Helping or hindering?
Volunteer tourism in Ghana and its critical role in development

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Abstract

International volunteering is not an overnight phenomenon; its history is deep-rooted in the development agenda which evolved in the late-colonial period, marked by the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions (Lewis, 2005, pp.14-15). The regulation of nation states’ economic and political systems prompted the increasing presence of Western NGOs in developing countries, providing the framework and mentality for the advent of the first volunteer organisations. The last decade however has witnessed a revolution in the international volunteering scene, with the emergence of an entire new industry labelled ‘volunteer tourism’.

This new type of volunteering differs from the traditional, most critically in its implication as a reciprocal rather than purely altruistic form of participation. Young volunteers are enticed towards overseas projects by the appeal of travel and adventure, the broadening of horizons and attainment of personal skills, and enhanced prospects for future employment or study (Jones, 2004, p.10). Volunteer tourism is heavily linked to the surging popularity of the ‘gap year’ within Western culture, whereby young adults opt to take a break from study or employment, most commonly at a pre-university stage. The gap year culture has become so prominent and widespread that it is considered by many youths as a natural rite of passage, and fuels the volunteer tourism industry with participants in their thousands every year.

Whilst the volunteer tourism industry is a thriving contemporary trend, it has attracted concerns regarding its effectiveness, appropriateness, and sustainability, particularly regarding the nature of its current participants. Whereas classic volunteering is characterised as coherent and stable, rooted in ideological and moral convictions, the modern volunteer is linked with themes of individualism, short-termism, autonomy and a degree of egotism (Hustinx, 2001, pp.62-65). Subsequent doubts concerning the motives of volunteer tourists and their relationship with the developing communities with which they engage have invited critical attention, and a synthesis of this critique will form the basis for this dissertation.

The concept of an individual volunteering their time to engage with developing communities is often assumed to be an “unqualified good” (Lewis, 2005, p.20). As a presupposed alternative to aid, there needs to be more research both into the impacts on community and environment. These are typified as low risk, but could be of high environmental impact given the growing carbon footprint required. The fundamental question to be addressed in considering volunteer tourism within the development context of Ghana is whether it is currently helping or hindering the communities with which it engages. The work employs a meta-model to examine the multi-dimensional nature of the impacts, and their implications for sustained growth and development. Further consideration is give to what local communities can do to mitigate negative impacts.
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1. Introduction

Volunteer tourism is a rapidly growing industry, fuelled by the ‘gap year’ phenomenon and the enthusiasm of its young participants to travel the world whilst ‘making a difference’. With volunteers working at grassroots level in local communities, its participating organisations commonly claim to be doing good within developing countries. In reality however, opinions regarding the potential contribution of volunteer tourism are strongly divided; a dichotomy between its endorsement as a creative and engaging solution on one hand, and its rejection as a paternalistic and inappropriate activity steeped in neo-colonial motives on the other.

This dissertation seeks to examine the differing perspectives offered, considering the theoretical insight, ideological considerations and practical relevance of volunteer tourism within the country-specific context of Ghana, carrying out primary research to gauge critical insights from key actors within the industry. During March 2011 interviews and questionnaires were conducted with 9 organisations and 30 former volunteers working in Ghana, aiming to gain valuable insights relating to their participation, motivations and roles within the volunteer tourism industry (see Appendix 2). By linking existing theory with this fresh input, this dissertation aims to examine the extent to which volunteer tourism can act as a positive force for development. It highlights the relevant barriers and limitations to its impact, and provides recommendations towards rendering the industry more complementary with the development needs of its host communities, based on the case of Ghana.

This work commences with a historical narrative to contextualise international volunteering, and the factors promoting the rise of the industry’s current structure. It seeks to define the most salient features of present-day volunteer tourism, before applying their consideration within the case of Ghana to establish the industry’s development impact. This involves examining the roles and motives of the present-day organisations and volunteers, aiming to frame the theoretical debate regarding volunteer tourism within a practical context. Finally, this work strives towards its principal aim of concluding whether volunteer tourism can represent a constructive force for development in Ghana, and offers recommendations with a view to harnessing its potential.

2. Historical background and contemporary context

Rather than simply providing a historical timeline mapping the origins of international volunteering, this opening section seeks to examine the motives and practices of the first overseas volunteer movements. This serves as a useful comparison as the nucleus of this dissertation centres on such considerations in relation to today’s organisations. Whilst Lewis (2005, p.20) offers the notion that international service is largely represented as an “unqualified good”, accounts and opinions relating to the earliest volunteer organisations challenge this ideal, and indeed echo some of the criticisms charged against contemporary volunteer tourism.
2.1. The origins of international volunteering

Though the origins of international service gained formal recognition through the foundation of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and US Peace Corps (in 1958 and 1961, respectively), its first activity predates these organisations by several decades. Gillette (1968) outlines the collective involvement of English and American pacifists during the First World War, travelling to rebuild the ruined village of Verdun in northern France. Following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the mass ranks of newly-unemployed throughout the Western world were commonly utilised for similar purposes in overseas workcamps, and in the aftermath of World War II such movements played an important part in Europe’s reconstruction (Gillette, 1999).

This same period saw the first instances of international service within Africa, employed during the late-colonial era. According to Manji and O’Coill (2002, pp.3-5), missionary societies and voluntary organisations assumed a purpose beyond simply providing welfare services, perhaps more notably acting as a means of controlling the native population. To this end, “charity was not only designed to help the poor, it also served to protect the rich” (Ibid, p.4), suppressing the anti-colonial struggles of the local communities. It must be noted that the notion of ‘development’ only surfaced at the point of Africa’s independence, prompted by the new emphasis on international co-operation following the collapse of Western Europe’s empires (Roberts, 2004, pp.16-23). Therefore during this earlier period, the work of voluntary organisations concerned itself more with the “apparent failings of Africans” (Manji and O’Coill, 2002, p.5) and correcting their ‘uncivilised’ nature rather than seeking to redress the socio-economic circumstances that they faced.

The ‘era of development’ provided the backdrop in which the Peace Corps were founded in 1961, and Gillette (1968) acknowledges the organisation’s more considerate approach concerning international service, selectively recruiting a wide professional and social cross-section of participants through a challenging application process. However, the Peace Corps’ intentions appear far from wholly altruistic, as expressed by the organisation’s first director, Sargent Shriver:

“The Peace Corps is a two-way street; we will help the people in the underdeveloped nations... and they will help us to gain the understanding that will help us as the leader of a sorely besieged free world”. (Amin, 1999, p.16)

Therefore, in the same manner that early voluntary movements appeared to hold self-interested motives (i.e. the suppression of the local population), the Peace Corps was founded at least partially upon political aims, to resist the spread of communism by boosting U.S. relations with the non-aligned during the Cold War.

