

The Role of **Volunteer Tourism**: The Case of International Work Camps in Vojvodina, Serbia

TAMARA KLICEK * [tamara.klicsek@gmail.com]

ZÉLIA BREDA ** [zelia@ua.pt]

Abstract | This paper addresses the importance of volunteer tourism as a strategy to contribute to tourism development in Serbia. The instability caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia has prompted an economic crisis and a severe halt in tourism activities. International work camps in Serbia attract hundreds of volunteers from all over the world. This is considered to be helping to restore international tourism in the country and to subsequently building up and enhancing infrastructure. The paper presents an evolution of tourism in Serbia and briefly outlines the situation of tourism in Vojvodina, where numerous volunteer tourism activities have been carried out. Through the case study of international work camps promoted by the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina (VCV), the paper addresses volunteers' motivations and perceptions, and at the same time discusses how volunteering activities can contribute to tourism development. This case study reveals that most volunteer tourists see work camps also as a holiday experience, looking to visit tourist attractions in the area; simultaneously they are highly aware of their role in destination development. It also suggests that the high level of interaction between volunteers and locals raises community's awareness to tourism potential, making the first step towards future tourism activities.

Keywords | Volunteerism, Volunteer Tourism, Serbia, International Work Camps, Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina.

Resumo | Este artigo aborda a importância do voluntariado para o desenvolvimento do turismo na Sérvia. A instabilidade causada pelo desmembramento da Jugoslávia provocou uma crise económica e uma interrupção das actividades turísticas. Os campos de trabalho internacionais, que atraem centenas de voluntários de todo o mundo, contribuem para ajudar a restaurar o turismo internacional no país e, por conseguinte, a construir e a reforçar as infra-estruturas. O artigo começa por apresentar a evolução do turismo na Sérvia e descreve a situação em Vojvodina, onde se desenvolvem várias actividades de turismo voluntário. Através do estudo de caso de campos de trabalho internacionais, promovidos pelo Centro de Voluntariado de Vojvodina, pretende-se abordar as motivações dos voluntários e suas percepções, e ao mesmo tempo, analisar como é que as actividades de voluntariado podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento do turismo.

* **MSc in Management** by the University 'Privredna Akademija' (Academy for Economy & Business, Serbia) and **Assistant lecturer** at the Faculty for Management, University 'Privredna Akademija' (Academy for Economy & Business, Serbia).

** **MA in Chinese Studies Business and International Relations** by the University of Aveiro. **Assistant lecturer** and **PhD student** at the Department of Economics, Management and Industrial Engineering, University of Aveiro.

Este estudo revela que a maioria dos voluntários considera os campos de trabalho também como uma experiência de férias, esperando visitar atrações turísticas na área, mas ao mesmo tempo está consciente acerca do seu papel no desenvolvimento do destino. Também sugere que o alto nível de interação entre voluntários e residentes sensibiliza a comunidade local para o potencial do turismo, dando o primeiro passo para futuras actividades turísticas.

Palavras-chave | Voluntariado, Turismo Voluntário, Sérvia, Campos de Trabalho Internacionais, Centro de Voluntariado de Vojvodina.

1. Introduction

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe had led to profound geo-political changes in the region. In the early 1990s, Yugoslavia experienced dramatic political transformations and ethnic conflicts that led to its dissolution. Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were recognized as independent states; whereas the remaining republics of Serbia and Montenegro declared a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Under the leadership of Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia led various military interventions in neighbouring republics, which resulted in the banning of FRY from the United Nations (UN) in 1992. In 1998-99, massive expulsions of ethnic Albanians living in Kosovo provoked a reaction of the international community, leading to the NATO bombing of Belgrade. Elections in 2000 dictated the end of Milosevic's leadership, and one year later the UN suspension was lifted. In 2003, the country turned into a loose federation of two republics called Serbia and Montenegro, and in 2006, Montenegro formally separated from Serbia.

The Serbian economy experienced severe structural changes caused by these geo-political transformations, making the country lag behind in socio-economic development. The rapid collapse of Yugoslavia was followed by highly destructive warfare, the destabilisation of republic boundaries and the break-up of important inter-republic trade flows (Caritas Europa, 2002). Then the mismanagement of the economy during the

Milosevic era, the extended period of economic sanctions, and the damage of basic and productive infrastructures during the NATO bombing left the economy in a bad shape. In 2000, the new government implemented stabilisation measures, embarked upon a market reform programme (aiming to structure and privatise major sectors of the economy and to attract foreign investment) and established connections with several international organisations. Given that Montenegro detached its economy from Serbia during the Milosevic era, the formal separation of the two republics had little real impact on both economies.

