The liquid organization of volunteer tourism

Implications for responsibility

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THE LIQUID ORGANIZATION OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract

Drawing from developments in sociology and organizational studies, this paper argues for a new understanding of volunteer tourism as liquid organization. It aims to explore the organization of volunteer tourism using a liquid organization perspective and to better understand the potential implications of this liquidity on the responsibility of volunteer tourism organizations to host com- munities. The analysis is based on data collected from 80 volunteer tourism organizations. The findings reveal that the volunteer tourism organizations show characteristics of liquid organiza- tion to varying degrees. The significance of the research is to problematize the way in which the institutional characteristics of volunteer tourism are (not) conceptualized in current literature and to introduce liquid organization as a means of reinvigorating debate about responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism has been widely characterized as a form of alternative tourism, with early proponents arguing that it can offer meaningful experiences and potential benefits for both host communities and guests (e.g. Wearing, 2001). However, critical scholars have increasingly questioned the benefits of volunteer tourism for host communities. There is still a lack of clarity about whether volunteer tourism contributes to poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods,

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and social and economic progress appears a distant promise for many host communities (e.g. Guttentag, 2009, 2011; Butcher, 2011). More recently, Lyons and Wearing (2008) have taken issue with the commercialisation of the volunteer tourism industry, arguing that while profit remains a key driver and host communities are positioned as resources to be exploited, the mooted benefits of volunteer tourism are likely to remain hypothetical. As Butcher and Smith (2010) point out, the impacts on local communities are assumed rather than researched and new thinking in terms of how to empower local communities and responsibility in volunteer tourism appears to have stalled. This blockage may be attributed in part to the resistance of capitalist interests to prioritise community benefit over profit (Wearing and McGehee 2013a, 2013b). However, could it also be that our embedded ideas about volunteer tourism as a monolithic industrial complex is hindering our capacity to identify alternative and more nuanced sources of potential action to deliver community benefits?

The aim of this paper is to explore the organization of volunteer tourism using a liquid organization perspective to better understand the potential implications of this liquidity on the responsibility of volunteer tourism organizations to host communities. Our point of departure is to question how the organization of volunteer tourism is conceptualized (or taken for granted) in critical debates. Drawing from developments in sociology and organizational studies (Giddens, 1991, 2000; Bauman, 2000), this paper argues that the concept of liquid organization can deliver new understandings by questioning conceptualizations of volunteer tourism as a solid and internally consistent industrial subsector where responsibility to deliver community benefit rests with tourism operators. Instead, the liquid organization perspective opens up a dynamic, internally heterogeneous view of volunteer tourism where the power to deliver community benefits is dynamic, diverse, distributed and temporal. In addressing the above aim, the analysis is based on data collected from 80 volunteer tourism organizations and 31 interviews with organization representatives. This paper argues that many volunteer tourism organizations display characteristics symbolic of liquid organizations (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014), and this liquidity has significant practical and ethical implications for how volunteer tourism operates and how roles and responsibilities are attributed.

Three assumptions shape the approach taken in this paper. First, our understanding of the organizational characteristics of volunteer tourism is an important determinant of how and where we perceive opportunities for action (i.e. to deliver benefits to local communities). In other words, the taken-for-granted assumption that volunteer tourism is a solid industrial complex has contributed to a view where operators have responsibility for delivery benefits and that communities are passive recipients. In other words, we seek to undo this dominant ontological framing of volunteer tourism. By invoking a liquid perspective on volunteer tourism, we raise questions about where the locus of control lies; who has responsibility (and the inherent contradictions that are implied in a post-structural perspective); and what might be done to further the interests of host communities. The significance and contribution of this paper then is

to raise discussion away from mid-level industry-centred critique of the failures of volunteer tourism, to develop deeper insights into the consequences of meta-sociological shifts such as liquid modernity and individualisation. In doing so, we can better understand the nature of partnerships between volunteer tourism organisations and host communities, and ascertain areas for volunteer tourism organisations to improve their practices, as well as identify opportunities for host communities to re-assert their agency and, possibly, take a greater role in their futures.

Second, our framing of "communities" is necessarily post-structural. "Host" or "local" communities often comprise individuals and groups with both shared and conflicting social, cultural and economic values and interests (Mascarenhas, Coelho, Subtil, & Ramos, 2010). Community members also have different levels of engagement in volunteer tourism, and as a result, the nature of an individual's involvement with volunteer tourism may determine their perspective on such activities (Burrai, Font & Cochrane, 2015).

Third, this paper positions host communities' as important stakeholders in volunteer tourism. It seeks to reveal and understand volunteer tourism organization's responsibilities towards host communities. While it is acknowledged that host communities are not necessarily passive recipients of volunteer tourism, it is also acknowledged that host communities and volunteer tourism organizations generally exist within unequal power relationships whereby communities may be dependent on volunteer tourism organizations for resources and funding (Sin, 2010; McGehee, 2014?). Therefore, within the boundaries of this paper the focus is predominantly on using the liquid organization perspective to focus on the actions and organization of volunteer tourism organizations rather than host community perspectives (see Burrai, Font & Cochrane, 2015 for an in-depth analysis of host community perspectives on volunteer tourism).

Late modernity and liquid organization

Under traditional or early modernity, which dominated for most of the twentieth century, the scientific paradigm inspired a hegemonic worldview. Translated into organizational studies, relationships were structured, hierarchical and fixed, lines of command and control were clear, and organizational boundaries could be clearly delineated. Towards the latter part of the twentieth century, post-structural scholars started chipping away at the fixed nature of these structures, arguing that massive social and technological changes hastened by globalization and neoliberalism, were increasing mobility, transience and individual agency (Giddens, 1991; Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994). Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity thesis formed the foundation for theorising about liquid organization distinguishing between early or 'solid' modernity and what he termed 'liquid' modernity. Bauman (2000) described 'solid modernity' as consisting of stable structures in which institutions such as governments exerted power through control and limiting possibilities. In organizational studies, the stratification of actors into different roles or organizational categories meant that tasks could be attributed to actors and lines of responsibility could be clearly delineated. Weber (1947) and Mintzberg (e.g. 1973, 2008) were among those that contributed to this systems view of organizations and machine bureaucracy.