A particularly damaging critique on early international volunteering was the insight offered by the Austrian philosopher Ivan Illich (1968), in his direct address to the volunteers of the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP). Illich focused on the inappropriate and “offensive” paternalism inherent within CIASP’s work in Mexico, in an attack marked by the statement, “to hell with good intentions... you will not help anybody by your good intentions”. He condemned the narrow perspectives and lack of cultural understanding amongst the untrained volunteers, and closed his address by appealing, “come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers... come to study... but do not come to help” (Illich, 1968).
2.2. The growth (and subsequent rejection) of mass tourism

The key distinction between today’s international volunteering and its earlier equivalent lies in its growing engagement with tourism industry time, with Tourism Concern (2007) noting the “increasingly blurred” lines between the two industries. Mass tourism truly evolved as a “social phenomenon” (Callanan and Thomas, 2005, p.185) during the second half of the 20th century, stimulated by increasing leisure time and disposable incomes, improved mobility and communication technologies within Western countries (Lyons and Wearing, 2008, p.3). The 1960s saw the emergence of the ‘package holiday’, bringing large numbers of tourists to numerous new areas throughout the world, which profoundly affected the recipient destinations (Mowforth and Munt, 2009, p.90).

The exceptional growth rate of mass tourism soon began to highlight its negative implications, “exposing tourists to international cultures in an uncontrolled and exploitative manner” (Callanan and Thomas, 2005, p.185). Issues arising included the exploitation of the local labour force and the repatriation of economic benefits, environmental degradation, and the disruption of indigenous culture (Brown and Hall, 2008). The notion of ‘sustainable tourism’ began to evolve, as a rejection of this consumptive, exploitative mindset. Whilst initially regarded as a niche issue affecting a minority, the effects of globalisation have broadened its exposure and gained a wider appeal (Pattullo, 2006). This increasing demand for an alternative, more discriminating experience has prompted a new array of niche products, amongst which volunteer tourism is one of the fastest growing and most prominent (Lyons and Wearing, 2008, p.3).

2.3. Contemporary volunteer tourism: the gap year phenomenon

The most popular definition of contemporary volunteer tourism is offered by Wearing (2001, p.1), applying to:

“those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society and environment.”

The last few decades have brought such travel and volunteering possibilities to young people that simply didn’t exist previously, prompted by the expansion in cheap global travel, shifting demographics and identities, and changed work and learning patterns (Randel et al., 2004, p.8). Furthermore, today’s society has become restless, jaded and increasing guilt-conscious, linked to the increased media exposure of global inequalities, international initiatives and goodwill activities (Callanan and Thomas, 2005, p.185).

The most significant development in this field however has been the recent explosion of the ‘gap year’ phenomenon, broadly defined as “a period of time between 3 and 24 months taken out of education or a work career” (Jones, 2004, p.22). Emerging as a lucrative new industry, the worldwide market in gap year travel was valued at over £5bn (and rapidly rising) in 2005, with an estimated 2 million annual participants (Ward, 2007). In recent years, the gap year has evolved as “a recognised, institutionalised and professionalised phenomenon” (Simpson, 2004, p.681) within
the UK, to the extent that taking such a break to travel abroad has almost become a natural rite of passage amongst school leavers and recent graduates.

The gap year industry is broad and diverse, comprising both non-profit and commercial organisations and involving destinations throughout the world. Its spectrum of activities is equally varied, including teaching and community welfare, medical assistance, conservation and cultural restoration, economic development and scientific research (Carter, 2008, pp.12-13). In general the industry is deemed to endorse a simplistic concept of ‘development’ (Simpson, 2004, p.681; Roberts, 2004, p.27), perpetuating the attractive notion that its enthusiastic young participants can make a positive and meaningful contribution during their placements abroad. The marketing employed by gap year organisations typically focuses on the attainable possibilities of their activities, detailing tangible end products such as ‘building’ a school, library or clinic (Simpson, 2004, p.685). This enticing perception attracts young adults in their thousands, offering them a broadening of experiences, the attainment of new personal skills, and enhanced prospects for further study or employment (Jones, 2004, p.10).

3. Motivations of organisations and volunteers

Given the growing and ever-changing nature of volunteer tourism it is important to consider the roles of the industry’s main actors, namely its organisations and participating volunteers. The effectiveness of any given venture is strongly determined by the motives, priorities and expectations of its key contributors, and therefore this section seeks to examine the participation of today’s organisations and volunteers, establishing the key themes and goals towards which they are stimulated.

3.1. Purpose of volunteer organisations

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of contemporary international volunteering is the vast diversity of organisations participating within the field, varying significantly in their motives, purpose and approach. Amongst the most established organisations is VSO (founded in 1958), which is commended within existing literature for its strong approach in working with partner organisations, recruiting and preparing suitable volunteers, and understanding local needs (Unstead-Jones, 2008, pp.15-16). VSO bases its work on long-term strategic plans which consult the host country’s development priorities, with sustainable aims and objectives negotiated and agreed with local partners (VSO, 2005, pp.8-9). This type of considerate and engaging approach fulfils Lyons and Wearing’s (2008, p.7) definition of best practice within volunteer tourism, prioritising local needs and focusing on the quality of interactions between volunteers and host communities. Kennedy and Dornan (2009, p.194) also place a key emphasis upon productive co-operation between host and volunteer, and the benefits of mutual understanding and cross-cultural exchange which evolve from such relationships.

Unfortunately such encouraging elements aren’t deemed to be evident throughout the industry, an issue perhaps attributable to its broad-ranging nature. Various authors draw distinctions between different types of organisations, between those providing long- and short-term assignments
Prompted by the contrasting backgrounds and features of different organisations, there are growing concerns regarding levels of effectiveness and appropriateness within the volunteer tourism scene. At the crux of many such fears is the relationship between volunteer organisations and development theory, and particularly how they choose to engage with local communities. As expressed by Raymond (2008, pp.57-58), this involves both ethical and practical considerations; the type of work which volunteers should be involved in, and the way in which this matches the needs of the host environment. A main concern for Lyons and Wearing (2008, pp.7-9) is that the recent influx of commercial organisations are prioritising corporate philosophies and ideologies before such issues, resulting in the “gradual process of the commodification of volunteer tourism” (Ibid, p.9). Mdee and Emmott (2008, p.195) highlight the increasing tension between commercial viability and development impact, suggesting that many organisations are forced to market themselves according to simplified public perceptions of development as ‘making a difference’, and therefore hinder themselves from engaging more critically. This is perhaps symptomatic of the declining levels of strategic planning across the industry, with most present-day gap year organisations mobilising their own distinctive brand of development discourse “in which enthusiasm and good intentions are allowed to prevail” (Simpson, 2004, p.683). Marketing slogans such as “you are the difference” (Global Vision International), “make a difference!” (Travellers Worldwide), and “leave your mark on the world” (Global Volunteers) typify the way in which numerous organisations characterise volunteers’ impact as wholly positive and clearly achievable, masking the true complexities of development assistance.

