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Understanding community attitudes towards volunteer tourism

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ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism has been growing rapidly since the last decade. However, similar to other forms of tourism, volunteer tourism has been criticised for neglecting locals' desires. As such, it is crucial to empower local communities and understand their needs, including their perceptions and attitudes towards volunteer tourism. Social representations have been used to examine community members' ideas, their perceptions and the ways they think about tourism development. However, how local communities perceive alternative forms of tourism, including volunteer tourism have been under-researched. Using qualitative interviews with local residents in Mongolia, one of the post-Soviet countries and a fast-growing volunteer tourism destination in the world, this paper examines host communities' general understanding and attitudes towards volunteerism and volunteer tourism development based on the perceived impacts, and considers how the social constructions of volunteerism underpin local residents' perceptions of volunteer tourism. In addition, by investigating the historical and cultural influences in the host community, this article aims to pinpoint the relationship between social representations and cultural influences, offering an interesting insight to understand volunteer tourism development.

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Introduction

Alternative forms of tourism, including volunteer tourism, are defined as 'development that is less commercialised and consistent with the natural, social, and community values of a host community' (Gursoy et al., 2010, p. 381). Such development places stronger emphasis on the contact and rapport between tourists, hosts and the environment, together with greater collaboration with other sectors in the local economy. However, similar to other forms of tourism, volunteer tourism has been criticised for neglecting local desires, it is crucial to empower local communities and understand their needs, including their perceptions and attitudes towards volunteer tourism (Teye et al., 2002). In fact, examining attitudes of destination communities is crucial for identifying support for or rejection of tourism, and it is relevant for destination planning and management purposes (Harrill, 2004). The lack of local understanding and support from residents have even been seen as a reason for tourism-planning failure (Gursoy et al., 2002).

In general, host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism have been focused on the perceived impacts of tourism (Andereck et al., 2005; Bastias-Perez & Var, 1995; Long et al., 1990). Previous studies reveal that residents' support for tourism is affected by the costs and benefits in economic, social

and environmental aspects (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). However, some studies have suggested that there are other factors influencing residents' attitudes towards tourism. For instance, Zaidan (2016) points out the influences of culture on tourism perceptions. His study demonstrates that there are significant perceived cultural differences between tourists and hosts and the perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism through a case study of Dubai. In addition, the study of Davis et al. (1988) highlights how residents' attitudes towards tourism development can be predicted by their knowledge of tourism and the local economy. Andereck et al. (2005) also observe that knowledgeable locals tend to have more positive perceptions of how tourism impacts different areas, including community life, image and economy. As such, culture and residents' knowledge of tourism play pivotal roles in determining the extent to which they support tourism development in their countries. While a lot of research has been done on host communities' perceptions and attitudes towards mass tourism, there lack investigations on how host communities perceive alternative forms of tourism, including volunteer tourism.

Similar to tourism studies in general, volunteer tourism literature has largely been emphasised on tourists (Butcher & Smith, 2010; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Coren & Gray, 2012). Vrasti (2012, p. 14) explains

'most tourism research adopts a behaviourist approach that privileges volunteers' motivations, attitudes and experiences over the larger power relations and socio-economic conditions that make this encounter possible in the first place'. As locals are often placed at the bottom of the tourism hierarchy, there has been less attention given to host communities in volunteer tourism literature (Wearing & McGehee, 2013), and most of studies concentrate on how volunteer tourism potentially benefits host communities. For instance, Sin (2010) observes the opinion of volunteer tourism from the perspective of host-communities in Cambodia based on their experience with international volunteers. Conran (2011) explains how intimacy overwhelmingly mediates volunteer tourism experience for most participants, including members in host communities. Lupoli et al. (2014) study the impacts of volunteer tourism in host communities based on an online questionnaire sent to 183 volunteer tourism organisations. Zahra and McGehee (2013) go further to examine the impacts of volunteer tourism on host communities utilising a community capitals perspective.

Upon evaluating these studies, it is found that host communities' attitudes and perceptions towards volunteer tourism have been examined by their experience and actual impacts, and their opinion was mostly collected from volunteer tourism stakeholders, including representatives from NGOs, missionary workers and local residents who have hosted international volunteers. However, volunteer tourism is still a growing segment in most destinations and its stakeholders only represent minority views in the society. Wearing and McGehee (2013) add that there exists 'some difficulties in identifying and including the full spectrum of stakeholders who may fall under the terms host and community' (124). In some cases, there is a lack of general understanding of volunteer tourism that hinders tourism development in local communities. Sometimes it even creates misunderstanding and conflicts between local residents and international volunteers.

In fact, host communities' attitudes and understanding of volunteer tourism may vary based on the culture-dependent understanding of 'volunteering'. Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011, p. 126) state that 'the construction of cultural difference between the developed and developing world remains unquestioned, while similarities between people with diverse cultural, social and religious backgrounds go unmentioned'. Hofstede (2001) adds that different cultures have distinct meanings and values for volunteering, and these cultural values are influenced by differences in political systems. Therefore, this study responds to a call for (1) examining host communities' general understanding

and attitudes towards volunteerism and volunteer tourism based on the perceived impacts; (2) considering how the social constructions of volunteerism underpin local residents' perceptions towards volunteer tourism; (3) suggesting ways to enhance local residents' understanding and support towards volunteer tourism development.

This article will explore questions central to the attitudes of local residents towards volunteer tourism development using a case study of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, one of the fast-growing volunteer tourism destinations in the world. It presents a preliminary study on mapping the social representations of different age groups and generations, thereby contributing to the dialogue on social representation theory in volunteer tourism studies. By investigating the historical and cultural influences in host communities, this article aims to pinpoint the relationship between social representations and cultural influences thus offering an interesting insight for volunteer tourism development.

