ABSTRACT

A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON VOLUNTEER TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Erika Denise Nelson

Since 1994, South Africa has become a major destination for volunteer tourism, an international phenomenon combining post-modern paradigms of civic engagement and alternative travel. Organizers claim that such service establishes reciprocity in traveler-host relations, transcends the impersonal nature of mass tourism, and contributes to sustainable development. This thesis draws from interviews and participatory methods at three case studies to evaluate these assertions from the community perspective. Results reveal that counter to popular assumptions, NGOs, providers and volunteers often fail to address local needs, contribute to poverty alleviation, or empower host communities. Unprepared travelers can inadvertently undermine local control in a way that perpetuates existing power structures. While the combination of travel and service has the potential to be transformational for both volunteers and South African communities, an elemental change in approach and priorities is needed before the goal of a new era of solidarity, service and post-development can be realized.
A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON VOLUNTEER TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Faculty of Miami University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Geography

by

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Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Thomas Klak for welcoming me into this program and especially his unwavering enthusiasm for our shared interests. I hope we can continue to work together. A special thanks to Dr. Charlie Stevens for encouraging me to explore the South African stories and for providing thoughtful and sensitive feedback along the way. I am grateful to Dr. Danielson Kisanga for recognizing my alliances early on and contributing his views on African history and development.

The Geography Department at Miami University for research and educational funding: Dr. William Renwick, Dr. Jerry Green, and especially Dr. Ian Yeboah have provided valuable contexts for this project. Debbi White, as always, holds the department together. In South Africa, Dr. Christian Rogerson at the University of Witswatersrand for his support and encouragement.

I am continuously grateful to every member of my family for their faith in me. Each of them has contributed knowledge and guidance that help to make me who I am. I have done my best to reflect these belief systems and social commitments in this work.
DEDICATION


To Steven for always holding my hand.
PROLOGUE

In 2001 I led a group of young people on a volunteer service trip to Ghana where for three weeks we worked at an orphanage. I was deeply moved by the people there, and their enthusiasm for our labors. But I was equally unsettled by wastefulness of the tasks we were performing, such as repainting classroom walls that had just been painted by the volunteers on the previous trip cycle. A few months later I moved to South Africa to become a Volunteer Development Manager and Trainer for an international non-profit in Johannesburg. It was a dream-come-true to return to the country I so loved for a job that expressed my commitment to service and community development.

It was through this volunteer work that I first heard about a rural development project that had received awards for social entrepreneurship. Encapsulating every one of my interests, this small community and school near Rustenburg had established permaculture ‘eco-homesteads’, trained local Tswana people to deliver workshops on gardening, composting, designing and selling herbal products, and had devised its own natural building technique to address the housing shortage. At an awards dinner, I was introduced to the founder of this private project, which led to my being offered the position as manager beginning in February 2004. My role was to fundraise, coordinate functions, oversee projects, including the hospitality and herbal businesses, provide interpretive site tours and manage payroll and supplies.

Over the first few months an American student came to complete a Master’s Degree in natural building. Because I was living there, I shared the reactions of the other community members who were initially baffled and amused but ultimately angered by her long-term presence, as she felt that food and housing should be free in exchange for the labor she performed. Her project wasted time, space, and building materials and was initiated without any local input; it kept young men out of school to assist with the labor but brought no benefit to the community.

I quickly became concerned for the needs of the local people, and gained empathy for their perspective. Most had believed that their commitment to the goals of the project would lead to a better quality of life, home ownership in the village, employment, and an opportunity to advance their skills. These dreams had been frustrated over the years as the project founder had turned his attention elsewhere, leaving the people without the authority to fund-raise for small grants or determine their own future. In response, I began holding community meetings to give people freedom to air their concerns. Before long, I was asked not to attend, as the people felt inclined to run their own affairs and would instead consult with me regarding their options and decisions. Once they had elected their own representatives, and gained Not-for-Profit status within the village, I shared the good news with the project director, anticipating that a major milestone had been achieved.

My excitement was immediately quashed. Rather than building on the enthusiasm of the villagers, he perceived their empowerment as a threat to his position, and my involvement as a betrayal. Naively, I had believed that improving the lives of local people had been the goal of the project. Instead, it seemed that for him, it was just an experiment in technologies and development, not a serious undertaking to solve rural problems and improve livelihoods.

Together, these experiences combined to initiate the core research question of this thesis. That is, who benefits from the efforts of development agencies and NGOs, and who is accountable for the measurement of outcomes related to volunteer service?
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Republic of South Africa is uniquely suited geographically and historically to supply a rich source of data for understanding the combined forces of development initiatives and tourism. Its recent political events illustrate the nexus of private philanthropy, experiential education, and social science research. Throughout 400 years of colonialism and under Apartheid laws, much of the white population was able to live as visitors might, detached from the realities and culture of the majority of their neighbors in the manner of diplomats in a sequestered community. Since 1994, South Africa has transformed itself into one of the world's most progressive democracies. Even as it faces daunting challenges of enforcement of policies and the building of black economic empowerment, it has become both a site of investigation and a source of inspiration for people and agencies who seek to support its goals of truth and reconciliation. “A World in One Country,” South Africa captures the best and worst examples of human society’s potential and weaknesses against a backdrop of exceptionally diverse and stunning landscapes, and a wealth of natural and human resources. Its high levels of HIV/AIDS death, crime, and unemployment that coexist with world class cities and shopping centers, beaches, and big game safaris draw development agencies to address the former, and tourists to enjoy the latter. The conjoining of these forces makes it the top destination for a combination of development service and travel: the emerging global phenomenon of ‘voluntourism’ (Voluntour newsletter January 2010).

Meeting all of the criteria for both tourism and development attention, South Africa now also attracts study abroad and internship programs that incorporate some community service into a summer or semester (AIFS 2010, CIEE 2010, SIT 2010), usually in the notoriously beautiful Western Cape. An on-line search for volunteer programs in South Africa will reveal several hundred options, promising the chance to “wage peace through service” (Global Volunteers), as well as slogans encouraging participants to ‘motivate youth’ and ‘improve the quality of life’ for the close to 2 million AIDS orphans (South Africa AIDS Foundation 2008). In addition, clients are told that travel costs may be tax deductible and are a “great way to enhance your CV” (Google online search ‘Volunteer South Africa’ 2010). One study abroad recruitment website broadcasts the chance “to see first-hand what others only see in the movies” (Google online search ‘Study Abroad South Africa’ 2010) a clear allusion to the overly-dramatized and romanticized images attached to much of
the Global South. These post-modern paradigms share the goal of establishing mutuality, reciprocity, and authenticity in traveler-host relations by expressing solidarity through service.

This thesis uses three case studies and draws on the local point-of-view as a tool to examine the assumption that volunteers are contributing to poverty alleviation and development, a perspective unexamined in the literature. Counter to organizers claims, service and development work often fail to address local needs or leave lasting improvements, and unprepared travelers often unwittingly sabotage chances for authentic and shared benefits. As tourism moves from the abstract to the personal through the process of seeking reciprocal interactions, investigation into the outcome of volunteer labor and impact on local people is relatively new and unexamined. While the coexistence of poverty with wine farms and exotic wildlife will continue to make South Africa a major draw for voluntourism, it is increasingly important to adjust the practice of this altruistic phenomenon to become a more realistic reflection of the expectations of participants on both sides.

South African History and Context: Links between Geography and Poverty

The struggle for political equality in South Africa can be traced to the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s, the subsequent arrest and imprisonment of anti-apartheid activists such as Nelson Mandela in 1962, and the youth-led Soweto uprising in June 1976. A variety of political parties and leaders organized against structural racial oppression, forced removals of whole communities to remote areas, and educational policies designed to perpetuate Africans as an underclass in their own country. Much of what is revealed in this research in community interviews and the articulation of needs is directly tied to lasting geographical footprints established as a planning strategy for the ‘separate development’ of South Africa’s races. From 1948 when the Nationalist Party came to power, Apartheid acted as structural internal colonialism (Wolpe 1990) that manipulated geography to meet social-engineering ends. Bearing all the markers of traditional colonial power structures and exploitative policies, laws such as the 1913 Native’s Land Act\(^1\) and the 1950 Group Areas Act\(^2\)

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1. The Native Land’s Act was a piece of segregation legislation that decreed that only land in certain areas could be owned by non-whites. Land designated for this purpose totaled just 7% of the country. The Act created a system of land tenure that deprived the majority (86%) of South Africa’s inhabitants of the right to own land, which has major socio-economic repercussions to this day.

2. In an extension and solidification of the 1913 Law, the 1950 Group Areas Act set aside different residential areas for different races. It led to the forced removals of entire populations from the ‘wrong’ areas (such as District 6 in Cape Town and Sophiatown in Johannesburg) into townships and homelands designated for that race. It also forced non-whites to travel long distances in order to work, and eventually, to show a ‘pass’ which indicated that they had employment which permitted them to be in a white area.
strove to not only minimize social contact between the races, but to explicitly remove Non-White South Africans from urban areas and productive land.

By the late 1980's pressure on South Africa to change its policies had amounted to sanctions in sports, investments, and placed limits on travel within Africa. The international rallying cry of the popular movement, “Free Nelson Mandela!” became reality as opposition political parties were finally un-banned in 1990 and a Government of National Unity was formed to draft a new constitution. This recent political and social history of South Africa has been well-documented, largely due to the popularity of leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu who brought moral, spiritual, and ethical perspectives to the political table. The fact that their approach paved the way for the most peaceful and positive transformation in modern history is belied by the fact that these voices and alternatives have been more recently quashed under neoliberal and other economic forces (Hart 2002). The location of both rural and informal communities today, psychologically and physically apart, continues to reinforce and limit people’s access to education, transportation, social services, communication systems, and employment. This persistent marginalization and multi-generational poverty may no longer be de jure, but surely reflects the influence of de facto policies of urban bias and underdevelopment that perpetuate educational, social, racial and economic divides.

These modern circumstances create the contextual framework to this thesis as it illuminates the myriad ways that external institutions increase pressure for both economic development and the formalization of traditional livelihoods in ways that may undervalue and even undermine local control and customs. Under the pressure to be modern, small enterprises that supported extended families now require permits and licensing, childcare necessitates teacher training certificates, and home-based businesses are subject to building inspections and taxes. The current governments’ adoption of neo-liberal economic policies that include divestment from social programs such as provision of clean water, health care and quality education, promised under the 1994 constitution, has left the majority of South Africans with little to distinguish between life before and after their democratic aspirations were achieved. A member of a community targeted for assistance by a private volunteer tourism company put it this way:

“We are very grateful for the volunteers who come here to be with us. They have given us more hope than the government.”

- Home stay hostess at SERV-SA, Case Study 2
It is sad to note that, after decades of struggle against Apartheid, the slow pace of change coming from government programs has resulted in a palpable epidemic of apathy and hopelessness that may cripple the potential of a new generation, even though the expectations that many people hold for their government are patently unrealistic. The woman quoted in this interview recognizes the supportive role that Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and volunteers play in communities, but in some ways is passively depending on both; she is not actively working within her own community to maximize its potential.

Tourism, an increasing focus of economic development efforts in South Africa, serves to replicate and extend these economic development pressures, as just one more “aspect of the global process of commodification in which people, places, and cultures have been objectified” (Meethan 2001:5). Whole communities now rush to compete with their neighbors to be the most attractive to tourists through the modernization of roads and tourist shops and the upgrading of overnight accommodation options. Often, the tourists, and the expected benefits, both fail to appear as the newest fashion dictates a change in tourists’ tastes, bad press eliminates a region from guided tours, or geographic location becomes inconvenient or undesirable.

While the details of these conditions and responses will be further explored in both the case study descriptions and findings in this thesis, it is important to appreciate that the current era of South African history influences the interactions between members of these communities and the outsiders who come with offers to help.

South African Cultural Resources

Geography underscores the persistence of internal colonialism in the country today, where the co-existence of 1st world standards of luxury in close proximity to economic disempowerment continues to draw development agencies, NGOs, and volunteer tourists to participate in alleviating poverty from within South Africa. In South Africa’s impoverished rural areas and within its crime-ridden townships especially, cultural traditions and deep Christian faith contribute to a belief that volunteers are a manifestation of God in the community. Recalling how a daycare center had first been opened, the principal laughed while saying, “Then God helped us. Or maybe it was social services!” With little knowledge of how to get help from the government, and surrounded by the early death of so many parents and youth to HIV/AIDS, South Africa’s poor naturally draw on these traditions of faith as the foundation of survival and strength. In traditional society, the task of childcare in particular is a role shared by women, with the support of an intergenerational network
and an environment largely free from external risk. Children, even those under the age of 3 raised in a village, could safely wander amongst animals and adults exploring their environment, while mothers could be assured that lunch would be offered at whichever home the children found themselves at mealtime.

As society has modernized and urbanized, and village life moved (sometimes by force; see footnote 2) to densely populated townships, social problems such as crime and violence, and the need for organized daycare for working mothers have become pressing concerns. Each of the three case study sites were home to people who filled this role for little or no pay within the formal economy. One woman walked two hours each way for over three years in order to provide childcare in a community with no resources to prepare children for school. The principals of most daycare centers in Cape Town were performing their roles without remuneration: all costs paid by parents went to cover (and share in) the two meals they prepared for the children each day. The majority of the centers are named in order to directly invoke the essential role that God plays in creating and sustaining the school. Examples in Xhosa and Zulu are Qhamani and Nkosi (God), Thandolwethu (love of the people), and Babalwa (freely offered/something given; also, to preserve).

In several cases, the contributions of the NGO and the volunteers it brings are the single difference that allows individuals to continue to survive and carry out their work. Small donations in time or money repair the roof or supplement the meals for the children. After the only community store in Case Study Two closed down, the work of the NGO and its connections with former volunteers enabled its re-opening. Here, a community leader has been elected informally as pastor to his people, and speaks openly and emotionally of his “arrogant and alcoholic” past. At the shop, he shared with me the fact that he credits a volunteer and the NGO for the transformation that has taken place in his life. For him, it was God’s plan that the volunteer tourism company chose his community as a focus of their work, elevating him into a position of legitimacy, with spiritual, political, and social leadership roles. The contact that he maintains with past international volunteers creates opportunities for him to interact and plan projects with good people from all over the world and enables him to be of greater service to his community. This gentleman has many counterparts across South Africa where one finds women performing crucial social services that operate under the radar of local government or even the volunteer service NGOs. Informally, and with little support, there are in excess of 100,000 grandmothers taking care of their grandchildren as a whole generation of parents has died of AIDS (South Africa AIDS Foundation 2008).
These stories are told to highlight the environment in which volunteer service plays a supporting role, and to convey the extent to which moral support in these circumstances can be more meaningful than material contributions. That said, members of these marginalized communities may appear downtrodden and desperate, when in fact they are operating in a sophisticated informal economy of affection that draws upon faith in God. Long before there were volunteers, and long after they are gone, these enterprises survive in the harshest and sometimes most heart-breaking of environments. Personal experience reinforces the existence of these sorts of social networks as a strength running through much of traditional society, and the patience and endurance of the individuals who maintain them. Illich (1971) proposed that ‘conviviality,’ defined as the extent to which individuals are able to act on their own conscience and within their own belief systems, should be used as a measurement for assessing human needs. If development is a means to expand human freedom of choice, then conviviality expressed through African culture can be seen as a fundamental human right. As will be highlighted in Chapter 4, development strategies that focus solely on the economic aspects of community life not only fail to support these informal survival networks, but can even work to undermine them through misguided attempts at modernization and formalization.

Conceptual Underpinnings of Volunteer Tourism and Development

Mass Tourism. Traditional tourism is associated with cruise ships, safari companies, and the stereotypical traveler as a consumer of (natural) resources of another country (increasingly in the Global South). In this model, most of the profits accrue to an external tour agent or the travel industry with few financial or social benefits transferred into the local economy. Hotels are often owned by trans-national corporations who, although they hire local people and create low-skilled jobs, stop short of investing in social upliftment programs or profit-sharing. Often, local people are literally banned from beaches and restaurants in restricted tourist zones in an attempt to protect tourists by keeping them inside an insular and sanitized bubble. The creations of local artisans for sale in the gift shops are often mass-produced replicas of cultural artifacts procured at low prices from the artists and sold at high prices to tourists, and represent the only source of income for nearby villages.

Alternative (New) Tourism. In contrast to mass tourism, and in a spirit of solidarity, volunteer tourism organizations strive to achieve mutual benefits between the individual traveler and the communities with which they are engaged. In contrast to the critical analysis of Mass Tourism, efforts such as
Volunteer Tourism can be understood as the desire to separate oneself from the negative associations of traditional tourism practices. The creation of an identity as an alternative ‘non-tourist’ through the act of performing service work becomes an important issue at the site of volunteer-community engagement. The stark contrast between how the volunteer views him/herself and how members of the community view him or her will underscore and inform the issue of contrasting perspectives as it plays out on the ground and in the relationships it produces. As Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) describe, the alternative tourist is identified as having different goals than a traditional tourist, seeking rewards that are natural, less structured, and authentic. This search for authenticity will be explored in Chapter 5.

Service Learning and Civic Engagement. In a move towards social responsibility, international study abroad programs departing from the Global North are increasingly focused on experiential learning and community engagement and include a component of community service work as at least a small part of the itinerary. Study abroad programs often promise students the chance to “make a corner of the world a happier, healthier, safer place to live for those who need your help” (AIFS South Africa Study Abroad Program Brochure 2010/11). There are many substantial arguments in place that underscore the advantages of volunteer service, both integrated with or independent of structured university courses, including the assertion that it adds a “moral dimension in how people come to understand the world and play a part in its re-creation” (Mohan 1995:271 in Oldfield 2008:271). The literature on service learning assumes as a starting point that the benefits gained by students are shared equally with community participants, and fails to adequately consider the effectiveness of such projects from the perspective of beneficiaries (Oldfield 2008).

Development, Capital, and Poverty. Post-development theory emerged in the late 1980s as a tool for evaluating and critiquing the predominant form of international development that had economic growth as its core focus. This thesis draws from the Marxist perspective that sees an investment in infrastructure, centralized planning, and technological advancement as an insufficient approach to meeting basic human needs, largely because quality of life is not necessarily enhanced through material improvements. International development agencies, as outgrowths of capitalist expansion, also rely on increased production to create benefits that will “trickle down” to the world’s poor. Instead, there is evidence of “African countries being poorer in real terms…in 1990 than they were in 1960” (Corbridge 1993: 129, in Trainer 2002:57). These ‘real terms’ include access to education, improved health care, and the ability to determine one’s own destiny or the advancement of
livelihoods in one’s community. Post-development thinking is focused on this “fundamental fault” (Trainer 2002: 59) of conventional development theory and directs the dialogue towards quality of life issues to measure improvements, as well as analysis of the legacy of negative environmental impacts left in the wake of industrial growth. On the ground in Africa, the reversal of fortune is most profound at the subsistence level, where agricultural land has been appropriated for export crops and is no longer used as a resource for feeding local people. The development that is occurring (4-lane highways, international airports, improved mining technologies, and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange) is irrelevant to a majority of the country’s people, as it actually draws away from them the productive resources they once had (ibid:60). As such, an understanding of the reasons for the existence of poverty is crucial to the approach by which it is addressed.

