Tourism Management 60 (2017) 348–356

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tourman

Contextualizing the complexities of managing alternative tourism at the community-level: A case study of a nordic eco-village

Solène Prince*, Dimitri Ioannides

Department of Tourism Studies and Geography, Mid-Sweden University, European Tourism Research Institute (ETOUR), Kunskapensväg 1, 831 25, Östersund, Sweden

HIGHLIGHTS

- The contradictory goals of sustainable tourism make it difficult to practically apply alternative tourism strategies.
- Sólheimar eco-village is used as an ethnographic case study to assess managerial difficulties in alternative tourism.
- A lack of human resources dedicated to the alternative experience of guests impedes sustainable tourism development.
- Knowledge over conflict resolution, critical reflection and cultural communication is crucial to alternative tourism.
- Alternative tourism is conceptualized as a forum for discussion between host and guest.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 10 June 2016
Received in revised form
19 December 2016
Accepted 20 December 2016
Available online 27 December 2016

Keywords:
Sustainability
Alternative tourism
Iceland
Volunteer tourism
Focused ethnography

ABSTRACT

To shed light on the complexities of fostering sustainability through alternative tourism, we explore the managerial contradictions and difficulties that arise as alternative tourism is developed in the name of sustainability at Sólheimar eco-village in Iceland. Following a focused ethnographic approach, we establish that those behind the management of volunteers, students and other guests regularly struggle to coordinate these respective groups in a manner that balances economic objectives with those relating to the environment and social equity. This is because limited human resources and strategic knowledge exist to fulfill all the host community's goals through alternative tourism. The findings reveal the need to conceptualize alternative tourism as a forum for discussion between host and guest over the complexities of generating sustainable development. This highlights the need for knowledge transmission over matters such as conflict resolution, critical reflection and cultural communication associated with the tourist experience at the community.

1. Introduction

The term alternative tourism is usually used to describe tourism that is characterized by small-scale and locally owned and controlled operations, offering experiences related to, for instance, educational tours, volunteer travel, farm-stays, and ecotourism (Oriade & Evans, 2011; Weaver, 2006). Many observers consider that alternative tourism has the potential to bring about sustainable development to communities due to its participatory, localized and sensitive character (Scheyvens, 2002a, 2012). The reality is, however, that conflicting interests and contradictory goals plague the development of alternative forms of tourism (Coghlan & Noakes, 2012; Deville, Wearing, & McDonald, 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2016; Weaver, 2013, 2007). Moreover, the complex conception of sustainability in tourism scholarship, not to mention its normative future-driven orientation, renders the application of sustainable norms difficult for local stakeholders (Ruhanen, 2008; Sharpley, 2009; Xiao, 2006). Lane (2009) believes this relates to the weak understanding of what fundamentally drives markets in tourism. Inevitably, the compromises firms and other stakeholders must make in their pursuit of sustainability materialize in their managerial practices where they need to decide how they want to, for instance, develop human resources, invest in capital, adopt new technologies and offer a competitive product (Smith, 1997). Ultimately, community stakeholders involved in alternative tourism must ensure they have a strategy for hosting and interacting with tourists as they seek to benefit from their presence (Salazar, 2012).

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: solene.prince@miun.se (S. Prince), dimitri.ioannides@miun.se (D. Ioannides).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.12.015
0261-5177/

In this article, we explore the managerial contradictions and difficulties arising in local contexts where alternative tourism development is promoted for sustainability's sake. For our case study, we focus on an alternative space, in this case the Icelandic eco-village Sólheimar, which like other such destinations hosts guests, including volunteers who provide free labour and with whom the locals share best-practices (Dawson, 2006). Despite the eco-village's mission to promote social integration (in this case of persons with mental handicaps) and eco-living practices, it is obvious that, on a daily basis, various practical organizational issues crop up that challenge the settlement's overall mission in terms of moving toward sustainable development. Thus, the main question we have chosen to ask is: what managerial challenges does this community face in its attempts to reconcile its mission of social equity generation and environmental education with that of its overall economic goals through alternative tourism?

We begin with a literature review on alternative tourism highlighting research that has identified complexities and contradiction in its sustainability and management. The methodology details the focused ethnographic approach that was used to study Sólheimar. The ensuing section gives background information on the case study before presenting the findings. These findings are divided into two categories: 1) reconciling comfort with contribution and; 2) managing productivity and creativity. The increased number of guests and volunteers put pressure on local human resources, revealing a need to foster a form of alternative tourism management that enables tourists to contribute to more than just the community's economic goals. We propose that for alternative tourism to become a tool for community development, there needs to be investment in knowledge transmission over practical matters such as conflict resolution during the tourist experience, and critical reflection and cultural communication between host and guest over local matters. Alternative tourism is thus conceptualized as a forum for discussion between host and guest over the complexities of generating sustainable development. Finally, we suggest further research in the field of alternative tourism and encourage the use of ethnomethodologies in tourism management research.

2. Alternative tourism: tourism for sustainable development?

Alternative tourism has gained increasing popularity in discourses of sustainable development because of its purported sensitive approach to host communities' needs (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Scheyvens, 2002a; Singh, 2002; Weaver, 2006). Alternative tourism experiences usually include educational tours, volunteer travel, farm-stays, ecotourism, and other tourism types characterized by small-scale and locally owned and controlled operations (Oriade & Evans, 2011; Weaver, 2006). Some observers even argue that, rather than reflecting modern consumer culture, these approaches encourage close exchanges between host and guest centered on profound cultural encounters (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; MacIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Zahra & McGehee, 2013). Scholars praise these tourism forms, not only for their limited adverse environmental and socio-cultural impacts, but also because they aim to provide greater participatory opportunities for small entrepreneurs, residents and various local stakeholders, while spreading the wealth to local stakeholders (Scheyvens, 2012, 2002a; Singh, 2002). This participation is considered crucial to ensure the specific needs of communities members are met through tourism (Saarinen, 2006; Sebele, 2010; Tosun & Timothy, 2003).