Bauman (2000) argued that solid organization has shifted into a liquefied state, which he calls "liquid modernity". Like liquids, liquid modernity is fluid, flexible and does not hold its shape for long. In liquid modernity, social and technological shifts are feeding post-industrialisation, where the focus has shifted from production to consumption, and from an industrial to an experience economy. Individuals create their own identities through consumption as an ever-changing and ongoing process. Liquid times are uncertain, unregulated and privatised, and identities and relationships change at speed (Bauman, 2000). Unlike solid modernity that strove for certainty, liquid modern life is 'rhizomatic', it is 'a constant state of becoming, a middle without a beginning and an end' (Blackshaw, 2005, p.93). In the process, there has been a blurring of boundaries in a number of long established dualisms in organizational studies such as producer-consumer, public-private, centre-margin, and power-resistance (O'Doherty et al, 2013). In tourism a similar blurring has been registered in concepts such as origin-destination, home-away, host-guest, and producer-consumer (Dredge and Jamal, 2013).

Despite the increasing attention paid to liquid or late modernity, much of the focus has been on the processes and effects of individualisation, risk and reflexivity. Put simply, the break down in the solid structures of modernity has led to processes of pluralisation and individualisation that have, in turn, resulted in a reconfiguration of relationships between the individual and society. Giddens (1994) captures this in the notion of 'life politics', where collective solutions to societal problems are being replaced by individual choices and actions. In the tourism literature there has been little exploration of these wider sociological processes with the exception of a few authors. Butcher and Smith (2010), for example, call attention to the way that life politics has influenced the growth of volunteer tourism. Dredge & Jenkins (2012) draw attention to the way these processes are prompting tourism policy agents to respond to perceived (political) risks rather than societal issues. To date however, there has been no explicit attention to the consequences of liquid modernity for the organization of tourism, a gap this paper seeks to address.

Building upon Bauman's liquid modernity, Clegg and Baumeler (2010) and Kociatekiewicz and Kostera (2014) argue that organizations and institutions also change and liquefy. These authors conceptualise liquid organization as a landscape of hybrid organizational types, ambiguous organizational identities, flexible and dynamic structures, fluid missions and objectives, uncertain futures and loose partnership bonds and commitments within ever growing and changing networks of organizations, projects and individuals. Clegg and Baumeler (2010: 1723) further explain:

> Where organizational life is increasingly subject to liquid differentiation, people
> move rapidly from project to project, assuming and making new identities as they
> shift. The opportunities for coherence are both more difficult, as projects present

discontinuity of places, people and problems, and more challenging for those who seek to escape upwards from the demands of peripatetic project life.

In comparing the liquid organization with the classical organizations of solid modernity, Clegg and Baumeler (2010, p.1717) state, "If the classical organization gave us the character of a bureaucrat secure in routines, imbued in the spirit of living an ethos of vocation, the liquidly modern organization is embedded not in such a stable character but in one rapidly mutating". In addition, Bauman's (2005) notion of liquid relations, i.e. relations that are loose and fleeting, also traverses into liquid organizations and thus according to Clegg and Baumeler (2010, p.1718) "liquid organizations in Bauman's sense will be those in which investments in people are very largely liquid, are easily liquidated and carry no long-term investment implications". These characteristics can easily apply to volunteer tourism organizations, so the question is, to what extent is this liquid organizations lens useful in understanding the challenges associated with the management of volunteer tourism?

Although Bauman (e.g. 2000) often poses solid and liquid modernity as contrasting opposites, he also states that the boundaries between solid and liquid modernity are to some degree porous, and solid and liquid modernity are not completely separate from one another. Rather, there is "a degree of overlap between the two, a seeping of the 'solid' into the 'liquid' other" (Blackshaw, 2005, p.48). Thus, solid and liquid exist together. Liquidity and mobility are often romanticised as a measure of neoliberal flexibility, adaptability and superiority, but Costas (2013), drawing from Sartre (1943/2003), calls for a widening of the metaphor arguing that liquidity can only be understood by including notions of stickiness and friction (Costas, 2013). Further, Clegg and Baumeler (2010) argue that there is still a high level of ambiguity because there are still examples of 'solid' organization in liquid modernity.

A key moral and ethical concern in both solid and liquid modernity is *adiaphorization*, or the moral distancing of people from their decisions and actions (Bauman, 2000; Bauman and Donskis, 2013). In solid times, responsibility was drawn upwards to managers, and in liquid modernity managers deflect responsibility, casting it downwards to subordinates who are supposed to self-manage. Adiaphorization in the context of liquid organization has only recently begun to receive attention (e.g. Bauman, 2014; Clegg & Baumeler, 2010; Jensen, 2014; Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014). A central concern is that liquid organizations, given their fluidity and liquid approaches to responsibility, may be prone to distancing themselves from their moral obligations in order to increase efficiency and promote their own interests. Bauman (2014, p.xvi) explains adiaphorization:

> … as the process of cutting down moral responsibility to a *manageable size;*
> and of recycling it into a form that is amenable to management. Reduction and
> simplification of moral obligations and ethically inspired emotions in general

are viewed as indispensable conditions for a focused, determined, efficient and therefore rational conduct. (italics in original)

In this vein, moral responsibility *for* an-Other, an interpretation inspired by Kierkegaard 1859/1962 and later Levinas, 1969 and which denotes a commitment to the flourishing and well-being of an-Other motivated by an ethic of care at a deeply personal level, has shifted towards a consequentialist viewpoint. In this view, responsibility is attributed in a crowd of others, and actions are evaluated in terms of its consequences or impacts of certain actions. In this process responsibility is abstracted, de-personalised and individualistic (Bauman, 2014). In market-mediated conditions, this adiaphorization – or distancing of the individual from moral commitment and its breaking down into manageable components - takes place when the market buys into the "moral tranquilizer" that volunteer tourism helps local host communities (Ognjenovic, 2010).

