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An examination of not-for-profit volunteer tourism sending organisations' guiding considerations that influence volunteer tourism programs

Faith Ong
Michael Pearlman
Leonie Lockstone-Binney
Victoria University
Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding author: Faith Ong, Lecturer, School of International Business, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, 8001, Ph: +61 3 9919 4152, Email: faith.ong@vu.edu.au

ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examines the guiding considerations that not-for-profit volunteer tourism sending organisations utilise in designing and implementing volunteer tourism programs. These considerations encompass overarching factors that affect the strategic and operational direction sending organisations take, influencing their choice of activities and providing the framework for their programs.

The study explores the vision and mission statements of not-for-profit sending organisations along with their program principles to extrapolate guiding considerations that underpin the implementation of volunteer tourism programs. Eleven guiding considerations were determined, with the five most frequently occurring listed in rank order as: Interaction, Needs of Host Community, Participant-Focused Benefits, Host Community-Focused Participation and Quality of Life.

With three guiding considerations focused heavily on the impact on, and needs and involvement of the host community, it is a promising indication that not-for-profit sending organisations place strong emphasis on a host community-led strategy that keeps their programs relevant to key beneficiaries. However, the needs of the participants are not neglected, with participant-focused benefits, such as the learning and adventure components of trips, being a prominent guiding consideration to emerge from the analysis. Lastly, bringing mutual benefits and positive interaction between host communities and volunteer tourists is also a key focus of sending organisations in organising their programs. This research contributes to the limited literature on volunteer tourism sending organisations and offers an initial insight into the motivations and criteria that mould programs from the perspective of these organisations.

Keywords: Host Community, Sending Organisations, Volunteer Tourism, Volunteer Tourism Programs

INTRODUCTION

As a global market, volunteer tourism is estimated to generate 1.6 million tourists, contributing between US\$1.76 billion and US\$2.63 billion (Tourism Research and Marketing Group, 2008) to the global economy. Volunteer tourism may be the perfect tool to combine the modern traveller's leisure needs with the impetus to help others through volunteering.

In response to growing demand for volunteer tourism, a substantial body of research has been conducted to gather the perspectives of volunteer tourists and host communities. Much of this research has centred on factors such as volunteer motivations (Brown, 2005; Campbell & Smith, 2006; Lyons & Wearing, 2008b; Söderman & Snead, 2008), impacts of volunteer tourism trips on the participants (Matthews, 2008; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004), the discovery of the 'self' through volunteer tourism programs (Wearing & Wearing, 2001; Wearing, 2002) and the impacts of these programs on host communities (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Guttentag, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007).

A corresponding level of investigation from the sending organisation perspective is currently lacking. Sending organisations play a vital role in the planning and delivery of volunteer tourism programs, often acting as intermediary between the host community and volunteer tourists. Answering Coghlan's (2007) call for more research that adopts this approach, this study offers insights into the guiding considerations underpinning the development and operation of volunteer tourism programs from the volunteer tourism sending organisations' (hereafter referred to as 'sending organisations') perspective, drawing on their vision and mission statements and their program principles.

In organising programs, sending organisations may have established guiding considerations that govern the design of their programs and influence the activities that are included in them. The vision and mission statements of these organisations, as well as explicit program principles, being the planning documents that guide organisations, are essential elements that can reveal much about the priorities of sending organisations in designing their programs.

This research provides an exploratory examination of the factors underpinning the program principles and vision and mission statements of not-for-profit sending organisations. In doing so, the guiding considerations that influence sending organisations in organising their programs are revealed.

To achieve this research objective, this article sets the scene by discussing sending organisations and their role in organising volunteer tourism programs. The methodology for the study is then established, followed by presentation and discussion of the findings related to sending organisations' guiding considerations. In conclusion, future research opportunities in this area are identified.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review establishes the nature of volunteer tourism, leading onto a focused discussion of sending organisations and the part they play in this emerging field.

Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism, as a concept, has attracted increased attention amongst operators in the tourism industry, and has prompted closer examination from both researchers and marketers alike (Wearing, 2003). One of the most commonly used definitions describes volunteer tourists as those who "volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that invoke the aiding or

alleviating of the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment” (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Volunteer tourism is frequently linked to concepts of ‘social tourism’ (Relph, 1976), ‘moral tourism’ (Butcher, 2003) and ‘serious leisure’ (Stebbins, 2005).