Tourism was one of the sectors badly hit by the unrest of the 1990s. Serbia suffered a severe halt on tourist activities, but despite the significant drop in domestic and international tourism, the country is recovering. Nonetheless, Serbia still lacks infrastructures, being essential to invest more time and money in tourism development. Given the shortage of resources, one of the approaches could be the promotion of volunteer efforts to push tourism forward. Every year numerous volunteer activities are promoted all over the country, constituting a non-commercial and simple facet of tourism, easily providing socio-economic development in economically devastated communities.

Volunteer activities have a long and established history in Vojvodina, as well as in the rest of the country, being a presence in today's life and very significant in local community development. In light of this, the paper makes an overview of tourism in Serbia and discusses the importance of volunteerism

as a possible strategy for developing tourism in a country that had suffered, economic and socially, from damages caused by the political situation of the 1990s and early 2000s. It presents an assessment of contemporary tourism in Serbia and briefly outlines the current situation for tourism in Vojvodina. Furthermore, through the case study of the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina, the paper addresses volunteers' motivations and perceptions, and at the same time discusses how volunteering activities can contribute to tourism development.

2. Tourism in Serbia

Until the 1990s, tourism development in Serbia was in line with tourism development in Yugoslavia, which projected a particularly welcoming and positive image of the country to Western mass tourist markets (Hall, 2002). Yugoslavia was generating more tourism hard currency income than the rest of the communist Central and Eastern Europe combined (Hall, 1998), but the spending per tourist was generally much lower than in other Mediterranean destination countries (Hall, 2003). The political fragmentation of Yugoslavia and subsequent conflicts in the region destroyed the positive unitary image and changed the course of tourism. These events had reversed

Yugoslavia's position in relation to other Central and East European countries, which applied more liberal models of transition, thus stimulating new and relatively distinct images. They were seen as being suddenly open, inviting and embarking on a process of substantial transformation (Hall, 2002). By contrast, in the formerly relatively open Yugoslavia, conflict and shifts towards totalitarianism in Serbia and Croatia acted as a strong repellent to international tourism.

In the period 1990-2000, tourism in Serbia was marked by the decrease of international flows, as well as the decrease of foreign currency income (Figure 1). The decrease of international tourism arrivals was 81.3 percent, while the foreign currency income generated from tourism was reduced over 93 percent. In order to express the scale of Serbia's lagging behind the world tourism trends, it should be stressed that in the same period, the total tourism flows in the world, expressed by the number of arrivals, increased 54.4 percent, and the total income generated from the international tourism increased 77.1 percent (UNWTO, several years). From then on, Serbia's tourism arrivals and receipts have been growing steadily. In 2006 these indicators were still in the early stages of a rebound toward pre-1990s levels, having experienced however a dramatic increase in 2007. In that year, receipts quadrupled the amount achieved in 1990

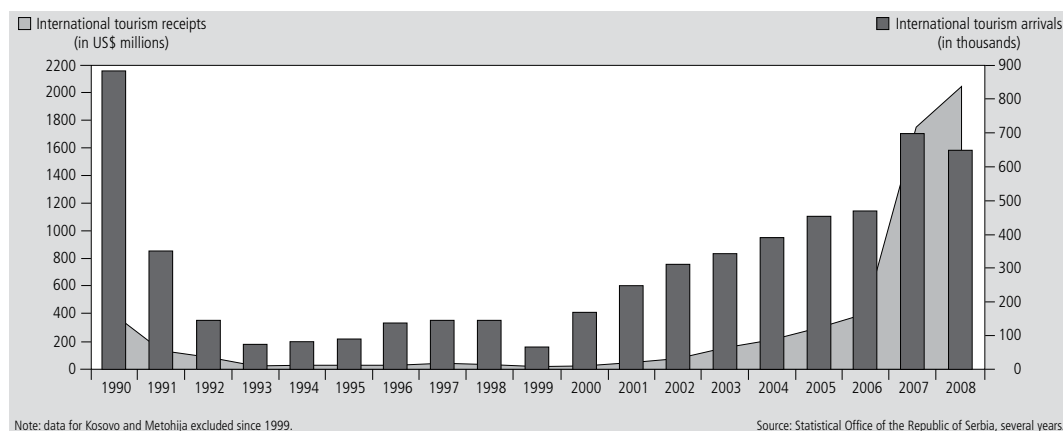


Figure 1 | International tourism arrivals and receipts in Serbia.

and arrivals experienced a 48 percent increase over the previous year. In 2008, despite the slight decline in arrivals, receipts reached its highest levels, having surpassed 2 billion USD. Underpinning this growth, stimulated by both business and leisure tourism, is the country's friendly business environment, low human capital costs, fast economic growth, and a number of desirable leisure attractions.