3.2. Motivations and expectations of volunteers

Classically the act of volunteering is linked with notions of service and altruism, typified as “the willingness and ability of citizens to give their time, out of a sense of solidarity and without expectation of monetary reward” (UN Volunteers, 2005, p.6). In the present day context however, volunteer tourists are evidently motivated by a more bilateral, reciprocal form of engagement, with the desire for personal gains as striking as the spirit of benevolence. For young gap year participants such personal benefits include the broadening of their horizons, experiences and skills (Jones, 2004, p.10), conceptualised by Wearing (2001, p.2) as the “greater awareness of self”. Within the research conducted amongst former volunteers motivations linked to the idea of personal growth were prominent, with participants detailing their desire for a “life changing experience” (V18), “a new outlook on life” (V21), and hoping “to grow as a person” (V11). Additionally cited personal motivations included social aspects (“to have fun and meet some great people” (V1)), the acquisition of particular skills (“initiative, problem solving and adaptability” (V8)), and professional development (“to gain practical experience in international health and development” (V20)).
Altruistic motives were also evident in participants’ responses, though they tended to assume very broad and generalised terms. Most prominent was the commonly-cited intention to make “a difference” (V12; V15; V23; V25); a sweeping statement offered without detailing any specific aims. In fact, only one participant made reference to any targeted goals, citing the endeavour of “helping youth participation in governance and development issues”. This distinct trend in the research endorses Hustinx’s (2001) distinction between the ‘classic’ volunteer, influenced by traditional roles and ideological convictions aligned with a particular organisation or cause, and today’s ‘new’ equivalent who is less fixed to such frameworks and therefore strives more generalised aims (which also account for their personal autonomy and inconstant nature).

A further focus of volunteer motivations within existing literature relates to the dual existence of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, i.e. stimulus forcing people away from their country of residence in addition to those attracting them to the overseas location (Unstead-Jones, 2008, p.10). The research conducted emphasised such ‘push’ factors, with volunteers expressing discontent with “working a stupid job” (V1), feeling “guilty for living a cushioned life” (V9), and being “plain tired of living for myself” (V13), highlighting the desire for escape and change as central within several volunteers’ motivations. ‘Pull’ factors were also commonly declared within the questionnaire responses, yet in most instances related to individuals’ yearning to travel and explore Africa (V3; V4; V9; V11; V14; V15; V16; V17; V19; V23) rather than the specific appeal of their volunteer roles or exact host environment in Ghana. This highlights the reality that the tourism element accounts significantly towards volunteers’ motives to participate within this dual-faceted industry. In addition to experiencing new places and cultures, a few participants alluded to the desire to experience poverty (e.g. “to see how African people live and whether the poverty out there is as bad as what is portrayed” (V5)). This supports Ingram’s (2008, p.52) concern that volunteer tourism uses poverty as a ‘spectacle’ to create harmful power imbalances between host and volunteer, perpetuating the notion of ‘third world’ which legitimises the validity of young, unskilled participants (Simpson, 2004, p.682).

4. Volunteer tourism in Ghana

This dissertation has adopted a country-specific focus for its analysis, to enable the thorough examination of volunteer tourism within a direct, relevant and practicable framework. Accordingly, this work centres on the West African nation of Ghana, a destination heavily favoured amongst Western organisations and volunteers. This following section maps Ghana’s current development context in relation to the role of volunteer tourism, and outlines the key characteristics of volunteer organisations currently working there.

4.1. Ghana’s development context

Situated on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, Ghana is regarded as a “beacon of hope and stability” (VSO, 2005, p.6) within the turbulent region, to the extent that it is described by DFID (2011) as “the proof that development works”. Having successfully adopted an increasingly participatory democracy Ghana is striving to achieve middle income status (NDPC, 2005), and has targeted the attainment of particular social aims regarding this economic target, with an emphasis on inclusiveness, social cohesion, harmony and order (UNDP, 2007). Volunteerism is cited within
Ghana’s PRSP (NDPC, 2005, p.28) as a priority policy issue towards this human resource development, and likewise the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2007, p.146) recommends “developing measures to make tourism an important medium for promoting inclusiveness and empowering the excluded”. Whilst a full consideration of Ghana’s development priorities would demand a separate dissertation in itself, this basic outline suggests that volunteer tourism is compatible the country’s current policies and can conceivably offer relevance in meeting such social aims.

4.2. Current volunteer tourism activity

According to Volunteer Abroad (2011), there are currently 103 different organisations offering placements in Ghana, a total only exceeded by South Africa (129) and Tanzania (121) within the African continent, with Tanzania (100) and Uganda (81) also prominent destinations (see Figure 5: Appendix 1). This highlights a general trend whereby the most popular volunteering destinations are former British colonies, perhaps understandably given the historical impact of the English language and economic, cultural and political influences. Ghana’s favoured status is also supported by its peaceful, stable and safe reputation. On a broader level, Africa is the most popular world region with 483 organisations (see Figure 6: Appendix 1), possibly in part promoted by the emotive and poignant sense of compassion attached to the continent by numerous media and charity campaigns.

Within Ghana, 57 of the organisations offer placements in the capital, Accra, with other heavily-populated locations including Kumasi (24), Cape Coast (16) and Tamale (13) popular amongst organisations, suggesting a possible urban bias in the spread of volunteer placements (see Figure 7: Appendix 1). In terms of the duration of placements, the typical volunteer involvement in Ghana is less than 2 months (see Figure 8: Appendix 1), and notably over 70% of the organisations working in Ghana were established since the turn of the millennium (see Figure 9: Appendix 1). Also considering that 86% of organisations have minimum age requirements of 18 years or lower (see Figure 10: Appendix 1), the make-up of volunteer tourism within Ghana appears to generally typify the ‘gap year’ industry; newly-formed organisations offering short-term placements for participants of a school-leaving age in urban areas of tourist interest and convenience.