Not-for-profit organisations have long been the strongest advocates for volunteer tourism (Lyons & Wearing, 2008a), particularly in relation to the 1960s boom of young American volunteers going overseas to teach and volunteer for various community development causes through the Peace Corp Program (Cobbs, 1997). With the increasing participation of for-profit organisations in this sector, the validity and effectiveness of programs have come under scrutiny, with doubts raised as to whether the uniquely altruistic aims of volunteer tourism can be maintained.

Volunteer tourism programs, hereafter referred to as ‘programs’, include activities associated with community welfare, environmental regeneration, cultural developments and other similar projects (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Volunteer tourism has further been subjected to criticism with the suggestion that some programs do not always epitomise a mutually beneficial form of tourism, with benefits being heavily skewed towards the tourist at the expense of host community needs (Raymond, 2008). In addition, there has been debate as to what combination and proportion of activities qualifies as part of a dedicated program. Brown (2005) describes two ends of this spectrum, with ‘mission trips’ emphasising volunteering as the main objective of the trip and ‘leisure-oriented vacations’ providing a relatively small volunteering component in comparison to the leisure components of the package. Building on this analysis, Callanan and Thomas (2005) proposed a conceptual framework to classify programs on a spectrum from shallow to deep involvement, with increasing emphasis on the volunteering component from the former to the latter. This spectrum reinforces the need for an exploration into sending organisations’ guiding considerations in the development and operation of programs. Such insights can help to create a management structure that enables even shallow programs to enhance their contribution to the host communities they engage with.

The organisation of programs typically consists of three main parties in direct interaction: host communities, volunteer tourists and sending organisations. While host communities and tourists can be understood through conventional definitions in the tourism literature, being the visited and the visitor respectively, the concept of sending organisations as referred to in this research, and elaborated upon in the following section, is not necessarily synonymous with the intermediary role of a commercial tour operator.

Volunteer Tourism Sending Organisations

One often-overlooked perspective in the body of literature relating to volunteer tourism is that of sending organisations. Sending organisations, which play an increasingly important role in this expanding sector, can include private companies, non-governmental organisations, charities, universities, conservation agencies, religious organisations and governments (Guttentag, 2009). While sending organisations can work in collaboration with an established non-governmental organisation (NGO), they often act as the direct intermediary between the host destination and volunteer tourists.

With respect to the host community, the responsibilities of sending organisations include building ties with local communities to understand their development needs, designing programs with these needs in mind and marketing programs such that there will be sufficient manpower for them (Raymond, 2008). Sending organisations’ responsibilities to volunteer tourists may include

arranging for logistical movement of resources required for programs, pre-departure briefings to establish roles and responsibilities as well as post-trip acclimatisation back to their home countries.

In light of limited research on the workings of sending organisations, Palacios (2010) made some tentative suggestions as to how these organisations contribute to the success of their programs. Firstly, sending organisations establish strong relationships with the host organisation or destination that are based on mutual trust and a constant evaluation of projects over the longer-term. This enables sending organisations to gain a clear idea of the needs of the host destination and to tailor their programs accordingly. Secondly, sending organisations ensure that experiential learning takes place with the volunteer tourist for the duration of the trip, encouraging them to critically engage in their experiences through guided reflection and education, thereby enhancing the leisure experience for the tourist. Thirdly, a good sending organisation views programs as a continuing process for the participant and not an isolated experience. This requires their full involvement from pre-departure preparation, in-country orientation upon arrival, post-experience debriefs and support for returning volunteer tourists to cope with reverse culture shock (Raymond, 2008). Lastly, to ensure that participants understand the trip purpose and to emphasise the role of each individual, sending organisations clearly define the functions and responsibilities of each participant in relation to the program. The avoidance of role ambiguity encourages realistic expectations of what is needed from participants and minimises any disappointment resulting from disconfirmation of expectations (Palacios, 2010). These suggested success factors have yet to be empirically tested. It is beyond the scope of the current investigation to do so.

This research explores sending organisations, in particular the perspective of not-for-profit operators. As these organisations are typically made up of NGOs, logic would dictate that their programs be highly geared towards the needs of the host communities they serve in order to fill the void that public and private sector sending organisations are unwilling or unable to fulfil (Kennedy & Dornan, 2009). In seeking to identify the guiding considerations of these organisations, it is expected that an exploratory understanding will emerge of the likely altruistic influence that affects the types of programs these operators offer.