Volunteer tourism as a development tool

Even volunteer tourism has developed for a few decades, there exists a diverse understanding of its nature. Some scholars considered volunteer tourism as a neo-liberal response to world poverty and underdevelopment (Dhruvarajan, 2000; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Sin, 2010), while others see it as a development tool (Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2011; Wearing, 2001). It is undeniable that there are diverse motivations for volunteer tourists. For example, Brown (2005) differentiates 'volunteer-minded' travellers from 'vacation-minded' travellers in volunteer tourism. He states that the former '[conforms] to some degree to volunteering motives in general in such aspects as personal fulfilment, identity enhancement and self-expression, promoting peace and cultural exchange' (Brown, 2005, p. 492) while the latter '[focuses] on mainstream tourism where individuals travel for pure leisure purposes' (Brown, 2005, p. 492). Acknowledging that different motives exist among volunteer tourists, the recent development of volunteer tourism has generally retained the three requirements of volunteering set by United Nations Volunteers (1999). While volunteering or volunteerism may not be the primary motivation for volunteers in all cases, the actual works involved in volunteer tourism programmes are forms of 'volunteering' that are done voluntarily without financial gains, and their works do benefit host communities in some ways. As such, even volunteer tourists might have different concerns when they participate in volunteer tourism activities, it is undoubtedly that they are involving in some voluntary work that would bring positive

changes and could be seen a development tool in the host communities.

In addition, volunteer tourism has developed with specific goals to promote economic development that would improve local conditions, minimise exploitation on local population and resources as well as to ensure ecological and cultural sustainability in the host communities. With more concerns placed for the locals, volunteer tourism has the potential to act as a development tool for the host communities and a change agent in the tourism industry as a whole (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

Situating volunteer tourism as a development tool and an agent of change, it is crucial to place more concerns for the host communities, including how they perceive and understand volunteer tourism. Timothy and Tosun (2003) add that it is more likely for the local community to know the best plans and solutions in the local context, and community involvement has the potential to increase awareness and interests in local and regional issues, thereby contributing to a more sustainable development.

Social representation theory

Social representation theory is a social theory of knowledge, which is shared by members of a group of community about a particular aspect of the world (Moscovici, 2000). To be specific, social representations are the common knowledge of a social group on languages, ideas, values, images, attitudes, norms, behaviour and action orientations (Wagner, 2003). These social representations are built through social interactions and discourses to change our lives (Moscovici, 2000). They can be considered as part of our culture and cognition of everyday life. Valsiner and Van der Veer (2000) argue that cultural tools including signs, representations and knowledge serve as instruments to cope with the uncertainty of the immediate future. By using this social and cultural knowledge, we can bridge the past and future, and to act accordingly.

In the context of tourism, social representation theory illustrates that residents form their representations of tourism through factors like their direct experiences, including social interactions and exposure to information sources like media. In turn, these representations underpin the perceived impacts of tourism (Fredline, 2006). That is, local residents might interpret and understand tourism differently based on their own experience of social interactions, and this would eventually affect their attitudes towards tourism development.

In previous studies, social representations theory has been used to examine community members' ideas, their perceptions and the ways they think about

tourism development (Meliou & Maroudas, 2010; Monterrubio & Andriotis, 2014; Suess & Mody, 2016). The study of Fredline and Faulkner (2000) reveals that social representations theory provides a better understanding on the complexities of community representations and how social networks inform residents' experience. Andriotis and Vaughan (2003) also suggest that the theory can help to explain individual and collective perceptions towards tourism. While social representations theory has been applied to tourism studies, it was mostly used to assess residents' perceptions towards mass tourism. How host communities view specific types of tourism, such as volunteer tourism, has been under-researched. In addition, as compared to mass tourism, local residents' knowledge of alternative tourism might be relatively limited, hence the lack of understanding might alter their support towards such forms of tourism. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how local residents' knowledge and understanding of volunteer tourism shape their support towards its development.

Setting the scene: the Soviet construction of 'volunteering'

Situated in North Asia between Russia and China, Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world with 3.01 million people living in an area of 1.6 million square kilometres in size (World Bank, 2018). As a Soviet-allied communist state, Mongolia had been developed under Soviet influences for 70 years until 1990. Unlike the western understanding of altruistic volunteerism, the moral meaning of volunteerism in Mongolia has been deeply influenced by the communists' idea of '*Subbotnik*', which refers to unpaid work enforced by the government, including cleaning streets, repairing public amenities, and other voluntary contributions to society during the communist era. Voicu and Voicu (2009) suggest that such involuntary volunteering 'created aversion, distrust and tacit resistance among ex-Soviet citizens and often led to the general scorn and rejection of public life and volunteering' (p. 543). Some studies have demonstrated the low levels of volunteer involvement in the post-communist countries, for example, Plagnol and Huppert (2010) explain the socialist heritage in the society and compulsory volunteering during Soviet times largely repressed people's intrinsic motivation to volunteer. Even if ex-Soviet citizens migrated to democratic countries, it is found that they still reject and avoid the idea of volunteerism in certain ways (Zychlinski & Kagan, 2014). As such, the Soviet construction of volunteering may have shaped Mongolian residents' understanding of the

concept, thus influencing how they interpret and understand volunteer tourism activities in the country, particularly for the elder generations.

The development of volunteer tourism in Mongolia

In the early 1990s, Mongolia transitioned from a single-party rule to a liberal political-economic system, which came with severe financial difficulties and social problems including poverty, unemployment and school drop outs in the country (Erdenechimeg, 2005). Since then, international organisations like Peace Corps, World Vision, Save the Children, JICA and KOICA have established country offices in Mongolia to provide assistance to different areas in the society with hopes of alleviating these social problems. The arrival of these international organisations marked the beginning of international volunteering in Mongolia and it facilitated the spread of an altruistic form of volunteerism to local residents.