5. Case studies: volunteer experiences

The experiences and insights of different stakeholders are essential in providing a fresh and valuable contribution regarding the research field of volunteer tourism, and therefore questionnaire interviews were conducted with a number of organisations and former volunteers working in Ghana. The full process and questions are detailed in Appendices 2-4, but the chief purpose was to establish the motives, expectations, activities and experiences of the participants, offering insight into to the current effectiveness and appropriateness of volunteer tourism in Ghana.

5.1. Selection, preparation and support
The volunteer selection process is critical within an organisation’s work, not only in recruiting participants and allocating them to suitable roles but also in defining the mentality and expectations for successful applicants’ volunteering experiences. The questionnaire results suggest that different organisations employ varying levels of stringency in recruiting volunteers (see Figure 1); indeed some paid this process the most minimal attention (“if you filled out the paperwork and paid the money for the program, you were enrolled” (V9)). Some volunteers seemed to be taken aback by the ease of their application experiences, remarking “I found it very easy to apply which actually surprised me” (V3), and “they said there was an acceptance procedure, but I was accepted within 3 hours of my application” (V12). Whilst a few volunteers were asked to complete either face-to-face or telephone interviews, a more common scenario involved the completion of an application form which often included writing a personal statement or submitting references. Participants perceived the main purpose of this process to prove their desire or suitability as a volunteer (V1; V11; V13; V14; V25), and to choose their most appropriate placement (V16; V23; V24). Indeed, several of the organisations interviewed suggested that selecting suitable placements represents a key priority within their application process (O2; O5; O9). No individuals remarked upon the selection process as a particularly challenging experience, and indeed several of the organisations interviewed admitted to accepting “almost any volunteers” (O2), having “very few requirements” (V5), and taking “anyone who is interested” (O3). This generally relaxed attitude concerning volunteer recruitment suggests that most organisations subscribe to the UN Volunteers’ (2005, p.10) simplistic depiction of volunteerism as “something that anyone can do”.

Figure 1. Volunteer experiences: Application process

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<th>Process</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application form</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic details/none</td>
<td>7</td>
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Source: Author’s visualisation of volunteer questionnaires

Once accepted for their placements, the levels of preparation and training offered to volunteers also varied (see Figure 2). Only two participants (V6; V22) recalled taking part in dedicated pre-departure training, whereas many more volunteers were offered an orientation after arriving in-country (the duration of which ranged from a few hours to one week). For several participants, receiving information to read represented the sum extent of their pre-volunteering training and preparation, whereas a few individuals received little or no guidance in this area. Across the board, much of the training related to culture and language (V2; V8; V9; V11; V12; V15; V16; V21; V22), safety and packing (V4; V13; V14) and information about the local surroundings (V1; V23; V25; V26), with seemingly little attention devoted to the skills and duties involved within the volunteer placements. This suggests that organisations’ attentions are possibly more focused on satisfying the
needs of their volunteers rather than ensuring that the volunteers satisfy the needs of the communities which they work (although the former is something of a pre-requisite for achieving the latter). This trend fuels the existing accusations of volunteer tourism as neo-colonialist, “based on the market increasingly catering to the needs of volunteers rather than the communities they claim to support” (Mdee and Emmott, 2008, p.194).

Once in-country, one quarter of questionnaire participants reported receiving little or no supervision or guidance during their placement (see Figure 3). Certain volunteers expressed that “I often wished they would help me more” (V23), and described the in-country support as “disorganised” (V3) and “a let down” (V29). Fortunately the majority of volunteers enjoyed at least occasional contact and support, ranging from direct supervision or the consistent presence of a local coordinator to infrequent visits or phone calls from the organisation’s staff. Aside from the direct role of supporting current volunteers, an organisation’s local presence is also indispensable within the wider aims of gauging the placement’s long-term effectiveness, ensuring that consecutive volunteers efficiently succeed each other’s work, and gaining participatory feedback from the local community. Based upon the questionnaire results certain organisations are demonstrating good practice in this area, providing constant support, troubleshooting and feedback, however many other organisations appear to be largely neglecting this essential role. Indeed, amongst the organisations interviewed most seemed to focus much more attention on post-volunteering feedback and analysis, rather than providing the necessary level of support during a volunteer’s placement.

5.2. Roles and activities
Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to define the main day-to-day activities within their volunteering roles, and to offer opinion on both the direct and durable influences of their work. A notable observation is that a significant proportion (exactly half) of volunteers’ daily tasks centred on routine, traditional chores, typically involving the bathing, dressing, feeding and supervising of children at orphanages. Mentions of more advanced and targeted duties were usually linked with medical or agricultural placements (e.g. “antenatal labour and postnatal care” (V10); “surveying the surrounding farmers with regards to weather patterns, crops and soils” (V22)). Whatever their roles involved, volunteers were generally strongly engaged with their placements, with two-thirds of participants working for at least 30 hours each week (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Volunteer experiences: Volunteering hours [per week]

Source: Author’s visualisation of volunteer questionnaires

Given that large numbers of volunteers were contributing with unskilled, everyday tasks, it is pertinent to consider whether there was a vital demand for their presence or alternatively if they were simply supplanting an existing local supply of assistance. Indeed, one of the organisations interviewed implied that its placements were driven by volunteer preferences rather than local demand, stating “it started off with schools and orphanages and gradually increased to hospitals, vets, journalism, etc, as I found more people interested in volunteering in those areas” (O2). Several questionnaire participants suggested that their roles were largely superfluous, with one individual offering the following insight:

“Our basic role was not described by anyone, probably because there was no role aside from that of babysitter... When it comes down to it, all the roles that the volunteers filled could have been easily replaced by the adults living at the orphanage.” (V9)

Similar views were echoed elsewhere, with other participants suggesting that “the staff were frustrated at the amount of volunteers around” (V17) and “the work that I was involved in would have taken place whether or not I was there” (V20). Conversely, only one volunteer made explicit reference to their role being in essential demand, stating “the children had not had a teacher in a few months” (V19).

Most participants were confident that their work benefitted the local community, and focused on a number of different aspects in qualifying this notion. Some volunteers remarked upon positively changing attitudes (e.g. “I made a difference and changed some of the bad practice that happens” (V10)), whereas others detailed the material benefits provided in the form of food, money, shoes and sports equipment (V12; V13; V21; V25). Several participants termed their work’s benefit as providing knowledge or skills (V4; V5; V6; V15; V19; V24), whilst a few volunteers pointed to establishing long-term facilities including a well (V3), water pipes (V2) and organic farming practices (V22). A number of participants reflected on contributing to the general happiness and
wellbeing of those with whom they worked, epitomised by the statement, “I think just helping with anything was a positive impact” (V17). Amongst the few respondents who believe their work had a negligible effect, reasons given included their volunteer role being limited in time, (V26), “not being utilised productively” (V16), and being configured for personal gain rather than external benefits (V23).