As we will unpack below, this discussion of liquid organization, its fluidity and stickiness, resonates with the organization of volunteer tourism and the difficulty of understanding responsibility in volunteer tourism. Table 1 summarizes the themes emerging in the literature on 'solid' and 'liquid' organization, and it helps to unpack the empirical complexity of liquid organization later in the paper.

Table 1. Comparison of Solid and Liquid Organizations

Solid Organizations	Liquid Organizations
• Fixed hierarchical structures	• Fluid post-structural shape
• Highly regulated by government	• Minimal government regulation
• Fixed identities	• Shifting identities
• Close partnerships & stable Relationships	• Loose partnerships & unstable relationships
• Long-term solid goals & commitments	• Short-term fluid goals & commitments
• Clear attribution of responsibilities	• Shifting responsibilities

Liquid organization and volunteer tourism

Little theoretical or practical attention has been given to the organizational characteristics of volunteer tourism. Some literature acknowledges that volunteer tourism takes place within a

variety of organizational contexts including different organizational types, profit statuses, operational arrangements and motivations for engaging with volunteer tourism (e.g. ATLAS/TRAM, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Other literature reveals some general assumptions about roles and responsibilities of volunteer tourism actors that infer a particular understanding of the organization. For instance, the literature frequently argues that volunteer tourism organizations are responsible for meeting the diverse needs of stakeholders including volunteer tourists and host communities (Coghlan & Noakes, 2012; Ong et al., 2011; Raymond, 2008a) and that good practice adopted by volunteer tourism organizations is central to maintaining a sustainable and responsible volunteer tourism industry (Wearing & McGehee, 2013a, 2013b). Such attributions of responsibility suggest that these researchers are, at least implicitly, interpreting volunteer tourism organization in terms of fixed and solid structures although these assumptions are not made explicit. Furthermore, there is some limited acknowledgement that boundaries and distinctions between categories of actors at times are blurred, but the implications of these observations are not followed through in terms of understanding how this affects roles and responsibilities.

Here, we do not wish to minimise the important understandings generated from this existing research. Rather, we seek to raise attention to the idea that there is a blind spot in thinking whereby the fluid, slippery and difficult organization of volunteer tourism has been acknowledged but its implications disregarded as researchers fall back on a solid modern lens. But the implications of this fluidity, according to Bauman (2000) and discussed above is *adiaphorization*, or the distancing of actors from responsibility. Volunteer tourism researchers have picked up on this indirectly, and have expressed frustrations that those actors who have been attributed responsibility are not fulfilling these expectations (e.g. Sin, 2010). We argue that these frustrations are symptomatic of an ontological gap between the liquid organization of volunteer tourism and the solid attribution of responsibilities for implementing sustainable practices by the researchers. While responsibility tends to be interpreted as a 'solid' attribute, for example, clearly attributed responsibilities between stakeholders, stable relationships between partners and long-term commitments from organizations, in reality volunteer tourism organizations typically operate in a more liquid manner. This gap produces a rhetorical dead end, where researchers call for greater commitment from actors they attribute responsibility to, but those actors play fluid, shifting roles and dynamically distance themselves from those responsibilities. Of course, it is not just volunteer tourism organisations that hold responsibilities in volunteer tourism, some members of host communities will also have roles in volunteer tourism organisations including more powerful management roles and there may be local actors who enact liquid responsibilities. But before we go any further with these arguments, we need to examine the organization of volunteer tourism to determine whether the liquid organization lens is appropriate.

METHODOLOGY

A critical analysis of volunteer organizations was undertaken with data collection focusing on their operational aspects including their partnerships with other organizations and host communities, their aims, missions and values, and also the organizations' programme monitoring and evaluation practices. We choose a critical performative lens to explore the organization of volunteer tourism because how the organization works in practice is often quite different to the structures that are represented in annual reports, on websites and so on. This critical performative approach is seeks to question dominant ways of thinking and expose practices that perpetuate unequal power relations between stakeholders. It is performative because it seeks to promote better practices within the industry through encouraging organizations to reflect on their current ways of doing things (Spicer & Alvesson, p.367). This critical performative approach is relevant to the liquid organization perspective as both are concerned with revealing relationships that distance actors from their moral responsibilities. Within this critical framework, qualitatively driven mixed methods were employed to examine the organization of volunteer tourism. Three stages of data collection took place: 1) a qualitative desk study of secondary data; 2) a quantitative online survey; and 3) qualitative in-depth interviews. Each stage built upon the previous stage and all three stages of data collection contributed to the overall process of crystallisation during the analysis phase (Ellingson, 2009).

Selecting organizations

The volunteer tourism literature has identified that not only do a variety of different types of organizations, such as commercial tour operators and NGOs (ATLAS/TRAM, 2008), provide volunteer tourism projects, but that there are also increasingly blurred boundaries between the commercial sector and the non-profit sector as organizations partner together in order to provide volunteer tourism experiences (Keese, 2011; Lyons & Wearing, 2008a, 2008b). Therefore, it was important that the full variety of organizations was represented in this research. Purposive sampling (Bryman, 2008) was employed in order to identify organizations that represent this variety. Specifically, the sample included NGOs, not-for-profit organizations, for-profit-organizations and commercial tour operators. From within this sample, key informants from each organization were identified and invited to participate in both the survey and the in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This research focused on organizations which met the following criteria for inclusion: (1) The primary focus of the organization is on offering short term volunteer tourism projects (less than three months). The rationale for this being that over three months is generally considered 'international volunteering', which is often a more permanent and professionalised form of volunteering (ATLAS/TRAM, 2008); (2) The organization is not a government or quasi-government organization, also because these organizations offer a more formalised and professionalised form of long-term international volunteering; (3) The organisation has head offices in or across the following locations: Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and the United Kingdom. These countries were selected because they represent the top five English-speaking countries with the highest prevalence of volunteer tourism organisations (ATLAS/TRAM, 2008).

