



## Volunteer tourism: The case of Habitat for Humanity South Africa

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### Abstract

Volunteer tourism as a subset of alternative tourism is the focus of analysis. This paper contributes to the limited writings on volunteer tourism by investigating the activities in South Africa of Habitat for Humanity, a grassroots ecumenical Christian organization that works in partnership with communities to eliminate poverty through the provision of shelter. A profile of the volunteer tourist and of their tourism experience in South Africa is presented which is based largely upon the return of 123 questionnaires from volunteer tourists in South Africa working with the local branch of Habitat for Humanity.

### Introduction

Over the last 15 years, research on tourism-led strategies of economic development has found a new focus in the possibilities of 'new tourism' in general (Mowforth and Munt, 1998) and around notions of alternative tourism in particular (Weaver, 1991, 1995). The concept of 'new tourism' refers to observed changes in the preferences of international tourists away from mass packaged forms of tourism and is interpreted as an element of post-Fordist consumption patterns (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Swarbrooke et al., 2003). The new tourist is seen as a more experienced traveler than the conventional mass tourist in terms of demanding unique and enticing holiday experiences and thus responding to many of "the problems raised by mass tourism" (Weaver, 1998, p. 31). Among the key distinguishing features of this new tourism are a shift to smaller or individual group travel; a move from packaged experiences to unpackaged or more flexible travel, and, a search for more real, natural and authentic forms of tourism or travel experience (Mowforth and Munt, 1998). Overall, one of the major characteristics of new tourists "is their need to escape from everyday routines in a bid to achieve some form of fulfilment." (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, p. 59).

Across the developing world, alternative tourism has surfaced as the flagship concept for new tourism (Rogerson, 2001). Some researchers contend that since the early 1980s, "alternative tourism has emerged as perhaps the most important topic of contemporary tourism research" (Weaver, 1995, p. 595). During the past decade, argues Brohman (1996, p. 63) "the concept of alternative tourism has emerged as one of the most widely used (and abused) phrases in the tourism literature". Indeed, Weaver (1998, p. 6) states that the term "alternative tourism has been used in a number of distinct ways, with the common characteristic of representing an alternative to mass or large-scale

tourism." The growth of alternative tourism is interpreted partly as a response to some of the negative consequences of the mass tourism-led model of economic development and partly a result of wider post-Fordist shifts in tourism preferences in the west (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Weaver, 1998). Within the broad definition of alternative tourism are subsumed a cluster of activities, including ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism or trekking. In addition, alternative tourism is linked strongly to more general conceptualizations of 'community-based' forms of tourism (Weaver, 1998). Although disciples of alternative tourism sometimes tend to present it as an idealized polar opposite of mass tourism (see Khan, 1997), Weaver (1998, p. 10) cautions that "such ideal types are rarely encountered in reality." Moreover, Cater (1993, p. 85) goes further and warns of the dangers of romanticizing the notion of alternative tourism.

In South Africa, the issue of alternative tourism has attracted a number of research contributions, particularly in terms of works concerning cultural tourism (Jansen van Veuren, 2001, 2003) and ecotourism (Fennell, 2003) and more broadly in terms of the project programming for Spatial Development Initiatives (Rogerson, 2001). The objective in this paper is to examine one South African case study of a so far little researched dimension of alternative tourism. More specifically, the focus here is upon exploring an example of 'volunteer tourism' in South Africa. The term 'volunteer tourism', following Wearing (2001, p. 1), is viewed as encompassing "those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized 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." For Scheyvens (2002, p. 102), this genre of tourism is best described as an element of 'justice tourism' as it "may

involve individuals from Western countries paying to come to the Third World to assist with development or conservation work, as they desire to achieve something more meaningful than a pleasure-filled, self-indulgent holiday." Accordingly, for many scholars, volunteer tourism would be "located firmly within the sphere of alternative tourism" (Wearing, 2001, p. 23). In terms of the shift away from the mass tourism's three Ss – sun, sand and sea – to alternative tourism's three Ts – traveling, trekking and trucking (Mowforth and Munt, 1998), the activities of volunteer tourists are anchored upon defining themselves as 'travelers' seeking personal and unique experiences.