METHODOLOGY

As an exploratory study, an inductive approach was undertaken for the purpose of determining what, if any, guiding considerations underpin the operational parameters of sending organisations.

Program principles and vision and mission statements form the primary input to this research. While other forms of planning documents may exist, such as organisation charters and terms of reference, they were not readily available to the researchers. Although this presents a limitation in drawing the compilation of guiding considerations from a wider selection of documents, the uniformity in the types of documents analysed ensures comparability (see Table 1).

Vision and mission statements are the formalised documents defining an organisation's unique and enduring purpose, providing a common direction or focus (Bart & Tabone, 1999). In studies of both not-for-profit and profit-motivated organisations in general, the components of such statements have been found to have significant positive behavioural impacts on organisation performance (Bart & Baetz, 1998; Bart & Tabone, 1999), indicative that such an affect may exist

in the context of the current study, between the planning statements of not-for-profit sending organisations and the programs they offer.

Program principles, for the purpose of this research, are defined as the guidelines that sending organisations define specifically in relation to the scope of their programs. While vision and mission statements are applicable to the entire sending organisation, program principles are applicable only to the programs offered.

Purposive sampling was used to obtain a preliminary list of for-profit and not-for-profit sending organisations. To achieve this, an internet search of public domain websites for sending organisations yielded 73 pages of results. A list of 81 programs from around the world featured within the first 10 pages of search results using the term ‘volunteer tourism sending organisations’. As the results yielded websites related to other aspects of volunteer tourism, the use of purposive sampling in this case allowed only websites of sending organisations that were related to volunteer tourism to be included for consideration, thereby creating an appropriate list to describe the phenomenon under study (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008).

The organisations were further filtered to sending organisations that had both their vision and mission statements as well as program principles available on their websites, which were formulated into a subsequent listing. From this list, further filtering with the use of more specific criteria was applied and a selection of not-for-profit sending organisations with Australian offices was extracted. The criterion of ‘with Australian offices’ was utilised to refine the list of sending organisations to be examined by geographical means, in reference to the location of the researchers. In addition, the criterion of ‘not-for-profit’ was used to ensure that the sources of data and context were similar. An examination incorporating for-profit sending organisations would be extensive and beyond the scope of the current study.

Based on the availability of vision and mission statements and program principles, 12 not-for-profit sending organisations were selected for study. These organisations had program principles and vision and mission statements with word counts of between 58 and 122, which does not present high variability between the statement lengths. Information related to the 12 sending organisations is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: List of sending organisations selected for study

Name	Year of establishment	Location of headquarters	Focus	Statement and principle word count
African Conservation Experience	1999	Gloucestershire, UK	Wildlife conservation	58
Australian Volunteers International	1961	Victoria, Australia	Community development	89
Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development	1998	South Australia, Australia	Community development	103
Cross-Cultural Solutions	1995	New York, USA	Community development	116
Engineers Without Borders	2003	Victoria, Australia	Development engineering	122
Global Vision	1998	Exeter, UK	Environmental	104

International			conservation, community development	
Habitat for Humanity Australia	1988	New South Wales, Australia	Community development (housing)	88
International Student Volunteers	1984	California, USA and New South Wales, Australia	Environmental conservation, community development	115
Palms Australia	1965	New South Wales, Australia	Community development	115
Restless Development	1985	London, UK	Community development	88
World Youth International	1988	South Australia, Australia	Community development	80
Youth Challenge Australia	1992	New South Wales, Australia	Community development	116

A content analysis was performed on the data collected, as it was considered to be an appropriate means of addressing the research objectives in an exploratory manner. According to Weber (1996, p. 9), content analysis is “a research methodology that utilises a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender of the message, the message itself, or audience of the message”.

NVivo 8, a recognised qualitative data analysis software (QDAS), was selected as an appropriate analytical tool for its capabilities relating to the classification, management and linking of data (Bazeley, 2007). This program was used mainly for the inductive coding of text under broad topics and grouping of topics into similar factors. The search for commonalities amongst the data set was motivated by the small sample size.

