

IMPACTS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF VOLUNTOURISM IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract- This paper attempts to propose a conceptual research framework for investigating the impacts and effectiveness of voluntourism activities in Malaysia. Three major stakeholders of voluntourism; voluntourist, voluntourism organization and community in need will be the main focus of the propose research. In the context of tourism in Malaysia, voluntourism has been a phenomenon as it was proposed by the government to promote public good among local community in Malaysia as well as volunteer tourist that visits Malaysia with purposes that combines both voluntary work and enjoying leisure and touristy of the volunteering destination.

Keywords: Voluntourism; volunteer tourism; voluntouring; tourism impact

1. Introduction

Various tourism concept such as eco-tourism, nature-based tourism, sustainable tourism, green tourism and cultural-heritage tourism have been widely discussed elsewhere. However, the volunteer tourism or voluntourism particularly in Malaysia has not received an adequate attention often than a few tourism scholars. The earlier concept of voluntourism was defined through the terms of volunteer tourism and it was later converted into Voluntourism and has been used by many researchers in the field. One of the most prominent definitions that has been proposed is "...those tourists who, for various reason, 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 or environment" (Wearing, 2001).

Through this concept, the two main stakeholders in voluntourism were addressed; the voluntourism organization and the voluntourist. Meanwhile, Brown (2005) describes voluntourism in the context of tour operators, the voluntourist and the local people. Significantly, these three stakeholders are connected through the tour packages that offer different experiences such as volunteering opportunities and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the significance growth of Voluntourism as an alternative to traditional traveling is manifested through the increasing numbers of volunteers that have signed up for different programs, with various types of organizations throughout the world (Tomazos, 2010; Tomazos and Cooper, 2012). Meanwhile, the volunteer travel organizations normally formed for two different reasons; for-profit and non-profit (Brown, 2005). However, Tomazos (2009) classified the volunteer tourism organizations further, significantly as the focus was turned towards non-profit organizations that charge large amounts for participation. Rogers (2007) as cited in (Lo & Lee, 2011) found that, volunteer projects do not always contributes directly to the community but also through various types of program such as building homes and school, affectionate for flora and fauna, and many more.

Apparently, the supplies of community-based assistance through tour operators, NGOs and academic groups focuses not only for community development but also involved scientific research and cultural attention (Wearing, 2004).

In Malaysia, the government provides support in terms of funds, facilities, volunteers and project to cultivate voluntourism project. 1Malaysia Voluntourism is an effort by the government to acknowledge the spirit of volunteerism within the context of local community as well as the visitors in assistance to the development of tourism sector in Malaysia. Five major focus of 1Malaysia Voluntourism; 1) One Malaysia Green, One Malaysia Clean; 2) 1Malaysia Voluntutoring; 3) 1Malaysia Volunsharing; 4) 1Malaysia Event; and 5) 1Malaysia Cultural and Heritage (Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia, 2014).

1.1 Forms of Voluntourism

Volunteering involves for-profit organizations and non-profit organizations. Some might argue on the ambiguity of motives for both parties although the objectives setting on organizing voluntourism have always been the well-being of people in need. The differences of ultimate goal by both parties could be questionable and different approach should be used to reduce negative impacts and chaos on community participants. Ultimately, the voluntourism projects could be similar from one to another, the voluntourist will be asked to do voluntary works while travelling, however, the aims and objectives could be varied (Chen & Chen, 2011).

This paper attempts to propose a conceptual research framework for investigating the impacts and effectiveness of voluntourism activities in Malaysia.

1.2 Measuring Voluntourism

The significant theories of voluntourism have been used in numerous disciplines and implemented into different types of study. This research is to propose to study of three different theories that are;

i. Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis: The Voluntourist → Community in need

The empathy-altruism hypothesis states that feelings of empathy for another person produce an altruistic motivation to increase the person's welfare (Lishner & Stocks, 2007). In the context of voluntourism, a person who choose to be a voluntourist or sign up for a voluntourism program organized by an organization or the voluntourist that initiates the volunteer travel to reach the satisfaction of helping others, giving back, serving public good, charity or an initiatives to do good deeds.

ii. Impact Philanthropy Theory: The Volunteer Organization → The Voluntourist

An impact philanthropist is someone who wants to personally 'make a difference.' While that motive is straightforward, its logical implications are significantly different from other models of philanthropy. In Voluntourism context, a volunteer organization should use the opportunity of understanding the characteristic of a philanthropist to be able to involve in a particular Voluntourism project.

iii. Social Exchange Theory: The Volunteer Organization → Voluntourist → Community in need

Ap (1992) defines the social exchange theory as “a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation.” This definition suggests individuals are positively disposed toward actions from which they benefit and can be negatively disposed toward actions from which they incur costs of some kind (McGehee & Andereck, 2009). In the Voluntourism context, the community in need will accept the voluntourism if only they think the project is going to bring them benefits; be it short term or long term project.