Alternative tourism can thus be considered a form of sustainable tourism, where its smaller-scale and more sensitive operations can be used effectively to generate local bottom-up development (Moscardo, 2008). However, a primary challenge associated with alternative tourism as a path to sustainable tourism is that sustainability is a multi-dimensional concept, meaning its operationalization can mean different things to different players. Other than the age-old question about "what should be sustained and developed" the problem exists that, for many stakeholders, sustainability becomes hard to grasp due to its future-oriented nature (Dryzek, 1997; Redclift, 1987; Rist, 2002). Particularly those players with fairly short time perspectives (e.g., business owners and developers) are likelier to emphasize immediate economic priorities to ensure their sustainability through tourism, rather than to oversee to environmental and social equity goals (Lane, 2009; Liu, 2003; Prideaux, 2015; Sharpley, 2009). The persons with a longer-term comprehensive vision of sustainability are usually those whose motives are not driven by economic ambitions (e.g., environmental groups or social activists).

Weaver (2009, 2007) speaks of "veneer environmentalism" whereby most stakeholders are unwilling to shift their practices, which focus overwhelmingly on short-term gain generation. To these players, the sustainability discourse's utility has much to do with a public relations' perspective. Endeavors associated with alternative forms of tourism have been criticized for supporting their own reproduction through economic gain. There are numerous forms of tourism, initially meant to be sensitive and small-scale such as eco-tourism and backpacking, which have intensified through the past decades becoming increasingly standardized and not so diversified from the mass tourism they were meant to replace (Cohen, 1972; Scheyvens, 2002b; Wheeller, 1997). Accordingly, Guttentag (2009), Mostafanezhad (2014) and Palacios (2010) have argued, for instance, that many volunteer organizations are more likely to seek their own reproduction as capitalist enterprises through alternative tourism.

There is always the real risk, in cases where alternative tourism is promoted, that economic growth may divert local actors' interests away from their original objectives (Coghlan & Noakes, 2012; Weaver, 2013). It is inevitable that any enterprise, even those purported to be aimed at alternative tourism, through their sheer necessity to survive, might appear to be profit-oriented, while in reality they are working strategically to stay afloat. Coghlan and Noakes (2012), writing on NGOs involved in volunteer tourism, explain that alternative stakeholder groups are usually forced to compromise between: "*'money' and 'mission', and that the ensuing tradeoffs are characterized by degrees, not absolutes*" (p.128). Inevitably, local actors have to provide a variety of activities, experiences and comforts to their paying customers. The goals of households, businesses and organizations that strive to subsist from alternative tourism often become contradictory since, on the one hand, they seek to pursue their idealistic mission while, on the other hand, they have to recognize the daily realities that are shaped by the global capitalist system (Deville et al., 2016; Mostafanezhad, 2016). For instance, Mostafanezhad (2016) describes that despite their harsh critique against the agro-industrial complex, some farm hosts shopped at large economy warehouses to afford feeding their volunteers as the food they grow is expensive. This trade-off goes against the principles of organic farmers, but is deemed crucial to support the promotion of affordable organic food in the long-run. The issue becomes more problematic when guests come to believe that their hosts are compromising the very principles they purportedly stand for and might not be as altruistic as advertised (Mostafanezhad, 2016).

This dilemma that alternative tourism stakeholders face is crucial to consider in order to promote sustainable tourism at the community-level. While Wheeller (2012, 2005) outlines the necessity for tourism scholars to consider the challenges of sustainability within a wider context of power by considering economic and political systems, he also acknowledges the importance of

studying the emergence of human characteristics that complicate the advancement of sustainable development. Wheeller (2012, 2005) names greed, corruption and hypocrisy, but one could add to this list the local confusion and concern that comes from attempting to offer an alternative experience. Fundamental to this issue of confusion are the managerial decisions that must be made in the light of the contradictory goals of sustainable development. Lane (2009) claims that few tourism scholars understand the fundamental nature of the markets driving tourism in their research on sustainable tourism. Concurrently, Smith (1997) lists challenges tourism businesses encounter, which are often disregarded in sustainable tourism research such as: difficulty accessing investment capital due to seasonality; lack of development in human resources; slow responses to technological change and; offering more competitive products on a global market. Limited research has highlighted and attempted to resolve the day-to-day complexities of pursuing and managing sustainability, which has complicated the implementation of tourism that follows the tenets of sustainable development. Ruhanen (2008) demonstrated, through a study of five destinations in Queensland, Australia that the tourist industry often does not find academic research on sustainability relevant to its needs, though its actors adopt its language in their planning documents. This mismatch is mostly associated with the lack of a clear definition of sustainability in academia and scholars' overly theoretical and complicated approach to sustainability (Ruhanen, 2008; Sharpley, 2009; Xiao, 2006).

It can thus be argued that bridging alternative tourism with sustainable tourism development requires a consideration of the managerial compromises actors make within their particular contexts while driven by particular goals. Matarrita-Cascante (2010) and Matarrita-Cascante, Brennan, and Luloff (2010) acknowledge the need to understand the internal social processes of communities in order to move beyond economic growth and towards environmental and social equity goals. Acknowledging the importance of social processes implies meticulously looking at how the community handles tourism and its impacts. As Salazar (2012, p.18) highlights: "*Local communities must develop strategies for receiving and interacting with tourists as well as displaying themselves and their visible culture*". The following case sheds light on this challenge from an eco-village's perspective.

3. Case study

Iceland has become a popular tourist destination in the past decade, hosting since 2006 more visitors per year than it has inhabitants (Sæþórsdóttir, 2010). Besides the popular standardized activities, various communities, organizations and households around the country host guests interested in a deeper cultural exchange. This type of opportunity can be found at Sólheimar eco-village. In 1930, Sesselja Sigmundsdóttir founded Sólheimar eco-village as a means of helping mentally handicapped orphaned children by creating a designated space for them to develop (Bang, 2002). From the outset, Sesselja fostered organic gardening and other techniques for the self-subsistence of her community, which initially was a summer-time operation. Eventually, the project became firmly established and the space grew into a year-round village of about 100 inhabitants. It offered various facilities for accommodating the children as they grew up, and became a space for the integration, valorization and development of adults with varying mental conditions (e.g. autism, Down's syndrome).