Domestic tourism, the major tourism segment in the country, despite having widened the gap in the share of total tourism arrivals between 1990 and 2000, had also suffered some setbacks caused by the political situation and the economic downturn and has not yet reached the pre-1990s levels. Since 2000, the share of domestic tourists has decreased, whereas international tourism has been growing steadily. This increase might be explained, in part, by the fact that, from 1999 on, data from Former Republics of SFRY, which used to be treated as domestic arrivals, is part of foreign arrivals. From 2000 to 2004, international tourism arrivals grew at an annual average rate of 24.2 percent, while domestic tourism dropped 5.7 percent. The tourism composition in 2004, right after the country turned into a loose federation of two republics, was practically the same as in 1990 (Figure 2). From 2004 on, domestic tourism has experienced an increase, however inbound tourism is growing at a faster pace, thus having already surpassed its 1990

share (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, several years).

The foundations for the revitalisation of Serbia as an international tourism destination can be attributed to the resume of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's membership in international institutions, the normalisation of diplomatic relations with key international players, and also the overall results of democratic changes (Popesku, 2002). These aspects obviously affected Serbian tourism and caused changes in its volume and structure. The positive trend in international tourist flows started in 2000, and has been noticeable all over the country, especially in big city centres, particularly in Belgrade.

The year 2000 can thus be considered as a turning point regarding the creation of the basic prerequisites for the definition of the strategic approach to introduce Serbia as a tourist destination at the international market. In 2004, a new tourism law was adopted, representing a new legal framework to promote tourism development. But it was not until 2006 that concrete steps were taken. The Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services has proclaimed it as the Year of Tourism Investments, announcing the beginning of the implementation of a new strategy of tourism development and the creation of favourable economic and legal frameworks for the rapid growth of foreign and

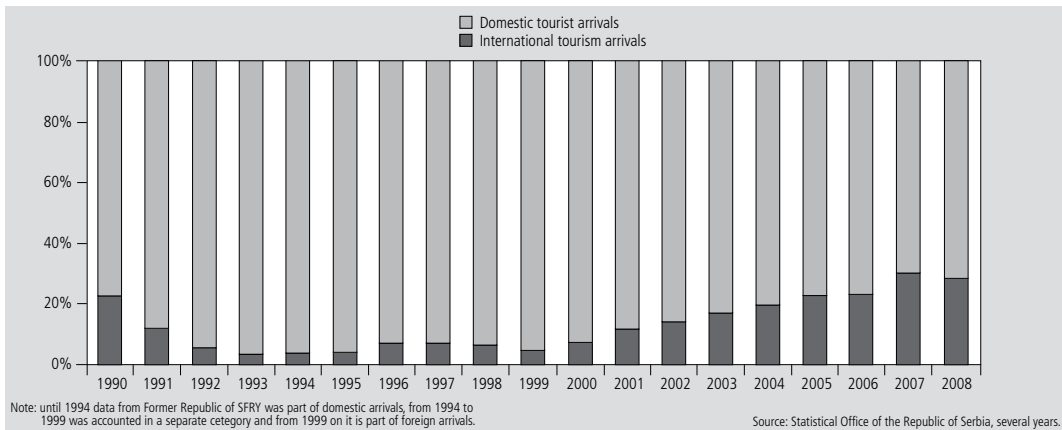


Figure 2 | Composition of tourism in Serbia.

domestic investments in the tourism sector. The Tourism Strategy (HCZ & FEUB, 2006a) was followed by three additional documents: a competitiveness plan (HCZ & FEUB, 2006b), a strategic marketing plan (HCZ & FEUB, 2006c) and a strategy for encouraging and developing foreign investment (Dimitrijevic, 2006).

There has been several factors affecting the tourism development in the country, however, the government is willing to fight these problems and is determined to seize the opportunities, developing strategies and actions. One of the outlined strategies is based on the fact that Serbia should not offer dominantly one-sided tourist products, but a large number of different products with strategic long-term potentials. The selection of these products has been based on the valuation of the market potential of existing and potential tourist products. Therefore, the highest priority has been given to nine tourism products, which have been established as especially interesting to Serbia: business tourism and MICE, city holidays, events, nautical tourism, special interest tourism, mountains and lakes, touring, health tourism and rural tourism (HCZ & FEUB, 2006a).

The tourism strategy goes further and suggests the creation of tourism clusters in Serbia, based not on the existing administrative borders, but on the concentration of different types of resources in various parts of the country. Four different geographical

clusters had been identified (Belgrade, Vojvodina, South-East and South-West Serbia), each of them with a different set of key products that should be strongly developed. Vojvodina, a very unique cluster with a rich multicultural heritage, is an autonomous province situated in the north of the country (Figure 3) and is economically the most developed area of Serbia. Agriculture accounts for 24 percent and industry is responsible for 40 percent of the GDP (CESS, 2006). Part of the income of the service sector comes from tourism, which is developed on its rich natural and cultural resources, and its interesting events. For this region, the Tourism Strategy outlines the valuation of waterways, the development of rural tourism, and the promotion of the rich and varied gastronomy, which derives from the numerous ethnic groups that have inhabited the region.