Organizations were first identified using an existing list of organizations provided in the report by ATLAS/TRAM (2008). To supplement this data and to account for the growth in volunteer tourism organizations since 2008, an internet search was conducted between April and June 2012 to identify further organizations which met the above criteria. The contact details of organizations meeting the sample criteria were recorded using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Internet searches were carried out on Google.com.au, Google.co.nz, Google.com, Google.ca, Google.co.uk using the search terms 'volunteer abroad', 'volunteer

programmes', 'volunteer projects', 'gap year volunteer programmes/projects', 'volunteer travel', 'volunteer tourism', 'voluntourism'. Organizations were also identified via searching the following databases: *volunteerglobal.com, transitionsabroad.com, gonomad.com, goabroad.com, volunteerinternational.org*. A total of 192 organizations were identified as meeting the above inclusion criteria. Of these, representatives from 16 organizations responded to say that they were too busy to participate and there was no response from 64 organizations. Representatives from 112 organizations replied indicating their interest in the research and the survey was sent to those individuals. The survey was completed by 80 participants representing 80 different organizations, capturing 42% of the total sample population. Interviews took place with 31 participants representing 29 different organizations.

The researchers did not have any prior affiliations with any volunteer tourism organizations and all of the organizations that met the sample criteria were invited to take part in the research.

At the outset of the research, from the author's etic perspective it was unclear as to who within an organization was the most appropriate to answer the survey and take part in an interview. The process of making contact with key informants required patience and some interaction between staff members in order to determine who was to be invited to take part. This practice is not uncommon in organizational research (Feldman, Bell, & Berger, 2003).

Data Analysis

Survey data analysis involved producing descriptive statistics, such as frequency, mean and distribution for the purpose of summarizing and providing a broad understanding of the organizational contexts of volunteer tourism organizations. The interview data underwent a thematic analysis (Bazely, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As part of an overall process of crystallization the survey findings and interview findings also underwent a combined analysis (Ellingson, 2009).

Findings: The liquid organizational contexts of volunteer tourism

Fixed versus liquid structures

Different types of volunteer tourism organizations, with varying interests and missions, took part in this research. Participants were asked how their organizations were best identified according

to type of organization. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the types of organizations that took part in the survey and interviews and shows that a relatively even representation of different types of organization took part in both the survey and the interviews.

Table 2. Breakdown of Organizations Represented in Survey and Interviews

Type of organization	Survey (# of organizations)	% n= 80	Interviews (# of organizations)	% n=29
NGO	20	25	8 (9 participants)	28
Travel organization	20	25	7 (8 participants)	24
Registered charity	19	24	5	17
Philanthropic organization	4	5	2	7
Social enterprise	12	15	6	21
Other	5	6	1	3
Total	**80**	**100**	**29**	**100**

The findings are not heavily skewed towards a particular type of organization. In both sets of data, 'NGOs' and 'Travel Organizations', followed closely by registered charities had the highest representation, whilst 'Philanthropic organizations' and 'Other' were the least represented. These preliminary categorisations indicate that volunteer tourism programmes take place in contrasting organizational sectors ranging from registered charities to commercial travel organizations. However, as discussed below, such categorisations only provide a limited representation of what constitutes a volunteer tourism organization. They do not account for the multidimensional nature of many of the volunteer tourism organizations that operate within the dynamic and fluid spaces of the volunteer tourism industry. Rather, the findings of this study support the interpretation that some volunteer tourism organizations embody characteristics of liquid organizations, making it difficult to accurately classify volunteer tourism organizations according to 'type'.

From the interview data, the research revealed the key theme 'structure ambiguity' which refers to participants who did not feel that the status 'for-profit' was a true reflection of their organization's operations. Some participants claimed that although they were set up with a business structure, in a practical sense their organization made no or very little profit. For example, Interviewee 7 and Interviewee 10 commented:

> At the moment it's a private limited company, which in the UK, theoretically it's for-profit. In practice it doesn't make a profit. *[Interview 7, For-Profit]*

> The way we're set up, we have a registered charity but we're also a registered company in the UK, so effectively we're for-profit but we don't make any profit from what we do. Everything at the moment goes directly back into the projects and the costs of having volunteers on the ground and we don't even

pay any salaries to directors or any staff. But we are registered, so we're a social enterprise, we're registered as a company so we could effectively be for-profit but we're not really. *[Interview 10, For-Profit]*

Similarly, Interviewee 29 considered their organization's activities, for the most part, in alignment with a not-for-profit organization, yet in terms of business structure these organizations remain companies with the potential to profit from their volunteer travel activities, even if at present they do not or do not consider it to be substantial.

We pretty much run it on a non-profit basis, anyway anyone that works for us gets a pretty meagre salary – it pays the bills but it's not much more than that. We spend a lot on marketing and advertising the programmes to get more people over there. There's not really a lot left over at the end of that unfortunately. *[Interview 29, For-Profit]*

Participants were probed as to why they did not seek official not-for-profit status if they felt they were operating in ways that aligned closer to not-for-profit principles than for-profit. The theme of 'operational constraints' was displayed by five participants. These participants believed that operating as a registered not-for-profit would impose a variety of operational constraints that would be detrimental to their activities:

Registering as a charitable company, which is not a particularly straightforward process in itself, would simply create unnecessary additional administration costs without any significant advantages at present for either us or the projects that we support...This structure will constantly be under review but for now it suits our purposes best. *[Interview 10, For-Profit]*

We're a regular company but we model ourselves on a non-profit. (Name of organization) was set up as a non-profit organization in (name of country). When we moved back we realised that in (name of country) the rules are a little bit different and we would have trouble paying salaries to anyone if we were non-profit unless we went the full charity route and had an independent board of directors and we just decided that we weren't really big enough at that stage to justify it, we didn't want to lose control of what we were doing, so it's something that we're still considering. Maybe in the future we might do it, but it's just a big call to get a whole bunch of strangers on a board of directors and have them telling you what to do. *[Interview 29, For-Profit]*

Thus, higher administration costs and loss of control over the organization's activities were viewed as deterrents to 'officially' becoming a not-for-profit. These comments also suggest that the organization of volunteer tourism is not always entirely liquid and frictionless. Rather, in some countries there are statutory classifications that create a kind of friction or stickiness where the organization is tied to a particular structure or set of rules. These volunteer tourism organizations are still able to move and change, but not as fast.