In terms of this contribution to the literature on alternative tourism, two sections of discussion are presented. First, as a context, the existing international writings that debate volunteer tourism are reviewed. It is argued that whilst international volunteering has a long history and is relatively well-documented, there has been only limited attention accorded by tourism scholars to the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. Second, the focus turns to investigate the activities in South Africa of Habitat for Humanity, which is a grassroots ecumenical Christian organization that works in partnership with communities to eliminate poverty through the provision of shelter (Groom, 2002). A profile of the volunteer tourist and of their tourism experience in South Africa is presented which is based largely upon the return of 123 questionnaires from volunteer tourists in South Africa working with the local branch of Habitat for Humanity.

### Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism is one of the most undeveloped themes in the scholarship on alternative tourism. For Wearing (2001, p. 1) it has suffered particularly from a lack of differentiation from other forms of tourism or volunteering such that "it has been the subject of selective pragmatism rather than a specific definition or method." Indeed, in the recent volume by Swarbrooke et al. (2003), the activity of volunteer tourism is incorporated as part of discussions on the global adventure tourism industry. Accordingly, as compared to the rich veins of material that have consolidated around for example issues of ecotourism or cultural tourism, relatively few tourism scholars have addressed the topic of volunteer tourism. The most important contributions are offered in the writings of Wearing and Neil (2000), Wearing (2001) and Scheyvens (2002).

It has been observed that an extensive literature has grown up concerning the development of organizational volunteering, such as with the US Peace Corps, albeit "without it having been considered as a form of tourism" (Wearing, 2001, p. 50). None the less, some work indicates that such volunteers do not perceive themselves as being 'at leisure' rather they are involved in a sense of "good citizenship concern for the community" (Parker, 1992; Wearing, 2001). It is argued that the most significant development that may occur in the volunteer tourist experience is that of a personal nature, namely the greater awareness of self, the refiguring of self and identity (Wearing and Neil, 2000; Wearing,

2001). As Wearing (2001, p. 3) notes: "as part of the volunteer tourism experience, interactions occur and the self is enlarged or expanded, challenged renewed or reinforced." Gard McGehee (2002) argues that involvement in volunteer tourism increases self-efficacy and facilitates the development of new networks such that it influences volunteers' participation in social movements.

Taken together, the range of different institutions and organizations that are involved in volunteer tourism "play a role in providing tourism experiences that fall outside the boundaries of what is generally considered to be mass tourism" (Wearing, 2001, p. 37). Moreover, the kind of organizations that largely fall under the rubric of the voluntary category of experiences commonly furnish international support and sponsorship for a range of conservation research projects and community development work.

A broad distinction is made in the literature on volunteer tourism between those volunteers engaged in volunteer work in conservation as opposed to development work (Scheyvens, 2002). Nevertheless, what is crucial is that the volunteer tourist – whether engaged in conservation or development work – form a link to the destination area which enables the individual to have an experience that incorporates social value into identity (Wearing, 2001, p. 14). Indeed, the forms of voluntary work "which allow for relationships to be built between the tourists and local people can be very effective in highlighting justice issues" (Scheyvens, 2002, p. 115) in the developing world.

In terms of conservation work, volunteer tourism can involve travel to varied locations in Africa, Asia, Central and South America including rainforests, cloud forests, conservation areas and biological reserves (Wearing, 2001). Illustratively, GREENFORCE is a non-profit organization set up in 1996 and operates environmental conservation expeditions in developing countries around the world (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, p. 300). Volunteers support the agency's work for the host country's National Trust or Wildlife Commission by collecting data or undertaking environmental inventories in order to assist these government organizations in producing management plans that endeavour to protect or rebuild endangered ecosystems (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). Likewise, other agencies that involve volunteer tourists in environmentally responsible travel and conservation work include the World Wide Fund for Nature, Earthwatch Institute and Youth Challenge International (YCI), the latter the focus of the most detailed research on volunteer tourism by Wearing (2001). The YCI projects typically aim to be locally identified and sustainable, while providing the participants – 'challengers' – an opportunity to learn about and be involved in conservation issues (Wearing, 2001, p. 45). Often projects linked to conservation work are situated in enticing areas, such as tropical rain forests, lagoons or beaches, where volunteers may be involved in supporting endangered species by for example carrying baby turtles to the sea (Scheyvens, 2002).