Today, residents with some form of mental handicap compose about 45% of the village's population. These individuals work at the different businesses and artisanal workshops developed at Sólheimar or occupy other positions around the village such as in maintenance. Their tasks are adapted to their respected capabilities and are meant to foster feelings of self-worth and inclusion. Meanwhile, able-minded individuals who participate in the livelihood of the village in tasks like administration, coordination and leadership have to adapt to the form of organization the disabled residents require to live and work in the village (Bang, 2002). Many programs and venues around the village promote the social well-being of the handicapped residents. These include a pool, theatre groups, music groups, a gymnasium, and communal lunches and morning meetings for all members of the community.

The Global Eco-village Network (GEN) proclaimed Sólheimar the first Icelandic eco-village in April 1997. Eco-villages is the term used to describe settlements where community members have come together to form a living space based on idealized shared-values (Bang, 2007). Just as in Sólheimar, these shared-values mostly relate to principles like social inclusion and ecological preservation. They may also target spirituality, self-governance, convenience and other matters, which many groups believe have been eroded by the capitalist system (Dawson, 2006; Jackson, 2004; Kirby, 2003; Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008). Sólheimar boasts buildings with low environmental impact and is self-sufficient in its energy needs due to abundant geothermal resources. The promotion of organic materials, the restoration of the earth and locally-based food production and processing are among the principles guiding the development of Sólheimar's companies and artisanal workshops. There are six artisanal workshops at Sólheimar, producing: ceramics, art, candles, soaps and creams, and weaved and wood crafts. As for the businesses of the village, there is an organic greenhouse, a tree-nursery, two certified eco-friendly guesthouses and an educational center, which was built in 2002.

The economic subsistence of Sólheimar depends on the profit generated at its local businesses, but also on subsidies from the Icelandic state and financial support from affiliated businesses and private donors. The channel for these funds and donations is the Sólheimar Relief Fund, which subsidizes or lends money for construction work, purchasing tools and materials for the maintenance of the village, providing educational opportunities to the community, and funding leisure activities for the disabled residents. Eco-villages (especially those which are part of the GEN) often promote social exchange by inviting guests and volunteers with whom to share best-practices. This is done to promote environmental education, but also to generate local income (Bang, 2007; Dawson, 2006; Jackson, 2004). The administration of the Sólheimar community, through the educational center, invites interns on its own account and accepts volunteers from different external programs to participate in its social, environmental and economic activities for periods ranging from a few weeks to a full year. These activities can include projects coordinated by the educational center or undertaken anywhere within the community. They also imply providing labour to the different businesses and workshops. These volunteers live in the village in designated accommodation and participate in all aspects of daily life, which includes attendance at communal lunches, morning meetings and social events. They are also invited to contribute to the well-being of the community in any way they would like beyond their working hours.

Sólheimar hosts various partnership-run education opportunities at its educational center. Local school groups regularly benefit from the center's expertise while workshops, conferences and exhibits are open to the public. Also, international groups use these facilities through partnerships or as an experience catered to them by the coordinators of the educational center.

The education opportunities can be classroom-based, but also hands-on where the village can be used as a case study for sustainability projects or for gaining an experience in community service. For instance, twice a year, approximately 10 American

students come to Sólheimar through an established American study program, taking their courses at the center, integrating with the community, volunteering at the local workshops and businesses, and going on excursions planned by the center's coordinators. The two guesthouses at Sólheimar are used to host students and other visiting groups, but also any tourists interested in overnighting. Guided tours of Sólheimar are offered by the center to visitors, who are also encouraged to buy local-made crafts and fresh produce, participate in various events and even help out in the community.

4. Methodological framework

For this study, the main author conducted focused ethnographic research during a 6-week period in early 2015. Focused ethnography implies the researcher enters the field with specific research questions, rather than with the aim of broadly observing a cultural group (Knoblauch, 2005; Wall, 2015). This method is moreover used to study emerging cultural contexts where patterns of behaviors are found in individuals with common perspectives, goals, sub-cultures and social affinities, rather than in a cultural group that differs completely from the researcher in a cultural sense (Knoblauch, 2005; Wall, 2015). Specifically, the main author gathered data relating to the patterns of behavior hosts and guests form as they interact at Sólheimar in order to study the dynamics of alternative tourism management at the eco-village. The main author was already familiar with the village through a previous involvement as an intern. This earlier involvement facilitated her access to the community by knowing key informants and ensured she had grounded knowledge of the context and people she was about to study. During this earlier internship, which occurred for three months during the fall of 2010 she had become an integral part of the Sólheimar community working on educational projects and helping out at the organic greenhouse. She also participated in a variety of local activities. When she joined the community once more in 2015 as a researcher, she pursued participant observations and interviews to complement and re-orient the conclusions drawn from the first visit.

Ethnography implies immersion in the daily lives of people belonging to a culture-sharing group (Wolcott, 2008). It was crucial for the researcher to sustain and maximize contact with volunteers, visitors, students and community members alike throughout her fieldwork to ensure the validity of the data collected. Creswell (2013) notes the qualitative validation process implies prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field in order to build an informed picture of the situation. The success of ethnomethodologies such as participant observation rest in the researcher's ability to foster positive social relations with the study subjects (Frohlick & Harrison, 2008). As Hammersley (2014) explains, membership and the researcher status are akin to complements, rather than contradictions during the data collection process when the researcher is immersed in his or her study context. Hammersley's (2014) own research was, she described: "*based on a sense of mutual understanding and shared confidence between the researcher and research participant*" (p.861). Many ethnographic researchers include the practice of listening in their active engagement, meaning that conversation is as important as observation throughout the immersion process (Forsey, 2010; Hockey, 2002). The main author gathered most data through on-site informal conversational interviews during daily activities where she approached volunteers, visitors, students and community members alike in their context of experience (i.e., their workplace, social spaces such as the lunch hall, and community events) when it seemed appropriate. Belsky (2004) writes that on-site informal conversational interviews lead toward a greater appreciation of the subject's perspective. The close contact moreover facilitated the validation process as regular member-checking could be done informally throughout fieldwork. Member checking implies soliciting the participants for their view on the credibility of the researcher's interpretations and findings (Creswell, 2013).