When prompted to consider the long-term benefits of their volunteering, the aggregate view presented was slightly less constructive. Many participants responded confidently, yet these views were almost exclusively linked to the personal connections that they formed, with reactions including “the fact that they miss us, is enough to make me feel like I did something right” (V13), and “I really hope the children know how much they meant to me and how much they are a part of my life now” (V11). For several respondents, the continued effect of their work was dependent on future volunteers succeeding their roles (V3; V4; V8; V14; V19), critically highlighting that the sustainable impact of international volunteering is heavily reliant on organisations maintaining a supply of volunteers in the long-term. In total, 9 participants expressed doubts about the enduring relevance of their work, suggesting that their roles were “instantly gratifying, not sustainably helpful” (V9), and “not involved in long term development” (V21), offering the perspective that “it is hard to create anything sustainable” (V1) and that “change takes a long time” (V10). When asked to qualify their positive contribution in Ghana, some of the organisations interviewed claimed their work to be generally making a small difference (O1; O2), whereas others pointed to tangible achievements such as educating the community in first aid (O3), providing medical apparatus and building materials (O7), and providing water filters to schools and orphan homes (O8).

5.3. Reflective evaluation

When pressed on the most positive and negative elements of their time volunteering, the majority of questionnaire participants portrayed an upbeat outlook on their experiences. Several contributors cited numerous positive aspects, by far the most common of which related to the personal connections and friendships that they formed. The local Ghanaians (especially the children) were described in such warm terms as “wonderful” (V7; V15; V28) and “amazing” (V6; V18; V26), and evidently had a profound influence on most volunteer’s experiences. In addition, several volunteers cited the opportunity to meet other volunteers as a positive factor (V14; V16; V19; B22). Other prominent responses highlighted cultural experiences (V11; V21; V22; V25; V30), and the pleasure derived from travelling within Ghana (V3; V8; V26). For some participants, the most constructive element of their volunteering was feeling of reward or satisfaction that it promoted, with individuals referring to the “enjoyment when you feel like you’ve impacted on someone’s life” (V8), “putting a smile on people’s faces whilst out there” (V5), and making “those few days brighter for the kids” (V25). Other participants chose to focus on the theme of personal development arising from their volunteering involvement, specifically the attainment of new skills (V23), experiences (V24) and outlooks (V26).

It’s perhaps indicative of the overwhelmingly positive experiences amongst the participants that several of them couldn’t summon a single negative aspect of their time volunteering (V2; V14; V16), whereas for a few others having to eventually leave Ghana represented their nadir (V11; V13; V26)! Cultural issues accounted for negative encounters within some responses, ranging from
homesickness (V15) to being “stared at” (V24) and asked for money (V1), and unfortunately also incidents of “racism and abuse” (V6) and physical violence (V4). For some volunteers, experiencing the reality of life in Ghana (“the poverty, realisation that things would not change, the inequality” (V21)) was difficult, coupled with an acknowledgement that their work only achieved a short-term impact (“only being able to provide care and aid for a limited period” (V17); “the fact that we are only in the children’s lives for such a short period” (V18)). Ominously, a number of respondents alluded to issues involving their volunteer organisations, including a lack of support (V3), a failure to meet expectations (V12), poorly organised placements (V20), concerns regarding the possible misappropriation of volunteers’ placement fees (V9; V29).

The majority of participants suggested that their volunteering experience had reaped personal gains; for some this related to work or study, either in providing the inspiration to pursue a career in a related field (V12; V13; V14; V26) or contributing towards their future employability (V19; V20; V22). The enrichment of personal skills was also a popular response, with respondents particularly mentioning improved self-confidence (V4; V8; V21; V28), adaptability and resourcefulness. For other volunteers their experience brought more intangible benefits, such as increased self-awareness (V2; V28), a greater sense of understanding and perspective (V3; V6; V18; V29), and changing values (V1; V18; V21).

5.4. Summary of findings

Whilst this work doesn’t intend to homogenise the experiences of all volunteers in Ghana, there are certain trends evident across the research findings. Clearly the majority of volunteers thoroughly enjoyed their time in West Africa, usually gaining a combination of personal benefits plus a sense of positively impacting the lives of others. The majority of participants demonstrated an enthusiastic and dedicated approach to their volunteer placements, forming strong personal connections and seemed to be positively embraced within the local communities in which they worked. However their contributions were often realised despite the support of their volunteer organisations rather than because of it, with numerous individuals stating dissatisfaction at the lack of support, guidance, purpose or trust. Volunteers generally lacked the training and preparation necessary to maximise their impact, and more often than not they carried out basic roles which lacked a sense of definition or long-term purpose. Whilst the majority of participants felt secure about the direct impact of their time volunteering, a large number expressed critical doubts regarding the lasting influence and wider impact of their activities. Amongst the full range of questionnaires there were some examples of volunteers carrying out productive, innovative and well-planned roles, suggesting that volunteer tourism certainly offers potential as a form of development assistance. However, many of the organisations currently working in Ghana are clearly failing to adopt the responsible approach necessary to truly benefit the communities in which they work.

6. Helping or hindering?

Opinions regarding the contribution of volunteer tourism towards development are highly divisive, and this following section attempts to juxtapose the opposing perceptions; the notion that it can
offer potential as a development solution versus its depiction as an inappropriate form of paternalism. The offerings of the research participants are measured against the foremost themes within existing literature to ascertain the current effectiveness of the volunteer tourism industry in relation to the case of Ghana.

6.1. Volunteer tourism as a force for development

The findings of the research conducted suggest that volunteers in Ghana don’t necessarily consider their contribution within the context of international development, reiterating Tourism Concern’s (2007) suggestion that many volunteers simply fail to understand that they are engaging with development work. This disengaged stance is largely reciprocated by development professionals, and Pratt (2002) implies that the informal nature of volunteerism obscures its importance to economists and planners, discouraging its incorporation within development strategies. Following the widespread adoption of the ‘rolling back of the state’ model as a development package there is an onus on non-state actors to meet essential social needs, and certain authors (Pratt, 2002; UN Volunteers, 2005; Randel et al, 2004) believe that international volunteers could potentially help to fulfil this role.