Service. The cultural phenomenon of social solidarity with less-privileged members of society also has a long history with roots in the major religions’ call to service. For centuries missionaries have been called to remote regions across the globe, while the secular parallel sparked movements such as the Peace Corps, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and Doctors without Borders, etc. Western socio-cultural norms encourage and reward self-sacrificing behavior through scouting, volunteering with the elderly, and the recent adoption of community service hours at both the high school and post-secondary levels to complete graduation requirements. On a mega-scale, the emergence of international institutions such as the IMF, USAID, and the World Bank from the middle of the 20th century brought the interest for the welfare of others around the world into the mainstream. Expressing responsibility towards those considered less-fortunate, or who have suffered from a natural disaster, war, famine or disease, has become a cultural norm, a rite of passage for maturity, and a central aspect of individual identity formation.

Voluntourism. Two popular forms of alternative (responsible) tourism are Eco-tourism, and Volunteer Tourism, which have found their way into specific South African government objectives as vehicles through which to meet economic and other development goals (Rogerson 2002, Scheyvans 2002). As a complement to the larger international development framework, volunteer tourism and its counterpart service learning are the focus of this paper. Here, outside of formal institutions such as the Peace Corps or a church mission, individuals travel privately in order to directly see first-hand, meet personally, and manually assist those in need in almost any country around the globe.
Subject Definitions. Volunteers who were the subjects of this research fall into two categories. The first are volunteers who have paid an outside agency for placement as a ‘voluntour’ in the community, such as in SERV-SA, Case Study Two. The other studies were of students who were volunteering as part of an academic course, a fact I was unaware of until arriving at Case Study One. Although there was an initial complication of making a distinction between them, there are many more similarities than differences, such as objective, age, and position. Throughout this thesis, instead of repeatedly identifying individuals as one or the other, I chose to roll the subtle differences into a common identity: the service volunteer. Moreover, this research is meant to highlight the local point-of-view, and to the community, students and volunteers are one and the same. The moniker ‘service volunteer’ is a reflection of this united identity and positionality from the perspective of the host communities.

While the circumstances and objectives of the service volunteer are likely to vary within these two models (one fulfilling a requirement for course credit and the other seeking a local connection as part of an international holiday), this thesis will demonstrate that regardless of differences, travelers from the United States and Europe cannot help but carry with them a certain embodiment of power and associated cultural assumptions that inform their interactions with local people. Whether contributing to poverty alleviation within the (post) development paradigm, or establishing an alternative status as a socially conscious tourist, few service volunteers have managed to break down these barriers or find the authentic relationships with local people they seem to crave. The conclusion of this thesis will make recommendations towards increasing the likelihood of more equitable service volunteer experiences for travelers and host communities.

Presentation of the Research Problem

In light of the fact that South Africa has its place atop the list of “Five Great Voluntourism Trips of 2010” (Travelanthropist 2010), and because Study Abroad programs to South Africa from the United States have also experienced a 15% increase in the last ten years (Institute of International Education 2009), there is a pronounced need for a better understanding of the benefits being transferred to local communities through this form of travel. Therefore, this investigation measures whether short-term ‘civil engagement’ projects are accomplishing their goals. In short, are the facilitators of volunteer service placements doing what they say they are doing? Are communities experiencing an increase in capacity, or relief from poverty in the ways they are meant to? If not, why? and how can these processes and placements be improved? Because the research problem is informed by my previous experience and is therefore a less romanticized portrayal of volunteer-
community interactions, participatory methods, along with interviews to further support the empirical data, were used to substantiate the findings. As promotional materials and the internet “sell” the notion that volunteer service contributes to development, examples of these were reviewed as a complementary form of literature. In turn, as alternative tourism claims to be different from mass tourism, I looked for evidence of this cultural shift in the field.

Organization of Thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. This introductory chapter (1) serves to establish a historical context for both the phenomenon of volunteering abroad, and to specifically highlight the legacy of Apartheid (and post-Apartheid) policies on the creation of marginalized communities in South Africa. This chapter draws on the history of development and tourism to evaluate the work performed by ‘voluntours’, and frames the problems to be addressed by this project. Chapter Two presents the research problem and reviews several streams of literature: volunteer travel and service learning, community-based development and tourism to create a nexus for understanding what takes place on the ground during volunteer-community interactions. These concepts are used as a tool to more fully introduce the research questions. Chapter Two also familiarizes the reader with the case studies from which the empirical data is derived, bringing together historic and conceptual frameworks to support the arguments that follow. Chapter Three is an explanation of the methods chosen to address the conceptual issues, and an analysis of the theoretical basis of the chosen approach. Chapter Four addresses the intersection of volunteer service and larger development ethics, goals, and problems. It highlights the importance of having NGOs and project facilitators listen to community needs, making responsible assessments of the ability to address those needs, and working in partnership with communities towards community empowerment. Chapter Five situates volunteer service within tourism and illustrates the many ways that tourism which includes volunteering may be fundamentally indistinguishable from mass tourism, and may even negatively impact communities. Chapter Six concludes by making suggestions for the improvement of international volunteer service projects with the goal of increased community-volunteer equity and authentic value to local populations.
Chapter Two
A PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS THROUGH A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The key goal of this study is the measurement of positive impacts in beneficiary communities from the perspective of local people. Therefore, the research seeks to better understand the disconnect between well-intentioned volunteer service efforts and the lack of meaningful or visible change in recipient South African communities. Even if voluntour organizers were not touting the contributions of service to communities, it should be important to providers to seek the beneficiary perspective. By undertaking this research, part of my goal is to contribute towards reversing a trend that appears as a one-sided benefit of volunteer service, and to suggest that future programs focus more on shared benefits, two-way educational exchanges, and the re-direction of attention towards the needs of community hosts.

The first step was the review of the multiple literature streams that inform and situate volunteer tourism and service learning. The next step was to uncover the goals and claims of volunteer service organizations and then to answer whether or not the case studies could reveal that they were doing what they claimed to be doing. The theoretical product conjoins two subfields that have been studied and written about as if they are separate: service learning for course credit and volunteer tourism. The literature streams run parallel to one another but speak to different audiences in different academic settings. However, as my focus in this thesis is on the perspectives and experiences of host communities, and members of these communities do not conceptually differentiate between the various types of visitors, it is appropriate that tourists are aggregated throughout. It is therefore suggested that the structural separation among tourists, students, and volunteers exists only in the minds of scholars and the tourists, students, and volunteers themselves.

A Review of Relevant Literature

*Volunteer Tourism and Service Learning: Definitions and Practice*. In the following section, the practice and process of Volunteer Tourism and Service-Learning are brought into focus through a trans-disciplinary review that informs the debate over best practices, descriptions, and their potential as a tool in poverty alleviation. Beginning with the parallels between service learning models and the emerging field of volunteer tourism, this conceptual framework draws upon development and tourism literature to raise some philosophical issues: altruism and ethics, dependency and empowerment, social responsibility and the neo-liberal global development agenda. Thus this
review also brings into line two divergent streams of academic inquiry which describe the same things: international education that focuses on service learning and community engagement, and the subfields of “new” and “alternative” tourism that explore volunteer tourism. These disciplines rely on theories common to community and social work, philosophy, and sustainable development literatures to inform them, and seek methods from geography and anthropology with which to establish their approach. Throughout this paper, service learning and volunteer tourism will become one term: volunteer service, to both ease the reference to the topic at hand and underscore the commonalities of the previously separate concepts from the community perspective. This conjoining became a fundamental statement within this thesis: that is, communities on the receiving end distinguish no difference between identities to which outsiders may attach considerable importance.

Within service learning and development, some authors propose models for implementing service projects (Meppem and Gill 1998, Stark 2002, de Beer and Marais 2005, Bednarz et al. 2008, Raymond and Hall 2008) that are infused with an optimistic tone regarding both the spirit and benefits of this form of short-term service. In the attempt to mold it into something more useful, advocates feel that if programs are managed in such a way that ensures community control rather than further marginalization, the negative aspects of the development framework (external, top-down, short-term interventions) can be overcome (Wearing 2001, de Beer and Marais 2005, McGehee and Anderack 2009). Others argue that if sustainable learning and practices are built into projects (Meppem and Gill 1998, Klak 2007), then volunteer service has the potential to become a dynamic tool in the international development effort (Stoddart and Rogerson 2004, Wearing et al. 2005), and the feather in the crown of alternative tourism (Kennedy and Dornan 2009). With much less enthusiasm, others critique the motives, consequences, and products of the volunteer service undertaking in an effort to illuminate the pitfalls and imbalances that persist in North-South interactions, regardless of participant intentions (Illich 1968; Oldfield 2008; Tomazos and Butler 2008; McGehee and Anderack 2009).

Service Learning and Volunteering Links to Participatory Development. Although volunteer service can take a variety of forms, from nature conservation to home construction, the most commonly practiced, promoted, and examined sub-set in the literature are projects that fall under the umbrella of community and/or sustainable development (see Stoddart and Rogerson 2004). As advocates for building upon the established connections of local NGOs and inserting volunteers into on-going social upliftment programs, Kennedy and Dornan (2009) and Wearing et al. (2005) visualize a model
for the creation of high-impact, low-cost sustainable development that is successful because it helps to establish bonds of private aid between individuals, rather than through trans-national organizations. De Beer and Marais (2005), however, feel that the efforts to ensure that community development is inclusive and empowering still face challenges.

Literature concerned with the impacts of volunteer tourism and service learning focus on best practices (Oldfield 2008), the pitfalls to avoid (Bednarz et al. 2008), and the potential to make an impact if certain conditions are met (Raymond and Hall 2008). De Beer and Marais (2005) are particularly sensitive to the South African post-apartheid context and recognize that rural people are often lacking in self-esteem and organizational skills, and remain marginalized by their exclusion from national development priorities (Hart 2002). With this in mind, it seems even more crucial that NGO and volunteer efforts not perpetuate this marginalization, but rather dedicate themselves to “ethical and reciprocal” (Bednarz et al. 2008) interactions towards the goal of community empowerment. Others focus more on the process and ethics of site selection, the level of community control, the quality of interpersonal interaction, and the potential for leaving things worse than they were before (Illich 1968, de Beer and Marais 2005, Bednarz et al. 2008, Raymond and Hall 2008, Tomazos and Butler 2008, McGehee and Anderack 2009). In short, while a number of authors view voluntourism and service learning in a largely optimistic light, deeper analysis shows that ensuring equity in project selection and implementation can be problematic, and can carry risks for both participants and host communities. This means that greater attention and care should be taken with managing the orientation and expectations of travelers before they arrive in South African communities, a responsibility of faculty and travel agents. Within the host nation, an oversight of programs and operators that serves to ensure the protection of local people should be given higher priority by government.

Alternative Tourism and Volunteer Service. Wearing (2001) feels that what defines alternative tourism is its objective to create an opportunity for shared learning and authentic interpersonal experiences in contrast to packaged tours and isolated resorts. Ideally, these interactions benefit the volunteer through personal growth and international awareness while simultaneously building a sense of pride in the local people related to their own manner of living. For students, approaching international service work with humility is considered by practitioners as a prerequisite for learning to take place (Oldfield 2008). Successful students must also have the interpersonal skills needed to appreciate and partner with communities to both understand and work together towards resolving their problems (Bednarz et al. 2008). Participatory approaches to human development are difficult to quantify, but
de Beer and Marais feel plainly that “sustainable community development can only be achieved through participation and empowerment” (2005:50) and this must be the guiding principle of volunteer projects that seek to consider themselves as “alternative” to other sorts of development, or to traditional forms of tourism. Underlying these recommendations is the assumption that behaviors and attitudes of the student/voluntourist can be modified through counseling, orientations or required reading. However, MacCannell (1989:3) argues that all forms of tourism represent “a willingness to accept, even venerate, things the way they are,” suggesting that little can be done to over-turn the social and class disparities that exist between divergent parts of the world. This reality has been largely mimicked in the international education field, where creating sociopolitical solidarity or affecting a change in the status quo have never been a conceptual goal (Kiely 2010). As such, from the perspective of political ecology and feminist theory, these forms of travel and civil engagement fall far short of the goals of participatory engagement or social justice imperatives, and can be critiqued as continuing to favor outdated modes of both tourism and development that draw benefits (pleasure and self-satisfaction) from destinations while giving little back.

Critical Assessments of Voluntourism. While there are many perspectives from which one can critique the vast historical undertaking known as service work, and now, volunteer tourism, most scholars seem to assume that, on the whole, any help that is given to poor communities must be better than no help at all (Kennedy and Dornan 2009). However, as with many common practices of the dominant culture, closer scrutiny of costs is in order. Illich (1968), speaking in the early days of global solidarity movements, asserted that the damage done to local communities was too high a price to pay for the belated awareness that volunteers should never have imposed their values and expectations on a foreign community in the first place. From Illich’s standpoint, the tone of much of the literature seems blind to the possibility that students might be causing harm through brief encounters with low-income communities for which they have no training (as illustrated in Bednarz et al. 2008), such as creating expectations they are unable to fulfill, or alternatively through brief, intense visits to vulnerable children. The failure to put the needs of the community first is apparent in almost all of the service and volunteer tourism studies, program models, or industry goals (McGehee and Andereck 2009), even as language used to describe them is steeped in this assumption of mutual benefit. The possibility of a less than ideal intercultural exchange receives only scant attention such as suggestions made to modify volunteer expectations (Raymond and Hall 2008). Stark raises the issue of social and environmental equity, but retreats from the issue with a recommendation for the further study of ethics within alternative tourism (Stark 2002). None of the
modern scholarship, however, comes near the radical point made by Illich three decades ago when he alluded to responsibility to a higher moral standard, and pleaded with departing volunteers to ‘just stay home’ (1968: np).

Conclusion. As much of the literature has neglected the community point-of-view, or has chosen to focus on participant benefits or the nature of service within service learning, the overall body of work falls short of painting a holistic picture of voluntourism. Existing analysis is from a largely optimistic, uncritical, and often Euro-centric viewpoint, while evaluation of programs or examination of its effectiveness is in its infancy (Rogerson 2010). In the “post-development” era, the persistent tendency for young people to set off on treks designed as both rite-of-passage experiences and modern-day missions (both faith-based and secular) is accepted in spite of its contradictions. The emphasis in these adventures is not on the impact made on target communities, but on the life-changing potential they hold for the volunteers. Regardless of a trend towards alternative and responsible tourism, local people are not experiencing a difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ tourism practices. As such, any meaningful change will need to be spear-headed by organizers, as volunteers are often inadvertently contributing to the perpetration of uneven relationships and structural oppression already in place.

This situation plays a part in justifying and supporting the continued expansion of international volunteer service without a significant modification to current practices. This thesis explores the consequences of program benefits being solely to the tourist (and industry). It also illustrates that while service-learning can indeed be a unique opportunity for learning, it often misses the point when it comes to service.

The Case Studies (pseudonyms are used for the three organizations)

Empirical data were collected over a course of six weeks at three study sites from May-June 2009 (see Figure 1). They were chosen to represent geographical diversity, rural-urban contrasts, and different philosophies regarding development efforts and volunteer placements. They are representative of volunteer-community interactions only to the extent that two of the three were found on the internet, making their choice as random as if I were a potential volunteer seeking a program placement opportunity on-line. It is partially because of the ease of locating the organizations that the names have been changed: to protect the interviewees as well as the cooperating case study sponsors.
Table 1. Case Study Descriptive Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>1. EDUCARE</th>
<th>2. SERV-SA</th>
<th>3. YouthAid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO owns land and buildings</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth/Peer Education Focus</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serves orphans and other young children</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-Development Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-for-Profit Status</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Local Economic Sustainability</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer Cultural Performances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Tourists Pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as Volunteers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the people involved with projects at the chosen case study sites shared many common challenges and goals, the empirical research revealed notable contrasts in organizational approach by NGOs that reflect different models of volunteer/student placements. Case Study One, EDUCARE, is an NGO in Cape Town that recruits volunteers through their website in support of various educational programs, but also relies on local volunteers to interact with high school students, and, in one case, coordinates a local school that has ‘adopted’ a sponsored daycare center. In contrast, Case Study Two, SERV-SA, is a for-profit volunteer tourism travel business that initiates relationships with needy communities in order to facilitate placements for volunteers who contribute both a program and project fee. Yet another model is exhibited at Case Study Three, where YouthAid is a South African NGO on private land that receives development funds and assistance from an American donor agency. Volunteers at each site are sometimes students receiving academic credit, travelling independently or with a faculty member as part of a course, or are private travelers or philanthropists who have used the internet or personal contacts to arrange to volunteer in a South African community.

The use of interviews convey a wide array of responses from community members that reflect the nature of their environment and the types of work being performed each day that sought
to integrate volunteer efforts. Across the project sites, expectations of volunteers were generally low, meaning local people believed volunteers were visiting on a more social basis, or for their own travel experience. To a large extent, community members at all of the sites were more interested in service volunteers as a source of material gifts or monetary donations than as opportunities for shared labor or training.

Each project was facilitated by a NGO that managed volunteer placements and student researchers, working in partnership with a local community. The NGO often acted as an intermediary between the community and outsiders, to assess and interpret the needs of the local people, much like a faculty member may do in coordinating service-learning assignments. While in some ways the differences in organizational structure, history, and goals at the case studies complicate the research, the results of this thesis benefit from the piecing together of common strands of culture and circumstance to derive general empirical findings from recurring trends. Additionally, results were organized into a theoretical framework related to tourism and development, as well as socio-cultural and geographical themes. Findings also strive to separate interpersonal failures, such as broken promises, jealousy, or simple misunderstandings, from empirical data.

Case Study One: EDUCARE, Cape Town

EDUCARE has a mission of “helping children and young adults in South Africa’s disadvantaged township communities” with educational and capacity building programs at every level of academic development (2008 Annual Report). This South African-based NGO was chosen to provide an example of international service learning and voluntourism in a township context. It therefore contrasts dramatically with the other two case studies due to the different challenges of life in an urban environment versus life in a remote rural area. Here, concerns are less about transport and access to resources, and more closely connected to crime, drugs, and the stress of life in a densely populated township. The NGO has been in business for over ten years to promote the “economic and social development in communities” and “to assist youth in contributing to the living standards and environment in the areas in which they live” (2008 Annual Report). By 2009 the environmental mission had been partially abandoned in favor of responding to more basic and
urgent issues such as malnourishment, infrastructure, and general material support for early childhood development (ECD). Addressing the daily needs of young children in townships is a widely supported idea that draws hundreds of volunteers and students into orphanages and day-care centers in South Africa and other developing countries. This case study seemed an ideal example of measurable service-learning impacts and positive interaction between volunteers, students, NGO staff, school principals, and children.

EDUCARE headquarters are located in the leafy, formerly-white suburbs stretching south along the Cape Peninsula and nestled around the base of Table Mountain. In just twenty minutes, the staff and volunteers can be deep into the townships that surround the city, making access to the most needy daycare centers logistically, if not psychologically, convenient. These spatial relationships between races constructed in South Africa under Apartheid land-use policies have persisted largely unabated since the end of racial urban segregation (Oliver 1996). The previously
intentional, and now _de facto_ shortage of urban housing, as well as lack of jobs for a largely illiterate (in English) and uneducated population has resulted in an estimated surplus of one million people living in marginal informal settlements on the Cape Flats east of downtown Cape Town (see Figure 2). Rather than mitigating these circumstances, globalization and hyper-urbanization have further exacerbated the problem as South Africans flock to the cities from underdeveloped rural areas and the former homelands. Visitors arriving by air drive past seemingly endless informal settlements on both sides of the National Highway (N2) on their way to the city center. Poverty, frustration, and the lack of opportunity to escape these conditions result in extremely high rates of crime. The most vulnerable residents of this environment are young children.