4.1. Focused ethnography at Sólheimar

The main author participated in the same activities as the volunteers, including volunteering, for the sake of observations. Observations of the volunteers at their work places were done by spending 3 working days in total helping at the bakery and 4 working days in total helping at the greenhouse. Observations of volunteers at the educational center were done sporadically during working hours since the main researcher had office space there. Observations of the volunteers in communal spaces were done on a daily basis at the morning meetings, lunch hall and during social activities on the evenings and week-ends. The main author also shared accommodation with the volunteers. This made it easy to approach with questions and observe the 15 guests who volunteered in the community throughout the fieldwork. Volunteers were notified of the main author's role as a researcher. The main author also gained access to 8 reports where previous volunteers had reflected on their experience. She also revisited her own final internship report prepared after her initial visit in 2010.

At the time of fieldwork in 2015, there were also 10 students from the American study program whom the main author encountered informally through the same activities as the volunteers. She also observed them by following them on one fieldtrip to Reykjavik and attending 3 of their regular lectures. She formally interviewed the two coordinators of the American study program to get their impressions on the management of their study program at Sólheimar. She studied the other visitors who came sporadically through Sólheimar during her fieldwork through covert observations and informal conversations in communal areas.

The main author relied on formal interviews with five key individuals in the community who had close involvement or contact with volunteers, students and guests. These interviews were done to avoid researcher bias that could stem from spending more time with the volunteers. This was especially needed since the main researcher had more affinity with volunteers, being their age and an outsider like them. These interviews were done in English as the main author does not speak Icelandic. Most Icelanders are highly proficient in the language, and so it did not pose any major issue. She interviewed the two coordinators of the educational center who deal with the volunteers by managing the selection process, welcoming them, and seeing to their integration. It is also part of the coordinators' duty to manage the center, the local guesthouses and offer guided tours of the village, which involves them further in the management of visitors. The main author got office space at the center, which placed her in close contact to these coordinators' daily managerial tasks and enabled her to also conduct many on-site informal conversational interviews with them during fieldwork. It was important to interview the managers of the organic greenhouse and tree nursery as these individuals get the biggest share of volunteers, students and guests who come to the village for volunteering. She also interviewed the manager of the wood workshop to get more depth in the perspective of community members involved with creative workshops (though most creative workshops do not work with volunteers and those that do accept very few).

The other members of the Sólheimar community included in this study were approached through repeated casual on-site conversations and contextual observations. Participants were notified of the main author's role as a researcher during conversations.

These individuals were: the disabled residents, the music teacher, the social coordinator, the manager of the bakery, support staff for the disabled residents, the manager of the local store, different employees at the businesses and the other managers of the creative workshops. Observations of the community members at their work places were done while helping as a volunteer, as described earlier. All the creative workshops were observed through 3 informal visits lasting on average 20 min. The greenhouse and the tree nursery were also observed 3 times, each through informal visitation of about 20 min. Observations of the community members were also done regularly in communal spaces.

Conversations and observation with volunteers revolved around their purpose of coming to Sólheimar, their background, what they liked and disliked about their experience, and their overall impressions and the lessons they were learning as they integrated with the community. With the members of the community, discussions and observations related to how it was to host and work with volunteers, what kind of people they preferred, examples of successful projects and also the challenges of hosting and working with volunteers. Throughout the fieldwork the main author noted all the information from her formal interviews, conversational onsite interviews and daily observations as field notes in a diary. This process was done to ensure the collection of detailed data in order to enhance the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2013). All participants in this research were given pseudonyms. The interviews were not recorded as they often took place in busy common areas (e.g., coffee house or lunch hall) and workplaces (e.g., the greenhouse and the educational center) where there was a lot of noise and disturbances from the surroundings. This prevented the usage and analysis of extensive quotes, but it placed the interview participants in their realm of involvement preventing the development of an overwhelming uneven relation between researcher and respondent, and it allowed for the observation of contextual interactions (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Jones, 2009). The data was analyzed to form a description of the themes that characterize the managerial dynamics at Sólheimar in terms of alternative tourism. The different data were triangulated to generate corroborating evidence to validate the relevance of these themes (Creswell, 2013). To further confirm the validity of the conclusions, two volunteers and one of the coordinators of the educational center were used for member-checking.

5. Findings

Those behind the management of volunteers, students and guests at Sólheimar often find it hard to grasp the full benefits of hosting these individuals. The economic value these visitors help generate is clear, but because of a shortage of human resources and strategic knowledge of how to handle volunteer experiences within the community, it is at times challenging for the latter to adequately address its environmental and social-equity goals through alternative tourism. The founding goals of self-development and therapeutic lifestyles cherished by Sesselja have been mostly replaced by objectives of economic subsistence at the workshops and businesses around the village, highlighting the pervasiveness of the market system at all managerial levels outlined by scholars such as Lane (2009) and Sharpley (2009). The classroom and hands-on experiences the educational center promotes, the accommodation and food it provides and the setting it offers to the groups that use its facilities need to appeal to clients in order for it to generate revenue from customer service. While these activities might be packaged as alternative experiences by the eco-village, these are ultimately aimed at increasing profit (Weaver, 2013). The presence of volunteering guests is easily justified to accommodate economic goals.

As Mostafanezhad (2016) explains, idealist spaces also have concerns over their economic sustainability as they are forced to function within the capitalist system. Through its commercial endeavors, Sólheimar diffuses a brand to its visitors based in the organic and socially responsibility in a way that generates revenue. This is not an alternate plan for fostering the subsistence of a community outside of the current economic system. The imperative to run viable businesses at Sólheimar is rather defined, in Weaver's (2007) terms, in parallel to responsibly navigating norms and structures of the capitalist system, in this case by producing ethically correct products and staging alternative experiences. As we highlight, this challenge has repercussions on the interactions of the community members with the volunteering guests at Sólheimar, and therefore affects the management of the later in two ways: firstly by blurring the line between their comfort and their contribution, and secondly by requiring the management of their productivity and creativity. These challenges are presented as practicalities that must be addressed to ensure alternative tourism, in this case volunteer tourism, can be used to generate a sustainable form of tourism at the community-level.

