state in their research that the most significant motives for Australian volunteers in 2004, was their beliefs and especially the importance of helping others. Another significant motivation in the same research was volunteers' belief that, 'What goes around comes around.' The third most important volunteers' motivation was being recognized for their skills and contribution. For example, career development was ranked as the least important for volunteers (Esmond and Dunlop, 2004). In this case, we see the prevalence of altruism over self-motivation. Similarly, Stoddart and Rogarson (2004) concluded that the primary volunteers' motivation is helping others in need. This was followed by self-oriented motives that were gaining new experience, networking and travelling.

Methodology

The main objective of this research was to identify the motives of young people for participating in volunteer activities conducted within the Global Citizen internship mediated by the students' non-profit organization AIESEC. These internships are focused on the non-profit sector and enable the participants to gain international volunteer experience. The research undertaken was carried out with former participants of the Global Citizen programme mediated by AIESEC (AIESEC, 2014b). In 2014, this organization operated in more than 120 countries worldwide and involved around 100,000 students from more than 2,400 universities (AIESEC, 2014a). One of its main aims is to arrange international internships in various fields of interest for students or recent graduates. According to AIESEC (2014b) the Global Citizen programme is a program focused on arranging short 6 to 12 week intercultural internships which are usually but not always undertaken in developing countries or in social and economically disadvantaged communities.

Research methods

The aim of this study was to examine a particular case in-depth, and a qualitative research approach was employed, which was considered to be appropriate for a deep investigation of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). For the purpose of the research, both semi-structured and unstructured interviews and also the researcher's field experience were utilized and subsequently analysed.

Individual interviews and interview framework

Qualitative research methods enable individual examination of each participant and the acquired complex data in the context of the topic. The interview framework was set up based on the results of preliminary literature review and the researcher's experience gained during his own participation in the same type of voluntary project that was undertaken by all the respondents. The following four themes were chosen for the interview: motivation for undertaking a voluntary project; information gained before the project was undertaken; the connection between the project and the field of study; and the benefits of the project. Specific questions related to each topic area were asked. The aim of the interview framework was not to follow the questions rigidly, but rather to use them as the main starting points and simultaneously as the boundaries, which demarcated the research topic. The task for the researcher was to react on the answers of the respondents, to ask appropriate additional questions, and to follow the main themes of the interview. The interview framework is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Interview framework

<p>MOTIVATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why did you decide to undertake development internship?• What made you work without salary as a volunteer?• Was a lack of money a barrier for you?• Why did you choose AIESEC for your volunteer internship? (Did you consider any other organization?)• How did you choose the focus of your volunteer internship?• Was there any aim you wanted to achieve during the internship?• Did you have any expectations about your free time during your volunteer internship?• Did you stay in the host country after you had finished your volunteer internship? <p>INFORMATION BEFORE INTERNSHIP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where did you get the information about your internship from?• Who had the influence on you while you were making decision to go or stay?• Did anyone dissuade you from going volunteering abroad?• Was AIESEC support sufficient?• What scope of work did you expect from your internship? <p>CONNECTIONS TO STUDIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did you consider your field of study while deciding your volunteer internship focus?• Was there any problem to undertake during your internship regarding your study duties? <p>BENEFITS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What did you get out from this volunteer internship?• Is there any change in your personality caused by your experiences from your volunteering?• What influenced you most during the volunteering?• What did it mean for you to work for free, as a volunteer?• Was the undertaken internship most beneficial to you or the host community?• Did you get what you expected to? <p>MAIN ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was this your first volunteer internship?• What benefits do you see in volunteering?• Would you again go abroad as a volunteer?• Would you recommend volunteering to your friends?• Would you recommend AIESEC?
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Selection of respondents and their profile

The main criterion for the selection of respondents was participation in the volunteer project called Global Citizen (GC) internship provided by AIESEC Czech Republic in 2012 and 2013. The other criteria were based on the conditions given by AIESEC for the applicants to undertake the internship. These criteria were: the applicant must be a college or university student or a graduate no more than 1.5 years after graduation; they must pass the selection process where the main emphasis is on English communication skills.