Given that for many, the history of development represents “an insidious failed chapter” of Western modernity (Lewis, 2005, p.15), there is ample scope to consider the alternative approach that volunteer tourism can offer towards meeting development needs. The current prescribed ethos is perhaps overly-focused on measurable results and narrow definitions, representing a technical and managerial process which volunteers can help to humanise by bringing “elements which cannot be supplied through standard technical cooperation” (Randel, 2004, p.6). The fact that several questionnaire participants chose to pursue a career or studies in the field after volunteering abroad (V13; V14; V20; V23; V26) validates the notion that the experience can promote a greater understanding and awareness of development issues (Machin, 2008, p.7). The positive implications of this connection are noted by Mdee and Emmott (2008, p.195):

“The young volunteer is the global elite of tomorrow and their experience of immersion may actually have positive long-term impacts on the politics of poverty reduction.”

This creative, enthusiastic approach can help to promote international understanding and solidarity, and moreover bridge the gap between development professionals and the ‘non-specialised publics’ who engage with development in practice (Lewis, 2005, p.16).

As highlighted by the motivations, activities and reflections of volunteers in Ghana, the central focus of volunteer tourism lies within its people-centred approach and the construction of personal connections. Despite being clearly pigeon-holed as the ‘helper’ and the ‘helped’, the acquaintance, cultural exchange and mutual understanding developed between the two parties can yield positive benefits (Ellis, 2007). Chief amongst them is the concept of ‘social capital’, and the contribution of volunteers in fostering solidarity and linkages within wider society (Randel et al, 2004, p.11). Their presence helps to create virtuous cycles of interaction within social networks, and spurs the collective action that is pivotal in various development interventions. This links strongly with Ellerman’s (2005) notion of ‘assisted self-reliance’ whereby as external actors volunteers can help
to spur the local community in pursuing their own needs, gaining the autonomy and responsibility to seek solutions to existing problems.

Within the research conducted, it became apparent that most volunteers valued their input in terms of effort, enthusiasm and application rather than the supply of direct skills or targeted services. To this end, volunteer tourism compliments the shift in development theory from technical assistance towards the broader concept of capacity development (Pratt, 2002). Rather than seeking to fill immediate gaps in technical abilities, capacity development aims to improve long-term capabilities by promoting local ownership, sustainability and participation, symbolised as the process of ‘learning with’ rather than ‘training of’ or ‘teaching to’ (Devereux, 2010, p.350). The spirit of volunteerism, emphasising commitment, reciprocity and solidarity, plus a belief in collective action at grassroots level, offers great relevance in reinforcing such objectives.

### 6.2. Volunteer tourism as inappropriate paternalism

Whilst there is strong support for the contribution of volunteer tourism towards development it is perhaps outweighed by the level of concern and criticism (Mdgee and Emmott, 2008; Simpson, 2004; Brown and Hall, 2008), largely centring on its portrayal as an inappropriate form of assistance. The ever-changing and increasingly-commercialised industry is accused of prioritising the needs of its volunteers over the communities they work with. From the balance of the questionnaire responses, most volunteers certainly acquired a strong degree of personal benefit by attaining skills, experience and enhanced career prospects, yet there was no evidence to suggest than any volunteer’s participation deliberately adopted what Devereux (2008, p.361) labels a “form of Northern imperialism”.

Whereas imperialist motives may not be apparent, there are pertinent concerns about the paternalistic nature of volunteer tourism. On an ideological basis, the framing of ‘server’ and ‘served’, ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Lewis, 2005, p.21), promotes unequal power relations between the volunteer and local community. The issue attracts heightened criticism when the role of ‘expert’ is played by young, unskilled volunteers. While this scenario is labelled as “potentially exploitative” (Mdgee and Emmott, 2008, p.198), the vast majority of questionnaire participants were seemingly comfortable about their role and duties, and no such problems relating to this issue were cited.

What was notable from the research content however is that the majority of volunteers carried out routine, functional and everyday tasks within their roles, and rarely involved themselves in duties which engage with durable development planning. This is possibly considered a blessing, as volunteers possess “limited skills, experience, and understanding of the local context” (Devereux, 2008, p.362) and are therefore perceived to be incapable of effecting meaningful change. As today’s popular volunteering placements are arguably negligible in impact and consequences, they are accused of seeking to “work round rather than transform” the relationship of developing societies to the natural world (Brown and Hall, 2008, p.845). Furthermore, the very presence of volunteer tourists cultivates a sense of dependency (exacerbated by the short-term nature of volunteering) and risks the host community suffering from a ‘demonstration effect’ and the copying of Western culture and practices (Carter, 2008, pp.20-21).
In addition to doubts concerning the suitability of individual volunteers, further criticism centres on the practices and mentalities of the organisations with which they work. Many of the current gap year organisations are labelled as “badly planned and supported” (Ward, 2007), and capable of causing more harm than good. As cited by several research participants (V3; V9; V12; V20), some organisations fail to effectively define volunteer roles or provide the resources and support necessary to render them productive. Moreover, there is little indication of long-term project planning within many organisations, and they seem to be hindered by the basic conviction that ‘doing something’ is a sufficient approach.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this dissertation suggest that volunteer tourism can offer potential as a development solution in Ghana yet it is hindered by certain shortcomings, many of which are self-inflicted by the mindset and approach of participating organisations. Whilst today’s volunteers are generally young, unskilled and inexperienced, they do possess particular strengths which can offer an alternative, more humanising approach to development. Their involvement might be commonly influenced by themes of self-interest and individualisation, however the majority of volunteers participating in this research demonstrated a strong enthusiasm and dedicated approach, becoming strongly attached to the cause of their work and gaining an improved conception of development issues. Their people-centred contribution can help to enhance contemporary notions such as social capital and capacity development within Ghanaian communities, and greater efforts should be made to realise such advantages.

As for the roles and activities of volunteer organisations in Ghana, this research echoes the industry’s diverse and multi-faced nature with a wide spectrum of effectiveness evident amongst different organisations. This ranges from those demonstrating best practice through a considerate and engaging approach, to the poorly-planned and unsuitable projects which epitomise the criticisms aimed at the industry within existing literature. Many organisations are structurally flawed, lacking in any purposeful selection criteria, failing to sufficiently train and prepare their volunteers and providing them with little or no in-country support, and neglecting the vital process of monitoring and evaluation.