EDUCARE focuses on ECD by working directly with the daycare principals who operate independent facilities. Most of these women, serving up to 85 children in small rooms adjacent to, or sometimes directly in their home, survive in subsistence conditions with meager financial inputs from the families of the children. The buildings, facilities and infrastructure, quality of care, and material supplies vary from virtually nothing (babies sleeping on a damp cement floor) to one newly constructed two-story school complete with chalkboards, books, flush toilets, kitchens, and offices. This one showcase facility was built with donations from Rotary International, with finishing touches such as paint, tiles, and landscaping having been completed by volunteers provided by EDUCARE.

Figure 2. View overlooking the townships of the Cape Flats, stretching far into the distance towards the side of Table Mountain and Cape Town. An estimated 1.5 million people live in these settlements. Photo from Google Images accessed 4/21/2010.
Volunteers are recruited through the organizational website, and are comprised largely of students from the U.S. and Europe who want to conduct projects or community service for academic credit, although there have also been others who have worked with the daycare centers for up to six months. Volunteers arrange their own housing, but are transported into the township each morning by the NGO and picked up in the early afternoon. One or two volunteers (depending on the total number available) work at the centers either playing with the children or assisting the adults for 2-3 hours. This type of service consists mostly of reading books (if books are available), playing simple games such as musical chairs (if a music device is available), cooking and serving meals, and other forms of interactive play.

I initiated contact with EDUCARE from the United States as any other potential volunteer would. I located their information on-line, and sent an e-mail to the volunteer coordinator expressing interest in conducting research while volunteering, in order to directly experience what the other volunteers experience. The coordinator accepted me for a two-week period, negotiated a fee for the placement, and agreed to support my research goals. In turn she contacted the daycare centers in advance to request that time be set aside for me to interview the principals and staff about their perspectives pertaining to working with the volunteers.

Case Study 2: SERV-SA, Northwest Province

This South African-owned and operated company recruits volunteers over their website, and offers a choice of over 11 different volunteer projects, matched to the individual volunteers’ interests and skills. They have won numerous responsible tourism awards, and have recently expanded to other countries. Because of the wide variety of volunteer service arrangements, it is more difficult to classify the mission of the organization, except to see it as a for-profit tourism company that places volunteers in support of a socially responsible agenda. In the case of the project I visited for this research, the founder of SERV-SA, whose home office is approximately 45 minutes away, said the “site selection seemed obvious, ”a reflection of a consciousness of Apartheid’s geographical legacy and the recognition of the obstacles facing people living in remote and under-served areas such as this one.

The targeted community, named after a hole in the ground, is less than an hour from Pretoria but seems a world away. Just a collection of houses, a shop, and a church with goats and chickens wandering free, conditions have not changed much since the days when it was part of the Boputhatswana Homeland under the Apartheid system. Settled since the 1950s, people remain here because it is where their family had been assigned land. The Homeland itself didn’t hold contiguous
territory (see Figure 3), but was rather made up of lines drawn around clusters of people who identified themselves as predominantly Tswana-speaking. The rural location is exemplary of the types of conditions that are to be found across South Africa, and especially in regions that were once a part of the ‘independent’ Homelands, which define the communities in Case Studies Two and Three. There are pockets of Tswanas, who are actually out-numbered by the Matabele who were relocated there, and who founded the church that remains the only community focal point. This disjointed identity remains to this day, in houses scattered across a hillside, with a variety of cultural groups living side by side suffering the same deprivations, but lacking a common language.

Attempts at rural development by former homeland governments failed dismally, and consequently the highest rates of unemployment and lowest levels of infrastructural development are found in rural South Africa.

The area is characterized by high rates of illiteracy and unemployment. It is poorly serviced by either infrastructure or governmental social welfare programs (i.e., one streetlight recently “won” by petitioning the government for over a year). Many people are either old age pensioners surviving on R850 ($90) per month, or single mothers who receive a child dependent grant of R250 ($28) per month, resulting in hand-to-mouth subsistence conditions.

I contacted SERV-SA prior to my arrival in Johannesburg after finding their operation on the internet. I negotiated to pay a fee to the company that allowed for a home-stay experience and the owner worked with the community in advance to obtain permission for me to conduct interviews. SERV-SA and this project site in particular were chosen in expectation of witnessing the working style, relationships, and efficacy of a professionally operated volunteer tourism agency, and to provide an example of best practices in the field. Specifically, the mission statement of the organization seemed to reflect a working example of the benefits of communication, planning, and shared goals. The majority of the program fee goes to cover the costs of a small building project (an addition to a home or toilets for the school), or directly into the hands of the family in exchange for a home-stay. Volunteers are expected to complete a project before they leave, and to pay any community members who assist them with construction tasks or daily needs. Because the organization was dedicated to volunteer tourism, (and not simply accepting volunteers who approached them) it could also provide on-going evaluation of the contributions made by volunteer service to community development goals over time. Unfortunately, there were no additional volunteers assigned to this project during the week-long stay, so there was no opportunity to observe interactions between volunteers and local people.

The SERV-SA model for volunteer tourism is transparent and honest. The owner directed me to this particular project as one of their success stories, as the Bicycle Project initiated by a former volunteer had become the focal point of the community, and had led to employment, directly and indirectly, for five people. SERV-SA felt confident that I would learn about all the positive things that their organization and service volunteers had done for the people of this area. This turned out to be largely true, as long as I focused my attention on the people who had strong ties to the shop, hosted volunteers at the daycare center, or had received a bicycle.

However, near the end of my stay, the SERV-SA director contacted me to encourage me to also visit the Ndebele Cultural Village nearby, in order to “see the other side of the story.” It was because of the experiences I had with the members of this nearby community, former recipients of SERV-SA efforts, that my assessment of program success was partially revised. I am grateful to the
program directors for allowing me to include these alternative perspectives from within the adjacent village, and it is for this reason that Case Study Two actually serves as two distinct examples from which different arguments in the thesis are drawn. The animosity between the two groups of people and level of desperation amongst members of the latter group is described and analyzed in Chapter Five.

Case Study Three: YouthAid, Mpumalanga Province

I had known about the YouthAid project since its inception in 2004, and had always wanted the chance to visit it in order to witness what I understood to be the true integration of environmentally sustainable practices for rural village development. The U.S.-based NGO that finances much of the project is dedicated to “developing and implementing innovative sustainable solutions to the challenges facing African children” (website; accessed 1/30/09). In partnership with a locally initiated project to house orphaned or abandoned children, it also focuses on youth development, theater, and peer education. It is located on private land about 6 miles from a national highway, nearly 2 hours northeast of Pretoria. I had met the project directors and the U.S.-based partner five years earlier when they had received permaculture training at the center that I managed. As such, I anticipated that the project would have clear goals and strong leadership and could illustrate how a community can effectively meet with external groups on its own terms. Acting as host to short-term service volunteers as well as day guests, international building and food security workshops, and drawing local volunteers to grow food and manage childcare, this site had the potential to illustrate the integration of volunteer energy into long-term project goals. The organizational structure seemed like a good match for international (and local) service-learning groups interested in participating in a successful project modeling sustainable practices.

This case study site is unique because of its structural arrangements. There is a local NGO with a mission of youth development and the provision of housing for orphans that is partnered with a U.S.-based NGO that raises money to support the program. The American organization is chiefly concerned with increasing public awareness in the U.S. regarding the needs of millions of young people orphaned by HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Donations go directly to addressing the housing and nutritional needs by relying on “green” technology for building materials and organic (no fertilizer or chemicals) food production. There have been several workshops demonstrating green building techniques such as earth bag and straw bale construction.

Geographically isolated, the project is on land purchased from the uncle of the project leader, with title recently transferred to YouthAid. The land is dry, impermeable rock with few trees.
or vegetation other than drought-resistant ‘sour’ grass. Although it was winter, the gardens were producing tomatoes, and onions and other winter crops were being planted and nurtured by local volunteers. There are few private cars, and the town is otherwise inaccessible except by walking. The thatch roof atop the earth bag cookhouse (see Figure 4) is visible from the floor of the valley rising up from a small river. Currently there are less than 15 orphans living at the facility, ages 8 through 19, but the goal is to build four-six more dormitories housing eight children each. The only adults living at the site are the husband and wife team of project directors. Therefore, interviews here were with the day staff and local volunteers (18-22 years). There have been two American volunteers who have lived on the project site for a year or more, facilitated by the U.S. NGO, performing building projects and administrative tasks. One was making a return visit while I was there, as he had come on contract from the U.S. NGO to lay the foundation for the daycare center.

The research was conducted over 10 days during which time accommodations were provided in a private home about a 25-minute-walk away. Each morning there was on-going work underway into which the interviews were integrated: with the women cooking, with local volunteers chopping firewood, with tending to the gardens and other site maintenance. Due to prior relationships, there was the chance to assist in planning for the service to be performed by the American student volunteers who came for three days during my stay in late June.
Research Questions

These investigations were undertaken to reveal the point-of-view of local people, whose perspectives are often under-utilized in social science research. As communities are the proclaimed beneficiaries of volunteer tourism, it is the assertion of this paper that the community perspective must be used as the basis for evaluating program success and local benefits. As the literature recommends reciprocal exchanges between volunteers and tourists, the extent to which this is occurring may be an evaluative tool for measuring levels of empowerment achieved through alternative tourism.

The research questions pursued in this thesis are as follows:

1. What does the current model for volunteer service have in common with traditional development practice?; How is this experienced by local people?; and Are community members learning from volunteers, or feeling marginalized?

2. Do local people see a difference in, or have a preference for, volunteer tourism over traditional tourism? Do service volunteers learn from the community, or remain detached?; and Can community-based tourism and service become a path for sustainable development? If so, under what circumstances, and under whose control?
Introduction

The choice of methods in this thesis has a political importance that is central to understanding the research approach. Participation, political ecology, and feminist theory form a backdrop to the use of ‘bottom-up’ data-gathering techniques that seek out the voices of marginalized groups with the express goal of validating and legitimizing their experiences. While not an exercise in political ecology, this thesis is informed by political ecologists and anthropologists who recognize that the local conditions in which people are surviving today can be linked to external global processes outside of their control. In order to play a role in the destabilization of existing power structures so often mimicked by tourism and development initiatives, assessing the level of control and the nature of participation by local people was used to provide a baseline for project benefit and evidence of equity. Participatory methods, in development practice, are often recommended to support the empowerment of communities as part of capacity building efforts, as well as in community-based tourism schemes. The participatory approach as a research method was applied in this thesis in order to highlight the advantages that it may provide to development projects as a whole. Earlier I noted that the subject of the research, the benefits and potential of volunteer tourism and service learning to participants, is well-documented, but targeting the investigation around the beneficiary communities is rather uncommon. This chapter will describe and justify the methods used, and illustrate that participation may be just the first step in the process of achieving true community empowerment.

This thesis will argue that by approaching the research as a participant observer (fellow volunteer) and participating in community life and work (staying with local people, assisting with tasks as a volunteer) I was able to gather data that neither NGO representatives nor other volunteers had experienced. Because I was embedded in the community and able to carry on informal conversations and elicit stories from local people, I had access to more private reactions to decisions made by the partner NGO, and a chance to follow-up with people after the volunteers had gone. To some extent, findings drawn from the observation of community-volunteer interactions became a more significant portion of the data for evaluating levels of respect, reciprocity, and community control of processes than did the formal interviews themselves. Each case study offered different illustrations and degrees of success across time and space, and provided insights often intertwined
with complex interpersonal human relationships and socio-political and environmental circumstances.

Each NGO was contacted in advance to obtain permission to conduct research. Prior to each interview, the purpose of the project was discussed, questions and concerns addressed, and rights of both confidentiality and refusal explained. A consent form that includes contact information was reviewed and signed by each participant. Interviews took place alongside daily activities for the most part, unless it was necessary to sit separately with the individual, as in the case of school principals surrounded by toddler-aged children. Other interviews were done at a nearby picnic table, for privacy and noise reduction, or inside a private home. Though a few interviews lasted more than an hour, the majority lasted between 30 and 45 minutes.

All interviews were conducted in English. Although there are 11 official languages in South Africa, children are taught English in school usually beginning from Standard 4 (8 years old) and therefore it is widely spoken. Interviews were recorded, and then transcribed after I returned to the U.S. Confidentiality was maintained as outlined by the Human Subjects Review Board. One interview was not transcribed due to limited English skills on behalf of the informant and poor sound quality. Even though a translator was available in this instance, it is suspected that the subject believed that being interviewed was to receive some financial gain. All interviews were with Black South African people. These were Xhosa and immigrant Pedi at EDUCARE in Cape Town, Tswana and Ndebele with SERV-SA, and predominantly Zulus and Sothos at YouthAid, along with volunteers from both Zimbabwe (Shona) and Swaziland (Swazi). In most cases informants were between the ages of 30 and 50 except in the case of youth volunteers who were local to the YouthAid project and were between the ages of 18-22, as noted in Table 2 below. Three interviews were with two or three people at a time, which makes the total number of interviews different than the total number of individuals. This was done either at their request, or because of time limitations. All of the school principals at EDUCARE (Case Study One) are women, as well as the home-stay hosts. One of the former long-term American volunteers from YouthAid was visiting during my field study, and proved to be a rich resource for construction history and site evolution over time. Three interviews, each with owners of educational tour companies, were with two White South African males aged approximately 42, and one American of retirement age. However, the content of these interviews provide a management perspective rather than community-based evidence, and the interview questions and conversation topics were different. A list of interview questions is found in the Appendix.
Table 2. Interview Demographics
(organization names are pseudonyms)
n=34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Local Youth Volunteers (Age 18-22)</th>
<th>Daycare Operators (Women)</th>
<th>Community Members (Residents &amp; Local/Day Volunteers)</th>
<th>NGO Directors and Voluntour Business Owners</th>
<th>Home-stay Hosts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. EDUCARE Cape Town</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. YouthAid Mpumalanga</td>
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Research Methods

The Advantages of Participant Observation

Participant observation is a research method adapted from anthropology that geographers use when they are seeking to uncover the day-to-day lives and stories of a community of people whose way-of-life is not readily visible to outsiders (Jorgenson 1989). Participation allows for the direct experience of life as a community member, and can be considered as both the ends and means of development. Its use is an expression of solidarity that destabilizes power relations, and encourages the building of trust. This approach was chosen as being particularly powerful in the South African context, where the living conditions of the majority population are rendered invisible, by design, through the spatial geography established under Apartheid. In addition, the historical mistrust of White people requires deliberate expressions of empathy. As a White woman, I am counted among other volunteers or NGO employees - almost all of whom are from outside the country - choosing to live in rural or informal settlements. This is a conscious personal and political act that is appreciated by and encouraging to local people. As the purpose of the research was to understand the experience of being a volunteer on the project, as well as understanding the feelings and impressions of South African community members, becoming a volunteer myself was a self-evident choice. Particularly, as one of the objectives in this project is to uncover the situations in which volunteer labor and inputs are contributing to community development, personal participation allowed for first-hand experience of volunteer service. Since “participation is a prerequisite for sustainable development in Africa” (Dorsner 2008), the research itself was an attempt to participate as a volunteer and a guest in the community simultaneously.
Although participant observation methods have been around since the 19th century, evaluation and critical assessment of them is more recent. Maiter et al. (2008) argue that all observation is participant observation, because simply by being there, the researcher changes the behavior of the individuals being observed. From this perspective, evidence could never be “real” unless the community remains unaware of the deception. Kearns (2000) goes even further to say that the process is one that also changes the researcher (observer), as they become a part of the community and dynamically act on it.

However, participant observation is highly qualitative by nature, and has been critiqued as being invalid as there is no way to ‘prove’ or substantiate interpersonal experiences (Baxter and Eyles 1997; Mosse 2001) or the subsequent analysis by the researcher. Personal bias is therefore acknowledged in this context, as past experiences working on similar development projects in South Africa have already instilled doubt about the measure of positive impact being made by external volunteers. As such, the very choice of research project undertaken for this thesis, the research questions, and the approach, are each heavily influenced by prior knowledge of exploitation and cross-cultural misunderstandings that worked to change this researcher when previously a part of a similar community. Therefore, the choice to visit three different case studies rather than the much less complicated choice of one, is a conscious attempt to substantiate data through repetition and comparison.

Semi-structured and Informal Interviews

One of the ways to triangulate findings from the ethnographic field notes based on the participant observation method, and to gather uniform data sets, is through semi-structured and informal interviews. These were carried out with 34 community members across the three case sites (see Table 1). Conversations were recorded with a small audio device that allowed for casual discussion that sparked memory and creative thinking, with minimal need for note-taking. These types of interviews complement participant methods (Fontana and Frey 2000) because they allow the researcher to remain embedded in the community while carrying on open-ended conversational research with participants in the field, over lunch, around the fire, etc. Other researchers in South Africa have relied on this technique in order to specifically encourage women to relate their stories, as described by Kihato in her work with migrant women in Johannesburg: “the use of interviews provides a platform to validate women’s subjective experiences, elevate their voices, and narrate their subjective interpretations” (2007:94). Transcribed interview text provides empirical evidence that what was uncovered during participant observation also corresponds with the perspective of the
people engaged in the project. Interview questions sought to establish the key elements of the relationships and experiences of the community before, during, and after volunteer service contact. Even as there was a list of questions, subjects were encouraged to elaborate on their memories, share personal anecdotes, and to articulate disappointments as well as positive outcomes. The majority of these interviews became two-way conversations in which stories were shared and common ground was established. Many of the stories that illustrate key points in the later chapters were shared outside of the official interviews.

Feminist and Community-based Research Approach

Community development is as much the focus of this research approach as it is the goal of volunteer service. The case studies are examples of volunteer service projects that aim to contribute to the development of communities, as a starting point for local control and empowerment. NGOs and volunteers who seek to contribute to community development should recognize that cross-cultural communication and understanding is the first step towards equity in project design and implementation. This approach starts with respect and consciously seeks the perspective of the ‘other.’

As a methodological approach, community-based research into volunteer service allowed for the gathering of empirical data needed to inform the findings, conclusions and recommendations. In addition, both Marxism and feminism, contributing to the enlargement of social theory, aid in the understanding that within community engagement, there are bound to be different perspectives amongst people sharing a common experience (male/female; rich/poor). Women were subjects of 76% of the interviews in this project, a statistic that reflects the types of work undertaken for community development (early childhood centers and orphanages, small tourism-oriented businesses; acting as hosts to service volunteers), and the role of women in attempts to forge brighter futures for the next generation. The higher proportion of women interviewed at all sites reflect this bias, and also underscores the role of women in South African society as the ones who were forced historically to remain in rural areas under Apartheid while the men sought work in the mines of Johannesburg.