Scheyvens (2002, p. 108) records that "tours which involve conservation work offer a responsible 'holiday with a difference' to increasing numbers of Western travellers, who

often pay significant sums of money for the privilege of doing this work." Normally, the payment cost of the tours covers the volunteer's "subsistence expenses with accommodation standards varying from basic to luxury depending on the particular tour they choose, plus a contribution to the conservation work of the organization involved" (Scheyvens, 2002, p. 108).

The second strand in the volunteer tourism literature is comprised of debates surrounding voluntary development work by tourists. This can range from offering medical assistance, involvement in economic and social development or even projects geared towards heritage and cultural restoration (Wearing, 2001). In terms of detailed research by tourism scholars, the focus on volunteer development work is less prominent. In the work of Scheyvens (2002, p. 111), however, it is observed that unlike the volunteer tourism linked to conservation, "the locations of the various development projects are not always scenic but as with conservation work, there is likely to be some free time for leisure pursuits." Moreover, there is a considerable degree of variation in the nature and approach of organizations involved in development work linked to volunteer tourism. At one extreme are certain organizations which are altruistic in their orientation and have emerged in response to a direct need for assistance in a particular developing world context. At the other pole are organizations that "are simply travel agencies with a conscience, organizations which seek to open the eyes of affluent Westerners to global problems but also, perhaps idealistically, make these people part of the solution to these problems" (Scheyvens, 2002, p. 113).

Overall, it is cautioned that volunteer tourism as a form of alternative tourism should not be necessarily be seen as ethically and morally superior to mass, conventional forms of tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 1998). Indeed, within volunteer tourism there are many seemingly noble or community development projects which have minimal involvement of local communities or are insensitive to local needs and interests (Scheyvens, 2002). It is against this backdrop that attention now turns to introduce the case study of Habitat for Humanity and to construct a profile of volunteer tourists involved in its operations in South Africa. This case study in South Africa furnishes a modest addition to the limited existing literature concerning volunteer tourism and development work.

### **An example of volunteer tourism in South Africa**

As indicated, within the spectrum of research that considers volunteer tourism, our case study falls into the category of those organizations that link volunteer tourists to development work. The core mission of Habitat for Humanity involves the construction of houses for poverty-stricken communities around the world. In this section, two profiles are offered. The first considers the nature of the organization that is the focus for volunteer tourism. The second is a profile of the volunteer tourists themselves and of their experiences in South Africa. This is based upon a short questionnaire which was completed by 123 former volunteer tourists in

South Africa and supplemented by other source material from the South African affiliate of Habitat for Humanity (Groom, 2002).

#### *Habitat for Humanity and Habitat for Humanity South Africa*

Historically, Habitat for Humanity emerged in the early 1970s out of a small Christian organization in the USA which wanted to 'make a practical difference' to local development and reasoned that this goal could be best attained through social development (Stoddart, 2003). By the construction or renovation of the houses of the very poorest, it was believed that Habitat for Humanity would make 'a real difference' to a local community and re-create a sense of independence and togetherness. The Habitat organization expanded beyond this initial geographical focus on poor communities in the USA. During 1989 a so-termed Global Village Work Camp programme was launched which now (2003) allows participants to build a house in one of 87 countries and to live within the community while they do so (Groom, 2002). Although the Habitat for Humanity organization does not require either its volunteers or beneficiaries of houses to be of the Christian religion, it is founded upon a Christian faith and openly is committed to Christian ethics (Stoddart, 2003).

National organizations and local affiliates of Habitat for Humanity work through a community development model that values broad-based participation by helping families living in inadequate shelter to construct and own simple, decent, healthy houses. Families participate in the construction of their own homes and the homes of four other families through a process known as 'sweat equity'. Subsequently, they pay off the cost of materials of their homes through a system of interest-free, non-profit but inflation adjusted 'mortgages'. Such 'mortgage' repayments are paid into a local revolving fund termed the 'Fund for Humanity' which, in turn, is applied to build more affordable houses within the same community and thus providing for the long-term sustainability of the project (Groom, 2002).