However the greatest damage caused by many organisations lies not in their organisational structure, by rather in their inappropriate, complacent and misaligned approaches. Given the increasingly commercialised nature of the industry, it somewhat inherent that their placements and activities are greater catered towards the desires of their volunteers rather than the supported communities, self-legitimising their purpose and therefore defining their own ideals about needs and solutions. This encourages organisations to promote their work in simplistic and appealing terms, resulting in the creation of volunteer placements which fail to truly engage with long-term development. The majority of roles carried out by the research participants in Ghana focused on everyday, routine activities, rather than duties which are strategically targeted for a sustainable purpose. The marketing focus and actions of today’s volunteer tourism organisations imply that they are simply content with being portrayed as a constructive and considerate form of tourism, yet
this narrow and limiting mentality hinders them from truly engaging with the practice of development.

Overall, volunteer tourism in Ghana offers sufficient potential to be considered as a valuable development tool, and its alternative, grassroots and participatory focus can help to complement the more formal structure of traditional, mainstream assistance. Indeed, the fresh enthusiasm offered by its volunteers could represent a remedy to the apparent failings of current development assistance, namely being over politicised, ‘top down’ and target-driven. The development field currently neglects the value of volunteer tourism, considering the individual contributions of its young, inexperienced participants as insignificant and meaningless. However if greater efforts were made to engage with the broad, constructive offerings of volunteer tourism as a whole, it could be recognised as valuable resource within the practice of development, helping to promote social capital and capacity development within host communities. However, a much more considered approach is essential to harness this potential, and the following section highlights possible areas for the consideration of volunteer organisations, government bodies and development institutions.

7.1. Recommendations

- **Industry regulation**
  Given the rapid and uncontrolled growth of the volunteer tourism industry, enforcing a sense of accountability towards good practice is fundamental in improving levels of effectiveness amongst organisations. Groups such as Tourism Concern (2007) have attempted to establish a code of practice whereby organisations would work to agreed structures, verified by a certifiable ‘kitemark’. Previous efforts to self-regulate the gap year industry have failed due to reluctant support from the Department for Education and UCAS (Griffiths, 2007), and Clothier (2010) suggests that the industry-dominating large travel organisations would fight to resist such any moves towards a regulatory body. Nevertheless it remains a vital proposal that is worth pursuing to ensure externally accountable, and one which would promote organisations’ focus on providing realistic programmes with considered objectives, consulting with local actors, and providing sufficient levels of training, monitoring and long-term planning. For profit-making organisations the issues of competition and commercial viability will always be a source of conflict against the desired aim of development; however an obligation to certain standards and procedures would be more conducive to the industry’s positive influence.

- **Changing mindsets**
  The way in which organisations chose to market themselves largely determines how the industry is perceived, and a certain change in mindset is necessary to greater facilitate volunteer tourism’s potential as a force for development. First and foremost, organisations need to recognise their limitations; promoting volunteering as the most simplistic and attainable of development solutions is causing more harm than good, framing the volunteer as the all-powerful expert and promoting an unequal power relation with the host community. Rather than endorsing “development by monument” (i.e. identifiable achievements such as ‘building a school’ or ‘teaching a child to read’) (Hunter, 2010), volunteer organisations must acknowledge their efforts as part of a wider process. This change in emphasis would surely influence the mindsets of participating volunteers, promoting more realistic expectations, targeted roles, and focused outcomes.
• **Greater links with development bodies**

At present the development field generally pays scant regard to the efforts of volunteer tourism; after all it largely contradicts the technical, formalised and results-focused ideals of development practitioners. However, the ability of volunteer tourism to offer an alternative perspective is one of its greatest strengths, and is certainly undervalued and underemployed at present. International volunteers are far greater immersed into the host environment than the average Western development expert, and can therefore provide a valuable insight into the reality of local needs, difficulties and responses. This renders volunteers as a potentially vital and relevant source of contribution within the development field, which calls for the greater efforts of NGOs, international bodies and local institutions to embrace the volunteer tourism industry. The UNDP (2010) are currently calling for a “new vision of multilateralism that is anchored in human development and inclusive participation”, and this is a model towards which volunteer tourists could play a positive and complementary role.

• **Broadening of volunteer roles**

A large proportion of volunteer tourism placements are focused on short-term, everyday activities, the purpose of which are largely meaningless within the development context and negatively serve to create dependency and supersede existing local support. The true strength of volunteering lies not in its technical assistance, rather in its people-centred approach and contribution towards cultural exchange, capacity development and social capital. A shift in volunteering roles from the ‘instantly gratifying’ to more targeted activities, focused on tackling the causes rather than the symptoms of poverty, would emphasise such positive attributes and achieve a more relevant and sustainable impact. UN Volunteers (2009) suggests that the broad concept of volunteerism includes four different types of activities; mutual aid, civic engagement, advocacy/campaigning, and service to others. However, at present many organisations demonstrate a narrow interpretation of volunteering, with most of their roles defined as a form of direct assistance. If organisations were to establish a more diverse array of roles, focusing on advocacy and activism and reinforcing issues including human rights, community ownership, sustainability and good governance by emphasising their volunteers’ strengths in cultural exchange and social engagement, volunteer tourism could expand its positive contribution towards development.

• **Engaging with domestic volunteering**

In addition to international participants, a rich source of volunteering potential also lies domestically within developing countries, with organisations such as UN Volunteers (2011) working towards “mobilising an increasing number and diversity of volunteers throughout the world”. In Ghana for example, the local NGO Volunteer Partnerships for West Africa has over 2,000 members (NGO News Africa, 2010), and strives to empower local people, “particularly young people and disadvantaged groups, in order to engage them in their communities” (VPWA, 2011). There is great potential to unite the efforts of international and local volunteers, combining external perspectives and endeavours with local expertise to promote solidarity, mutual understanding, and creative, collective responses towards development needs.

**7.2. Issues for further investigation**
Given the limited scope of this dissertation it was necessary to adopt a fairly narrow focus within the ever-expanding, complex and changing industry of volunteer tourism. Over the course of the writing process several additional questions emerged within the broader consideration of volunteer tourism, which certainly warrant further investigation:

- **What happens when the support ends?**
  In recent years volunteer tourism has increased boundlessly in popularity, prompting a massive influx of new organisations (see Figure 9: Appendix 1). However, as many of such organisations are commercially-founded their continued existence depends on the perpetual supply of volunteers. The unpredictable and changing nature of youth culture implies that gap years may not always remain in vogue; therefore if various organisations lose their supply of volunteers or are forced to collapse, what are the implications for their supported communities? The fostering of dependency towards a finite form of assistance could have damaging consequences.