For these participants, the perceived impracticality of becoming a not-for-profit was the reason used to justify the official profit status of these organizations. For other organizations, the ambiguity in profit status was down to the fact that the organizations offered both for-profit and not-for-profit travel activities. The sub-theme "for-profit and not-for-profit activities" was identified in both the survey and interview data and relates to those organizations which also run profit making tourism activities and therefore it is not appropriate for them to operate within a not-for-profit structure.

> It is important for us that it is not only for volunteering. Volunteering is the crux of what we do but at the same time things like learning Spanish in Peru or learning Indian cooking in India, that kind of stuff that brings that cultural immersion aspect still forms part of what we do, so we're set up in a way that enables us to do more than just the charity side of things. *[Interview 19, For-Profit]*

> We like the adventure side, we want to be trekking and swimming with dolphins. It's a benefit for us to have the tourism side to it and also the tourists that come through, it's their funding, as long as their funding is used and directed by our teachers, builders and managers and that local input and direction, that's what achieves great things, that structure. *[Interview 20, For-Profit]*

The above examples represent autonomous companies that operate both for-profit and not-for-profit activities within one organization. In contrast, the following example represents a company with its own charity:

> ...we are a limited company and that's why we have the charity completely separate so that people know that their charitable donations are completely separate and that's what's going to the project. Whereas the (name of company) side is basically all of their costs and operating costs and that side of things, and also because we offer some just expeditions sometimes, that's why we're not solely a charitable enterprise. *[Interview 17, For-Profit]*

The interviewees conveyed a sense of value for the freedom of not being bound by the rules of being a registered charity or not-for-profit. This autonomy allows the organizations to remain flexible. Flexibility is favourable because it enables the organizations to diversify and meet market demands in order to attract volunteers and their funding. Participants are aware that their organizations are situated within broader liquid modern environments of neo-liberalism and financial insecurity, and recognise the value of being able to adapt in order to meet the demands of volunteers who fund their operations. The aversion to the perceived boundaries and bureaucracy that being a registered not-for-profit or charity might entail can be interpreted as supporting the notion that such volunteer tourism organizations represent liquid organizations operating in accordance with their broader liquid environments and is further exemplified by Interviewee 19:

It (being a registered charity) makes it more difficult for you to be able to help them arrange trips or to arrange stuff like language learning. If it doesn't cover exactly what you as a charity cover then you're not allowed to touch it. I mean the other thing obviously is that in the current climate, any charity that is reliant on grant funding and all that kind of stuff is just dying at the moment. It's very difficult out there, all that money doesn't exist like it used to. It's not a good time to be setting up a structure that isn't volunteer funded. *[Interview 19, For-Profit]*

Fixed versus shifting identities

Unlike the solid organizations of modernity which are characterized by fixed structures and identities, a key characteristic of the liquid organization is their dynamic, fluid and shifting nature (Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014). The liquid organization is a mobile concept; it is constantly changing and becoming, as opposed to being a permanent static entity (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008; Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014). Similar to the dynamic nature of the liquid organization, a number of participants discussed how their organization has changed over time in terms of mission and market interests. Consequently, as their organization's approach to volunteer tourism shifts, their volunteer tourism programmes change shape and mission too. Several organizations were, at the time of interview, in the midst of changing focus:

> ...our programmes are also adapting, they're growing, it's a dynamic or organic situation where we started focusing on just teaching English and just teaching environmental conservation, well that's gone out to broaden out now to a bit of hospitality, small business development, which I think is very much related, those skills that you learn in the English classes or in the conservation classes can be applied further on. So I think we're building on what we're doing on the basis of some of those basic education classes that we first offered, and diversifying too, to putting in concrete floors, helping families get roofs over their homes, so it has adapted a bit, but it's looking like now more than ever we're starting up new. *[Interview 14, Not-For-Profit]*

Motivations for change varied between organizations. Interviewee 14's volunteer tourism programmes and focus were diversifying as they discovered new ways in which volunteer tourism could provide development assistance. In contrast, two organizations in particular had taken the decision to move away from the notion of volunteer tourism and volunteer tourists 'helping' with community development. Through their own long-term experiences of offering volunteer tourism programmes, they no longer felt comfortable with taking such an approach, and were critical of doing so.

> ... we think it is a very chauvinist attitude and a bit of a joke in a way because honestly what on earth can a westerner do going out for a matter of a few weeks? I mean the whole idea is wrong. I don't mean to say that people haven't

done useful things, of course they have, but you should never go out with the assumption that they will. *[Interview 18, Not-For-Profit]*

Instead, these organizations now lean towards making the focus of their volunteer programmes about the learning experience of the volunteer. Interviewee 18's organization was particularly flexible in their approach.