The establishment of international organisations' country offices and the dispersal of long-term overseas volunteers have laid the foundation for volunteer tourism development in Mongolia. With the end of communist rule and the opening up of the country in the 1990s, tourism developed rapidly in Mongolia. In 2010, international tourists arrival reached 450,000, triple the number in 2000 (Ulaanbaatar Tourism Department, 2017). The improved tourism infrastructure in Mongolia has attracted foreign NGOs, schools and religious groups to initiate volunteer tourism programmes in the country, particularly during summer time when the climate is mild for tourists. In fact, the population of Mongolia concentrated overwhelmingly in its capital city, Ulaanbaatar, which has given rise to different social and environmental problems. Therefore, most of the volunteer tourism projects can be found in Ulaanbaatar and its surrounding areas. While the official number of volunteer tourists is difficult to obtain as they usually visit with tourist visas, there are signs of increase. For instance, one of the leading volunteer tourism organisation, Lotus Children's Center, hosted 220 international volunteers from across the world in 2016 and the number has been increasing every year. International organisations such as YMCA have also started to develop volunteer tourism programmes since 2015 and recruited volunteers from different parts of the world. Another global youth organisation AIESEC has expanded its network to Mongolia and displaced volunteers to various schools and community centres every summer. Even though there are increasingly more volunteer tourism activities in Mongolia, they are mostly conducted on a one-off

basis and there lacks collaboration between different NGOs and programmes. Hence, efforts on volunteer tourism remain scattered across society and there is inadequate understanding from local communities.

Methodology

Unlike previous studies focusing on volunteer tourism stakeholders, this study examines the perspectives of the general public towards volunteer tourism to investigate how cultures or locality shape their understanding of volunteer tourism. As volunteer tourism is closely related to the concepts of volunteerism and volunteering, how local people perceive volunteerism might have influenced their attitudes towards volunteer tourism development. Therefore, this study also investigates how local residents perceive and understand the concept of 'volunteering' as a prologue to gain an inclusive understanding of their perspectives. The reasons for choosing Mongolia as a case study for this topic are three-fold. Firstly, it is geographically located between Russia and China, which has been heavily influenced by both Western and Chinese cultures. The hybrid cultures might have influenced local residents' perceptions towards foreigners and international volunteers. Secondly, Mongolia is one of the post-Soviet countries, lending for interesting examination on whether former communist ideas have affected their perceptions towards volunteerism and volunteer tourism. Thirdly, tourism in Mongolia has been rapidly growing in recent decades, which comes with the growth of volunteer tourism, rendering it as one of the fastest-growing volunteer tourism destinations in the world. According to Projects Abroad, one of the leading volunteer tourism organisations in the world, voluntary work is crucial to improve the lives of many Mongolians as a majority of them are still living under the poverty line. The organisation is currently providing more than twenty different types of voluntary projects in Mongolia whereas they only have two projects in Myanmar, six projects in Thailand and thirteen projects in China. Therefore, as a fast-growing volunteer tourism destination, there is an urgent need to assess how local residents view volunteer tourism activities and understand their attitudes toward its development in Mongolia.

This study adopts a qualitative method that is believed to provide a 'deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods' (Gill et al., 2008, p. 292). In the initial stage, 31 residents of Ulaanbaatar were asked in a survey in English to describe their perceptions of volunteerism and volunteer tourism in the country by random sampling. The survey was sent and answered by e-mail.

Following this, in-depth face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted with 21 Mongolian residents who have not previously hosted or got in touch with international volunteers. In short, they have no previous experience in volunteer tourism. Most interviews were conducted in English in public areas or places suited to the respondents' convenience in Ulaanbaatar. Given a few older respondents had limited command of English, some interviews were done with the assistance of an interpreter. The interpreter was fluent in English and Mongolian languages, and had experiences in volunteer tourism. Therefore, she had an adequate understanding of the issue and the purpose of this study. Before conducting the interviews, briefing sessions were held with the interpreter to familiarise her with the interview content and the flow of the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the roles of the interviewer and interpreter were clearly explained to the respondents to avoid any tension or misunderstanding. During the course of the interview, the respondents' body language and other expressions were observed. In the event that body language or expressions were not congruent with the spoken words, the author would ask the interpreter to repeat and clarify the respondents' meaning. Conducting interviews with an interpreter is indeed an issue of empowerment as it is an important approach to ensure the voices of the ethnic minorities are heard (Murray & Wynne, 2001). Interviews act as an important tool for social representation theory as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural perspectives of volunteer tourism. Similar to the research of Aquino (2013) on volunteer tourism, data was collected until theoretical data saturation had been reached. Saturation represents the fullness from depth rather than breadth and it can be achieved much sooner when the study aims are modest (Padgett, 2008). Since this study has modest aims focusing on how local residents perceive and understand volunteer tourism, research information reached saturation at 52 respondents when no additional data could be found to develop new ideas and theories.

Questions focused on how participants perceive the concept of volunteerism, their experience in volunteering and attitudes towards volunteer tourism development in Mongolia. Given that the concept of volunteerism has only been developed in Mongolia in recent years, this paper also aims to address how the social representations of volunteer tourism have changed or evolved across generations. As such, respondents in this study are mainly divided into two groups: (1) young people below 34 years old; (2) people above 34 years old. The divisions can be explained by the

following reasons. Firstly, Mongolia is a young country such that approximately 65% of the population is under the age of 34 (United Nations, 2017). Secondly, the average life expectancy is 69.8 in Mongolia (WHO, 2018), and 34 is roughly the median age of average Mongolian residents. Thirdly, since Mongolia transitioned from a communist country to a socialist state about 30 years ago, the age division allows us to examine whether perspectives among local residents differ due to living under different political systems.