These patterns of *apartheid* remain in place, as ownership of family land in the former homelands is retained by widows, young mothers, or women who were unable to access quality education. The agency of these women working towards the betterment of their communities, and the burden of responsibility placed on them in caring for the children of deceased family members or others orphaned by AIDS, situates them as the core of the research on community needs and
NGO impacts. Their ability to negotiate these various challenges belies the caveat of “neutral objective social science which tends to reproduce ‘black’ and ‘female’ as devoid of reason and therefore substandard and subhuman’ (Magubane 2004:2 in Kihato (2007:94). The chosen methods, and the emphasis on these narratives, optimize my experience as a facilitator and my position as a political ecologist working to destabilize power relations between local communities, NGOs and volunteers.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is a flexible and creative research method that sees the researcher as a part of the social processes that take place within communities. Being a political ecologist with an anthropology background, I believe the grounded theory approach to be appropriate in the South African setting because it recognizes that knowledge is relative to particular circumstances. As explained by Bailey et al. in their 1999 response to Baxter and Eyles (1997), grounded theory demands critical enquiry and attention to tendencies in social interactions, as opposed to hard truths. Grounded theory is a technique developed in response to the critique that qualitative geographic methods lack scientific ‘rigour’ due to the way in which participation and field notes are produced in a creative fashion (Bailey et al. 1999). I chose it, however, as an opportunity to build theory while in the field, rather than to test theories as other scientific methods do. Combined with participant observation, it allows the researcher to become a reflexive (and flexible) part of the research process; to step outside of the researcher role into the participant role and to develop new theories based on the outcomes of creative processes. Because this project is partially designed to develop theories and conclusions that can be used in other volunteer development projects, in South Africa or other parts of the world, grounded theory allows the creation of theory from concrete experiences that result from interpersonal relationships, but are applicable in broader contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

Whether or not the participants in volunteer tourism or the students in service learning projects are performing labor that “makes a difference” in a host community has undergone little scrutiny. The best intentions of each of the investigated NGOs sometimes fell short of incorporating the voice of the community, whether because of financial constraints, time pressures, or indebtedness to donors. By undertaking this project, and approaching it with the described methods, this thesis gives voice to the too-rarely-heard ‘recipient’ of development. Determining if the various types of development aid have actually accomplished their goals can be difficult, but also very simple: just
ask the people, on the ground, whether volunteers have improved their lives or made their communities stronger. In the most basic of terms, this is the method employed, and the corresponding results will be illustrated with direct quotes and observations from the field notebook that reveal the untold story. It is hoped that these examples will increase the understanding of how the approach taken through research can be applied in volunteer service programs to make the experience of the service volunteer and the host community more equitable.
Chapter Four
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM TO DEVELOPMENT

Introduction: A Post-Development Framework

This chapter compares and contrasts international development philosophies and methods with those of volunteer service as they are perceived and experienced by local people. As decades of outside investment in poverty alleviation and economic development has wrought few tangible or sustainable results to ordinary people, this chapter uses empirical data to critique the role that both NGOs and volunteer tourism agencies play in perpetuating these inadequacies. In support of a development or modernization agenda, volunteer service can often carry with it similar assumptions and power relationships as the outside experts from international development institutions. Development ethics suggest that it would be more useful to apply ‘value-based’ interventions (Corbridge 1998) that respect and enhance local cultural variables rather than to continue to push societies towards technological advancement. Evidence from community interviews points directly to the need to listen to local priorities before attempting to impose solutions. As volunteer service continues to expand, the suggestion is made to put Learning before Service by employing participatory practices, and to re-conceptualize human needs outside of developments’ traditional economic growth imperatives. To remain alternative, volunteer service can start by supporting local solutions to local problems, within the mode of social justice. It can also pursue the attainment of basic human rights and the empowerment of communities towards finding their own sustainable practices.

Literature assessing Volunteer Travel and Service Learning cast them as effective tools for development wherein students and communities accrue equal benefits (Bednarz et al. 2008). Kennedy and Dornan claim that voluntourism has made “substantial contributions to poverty reduction” (2009:183) even as they acknowledge that there are no standards for measuring its impacts (2009:198). Because these basic questions have remained under-analyzed, this chapter will discuss and answer the following research question: “What are the measureable impacts of volunteer service on meeting human needs or alleviating poverty?” and draw from local perspectives in an attempt to substantiate the claims made by NGOs and other volunteer service practitioners. It will also discuss the ethical considerations of continuing to operate volunteer service programs in South Africa while these fundamental concerns remain unaddressed.
Development and Community Choice

The Development Paradigm

Traditional forms of development aid are characterized by Euro-centric bias that adopts a one-size-fits-all model towards economic and technological growth. Designed to stimulate underprivileged nations in the post-colonial era on a linear path towards the “end goal” of development, projects were forged across Third World nations over decades with little thought of the socio-cultural or environmental costs required to achieve them. To partially counteract this trend, voluntary organizations and NGOs spearheaded alternative development efforts in the 1950s and ‘60s, to target issues such as poverty and malnutrition, and to challenge the assumptions of modernization theory (Kennedy and Doman 2009). Following the United Nations Summit on Environment and Development in 1992, sustainable development in the Third World became the focus of NGOs and IFIs (International Financial Institutions). In simple terms, there was an acknowledgement that development strategies needed to become more holistic, as stimulating economies at the expense of the environment and human health was proving to be un-sustainable. Simultaneously, attention to issues such as local ownership, participatory decision-making, and the need to integrate community capacity building with technologically appropriate solutions created a whole new market for alternative NGOs (de Beer and Marais 2005).

Individual philanthropy was given a cultural push when, in the 1990s a new form of identity emerged that established in young people’s minds that they are “change agents,” each containing the seed necessary to make an impact on the world (Butin 2003 in Oldfield 2008: 269). In this environment, there is no need to subject one’s self to the application and screening process of government branches such as the Peace Corps. Today anyone can purchase a volunteer service package privately and travel to their country of choice without any corresponding training or in-country orientation. In some ways, due to his example of overcoming personal deprivations in order to achieve social change, leaders such as Nelson Mandela played no small role in the belief that one’s character has the power to transform both local politics and global history. This attitude played out in the increase in study abroad and the emergence of the ‘alternative break’, as well as in the birth of independent travel operators that established more programs to the Global South. Service Learning, both in nearby communities and in disadvantaged communities abroad, received new attention from universities seeking to ‘internationalize,’ while volunteerism was encouraged by the social responsibility arms of large corporations. Today, in collaboration with the internet, there
are ample opportunities for young people to ‘Be the Change’ in the world by taking action as amateur extensions of development NGOs.

History of Oppression in South Africa

The transition to majority rule through democratic elections and the freedom to participate in all forms of civic life became a political reality in South Africa in April 1994. The new government claimed to be people-centered in performing its functions (de Beer and Marias 2005), made community development one of its primary goals, and provided funding to support these ends. However, sixteen years after the adoption of a progressive constitution, tangible equality and freedom are lagging far behind. The structural conditions of economic and social apartheid remain entrenched in society as the majority population still suffers the consequences of Bantu Education and a continued lack of access to resources, government benefits, and secure livelihoods. Under Apartheid, Black people were treated like children, and under-educated by design in order to ensure they could never compete for even the low-level jobs that government held in reserve for Whites. One of the few jobs available for a Black woman was as a domestic servant in a White home. Her job was to clean, do laundry, and cook for the children of her employers while her own children remained behind in the ‘homelands’ or townships without their mother’s care. Under this system, a White 13-year-old boy had complete authority over a Black woman who was his family’s employee.

In parallel, Black men were valued only as cheap labor and spent their lives in underground gold mines, or relegated to construction and agricultural jobs. It was a commonplace practice to refer to men as “boy” or “Kaffir” (infidel/savage), to inflict unjust or even deadly corporal punishment, and to prohibit men from travelling freely through the enforcement of Pass Laws. In short, the Apartheid system kept families apart, denied children access to both education and their parents, and emasculated men by keeping them from their traditional role as family providers within official government policy. Consciously or not, volunteers and development agencies are often granted authority in disadvantaged communities, and carry the mixed baggage of assumed superiority, education and skills, moral imperatives, and commonly, white skin. Black people were long acculturated to defer to Whites, and will commonly step aside, listen intently, and follow

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3 The 1953 Bantu Education Act is a much-hated Apartheid-era policy that Mandela described as “institutionalized inferiority.” Officials argued that because there was no place for Africans in society above that of laborers, there was no need to educate them. Under the law, church and mission schools had to hand control over to government. It was in opposition to this law, and being taught only in the oppressors’ language – Afrikaans – that spurred the Soweto Protests in 1976. Many youth of this generation boycotted school as their only means of resistance and therefore received no education at all.
instructions, even if they disagree. It was historically in their own best interest (in the short-term) to appear acquiescent, even if they knew the White person was wrong, and the idea would fail.

Research conducted for this project unfortunately found many of these power structures still in place. Intentional or not, many examples of voluntary service work carry with it the same assumptions related to superior/inferior and right/wrong as are prevalent in the colonial era and large-scale development efforts that have gone before. A South African woman working with children at the YouthAid Case Study described the relationship between the community and the NGO representative like this:

“They see that we are Black and they think our brains are Black, too. I have told her our feelings many times; simple things that she should understand by now…”

This quote, though hopefully not illustrative of all NGO-community relationships, is nonetheless an example of the sensitivity between the races that exists to this day, and that may remain for generations to come. The assumption of superiority that enabled Europeans to colonize and subjugate the African continent still shapes the future of the African people in the post-Apartheid era. Service volunteers, largely of European descent, are often unwitting heirs of the culture that established these power structures under first, colonialism and later, Apartheid. As such, heightened self-awareness on behalf of development workers (and service volunteers) is necessary to ensure that any “help” is aligned with and in support of community goals, and not determined by external agendas that can undermine local agency.

Listen and Learn

The younger the international volunteer, the less likely they are to be aware of the depth and breadth of South Africa’s socio-political histories, and therefore may be less able to resist imposing textbook solutions onto culturally determined survival strategies. At EDUCARE Cape Town, in the township environment, there was a nineteen-year old business major and fraternity member (he often pointed this out) volunteering from an American university. He seemed unable to contain himself when it came to offering solutions and solving problems. This young man had travelled to South Africa with a group of five other students as part of a summer service-learning course. Their 2-month project was to teach economic sustainability to the school principals by showing them ways to increase their income and eventually become self-sufficient from EDUCARE. This example illustrates the many ways that service volunteers often enter communities with no background or cultural knowledge and rather irresponsibly assume they can solve problems with a minimal investment of time and energy. During his second day at the day-care center, the young man was
confident enough to tell a school principal how to complete a task correctly, wresting the tool from her hands. In their enthusiasm, he and his friends rearranged all the furniture in the classroom as the women staff protested, knowing that the children got over-excited when they knew a break was coming. While seemingly harmless in both intent and long-term consequences, it points to two closely related issues. One is that the students were not humble or self-aware enough to take the time to understand the local approach to the challenges, nor are they open to learning from the South Africans they meet. Perhaps more crucially, it leads to the creation of an unbalanced situation where hope for mutuality is lost, and the power of the women (daycare staff) working in their own environment is diminished.

Interview questions prepared for this project specifically sought to target the experience of mutuality in volunteer-community relationships. Responses show that many local people understand the importance of working side-by-side to solve problems, but deeper investigation proved that they were often put into the position of being the ones to train the volunteers in the value of this approach.

“It’s important for people to learn from us while they are here. And it is important for us to learn from them. We want to! But they have to listen to us first.”
- Daycare principal, EDUCARE Cape Town

This above example, of American students performing service in South Africa, underscores quite plainly the ways that the Learning must come before the Service. How can someone expect to help before they understand the problem? A young South African man volunteering in the gardens at YouthAid expressed his attitude towards volunteer motivations this way:

“They come to learn and we must teach them. We sometimes need someone to paint and to water our plants. For me, it is no big deal. They (volunteers) should go home and explain to their friends, ‘I have been to South Africa and have learned something I didn’t know how to do.’ It doesn’t matter what they know, as long as they are willing to learn.”

From his perspective, he and his fellow volunteers at YouthAid are the ones with the valuable skills; he would likely be surprised to know that the American service volunteers were expecting to share their knowledge with him. These stories are included in order to illustrate that the specific environment of post-Apartheid South Africa makes it more important than it might be in other countries to ensure that volunteer and development efforts build self-esteem and contribute to community capacity building, rather than inadvertently deny individual agency or undervalue local knowledge.
Community Development Needs: Local Voices

For development to be community-based, ethical, and effective, both initial and on-going communication of goals and objectives is paramount. Integrating volunteer service into locally initiated projects is the most promising model for effective outcomes (Wearing 2001) and fulfills the goal of service learning to “meet genuine human needs” (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999). The next section of this chapter draws directly from community informants to illustrate that, in the selected case studies, urgent and apparent community needs were being largely ignored by agencies and their volunteers in favor of meeting objectives important to the NGO. It is arguable that the ethical implications of imposing standards and providing services that are neither in response to nor in partnership with those of the community leaves volunteer service on unstable moral ground. However, each case study is different, with complicated relationships among representatives, volunteers, and community members who are unevenly empowered and separated by culture and sometimes language. In several instances involving these three case studies, the stated aims of the NGO and subsequent volunteer assignments were clearly not the priorities of the people who were interviewed. The following descriptions will reveal the needs of the community in contrast with the activities of the NGO or agency responsible for placing volunteers.

EDUCARE: Case Study No. 1

This case study provides a profound example of how broad socio-cultural differences can clash when seeking solutions to an emotionally charged set of circumstances. A primary goal of the NGO is to build professional capacity within and to modernize the operations of the daycare centers it sponsors in the township near Cape Town. This is a useful example of the imperatives of development that involves “modernization”, i.e. changing society towards the market-based technically-sophisticated, rationally organized…society characteristic of rich countries” (Trainer 2002:54). EDUCARE activities can be viewed through this lens, as bringing buildings up to code, having computer-based communications, and maintaining the formal records required to obtain non-profit organization (NPO) compliance is their main objective. In order to access grants afforded by NPO status, the principals meet twice a month at a forum with an EDUCARE coordinator to share concerns, keep training up-to-date, and to reinforce the financial accounting requirements. These financial reports are the focus of discomfort, embarrassment, and tension to the principals who fail to understand the mistakes repeatedly made. Principals who had mastered the accounting requirements were compelled to defend the others with statements such as these:
“It’s not that we are stupid. We just didn’t get a chance to go to school.” (see Footnote 3)

“They don’t feel comfortable asking for help over and over.”

“If you don’t know how to ask in English, you feel unwelcome.”

By having a chance to spend time with the principals when the EDUCARE representative was absent, I observed that many of them were carrying out a form of passive resistance against the financial deadlines. Principals were actively avoiding the NGO ECD coordinator whenever she sought their statements. At least half of the interviews at this case study contained reference to the confounding nature of the accounting requirements. In contrast, their attention and desires were focused on getting playground equipment rather than a computer, and they expressed the preference for having a roof repaired before receiving any further training. However, over time, and after several warnings, if the daycare principal fails to complete the financial statements that keep her operation legitimate, the facility is dropped from EDUCARE sponsorship. This punishment was described to me as a form of “tough love” by the ECD coordinator, and is designed to coerce the centers into conforming to modern standards.

What the NGO and the ECD coordinator failed to grasp, however, was that the women were already functioning at their highest capacity, and were not likely to ever make the finances a priority. It seems clear that the support and the daily motivation needed to operate the schools came from a different source entirely. As an example of what Goulet would emphasize in this instance as the need for a qualitative, not quantitative approach to human betterment (2002), the women needed social support, not technical enhancement. In fact, even as there was a consistent desire to improve the facilities, access financial resources, and host volunteers, the women would continue to run the centers with or without the support of EDUCARE, as they had been doing prior to their intervention. This is because they were doing it for the children; it is their life’s work. The pressure to conform and to modernize failed to impress them as being more important than the care of the children. However important the accurate accounting is to the NGO, the coordinators, and, by association, to the volunteers, they all seem to be missing the point, as this quote from an interview with a principal illustrates:

“Everything we can do here for the children, it is not enough. My dream is to have daycare for them 24/7. You know why? Three weeks ago two of my children (from the school) were kidnapped, raped, and murdered. This wouldn’t have happened if they lived here with me. If only school hadn’t been closed that day! Now we try to go to the homes to see how the children are living. Sometimes, volunteers, if they are here long
enough, they come with me. This is how we know the problems the children have. We say, “Where are the blankets? Where is the food?” and we know the children are naughty at school because they learn violence at home. Some of them won’t talk. Poverty makes everything worse. Safety is my top priority over even education.”

- Principal of a daycare center, EDUCARE Cape Town

Being “dropped” from the NGO program only further “punishes” the most vulnerable members of society. The consequences of being dropped from sponsorship are losing access to donations, vitamin-fortified staple foods such as e-pap, and the volunteer services. While new buildings, freshly painted walls, and donated books are all welcome additions, principals pointed to the urgent need to provide fencing around buildings so that children can’t be kidnapped from the yard. Child abduction, murder, and rape (even of children under 3 years of age) is painfully common in South African township environments, allegedly linked to unemployment, ignorance, structural violence, and the belief that intercourse with a virgin is a cure for AIDS. For these women working for a better life for the children, the ability to control their environment, to control how their energy is used, and to control the future of their community is the underlying wish. Although the principals were strong enough to seek the help of the NGO at the start of their relationship, it remains to be seen whether they can be strong enough to communicate the larger obstacles that embody and continue their community’s oppression.

The vast gulf of difference between this reality and life in Cape Town’s suburbs where EDUCARE has its offices, serves to illustrate the insufficiencies of assessing children’s needs from the NGO perspective (toys and books) and from the community’s perspective (security). This story was also shared because it is such a painful example of many concerns within development work: the assumption that technology and modernity will improve people’s lives, the inability to understand the reality of another’s experience (even just 30 minutes apart), and continuing development efforts that make no attempt to address the underlying structural causes of economic and social inequities.

SERV-SA: Case Study No. 2, Northwest Province

As described in Chapter Two, the people living at the SERV-SA site faced challenges related in part to the geographical legacy of Apartheid. This NGO, amongst the three examples, had delivered positive material benefits for several people, including the extension to the daycare center and the bicycle project/convenience store that addressed transportation and social needs. However, regardless of work done by the volunteers, the overall sense of hopelessness and the interwoven and
overwhelming number of challenges confronting the community make the planning, building, and training efforts seem futile. I held one interview with a household of three adults that went like this:

“The volunteers want to help everyone, but it is difficult. They looked to where the need was, so they built a big room at the daycare center. But we also need a clinic, and for the schools to be closer. The children walk more than two hours each way and are exhausted when they get there, and exhausted when they come home. It is a big problem. We see the volunteers come, and they may do something, but it is not for all of us. We have seen the bicycle shop (across the street), but no one can afford to buy a bike. Perhaps they will reduce the price. People with bikes can make money.

But the volunteers should come and do a different project next time, like to help someone know how to plant a garden or start a business. I would like to learn how to make bread. One volunteer tried to help us, but when he left there was nothing! He should have helped us get something started that would last.

Unemployment is really bad. There is nothing to do here! We lost the soccer balls so now we can’t play anymore. Yes, volunteers have made the community better, and hopefully one day we will have built something for ourselves. They could teach us to write a grant, or about marketing so we can start a business. I want the volunteers to bring us another solar cooker; they taught me how to use one. It takes a long time to cook, and you can do other things while it is working. But it can’t work when it’s raining! (laughter)

It is too dry and rocky to grow vegetables, and we can’t even have chickens. The lady who was selling chickens died and her children ate them all. Now there is nowhere to buy more. Everything is too far.”