Based on its cultural, ethnic and natural resources, Vojvodina attracts about 15 percent of the country's total visitors, both domestic and international (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, several years). Volunteerism has a long record in Vojvodina, as well as in the rest of the country (Milivojevic, 2006), and has a presence in today's life. Nevertheless, these activities have not been specifically mentioned in the tourism strategy. In terms of the Serbian economy, whilst the overall national contribution of volunteering activities might be minimal, their local contribution to community

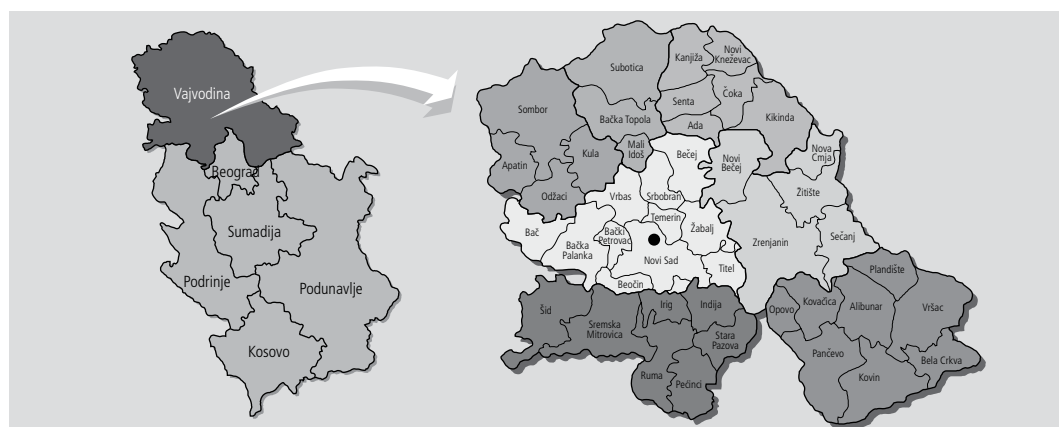


Figure 3 | Location and administrative composition of Vojvodina.

development is significant. Volunteer projects contribute to the establishment of interactions between volunteers and the community. Although these interactions might not be lengthy, they are intense, thus providing opportunities for the development of more sustainable and meaningful tourism experiences (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

3. Volunteerism and volunteer tourism in Serbia

The concept of volunteering and civil society in Serbia finds its roots in the Old Slavs tradition of solidarity that dates back many centuries ago. According to Milivojevic (2006) it can be divided into four distinct phases. Before the Second World War (1), the Serbian Church was very active in a variety of volunteer activities, especially during the Kingdom of South Slavs (end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century). In addition, several volunteer actions were undertaken by the Royal Family, and different foundations and memorials were founded by the Serbian Royal Academy. In the period right after the World War II (2), the communist regime had virtually erased freedom and the establishment of associations of citizens focusing on recreation, culture and sports, having these become part of the state-controlled system. Nonetheless, many volunteer work camps for young people were organised in different parts of the Social Federation of Yugoslavian Republics. Beside the volunteering and the travelling components, these camps were a matter of honour and reputation. They were not just organised for volunteer work, they were a proof of political loyalty. Until late 1950s, these camps were organised once a year and young people from all over the country took part for a month. In this manner, the country, ruined by the war, managed to develop its infrastructures to some extent. The idea of taking part in the camps was to show political correction to the leading structures at the time.

Since the 1970s until the beginning of the 2000s (3), volunteering has experienced ups and downs. In the 1970s, the number of volunteer work camps has reduced considerably, but in late 1980s, international volunteer camps with a concept other than political correction had started to grow. During the period of the conflict between former Yugoslavian Republics (1991-2001), the number of volunteer work camps was again substantially reduced. The cause of this was the rapid decline of standards of living and the emergence of an economic crisis. All of a sudden, life became a matter of surviving. On one hand, there was a total economic collapse, low welfare and big corruption, and on other hand there was a fast accumulation of wealth by some individuals. All this caused suspiciousness and prejudices towards public, governmental and non governmental institutions, as well as organisations in general, including volunteering groups. The political turnover of 2002 brought about a new phase in volunteering (4), existing a number of foreign Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that have been helping to build civil society in Serbia.