> Initially we used to run a very traditional volunteering scheme where we recruited people for specific work, but what we found over the years was that this doesn't really work...so we began to modify our scheme and the emphasis has been more on providing a unique learning opportunity for people...so there are always opportunities for volunteers to help in any way they can but the way they may help is kept open. *[Interview 18, Not-For-Profit]*

> We concentrate very hard on, you know, training them (the volunteers) up as much as we can and that they're not going to save the world... Despite all of this we still feel like we are doing volunteer tourism, we still feel like a lot of it is people going over there and taking pictures of the poor and that's not correct. We're thinking about completely re-structuring again...so a learning type of tour...that's the type of thing we're pondering at the moment *[Interview 3, Not-For-Profit]*

Whilst the above organizations were clear in their reasons for changing their focus and approach to volunteer tourism, Interviewee 1 was certain of change but they were unsure what direction their organization may take in the future. They appeared willing to let the organization's future path be directed by either the communities or the volunteers, and as is typical of the liquid organization (Bauman, 2000; Blackshaw, 2005), they are comfortable with uncertainty.

> I don't know how the organization will evolve in the future. I think that we will respond to demands. Whether the demands come from the slums or the demands come from the volunteers, we will adjust it. *[Interview 1, Not-For-Profit]*

The dynamic and changing nature of these organizations and their different and fluid interpretations of volunteer tourism reinforce Lyons and Wearing's (2008a, 2012) argument that volunteer tourism is an ambiguous phenomenon. These findings also further empirically substantiate Callanan and Thomas's (2005, p.195) observation that volunteer tourism has become "increasingly ambiguous in definition and context". Volunteer tourism programmes are not only situated in different organizational sectors such as the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, but the programme contexts also shift and change as the missions and markets of organizations change, making it difficult to classify and define many of the organizations.

Fixed versus loose partnerships and relations

Drawing from existing volunteer tourism literature (e.g. ATLAS/TRAM, 2008; Eddins, 2013; Lamoureux, 2009; Raymond, 2007, 2008a) the survey asked participants about their partnering relationships. Table 3 summarizes the findings. It was found that the majority (78%) partnered with other organisations, and that the most common partnership was with 'In-country host partners'. Partnerships with 'Tour operators' and 'Donor/ funding agencies' were least common. Respondents also revealed a diversity of partners which included universities, schools, churches, insurance companies and industry groups. In the interview sample, two broadly defined partnership structures which influenced how volunteer tourism programmes were managed were apparent. These were 1) 'Multi-layered Partnerships' and 2) 'Direct Partnerships'.

Table 3. Type and Frequency of Partnerships

Type of Partner	Frequency of Partnership
'In-country host partner organizations	66% 'Always' partner
'Tour operators'	34% 'Never' partner
'Donor/funding agencies'	41% 'Never Partner

The first type of partnership, 'Multi-layered Partnerships', between sending organizations and in-country host partners involves a sending organization recruiting and sending volunteers to one or more in-country host partners. Host partner organizations may then work with further partners such as schools, health clinics and community centres, for example. The volunteer is placed within the network of host partner organizations and responsibility for the volunteer during the programme is predominantly transferred from the sending organization to the host partner organization. Fourteen organizations from the interview data set engaged in this type of partnership. The second main type of partnership, 'Direct Partnerships', is between sending organizations who partner directly with other locally based organizations or individuals without an intermediary host partner organization. A key difference between Direct Partnerships and Multi-layered Partnerships is that, in a Direct Partnership, the sending organization does not delegate responsibility for the volunteer or the programme to another organization during the project. Rather, the organization both sends to and hosts programme/s (i.e. has an active presence during the programme). The organization still engages in partnerships with local organizations such as NGOs, community based organizations (e.g. schools, hospitals and churches) and government agencies, however, responsibility for the volunteer at the programme on the ground is not delegated to these partners. Fifteen organizations from the interview sample engaged in this type of partnership.

These two partnership structures can only be defined here in 'broad' terms as within each of these categories partnership structures can further vary. Partnerships vary not only from organization

to organization, but also partnership to partnership depending on the project/programme. Interview participants 19 and 29, both sending organizations, describe how their partnerships differ according to the particular project and location.

> So the way that we work, it can actually be different in every single country that we work in to be honest, and there's a slightly different situation in every instance...either directly into a project, into a coordinating local entity or into something with our staff, so sort of three different layers. *[Interview 19, For-Profit, Multi-Layered Partnerships]*

> We work in 28 different countries, in most countries we just have one partner that we work with. Those partners vary in their structure and how they look, so in some cases it can just be an individual that's keen to make a difference in their local community and in other cases it can be a small community group all the way up to pretty large NGOs with 20 or 30 staff. *[Interview 29, For-Profit, Multi-Layered Partnerships]*

These quotes demonstrate how, particularly in the context of Multi-layered Partnerships, organizational context doesn't just change from volunteer tourism organization to volunteer tourism organization, it actually changes from programme to programme and geographical location. This means that volunteer tourism activities don't just take place within the one organizational context, they can be situated in multiple inter and intra organizational contexts within the one organization. As is characteristic of the liquid organization, these organizations' partnerships do not maintain any shape in particular, rather they are organized in ways that they alter and adapt as new partnerships arise in multiple and diverse contexts and networks of other organizations and individuals (Elliot, 2007). Thus, "Organisations are no longer seen as collections of stable and static entities (people, material resources, ideologies and so on) but as shifting networks in a permanent state of flux and transformation" (Kelemen & Rumens 2008, p.55).

Fluid versus solid commitments

In liquid modernity, the forming of partnerships and connections between organizations are supported by "the software universe of light speed travel" (Bauman, 2000, p.117), whereby technology facilitates communications across geographical distances, allowing partnerships to be made regardless of the organizations' spatial locations. Interviewee 19 highlighted the everyday ease of making contact with a potential new partner:

> If somebody reaches out to us and says "we really need volunteers" then I can call my guy in (name of country) for example and say there's somebody down the road who really needs help, could you go and have a meeting with them... *[Interview 19, For-Profit, Multi-Layered Partnerships]*

Breadth and depth in partnerships are two continuums found to exist in volunteer tourism partnerships. The term 'breadth' refers to the number of partnerships that a volunteer travel

organization is engaged in, which can be clustered in one geographical area or spread worldwide. The survey identified that the number of organizations partnered with ranged from 1 organization to 300 organizations. Whilst most organizations represented in the survey partner with 1 to 5 organizations (29%), followed by 6 to 10 organizations (27%), some organizations were partnered with 51 to 100 organizations (7%) and 101 to 300 organizations (9%). The breadth of partnerships for sending organizations also varied greatly from organizations working with few organizations, to organizations partnered with one 'umbrella organization' which then feeds into multiple other organizations, as described by Interviewees 7 and 19 below. Thus the management of programmes takes place on vastly different scales between organizations.