Findings

Changing understanding towards volunteerism

The findings suggest that locals' perspectives of volunteerism vary across the two generation groups in Mongolia. Among the older generation, about 40% of them related the concept of volunteerism to the unpaid work enforced by the government during the Soviet era. One respondent mentioned, 'volunteering is about planting trees in the 1970s'. Another added, 'there was forced work given by the government, for example cleaning the streets and putting off fires ... some of us needed to work for long time'. The examples given by the elder residents demonstrate that there is limited understanding towards the altruistic form of volunteering in the society. Further, more than half of the older residents reported having limited knowledge about volunteerism and some even expressed having no idea about the concept. Only very few of them associated volunteerism with ideas like 'helping people during free time' and 'help people with their expertise'. For those who understood the meaning of volunteering, a few respondents added that it is something less important than work and school, hence referred to it as 'a waste of time'. During interviews, one resident shared,

In Mongolia, comparing Soviet regime in the past, volunteering concept is rapidly changing. In previous system, people believed that he/she must become a patriot and be a disciplined, principled and good child and pioneer by the influence of propagandized hidden agenda to create human resource pool from young generation continuously. During this period, from childhood to adulthood, almost all people contributed to social development and spent their time and energy for construction of urban areas and factories even infrastructure facilities. Nowadays, we are still lack of volunteering and philanthropy due to circumstances earlier mentioned with characteristics of one-political-party-led, propagandized, no-voice- to-express and no chance to follow their own inner call.

It demonstrated how the changing political system influenced locals' understanding towards volunteerism

in Mongolia. Dekker and Halman (2003) also support the idea and explain that the collapse of communism and the rise of democracy had dramatically changed the character of volunteering in the nation.

Conversely, the participants from the younger generation had a clearer understanding of the concept of volunteerism, which is similar to the western form of altruistic volunteerism. About 90% of them could relate the concept of volunteerism to 'helping people in need without asking for any rewards' and they even stated that volunteering would be beneficial for volunteers themselves, as they would feel satisfied and be able to learn when they offer help to others. This reinforces the idea that volunteering may lead to value change and influence the lives and lifestyles of both sides (Wagner, 2003). Contrastingly, no participant in the older generation group pointed out the mutual benefits of volunteerism. Additionally, when asked to share examples and experiences of volunteering, the younger generation could give a wide range of activities, such as cleaning the environment, helping the elderly, teaching kids in need, translation work and different kind of fund-raising programmes, whereas the elder generation gave limited examples like planting trees, collecting garbage and donating blood.

The changing understanding of the concept of volunteerism is mainly due to the influence of schools, local and international NGOs, religious groups and social media. Simply put, the concept of volunteering is shaped and constructed by social norms rather than developed intrinsically from individuals. Butcher and Einolf (2017, p. 11) explain that 'external norms work even more powerfully in the Global South, where the culture is less individualistic than the Global North, families and communities share close bonds, and norms of reciprocity and mutual aid are strong'. Many of the younger respondents in Mongolia stated that they learnt the concept of volunteerism from schools, churches, different social media platforms and international organisations like Peace Corps and UNV. Some of them indicated that they are the members of different voluntary services clubs, including the Rotaract club, the Mongolian Youth Foundation and AIESEC Mongolia. These clubs not only provided a wide range of opportunities for youngsters to serve in different areas but also created ecological effects on volunteerism. According to Lee and Brudney (2009),

when people have social ties to a wide range of heterogeneous others, they are not only more likely to hear about volunteer opportunities or meet other volunteers, but also to believe that other people will share their volunteer impulse, that they will not be left in the lurch by others shirking their responsibilities. (518)

Therefore, the social context plays an important role in promoting volunteerism among young people in Mongolia.

Perceived positive impacts of volunteer tourism

Despite the varied understanding and social constructions of volunteerism in Mongolia, local residents explained the perceived positive benefits of volunteer tourism development for the country. Most of the respondents believed volunteer tourism would benefit individuals and the community as a whole.

Provide assistance and additional workforce to the country

Although volunteer tourism is a relatively new phenomenon in the country, some local residents had a basic understanding of the concept, which involves international volunteers coming to bring positive changes in society. Many respondents expressed the view that the coming of international volunteers could provide further assistance to various development in the country, including education, social development and environmental issues. One of the local residents shared, 'Mongolia is a big country and we need a lot of help especially from the countryside, international volunteers can fill the job vacancies that not everyone could do ... sometimes we have a shortage of manpower and expertise'. Another resident added, 'the nomadic culture of Mongolia is depreciating and we would benefit from highly specialised people to help out', pointing to the potential of international volunteers to provide technical assistance to the country. In general, local residents believed it would be advantageous for international volunteers to spend time and share their experience with local communities so as to alleviate some of the social problems in the country. They also acknowledged the abilities and experience of international volunteers and believed they are able to understand the problems in the country and provide innovative and practical solutions. For instance, a local resident explained, 'there is a lot of people who need help in Mongolia, but the government cannot provide enough assistance, so we need volunteers from different places to help. Volunteers can help us through discovering new ways to solve problems in the society'. In sync with the idea suggested by Devereux (2008), he suggests volunteer tourism provides technical assistance that would enhance the capacity in developing countries either by direct provision of skills from outside or by enhancing the capacity of local people, which commonly includes educational

assistance, provision of personnel from donor countries, funding or provision of personnel to countries of the South.