- **Where does the money go?**
  Most organisations charge their volunteers fees totalling thousands of pounds to participate for a relatively short period of time, and these charges are typically exclusive of flights and living costs. The industry has undergone a shift in dominance from non-profit to commercial organisations in the past decade, most likely correlating with a declining sense of financial accountability and an increased strive for profit-making. Under such circumstances it is vital to investigate whether any financial benefits trickle down to the host communities, or are they simple being manipulated to attract volunteers (whose activities might not be desired or beneficial) whilst the organisations involved reap the monetary gains?

- **What accounts for the unequal spread of volunteer tourism?**
  As outlined by Figure 5 (Appendix 1), Ghana is a relatively popular destination for volunteer tourism organisations, much more so than many poorer countries within sub-Saharan Africa. This dissertation attributes Ghana’s attractiveness to a combination of language, culture, safety and stability, furthermore noting that volunteer placements are typically biased towards the more prosperous urban areas (see Figure 7: Appendix 1). However if volunteer tourism is to be considered as a viable form of development assistance, its involvement should surely be determined by actual needs rather than simply convenience or volunteer preferences. As a global issue, it is therefore crucial to consider whether volunteer tourism can realistically establish and sustain itself within the areas of greatest poverty and disadvantages.

- **What potential lies in South-South (or South-North) volunteering?**
  As commonly expressed within existing literature, a prominent ideological basis for volunteer tourism is the (unsubstantiated) assumption that young, keen and unskilled Western volunteers are naturally able to assist developing communities. However, with the increasing recognition of domestic volunteering within developing countries, local participants might be able to offer the same enthusiastic and dedicated attitude with the added advantages of a greater cultural awareness, long-term involvement and participatory approach. If domestic volunteering continues to grow in significance would this render volunteer tourism redundant, or is there potential to combine local and international efforts? Furthermore could volunteers from developing countries help to assist Western problems, and would their involvement in doing so help to further contest the paternalistic notion that the ‘West knows best’?
8. References


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Illich, I. (1968) ‘To Hell With Good Intentions’. *Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP)*. Cuernavaca, Mexico, 20 April 1968. Available at:  


*V1-V30: Volunteer questionnaire responses (see Appendix 3)*

*O1-O9: Organisation interview responses (see Appendix 4)*
Appendices

Appendix 1: Additional figures and tables

Figure 5. Volunteer organisations: African countries

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Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com

Figure 6. Volunteer organisations: World regions

Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com

Figure 7. Organisations in Ghana: Location

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Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com
Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com

Figure 8. Organisations in Ghana: Typical placement duration

Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com

Figure 9. Organisations in Ghana: Year founded

Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com

Figure 10: Organisations in Ghana: Minimum age of volunteers

Source: Author’s visualisation of data from volunteerabroad.com
Appendix 2: Research methods

Volunteer participants were invited to complete the research questionnaire (see Appendix 3) through a combination of the author’s personal contacts and organisations’ alumni groups on social networking websites. In total 30 volunteers completed the questionnaire, including contributors from the UK, Europe, North America and Oceania. There was a reasonable range in participants’ ages (18-42), volunteering periods (2-17 weeks) and activities (including teaching, orphanage, medical, agriculture and sports placement), therefore representing a fairly broad cross-section of volunteers.

Organisations working in Ghana were found via volunteerabroad.com, and were asked to complete a short interview by email (see Appendix 4). Communication was made with 91 of the 103 listed organisations working in Ghana (the remaining 12 didn’t list any contact details), and 9 different organisations kindly participated in the interview.

The research sought to adhere to good ethical practice, and therefore all participants were offered the following assurances regarding the right of withdrawal and issues of confidentiality:

- If you agree to take part in the research, you may withdraw from it at any stage.
- All the information that you give to me will be treated confidentially and will be rendered anonymous in the assignment.
- Only the student researcher and my tutors will see material from the research.
- All material from the research will be erased after the research has finished.
- You are welcome to contact myself or my module leader if you require further information about the research.

To acknowledge such ethical considerations, all participants were obliged to confirm their consent to the following:

- The nature and purpose of the research, as part of a dissertation on volunteer tourism in Ghana, has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage.
- I understand that all information I give to the student researcher will be treated confidentially and will be rendered anonymous in the assignment.
- I understand that only the student researcher and his tutors will see material from the research.
- I understand that all the material gathered for the research will be erased after the research is finished.
- I understand that I may contact the student researcher or module leader if I require further information about the research.
Appendix 3: Volunteer questionnaire

1. Basic information
   • Date of volunteer placement (month/year)
   • Age (at time of volunteering)
   • Volunteer organisation
   • Duration of volunteer work
   • Location in Ghana

2. Motivations and expectations
   • What were your main motivations for volunteering abroad?
   • What influenced you in choosing Ghana as your destination?
   • Did you actively research different voluntary organisations prior to applying for your placement?
   • What influenced you in selecting the organisation that you volunteered with?
   • What did you expect to achieve from volunteering in Ghana?

3. Volunteer activities
   • What training or preparatory guidance were you provided prior to undertaking your role?
   • What were the main day-to-day activities involved within your volunteering role?
   • What supervision and feedback did you receive during your volunteer placement?
   • What tasks did you have to complete during the application process for your volunteering placement?
   • How many hours did you typically spend volunteering each week whilst in Ghana?

4. Evaluation
   • What were the most positive aspects of your time volunteering in Ghana?
   • ...and what were the most negative?
   • How (if at all) did your volunteering experience differ from your expectations?
   • How do you feel that your work was of benefit to the local community?
   • Do you feel that the impact of your work has continued after you finished your placement?
   • How has your volunteering experience benefitted you (in a personal or professional capacity)?
Appendix 4: Organisation interview

I’m contacting you as a final year undergraduate student at the University of East London, and I’m currently working towards a dissertation exploring the issue of volunteering in Ghana. As an organisation carrying out such activities, I would be most grateful if you would be willing to kindly contribute to my work.

If you could take few a just minutes to consider and respond to the five questions below I would truly be most grateful. If you wish to learn any further details about my planned dissertation, I can forward you a copy of my project proposal and/or answer any specific questions that you might have.

• What prompted your organisation to establish volunteer placements in Ghana?

• How did you determine the location, type of activities, and the groups and communities that your volunteers work with?

• What skills, experience and personal qualities do you seek in any prospective volunteers?

• What measures do you have in place to assess the impact and effectiveness of your volunteer placements?

• How do you believe that your organisation is contributing towards Ghana’s development needs?

Many thanks in advance for taking the time to read this communication, and I would be very grateful if you would be happy to respond to my questions.

Kind regards

Richard Forsythe

Undergraduate Student
International Development in the Third World (with NGO Management)
School of Humanities & Social Sciences
University of East London