In 2006, in order to contribute to the development of volunteerism in Serbia, and therefore to the overall civil society development, the IZVoR Initiative started to be implemented. This Initiative started as a working group composed of members of several NGOs who attended a meeting organised to celebrate the International Volunteers' Day. It was then decided that they would jointly support actions with the aim of introducing official volunteering policies and legal means of regulation of the volunteers' status in Serbia. All stakeholders involved in the project intended to promote a culture of volunteerism as an organised way of citizens' participation in local community development, and increase capacities of citizens and civil society organisations to influence policies and contribute in the country's development process (NSHC, 2005).

The Civil Society 2005 survey (Milivojvic, 2006) indicates that approximately two fifths of the citizens in Serbia had volunteered at least once during

the previous year. While these statistics about local volunteering exist, there is no data about people coming from abroad to make volunteer contributions to local community. One of the reasons for the absence of quantitative data might be the fragmented nature of these activities. It is known however that in the late 1980s (possibly as a result of the foundation of the Volunteer Service of Serbia – a service for the exchange of international volunteers –, which can be pointed as the beginning of international volunteer tourism in Serbia, and again after the bombings in 1999), the number of international volunteer camps has started to develop (Klicek, 2007).

Volunteer tourism makes use of these “holiday-makers who volunteer to fund and work on conservation projects around the world and which aims to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration” (Wearing, 2004: 217). It is a new form of alternative tourism with new business structures, new motivations for travelling and gives rise to new experiences. Tourism is thus seen, not only as an industry with an economic rationale, but as a social force, by fostering cross-cultural understanding, contributing to cultural and environmental protection, facilitating learning, promoting peace and fomenting global consciousness (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

According to Wearing (2001: 1), a volunteer tourist is someone, that for various reasons, “volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve helping to alleviate the suffering or material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment”. For Scheyvens (2002: 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.”

According to Rando (2004), the motivations of volunteer tourists can be divided into three different groups. The egocentric motivation (1) is based on the fact that the travel itself carries the need for satisfaction through pleasant and fun experiences. The altruistic motivation (2) is based on fact that volunteer tourists travel to change something in others’ lives or in the social environment. Bio-centric motivations (3) are those that run on a journey directed towards the interaction with the living environment (organisms and ecosystems).

Most of the research in this area has concentrated on the profile and motivations of volunteer tourists (Brown & Morrison, 2003; McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Norman, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Mustonen, 2005; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2000, 2002; Wearing & Deane, 2003), while only a small number of studies have been directed to the communities who host the volunteers, exploring the socio-cultural and environmental sustainability of volunteer tourism (Guttentag, 2009; Solinas *et al.*, n.d.; Wearing, 2001, 2004).

It is generally pointed that the interaction between locals and international volunteer tourists leads to a creative cross-cultural process resulting in innovation and in tourism development (i.e. turn a local destination into a tourism destination). Volunteer tourism is thus beneficial both for volunteers and for the local community. Indeed, volunteer work, considering its international and intercultural aspects, has a great influence on local communities. It helps to stimulate citizens’ participation on problem solving in their local communities and to improve the quality of the environment. Also, it is a very good way for volunteers themselves to gain a valuable educational experience, knowledge, new skills, and overcome preconceptions and xenophobia, by raising their cross-cultural and global perspectives (Jones, 2005).

4. International volunteer work camps in Vojvodina: an empirical study

4.1. Methodology

In order to identify the potential of tourism development through volunteering activities, a study was carried out in 10 international volunteer work camps that took place in Vojvodina from May to September 2005 (Klicek, 2007). The study aimed to make a socio-demographic characterisation of international volunteers that participate in work camps in Vojvodina; find out more about their motivations, expectations and impressions on volunteerism and the area; and identify what type of tourist activities they engage in during their stay. The study was based on non-participant observation and on a questionnaire, which was administered in English to the total number of international volunteers that took part in work camps organised by the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina (VCV) in 2005. In total, 114 volunteers were contacted for the survey and the response rate was 100 percent. The questionnaire, built based on the ATLAS cultural tourism research project conducted in 2004, was divided into three main sections: the first relates to the general characterisation of volunteers; followed by a section in which respondents were asked about their perceptions and expectations. The third section concerns the importance of volunteering activities in the promotion of tourism activities. Content analyses were used in the open-ended questions, whereas closed-ended questions were analysed using the SPSS software package.

4.2. Characterisation of the volunteer centre of Vojvodina

The VCV was founded, in 2004, as a programme of the Nature Conservation Movement of Vojvodina, with the aim of promoting awareness about volunteerism. In 2005, the VCV was established

as an independent NGO, intending to organise volunteering programs, promote youth education and exchange programmes at the international level, cooperate with similar organisations in the region and around the world, exchange cultural experiences and promote the acceptance of differences (VCV, 2006).