Enhance understanding and cultivate friendships

As the tourism industry has only been developed in Mongolia over the last decade, local residents have a limited understanding of foreigners. Some of them viewed volunteer tourism as a better means of bridging the gap between foreigners and local people. One of them indicated, 'when they come for volunteer tourism, our people would not think of them as tourists as much, so I think there will be more communication and understanding between us'. Others believed international volunteers and local communities would be able to show love and support to each other. A local resident shared,

International volunteers can show [that] urban people can take care of our mother nature, not only nomads. Even people living with them can realize xenophobia is rooted on prejudice and stereotypes derived from cultural, social and fake news. They will be real, living change makers while they are living in Mongolia to demonstrate how people capable to support, help and love each other without any gains.

In addition, some local residents saw volunteer tourism as a better platform to enhance cultural understanding and cultivate friendships. They also believe volunteer tourism plays an important role in mediating tourist-host relations in local communities. One of them shared,

One of the problems with tourism is that it often paints a shallow or even sometimes false picture of a place and its people. Tourists are provided with a carefully designed image of a place they are going to. Their experience is sheltered and catered. It is not true culture immersion. Even if they stay with locals for a few days, the experience is often more a business transaction than a chance to connect and build relationships. Volunteer tourism, on the other hand, might make connection easier. It also makes it easier for friendships to form and people to get a chance to understand each other in a deeper way.

This line of thought is echoed by the idea that volunteer tourism provides an opportunity to develop cross-cultural understanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008) and attachment between volunteers and local participants (Conran, 2011).

Exchange ideas and develop locals' skills

Local residents acknowledged the coming of international volunteers not only contribute to the overall development of the community but also facilitate the exchange of ideas with individuals and enhance their skills. A handful of respondents indicated their will to

work with international volunteers. One of them expressed, 'volunteers help to open the minds of locals and we can learn about the working styles of different cultures ... we will be more confident when we are more capable of our work'. Another resident opined, 'volunteer tourism means more people participating in voluntary work, the coming of foreigners would be able to bring in new ideas and experiences, which is beneficial for us'. In general, local residents expressed the view that nomadic cultures in Mongolia are not competitive enough in the age of globalisation, therefore there is an urgent need for them to learn from different cultures. They believed volunteer tourism provides a platform for them to exchange their knowledge and experience with foreigners. One of them shared,

some of the positive impacts [of volunteer tourism] are the experience and knowledge exchange, which is extremely helpful for Mongolians to learn the cultural and international differences. Volunteers often bring new ideas, many questions and fresh perspectives and they challenge us to look at and think about things differently.

The views of local residents are in line with the research of Zahra and McGehee (2013) as they suggest that volunteer tourism is beneficial for building human capital in host communities, including facilitating the development of locals' skills.

Help to stimulate the tourism industry

Many respondents deemed the coming of international volunteers could help to bring in more tourists and stimulate tourism growth in Mongolia. One of them explained, 'I think volunteer tourism can be helpful in promoting tourism. They are not just travelling, but also help to make the country better'. Similarly, another local resident explained, 'when volunteers buy something in Mongolia, or even they go sight-seeing, it can support the local economy that is beneficial for our country'. A handful of local residents believed in the combined effects of volunteering and tourism. One of them explained, 'volunteering and tourism combined will benefit Mongolia in many ways. Tourism is an important sector that Mongolia needs to develop and the coming of volunteers means the positive impacts [brought to our country] could be doubled'. In fact, tourism was strictly limited in Mongolia by the communist government before the 1990s. With the opening up of the country and the building of more tourists' infrastructure, tourism in Mongolia has been gradually developing. According to the statistics from the World Travel and Tourism Council (2017), the tourism industry contributed US\$1.1 billion, 9.4% of the GDP in Mongolia in 2016.

It also provided 96,000 jobs, 8.5% of the total employment in the country, and the numbers are expected to rise in the future. Mongolian residents believed the development of volunteer tourism would further help to promote tourism in the country and it would also benefit different sectors in the society. Mason (2015) reiterates the importance of tourism for developing countries, as it can encourage greater social mobility through employment changes that would result in higher wages and better job prospects.

Perceived negative impacts of volunteer tourism

Most of the respondents believed volunteer tourism development would be advantageous for Mongolia. However, some of them also expressed concerns over the costs of volunteer tourism.

Loss of culture

Wearing and McGehee (2013) suggest that there are typical assumptions on 'locals are pre-modern, primitive, poor and technologically backward while their guests were modern, sophisticated, wealthy and technological advanced' (40). In the case of Mongolia, some local residents expressed concerns over the loss of culture when more international volunteers arrived in the country. One of them shared, 'when volunteers come here, they spread their cultures to our people, like nowadays local teenagers only listen to Korean and western music, sometimes I feel like our culture is losing bit by bit'. Similarly, another local resident explained, 'when volunteers come here in Mongolia, it is easy for our people to compare with them. Local people would think foreign culture is better', demonstrating the possible loss of culture when more tourists interact with local residents. In addition, Butler suggested that alternative tourism would 'penetrate further into the personal space of residents' (1990, p. 41). That is, the coming of international volunteers might be harmful for communities with less experience with tourists as they might negatively impact their cultures. The case might be more prominent in Mongolia as it is home to the nomadic culture that is not commonly found in anywhere else in the world. Close contacts between international volunteers and local residents might result in demonstration effects. As stated by Fisher (2004), when local residents being in contact with different lifestyles and consumption patterns, they directly compare their standards of living with these group tourists, which could lead to the demonstrated behaviour to tourists.