The use of keyword searches as a form of construct development textual data analysis was employed to develop emergent factors from the available text (Mossholder, Settoon, Harris & Armenakis, 1995). Quantitative indices were developed with keyword frequency queries using the Query function in NVivo 8, facilitating further development of factors in the analysis (Anderson & Shaw, 1999).

Tag clouds, a recognised aid to readers’ general impressions of data sets (Rivadeneira, Gruen, Muller & Miller, 2007), were also used to create visual representations of the word frequency queries conducted using an online tag cloud generator, *Tagxedo*. Tag clouds make use of different factors such as font weight, colour and size to assist in gisting information (Rivadeneira et al., 2007). For the purpose of the current study, font size was used as a differentiating factor with the most frequent words appearing in the largest font, while less frequent words were correspondingly and proportionally represented in smaller fonts. This form of tag cloud differentiation was selected as it has been found to be the most effective factor in enabling differentiation of underlying thematic differences (Bateman, Gutwin & Nacenta, 2008).

Figure 1: Tag cloud comprising the most frequently occurring words that appear in the combined text

In examining the tag cloud, the word ‘community’ (2.62%), and its variation ‘communities’ (1.49%), was the most frequently used word, signalling a strong emphasis on the host community as a general guide for sending organisations when organising programs. This emphasis on communities, especially from a not-for-profit perspective, is important in ensuring that programs do not detract benefitting communities that require assistance.

The second most frequent word to appear in the text is ‘development’ (1.62%), which is used in relation to the host community and participants’ personal development. The number of times this word is repeated points to the prominence of bringing about positive change and development as a driver in the projects that sending organisations organise or support. Coupled with the frequent mention of ‘sustainable’ (1.49%) and ‘projects’ (1.12%), these frequently used words demonstrate the significance that not-for-profit sending organisations place on ensuring that programs are meaningful and of value to the host community, as opposed to being only beneficial to volunteers.

While the frequency percentages may seem small, these numbers are indicative of the occurrence of individual words within a large body of text. Therefore their relative, and not absolute, frequencies provide a more accurate picture of their importance in the context of vision and mission statements and program principles.

The same text was coded into topics that contained similar statements. A total of 38 narrow topics were identified from this process, which are listed and defined in Table 2. After coding the text into topics, these were then regrouped to identify 11 guiding considerations that were representative of similarities among the topics. These are also defined in Table 2 with examples of relevant coded text.

Table 2: Guiding considerations and their constituent topics

Guiding Consideration	Researcher-defined description of guiding consideration		
	Topic	Researcher-defined description of topic	Topic frequency
Interaction (21.17%)	<i>This factor deals with topics that promote better relations and learning through interaction</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>‘a world of respectful global relationships’, ‘networks that link and engage people across cultures in order to cooperate’ and ‘advance mutually enriching and challenging relationships’</i>		
Constituent topics:	International cooperation	Fosters cross-national cooperation in bringing about change	7.18%
	Cross-cultural understanding	Encouraging mutual understanding of different cultures, especially between the host community and the participants, NOT the preservation of culture	7.11%

	Relationship-building	Foster linkages and cooperative opportunities among communities	3.55%
	Mutual learning	Respect for the host community, recognising the ability for learning to be a two-way process instead of a neo-colonialist assumption of coming in to educate or teach the host community	3.33%
<i>Needs of host community (20.49%)</i>	<i>This factor involves statements or phrases indicating that the needs of the host community are at the forefront of sending organisation considerations when organising programs, and are not merely assumed 'needs' that are driven by volunteer tourism market demand.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'we base our work on local circumstances', 'we focus on under-served areas' and 'work within existing structures'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Local requirements	The work done is based on what the host community needs or is driven by the host community	8.53%
	Underserved area	Insufficient resources within the host community to meet requirements. To cover this need while not replacing local jobs or enterprises	7.11%
	Existing resources	Not requiring new resources solely for the program - without building extraneous, wasteful structures	3.21%
	Willingness and ability	To have volunteers amongst the host community for the duration of the project	1.64%
<i>Participant-focused benefits (17.17%)</i>	<i>Aspects that put the participant at the forefront of the program.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'we become more socially aware and responsible, improve ourselves', 'experience that they are able to provide enthusiastic volunteers' and 'the ultimate adventure travel program'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Participant-focused goals	Aims that are primarily for the volunteer's benefit	10.24%
	Project worthiness assessed	Assessed by sending organisations for volunteer assurance that projects are useful to the host community	3.77%
	Support continuum	Providing pre-departure, in-country and post-return support to volunteers from sending organisations	1.71%