International work camp projects are one of its most important activities. They represent a special kind of short-term volunteer work, involving teams of volunteers from a range of countries, who contribute to solve specific problems, benefiting local communities. During its three first years of existence, the VCV organized 23 international work camps in Vojvodina and welcomed more than 240 volunteers from all around the world, mostly young people. Work camps take place from June to October, usually lasting 2 to 4 weeks, and comprising 10 to 20 participants per group. These camps cover different topics, but are mostly ecological camps.

4.3. Results and analysis

Volunteer demographic profile. International volunteers that participated in VCV work camps in 2005 were young people predominately aged from 20 to 29 years old (74%), female (62%) and with education on the secondary level (83%). The preponderance of this education level is explained by the relatively low age of respondents and the fact that 93.4 percent were still pursuing their studies at a higher level. Volunteers came from 23 countries around the world but the majority was from Europe, especially from Macedonia (13%), Italy (10%), Poland (9%), France (9%), Czech Republic (8%) and Belgium (7%).

Previous knowledge about the area. More than 70 percent of respondents had never been in Vojvodina before, so they privileged several sources of information about the area prior to their arrival. They mostly used Internet (32%), friends and family

(22%), guide books (14%), and newspapers and magazines (14%) as means to be informed. Only 5 percent used TV and radio as sources of information, and 5 percent contacted tourism boards to get more insights on the region. Not even one volunteer has selected travel agencies and tour operators as sources of information.

Motivations. Most of the volunteers (53%) chose to go to Vojvodina to take part on work camps primarily to gain new skills through volunteering activities. Almost 31 percent decided to join because they would like to learn more about the local culture, 13 percent mentioned that what impelled them to participate was the desire to help others and 3 percent wanted to learn a new language.

Volunteerism and tourism. Only 20 percent of respondents considered their trip solely as voluntary work, while the rest of them regarded it as some form of holiday. Given that volunteers participated in eco-camps, 30 percent perceived their trip as an ecotourism and nature-based holiday and 16 percent considered it as a rural holiday, whereas 16 percent regarded the trip as a cultural holiday. Volunteers, in general, were very interested in visiting cultural attractions in the region (such as historic and religious sites, monuments and museums), which is in accordance with their desire to learn more about the local culture.

Expectations. Regarding their experience in Vojvodina, volunteers were asked to mention aspects that they were expecting to find but did not get, and, conversely, aspects that they were not anticipating but did receive. According to the results, volunteers were expecting more visits within the area and in other regions, more crime, more organisational capacity and order, and more discussions about the war and the economic situation of the country. Volunteers were surprisingly endowed with good food, hospitable and helpful people, multiculturalism, enjoyment and friendships.

Discussion. In general, volunteer tourists are willing and have a desire to travel, often large distances, for the purpose of volunteering their time and skills toward worthwhile causes (Brown & Morrison, 2003). It is the concept of travel that has the greatest appeal to volunteer tourists. VCV volunteers, mostly young people still pursuing their education, can thus be regarded as a special type of tourists. These are usually curious to learn about a new culture, highly aware of their role in the destination and build up a high level of interaction with other volunteers and local residents (Wearing, 2002), through not lengthy but intensive experiences. The high level of interaction between volunteers and locals raises community's awareness to tourism potential, making the first step towards future tourism activities.

In Vojvodina, volunteer tourists generally experienced a surprise, meaning that the experience and the impression of the area were over their expectation because of lively and enjoyable atmosphere and open minded people, who were very hospitable and welcoming despite having experienced more than ten years of economy and politic crises. Intangible heritage values were thus recognised as important assets in Vojvodina, especially the hospitality of the local people. Moreover, this region was perceived as being a rich cultural area cherishing multicultural and linguistic diversity.

This case study reveals that the majority of volunteer tourists see work camps also as a holiday experience, looking to visit different tourist attractions in the area. This is in accordance with other studies that reveal that besides altruistic values, people engage in volunteer activities for other reasons: personal interest and social motivations, such as cultural immersion, educational and bounding opportunities, camaraderie, excitement and travelling prospects (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Ralston *et al.*, 2005; Smith, 2003; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004). In a research undertaken in Croatia, Forcic (2007) shows that the attitudes about volunteering, in general, reveal that the best about it is meeting interesting people.

VCV activities are prepared and run in partnership with the community, integrating local authorities, youth, other NGOs, local public companies and interested individuals. In this way there is a clear focus on community needs. Collaboration and partnerships also result in a stronger incentive for locals to value their resources, to preserve them and support tourism activities. NGOs look to practise a form of tourism with the intention of affecting new and positive attitudes, values and actions in the tourist and the host community (Wearing *et al.*, 2005), and often engage in tourism with the aim of achieving socially appropriate tourism, which is defined as having community support and involving the host community in decision making (Hall, 1991). Since VCV is a NGO and not a tour operator promoting volunteer tourism, its initiatives offer a true experience, putting an emphasis on altruism, learning and networking or meeting like-minded people, which are characteristics appreciated by volunteer tourists motivated by humanitarian values (Coghlan, 2006).