1.3 Impacts of Voluntourism

i. To the community

Meeting more and more volunteers from wealthier countries could result in local people feeling inferior and frustrated. In addition, if many volunteers visit needy communities at the same time, this might raise problems related to tourism and infrastructure development for some countries that might not have sufficient food and resources (Lo & Lee, 2011).

ii. To the voluntourism organization (NGO/Tour operator/government agencies)

Some organization is using voluntourism as a product of tourism to generate big money from the voluntourist who signed up to the program. For long term, the commercialization of voluntourism will effect on the trust, acceptance and collaboration from the community.

iii. To the voluntourist

Voluntouring experience is the reason of signing up for voluntourism project. Therefore, the best experience should be provided by voluntourism organization. The failure of providing this will jeopardize the longevity of project as well as destroy the community trusts and support.

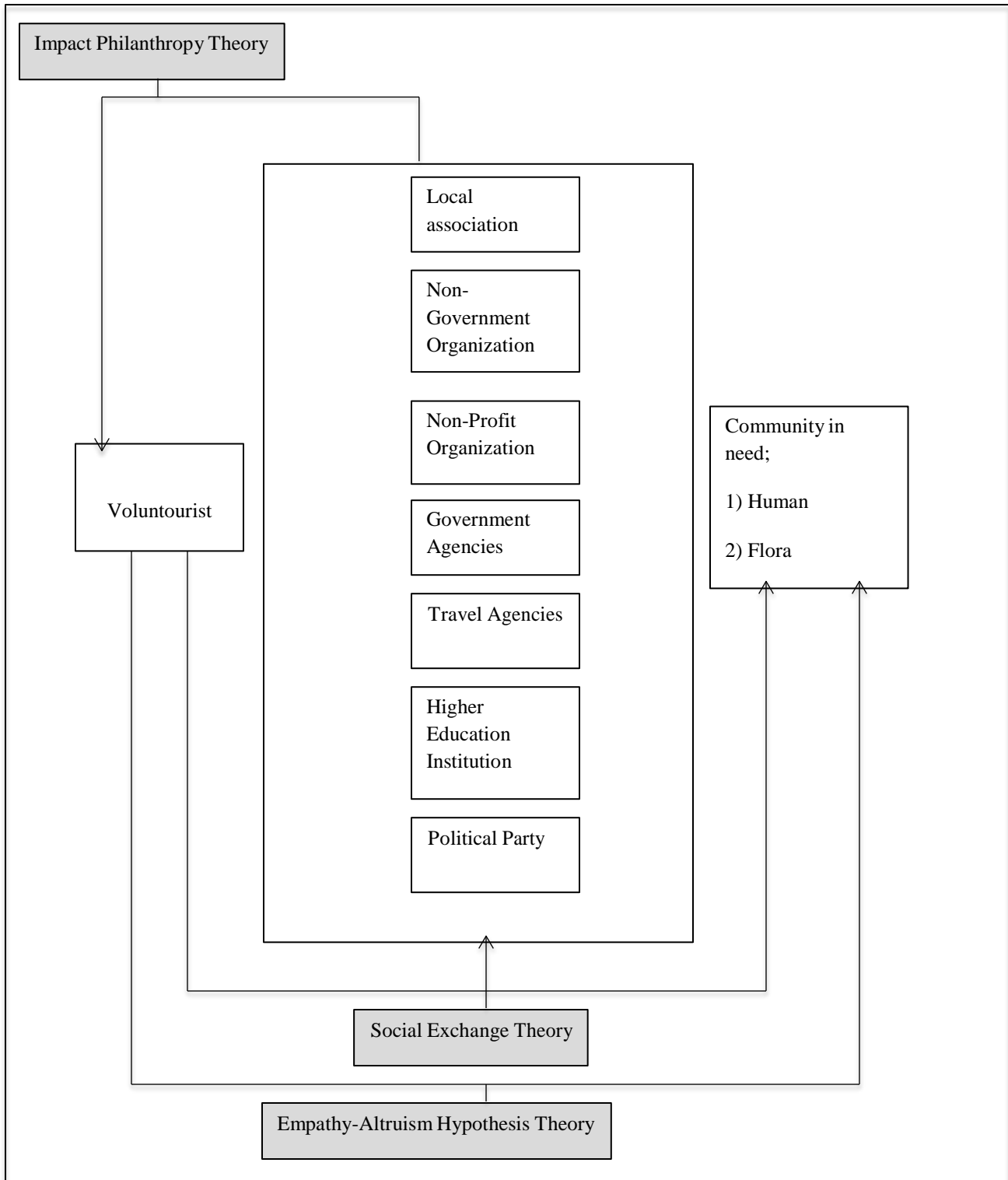


Figure 1: The Voluntourism Stakeholders and underlying theories

2. Prevailing Issues in Voluntourism

Voluntourism makes the travelling is worth living. The opportunity to be able to travel and doing voluntary work will always be a lifetime precious experiences. In fact, Voluntourism currently has the highest growth rate in global tourism and South East Asia is one of the most popular destinations (Malaysiatravelnews.com, 2014). Furthermore, the voluntourism organization actively offers various types of voluntourism project and facilitates numerous numbers of tourists from all over the world (Tomazos, 2010). Therefore, there is a need of a study to understand the implementation and the effectiveness of voluntourism project in the perspective of voluntourism stakeholders and community in need in Malaysia.

According to McGehee and Zahra (2013), the major focus has been given in understanding the voluntourist from different aspect with a paucity of study on the stakeholders involve in voluntourism projects. Unknown study has been done in Malaysia previously although the government has been very supportive in the voluntourism project. Therefore, this research will focus on the stakeholders of voluntourism organization and their implementation of voluntourism project and the effectiveness of the communities they are involved in. Raymond & Hall (2008) revealed the development of cross-cultural misunderstanding between voluntourist and the community participants through various case studies of voluntourism organization. Although the projects were aims to create cross-cultural understanding, it has turned into a never-ending misunderstanding between these two stakeholders if the voluntourism organization excluded a proper facilitation, training or a good guidance before, during and after the program.

On the other hand, the project managers of voluntourism organization should also monitor the commitment and efforts of the voluntourist in the fieldwork as well as giving attention in fulfilling their project's objectives and to cater the need and satisfaction of joined voluntourist (Tomazos & Butler, 2012). Recently, there have been media calls for the volunteer organizations to stop charging large amounts of money for their services based on the argument that where there is a need volunteering and assisting should be free of charge (Tomazos K. 2010).

2.1 The Way Forward