The litany of obstacles is reminiscent of what a Western psychologist would diagnose as a form of depression: at every turn there is a closed door, whether it is lack of money, knowledge, resources, or hope. As the SERV-SA director explained to me, this project site was an “obvious” choice because of the extensive community needs, which they have attempted to address through service placements when possible. I toured the positive examples of contributions made by service volunteers that had benefitted 4 or 5 people, including a bicycle repair shop and the daycare center. But what is seen as a positive enhancement to some in the community is the source of resentment to those living in close enough proximity to see the unaffordable bicycles. As such, these data point to a complicated question: what is the role of the NGO and for individual volunteers confronted with the deep helplessness that comes from years of trying and failing? Of surviving a political struggle only to feel more betrayed by a democratic government that has invested its resources elsewhere? Also, how can a travel company adequately assess, or hope to address, issues such as psychological trauma and the lack of infrastructure? This scenario provides an example of the qualitative or
abstract assessment of human needs that are much more difficult to measure than that of economic need, but provide insight into the building blocks on which all future success stories rest.

The SERV-SA example illustrates the problematic theory of development practice whereby too often, short-term NGO or donor funding “favors the creation of visible monuments, for example, a classroom, a market site, or a clinic” (de Beer and Marais 2005: 53), when what the community needs is an investment in skills training and capacity building, something that a for-profit volunteer travel organization is not likely to be able to provide. In what de Beer and Marais refer to as the “development fraternity” in South Africa, money and time are oriented towards visible building projects, but often end in results that are damaging to communities, as clinics are established without a long-term budget for their maintenance and staffing, markets erected without a management structure, or skills training is provided within a limited job market (2005:55). The result of these conditions are that the community is worse off than it was before, as the grant money is used up, leaving in its wake decreased morale and deeper skepticism towards the development process. At this community, needs are woven into the interview transcription above, yet the NGO had fallen prey to the often-repeated development mistake that relies on new buildings as measure of its work.

“Volunteers do not make it better. They come and then they leave. When we sit here we are free. If a volunteer wants to come and ask us what to do, we can tell them something. We just like them to visit, but when they leave things are the same.”

- A group of women in the SERV-SA community

This community, more than the other examples, seemed to be in a state of waiting, or the stasis that comes from learning that help can only come from the outside. All the signs of recent activity had taken place around visits from volunteers who had cleared a soccer field or a half-completed home for an indigent man. Once the volunteers left, it was the government that people seemed to be waiting on, even though individuals told me plainly in interviews that they had the skills to build homes and soccer fields themselves. Apartheid worked in a way that partially accounts for these attitudes: the former government was perceived to serve only the White population, therefore the new government was elected (and expected) to bring jobs and prosperity to Black South Africans. Since the new government - and obviously the volunteer tourism company - is unable to meet these needs, perhaps another radical change in the entire structure of society holds the only solution to this palatable and depressing condition of dependency. While it cannot be expected that an NGO, travel company, or service volunteers, can address the deep-seated psychological, social, and physical
(geographical) needs of this region, perhaps it is not entirely ethical to create the expectation that they can.

YouthAid: Case Study No. 3, Mpumalanga Province

This case study is similar to the previous one, in that the NGO had long focused on buildings, specifically environmentally friendly ones, as its main contribution to the development of the orphanage site. However, the YouthAid project director claimed that they had made it clear to the U.S.-based partner NGO from the beginning of their relationship that a borehole for water was their first concern: “That was the first thing we were supposed to get.” The issue was brought to my attention by the South African day volunteers, who asked me during interviews if I knew when they would get the borehole. With plans to house and feed at least 90 orphans, sanitary conditions and access to a reliable water supply are understandably a top priority. Yet five years into the partnership, a cooking facility, office buildings, a performance space, a guard house, and an internet café were completed instead. Based on conversations with a U.S. volunteer who had lived on the site for over a year to oversee construction, it seems that donors were also more interested in funding these more visible material contributions than in paying for a drill to prepare a borehole.

Without water on site, 5000 gallon tanks must be purchased and delivered several times a month, meaning water used for the gardens has a cost input that rivals the profits made from the selling of (or not having to buy) vegetables. Also, toilets are compost only, and the use of water from the tank for everything from washing clothes and dishes to cars and feet, creates enormous waste and a constant run-off of unpleasant-smelling “grey” water through the center of the community. The inefficiency and wastefulness of the current arrangement for water serves as a constant reminder to the residents that their requests for a borehole have been ignored. The YouthAid directors’ interpretation of the situation came down to this:

“They are building buildings while our children are dying. They care about buildings, but not about souls.”

It is these ethical concerns over empowerment, control, and choice that volunteers need to be aware of when entering a community, as the measure by which the community feels empowered will be reflected in the general reaction to the presence of the volunteer. The routine arrival of international volunteers into this setting only serves to perpetuate frustration at the delays in larger improvements, as volunteers water gardens, play with children, or witness musical performances while the really urgent tasks go uncompleted for another season.
The Potential of Volunteer Service in Development

NGO-Community Partnerships

NGOs have a reputation for being morally superior to financial institutions, government departments, or corporations that engage in development efforts (Kennedy and Dornan 2009). As such, NGOs can draw on a certain measure of power based on the assumption that they are more effective because they are in-touch with community needs, able to act as advocates for local people, and can do so without suspicion of having a self-serving agenda. By their nature, organizations which are not-for-profit (NPO) are attractive magnets for donations of time and money. By playing a role in hosting international volunteers and embedding them into ongoing projects, NGOs can act as a “bridge” between potential volunteers and communities, while offering some assurance that the projects will be ethical and community-based. But an organization that consciously sets out to “build capacity” must also earn an income by collecting fees from volunteers and students. Once they enter agreements to sponsor local projects, they assume a role of power (to bring or take away support, volunteers, and money) in relation to the beneficiary, much in the same way a shareholder, investor, or donor would.

In the mode of social justice, NGOs offer a unique example of engaged social development designed to eradicate the root causes of poverty through social work, not to just treat its symptoms. It is easy to look at volunteer service as either a strictly positive impact on communities, or at least a benign experience that benefits the service volunteer and does no harm to communities. With so little literature to draw upon, the few available examples portray the assumption that permission to come back each year is evidence enough that NGOs are performing a valuable service in communities (Kennedy and Dornan 2009). However, NGOs in developing countries can get ‘seduced’ into accepting and supporting the causes lavishly presented to them by Western NGOs with whom they have formed partnership agreements (Scheyvans 2002). On the ground, external NGOs can also unwittingly “push their agendas on to Third World partners even when they clash with the interests of local people” (Scheyvans 2002: 231). The findings of this research illustrate the extent of this problem by documenting the YouthAid community’s rejection of “green” and “sustainable” interventions that are misunderstood or unsuitable to local conditions. Collaboration with NGOs is nonetheless touted as the best choice from a series of worse alternatives (Wearing 2001, Scheyvans 2002, Kennedy and Dornan 2009).

YouthAid, at Case Study 3, provides yet another clear example of the ways that NGOs may be more loyal to a mission statement or donor dollars than they are to meeting actual community
needs. The commitment to donors to create an “environmentally sustainable” home for South African orphans resulted in the construction of buildings from natural materials, such as straw bale technology, mud-brick, and earth bag designs. It is a fact however, that many South Africans do not want to live in what they feel is ‘a mud house,’ especially when they see the beautiful homes that more wealthy people have. This is often simply because they have never seen the best examples of these techniques, and have long been exposed to the ideal of a western-style dream home. Even though natural building materials can create beautiful living spaces that utilize natural cooling systems and are easy to repair, the political message of putting AIDS orphans into what is considered to be sub-standard housing, or something more suitable for an animal pen, has serious consequences. When discussing the utility and tradition of adobe in the U.S., and even positive South African applications, community members were adamant: “But that’s their choice,” they said. “Brick is our choice.” They want a home that they believe will last; one that can be passed to their children.

To compromise, and to remain loyal to the sustainability mission, the U.S.-based NGO purchased a compression machine so that conventional bricks could be produced on site. Unfortunately, once the cement had been paid for and delivered, and workers paid an hourly wage to make the bricks, it turned out to be much cheaper just to buy them ready made. Therefore, local people, who had been waiting more than five years for dormitories for orphans concluded that Americans care more about the environmental program than they do about the people. “We could have built all eight buildings by now with regular (store-bought) bricks.” Instead, they have a straw bale house filled with termites, built on the side of a hill where rain and wastewater run right into its foundation. This example is not meant to be critical of attempts at environmentally neutral construction practices, or to disparage the mission of the NGO, but is drawn upon as a clear example of the mismatch between the NGO agenda and the acceptability of the building materials from the community perspective. And, after five years of fund-raising and construction projects, the failure of the green-building (straw bale and earth bag) destroyed the trust between the local and U.S.-based organizations. “I knew when the straw bale house got termites we had lost all credibility with them,” the U.S.-based NGO director said to me on the phone.

As stated earlier, the nature of the NGO-community relationship will provide the context for how well volunteers are integrated into these types of development projects. Because of this, any improvement to the integration of placements into community work, or the achievement of more long-term structural changes, must come from the management style of the particular NGO.
EDUCARE organization in Cape Town, where service volunteers performed only low-skilled tasks in a supportive role to the daycare staff, one principal described the placement process like this:

“Ten volunteers are coming next week! Who wants them?” the NGO representative says at the bi-weekly meetings. “They don’t ask us (in advance if we need them or want them),” she stated, “it’s o.k. if they want to come, but I don’t know why they are here.”

Given the current student-caregiver ratio, the daycare staff is happy for the help, especially when it came to serving lunch to 80 three-year-olds. This notion is reflected particularly in the EDUCARE example, where reaction to volunteer presence was very positive, but impacts were materially and developmentally insignificant. Unfortunately, they are unaware of any on-going project or goal to which the volunteers should be contributing. They could not recall having taken part in a discussion of what skills the volunteers would bring, or how they could best maximize their time working in the township program. A key issue for the principals at EDUCARE is the limitations put on volunteer-child interactions due to the lack of a common language. A daycare principal that welcomes volunteers regularly lamented that “they can’t help much if they don’t speak Xhosa.” While she would appreciate volunteers staying long enough to teach English to her local staff as well as to the children, the opportunities for this are rare since most volunteers are students who come for less than 2 months during university breaks.

Each of the case studies includes some form of daycare center that creates the opportunity for service volunteers to work and play with children. They also convey the many levels on which volunteer efforts can be wasted while attempting to navigate complex cultural labyrinths among NGOs, volunteers and host communities, as well as attempting to understand contrasting priorities and goals. Most service volunteers do not invest the time needed in order to do much more than provide moral support to desperately poor people. At EDUCARE, volunteers simply played with children, washed dishes, and picked up litter; clearly not tasks that can be contributing to community development. Social service providers have pointed out the potential harm done to children receiving sporadic attention from strangers followed by abrupt abandonment when the service period is over. When planning for the trip, service volunteers likely anticipate that the NGO will facilitate placements integrated into long-term community goals. If the NGO has done a good job of assessing and addressing community needs, then the work of the volunteers will be a better match with community priorities. If the relationship is poor, with no over-riding agreement about project goals and how service volunteers fit into the plan, then their labor will be largely wasted. Because
the needs on the ground are much more immediate than the concerns promoted by the sponsoring
NGO, the volunteer is unable to contribute in a meaningful way.

Development Ethics

We have just learned that the ethical considerations of pursuing a development agenda through
volunteer service in the absence of determining such basic issues as costs versus benefits should give
volunteers pause, as it can be perceived that the first cost to communities is the sacrifice of some of
their autonomy. Ethics are subjective and tied to the culture and motivations of an individual. Yet,
the idea of development itself, as a universally good thing for everyone, everywhere, is also “a
question of values and human attitudes, self-defined goals and criteria for determining what are
tolerable costs to be borne in the course of change” (Goulet 1997: 1161). In the world of
development agencies and NGOs, ethics must be made first and foremost, and should form the
basis of organizational decisions. In the debate over such philosophical questions as “the meaning
of the good life” (ibid: 1161), NGOs and individuals often express their personal ethic through the
choice of approach and methods when working across cultural and class lines. The adoption of
participatory methods is a conscious attempt to achieve reciprocal practices that embody an “ethical
basis for research relationships” and to acknowledge the voice of local people (Maiter et al. 2008:
307). The critical literature reinforces the experience on the ground by concluding that top-down
decision-making or externally imposed projects can no longer be justified (Corbridge 1998). Escobar
(1995) argues that development itself is unethical and that rather than make adjustments to it, whole
alternative approaches must be imagined.

Culturally superior attitudes serve to reinforce old, out-dated power relations, contribute to the
oppression of receiving communities, and just don’t work. In an era of liberation, solidarity, and
sustainable development, South Africans are expressing the desire to be assisted out of poverty, no
doubt, but also for those assisting them to listen to their needs and work with them on their own
terms. Community-based development in which NGOs and volunteers aim to stimulate and
support individuals as they work to strengthen their own communities is arguably the only ethical
choice. Too often it seems, simple opportunities for convivial and equitable relationship-building are
lost. At the YouthAid project, the service volunteers came to work in the community for about
seven hours over two days. Arriving late in the morning, they watered plants and played with the
children for just 2-3 hours before being called to lunch. In preparation, one of the newer buildings
had been transformed into a dining room with a long table and white tablecloth. A hot meal
consisting of chicken, side dishes and salads, and various soft drinks was waiting for the volunteers
and the professor, completely separated from the local volunteers with whom they had just been working. This abrupt segregation of the volunteers (all white except one Asian) from the women who had done the cooking, as well as the children, immediately created a barrier that disrupted the work-based solidarity that was just beginning to evolve.

While decisions must be individually made and locally determined, continuing development initiatives in which participants are blind to the neo-colonial and imperial paradigm they are extending is inherently irresponsible. Trainer (2002:66) asserts that “a more appropriate development focus is now evident” that stresses quality of life rather than economic gains, a reflection of the shift in attention towards these philosophical questions within development. As service volunteers hope to invest their best energies into the poverty alleviation strategies of far-flung South African communities, the ethics of developmental practices and the limitations of developmental goals must be incorporated into both the learning and the service. Deliberate actions and even uncomfortable stances should be taken to prevent the continuation of assumptions of difference.

The goals of solidarity and liberation from poverty inherent in the mission of participatory or grass-roots development can only be realized if control begins and ends in the hands of local people. If “participatory decision-making” has become the magic elixir for NGOs and international development organizations illustrating politically correct activities, it must be more than just gathering input from community members before going ahead and imposing decisions from the outside (Mosse 2001). The “bottom-up” ethics found in political ecology and feminist approaches remind those working in intercultural environments that only by assisting people in reaching their own goals can social justice occur.

“It is nice that they give us things to use with the children. But they don’t show us how to get things for ourselves.”

- Daycare principal, EDUCARE, Cape Town

This quote illustrates the common tension created when a community is benefitting from donor money and volunteer service. The woman is careful to express her gratitude and to show that she understands the motivations to do whatever can be done for the children. At the same time, she is asserting the even stronger desire to be taught how to do these things on her own, and to begin to overcome what Illich describes as “voluntary powerlessness” (1968). This sentiment echoes that of the woman at SERV-SA who wanted the volunteers to bring her community something that would
last. As NGOs claim to be meeting community needs, and volunteer service aims to contribute to
development, getting this request to providers and organizers that can respond to it directly could
represent the first step towards individual and community empowerment.

Evidence from the Field: Outcomes of Projects lacking Community Control

Born in the anti-establishment era of the 1960s, the idea of ‘participation’ in development work
has been largely integrated into both the planning and delivery stages of project implementation
(Mosse 2001). While it no longer seems radical to attempt ‘changes and reversals’ in traditional
power structures, the practice of community control, and its relationship to project success, remains
a challenge to both quantify and qualify in the field. Contemporary literature and program
assessments of work in South Africa argue that in order to be sustainable or equitable, community
development must be not only participatory, but community controlled (de Beer and Marais 2005).

At YouthAid, a group of 18 adults had received permaculture certification at a 10-day course
when the project was in its infancy. A new idea to the local people, sustainable agriculture using
available and appropriate inputs and technology was “sold” to them as the foundation of the donor
support for the orphanage. To this end, (and due to the lack of a borehole or running water)
compost toilets were built over pits so that human waste could be used to fertilize trees. When the
toilet holes were filled, the plan was to move the outhouse-style structure over a newly-dug pit and
plant a tree at the site of the old toilet. While a good idea in theory, these models are inappropriate
for the labor capacity of the community. With disbelief and laughter, the story was recounted to me
in which heavy equipment had to be rented to move the two approximately 800-pound structures
over the new pits. The labor of all available men was required for three days, to dig new pits, lift the
structures onto flatbeds, tie them down with ropes, and relocate them 100 meters away. What are
now called “the American toilets” are unsuitable to the location, are really nothing more than
outhouses, and have resulted in a loss of faith in the partner NGO’s pro-environment technologies.
They also represent and partially account for the delay in the investment in what the community has
needed from the start: a borehole to access running water.

During interviews, most community members were too polite to laugh or to completely dismiss
the efforts of the NGO to introduce new ideas and skills, but many questions related to these toilets
still simmered beneath the surface. For instance, when the service volunteers from the U.S. arrived
and headed for the toilets, their horrified screams were heard across the compound. The young
women had never been exposed to outhouses before, and begged their teacher to be allowed to use
the toilet on the bus. This request was denied, as seemingly part of the course was to have the students acculturate to local conditions. Acceptance of the available facilities came too late, though, as everyone had heard the screams and felt ashamed. Several members of the community confronted me later with questions about the toilets, what was wrong with the students, and more specifically, "We thought that those were the American toilets. Why wouldn't the Americans use them?"

Sadly, this is a classic example of a "do as we say, not as we do" situation. The "Americans" and other proponents of permaculture principals and environmental waste management surely have flush toilets in their own homes. However, the pit (compost) toilets are considered by project directors as examples of "sustainable development" for the orphanage. The student's reaction to the toilets show how stereotypes and misunderstandings may be perpetuated during intercultural interactions for which students are unprepared, doing harm rather than doing good (Raymond and Hall 2008). If volunteers, students and collaborating NGOs wish to see themselves as agents of development, then they should be aware to what extent the community they are working in was given a say in, first, the presence of the agency and second, the nature of the project to be carried out. True participation acknowledges input from local people to reflect the complexity of cultural differences and survival challenges, and is sensitive to short- and long-term needs. While community control doesn’t guarantee success in either development or capacity-building projects (see Wearing 2001, de Beer and Marais 2005), I argue that a lack of control can be correlated to limited results over time.

Discussion and Conclusions

The goal of this chapter has been to highlight the undeniable and seemingly unalterable thread connecting the weaknesses of the traditional development paradigm, and the current role of service volunteers. In spite of the best intentions, new approaches, and the sincere goal to become participatory and sustainable, examples from the three case studies show that top-down patterns remain in place. To the community, there is little difference between the externally imposed social solutions of the past, and the cultural misunderstandings reinforced by volunteer service today. They also respond to service volunteers in the same way that they respond to development agencies: with apprehension and resignation coupled with both gratitude and hope.