5.1. Reconciling comfort with contribution

As Vigdis and Gunnar, the coordinators of the educational center explained, there are many volunteers who apply to come to Sólheimar now that the internship program and many other partnerships are well established. Many are even refused through the selection process. The coordinators and the managers of the different workplaces are interested in people with appropriate backgrounds for the required tasks, but also in those who wish to learn from the community while sharing their skills and knowledge. Guests are invited to interact with the disabled residents in order to contribute to the latter's well-being. Volunteers and guests have been observed to bring significant value to the daily lives of many of these residents. For instance, the disabled community members often sought hugs from them, especially at the morning meeting, and approached them for small-talk and laughter during the day. Nonetheless, as the village seeks to accommodate more guests, students and volunteers for both economic and idealist reasons, the management of these individuals within the village becomes more difficult. The alternative experience implies exchanges between host and guest centered on meaningful cultural encounters and mutual learning (MacIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Zahra & McGehee, 2013), but these experiences at times require a certain level of managerial structuration to become positive for both the community and the volunteers.

Involving volunteering groups and individuals in the pursuit of the community's sustainable development can be tricky as these volunteers might have particular reasons for embarking on a volunteer experience that does not necessarily coincide with the managerial plan devised by their coordinators to enable them to contribute. As efforts are made to reconcile the needs and desires of volunteers with a plan for action, the situation then resembles the recurring issue identified by critical scholars of volunteer tourism where the volunteer's experience becomes more important than the community's goals (Guttentag, 2009; Mostafanezhad, 2014; Palacios, 2010). Such a difficulty arises, for instance, when volunteering-guests wish to experience different workplaces during their stay. The main author observed volunteers arguing with staff and coordinators about temporarily changing workplace, disregarding that their original workplace might need them that day or that the desired place might not need, nor wish, to have extra or unexperienced workforce. Some volunteers insisted that they deserved this experience because they did not only come to Sólheimar to provide cheap labor. The baker was particularly

overwhelmed one day when too many volunteers wanted to spend the day at the bakery, though she only needed the help of one or two individuals. This concern was mostly disregarded by these volunteers. At the greenhouse, tree-nursery, bakery and the creative workshops, the focus of the volunteers' work is mostly on producing goods by picking, packaging, reproducing and labeling. Ultimately, the volunteers are generally hired and managed to cut labor costs in order for Sólheimar to become economically sustainable. The management of the village is thus not always compatible with the desires of those who wish to learn from it.

Gunnar, expressed discontent with volunteers too focused on projects they designed themselves for their own interest or their requests to change workplaces for fun, instead of focusing on the community's goals. During the main author's internship, for instance, two interns did not want to help carpenters build the new roof of the volunteer accommodation because they preferred to work on their own projects. Reconciling alternative goals in the physical world and within the capitalist system is part of the reality of the eco-village, and the volunteers should learn this through some form of forum to critically think of their experience and their role within the community. Sólheimar's coordination of its volunteers mostly lacked the structure for transformative learning, which authors such as Coghlan and Gooch (2011), Mostafanezhad (2014) and Hammersley (2014) propose in volunteer tourism. Transformative learning implies that sending organizations arrange briefing sessions and critical discussions before, during and after the volunteer holiday to ensure the volunteers learn from their experience, and even become better citizens upon return. This is done so that volunteering can be more than an experience of self-growth and exotic adventures. Without an educational component of some sort, the activity becomes as Deville et al. (2016) and Weaver (2013) predict: highly comparable to any other standardized form of tourism with an economic concern over the comfort and experience of its guests. This outlines how the learning component of alternative tourism does not come automatically, and might require more than instructions to foster the changes desired by community-members.

All the volunteers who come to Sólheimar receive an introductory session from the coordinators of the educational center or from other volunteers to learn about the history and organization of the community. There are sometimes meetings with the coordinators during the stay of the volunteers, but these appear to mostly center on the quality of the volunteer experience. With the increased number of volunteers and other guests at the village, their stays not all being synchronized and the workload of the coordinators increasing, their conversations with them become more about how to improve their management (i.e., resolving interpersonal conflicts amongst volunteers, convincing them to clean their accommodation regularly, making sure they were happy, etc.) than about their contribution and learning experience. When the main author was an intern, her group of six sat down during the last week of volunteering and discussed thoroughly together the lessons learnt in the community. When she returned to undertake her research this meeting had become more of a farewell session, attesting to the less alternative and more mainstream nature of the host and guest interactions due to the increased pressure on the local carrying-capacity.

While Sólheimar's administrative body can work towards sustainable goals at the community-level, it can only do so within the limit of its wider context. For instance, while the guesthouses and local products of the village are certified ecological through various eco-labelling mechanisms, there is no public transport serving Sólheimar from the nearest town 10 km away. This means that guests come by car or through tours, or that the village must arrange their transportation. Overall, this is not very effective and requires, as Hall (2010) outlines about sustainable tourism, the support of macro-policy. The difficulties caused by the village's wider context complicate the host's relation with its volunteers. Volunteers have complained over, for example: the inefficient treatment of wastewater and the food wasted at the dining hall. For some guests, Sólheimar does not fit their preconceived ideal of an eco-village. The community, by contrast, feels misunderstood as it tries to solve these issues within its context of dependence on subsidies, location in a remote part of Iceland, and shift from charitable community to eco-village. The lack of sustainable planning beyond the local level does not only exacerbate local logistics (i.e., the transportation of guests, sorting the extra waste, etc.). It also leads to a need to develop strategies for effective communication between host and guests over issues of comfort and participation that affect the local social and environmental context.