Culture shock

Furnham (1984) defines culture shock as a consequence of language difficulties or even the cross-cultural differences in social skills, which would cause great social difficulty and affect everyday activities. Some residents anticipated the occurrence of culture shock when more international volunteers arrive in town. One of them related the experience with foreigners and shared, 'when I tried to make jokes with foreigners, it was hard cause they don't know our culture well, so they can't understand our language or jokes ... I think there might be culture shocks between volunteers and locals as well'. Another local resident expressed, 'I think it will be challenging [to host international volunteers] because of the cultural differences and misunderstandings that might possibly occur between us'. Culture shock may lead to the feeling of cultural confusion, a sense of alienation and isolation, and depression (Bhugra & Becker, 2005). Hence a few residents pointed out the uneasiness in hosting international volunteers, particularly due to cultural interactions.

Misinterpretation of volunteering

While some residents acknowledged volunteer tourism has the potential to promote volunteerism in the country, some viewed it in the opposite way. One local resident stated, 'the concept of volunteering is not well developed in Mongolia. The coming of international volunteers might provide further opportunities for business and other sectors to exploit them as free labour, which indeed have changed the real meaning of volunteering'. Another local resident shared similar ideas and suggested,

the negative impacts are obviously that the businesses or organizations that are accepting volunteers begin to expect volunteers to do it on their behalf. Mongolia is seen as a tool for various getaways and potentially money-laundering. Too shallow and sporadic involvement would not change much substantially.

In the interviews, a few respondents shared that the idea of volunteerism has not been made clear to some of the local residents. For example, manufacturing sectors viewed it as a way to get additional manpower and looked for volunteers to help with their work. Some local residents also indicated that local business should not exploit international volunteers as they might better serve the communities in other ways.

Over-reliance on foreign support

Even most of the local residents believed volunteer tourism would help develop the country and bring various benefits to the country, some of them expressed the concern of over-reliance on foreign support. A local

resident expressed, 'One negative aspect I imagine would be that perhaps foreign volunteers would be taking jobs away from native Mongolians. Foreign volunteers are willing to work freely, which benefit the one whom they are working for, but it would hurt the one who needs the job for a living'. A decrease in labour demand would be harmful for host communities like Mongolia where economic development is still a primary concern in the country. Guttentag (2009) believes volunteer tourism could lead to a drop in labour demand and a promotion of dependency. Even some organisations tried to make deliberate efforts to ensure the projects did not undermine local labour markets, it is doubtful whether all volunteer tourism organisations would be cautious. Another younger respondent shared, 'if many foreign people come to our country to volunteer, our people especially youngsters would avoid to volunteer because they believe having foreign volunteers would be enough', demonstrating the possible overlap between local voluntary work and volunteer tourism projects. There is a need to strike a balance between local and foreign efforts in terms of voluntary work in order to ensure a sustainable development in the country.

Attitudes towards volunteer tourism development in the country

Besides local residents' perceptions on volunteer tourism development in Mongolia, this study also involves an investigation on their attitudes towards volunteer tourism development in the country. Based on the viewpoints shared by local residents, they are divided into three clusters: (1) lovers; (2) neutralists; (3) haters (Table 1).

Cluster 1 – lovers

This cluster is labelled as being the most positive towards volunteer tourism development in the country, containing 71% of the sample. This cluster also comprised of 80% and 63% of the younger and older respondents respectively. Respondents have general ideas about the concepts of volunteer tourism and have learnt it from different ways, including international NGOs, schools, religious groups and social media. Their understanding of volunteering is not affected by the Soviet construction

of forced community work, and their perception is similar to that of a western form of altruistic volunteerism. In this cluster, respondent expressed their support to volunteer tourism and explained the perceived impacts of it. For instance, many of them indicated volunteer tourism is 'a good idea', it would be 'beneficial' and 'effective'. Some of them even pointed out that volunteer tourism provides mutual benefits to volunteers and host communities. One of them explained

I think volunteer tourism is beneficial for both sides, it could be a life changing experience for them. For example, volunteers might come from urban environment with luxury lifestyles ... when they come here, they can experience how to live in the nature and learn to take care of themselves with basic necessities. For local people, we can learn the languages, cultures and working styles of foreigners.

Respondents in this cluster also named other benefits that volunteer tourism would bring to Mongolia, including provide assistance and additional workforce to the country, bridging the gaps between foreigners and local people, opening the minds of locals and developing skills, exchanging new ideas, cultivating friendships, showing love and support to each other, and helping to develop the tourism industry.

Cluster 2 – neutralist

This cluster is labelled as neutral towards volunteer tourism, contains 23% of the sample. This cluster accounted for 16% and 30% of the younger and older respondents respectively. Most of these respondents lacked a general understanding of volunteer tourism, with many expressing 'I don't know what is it' and 'I have no idea if it's good or not'. Notably, their lack of understanding of volunteer tourism could be related to their ambiguous perceptions towards volunteering. For this cluster of respondents, when they were asked about the concepts of volunteerism, a majority of them indicated that they were not sure about it. Therefore, the ambiguous concepts towards volunteerism influenced how they perceive the development of volunteer tourism due to a general lack of understanding of these ideas and activities. In this cluster, respondents did not indicate specific support nor opposition for volunteer tourism development due to their limited understanding.

Cluster 3 – haters

This cluster is labelled as being the most negative towards volunteer tourism development in Mongolia, containing 6% of the study sample. This cluster composed 4% and 7% of the younger and older respondents respectively.

Table 1. Attitudes towards volunteer tourism development in Mongolia

	Respondents below 34 years old (N = 25)	Respondents above 34 years old (N = 27)	Total Percentage
Lovers	20 (80%)	17 (63%)	71%
Neutralists	4 (16%)	8 (30%)	23%
Haters	1 (4%)	2 (7%)	6%

Their understanding towards volunteer tourism varied, with some having perceptions similar to an altruistic form of volunteering and others relating it to the Soviet construction of forced community work. They viewed volunteer tourism as ineffective and potentially bringing other negative impacts to the local communities and hence indicated minimal support to volunteer tourism development in the country.