The stories recounted here also show that service volunteers can make little impact towards community development when the mission of the NGO project is different than that of the community. The voices of the people interviewed reveal a true desire to be given training, to take
on a larger role in their own destinies, and to share their cultural heritage with outsiders. So far, their experience has been one of decreased empowerment, personal disappointment, or the threat of punitive measures for failing to adapt to external expectations. As the risks born by local societies who have been the targets of development are now more widely known in the realm of both environmental and socio-cultural damage, how can it be assumed that volunteer service, within this paradigm, can operate without an equal measure of risk? Because of the role that NGOs play in facilitating volunteer service placements, accountability for the type of work performed, and its benefits, is ultimately in the hands of the NGO.
Chapter Five
ANALYZING VOLUNTEER TOURISM AS ALTERNATIVE TOURISM

Introduction: A Political Economy of Tourism

Marxist theory understands tourism as “a global process of commoditization and consumption” (Meethan 2001:167) that both exploits the desire for, and increases the alienation from, a romanticized cultural past. Critical tourism geographies deconstruct it as a capitalist industry (Britton 1991: 451) that relies on the “embodied consumption of experiences and encounters” (Gibson 2009:3). For better or worse, tourism is a pleasure-seeking pastime now commonplace enough in modern Western culture to be “seen practically as entitlement”(Gibson 2008:419). Framed as either a sacred journey of personal discovery or an altruistic and educational undertaking, contemporary and alternative tourism are both conceptualized as a drive to find the meaning that has been lost from modern life (MacCannell 1989, Mowforth and Munt 1998, Meethan 2001).

While poorly represented in geographical research until recently (Gibson 2008), traditional forms of mass tourism have been fully described and critiqued elsewhere (see MacCannell 1973, Mowforth and Munt 1998, Urry 1990, Reid 2003), and it is not the goal of this thesis to review the theoretical literature. Alternative tourisms that include volunteer tourism are less often the focus of critique (Mowforth and Munt 1998) but are central to this analysis. Contemporary tourism research suggests a shift in tourism, characterized by travel options that “take into account public sensitivities and concerns about the environment, communities, and sustainability” (Simpson 2007: 86). Reflecting a post-modern cultural trend of socially responsible travel choices that also offer an escape from the confines of modern life, travel is no longer just for leisure, but is also an opportunity to create an identity through the making of conscious travel choices (Weaver 1998, Wearing 2001, Stoddart and Rogerson 2004, Raymond and Hall 2008). Although tourism as leisure still commands a dominant proportion of the global travel industry, a market catering to alternative and ‘niche’ tourism has grown in demand for eco- and volunteer options that extend tourisms’ reach further into the developing world. This chapter explores the cultural relativism and conceptual framework that co-produce the Volunteer Tourism phenomenon. It also attempts to answer three research questions:

- Are South African communities experiencing alternative tourism as different from traditional tourism?
• To what extent does volunteer tourism replicate (and spread) the negative impacts of traditional tourism?; and

• How does volunteering as a part of travel differ from tourism as consumption?

Tourism is viewed within some development literature as the best hope for the economic development of rural communities in many parts of the Global South. Indeed, growth in the travel industry to South Africa has increased over 33% since the year 2000 (Euromonitor International 2008). This “drive” towards developmental tourism in South Africa ( Rogerson 2002) has lifted the hopes of impoverished people as governments expound the benefits of investing in tourism infrastructure and cultural villages that showcase traditional tribal life, artwork and food (see Jansen van Veuren 2001). The competition for the tourist dollar is stiff, however, and many tourism initiatives, even those that are community-based, have brought few long-term economic benefits to local people and often result in the compromise of some measure of autonomy, as well as cultural and social integrity at the tourist ‘site’ ( Illich 1968, Wearing 2001, Scheyvens 2002, Reed 2003, Tomazos and Butler 2008). The addition of volunteers into this environment is assumed to create opportunities for mutually-beneficial exchanges and direct material assistance.

Defining Volunteer Service in Tourism

To “volunteer,” as defined in Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, is to “give of one’s own free will by choice, without expectation of remuneration” and sounds altruistic, even as it may also be used to undeservedly elevate moral status. The ambiguities attached to the meaning of the verb “to volunteer” exemplify the cultural assumptions and disconnects that can occur when analyzing volunteer tourism. There are many languages that do not have a word that translates as “volunteer.” The concept of volunteer tourism itself is derived from a class and a culture with enough surplus time to both donate its labor, and to travel in order to do so (Wearing 2001). Similar to the observation made by Klak (2007) in his discussion of a need for a conceptual reformulation of ecotourism, “volunteer” can be added to the list of key concepts - such as sustainable development, alternative tourism, participation - that are “chaotic” because the words can mean different things in different contexts (see de Beer and Marais 2005). Klak goes on to describe how these “defining terms face little opposition” (2007:1038), as few would think to question the motivations or usefulness of a volunteer (just as no one argues for unsustainable tourism or development). In addition, there is little need to dispute the benefits that accrue to the volunteer who gains experience, may grow personally, and enjoys the satisfaction that comes from helping others. But it
is important to note that in applying this strict definition, the students involved in volunteer service at case study sites 1 and 3 were not actually volunteers, as they were receiving course credit which is a form of remuneration. The challenge, therefore, becomes one of breaking these signifiers down into recognizable pieces and examining the speaker’s intention in order to gauge how language can be used to manipulate some and empower (or dis-empower) others.

Data gathered for this project reveal that some ‘volunteers’ are supported by generous stipends, provided free housing, 4-wheel drive vehicles, and paid vacation in exchange for completing a task for an NGO over 6 months to a year. Other ‘volunteers’ conduct research or administrative duties and volunteer to help in the garden for the afternoon. Corporations send their staff into needy communities to improve their public image while employees are on the clock. Volunteering is increasingly professionalized and commoditized, and often includes training which is provided at conferences fully subsidized by the organization, which in turn raises expectations similar to those for employees: that certain goals, and/or seeing short-term material results will be met. A volunteer can volunteer an hour a week or 60 hours a week, with no distinction made between them on their recognition certificates. Often, volunteers are students, with no objective other than to earn university credits by getting out of a bus to engage with local people or play with children. NGOs and universities sprinkle their literature with volunteer statistics and language describing self-sacrificing contributions without quantifying their assertions. This casual use of the volunteer signifier plays a part in creating the expectations and molding perceptions of both volunteers and beneficiaries, and works towards branding the organization as service-based, ethical, and community supported. It is plain to see that the term is an overly broad conceptual category.

Community Understanding of Voluntourism

As the defining terms are chaotic, even within a single language and culture, it is important to note that one’s identity as a volunteer tourist has been co-produced by culture and clever marketing strategies in order to capitalize on a unique post-modern altruistic moment. This identity is carried by the traveler when he/she gets off the bus and is important to their individual self-image. It is

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4 Circumstances in which volunteers are paid generous stipends provide an illustration of how the word is sometimes used to manipulate communities and mask intentions. The contracted individual(s) are labeled as volunteers to the community in order to hide the fact that the NGO has the money to pay them. Local people are then assured that the person living amongst them is there only to help, when in reality they are fully supported and carrying out specific duties that the NGO has prioritized and funded.
very likely, however, that the people to whom the volunteer is introduced and intends to serve understand them to be nothing more than a tourist.

The informality of the defining terms is important in this project, and was somewhat uncomfortably brought to light during some of the semi-structured interviews. At one point during a friendly back and forth exchange it became necessary to acknowledge that perhaps there was not a shared meaning around the use of the word “volunteer.” Realizing that the women didn’t seem to understand what the role and the objectives of volunteers were, I asked directly whether they knew what the word “volunteer” meant. They did not. There appeared to be no distinction in their minds between a volunteer, a student, or a tourist. For them, they were all white people who were welcome in the community in order to satisfy the primary need for cash: by buying beaded trinkets or staying in the guest lodge; and for material benefit, such as building a small structure and bringing donations of clothing or paint.

This came as quite a revelation, at a point halfway through the research project, that responses to questions about volunteers - the subjects’ feelings about volunteers and whether they benefitted from having them in their community - had been a conversation about tourists only. It was clear that to these particular women, outsiders represent the opportunity to sell their beadwork. Of course they had answered questions about volunteers in the positive! And it is also clear as to why they would ask that more volunteers come, and why they wished they would stay longer.

“We want them to stay with us so that we can cook for them.”
“We will always need them to come because we have nothing.”
“Volunteers bring money and the donation. Then they build a building and go home.”
“I am happy when I know they are coming because I know I will get something good.”
“I see them hand out food parcels and hope that I am next.”
“If a volunteer is here, it means there is money. If there is no volunteer, then there is no money.”

The analysis of this experience contributed directly to a major finding of this thesis: what volunteers think they are doing and what the community thinks is going on are two different things. Also, that research methods such as interviews can create confusion as much as clarity, especially when dealing with complex conceptual issues around the identity of a person who is volunteering while being a tourist.

A related problem emerged that contributed to another finding: that the use of words that sound very similar may impact the integrity of the interview. At SERV-SA, the name of the NGO
was close enough to the word “volunteer” to indicate that the responses to questions could have been referring to either volunteers or to the NGO. Simultaneously, informants may have also assumed that the questions were seeking information about the role of SERV-SA, not about individual volunteers. When analyzing data after returning to the U.S., I decided that even if the questions may have been misunderstood, their usefulness had not been compromised. Rather, they provide an example that underscores the inseparable and complicated relationships between the NGO, the volunteers it brings, and how the community experiences them. The confusion over volunteer motivations and NGO relationships even puzzled one of my South African informants who inquired in the garden, “Don’t you have poor people in America? Why doesn’t somebody help them?” Even as some of the service volunteers may be very active in their communities at home, it is interesting to discover that South African people are asking some of the same motivational questions as those framing this project. There are complicated cultural and socio-political issues involved in the answer, also touched upon in this thesis, but if local people are initially baffled by the intentions of international volunteers, then efforts are likely to be misunderstood before interactions even begin. This gardener was also one of many people I met to whom whites, tourists, researchers, students, NGO staff, and volunteers are relatively indistinguishable. As a student/researcher interacting with the community, it was also assumed that I was “with” or “from” their partner NGO, which in a sense was correct.

Constructing Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism and service opportunities practically sell themselves. In the age of the internet and associated social networking sites, an entrepreneur in a developing nation can create a web-page offering a chance to “Make a Difference” and it’s quite likely that business will pour in. What Gibson has attributed to the “looseness” of tourism capitalism also serves to “fuel further cycles of destination production” (2009: 2) especially in places like South Africa, and results in a greater number of young people appearing on the doorsteps of those in developing countries. The rougher the terrain and the less-sophisticated the host community, the more likely the small business is to fill the traveler’s romanticized notion of authenticity. Claims made by volunteer tourism literature and program marketing materials are similar to those described in Chapter 4: promising volunteers the chance to make contributions towards “positive changes” in development efforts and to “sow the seeds of a better future for us all” (VFP brochure 2009), a reflection of the dominant cultures’ attitude towards the Global South and what potential volunteers have to offer.
In keeping with its unregulated and informal nature, volunteer tourism, like traditional tourism, takes place in countries that offer the most enjoyment to the tourist. Critics point out that some of the most popular volunteer target destinations are not necessarily those countries or communities in need of the most aid, but rather ones that contain multiple draws such as exotic wildlife, tropical beaches, and cosmopolitan cities that conveniently co-exist with some level of poverty (Tomazos and Butler 2008, Rogerson 2010). Rather than protecting or uplifting these populations, the attraction of tourists towards malnourished children and endangered animals can create disproportional volunteer attention. Documented instances of children being dressed in rags in order to manipulate sympathetic tourists into increasing donations exist throughout the developing world, with the danger being that the popularity of these target sites can “drive the market for certain types of programs at the expense of others” (Bluestone 2009: np). Alternative tourism development that is designed to be more responsible and sustainable can therefore grow in an uneven way to meet this demand, which creates an economic dependency on volunteer tourism that is similar to other forms of tourism. This is not a suggestion that these less-developed nations are beyond the need for certain types of aid, but only to point out the similarities between traditional tourism “draws” and those popular with voluntourists. The problem with this situation is clear: exploitation of both volunteers and local people is occurring, with the benefits remaining in the hands of those selling volunteer tourism or study abroad experiences.

Volunteering as Authentic Tourism

Social scientists understand the search for authenticity to be one result of the construction of social space, much in the same way that tourism delineates space for the use of work and leisure activities. What Goffman (1959) termed the front/back nature of public and private relationships, and the desire to experience what is commonly in ‘the back,’ informs the volunteer tourist’s desire for authenticity. Such an opportunity would be a glimpse into the workings of the factory, the commotion of the kitchen, or the intimate interactions taking place ‘back-stage.’ These ‘real’ experiences are the ones that are remembered and re-told upon the traveler’s return home as the chance to harvest corn, ride on the milk truck, or feel the grasp of a child’s hand represent the crossing of these insider/outsider lines. Traditional tourism exists in the realm of a constructed authenticity whereby local people and their daily lives are ‘sanitized’ as performance for the tourist (Urry 1990). The tourist agrees to play along with the display, satisfied with the novelty of contrast with his or her own life. To volunteer, on the other hand, holds the promise of sweat, dirt, solidarity, and shared satisfaction. Volunteering allows one to become an ‘insider’ and can fulfill what has been
called the modern desire for authentic travel experience that blurs the front/back and insider/outsider lines (MacCannell 1989, Urry 1990, Mowforth and Munt 1998). The motivation to achieve this sort of experience is highly understandable, and has the potential to form the foundation of lifelong service and international relationships.

Those participating are actively seeking to break with the negative associations tied up with mass tourism stereotypes, to align themselves as sensitive to community needs and environmental impacts, and to experience new pleasurable and meaningful things. In 1996, Coward described the approach as a state of mind that creates authenticity and reinforces otherness through the very choice of destination so that:

The middle classes smugly believe that…problems are not created by their sort of holidays. They travel independently, (and) visit ever more remote places. The moral superiority of this tourism comes from the idea that it provides an experience of the authentic culture of the host country rather than its destruction. The problems are blamed on the type of holiday taken by less affluent members of the affluent west…who do not understand that the true purpose of travel is to experience otherness…As a result, the discerning have to travel further afield.


Therefore, because volunteer tourism is both selling and delivering something different from conventional tourism, what makes it different can be an interesting line of inquiry. Within the capitalist political economy, this desire to perform service has been commodified into a business. Appealing to this market are dozens of volunteer travel organizations, service tours, and private agencies that arrange volunteer experiences for anything from a few hours to several weeks. Being a business, these organizers, and even NGOs, need to focus on profits and even accountability to donors that often comes before accountability to communities who are the supposed beneficiaries of their work. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a “service” has been provided to the paying customer (student/volunteer tourist) and that’s where the transaction ends, as far as agencies and universities are concerned. While I support the practice of students and volunteers paying fees to NGOs who must organize suitable placements and arrange for transportation, food, housing and materials in support of volunteer efforts, these costs should be made explicit before the transaction is completed. Volunteers should be aware of what they are paying for and who benefits from the financial inputs, as a way to more realistically understand their role as extensions of the organization.
In an increasingly commodified world, education and its benefits are also labeled and sold as products (Lippmann et al. 2009). Volunteer service as tourism is a packaged product promising authentic experience and ethical travel, yet both the phenomenon itself and the research into it are equally unstable. If the conceptual framework is as chaotic as Klak claims it to be, one would expect to find an equal amount of inconsistency in the practical aspects on the ground. It is precisely the fact that volunteer tourists are distancing themselves from tourism (Raymond and Hall 2008) that underscores the need to explore what these actual differences are. Indeed, volunteer tourism is fulfilling a function in the current tourism industry, and service volunteers are travelling and performing work. My analysis reveals that the claims of volunteer tourism marketing and the beliefs that volunteer tourists hold about their travel are very different from how the receiving community experiences them.

Unpacking these contrasts and seeking a way forward towards common ground is at the heart of this research. The search for authenticity can sometimes create unexpected outcomes, as the data show, and may create situations that neither the volunteer nor the community could anticipate. The story in Chapter 4 that described the shocked reaction of volunteers to the toilets is one example. But facilities are just one aspect of living in poverty that can shed light on life as experienced by “the other.” It seems to be a relatively common occurrence whereby service volunteers have little preparation for the ‘authentic’ circumstances they find while on the project site. After the volunteers had left, an interview with one of the older orphans gave her the opportunity to elaborate on her experience with student volunteers over the years:

“What I see is that they get emotional. They cry. I don’t know if it’s the place they see…they can feel pity for us. But we like the place. We have lived here forever. We don’t see anything that can make you cry.”

“They cry when they see the kids,” she went on, “maybe when they see people with no shoes or their clothes torn up. I think they don’t know if people are starving and if they have to come to us to get food. I think they ask themselves how things can be this way.”

Insight and perspectives such as this are too rarely heard in literature on volunteer tourism, and fewer examples exist to describe the tourist’s first exposure to the harsh reality that comes with authenticity. Was this the real Africa that the tourists had hoped to find? As the young South African woman concluded, these experiences were an opportunity to appreciate what citizens of industrialized societies take for granted, but that conclusion can only be assumed, as we don’t have
the volunteers’ side of the story. But as Raymond and Hall (2008) point out, these inequities being experienced by service volunteers can often be misunderstood as the result of “luck” for being born in the United States, not as the result of colonialism, capitalism, trade imbalances, or uneven development. The same young woman concluded the interview with her hopes for a positive impression being made on the volunteers at a fundamental level:

“Crying probably means they are changing inside their hearts; learning on a deep level. Sometimes when you see someone living in a different way than you are living, for example in a rural place, you don’t realize there are other ways of survival. Whether you have toast or porridge, you have to be grateful for what you have. I think that’s why they cry a lot; because they know they have it better. And they weren’t appreciating it, but now they are aware.”

As this paper is an investigation of volunteer service in host communities, it is becoming clear that in these examples, the community gained little more developmentally from the student’s volunteer efforts than they would have from receiving regular tourists. However, the search for the authentic – which is “thought to be elsewhere” – (MacCannell 1989: 3), in this case a rural South African village in high contrast to their daily life, may be the experience that tourists are seeking.

Performances and the Tourist Gaze

Authenticity within tourism has been reduced by MacCannell into a “staged authenticity” (1989: 98) whereby the tourist’s desire to find something real in a romanticized version of an African village has led to the production of cultural practices as a form of entertainment. By the simple fact of performing traditional songs and dances for outsiders, he argues, they become apparent, allowing access to cultural reality in various ‘stages’ that the visitor must work through to “break the bounds” and find the ultimate reality in the ‘back’ (1989: 106). Visitors to YouthAid (Case Study Three) are often welcomed by extensive performances put on by youth that involve singing of contemporary and traditional songs, and displays of Zulu-style dancing. These performances are free, and take place at the open-air earth bag center that was one of the first structures to be built (as described in Chapter 4; it is also used as a church) and are usually after a long day of visiting, or volunteering together, as the case may be. I was delighted to be greeted by the sound of singing children on my first afternoon at the project, as several dozen visitors had travelled from Pretoria and elsewhere to celebrate Youth Day (June 16; a relabeling and remembering of the June 16th 1976 Soweto riots). I didn’t question this, partly because it was Youth Day, and partly because the children seemed to be enjoying it so much. Later in the week when I was speaking with the local YouthAid project
director about creating video-logs of the youth’s artistic activities, I was surprised to hear that some of the young dancers had said, “I hate Americans.” The explanation she offered was that they were tired of having to put on shows, and especially tired of being recorded and filmed while doing so, with no offer coming from guests to perform for them in a reciprocal way. “We are tired,” one teenager told me after the service volunteers had left. “We worked all day, too. Why can’t they perform for us?”