Habitat for Humanity International's Global Village Work Camp programme offers opportunities for volunteers to work with its South African affiliate. It is claimed that "accepting the opportunity to live and work with an international affiliate is often a life-changing experience" (Groom, 2002). Volunteers work alongside members of the local community, raising their own awareness of poverty and building decent affordable housing. As partners in development, it is claimed that team members as volunteers "help build a true 'global village' of love, homes, communities and hope" (Groom, 2002). Overall, it is stated that the short-term mission programme offers trips that are designed to "provide an educational and spiritual experience within a cross-cultural environment." Such objectives are attained through the new relationships that are formed by team members both with each other and with the host community. Moreover, it is asserted that as volunteers "learn about important principles such as 'self-help' and 'sweat equity', you also learn to give of yourself in a new and diverse global village." In addition,

an important part of the experience is “*learning about the host community’s culture, language and social practices.*” Differences are emphasized with the conventional tourism experience as it is stated that “unlike tour groups, our hosts offer teams a ‘backdoor’ welcome to their community and encourage teams to visit some of their cultural and national ‘treasures’ available locally.” Finally, in the Global Village Work Programme it is stressed that participants form a “once-in-a-lifetime team” which travels, lives, works, prays, shares and eats together, albeit it is added “often in simple settings”. It is stressed as “vital” that participants remain flexible and committed to their team leader and other team members and that the first command for every team member is “Be a Blessing” (Groom, 2002).

The South African affiliate and host, Habitat for Humanity South Africa (HFHSA) was founded in 1987. It is a South African NGO that is committed to the broad principles and community development model of the US based organization. Moreover, it “*relates to sharing a particular world-view based on certain common ethical and moral principles*” (HFHSA, 2003a). In terms of its development work, HFHSA seeks to provide a sustainable approach to the housing needs of the poor in South Africa. Three years after the launch of its South African operations, however, the violence that characterised the closing years of the anti-apartheid struggle forced the organization to abandon its work in the strife-torn low-income communities.

Two years after the democratic transition, in 1996, the operations of HFHSA were re-established. The work of HFHSA is made possible through partnerships forged with many constituents in civil society – government, the private sector and the non-profit sector – at both local and national levels (Groom, 2002). For example, HFHSA collaborates with a number of large South African companies who provide both funding and local volunteers as part of corporate team-building programmes (Stoddart, 2003). Local organizational policies are committed to ensure the full participation of women at all levels from decision-making processes and in design and construction efforts. It is argued that HFHSA’s broad-based collaboration ensures a higher level of institutional and financial sustainability. Moreover, environmental sustainability is achieved through the application of local appropriate technology, the use of durable products and by community education (Groom, 2002).

In terms of its South African operations HFHSA considers that it offers a method for empowering local communities to address their own housing needs (HFHSA 2003b, c). Since its establishment in South Africa HFHSA has been responsible for the construction of approximately 1000 houses. Currently, the organization builds a 49.6 square metre house for R24 075 (January 2004 \$1 = R.6.50) for occupation by families earning incomes between R 800 and R 2500 per month. Families are selected for potential inclusion in the project based upon four criteria: (1) the family must be living in sub-standard housing; (2) they must own the land on which the house will be built; (3) they must be prepared to perform the required amount of ‘sweat equity’ and take part in a training programme; and, (4) importantly

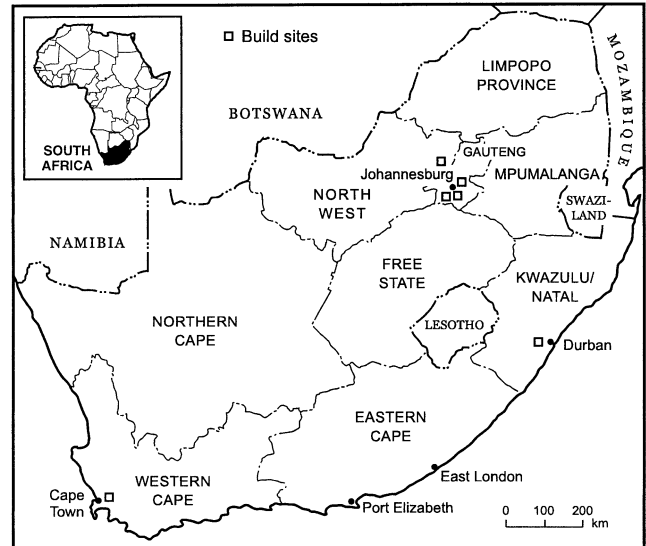


Figure 1. The Location of HFHSA Housing Projects in South Africa.

