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## **Introduction for special issue. Volunteer Tourism, Cosmopolitanism and Global Citizenship.**

### **Introduction**

Up until the relatively recent growth and growing profile of ethical tourism niches, it was unusual to associate tourism with global citizenship or cosmopolitan ambition: leisure was leisure and citizenship was political. If you wanted to make a difference to the world, or to study it, holidays were not the time or place to do it.

Political and social identities have changed. Sociologists refer to the decline of 'grand narratives' of Left, Right and nation. Fukuyama famously referred to 'the end of history', an era in which the major contestation of the organisation of society has been substantially resolved (1992). Undoubtedly the end of the Cold War brought into sharp relief the apparent exhaustion of erstwhile political identities through which individuals made sense of themselves in the wider world. The political realm increasingly became a question of technocratic management of *what is* rather than future oriented ideologies relating to *what could be* (Jacoby, 1992; Furedi, 2013).

One result of this has been the rise of lifestyle oriented attempts to act upon the world and its problems, outside of the political realm as previously understood. These attempts are often based around consumption and personal experience, and involve the elevation of pre-political virtues such as care and responsibility to others over distinctive political philosophies of market, state and democracy. The human and humane impulse to act in support of others, cut adrift from Politics (with a capital 'P'), becomes more a part of Giddens' life politics (or politics with a small 'p') (1994).

The rise of volunteer tourism is a good example of the trend Giddens noted. Its rise over the last thirty years has tended to associate tourism with wider moral, social and even political projects. Whilst others are the prospective benefactors, these are very much also projects of ethical selfhood: the forging of an ethical sense of self in a world in which the import of older political and moral parameters has diminished.

According to the influential web site VolunTourism.org the first ever use of the term 'voluntourism' (synonymous with volunteer tourism) was by the Nevada Board of Tourism as recently as 1988, who coined it to encourage volunteers to help in rural tourism projects (voluntourism.org: undated). David Clemmons, volunteer tourism entrepreneur and founder of VolunTourism.org, pointed out that the Google search engine had no hits for 'voluntourism' in 2000, but by 2010 the term yielded over 300 000 hits (cited in Vasquez, 2010). As I write the figures are 556,000 hits for 'voluntourism', with over 2 million for the now more commonly used 'volunteer tourism'. Commercial volunteer tourism companies and ethical gap year organisers have boomed. Some non-governmental organisations have also adapted to the trend, offering visitor friendly trips to their development and conservation projects.

Volunteer tourism is closely associated with global citizenship in the literature and in commercial marketing (Butcher and Smith, 2015). This is also the case for ethical tourism more generally, albeit the link is more implicit. Whereas citizenship implies a relationship – legal and political – to the nation state, and via the state, to the world, global citizenship seeks moral solidarity beyond borders and operates through a global civil society of NGOs and ethical consumption. Hence tourism can provide fertile ground for examining contemporary social and political identities, and raises novel questions for anyone interested in why and how people travel as tourists.

Global citizenship does not come with its own passport, or legal / political rights. It is, however, an important reference point for people's moral, social and political ambitions, connoting a cosmopolitan view of the world and a desire to act in support of others. Much debate has focused on the extent to which volunteer tourism does, or can, achieve its stated aims, or how it could be organised to succeed in this. Some have posed the question "who benefits": the global citizen with an exciting and impressive portfolio of experiences, or the communities they seek to help. Others have sought to understand what the rise of volunteer tourism and other ethical niches indicates about contemporary culture.

It is in relation to volunteer tourism that tourism's association with cosmopolitanism and global citizenship is most developed. Stephen Wearing's *Volunteer tourism: experiences that make a difference* (2001) paved the way for a wealth of writing from a variety of disciplines and perspectives. He and his co-writers have pushed the boundaries since. Mary Mostafanezhad, Jim Butcher and Pete Smith, Wanda Vradi and others too have pursued a broadly social scientific approach, positioning volunteer tourism in the context of contemporary political, sociological and human geographical debates around neoliberalism, postcolonialism, the geographies of care and subjectivity. Others, such as Angela Benson have focussed on volunteer tourism's performance: what works, what is problematic and what is ethical (and on what basis).

Many others again have written on the topic with insight (see Wearing and McGehee, 2013 for a review). The ideas have been discussed regularly at many conferences and meetings over recent years, including those of the *American Association of Geographers* (AAG) and the *Association of Tourism and Leisure Studies* (ATLAS). The mainstream press has also taken a strong interest, and articles about the efficacy of volunteer tourism, often based on tourists' own experience, are common.

Volunteer tourism as a spur to global citizenship is a theme that can be examined from many perspectives: sociological, psychological, political, anthropological and human geographical. It also has implications for business: its operation, marketing and also its ethical basis. The special issue reflects this diversity of perspectives, between and within papers. It includes papers that broach new conceptual and methodological ground. Others look at novel questions and cases. Taken together they comprise a worthy addition, an important point of reference for scholars interested in ethical tourism and volunteer tourism as business or as a part of contemporary culture.

## References

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