> Theoretically we could be working with a number of NGOs but in practice, at the moment, we work specifically with one particular NGO, they're based in (name of country), but they run projects in (name of countries), and recently they have expanded out into quite a lot of countries across (name of continent). So they identify volunteer placements. *[Interview 7, Not-For-Profit, Direct Partnerships]*

> We work in 24 different countries at the moment, so in terms of the projects themselves it sits at over 200 at this point, but we have our one coordinator in Peru who is liaising with 10 different projects that we work with there, for example, or we might work with one organization in Africa that actually covers three countries, so we have the relationship with the coordinators who are then coordinating within those countries. *[Interview 19, Not-For-Profit, Direct Partnerships]*

However, the ease of forming multiple connections ('breadth') does not necessarily translate into shared responsibility, closeness or trust ('depth') within a partnership. The term 'depth' refers to the closeness of a partnership between organizations, determined by the degree to which responsibility of the volunteer travel programme is shared between the organizations who work closely together to implement a volunteer travel programme. The following quotes represent examples of organizations displaying a strong depth of partnership.

> ...the partnership we have is with one project... I know the project very well because I was one of the people who founded it, with my husband who is from that village.... *[Interview 18]*

> ...we're actually a charity partnered with an independent NGO (based in destination country) and so that's our primary focus... *[Interview 26]*

The partnerships between these organizations and their partner/s are very deep in that their sole reason for existence is to support that particular partner and they maintain direct and regular contact, contributing to more 'solid' relationships between partners. In contrast, for other organizations, such as that represented by Interviewee 19 above, partnerships are often moderated by a third party such as an in-country coordinator who acts as the 'middle man' between the sending organization and the in-country host partners. These partnerships are more

'liquid' in nature. Partnerships are easily made and loosely structured meaning that bonds and allegiances are less secure than those within 'solid' and 'deep' partnerships. In addition, responsibility and accountability to each other is ambiguous in these liquid contexts (Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014).

Solid versus liquid responsibilities

A key issue in the current volunteer tourism literature, particularly with regard to the role of volunteer tourism organisations which is the key focus of this paper, is the impact of volunteer tourism on host communities and whose responsibility it is to deliver local benefits (Taplin, Dredge and Scherrer, 2014). The general approach to date has been to adopt a solid consequentialist approach to responsibility, where the consequences of certain actions are evaluated in terms of being responsible or not. Codes of ethics and other management prescriptions help to determine appropriate actions. However, the liquid organization perspective explored in this paper reveals that responsibility to deliver good actions is conceptualised differently by different volunteer tourism organizations, responsibility varies in terms of its proximity or distance to host communities, and it varies in terms of the object of that responsibility. Put simply, the liquid relations, short-term commitments, loose partnerships and unstable self-interests that characterize the liquid organization of volunteer tourism all have important impacts on the exercise of responsibility by whom, for whom and to what ends. These fluid relations are unlikely to be conducive to developing embedded trusting relationships between organizations and communities, and short-term interests and goals of some volunteer tourism agencies may go against the long-term interests of host communities (Raymond, 2008a; Sin, 2010).

The liquid nature of partnerships outlined above also influences the attribution of responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of volunteer tourism programmes. Organizations engaged in 'Direct partnerships' with host communities considered themselves responsible for this activity. However, in the context of organizations engaged in 'Multi-layered partnerships', responsibility for monitoring and evaluation was predominantly considered to sit with host partner organizations. Organizations often face ethical dilemmas, however because of their partnership arrangements, they are not directly accountable or have to take responsibility for, the actions of their partner organizations. This issue was demonstrated by an interviewee who discussed an incident where a volunteer had sent an email to their organization to say that they were concerned that children at the project they had been sent to were being beaten by one of the local workers:

> So with something like that obviously here in (name of sending country) we
> can't do anything so we have to pass that on to our partner organization.
> *[Interview 2, Not-For-Profit, Multi-Layered Partnerships]*

In this situation, this partnership arrangement acts to distance an organization from direct responsibility to the host community and reduces the organization's capacity to address the issue. This distancing of moral responsibility of volunteer organizations as a result of their liquid organization helps to explain the inertia or inability to deliver benefits to host communities often cited in the literature (e.g. Wearing, 2011; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a). For example, this research found that volunteer organizations operating at a global level can form new partnerships and projects with relative ease, which in turn encourages the mobility of volunteer tourism organizations, volunteers and resources. At first glance this would seem a positive attribute since flexibility is often deemed to be an advantage. However, volunteer tourism can involve working with marginalised people and sensitive environments and these are 'sticky' in place. Liquid organization allows volunteer tourism organizations to quickly shift their focus to, for example, more profitable or interesting locations based on consumer shifts, and this liquidity can therefore inhibit the embedding of volunteer projects in place. As a consequence moral interpretations of responsibility may be less likely to emerge.

While this liquid organization perspective helps to highlight the issues associated with fluid relationships, the metaphor of stickiness reminds us that not all in volunteer tourism is fluid and mobile. Communities are somewhere between liquid and sedentary and the relations between volunteer tourism entrepreneurs and their host organizations can also be deeply embedded, personal and lasting. These relationships create a viscosity in the midst of the mobile liquid organization of volunteer tourism and are more likely to generate a deeply personal moral responsibility to an-Other and their community. The following quote represents such a relationship.