they must have the capacity and willingness to repay the ‘mortgage’. The houses consist of two bedrooms, a lounge, full bathroom, a kitchen and include indoor plumbing and electricity. Housing construction takes place primarily in areas of poor settlement around South Africa’s major urban centers, Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. For example, in Gauteng province, HFHSA currently has four build sites active at Ivory Park, Orange Farm, Katlehong South and Letlabile with volunteer tourists involved at each of these sites (see Figure 1).

Beyond the construction of shelter, volunteers may also be involved in other housing linked projects. A donation from ‘friends’ in Northern Ireland allowed the establishment of a community gardening project at one HFHSA project that began in 1999 and has a total of 218 completed houses. The stated objective of this gardening project is to train “*homeowners how to plant trees and develop the aesthetic gardening ethic of the community*” (Stoddart, 20003). Several advantages are seen as flowing from the gardening project, not least the potential for income generation and self-employment opportunities and “*better health and safety for the children*” (Stoddart, 2003).

#### *The Volunteer tourists*

The profile of the volunteer tourists in South Africa is clearly both different to that of typical mass tourist or to international tourists visiting South Africa as a whole as a whole. The HFHSA records show that the largest number of volunteers are from the USA with a smaller group from Europe. Moreover, there is an almost equal share between male and female volunteers.

In terms of age profile, the survey of international volunteers at HFHSA projects disclosed that the largest segment of participants are ‘early retirees’ in the age group 50–59 years. This is a group of volunteer tourists who have the necessary disposable income and savings and who are fit, healthy and committed to development work. Indeed, the peak at 50–59 years indicates a group of financially

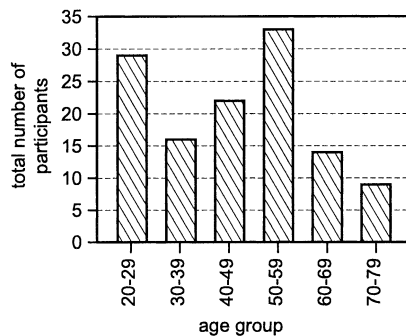


Figure 2. Age Profile of HFHSA Volunteer Tourists (Source: Author's Survey)

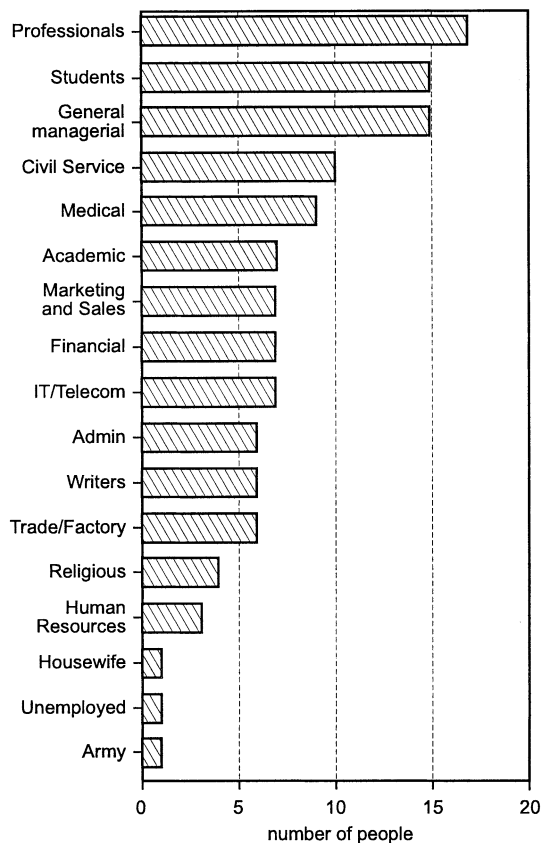


Figure 3. Occupational Profile of HFHSA Volunteer Tourists (Source: Author's Survey)