The researcher was also one of the participants of the same internship, therefore he had access to the AIESEC database which in 2014 included list of 281 GC internship participants who met the conditions for this research. Ten people for the interviews and ten alternate respondents were randomly selected. Finally, the interviews were conducted with 8 interviewees.

All interviewees were full-time students in the Czech Republic at the time of their internship, which was undertaken during their holiday periods.

Table 2 provides details of the participants who participated in this study. For the ethical purpose, all respondents are presented anonymously and their names are replaced with signs P1 – P8. Participants were free to pull out of the study at any time and were in no way compensated for their participation. They were treated respectfully and their consent was officially obtained.



Table 2: Participants' profile

<i>Participant/sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Study level</i>	<i>Previous volunteer travel experience</i>	<i>Duration of the trip</i>	<i>Destination of voluntary internship</i>
P1 / female	21	Ukraine	Un. Student	No	6 weeks	Serbia
P2 / male	23	Czech	Post. Student	Kirgizstan, Ukraine	8 weeks	South Korea
P3 / female	24	Czech	Un. Student	Serbia	8 weeks	Italy
P4 / female	21	Czech	Un. Student	No	7 weeks	Russia
P5 / female	24	Czech	Post. Student	No	7 weeks	Turkey
P6 / female	25	Czech	Post. Student	No	9 weeks	Vietnam
P7 / female	27	Czech	Ph.D. Student	No	7 weeks	Taiwan
P8 / female	22	Slovakia	Post. Student	No	6 weeks	Turkey

Interviews conducting

The interviews were conducted from March 27 to April 7, 2014 mediated by software for internet audio/video communication. Eight interviews were meticulously conducted with an average duration of 37 minutes each. During these interviews, the researcher was following a prepared interview framework. The respondents knew the topic and the purpose of the interview from earlier email communications. All respondents agreed with the recording of the interview and to the researcher using it for the intended research purpose.

Using internet voice call software was acceptable for all respondents and they did not see any barrier or limitations in using it during the interviews. The reasons for distance interviewing through internet calls was the time and place flexibility for both the researcher and the interviewees. The fact is that there was an absence of face to face contact but according to Carter (2014) this kind of interviews does not affect building trust between an interviewer and the interviewees. Additionally, it is more comfortable for the interviewees because they can freely choose the place for the interview.

Data processing

For data processing, it was deemed necessary to transcribe all recorded interviews. The analysis was carried out using software ATLAS.ti for qualitative data analysing. The researcher conducted the inductive content analysis using an open coding method. This is the first and basic step of data processing which is focused on marking and categorizing individual concepts through careful study of data (Strauss & Corbinová, 1999). Category constructions are used for classifying and sorting the collected data. According to Hendl (2008), designed categories present generalizations based on the individual connections in the content of interviews. After this process it was possible to interpret collected data.

During the data processing and interpreting procedure an *introspective method* was employed as well, which is based on the researcher's personal knowledge and experience gained in the specific surroundings or social processes (Čihovský, 2006). This was reached by the fact that the researcher was a participant of the same type of internship as all his interviewees.

Findings

The findings were drawn out from the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews with the respondents who participated in the voluntary internships mediated by AIESEC. The framework of the interview was focused on the four main themes: Motivation for the voluntary



work; Information before the internship; Connection between study and the internship; and finally, the Volunteer's benefits from the internship.

Volunteer motives for project abroad

The main objective of this research focused on volunteer tourists' motivation. This domain is very extensive and contains wide range of data. Due to that fact, it was useful to make different categories for better clarity. Regarding the respondents' responses this topic was divided to these five sub-topics: *Altruistic motives; Travelling and leisure; Experiencing new culture and people; Advantage at the labour market; New experience from abroad.*

Altruistic motives

The investigation revealed that this motive is very important for only one of the eight respondents. Respondent P6 said: *"It seemed to me that it is good that I can help people who are living in worse living conditions than I do."* Another response of the same respondent (P6) was: *"The next reason was that I wanted to be a volunteer and to do something meaningful and to help someone."* For the next three respondents, this motive of altruistic behaviour was only a secondary consideration. They mentioned it as they knew that they will contribute to a good thing, but they primarily expected some sort of benefit for themselves. For example, one response was: *"It was secondary for me. I didn't go there because of them but because of me... But, later I was also considering what I can offer to them as well (P5)."* In the rest of the interviews, the altruistic motives were mentioned very rarely, and if so, these were not important motives for the respondents. From these findings, we can conclude that the motivation with the altruistic motives, for the respondents except one, was not a very important factor.