	Recreation	Factors which relate to the recreational and adventure travel aspects of the program	1.45%
Host community-focused participation (16.40%)	<i>These are statements which encourage host community participation, as a community in general or as an individual. This factor acknowledges or encourages change and development to be put jointly in the hands of the host community as well as the volunteer, so as to reduce dependency.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'the right to make decisions about the kind of development they want', 'involves the community as project participants' and 'build the capacity of individuals'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Engaging host community	An inclusive policy that engages the host community in determining its needs and the activities performed during the program	9.01%
	Community participation	Encouraging the host community to participate in the project alongside volunteers instead of having volunteers do everything	6.49%
	Individual responsibility within the host community	Encouraging individual responsibility and accountability for the progress of the host community; in relation to host individuals, not program participants	0.90%
Quality of life (15.19%)	<i>This factor is concerned with the improvement of living conditions for the host community, and is exemplified by statements that relate to housing, improvement of life and poverty alleviation.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'to provide appropriate housing solutions', 'enhancing quality of life' and 'directly or indirectly contribute to poverty reduction'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Change & development	The sending organisation enabling or enacting positive change and development within the host community	8.76%
	Improvement of life	Enhancement of any aspect of quality of life for the host community	3.50%
	Poverty alleviation	To have poverty reduction as one of the main aims of all their projects, be it through financial injections or through the setting up of enterprises to earn foreign capital/reduce outflow of capital	2.40%
	Housing	Building physical environments for the host community's inhabitation	0.53%
Future considerations (14.56%)	<i>This factor encompasses topics that encourage long term consideration of projects, including the future of projects in contributing to the continued development of the host community as well as the role of future leaders in the host community.</i>		

Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>‘to participate in the future of their communities’, ‘sustainability of our voluntourism projects’ and ‘place young people at the forefront of change and development’</i>		
Constituent topics:	Sustainability	Survivability and sustainability of projects	8.14%
	Youth	Emphasis on youth as agents of change, regardless of whether they are from the host community or program participants	3.51%
	Long term	Long term impact of projects on the community	1.64%
	Holistic	Relating to all-round aspects of the work done	1.27%
Resources (9.86%)	<i>The building or provision of resources that are of benefit to the host community, such as technology, education and financial aid.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>‘promotion of local and global educational opportunities’, ‘direct financial support’ and ‘implementation of sustainable engineering projects’</i>		
Constituent topics:	Resource-building	Knowledge sharing, education - helping to build resources such as skills and knowledge for the local community	5.72%
	Technology	Bringing in, or developing, technologies that will aid the development of the host community	2.27%
	Education	Educating for the future, including human capital building	1.09%
	Financial support	Bringing in finances to aid the host community	0.78%
Role in development or change (6.64%)	<i>The topics grouped under this factor describe the roles that sending organisations engage in to promote change or development for host communities, such as being a direct agent of change or enablers or partners.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>‘participate in and develop networks’, ‘empower young people’ and ‘operate volunteer programs around the world in partnership with sustainable community initiatives’</i>		
Constituent topics:	Enabler or Partner	The sending organisation views itself as partnering with the local community in bringing about change	4.83%
	Agent of change	The sending organisation views itself as the bringer of change to the community	1.81%
Issues (6.38%)	<i>This factor encompasses encouraging the exploration of different issues that affect the host community, particularly pertaining to sending organisation’s roles in advocacy and further awareness of host community needs and concerns.</i>		

Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'promote discussion and an appreciation of problems that different communities face' and 'why doesn't the community have sustainable access'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Awareness & advocacy	Raising awareness of and taking on advocacy roles for issues that the host community is facing	4.12%
	Exploration of issues	Discussion of issues pertinent to the host community	1.90%
	Health	Focuses on health issues relating to the host community	0.36%
Environments (5.82%)	<i>This factor relates to the improvement or conservation of the physical, cultural and social environments of the host community, such as environmental, social justice and peace.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'direct benefits to the environment', 'an appreciation of problems that different communities face in their struggle for social justice' and 'peaceful world'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Environment	Relating to environmental conservation concerns	3.03%
	Justice	Social justice and fairness in relation to the host community	1.76%
	Safety	Making the world a safer place to inhabit	0.73%
	Peace	Peace in all aspects for the host community	0.30%
Organisation-focused goals (2.18%)	<i>These are goals that the organisation hopes to achieve for itself, including defining industry standards and promoting religious goals.</i>		
Relevant quotes for this guiding consideration	<i>'to set quality standards and lead the field in ethical, quality and professional voluntourism programs' and 'to demonstrate God's love in action'</i>		
Constituent topics:	Industry leadership	In defining standards and the quality of help given	1.34%
	Religion	Exemplify religious goals through programs	0.84%