stable people who have the means and the time to expend on humanitarian endeavours. One early retiree stated: "I actually built one of the walls of the house, working with two young men besides me." The next most important group are a younger segment of 'travellers' who are generally in their early 20s and who are taking either a sabbatical from work or a break between the completion of studies and work. A third – and smaller group – are in their 30s and 40s some of whom are contemplating life changes. Finally, there is a representation of retired older persons – aged 60 or more who are still healthy enough to take on the physical work of house construction in the projects. Figure 2 shows the age profile of the 123 participants in the survey.

In terms of profession, the participants in the HFHSA building projects are drawn from a wide range of occu-

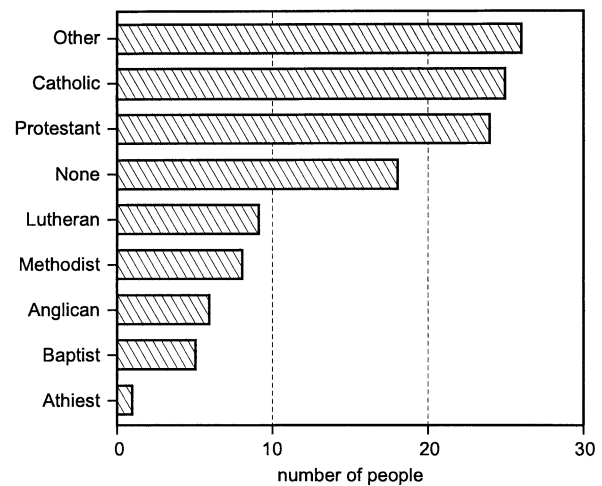


Figure 4. Religious Profile of HFHSA Volunteer Tourists (Source: Author's Survey)

pations (see Figure 3). In parallel with the age profile of participants, the largest number of volunteers are students on organized field trips, various kinds of professional people and those in general managerial roles and at work in office environments. This profile is underpinned by the expressed desires of many volunteers to appreciate both nature and the outdoors and have an opportunity to undertake physical work outdoors, to work with their hands and learn the practical skills of building. Overall, the group of surveyed volunteers were not searching for an escapist tourism experience rather these are people who secure a sense of physical, emotional and spiritual fulfillment from actual participation in a project, no matter what their background.

As the survey participants were mainly drawn from the USA and Ireland, there was not a wide variation in religious grouping (see Figure 4). The largest number of volunteers at HFHSA were Christian in one form or another. Of note is that there is a large group of people claiming no faith and even a few avowed atheist participants. The category of 'other' includes Buddhism, Hinduism and various smaller Christian groupings. Although most volunteers were primarily interested in the development work that they were undertaking, there were a number of comments concerning 'bible bashing', albeit counterbalanced by others enthused about doing 'God's work'. Overall a commitment to Christian ideals affords the backdrop to the build project and provides a common foundation for many volunteers.

Involvement in volunteer tourism through Habitat's development work was motivated by a number of factors (Figure 5). The prime response from the survey was of volunteer's desire to 'help the poor'. This was linked also to a strong respect for the philosophy and for the reputation enjoyed by the international Habitat. Not surprisingly, many of these volunteer tourists to South Africa had previous experience either of volunteer work with Habitat in the USA or other parts of the world or alternatively of working with another charity of service organization. In total, 90% of the sample had taken part in previous builds in the United States or Ireland. None the less, these builds were mainly 'week-end builds'; only 10% of participants had been involved in