Travelling and leisure

In contrast with the previous motive, travelling and leisure were the strongest motives which resulted from the interviews. The word 'leisure' is understood by volunteers as the spending of their summer break in an attractive and novel way. We can summarize the interviewees' responses related to travelling and leisure into the following main statements: "I wanted to enjoy my holiday." "It was a good way how to spend holiday." "I wanted to break away from school." "I wanted to go abroad and I love travelling." For example, the answer given to the question: "Did someone else motivate you or had any special influence on you while you were deciding whether to go or not to go?" was this: *"No, I really wanted to go somewhere for the holiday. I really love travelling. I like languages, meeting new people, so it was great opportunity for me to go somewhere for the whole summer holiday (P2)."* The two most frequent motives were travelling and not to waste the summer holiday by simply sitting at home.

Experiencing new culture and people

Motives included in this category relate to the authentic experience of spending time in unknown environment. Getting to know a new culture and people was also a significant motive for all the interviewees. We can say that from this trip they were expecting to become a part of the local culture, to meet new people, to make new friendships and to feel the authenticity of all those aspects. Respondent P5 stated: *"The main reason for me to go is to see and understand how it is going in different culture. How it is in other countries, whether it is Turkey, Indonesia or Kenya..."* Another respondent answered: *"I had a plan to try get involved in to that culture as much as I can... so I was most looking forward to experience*



new culture and this desire was fulfilled (P1).” One of the interviewed volunteers, P4, who went to Russia, was also motivated by expectation of experiencing new culture but the internship did not meet her expectations. She said: *“...mainly I wanted to experience the change of the culture and I am such a gourmet, I like tasting food but there was nothing to taste... so I wouldn't mind to go for example to China or Kenya next time because of this (P4).”* Two other interviewees, confirmed the motive of experiencing new culture stating that: *“It is very different when someone goes travel somewhere alone, it might be fine, but I was attracted to get inside into the culture (P7).”*; *“...if you travel just ordinarily you usually don't have any relationship with those people... and you won't get know how it really works in that country... While this [voluntary internship] you live in that country, see those people, live there longer, so you will get to know it (P2).”* The last respondent, P8, is motivated to go volunteering on the next internship to Taiwan or Brazil because she is interested in their culture and the way the people live there.

Advantage at the labour market

The meaning of this category is related to a sense of motivation associated with learning new skills and improving current expertise. Based on the information gained during the interviews we can positively say that the most significant motive from this category was to improve volunteers' language skills. For all of them, improving their communication in English was important and for two of them it was the Russian language as well. Interviewee P4 was deciding between projects undertaken on Taiwan or in Russian and finally she chose volunteering in Russia because of the language aspect. Another respondent P5 wanted to improve her English because four years earlier, she studied the language, but since then she forgot a lot of it and this type of voluntary internship offered a good opportunity for her English language improvement. For the respondent P2, who already had been on three voluntary trips, the motive of language improvement was very significant too, as he said: *“For sure I was expecting that language. From the beginning, it was English and then in the Ukraine I have also learned the Russian language. Then in Kyrgyzstan I have said to myself that is great I can practice this Russian language.”* It was also mentioned that some of the volunteer tourists wanted to improve their soft skills such as teamwork, presentations and problem-solving.