Firstly, their opposition could be explained by the lack of understanding towards volunteer tourism. One resident grumbled

nowadays many voluntary work are done by foreign volunteers at the church and they have special purposes, which is to preach religion. I think volunteering should be done without purposes, sometimes I think foreigners are spies, I don't like them.

This pointed out the misunderstanding of local residents towards international volunteers and foreigners, and that there is perhaps insufficient communication between NGOs and local communities about volunteer tourism.

Secondly, some raised concerns over the potential cultural and social problems that would be brought by international volunteers, including culture shocks, loss of own culture and the occurrence of more crimes and social problems as mentioned in the last section. This group of residents had got in touch with foreigners in different ways and their stereotypes on foreigners have shaped their perceptions towards volunteer tourism. They believed in the positive intentions of international volunteers, but felt hesitant about the interactions with them as well as the possible burdens that they would bring to the local communities.

Thirdly, a handful of residents believed volunteer tourism is ineffective and did not see a need to develop it in the country. One resident explained,

based on my understanding, I don't support it as a formal form of tourism per se. We have enough manpower and time to produce the results we want. Sure we can and do invite and work with international volunteers but volunteer tourism as it exists now is a rather tricky matter and if not done smartly, it can cause even worsened international understanding and unnecessary hindrances in people-to-people dialogue.

Another resident shared,

I only think professional volunteers would help because we don't have enough experts in the country, for example, children rights and special education teachers. It would be effective if international volunteers can come for three months because they can't help a lot in a short time.

These local residents doubted the effectiveness of short term volunteer tourism projects and believed the costs it brought to Mongolia might outweigh its benefits.

Discussion

As an alternative form of tourism, volunteer tourism provides platforms for tourists to become creative actors engaging in behaviours that are mutually beneficial to local communities. Wearing and McGehee (2013) stress the need to reposition the relationship between local cultures and tourists and suggest the concept of social value in volunteer tourism, which seeks to endorse local people and cultures. They add that micro-social elements need to be analysed as they are fundamental to the conceptualisation of tourists' destinations. Therefore, this study serves to explore the social representations of volunteer tourism from the perspectives of local residents in host communities, and to investigate different social factors shaping their perceptions.

From the research findings, it is suggested that the social representations of volunteerism, volunteering and volunteer tourism varied in Mongolia. Suggested by the research findings, institutional ideas in Mongolia affected some residents' understanding of volunteerism and volunteer tourism due to the Post-Soviet influences, particularly for the older generations. Some of them viewed it as a way to contribute to the government rather than a philanthropy to serve the society, whereas the majority of them have limited knowledge about volunteerism and some even expressed having no idea about the concept. The older respondents can only give a few examples of volunteering like planting trees, cleaning streets and putting off fires. With the help of international NGOs, schools and religious groups, the altruistic form of volunteerism has been promoted in the society. More Mongolian residents, particularly the younger ones, have basic understandings about volunteerism and volunteer tourism. In general, it was observed that participants who understand the real meaning of volunteerism and volunteer tourism tend to be more supportive towards its development in Mongolia. In short, there is a positive correlation between local residents' knowledge towards volunteer tourism and their support. Conversely, those who are unsure about the concepts and the motivations of international volunteers tend to be neutral or unsupportive towards volunteer tourism development. It is also found that by and large the younger generation indicated more support towards volunteer tourism development in Mongolia. They were born at the time when the society was no longer under Soviet influences, hence their understanding of volunteerism is less associated with the unpaid community work. They are more affected by the altruistic form of volunteerism and they saw volunteering as a learning process and would be beneficial to both the volunteers and recipients.

The research findings not only reflect the case study of Mongolia alone, but it also provide implications for volunteer tourism development in other destinations in the world. This paper emphasises a reciprocal relationship between the attitudes of local residents towards volunteer tourism and the perceived impacts of volunteerism. That is, if local residents have basic ideas about the altruistic form of volunteerism, they are more likely to understand the motivations of international volunteers and the impacts of volunteer tourism. In addition, the understanding of volunteerism is shaped by the host communities' history and culture, and individuals' knowledge and experience as illustrated in the theoretical framework (Figure 1). Among sources of information on volunteerism, schools, NGOs, religious groups and social media play important roles in shaping individuals' knowledge and experience for volunteerism and volunteer tourism. The findings of this study add not only to the understanding of host communities' attitudes towards volunteer tourism, but also explains the complex relationship between the social representations of volunteerism and local support for volunteer tourism development.

One unique implication of these findings is that, unlike mass tourism development, the perceived impacts of volunteer tourism were largely social. In Mongolia, volunteer tourism was seen as a way to alleviate social problems and

promote social changes. In a lot of cases, local residents believed the profession and experiences of international volunteers would positively influence their society. However, it is also important to note that some local residents expressed the uncertainties over volunteer tourism development in the country. They believe the impacts of volunteer tourism depend largely on the volunteering organisation, as well as the experience and personalities of individual volunteers. Some local residents suggested the need for international volunteers to have longer time commitment in the country and it is necessary for them to undertake pre-service trainings in order to understand different issues in Mongolia as well as to prevent cultural misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Set within the context of social representations, this study gives us insights into local residents' views and attitudes towards volunteerism and volunteer tourism development, conveying the complexities between local residents' perceptions and their support towards volunteer tourism development in host communities. Social representations of volunteer tourism are important since these values, norms and belief system shared by the society often guide their attitudes