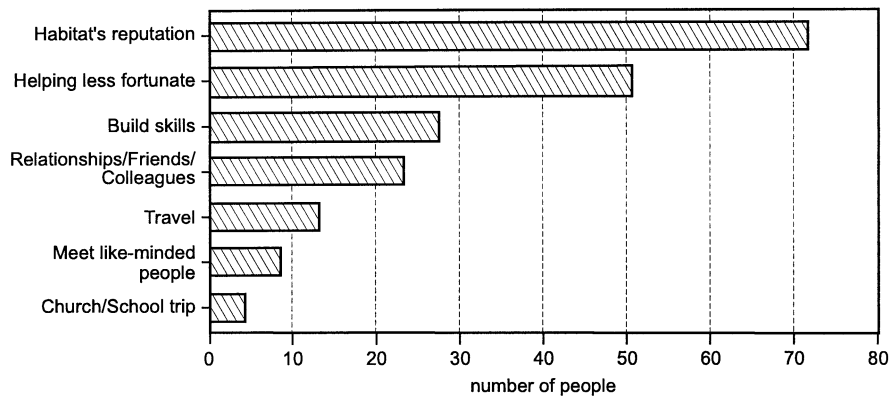


Figure 5. Reasons for Involvement of Volunteer Tourists with Habitat (Source: Author's Survey).

other international builds. The group of volunteer tourists in South Africa had an established history of social activism. Almost 60% had been involved in volunteer activities for other organizations, including environmental projects, inner city projects, orphanages, Engineers without Borders, The Sierra Club, International Relief Teams, the Peace Corps, youth/community missions, feeding the homeless, tutoring children and drug missions. Several volunteers were motivated to work with Habitat by a desire to build, learn building skills or contribute the skills they already had. Others had joined the project because of friends or colleagues who were already involved in Habitat. Finally, a large proportion of people expressed the importance of their interest in meeting and interacting with people from different cultures. Significantly, only a small segment of the volunteer tourists were motivated by the issue of travel opportunities.

In terms of choosing to work with the South African affiliate of Habitat, a number of key themes were highlighted by survey respondents (Figure 6). The two strongest and linked motivations were those for 'adventure' in terms traveling to the "dark continent" and experiencing African culture 'from within'. Interview responses variously spoke of "a mystique about Africa" for tourists which is unequalled by other continents. Moreover, it was stated that "*South Africa was particularly exciting because of its political and social history.*" The desire to help the poor was another critical factor in the choice of South Africa. Finally, the fact that during 2002 the HFHSA build in Durban was a "Jimmy Carter Work Project" (JCWP) was of importance to a number of participants and a factor in their choice of South Africa. Admiration for the former US President and especially for the work projects that he runs on an annual basis was a theme expressed by many participants. Indeed, many of the older participants in this project have been working on JCWPs for 15 years. Typically, these long-term volunteer tourists travel to foreign countries on a yearly basis to participate in a working holiday which is usually organized, as was the Durban build, to be a "blitz build" whereby a large number of houses are completed by a large group of volunteers in a short intense period of time and work. The intensity of the work maximizes the whole Habitat experience and correspondingly the pleasure of these volunteer tourists.

Although Habitat for Humanity in Cape Town has observed the potential for organizing specifically targeted working holidays and will be launching a project of this nature in 2004, the location within South Africa of builds of HFHSA so far have largely been pre-determined from the volunteers point of view. Either churches or schools in the source countries have organized the trips or in the case of the JCWP these have been organized by Habitat for Humanity International. The choice of site within South Africa at which to undertake development work was, therefore, highly restricted. In future the Cape Town branch of Habitat is hoping to capitalize on the city's growing international tourism profile and offer volunteers the possibility of working holidays specifically in South Africa's 'Mother City'.

It is evident that whilst in South Africa this group of volunteer tourists do not pursue the typical international tourist itinerary of visits to Kruger National Park, Cape Town, and the Garden Route (see Rogerson, 2002). For these volunteer tourists the development work was at the core of the tourism experience in South Africa. Indeed, many of the student volunteers were only in South Africa for a short period of time (a week – 10 days) limiting their opportunities to travel outside of the immediate vicinity of the build site. Some of the older volunteers, however, chose to extend their stay after the work camp in terms of visiting game parks and South Africa's other major tourism attractions. It is clear that in their off-work time, the volunteer tourist is a strong participant in what Scheyvens (2002) calls justice tourism in terms of participating in organized tours of South Africa's former black township areas, which sites of significance to the anti-apartheid struggle as well as learning more of the lifestyle of poor communities. During the build, activities were organised for the evenings and these often included visiting markets, orphanages, and sites of historical, cultural or religious significance. Indeed, all the groups host a barbeque function within a township as part of their visit. Moreover, all participants receive a beaded badge sourced from the occupational therapy section of a tuberculosis hospital in South Africa (Groom, 2002).