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings presented in Table 2, the most frequently occurring guiding considerations to emerge from the analysis are:

- (i) *Interaction* (21.17%);
- (ii) *Needs of host community* (20.49%);
- (iii) *Participant-focused benefits* (17.17%);
- (iv) *Host community-focused participation* (16.40%); and

(v) *Quality of life* (15.19%).

These are the five most common considerations guiding not-for-profit sending organisations when they organise programs. The first guiding consideration allows for a mutual benefit to transpire, and as is expected of international travel, encourages cross-cultural understanding and learning to take place between the volunteer tourist and the host community, instead of perceiving programs to be merely a one-way process of imparting knowledge from volunteer tourists to host communities. The potential for mutuality was noted earlier as being a contributing influence on the success of programs (Palacios, 2010).

Guiding considerations (ii), (iv) and (v) focus on the impact on, needs of, and participation of the host community, and rightly so, as programs should primarily be organised with the beneficiary in mind, be it through participation or consultation. These are further elements suggested to contribute to successful programs (Palacios, 2010). Seeking the host community's participation can be seen as one of the antidotes to the commoditisation of host culture, securing agreement from the host community before activities are performed so as to minimise overdramatic representations of culture more aligned to mass tourism models (Dodman & Rhiney, 2008; Kelleher, 2004; Wang, 1999). In particular, as the sending organisations selected were all not-for-profit in nature, philosophically their focus is likely to be on the host community rather than on the commercial pressures facing for-profit sending organisations.

The third guiding consideration concentrates on meeting the desires of the volunteer tourist, and is a significant consideration after host community-focused considerations. This indicates that the volunteer tourist cannot be fully counted on to view altruism as the overriding attraction of programs, but must also be able to perceive other benefits to their participation, be it through adventure or travel. This is supported by various other motivations cited in the volunteer tourism literature including skills acquisition by volunteers (Lyons & Wearing, 2008b) and camaraderie (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007).

The resultant five key guiding considerations back up findings from the existing literature in suggesting that they are significant elements comprising successful programs for both the beneficiary and the participant. Therefore, these five guiding considerations can be seen as not only the most relevant from the analysis of sending organisation's vision and mission statements and program principles, but also as being strongly supported by the volunteer tourism literature.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the underlying guiding considerations that influence volunteer tourism sending organisations in the management and operation of their programs. Using an inductive approach, a series of guiding considerations for sending organisations in planning their programs has emerged.

Five prominent guiding considerations came to light, particularly relevant in the not-for-profit context studied. Commitment to host communities and volunteer tourists alike features heavily in making programs beneficial and enjoyable experiences for hosts and guests. The findings further indicate that the priorities of not-for-profit sending organisations are predominantly outward-facing, with external factors acting as strong guidance for programs, such as a focus on the needs of the host community and the needs of participants as opposed to the pursuit of own organisational goals. The emphasis on the needs of the host community as one of the main guiding considerations partly counters previous criticism of sending organisations as prioritising tourists over host community needs (Frean, 2006; Raymond, 2008).

With the limited academic literature available on sending organisations, despite the key role they play in the volunteer tourism sector, this exploratory research contributes to a better understanding of their workings. This research may act as a building block for the continued examination of sending organisations. For example, to counter a limitation of the current research, a more expansive study employing primary data collection methods could be conducted, including the perspective of for-profit sending organisations, thereby affording an alternative perspective on how guiding considerations may vary for organisations motivated by profit. A wider investigation still, incorporating the other two stakeholders involved in the volunteer tourism relationship, volunteers and the host community, would provide for a holistic assessment of how well sending organisations live up to the hype of their overarching strategic and program planning directives.

Regardless, in defining the guiding considerations that influence programs from a sending organisation perspective, the current study has made a valuable contribution to the literature on volunteer tourism.

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