It is interesting to note that the American faculty member responsible for the student volunteers waited until that evening to scold her students for failing to engage with the performance: she expected them to sing along, to clap, and seemingly, to show more appreciation for the effort than they had. Many were too busy taking photographs and recording the performance to truly engage with the young people. Urry describes this as the “socially constructed way of seeing and recording” (1990:138) that allows for both appropriation of the object being photographed and the construction of a power/knowledge relationship. Surely this objectification played a part in the local girl’s negative reaction to the one-sided performance, and may have contributed to the professor’s embarrassment and anger that she expressed later that evening.

On the surface, this seems an example of all too familiar exploitation, a reinforcement of the power inherent in being the foreign traveler and the one with the camera, and it also reflects the typical nature of tourism as consumption (Urry 1990). However, another community member told me that the YouthAid project director often gives specific instructions to the orphans before volunteers arrive. “Make sure that they have a nice time when they are here. If they have a good experience, they will go home and raise money for us.” The savvy project director must have seen this happen often enough to believe in this strategy, and indeed, some of these very students were returning with a check to deliver directly to the orphanage, circumventing the U.S.-based NGO that would have offered a tax deductible receipt. These strategic motivations cast a pall over the memory of the children’s voices heard on the first day, as it seems that performances may be used to manipulate tourists/students as much as the unpaid child performers are to an extent being taken advantage of by the project director.

Alternative tourism research also seems to suggest that the responsible and sophisticated ‘new’ traveler will reject this form of staged authenticity and be able to ‘see’ right through the forced nature of cultural reconstructions such as children in traditional Zulu costumes. However, the South African government continues its commitment to the use of manufactured Cultural Villages as sites for business retreats, dining, and entertainment, and as a component of its larger investment
in tourism for poverty alleviation (Jansen van Veuren 2001, Rogerson 2002). In an interview with the owner of a local tourism company, he stated a belief that “there will always be a place” for African Cultural Villages within the larger tourism industry because “for many people, a superficial encounter with traditional tribal displays is all they want.” Within the tourism industry, it seems, there are myriad desires being expressed and various degrees to which the notions of authenticity can be fulfilled. Indeed, the photographs taken at either site would ‘appear’ to be the same upon the travelers’ return home, and any boundary-crossing or new understanding of ‘the other’ achieved by the volunteers at the orphanage would be lost.

What is often invisible to the community, however, is the learning that takes place during these encounters. It seems to have the potential within certain individuals to make an impact long after the volunteer holiday is over. Sometimes these brief interactions produce sincere, life-changing friendship that results in changed behavior in both parties. The post-travel response is too large a topic to explore and document here. However, examples from my research show that getting off the bus and living in communities, playing pool in the evenings, and staying with host families, have initiated commitments from some of the volunteers to individuals in that community. The SERV-SA Bicycle Project described in Case Study Two is an excellent illustration of how the real contribution from volunteering was made after a volunteer returned home, providing evidence that this form of authenticity can be life-changing. When this happens, it is a boundary-crossing link that may also inspire volunteers to do something in their own communities to address socio-economic imbalances.

Forcing Reciprocity

The Long Arm of Tourism

Tourism is an opportunity to ‘see’ the other, to better understand one’s self in relation to the other, and to some extent, agree to accept the inevitability of things the way they are (McCannell 1989). While much of tourism has undergone a cultural turn towards more social and environmental responsibility, these alternative tourisms, like the original forms, remain a product of the global structures that make exploitation possible under both colonial era and mass tourism models. Following this line of reasoning, volunteer tourism is an extension of traditional tourism, using the definition of ‘extension’ in its literal sense. Volunteer service, in its efforts to engage communities in mutual social interactions, extends tourist activities into the realm of the personal. Rather than viewing township conditions through the window of a tour bus or purchasing crafts in a village during a 30 minute encounter, volunteer tourists have paid for a service (purchased a
product) that allows them to get off the bus, to enter the community, and to ‘work side-by-side’ with local people. The ‘reach’ of volunteer tourism is felt when these volunteers choose to enter a community - sometimes for the afternoon – but increasingly overnight in a local home and perhaps for several weeks. This extension of tourism’s reach creates the opportunity for an infinite number of outcomes, both positive and negative, that are relatively new and unexamined.

Exploration of these issues is recommended by literature that supports the adoption of community-controlled and community-based (tourism) development models that depend upon and often require the active participation of local people (Scheyvans 2002). It is designed to encourage the “empowerment of people, ownership of the product, adaptation of a project, (and) simplicity in execution” (de Beer and Marias 2005: 53), but also envisions the community stepping up to achieve its own goals. These partnership models are touted as being ones of reciprocal action whereby service volunteers and community members strive towards mutual benefit and learning. Much of the volunteer tourism literature professes to share these goals: creating opportunities for volunteers to learn from community members through shared labor (Wearing 2001, Scheyvans 2002) and a humble exchange of skills, while building self-esteem related to local knowledge and practices at the community level (Oldfield 2008). As stated above, this search for engagement and authenticity has forced the conscientious traveler to seek out communities “further afield” and away from traditional travel routes. Accounts provided by local South African people describe young children screaming in terror at the volunteers entering their daycare centers, as they were unaccustomed to white faces. “They’ll get used to it,” the principal assured me, acknowledging the increasingly common and intensive nature of volunteer tourism in previously ‘behind-the-scenes’ and personal sites. These spaces now exist at the end of tourism’s long arm, reaching into living rooms, village gardens, private kitchens, and AIDS hospices as they become the new sites of volunteer-community engagement.

Responsibility and Reciprocity

One of the goals of the interview questions in this project was to find examples of reciprocal exchanges between service volunteers and community members, and to measure the extent to which reciprocity determines the “success” of both the interpersonal exchange and the capacity building of the community. While respect and mutuality are difficult to quantify, questions seeking to uncover how these exchanges work included:

- Do you have a choice about working with volunteers, and what type of work you do together?
- Do volunteers help you with the work you are already doing, or is separate work arranged for them to do when they are here?
- Do volunteers stay together, or eat, work, socialize with community members?
- What types of things do you teach them? And what do you learn from volunteers?
- Describe the relationship between the community and the volunteers.
- Should they come as volunteers, guests, helpers, teachers, or friends?
- Does the work they do benefit the whole community, or just some individuals?

Responses to these types of questions, as well as observation in the field (eating lunch separately) at the site of volunteer-host exchanges, illustrate complex and inter-related issues. One is the notion of reciprocity itself; the other is the perspective of the community, and its level of preparation to meet (respond to) volunteers on their own terms. In order to be reciprocal, exchanges must be between inter-dependent parties for mutual benefit (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary). As shown in the previous chapter, the case study communities in this project were not at a level of capacity that could be described as being equal to the education and socio-economic levels as the NGOs and service volunteers that come to engage them. As such, entering into these relationships cannot, for them, be described as reciprocal or of mutual benefit. Capacity levels that would allow for equal exchanges of goods and knowledge are lacking for a variety of historical and cultural reasons, such as poor education, lack of access to information, or delayed exposure to new ideas and technologies. In the case studies, inequalities are connected to vast differences in socio-economic realities between NGO coordinators, volunteers, and the community.

The YouthAid project provides another example of similar inequalities, and the dangers of designing programs based on these assumptions of reciprocity from afar. A three-week Natural Building workshop was sponsored by the US-based NGO at YouthAid to train a mixed group of local South Africans and paying Americans in this ‘green’ construction technique. The assumption was that the local people at YouthAid would appreciate being trained in a new skill, and the resulting building will benefit the orphanage and community. The Americans enrolled from home and paid thousands of dollars to participate. South African men from the surrounding area with construction experience were invited to join the project. Everyone worked together, and an environmentally-friendly earth bag building was completed, in spite of the South Africans’ preference for traditional cement bricks, as described in Chapter 4. After celebrating the completion (see Figure 5), the local men requested their salaries. It was only at this point that they were informed that the free training
was understood to be a gift to them, and that all they were to receive was a ‘Certificate of Successful Completion.’ The men were understandably outraged. “I felt terrible!” the YouthAid director told me, “they accused me of stealing the money.” Distrust in the American NGO and the local directors, as well as in the green agenda, was cemented. They also, quite rightly, argued that now the orphanage benefitted from a new building (administrative offices), and it was of no use to them.

We have just seen that the expectation of reciprocity and responsibility placed on communities in the community-based development and tourism model poses another question that needs to be examined: that of the labor performed by local people while ‘working side by side’ with volunteers. The anticipation of service groups is that ‘the community’ (or at least a number of local people in proportion to their group) will be available in order to undertake building or gardening projects that fulfill this ideal of a reciprocal exchange of labor. The external ‘gaze’ envisions formal adult unemployment, assumes copious free time, and expects willing local people to be available. For the purposes of the university program or volunteer tourism provider, this is the ideal of mutuality, a

Figure 5: Participants in the Natural Building Workshop celebrate the completion of the earthbag wall that will become an administration building, YouthAid, Case Study 3. Photo from organizational website, accessed 4/29/10.
chance for the co-production of knowledge, and the site where power relations are challenged (Scheyvans 2002). However, what is inherently problematic in this model is that it relies on a misunderstanding of local conditions, and disrespects the value of time and labor in the host community. In addition, it is careless with the measurement of the presumed benefits to ‘the community’ - which often has no clearly defined membership, and to which the workers in the above case did not belong. Understood and mutually-determined goals would have made these benefits clear and may have encouraged local participation. Instead, an environment was created where hope for reciprocity was lost, such as in the above example.

Assumptions of reciprocity also fail to understand that one of the realities of life for South Africans in marginalized and informal communities is the informality of their very existence. Employment and income are irregular and unreliable, along with transport, meals, electricity, and cell phone reception. Each day can be a struggle to access money, as exemplified by men standing on busy street corners in hopes of being picked up and hired to perform a day’s labor. Women wait at taxi ranks at four a.m. for a two-hour trip to Pretoria to work eight hours as a domestic servant; with up to 40% of their income going to cover the taxi (long-distance minibus) ride. In short, everyone needs to be paid for work that they perform. This income is urgently required to meet basic needs and obligations: for school fees and electricity, for transport to job sites and stores, and to buy food for the evening meal. Daycare staff in EDUCARE in Cape Town were not paid a salary, but worked to care for the children and only to share in the two meals a day provided. In stark contrast, the volunteer is the product of a society characterized by consumption, abundance, and enough leisure time to produce such a phenomenon as international travel itself (Mowforth and Munt 1998), and travelling to volunteer.

Yet volunteer tourism and service learning models continue to assume and to promote the idea that these individuals can meet on some sort of equal ground (Wearing 2001, Scheyvans 2002). Members of the host community, under modern socio-economic realities, may be fully acculturated to think and act in ways that reinforce the strength of the whole (Ferguson 2006), but often do not have the luxury of giving time to labor for which they are not being paid. While reciprocity in service work remains an admirable goal, it seems that in this context, the inequality that exists between volunteers and hosts supports MacCannell’s (1990) assertion that mutual benefit within uneven power structures is impossible.
Tourism, Volunteers, and Empowerment

One aim of the alternative tourist is to destabilize power relations between visitors and hosts by expressing solidarity through service. As such, it seems self-evident that empowering communities to meet with the pressures of outside development forces is a crucial component of this approach in practice, and is a pre-requisite for development (Scheyvens 2002, Mowforth et al. 2008). However, many of those motivated by the desire for “authentic” experiences (Stoddart and Rogerson 2004) are easy targets for criticism because they embody the belief that someone who is a tourist (who has paid for a travel product) is able to help host communities in a meaningful way. The notion of travelling to the other side of the world to deliver aid without prior screening, training, or understanding of the cultural context regarding development or human needs (Bluestone 2009) exists on a spectrum between ignorance, wastefulness, and potential to do harm. It may also be representative of a culturally superior attitude and what has been called a heightened sense of narcissism and self-esteem amongst the generation coming of age in the new millennium (Lippmann et al. 2009).

The quest for a connection to local people, and the desire to deliver aid to needy communities is a motivation to be examined on an individual level. A final example will show how, in spite of a volunteers’ best intentions to embody the ideals of alternative tourism and engagement, a community can reject this gift in favor of limiting interpersonal exchanges to economic ones in a way more reminiscent of the mass tourism model.

It has been outlined above that the SERV-SA site (Case Study 2) was made up of two communities that competed with each other for volunteer placements. This situation was created when the NGO had initially started their work with people who lived in association with a cultural village that had been built 10 years earlier but subsequently chose to focus more effort in response to the adjacent community at the crest of the hill. The original target site consisted of a lodge with en suite bathrooms, a restaurant and performance space, and brightly colored village walls in the traditional Ndebele style (see Figure 6). Designed to attract tourists during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, obtrusive facilities were built in the center of the small community, destroying its charm and cohesiveness. As an attraction, the site has fallen on hard times, and most visitors to the lodge prefer to pay for rooms by the hour. The restaurant is locked up and no busses have come in over two years. During my visit, there was a dead dog laying the center of the main street being casually stepped over but not removed.
The NGO approached the community in 2005 and worked directly with the villagers to set up a locally-managed tourism board, provided intensive training on running the restaurant and lodge, and brought international volunteers regularly to stay at the center in support of these initiatives. However, the SERV-SA director told me that none of these training sessions ‘took,’ and was unable to explain why the local people seemed to lack the ability to establish and maintain the standards expected of tourist facilities.

In a previous season, a young American woman had paid the NGO for a volunteer placement and was to work in this community. She had planned to focus on catering and marketing for the village, and to improve other aesthetic aspects of the infrastructure. However, rather than supporting these activities and participating in training, the local people continually asked her for money, displayed beaded trinkets for her to view, and failed to speak to her other than to attempt to lure her into an economic transaction. Left with no role in the community, and marginalized by expectations that she had money to spend and would spend it, she tearfully requested to be reassigned to a different project where her willingness to help would be appreciated.

The members of my host community (the upper village) shared this incident on the last day of my stay, in an attempt to comfort me after I had experienced something similar. Visiting earlier that morning, I had arranged to have a tour of the facilities in conjunction with a chance to interview the older local women (gogos) about their volunteer perceptions. Instead of sharing in a pleasant morning together, I was paraded through the village as part of a R50 ($7.50) ‘tour’ during which each woman in turn came out of her home with a woven mat covered in beadwork to make a sale. From house to house I was led, clearly expected to buy several items from each woman. After
several stops I inquired of the guide, half-jokingly, if she was simply taking me around to buy things from everyone. This was emphatically and seriously confirmed. With little cash, and in a rising sense of panic, I claimed to not want the tour, as I could not afford to purchase trinkets that I didn’t need, explaining my status as a student and my interest in the research. As we walked away, vicious shouting erupted from the porches as angry fists shot into the air. The frustrated women accused the guide of keeping me (and my cash) to herself, and desperately tried to convince me to return to their porches. There was no need to understand the Matabele language to understand what was happening. Embarrassed and heartbroken to the point of tears, I felt the emptiness of the what MacCannell refers to as the “empty meeting ground” (1992: title) of financial transactions that leave so many visitors feeling reduced to acting as ATMs for the people with whom they desire real relationships.

These examples illustrate an unsettling aspect of the data related to community capacity and empowerment. The research questions and participant observation were designed to measure if there are positive volunteer impacts on communities. What is remarkable about these stories is that they show that local people didn’t even seem to be aware that visitors were trying to help them. For this community, isolated and poor, their response to tourists is completely rational: they have no desire to get to know someone or to carry out community-building projects while their children are crying for food. In their defense, it shouldn’t be surprising that local people would make little to no distinction between white visitors who are tourists, student researchers, or volunteer tourists. Asking them to do so is merely vanity on behalf of the student or traveler who wants to see themselves as alternative to a traditional tourist. The service volunteer in this story likely understood the situation to be one thing: assisting a needy community with a vital development project. It seems that the individuals with whom she met were simply smiling and hoping to sell as much beadwork as possible until the time came for her to leave. Wearing (2001) describes these exchanges as the nascent discomfort that may be responsible for the emergence of alternative forms of tourism in the first place: the emptiness experienced by travelers who come away with trinkets but no meaningful cultural learning or interpersonal interaction.

These predominantly financial exchanges merely reinforce north-south power relations and the control and dependency that go along with them. Volunteer tourists, who have paid several thousand dollars on average for the opportunity to not be just a tourist, crave the chance to temporarily topple these power imbalances, and expect the local people in remote areas to willingly participate and play along. However, finding and working with communities who understand this,
and who are willing to step outside their own immediate needs to take part in working side by side with volunteers is not as straightforward as it may seem. Previously, the critique of mass tourism has been focused on tour operators who unethically disregard community needs, or make large profits before ensuring real local benefits. In this instance, it is the community who can be seen to reject the good intentions of the volunteer/tourist and return them to the traditional role as consumers and income-generators they are relegated to under mass tourism. Unfortunately, it is also clear that there is little hope for their cultural village gaining ground as a tourist destination when visitors are objectified and harassed, especially when trying to mutually engage. It is understandable within the SERV-SA project that, over time, volunteers now prefer to work in the “upper” village where they are more accepted by the community, can arrange for a home-stay, assist with sports initiatives, and interact with local people in the evenings.

Ironically, if one of the goals of community-based tourism is to empower people to engage with tourists on their own terms, the women at the cultural village provide one example of this choice. And they are saying loud and clear that they prefer the benefits and relationships of traditional (old) tourism.

Discussion and Conclusion

While people, generally from the global north, have been travelling for decades to assist needy communities, whether through church missions or private philanthropy, the opportunity for people to travel independently to a selected country to volunteer is fairly new. Because the findings of this thesis illuminate the microscopic impact that volunteering has on development efforts (see Chapter 4), I also suggest that volunteer tourism represents only a slight shift away from traditional mass tourism practices, if indeed there is any shift at all. In other words, volunteer service activities that take place in conjunction with some sort of travelling is still tourism. A “volunteer” is just another word attached to the description, which in many cases has not filtered down to the host community. With so much moral and cultural importance attached to the identity of volunteer tourists, it is remarkable that there is so little attention paid to standardizing the word’s meaning or ensuring that it crosses cultural boundaries along with the travelers.

As more and more people pay for placements that provide the opportunity to volunteer, it may also have become a service like any other aspect of the tourist industry; an industry that like any other is about profits, not about people, local or otherwise (Dominica eco-lodge owner Sam Raphael, personal communication 2010). For all that can be said to disparage the efforts of international development agencies, they can be given credit for generating their own funds and
transferring these resources into developing economies; for providing language training; for recruiting experts to deliver specific skill sets; and for staying in a region long enough to assess the impacts of their efforts. Little of this can be ascribed to those performing volunteer service on programs lasting less than 6 months. What has been described as “a morally seductive adaptation of modern mass tourism” (MacKinnon 2009: np) may bring about positive changes in both the tourist and their hosts, but this will most likely be only after many mistakes are made. Instead, volunteer tourism, once established within a target community, is by definition amateur and haphazard (Bluestone 2009: np), tends to make promises it can’t deliver on, and can generate conflict within and between communities, as illustrated in the SERV-SA case.