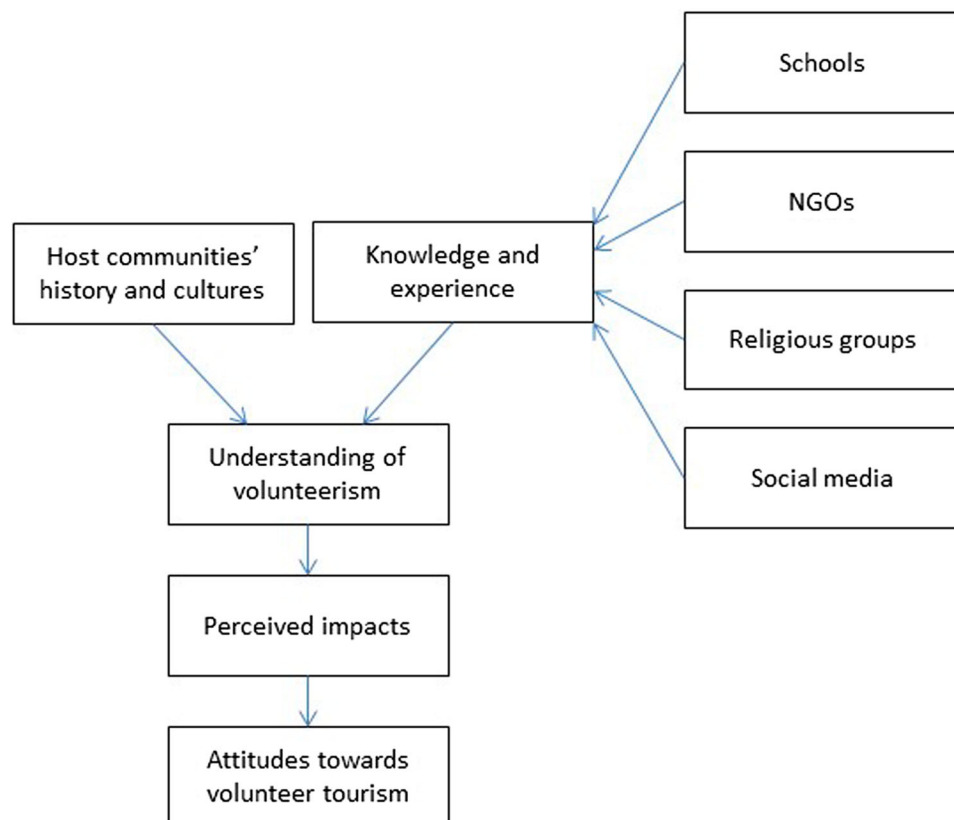


Figure 1. Social representations and attitudes towards volunteer tourism theoretical framework.

(Dekker & Halman, 2003). Terry and Hogg (1996) also explain that people are more likely to engage in a particular behaviour if it is in accordance with the social norms of the group. Therefore, how volunteerism and volunteer tourism are socially constructed in the community determines local's attitudes towards its development. Compared to mass tourism, volunteer tourism involves intensive interactions between hosts and guests, hence support from local residents is instrumental to its development. This research comprises of a case study of Mongolia, which is both a fast-growing tourism destination and post-Soviet country allowing for a study on how its history and culture shaped local residents' perceptions towards volunteer tourism. Unlike previous research, this study does not limit itself to volunteer tourism stakeholders, but rather presents a fairer evaluation by including the general public understanding of volunteerism and perception of the impacts of volunteer tourism development.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest there is an inadequate understanding of volunteer tourism from local residents in host communities, particularly for the older generations, which would influence their attitudes towards its development in the country. In fact, NGOs have been seen as social change agents with the ability to shift away from stereotypes and neo-colonial thinking towards a more emancipated society (McGehee, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for NGOs to foster greater communication and understanding between host communities and international volunteers. Additionally, it is also found that the concepts of volunteerism are not well developed in some host communities in the global south. This lack of knowledge towards the altruistic motives of international volunteers might act a hindrance to host volunteer tourism projects in local communities. As such, besides coordinating volunteer tourism projects, there is also a need for local and international NGOs to take the responsibility of sharing the values and importance of volunteerism to local residents so as to establish better volunteering infrastructure and networks within host communities. In fact, volunteerism is an important vehicle for sustainable development that it allows 'citizens to build their resilience, enhance their knowledge base and gain a sense of responsibility for their own community. Social cohesion and trust are strengthened through individual and collective volunteer action, leading to sustainable outcomes for people, by people' (UNV, 2018). Therefore, volunteerism should be encouraged not only in forms of international volunteer tourism programmes but also promoted locally to host communities in order to work for the betterment of society.

This study has its limitations, many of which provided a foundation for future research. This study focuses on

qualitative methods to look at the perceptions on volunteer tourism from local residents. Quantitative research is needed so that the attitudes of the local residents can be examined on a larger scale and in a more comprehensive manner. To provide a clearer picture of the host communities' attitudes, further research is needed on the relationship between demographic and socio-economic background of individual local residents and their attitudes towards volunteer tourism development in the country. Previous research have suggested that social class (Flick et al., 2002; Voicu & Voicu, 2003) and religiosity (Bennett-Hunter, 2015) correlates positively with volunteerism both at the individual and the country level. Hence these factors might also affect their perceptions and attitudes towards volunteer tourism. In addition, future studies can look beyond the intersections between volunteerism and volunteer tourism. For instance, volunteer tourism might possibly link with the politics of care (Butcher & Smith, 2010; Popke, 2006). How individual host communities perceive 'care' would affect how they interpret the caring acts performed by international volunteers, which might be another determinant for their attitudes towards volunteer tourism development.

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