5.2. Managing productive and creative volunteers

Sólheimar's mission might be distorted by economic incentives, but the community was founded on social and environmental goals after all, making it important for its members to foster and diffuse these values through sharing best-practices and providing educational experiences to those interested. Contributing to the community through projects is part of the hands-on education the coordinators of the educational center offer to groups who wish to use Sólheimar as an educational venue. The students on the American study program, for instance, get university credits for this type of community service. The coordinators of the American study program enumerated, during their interview, various projects that their previous students carried out successfully at Sólheimar. Some students designed and implemented a worm compost at the greenhouse and others made a Google document to help the coordinators sort computer files. In the early years of the program, there was frustration amongst the students as they were given projects that were too big for their time frame. Now, this situation is managed better as these students get smaller more practical projects they can complete within their stay.

Guests are welcomed to contribute with their own projects they feel could benefit the community. Examples of volunteer and intern projects include: the design of an aquaponics system at the greenhouse, the identification of providers of compostable plastic for packaging at the greenhouse, and the arrangement of gardening trays for the disabled residents to grow flowers. Volunteers, students and other guests are thus assets to the goals of Sólheimar as they seek to develop their own competence. Through the goals of social exchange and education, volunteering guests channel their agency into projects or solve simple issues for the good of the community, generating exchanges between host and guest centered on mutual exchange, rather than a consumer culture (MacIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Zahra & McGehee, 2013).

The Sólheimar administration and educational center do not have unlimited funds to hire professionals to work on every aspect of the village's sustainability. It is thus a suitable compromise to give projects to young adults with degrees in related backgrounds as part of a volunteering experience. Marketing, engineering, planning, graphic design and architecture are examples of fields in which the coordinators of the educational center do not have enough competence themselves or time to manage effectively, relying largely on their interns and students to take on such projects. Lena, for instance, worked on a project, which consisted of gathering information about a patented waste water management system called the “living machine” in order to write a proposal that would convince subsidiaries to grant the village the money to build itself this system. Gunnar seemed especially nervous about the quality of the report as he lectured Lena on how to structure it

repeatedly, even suggesting the main author have a look at it to ensure its language quality since Lena was not a native English speaker. That a volunteer, though educated in sustainability, is given such a complex project, where a lot is on the line, highlights the difficult position in which the village finds itself. Mostafanezhad (2014) explains that volunteering often hides dysfunctions at the national and global level where, instead of restructuring their economies, governing bodies let non-governmental organization depend on charitable work and public donations to handle their social and environmental issues. Using the help of volunteers is often a solution to such shortcomings, but then these guests need to be coordinated and monitored to ensure desired outcomes. The coordinators of the center find themselves managing volunteers and their projects, rather than overseeing the improvement of local sustainability by dealing with professionals.

To work at the different businesses and workshops, students and other volunteering guests will get training to learn how to do the tasks at stake. However, there are tasks around the village that require more competence than some volunteers, interns, visitors or students might have upon their arrival. Guttentag (2009) argues that the selection of volunteers lacking appropriate competence is a common criticism made against volunteer tourism organization. The increase of volunteer workforce might be good economically, but these individuals must be managed once they sojourn at Sólheimar in order to become beneficial to the community. It is not always easy for the managerial staff to oversee this type of administration as they seek themselves to be productive community members. Vigdis explained that there were so many things to do at the educational center, yet it is hard for her to delegate tasks to volunteers when she knows she can do it better and faster than them with her experience and knowledge as a local and Icelander. Solveig, a workshop leader, argued that it was tedious to be "*told what to do*" by volunteers at her workshop. Volunteers who do not grasp the context at stake can sometimes propose ideas that she knows will not function. This type of resentment has led some workshop leaders to substantially limit or even refuse having volunteers at their workshops.

Local managers were interpreted as trying to accommodate the economic growth they sought without any investment in the resources necessary to develop the volunteering guests' ability to participate as creative assets. There is no requirement in anyone's job description to have, or any ongoing attempts to find money to afford, competence in how to manage an alternative tourist experience. Smith (1997) explains that managerial challenges are often disregarded in sustainable tourism theory, though human resources play an important role in informing and guiding the behavior of guests. These shortcomings in human resources at Sólheimar were at the source of the complications observed between host and volunteers. Volunteers regularly mentioned the lack of clarity in their task, the unprofessional management of conflict and the lack of communication with their supervisors about what is expected of them as members of the community. There was also discontent amongst the volunteers that rules and the consequences of not following them were not applied consistently amongst the volunteers. The two coordinators of the educational center conceded that they did not know if these complaints were from people who were naturally overly exigent and self-centered, or that some guests came with the wrong goals in mind. Anyhow, when the guests are not managed efficiently because few human resources are dedicated to the oversight of their interactions, creativity and productivity, less focus can be directed at the direct promotion of sustainability.

6. Conclusion

The case of Sólheimar sheds light on the dynamics of managing alternative tourism at the community-level, where local actors hope to contribute to some aspects of their goals of social and environmental sustainability through tourism within a context that forces them to compromise between ethics and profit (Coghlan & Noakes, 2012; Weaver, 2013). This challenge was shown to have repercussions on the interactions of the community members with their volunteering guests. This occurs because the comfort and learning experience of the guests must be reconciled with their effective participation and contribution to the community. This reconciliation moreover requires the development of strategies for the management of the productivity and creativity of guests that go beyond the assigned tasks of the community members in leadership positions. Ultimately, those behind the management of volunteers, students and guests at Sólheimar at times find it hard to appreciate the benefits of hosting these individuals beyond the economic value they help generate because very few human resources and limited strategic knowledge exist within the community to enable it to fulfill its environmental and social-equity goals through tourism.

The high cost of training and educating tourists on short stays, moreover as their numbers increase, is one substantial impediment to the promotion of effective alternative tourism in communities such as Sólheimar. This reality is important to consider as the growth of alternative forms of tourism into mainstream tourism is a common path in the capitalist system (Cohen, 1972; Scheyvens, 2002b; Wheeller, 1997). Remaining an alternative tourism stakeholder requires practical efforts that must be discussed by researchers beyond notions of keeping operations small, interactive and contextually sensitive. Conceptualizing alternative tourism as an effective tool for community development requires an honest discussion over the challenges of being ethical in the present-day context. This implies, as Lane (2009) and Sharpley (2009) suggest, that tourism scholars should research more deeply the dynamics of the market tourism firms and communities have to deal with. Discussions over sustainability in alternative tourism should address the contexts of complexity, confusion, conflict and reconciliation within which managerial decisions need to be applied effectively.

