

Volunteers in some sport for development programmes are different: a comment on Burrai and Hannam

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The ARTICLE suggests that there should be a radical critique of the concepts of “responsible” volunteer tourism. In this short reply, I use one case study of volunteers travelling to carry out sport for development with non-profit organisations to illustrate the special case for sport and sport for development in the world of volunteer tourism (Reid & Tattersall 2013, 2017).

The IDEALS project in Lusaka, Zambia involved university students from the UK travelling to Zambia to coach sport for a 6-week placement during the summer vacation. The case study challenges the definition of volunteer tourism itself. Our research from 2010 to 2015 found that the student volunteers did not recognise themselves as volunteer tourists, instead they saw themselves as sport development workers and sport coaches. While tourists travel for leisure, these volunteers saw themselves travelling to work and not holiday. They understand that their project had a focus on empowerment and of reducing HIV and AIDS through sport. However, they tended to be recruited for their ability to contribute to the sport programmes, not to the empowerment or health agendas mostly because their day-to-day role was one of sports coach. This is something they reflected on when they returned and tried to reconcile their experience with the lives of those in Lusaka they had left behind. However, the volunteers paid for their experience and behaved like tourists at times. Each student volunteer was required to raise a sum of approximately £3000 over the year leading up to their placement to fund their involvement. While the students were volunteer sport coaches for 5 days per week for 6 weeks, they were based in serviced, gated accommodation and had time off at weekends and in the evenings (Reid & Tattersall 2013). They travelled to key tourist sites in Zambia (such as the Victoria Falls) and undertook tourist activities in Lusaka in their free time. Therefore the concept of volunteer tourism may be different in this case study of sport for development volunteering.

The ARTICLE suggests that the actions of volunteer tourists may inadvertently exacerbate the very issues of inequality that they wish to address. In the case study, UK Sport allocated funding to IDEALS in part to satisfy the promises made when London bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games. Sport and the agenda of legacy were facilitated by the vast money-making machine of the Olympic Games. However, UK Sport were operating at arms-length, handing over decisions to the Zambian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the ground and their partner Universities in the UK. This should have enabled the Zambian NGOs to lead the project and enhance their operations. This leadership was only slightly in evidence.

Sport has that ability to stretch across divides and motivate people (United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace, 2015). Following their time in Zambia, several volunteers founded charities to support the Zambian NGOs and fund further work around the IDEALS project sites. These charities enable groups of people to contribute and collectively make a difference through sport (in some cases in general or in some specifically football or netball). Charities such as Umutima and Perfect Day Foundation continue to provide scholarships for volunteer peer leaders and support the work of volunteers in Lusaka outside the summer vacation. This is collective action by the volunteers.

Sport is based on a paradox. Competition determines one winner. One player or team is “faster, higher or stronger” (Girginov, 2010). However, for sport to happen, competitors must cooperate. Two teams must agree a set of rules, two racers must know where the finish line is. In sport for development volunteering, as in volunteer tourism more generally, it is not necessarily sporting prowess that determines who is most powerful. In the case study, it was not just those with the funding that were the most powerful. Other elements of power such as expertise, knowledge and equipment were also evident. But mostly these are highlighted in the volunteer sports coaches from the UK. Their knowledge, sporting expertise and wealth appeared to give them a high status in the compounds where they worked and possibly influenced the perceptions of the young people that they meant to empower (Reid & Tattersall 2017).

The case for volunteer tourism in sport and sport for development has gone much further into the realm of evaluation than the ARTICLE seems to portray for 'responsible' tourism. I would argue that sport and sport for development funders have taken evaluation in a more serious light than the ARTICLE suggests meets with the criteria of 'responsible' in other domains. While the initial concept of the IDEALS project was forged in a partnership between Zambian NGOs and UK Universities, the management of that partnership has been along UK lines. For example, aspects of reports, conferences, monitoring and evaluation, and a focus on measurable outcomes reflected a western idea of efficacy. The importance of the Zambian perspective was sometimes lost in the picture. When we carried out research into the case study, attempts to hear the voices of Zambian partners were largely unsuccessful. The incoming sport coaches and those with the sport expertise were thought to be most knowledgeable, despite not understanding the local context. Zambians interviewed were reluctant to give more than surface responses to outsiders' questions (Reid & Tattersall 2013, 2017).