Data gathered for this thesis illustrate the many examples through which residents of these three South African communities are either unaware of the alternative volunteer signifier, or for various reasons related to education and empowerment, are unable to take advantage of the potential for using tourism as a tool in their community’s development. If this is the case, then regardless of the skills, intentions, and preparation of the volunteer, there will be little reason for the local people to acknowledge the term ‘volunteer’ as signifying anything different than ‘tourist’. This chapter has shown the many ways that alternative tourism is no different than traditional tourism and that in some instances, it can be worse for individuals and communities. Instead of tourism being contained in built-up areas where social and cultural damage has already occurred, the search for authentic interaction and social intimacy has brought tourists to the community’s doorstep. As organizers bear offers of cash inputs, a participatory rhetoric, and the promise of social solidarity and economic development, ill-informed (low capacity) communities may welcome the volunteers as an opportunity to gain any range of personal benefits. The result is an extension of mass tourism activities that have merely increased in intensity, and have created expectations that take on a moral component. With all of these complicated issues in mind, volunteer tourism seems to be standing on unstable ground. An approach that strives to be both more ethical and practical will be discussed in the following section.
Chapter Six
CONCLUSION

The investigation into volunteer tourism and service learning is as contradictory as the varied definitions, multiple approaches, and uncertain outcomes that characterize it. Just as communities can be both welcoming and skeptical, as volunteers can be both transformed and ridiculed, the outcomes of the volunteer service phenomenon carry each of these characteristics at once, making any evaluation a matter of time, scale, and circumstance. While the conversation continues around best practices and the optimism around the creation of enlightened world citizens is celebrated, reinforcing the current development paradigm through the use of student volunteers and tourists needs broader critique. If the understanding of community needs, as well as the intention to address those needs, is not the primary goal, then honesty in marketing, measurement, and self-appraisal is needed. When ‘making a difference’ simply reinforces differences that will remain unchanged, then the shift towards post-development and new tourisms is not yet evident.

As evaluation is complex and bound up in cultural assumptions and conflicting loyalties, the statements made in this thesis are drawn from the perceptions of South African beneficiaries to allow for a fresh and alternative perspective. Participant observation and informal interviews help to fill a gap in volunteer tourism and service learning literature that over-looks the needs, responses, and feelings of local people. Based on several years of experience, and the intensive fieldwork undertaken for this research, I argue that volunteer service makes a minimal impact on the material development or overall capacity-building of these particular communities. Contrary to the claims made by marketing materials, organizational reports, and alternative tourism literature, the advantages and benefits of volunteer tourism often fail to reach local people. I have also shown that communities often experience further marginalization and may set aside their own priorities after aligning themselves with well-intentioned NGOs.

This project was initiated in response to questions I had regarding the nature of volunteer-community interactions. While I had doubts about the benefits of development-oriented work to local people, I chose these case studies because I expected them to restore my faith in the reciprocal and interpersonal potential of volunteer efforts. Additional assumptions were made that ‘quality of life’ improvements and community empowerment indicators were both measurable and attainable. As indicated in the Prologue, I had also believed that NGOs and providers had a parallel interest in achieving these goals, but found this commitment to be at worst, absent or at best, under-emphasized.
Project Relevance

The findings of this thesis highlight the difficulty of clarifying and defining the act of volunteer service and situating it within one academic field or another. It also illustrates that on the ground, separate categories for students, volunteers, and tourists are a moot point and contribute little to the understanding or measurement of developmental impacts. By noting the commonalities and combining Volunteer Tourism and International Service Learning into a larger critique of post-development and new forms of tourism, I am suggesting that further research could also benefit by conjoining the research and practice of these forms of travel. Based on interviews, I learned that the lack of shared meaning in terminology plays a role in the ability to set meaningful goals, marginalizes NGO-community partnerships, and impacts the ability to assess program success. It is likely that this situation is one repeated daily as international travelers arrive in communities in the global south to undertake volunteer service. This sort of cross-cultural (mis) understanding has the potential to impact many aspects of development work, and will surely complicate project processes, from initial contact through goal-setting and assessment. As such, these data should be relevant to those initiating or carrying out development work that incorporates volunteers, and should be of interest to governments, social services, regulatory agencies and NGOs. These entities have the responsibility to ensure the protection of the people they are tasked to serve, and are the ones with the authority to set the tone for volunteer-community interactions.

Tourism for Development

While volunteer tourism can fill a developmental niche, and may bring material and social benefit to communities, many experts suggest that communities could derive greater benefit from well-managed and community-run traditional tourist operations than from those that are developed as ‘responsible’ alternatives that cater to volunteer interests (Kennedy and Dornan 2009; Simpson 2009). These complex relationships play out at various levels of empowerment and intention in the case studies, and illustrate the ways that circumstances unique to each community (such as levels of crime, access to information to make informed decisions, historical-geographic legacies, and capacity to influence control of their futures) can influence the outcome of any tourism strategy. It is because of these contingencies that organizers should look to locally based development plans, drawn up in partnership with the community, that clearly outline the types of tourism operations to be developed and how volunteers may be incorporated into long-term goals. Having some sort of tourism infrastructure can at least create opportunities for travelers to be of use to communities through the purchase of accommodation and tours, or through donations to fund long-term local
programs (Bluestone 2009). It is therefore suggested that if volunteers were able to accept the fact that they are tourists first, then more realistic expectations would be attached to the volunteer portion of a vacation, both for themselves and for communities (McGehee and Anderack 2009). At the time of this study, unfortunately, the three South African communities that serve as case studies are not yet able to capitalize on either the traditional or alternative tourism forms.

Evaluation and Measurement

From a geographical perspective, the analysis and measurement of such concepts as sustainability, alternative tourism, and community development lose integrity without attention paid to both time and scale. The extent to which volunteer service has positive impacts on the volunteers and students, the communities, or their members over time has not been a subject of inquiry. Even projects within South Africa that celebrate success will need evaluation in subsequent years to measure the sustainability of interventions. The results of this project point to the need for an evaluation of benefits, such as “Before and After” surveys of volunteers, as well as tracking projects within communities from one season to the next. This would serve to determine whether children who receive tutoring in Math and English from volunteers do better in school than their untutored peers, if gardens tended by service volunteers are re-planted, and if produce contributes to improved nutrition. In the community development realm, return visits by researchers for the purpose of determining whether a community project was sustainable - if people were becoming empowered to make choices and if economic returns were increasing - would aid in understanding techniques that do work, and under what conditions.

Unfortunately the literature that undertakes project assessment often avoids community perspective, and sidesteps these messy questions that have proven to be of little concern to the external analyst. In spite of training opportunities offered by NGOs or volunteers, traumatized victims of the Apartheid system and the AIDS epidemic accustomed to living on government grants are not likely to suddenly succeed in running businesses that comply with the increasingly complex standards dictated by ‘audit culture.’ Often short-term international volunteers do not have the skill-set, language, or the relationships with local people necessary to encourage proactive responses, nor the ability to access funding sources on a community’s behalf. They also risk creating situations in which local people are harmed rather than helped due to the artificial raising of expectations. Too often well-designed projects are undertaken that were not community-driven and therefore lack the local ownership necessary for maintenance and upkeep, two important elements of project
sustainability. These conditions are the ones that are repeated over and over, and which may relegate most volunteer projects to being the opposite of what providers and participants want them to be: short-term, material, helping a small number of people, and unsustainable, both environmentally and economically.

Local or Global Action?

Scale, as well as time, may prove to be a useful tool in determining the impacts of volunteer service and alternative forms of tourism and development. Advocates of voluntourism and international service learning sometimes point to the most minor changes in students, communities, and travelers as evidence of enduring impacts. The ability of a community to control decision-making and project processes is also related to the scale and nature of the initiative. Less powerful groups in society, such as women “will have more chance of participating in small-scale enterprises…and to influence the sustainability of tourism development” the closer those projects are to the household level (Milne 1998: 41 in Scheyvans 2002: 58). As alluded to earlier, any debate over the responsible or appropriate action to take within volunteer tourism and service learning will likely become a conversation touching on some fundamental philosophical questions that reflect personal ethics. While I could never deny the fact that bonds are created when Americans are given a chance to work side by side with local community members in places that contrast with their home environment, the pertinent question becomes one of (global) cost vs. (local) benefit. I suggest that some of these issues could be better understood by subsequent research into the decision-making process of those choosing to volunteer in the Global South. Specifically, studies could examine why people will pay $5000 to fly to South Africa to volunteer on a project when they could serve a local organization and have a similar experience in their own community, or at least domestically.

Also largely overlooked in the marketing materials are the environmental costs, such as what is ‘spent’ to fly internationally in order to train someone how to live sustainably by planting an organic garden. The emissions from air travel are now estimated to be a significant portion of the total pollutants contributing to the greenhouses gases and the melting of the polar icecaps, yet leisure travel and tourism to volunteer continue to grow, even amongst those aware of the imbalance of opportunity and the environmental consequences. An extension of the inquiry into costs must also be made at the local level in South Africa and elsewhere. There is too little attention paid to the burden borne by hosting communities in time, energy, and resources consumed in order to create an atmosphere conducive to hosting volunteers. The same can be said of developing tourism.
infrastructures to house them, especially when the service projects are not aligned to community needs.

Sustainability

I believe that more mutuality is possible between outsiders and communities, but that the learning would be more sustainable if it were situated in the local mindset. Traditional forms of African societal structure do not adapt well to capitalist and accumulative motivations, as typical economies are “not founded on limitless production and accumulation, but on redistribution within the framework of the cohesion of the group” (Zaoual 1994: 34). This emphasis on sharing resources as the best investment for future security has so far remained the dominant form of socio-economic strategy for large segments of South African society, as evidenced by the women at each case study instinctively looking after the children without remuneration. Appreciating the value of an economy rooted in relationships, not consumption - cultural imperatives specifically targeted for elimination under colonialism, Apartheid, and development - can be re-cast as knowledge about the meaning of sustainability and human needs: the goal of much of volunteer service and development action. It is these deep-seated beliefs about community that allow my South African informants to welcome volunteers and incorporate their work into a life philosophy, as an EDUCARE principal shared with me:

“Yes, we will always want the volunteers here. We want our children to see that people will come to give them help. When they grow up, they will know that everybody must give friendship. Children must know that we are all together; we are all the same. They must know that. It makes a big difference to know that people care.”

As such, one answer to sustainability may very well lie in African communities themselves. Listening to African people, and responding in ways that support, rather than marginalize cultural practices, can allow for the emergence of a sustainability that other societies may want to emulate.

Recommendations

This thesis has served as a critique of the manner in which some of the intercultural interactions and development efforts between volunteers, NGOs and communities takes place, and points to the need for further research towards a more ethical and transformative approach. For development to be ‘alternative,’ and for tourism to be ‘new’ local people should at least be able to take a role in determining whether volunteers or tourists come to their communities in the first place. In this context, ‘responsible’ means that tourism and volunteer service providers support the
communities they serve in setting the agenda for development decision-making through individually negotiated processes.

Before entering into service, perhaps volunteers should be required to complete an application to the organization in order to evaluate their level of commitment prior to acceptance onto the project. This would not necessarily be used to eliminate prospective volunteers as much as to provide an educational tool where individuals are challenged to think about their own motivations. This application would alert providers to volunteer attitudes and highlight available skills, while providing data related to participant’s perceptions of South African communities and beliefs about development. Ethically, I believe that volunteers working with children should be required to produce recommendation and reference letters, if not full evidence of a background check before being permitted to work in orphanages and daycare centers, similar to the requirements designed to protect minors in the United States.

Any evaluation of the service is the responsibility of the NGO, but I believe that long-term outcomes could be greatly improved by adding an assessment at the end of the service term from the community perspective, in conjunction with a performance appraisal by both a volunteer coordinator and the volunteer themselves. The data derived from these honest conversations could substantially enrich the provider’s relationships with both volunteers and the community over time.

NGOs and volunteer tourism agencies can also make a difference by instituting minimum stays, providing some language instruction, taking part in orientations and managing volunteer expectations so that the same mistakes are not repeated in communities year after year. Most importantly, time must be set aside for listening to communities, building relationships, and developing plans for reaching community goals. If each area where the NGO is involved had a working document drawn up by community members that outlined priorities, challenges, and plans for addressing them, then service volunteers and student groups could be more seamlessly slotted into projects where they are needed. Staff can then work to manage these plans to update them and actively collaborate with community leaders to envision ways to meet goals that benefit from volunteer support.

The table below illustrates some steps that could be taken toward increasing community control and thus improving the outcomes for both volunteers and local people:
Table 3. Recommendations and Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>FTSA</th>
<th>Provider or NGO</th>
<th>Faculty leader</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fully implement responsible operator certification and license only those who meet responsible and ethical criteria</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in partnership with communities to set priorities and determine nature and extent of volunteer and/or tourism activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage volunteer expectations through education, readings, orientations, applications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with communities that have the capacity to adopt pro-active strategies, articulate realistic needs and determine their own goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift priorities away from organizational profits and products and seek ways to ensure equitable distribution of financial, social, and individual benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop relationships with providers and communities to ensure service efforts are in line with and driven by local priorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate traditional African problem-solving methods into capacity-building efforts and course curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide language training, cultural orientation and opportunities that maximize social interaction between volunteers and communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement service evaluations for the benefit of organizers, volunteers, communities, and long-term data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Thoughts

Sixteen years ago, the good news out of South Africa resonated with the hopes and dreams of oppressed people around the world. As the focal point of positive energy and the potential of individual integrity, “Madiba Magic” (Nelson Mandela’s charm and intelligence) drew new
investment, international NGO headquarters, and waves of altruistic international volunteers to South Africa. Volunteer service should be undertaken in this spirit of solidarity and conscious engagement. This unique democracy was created on the tip of Africa in order to hand control and freedom to ordinary people: Isn’t that what volunteer service is designed to support? Let decisions regarding the future of development be left to scholars and philosophers, but rigorously uphold the personal motivations and ethics needed to integrate volunteer service into what is uniquely South African. The emotional call-and-response from the anti-Apartheid struggle is just as crucial to social justice efforts today; “Amandla! A-Wethu!” (Power! To the People!) and remains at the heart of human aspirations, no matter how elusive.
As my primary concern is for ordinary South Africans, it is encouraging to see that private industries and government are implementing systems that provide more focus on shared benefits within tourism. Businesses, and now the initiative towards Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) have been scrambling to manage the demand for volunteer service options, and to ensure some level of protection for communities that serve as destinations. The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism encourages businesses engaged in offering ‘responsible’ options to incorporate a number of ethical and culturally sensitive practices, such as the abstract goal to “build local pride and confidence.”

Tourism operations, along with NGOs, have worked together to develop these criteria and have pushed for their adoption within the South African market. Participation is voluntary and aims to “incentivize greater accountability within the sector and to assure volunteers that their contributions are sustainable” (FTTSA press release 9/23/2009; see below). This is a useful illustration of the shift in the tourism sector, but also remains open to criticism for failing to standardize how these guidelines will be quantified, and from whose perspective they will be measured. Fortunately, the declaration, as well as the formalization of FTTSA as a governing body, may serve to provide talking points around which goals can be established, ethical approaches outlined, and accountability maintained.

The South African government and tourism sector is called upon to spread the benefits of the tourism dollar as evenly as possible throughout all sectors of society, while simultaneously ensuring the protection of communities (and vulnerable children) who find themselves the focus of volunteer tourism.

The system was not yet in place at the time this research was conducted.
MEDIA RELEASE 23 September 2009
“Meaning well is not always enough”
FTTSA to Expand its Services to Voluntourism

“Voluntourism” refers to travel that combines elements of organised voluntary work with leisure travel and is a fast growing niche market in the global tourism industry. While voluntourism represents an enormous resource for socio-economic development and conservation in post-apartheid South Africa, there are a number of challenges that must be managed to optimise benefits for the destination.

The need for more accountability and self-regulation in the sector was identified by a number of South African voluntourism operators, and formalised through the publishing of a Code of Good practice in 2008. The Code of Good Practice highlights, amongst other things, the importance of ensuring that beneficiaries’ needs are met; that financial leakage is kept to a minimum; that skills transfer is sustainable; and that the rights of vulnerable groups (e.g. children, people living with HIV/AIDS, etc.) are protected.

Building on this Code of Good Practice, FTTSA carried out a series of consultations to test the need for third-party certification in the field of voluntourism. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and led to FTTSA seeking funding for a wider study to establish standards for the sector. Partial funding was provided by the SST Foundation in Switzerland, and FTTSA is committing own resources to complement this grant.

FTTSA certification is an independent endorsement of fair and responsible tourism practice in South Africa. It is based on adherence to specific criteria including fair wages and working conditions, fair distribution of benefits, ethical business practice, and respect for human rights, culture and the environment. Certification is voluntary and is currently offered to tourist accommodation, activities and attractions.

It is hoped that by extending its certification programme to South Africa’s voluntourism sector, FTTSA will help to incentivise greater accountability within the sector and assure volunteers that their contributions are sustainable. Jennifer Seif, FTTSA Executive Director also commented that “many of the challenges facing this sector are not unique to South Africa, and thus FTTSA will share information and lessons learned with peers in other developing countries so that they may establish similar checks and balances”.

FTTSA will develop voluntourism standards through research, consultation, field testing and benchmarking against local and international best practice. A number of voluntourism operators have already communicated interest in becoming certified once the standards have been set, and FTTSA hopes to have certified at least three voluntourism products by April 2010.
APPENDIX 2
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Contextual and Project-Specific:

- Who decides what work is to be done daily?
- Who decides how donations or other financial resources are spent?
- Which projects do you see as top priority? Are these projects being done first? Why or why not?
- How are decisions of the NGO or community made?
- Do you work with volunteers when they are here?
- Do you have a choice about working with volunteers and what work you do together?
- Do volunteers help you with your work, or is separate work arranged for the volunteers?
- Were you been asked whether or not you want volunteers to be here?
- Is there something that you wish that volunteers would do?
- What skills would you like volunteers to have? (what work needs to be done that no one in the community has time to do or knows how to do?)

To determine relationships

- Can volunteers benefit the community? If yes, under what circumstances?
- Do volunteers sometimes do things that you don’t like?
- What can be done about it?
- Do volunteers stay together or eat/talk/socialize with community members?
- Do you choose to spend time with volunteers outside of work hours?
- How could social time with volunteers be better?
- How do you feel when you are socializing with volunteers?
- Should they stay in the community overnight, or stay elsewhere? Why?
- What things can you do and the volunteers do together?
- What do you teach them when they are here?
- What do you learn from volunteers?
- What do you think they have learned about you and your community by the time they leave?
- Do you talk to other community members about the volunteers and their work?
- How would you describe the relationship between the community and volunteers as:
- Does the work the volunteers do benefit the whole community, or just some individuals?
- What would be different if volunteers didn’t come? Should there be a time when they don’t?
- Should they come as guests, volunteers, helpers, teachers, or friends?
- How long should volunteers stay?
- How long should the organization work with the community?
- If you have a vision of what your community is like in the future, is it the same as the one the NGO or volunteers have? How and why or why not?
- Are there volunteers coming to the community you see in the future? How is it the same or different?
- Tell me one thing that is good that would not have happened in your community without the help of the volunteers.
- Tell me one thing (or more) that you have learned by having volunteers here.
- Tell me one thing that has changed for the better since the volunteers started coming.
- Has anything been made worse?
- Have the volunteers helped to make your community stronger?
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