In short, volunteer tourism is low key in nature, includes small scale initiatives, encourages the involvement of communities and promotes locally owned businesses. Revenues, although limited because the small scale and seasonality of projects, supplement incomes of local families and add to a general fund used for community improvement projects. It is thus an alternative form of tourism very significant in local development, being a tool with which communities can have greater control over their own development. It is also a good way to help transitioning countries to develop their economies and infrastructures.

5. Conclusion

Tourism in Serbia is a promising sector, but has performed far from its full potential. There has been a slow progress of recovery after the country's separation from Yugoslavia, both for

foreign and domestic tourism. However, Serbia has a good tourist potential and the government has increased efforts to attract tourists and investment to develop tourism infrastructure. It is to believe that if general circumstances were different, Serbia would have become one of the most attractive tourism destinations in the region.

With the development of a tourism strategy in 2006, the country has laid down the foundations for a rapid tourism development. Four geographical tourism clusters have been identified, based on the concentration of different type of resources in various parts of the country. One of them is Vojvodina, a province located in northern Serbia, which is rich in natural and cultural resources, and with numerous interesting events. The strategy outlines that this region should be especially devoted to the valuation of its waterways, the development of rural tourism, and the promotion of its rich and varied gastronomy. No mention, however, was made to volunteering activities, which have a long history in Vojvodina and a significant impact on local community and tourism development.

Every year, more and more international participants take part in work camps in northern Serbia, meaning that interest in this type of activities in Vojvodina is developing. International work camps are a unique way of volunteering, open to anyone who wants to contribute to the development and improvement of a local society, thus being especially useful in economies lacking the adequate resources. At the same time, for volunteers, these camps are the most affordable way to travel, make friendships with people from all over the world, learn about other cultures, and attain new practical skills by working and helping in local communities. International volunteers thus have an opportunity to experience the culture and traditions of the host country in a direct manner. Volunteer camps also provide opportunities for cross socio-cultural exchange, mutual understanding, self actualisation and learning. All these aspects show the authenticity of volunteering as a form of tourism that offers

volunteer tourists the possibility to develop their own potentials having unusual, educational and cultural travel experiences.

At the same time, the convergence of aims between local communities and the tourism sector can be enhanced through volunteer-community experiences. Volunteer tourism is a way of raising local community's awareness of the tourism potential and therefore making the first step towards future tourism activities. It is also a good approach to create a society in which volunteering and environmental protection are basic values and the means to achieve gradual development and progress of a tourist destination by involving the entire community. Although volunteer tourism is a niche market in today's tourism industry, the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina, in partnership with local authorities and tourism organisations, should ensure local engagement in the tourism development process through improving resources such as community skills, knowledge and culture. Therefore, volunteer tourism could become a tool with which communities would have greater control over their own development.

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank the Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina (VCV) for its support.