Voluntourism is no longer a new phenomena; in fact it has been discussed in the mainstream agenda of many countries including Malaysia. However, there are many questions remain unanswered in terms of where the volunteer tourism is heading to. Will voluntourism accepted by multiple stakeholders? What are the challenges of being philanthropists and will the community accepted it for the long term? Is there any potential for voluntourism to grow in Malaysia and any good approach and synchronize flow of activities offered to the voluntourist? Were the outcomes to all stakeholders are the same? Are the social entrepreneur will lead to a better voluntourism programme? By answering all the questions, the principles of voluntourism maybe develop or establish, at the end.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Overview

In this level, the researcher will study the different steps that are usually adopted in studying the research problem along with the logic behind them. Therefore, this part will discuss and layout the methodology in order to get information from the respondents feedback and comment. The population and sampling size, instrumentation, data collection process and plan for data analysis will also be discussed. This research project employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods are based on the analysis of data collected from secondary sources while qualitative research methods are based on primary data from ethnographic and virtual ethnographic observations, as well as semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Populations and Sampling Size

Population refers to the complete group of objects or element to the research project (Hair, Samouel, & Page, 2007). Thus, sample size is a group or is the number of observations used for calculating estimates of a given population. For this study, the population includes stakeholders of volunteer tourism-related organization that are local association, non-government organization, non-profit organization, government, travel agency, higher education institution as well as political party.

3.3 Instrumentation

An instrument is a tool that used by researchers in collecting the data for their studies. As for this study, the researcher plan to use the qualitative data collection method whereby observation and face-to-face interview will be used in collecting the data from respondents. In other words, the researcher will set an appointment of interview session with stakeholders of volunteer tourism organization as well as the local communities. On the other hand, the data collection for quantitative methods will involve questionnaire survey that will be distributed among the local community and participants of voluntourism program.

4.0 Expected outcomes

This research aims to provide a better understanding of the possible negatives and positives output in voluntourism program and the main focus will be in the context of Malaysia. Hence, the findings of this research will answer the questions of whether the voluntourism implementation in Malaysia is equally accepted by the voluntourist and the local community in need.

5.0 Conclusion

Voluntourism has been a phenomenon to the tourism industry for its offer an alternative way of traveling that includes travel and volunteering. This research is aims to understand and investigate the possible impact of voluntourism programme that has been actively promoted by the Ministry. Hence, it is important to also paying an attention to the effectiveness of the voluntourism program to anticipate ways of organizing a better program therefore it will contribute to the growth of tourism industry in Malaysia.

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