This case highlights that for alternative tourism to become a tool for community development, there needs to be investment in knowledge transmission over practical matters such as conflict resolution during the tourist experience, and critical reflection and cultural communication between host and guest over local matters that go beyond simple instructions. This article's theoretical contribution therefore lies in its conceptualization of alternative tourism as a forum for discussion between host and guest over the complexities of generating sustainable development. In the case of Sólheimar, it must be considered that the cheap labor is needed to produce profitable environmentally-friendly goods and produce. Student groups and other paying guests are profitable to the community as they purchase its services and buy its goods during their stay, making marketing and product development essential aspect of the community's sustainability. The presence of volunteers, guests and students in the community improves its social context as they interact with the disabled residents and staff in meaningful ways. However, enabling guests eager to participate in projects that go beyond the economic realm and to maximize their positive interactions as they increase in numbers necessitates a particular string of interactive strategies on behalf of the local managerial body.

More qualitative research could bring forward the concerns and difficulties of the communities seeking sustainable development

through alternative tourism. Reconciling the goals of sustainability does not simply imply advocating local participation and the consideration of the environment. As scholars such as Ruhanen (2008) and Sharpley (2009) explain, overly theoretical and abstract notions of sustainability only lead to confusion and dismissal amongst stakeholders. More contextualization of host and guest interactions would help researchers grasp how human nature plays out in practice within wider contexts of economic and political power, as Wheeller (2012, 2005) outlines. Immersing the researcher in the study context is ultimately proposed as the best way to bring forward these complex dynamics alternative tourism stakeholders face as these are part of the mundane activities that make up their reality. The potential of ethnographic methodologies, which include on-site conversational interviews and participant-observation (Belsky, 2004; Wolcott, 2008), to contribute to the development of sustainable and alternative tourism theory should be explored further as these approaches enable the identification of the social patterns that make up the everydayness of managing sustainability.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Jaarko Saarinen and Sandra Wall-Reinius for their insightful comments on this article.