Finally, in terms of reflecting on their overall experience in South Africa the US group of volunteers expressed the opinion that they had contributed "*not just a house to the recipients*" but other intangibles (Stoddart, 2003). For ex-

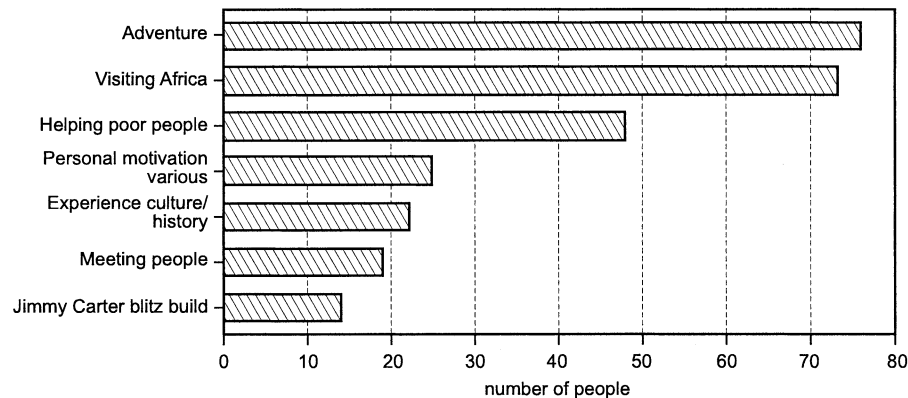


Figure 6. Reasons for Choice of South Africa (Source: Author's Survey).

ample, several respondents highlighted the fact that they had offered "A chance to see Americans in a different light." Indeed, high on the priorities list of especially younger participants was a desire to show South Africans that Americans are caring and responsible people who do know about the rest of the world, its problems and are prepared to help in any way they can to alleviate these problems. This response of volunteers was largely due to the events of September 11 and of growing awareness of America's unpopular image in many parts of the world especially with the actions of the administration of President George Bush. Two typical comments by US volunteers were of "Building bonds especially after September 11 with the international community" and that "In my travels, I have noticed Americans often have a bad reputation. I believe my actions demonstrated ... a better view of Americans to those who may have never met (one)." Other respondents highlighted the importance of cultural exchanges and a desire expressed by roughly half of respondents to improve 'race relations' and to participate in the non-racial society that is being constructed in post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed, most volunteers felt that they had contributed to international friendship by their development work in South Africa. On their departure many volunteers left behind clothes and tools as donations to the local communities. Some volunteers even sought to maintain long term written contact with the recipients of the particular houses that they had built (Stoddart, 2003).

Without exception, all respondents in the survey indicated that they had enjoyed their volunteer work experience in South Africa. Indeed, the fact that volunteers offered so few negative comments of any kind underscores how personal needs were met by their South African experience. Participants felt the build was rewarding on a level that so few other holidays are, precisely because of the elements of volunteering and 'giving'. Indeed, volunteers expressed the opinion that, as a result of their work, they 'felt a part of South Africa' and of its struggle towards a better future for all its population (Stoddart, 2003).

## Conclusion

Volunteer tourism, as part of alternative tourism, has so far received only limited attention in terms of tourism schol-

arship. The South African case of the activities of Habitat for Humanity shows clearly that volunteer tourists are 'new tourists' and searching for an experience which is beyond that offered by mass tourism. For the groups of volunteers involved in building houses in some of South Africa's poorest urban settlements the focus was squarely upon forming a link with local people in a manner that enables volunteers to have a tourism experience that does incorporate social value into identity. The development work undertaken by these volunteers to assist the shelter needs of poor communities is in locations which are often far removed from the scenic and exotic locales enjoyed by volunteer tourists engaged in conservation work. In terms of the South African tourism economy, whilst their overall national contribution is minimal, their local contributions to the development of 'justice tourism' must be noted as potentially significant. Indeed, in final analysis, South Africa provides fertile territory for the further expansion of scholarship on issues surrounding volunteer tourism.

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