> ...most of the people employed in (name of company) were beneficiaries of the charity, including the (name of country) director, he used to be a street boy, he was supported by the charity, went to school, got his diploma, got some training from (name of founder of company and charity) and also people like (name of person) and also from the locals like the local tour guides and the tour managers, now he's managing the (name of charity). *[Interview 8, For-Profit, Direct Partnerships]*

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to explore the organization of volunteer tourism using a liquid organization perspective in order to better understand the potential implications of this liquidity on the responsibility of volunteer tourism organizations to host communities. The volunteer tourism literature has been grappling with tensions between its potential as a tool to benefit host communities and the self-interested profit-motivations of this industry sector. Our approach has been to unsettle this discourse by questioning assumptions about the organization of tourism and to argue that the liquid organization lens holds important insights. Our starting point was to

question assumptions about the organization of volunteer tourism which have been largely based on a modern view that the sector is characterized by an industrial structure where actors and relationships can be neatly categorised, and the root cause of the lack of responsibility to host communities is the profit motivations and self interests of the for-profit actors.

Support for our approach in questioning the organization of volunteer tourism comes from Giddens (1991) who argues that modernity, and relations between society and individuals, need to be better understood at an institutional level. Bevir (2013, p.3) echoes a similar observation that "the new political economy draws on mid-level social theories that reify norms and structures". But organization is, by nature, a human activity that is "inherently contingent and changeable" (Bevir 2013, p.7). In this light, questioning meta-sociological change, institutional organization, relationships between the individual and society become important. In this paper, we have taken on this challenge in order to expose the taken-for-granted understanding of the industrial organization of volunteer tourism, to question if a liquid perspective resonates and, if so, what are the implications.

The above findings have highlighted that volunteer tourism organizations in this research show characteristics of liquid organization to varying degrees, and therefore, were also sticky to some extent. The survey results revealed difficulties in classifying volunteer tourism organizations according to traditional typologies such as 'not-for-profit/ for-profit', 'travel organization' or 'NGO'. The interview data reaffirmed the dynamic, liquid, mutable characteristics of volunteer tourism organizations, especially those spanning international boundaries characterized large numbers of partnerships and distributed roles. It also illustrated that relationships between individual actors, entities and governments can be characterized by varying degrees of solidness, fluidity or stickiness. Markets and interests of the volunteer tourism entities surveyed can shift, organizational structures are fluid and ambiguous, and organizational identities and boundaries are hard to define. For those entities whose activities appear to be dominated by market interests, "(i)dentity, like everything else, becomes fragmented and placed within a vague present, losing its significance as a reassuring signpost demarcating a lifelong path of activity. What is available instead is a façade...its purpose first and foremost as a marketing tool, a brand…" (Kociatekiewicz & Kostera, 2014, p.4).

Some organizations, particularly those that expressed a stronger affinity with development objectives (which we noted earlier is a modernist concept aligned with the growth paradigm) still retain some aspects of traditional, 'solid' organizations such as clear organizational structures and identities, long-term commitments and goals, and standardised processes and structures. Nevertheless, these organizations recognise that they are situated within an increasingly globalised and liquefied world in which they are predominantly reliant on volunteer tourists to fund and support their existence. Here Giddens's (1991) 'life politics' is relevant because, while

these entities they may exhibit solid characteristics, they rely on the liquid life politics of volunteer tourists for their survival (Butcher & Smith, 2015).

We paint here a picture of a very liquid world in which individualization, not only of volunteer tourists (the market) but also volunteer tourism entities, is driving the organization of volunteer tourism. In this liquid world, there is increasing vulnerability and risk, which in turn prompts volunteer tourism entities to be reflexive and agile in the way that they respond to shifts in individualization in the market place. Consequently, the volunteer tourism entities in this study were found to be acutely aware of the need to adapt to meet consumer demands, a finding which has also been reflected in other studies (e.g. Taplin, Dredge & Scherrer, 2014).

Conclusions

Emerging from our explorations of liquidity in volunteer tourism, we conclude that liquid organization is a useful lens to explain some of the challenges. So what then are the implications for responsibility? And how might we move this debate forward? We posit three possible responses: The modernist scientific rational response would be to argue for a return to solid structures, to return to a state of fixed relationships where roles and responsibilities are allocated and governments could play a greater role in regulating volunteer tourism. But neoliberalism suggests that this is an unlikely scenario. Second, from a critical perspective, this liquid characterization of volunteer tourism affirms the power differentials in global tourism and the very real risk of a loss of local host control. Whilst we acknowledge that communities are not homogenous and some, more powerful or elite members may exercise control and power in favour of their own interests at the expense of more vulnerable and weaker members of the host community (Burrai, Font & Cochrane, 2015), this research has demonstrated that host communities are becoming increasingly disempowered and subject to the whims and shifts of a mobile marketplace. In this view, operators are constantly prioritising issues and actions, where nothing is fixed, dependable or able to be planned. But this is also not helpful since critical opposition offers no way forward. Our third perspective is to draw upon Sartre's (1943/2003) notion of stickiness or viscousness as a counterbalance, and ask can the stickiness of host communities be a potential response to liquidity? Can metaphors such as stickiness and mobility help to reinvigorate thinking about responsibility in volunteer tourism?

Stickiness can be manifested more or less, and in different ways. In this research we found that stickiness was manifested in deep lasting relationships between members of a host community, between members of the host community and individual travellers, between travel tour operators and in-host travel companies and so on. These relationships resembled the moral commitment reminiscent of Kierkegaard and other philosophical writings. However, the critical lens dominating volunteer tourism has created a sense of hopelessness with respect to how the volunteer tourism sector perform their moral obligations to care for host communities. Our research has opened up the possibility of working with liquid organization (not just to

problematize it as critical studies might) to identify opportunities to create more sticky bonds with host communities as a means of reasserting moral responsibility.

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