Regarding to gaining professional skills and knowledge it is not possible to draw clear conclusions because the answers were very varied. For some interviewees, it was an important motive but for some of them it was not. For respondent P2 soft skills improvement motive was not important because as he said: *“I can improve my soft skills at home and I don't have to go volunteering because of it (P2).”* For another respondent P7 it was important to volunteer in a different area than was her field of study, as she said: *“I was attracted by that I can change the scope of my measure... and I wanted to experience something totally different where I don't have qualifications.”* For the rest of the volunteers these motives were related to advantage at the labour market and were more or less important. Interviewee P3 said: *“I chose project focused on project management because I study economic studies, so that experience might be useful for my studies.”* Respondent P5 mentioned: *“I study teaching, so I wanted some voluntary project related to it.”*

One of the reasons, for the respondent P6, to choose certain volunteer internship was her thesis orientation which was focused on relations between Czech Republic and south-east Asia, that is why she chose volunteering in Vietnam. There was also another respondent P8 for whom the motive of soft skills improvement was significant in the process of selecting a certain type of volunteer internship. However even if most of the reactions related to the association between field of study and the focus of the internship, any of the interviewed respondents did not have their voluntary internship acknowledged by their university as the internship compulsory for their study program.



Gaining experience from abroad

For five of the eight interviewees, the most important motive was to gain the experience of living abroad. For example, respondent P4 said: *“I wanted to try to survive for six weeks somewhere abroad alone [without family or close friends].”* Another volunteer P3 said: *“I wanted to experience something new... and try to live in a foreign country.”* Next respondent P2 who has undertaken already three voluntary trips said about the motivation of the first trip this: *“It was interesting for me and I am such a person who doesn’t like sitting at home, so I said to myself why not to try it? So, I went...”* Another respondent P8 had a similar reaction: *“...new experience and I didn’t want to stay at home.”* For the respondent P1 who was the member of the sending organization it was not that much important to gain personal experience of living abroad as to try the product of the organization which she was promoting. For the three remaining respondents, this motive was not significant. This attitude was affected by the fact that they already had the experience of living abroad before. On the other hand, for the respondents who went abroad for the first time, and who were alone without family or friends, this motive was very strong and challenging.

The single motives which came up as important considerations from the interview findings are presented below in the Table 3. They are sorted out by the relevance given to them by the interviewees. The first column on the left side shows the category of motivation and the motives are then sorted from the left, from the most significant to the most insignificant.

Table 3: Volunteers’ motives

	<i>Most significant</i>	<i>Very significant</i>	<i>Significant</i>	<i>Not significant</i>
Altruistic motives				To do something meaningful for people To contribute to a good thing
Travelling and leisure	Enjoying the holiday in an attractive way Travelling / not wasting time with sitting at home		To have a rest from school	
Experiencing new culture and people	Experiencing new culture	Making new friendships	Experience the authentic way of living in foreign country	
Advantage at the labour market	Language skills improvement (English, Russian)	Connection of the field of study	Soft skills (presenting, communication)	
New experience from abroad			New experience with travelling Experience in becoming independent from family	



Conclusions

Travelling and helping others is a natural phenomenon that is associated with people since time immemorial. Volunteer tourism, by contrast is an area only three decades old, and people are gradually getting more and more involved in it. In volunteer tourism the following aspects are generally involved: sending and receiving organizations (usually NGOs), governments, volunteers (tourist participants), and academics and researchers.

The main objective of this study was to explore the motives of young people for voluntary activities undertaken within Global Citizen internships mediated by the AIESEC organization. Based on the interviews analysis supported by literature and the researcher's experience from the field, there were five specified significant areas of volunteers' motivation which include: *altruistic motives, travelling and leisure, experiencing new cultures and people, the advantages of the global labour market, and the gaining of new experiences from abroad.* During the data analyses, the different motives were revealed from each above-mentioned category. Based on these findings we can say that there is strong prevalence of the self-interested motives over the altruistic motives. Thirteen different motives were uncovered including : travelling - not wasting time by sitting at home; enjoying a holiday in an attractive and pleasing way; experiencing new cultures; improving language skills (English, Russian); making new friendships; connecting with the field of study; experiencing the authentic way of living in a foreign country; practising soft skills (presenting, communication, etc.); new experiences linked with travelling; experience in become independent from one's family; rest from school; to do something meaningful for people; to contribute to a 'good thing'.

The results from the study provide insight in volunteers' motivation to get involved in volunteer programs. This may hopefully facilitate a deeper general understanding of this form of tourism and why it should be undertaken if an opportunity arises.

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