Advertising for the student volunteer experience focussed on, for example experiences of the previous volunteers (.. it was "the most amazing experience of my life"), pictures of student volunteers with African children on dusty football fields, and did not consider any other impacts nor any issues of sustainability or responsible tourism. Sport is good was the message. We need you to help is what it implied. However, the issue of self-regulation is mitigated in the sport for development sector. This statutory sector of sport for development and peace that is essentially run by NGOs is also evaluated by their funders regularly. The sector of sport for development (and the volunteers within it) has been looking at methods of evaluation and research into the most effective ways to achieve development through sport. This scrutiny of non-profit organisations is at a different level to much of the industry self-regulation of volunteer tourism mentioned in the article.

For example, Kidd and Donnelly (2007) conducted a literature review on what might be the benefits of sport for development projects for the UN Sport for Development and Peace Working Group (SDPWG). Coalter (2006) was commissioned by UK Sport (a key funder for a number of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) organisations) to create an evaluation toolkit or manual for NGOs to use while assessing the efficacy of the SDP projects in order to satisfy outside funding agencies. Instead Coalter recommended unique collaborative ongoing evaluation processes that started before the SDP project was conceived in cooperation with the local community. Kay (2012) and Kay, Jeanes and Mansfield (2012) have highlighted the need for a change in approach to sport for development volunteering. There is a need for more critical research where the local people have a voice to express their views about the projects and ideally to participate as volunteers themselves. This is what I found with my co-author Jennifer Tattersall in the case study student sport volunteering project in Lusaka.

The ARTICLE gives examples of the sentiment behind or the difficulties with "responsible" tourism and yet avoids any one definition of the term. Republished for 2017, the year of sustainable tourism for development, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2017) simplifies its Global Code of Ethics for Tourism into five tips for a responsible traveller:

Honour your hosts and our common heritage
Protect our Planet
Support the local economy
Be an informed traveller
Be a respectful traveller

However, this guidance places emphasis on the responsibility of the traveller. City of Cape Town (2009, p3) sets out a much broader definition which places responsibilities on all the different agencies involved in tourism as well as the host destination:

*A responsible tourism approach aims to achieve the three principal outcomes of sustainable development, i.e. economic growth, environmental integrity and social justice. The distinguishing characteristic of the approach is the focus on the **responsibility** of role-players in the tourism sector, and destinations in general, to take action to achieve sustainable tourism development.*

The importance of responsibility of all those involved in the travel to ensure it is sustainable may have been something considered by early development agencies sending volunteers into developing countries to use sport as a tool for development.

Certainly, evidence about the importance of sport to international development has been gathered since 2004 when the Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group was formed. The United Nations (UN) identified sport and physical education as a “fundamental right for all” (1978, UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, p2). Now the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) actively promotes sport to member states as a development tool. In the most recent UN resolution, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, sport was specifically mentioned:

Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.

United Nations (2015, p10)

Within the UN, sport has been assigned almost mythical qualities. It is thought of as a universal language that can transcend boundaries drawn along lines of race or religion or conflict. For example, for each of the 17 UN Sustainable Goals (2030 agenda) the UNOSDP has outlined how sport can make a significant contribution towards that goal. For example, Goal 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”

Gender equality and changes in norms and attitudes towards it can be promoted in sport contexts, where sport-based initiatives and programmes have the potential to equip women and girls with knowledge and skills that allow them to progress in society.

(UNOSDP, 2015)

Therefore, sport for development is explicitly given the status of a sustainable activity and it assumes the moral high ground with its ethical stance on “tolerance, cooperation and respect” (UN Inter-Agency Task Force on SDP, pi). In addition, research into physical activity and play indicate that as countries become more developed and citizens become more sedentary, inactivity may become an important risk factor in non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and stroke (Kohl et al, 2012). Sport is becoming part of a well-being and health improvement agenda as well as a tool for development and peace.

In conclusion, the suggestions put forward by the ARTICLE about the issues with responsible tourism can be seen within the case study of IDEALS in Zambia. However, sport is a very special case. Its position as a specific section in the UN Resolution on Sustainable Development Goals means it has a privileged position. The case study highlights those issues in relation to a project involving local NGOs and foreign aid support. Monitoring and evaluation of these types of projects are being undertaken. Future sport volunteer tourism activities should consider a co-creation process, where the volunteers and the host communities work together to design the most appropriate sporting interventions. That would be more “responsible” volunteer tourism.

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