References

- Brown, S. & Lehto, X., 2005, Travelling with a purpose: Understanding the motives and benefits of volunteer vacationers, *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 8(6), pp. 479-496.
- Brown, S. & Morrison, A., 2003, Expanding Volunteer Vacation Participation: An Exploratory Study on the Mini-Mission Concept. *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 28(3), pp. 73-82.
- Caritas Europa, 2002, *Report on Poverty in Europe*, Caritas Europa, Bruxelles.
- Centre for Strategic Economic Studies of Vojvodina (CESS), 2006, *Vojvodina: Future Region*. [Available at <http://www.vojvodina-cess.org/download/Vojvodina-future%20region.pdf>], (Site accessed 13 September 2006).
- Coghlan, A., 2006, Volunteer tourism as an emerging trend or an expansion of ecotourism? A look at potential clients' perceptions of volunteer tourism organisations, *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, Vol. 11(3), pp. 225-237.
- Dimitrijevic, B., 2006, *Invest in Tourism in Serbia*, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.
- Forcic, G., 2007, *Volonterstvo i razvoj zajedniuce – sudjelovanje gradjana u inicijativama u zajednici* (Volunteering and development – civil engagement to initiatives in local community), Udurga za razvoj civilnog drustva SMART, Rijeka, Croatia.
- Guttentag, D.A., 2009, The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 11(6), pp. 537-555.
- Hall, C.M., 1991, *Introduction to Tourism in Australia: Impacts, Planning and Development*, Longman Cheshire, London.
- Hall, D., 1998, Central and Eastern Europe, in Williams, A.M. and Shaw, G. (eds), *Tourism and Economic Development in Europe*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, pp. 345-373.
- Hall, D., 2002, Brand development, tourism and national identity: The re-imaging of former Yugoslavia, *The Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 9(4-5), pp. 323-334.
- Hall, D., 2003, Rejuvenation, diversification and imagery: Sustainability conflicts for tourism policy in the Eastern Adriatic, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 11(2-3), pp. 280-294.
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F., 2006, More than an "industry": The forgotten power of tourism as a social force, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 27(6), pp. 1192-1208.
- Horwath Consulting Zagreb (HCZ) & Faculty of Economics of the University of Belgrade (FEUB), 2006a, *Tourism Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.
- Horwath Consulting Zagreb (HCZ) & Faculty of Economics of the University of Belgrade (FEUB), 2006b, *Tourism Strategy of the Republic of Serbia: Competitiveness Plan*, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.
- Horwath Consulting Zagreb (HCZ) & Faculty of Economics of the University of Belgrade (FEUB), 2006c, *Tourism Strategy of the Republic of Serbia: Marketing Plan*, Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Services of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.
- Jones, A., 2005, Assessing international youth service programmes in two low income countries, *Voluntary Action: The Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research*, Vol. 7(2), pp. 87-100.
- Klicek, T., 2007, *The Creative Enhancement of Cultural Tourism of Vojvodina Through International Volunteer Camps*, Master Thesis, Faculty For Management (FAM), Novi Sad.
- McGehee, N.G., 2002, Volunteer Tourism and Social Movement Participation, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, pp. 124-143.
- McGehee, N.G., & Norman, W.C., 2002, Volunteer Tourism as Impetus for Consciousness-Raising, *Tourism Analysis*, Vol. 6(3/4), pp. 239-251.
- McGehee, N.G. & Santos, C.A., 2005, Social change, discourse and volunteer tourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 32(3), pp. 760-779.
- Milivojevic, Z., 2006, *Civil Society in Serbia - CIVICUS Civil Society Index report for Serbia*, Research & Analytical Center ARGUMENT in collaboration with The Center for the Development of Non-profit Sector (CDNPS), Belgrade.

- Mustonen, P., 2005, Volunteer Tourism: Postmodern Pilgrimage?, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Vol. 3(3), pp. 160-177.
- Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC), 2005, *Initiative for Volunteerism Legislation in the Republic of Serbia*, [Available at http://www.nshc.org.yu/eng_nshc/eng_izvor.htm], (Site accessed 11 November 2006).
- Popesku, J., 2002, *Ecotourism: A Tool for Sustainable Tourism Development in Serbia*. Paper presented at The World Ecotourism Summit, Québec City, 19-22 May.
- Rando, D., 2004, *Volunteer Tourism: A Viable Activity for Ontario?*, Master Thesis, Faculty of Forestry, University of Toronto, Ontario.
- Ralston, R., Lumsdon, L., & Downward, P., 2005, The third force in events tourism: Volunteers at the XVII Commonwealth Games, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 13(5), pp. 504-519.
- Smith, K.A., 2003, Literary enthusiasts as visitors and volunteers, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 5(2), pp. 83-95.
- Solinas, M., Clò, S., Nicósia, M., n.d., *Eco-Volunteering Programs as Good Practices for Nature Conservation and Sustainable Tourism Development in Protected Areas*, [Available at <http://nuke.aisa-on-line.org/>], (Site accessed 15 November 2009).
- Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), several years, *Statistical Yearbook of Serbia*, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.
- Stoddart, H., & Rogerson, C.M., 2004, Volunteer tourism: The case of Habitat for Humanity South Africa, *GeoJournal*, Vol. 60(3), pp. 311-318.
- UNWTO, several years, *Yearbook of Tourism Statistics*, World Tourism Organization, Madrid.
- Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina (VCV), 2006, *About Volunteer Centre of Vojvodina*. [Available at <http://www.volontiraj.org.yu/>], (Site accessed 5 November 2006).
- Wearing, S., 2000, Refiguring Self and Identity through Volunteer Tourism, *Loisir et Société*, Vol. 23(2), pp. 389-419.
- Wearing, S., 2001, *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences That Make a Difference*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford.
- Wearing, S., 2002, Re-centering the Self in Volunteer Tourism, in Dann, G. (ed.), *The Tourist as a Metaphor of the Social World*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford.
- Wearing, S., 2004, Examining best practice in volunteer tourism, in Stebbins, R.A. and Graham, R.T. (eds), *Volunteering as Leisure/Leisure as Volunteering*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford, pp. 209-224.
- Wearing, S., McDonald, M. & Ponting, J., 2005, Building a Decommodified Research Paradigm in Tourism: The Contribution of NGOs, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 13(5), pp. 424-439.