References

Anderson, J. (2004). Talking whilst walking: A geographical archaeology of knowledge. *Area, 36*(3), 254–261.
Anderson, J., & Jones, K. (2009). The difference that place makes to methodology: Uncovering the 'lived space' of young people's spatial practices. *Children's Geographies, 7*(3), 291–303.
Bang, J. M. (2002). The Camphill Network: Reversed integration of the differently abled. In J. Hildur, & L. Svensson (Eds.), *Eco-village living: Restoring the earth and her people* (p. 82). Devon, UK: Greenbooks.
Bang, J. M. (2007). *Growing eco-communities: Practical ways to create sustainability*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.
Belsky, J. (2004). Contributions of qualitative research to understanding the politics of community ecotourism. In J. Phillimore, & L. Goodson (Eds.), *Qualitative research in tourism: Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies* (pp. 273–291). London: Routledge.
Coghlan, A., & Gooch, M. (2011). Applying a transformative learning framework to volunteer tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 19*(6), 713–728.
Coghlan, A., & Noakes, S. (2012). Towards an understanding of the drivers of commercialization in the volunteer tourism sector. *Tourism Recreation Research, 37*(2), 123–131.
Cohen, E. (1972). Toward a sociology of international tourism. *Social Research, 39*(1), 164–182.
Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). London: Sage Publications.
Dawson, J. (2006). *Ecovillages: New frontiers for sustainability*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.
Deville, A., Wearing, S., & McDonald, M. (2016). Tourism and willing workers on organic farms: A collision of two spaces in sustainable agriculture. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 111*, 421–429.
Dryzek, J. S. (1997). *The politics of the Earth: Environment discourses*. New-York: Oxford University Press.
Forsey, M. G. (2010). Ethnography as participant listening. *Ethnography, 11*(4), 558–572.
Frohlick, S., & Harrison, J. (2008). Engaging ethnography in tourist research: An introduction. *Tourist Studies, 8*(1), 5–18.
Guttentag, D. A. (2009). The possible negative impacts of volunteer tourism. *International journal of tourism research, 11*, 537–551.
Hall, C. M. (2010). Changing paradigms and global change: From sustainable to steady-state tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research, 35*(2), 131–143.
Hammersley, L. A. (2014). Volunteer tourism: Building effective relationships of understanding. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 22*(6), 855–873.
Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2008). Justice tourism and alternative globalisation. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 16*(3), 345–364.
Hockey, J. (2002). Interviews as ethnography? Disembodied social interaction in Britain. In N. Rapport (Ed.), *British Subjects: An anthropology of Britain* (pp. 209–222). Oxford: Berg.
Jackson, R. (2004). The ecovillage movement. *Permaculture Magazine, 40*, 25–30.
Kirby, A. (2003). Redefining social and environmental relations at the ecovillage at Ithaca: A case study. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 23*, 323–332.
Knoblauch, H. (2005). Focused ethnography. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 6*(3). Art. 44.
Lane, B. (2009). Thirty years of sustainable tourism: Drivers, progress, problems – and the future. In S. Gössling, C. M. Hall, & D. Weaver (Eds.), *Sustainable tourism futures: Perspectives on systems, restructuring and innovations* (pp. 19–31). London: Routledge.
Liu, Z. (2003). Sustainable tourism development: A critique. *Journal of sustainable tourism, 11*(6), 459–475.
MacIntosh, A., & Zahra, A. (2007). A cultural encounter through volunteer tourism: Towards the ideals of sustainable tourism? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 15*(5), 541–556.
Matarrita-Cascante, D. (2010). Beyond growth: Reaching tourism-led development. *Annals of Tourism Research, 37*(4), 1141–1163.
Matarrita-Cascante, D., Brennan, M. A., & Luloff, A. E. (2010). Community agency and sustainable tourism development: The case of La Fortuna, Costa Rica. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 18*(6), 735–756.
Moscardo, G. (2008). Sustainable tourism innovation: Challenging basic assumptions. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 8*(1), 4–13.
Mostafanezhad, M. (2014). *Volunteer tourism: Popular humanitarianism in neoliberal times*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
Mostafanezhad, M. (2016). Organic farm volunteer tourism as social movement participation: A Polanyian political economy analysis of world Wide opportunities on organic farms (WWOOF) in Hawai 'i. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 24*(1), 114–131.
Oriade, A., & Evans, M. (2011). Sustainable and alternative tourism. In P. Robinson, S. Heitmann, & P. Dieke (Eds.), *Research themes for tourism* (pp. 69–86). Cambridge: CABI.
Palacios, C. (2010). Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 18*(7), 861–878.
Prideaux, B. (2015). Destination tourism: Critical debates, research gaps and the need for a new research agenda. In C. M. Hall, S. Gössling, & D. Scott (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of tourism and sustainability* (pp. 365–373). London: Routledge.
Redclift, M. (1987). *Sustainable development: Exploring the contradictions*. London: Routledge.
Rist, G. (2002). The environment, or the new nature of "development". In G. Rist (Ed.), *The history of development: From western development to global faith* (2nd ed., pp. 171–196). London: Zed Books.
Ruhanen, L. (2008). Progressing the sustainability debate: A knowledge management approach to sustainable tourism planning. *Current issues in tourism, 11*(5), 429–455.
Saarinen, J. (2006). Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies. *Annals of tourism research, 33*(4), 1121–1140.
Salazar, N. B. (2012). Community-based cultural tourism: Issues, threats and opportunities. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 20*(1), 9–22.
Scheyvens, R. (2002a). *Tourism for development: Empowering communities*. Essex: Pearson Education.
Scheyvens, R. (2002b). Backpacker tourism and third world development. *Annals of Tourism Research, 29*(1), 144–164.
Scheyvens, R. (2012). *Tourism and poverty*. London: Routledge.
Sebele, L. S. (2010). Community-based tourism ventures, benefits and challenges: Khama rhino sanctuary trust, central district, Botswana. *Tourism Management, 31*(1), 136–146.
Sharpley, R. (2009). *Tourism development and the environment: Beyond sustainability?* London: Earthscan.
Singh, T. V. (2002). Altruistic tourism: Another shade of sustainable tourism. The case of Kanda community. *Tourism (Zagreb), 50*(4), 361–370.
Smith, S. L. J. (1997). Challenges to tourism in industrialized nations. In S. Wahab, & J. Pigram (Eds.), *Tourism, development and growth: The challenge of sustainability* (pp. 147–163). London: Routledge.
Sæþórsdóttir, A. D. (2010). Planning nature tourism in Iceland based on tourist attitudes. *Tourism Geographies, 12*(1), 25–52.
Tosun, C., & Timothy, D. (2003). Arguments for community participation in the tourism development process. *Journal of Tourism Studies, 14*(2), 2–15.
Van Schyndel Kasper, D. (2008). Redefining community in the ecovillage. *Research in Human Ecology, 15*(1), 12–24.
Wall, S. (2015). Focused ethnography: A methodological adaptation for social research in emerging contexts. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 16*(1). Art. 1.
Weaver, D. (2006). *Sustainable tourism: Theory and practice*. Oxford: Elsevier.
Weaver, D. (2007). Towards sustainable mass tourism: Paradigm shift or paradigm nudge? *Tourism Recreation Research, 32*(3), 65–69.
Weaver, D. (2009). Reflections on sustainable tourism and paradigm changes. In S. Gössling, C. M. Hall, & D. Weaver (Eds.), *Sustainable tourism futures: Perspectives on systems, restructuring and innovations* (pp. 32–42). London: Routledge.
Weaver, D. (2013). Asymmetrical dialectics of sustainable tourism: Toward enlightened mass tourism. *Journal of Travel Research, 53*(2), 131–140.
Wheeller, B. (1997). Here we go, here we go, here we go eco. In M. J. Stabler (Ed.), *Tourism and sustainability: From principle to practice* (pp. 29–49). Oxon: CABI.
Wheeller, B. (2005). Ecotourism/egotourism and development. In C. M. Hall, & S. Boyd (Eds.), *Nature-based tourism in peripheral areas: Development or disaster?* (pp. 309–318). Oxford: Elsevier.
Wheeller, B. (2012). Sustainable mass tourism: More smudge than nudge – the canard continues. In T. V. Singh (Ed.), *Critical debates in tourism* (pp. 39–43).

Bristol: Channel View Publications.
Wolcott, H. F. (2008). *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (2nd ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
Xiao, H. (2006). Towards a research agenda for knowledge management in tourism. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development, 3*(2), 143–157.
Zahra, A., & McGehee, N. G. (2013). Volunteer tourism: A host-community capital perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research, 42*, 22–45.

Solène Prince Solène is a PhD student at Mid-Sweden University in the Department of Tourism Studies and Human Geography. She is researching the complexities and tensions found in alternative tourism within rural and idealist spaces. Her doctoral research has taken her to Iceland and Denmark, and touches upon subjects related to volunteer tourism, rural tourism and non-representational landscape theory. She holds a master's degree of science in sustainable development from Uppsala University.

Dimitri Ioannides Dimitri Ioannides is Professor of Human Geography in the Department of Tourism Studies and Human Geography at Mid-Sweden University. He is also Senior Fellow at Missouri State University where he taught for many years and held the rank of professor. He holds a PhD in Urban Planning and Policy Development from Rutgers University. In the past he has also worked on a part-time basis for the Center for Regional and Tourism Research on Bornholm, Denmark. His research interests include, among others, tourism and sustainable development, the equity dimension of sustainability, and particular the rights of low-level workers in the tourism sector. He has published a number of articles and book chapters relating to the economic geography of tourism. Together with Dallen Timothy he is author of *Tourism in the USA: A Spatial and Social Synthesis* (Routledge). Currently he serves as Series editor for New Directions in Tourism Analysis (Routledge).