

---

# 7

## Volunteer Tourism: An Existential Perspective

MATTHEW McDONALD AND JOHN WILSON

---

### Introduction

The term *authenticity* is most often invoked in tourism studies to describe the process whereby tourists evaluate the ‘realness’ or otherwise of a tourist destination. Studies investigating tourist motivations indicate a strong desire for travel experiences and destinations that are genuine and/or unique both physically and culturally (MacCannell, 1973). When some tourists plan their travels, they frequently ask themselves: to what degree is the destination real, and to what degree has it been preserved from the despoiling influences of global capitalism?

Authenticity, and its opposite inauthenticity, is similarly invoked by existential philosophers to describe modes of human existence. Authenticity is characterized by an honest encounter with the fundamental conditions of existence, namely freedom, responsibility, choice, anxiety, alienation and death (to name just a few). In contrast, inauthenticity is a mode of existence characterized by the building of psychological defences in order to avoid the conditions of existence. This mode of existence leads to isolation from world, one another and oneself through self-deception (MacCannell, 1973).

Scholars in the field of leisure and tourism studies have argued for some time now that leisure and tourism experiences have the potential for self-enhancement, and that opportunities and potential for such augmentation makes leisure and tourism significant in many people’s lives (MacCannell, 1973). As existential psychologists, it is clear to us that much of this self-enhancement is the result of encountering the conditions of existence with an attitude of openness. However, it is surprising to us that relatively few authors in the leisure field have employed existential philosophy as a conceptual lens through which to interpret leisure experiences. One of the few exceptions is Kelly’s (1982; see also Kelly, 1981) *Leisure Identities and Interactions*, which interprets leisure experiences through the existential concept of ‘becoming’.

The use of existential concepts for interpretive purposes has tended to figure more prominently in the tourism literature. For example, Wang (1999) argues that 'object' (destination)-related conceptualizations of authenticity in tourism studies are narrow and lack interpretative power, while Steiner and Reisinger (2006) explore existential themes with an emphasis on authenticity, stating that its application to tourism studies requires a more robust phenomenological framework such as the one developed by Heidegger (1927/1962).

In contributing to this modest yet growing body of knowledge, this chapter begins with a brief sketch of authenticity in tourism studies and its conceptualization in the existential literature. This is then followed by a discussion on how authenticity might usefully be applied to interpret the burgeoning field of volunteer tourism.

## Authenticity in Tourism Studies

Authenticity when applied to tourism is often equated with an ideal bygone era. We see this in the fetishized display of museum objects, which engenders a culturally imbued attitude towards the 'foreign' and the 'exotic'. This promotes a genre error dating back to when 'primitive peoples' entered exhibits in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims that museum exhibitions of the quotidian have transformed the ways in which ordinary life might be viewed, so that ordinary things become out of the ordinary when placed in museum settings. The museum experience becomes a culturally conditioned model for experiencing life outside one's own culture when travelling (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 51).

The authentic tourism experience is one in which the tourist gets in touch with both a real world and their real selves (Handler & Saxton, 1988: 243). Nevertheless, it would be an error to propose that the emotional experience of 'the real' entails an epistemological experience of a real situation: the show put on in the tourist destination may be bogus just as a museum object may be a fake (MacCannell, 1973). Wang (1999: 358) contends that existential authenticity in tourism acts as a healthy antidote to the experience of alienation, or the loss of the 'true' self in our work and societal roles. Subjectively, Wang's (1999) intra-personal authenticity refers to ephemeral bodily feelings of pleasure and spontaneity, but also to aimed-for peak experiences not encountered in everyday life (McDonald *et al.*, 2009). Interpersonal experiences for Wang (2000: 68) involve the construction of 'communitas' in and among tourists and their hosts.

Daniel (1996) uses dance performance to magnify existential authenticity in the sphere of tourism. He believes dance performances, such as the rumba in Cuba, are further authenticated by the tourist's *participation* in the event rather than just being a spectator of it. Similarly, any imposed exclusion from the dance would, according to Radcliff-Brown (1964), produce a feeling of alienation as being 'put on the shelf' and perpetuate the long-established tourist

role of detached observer. From the performing dancers, tourists 'access the magical world of liminality which offers spiritual and aesthetic nourishment' (Daniel, 1996: 789). This liminal world, Daniel (1996) argues, affords relief from day-to-day tensions and authorizes immoderation approaching 'near-ecstatic experiences' (p. 789). Similarly, Wang (2000) maintains that engaging in tourism implies an easier, freer, spontaneous, less functional and more romantic lifestyle, which enables people to transcend their daily lives. The more adventurous postmodern tourist does not bother themselves with the authenticity of toured objects. Rather they are in search of their authentic selves with the aid of such objects and locations.

Olsen (2002) maintains MacCannell's (1973) quest for authenticity in tourism is doomed to failure because of the tourist's role as an interloper. Since social relations are bought and traded along with goods, the tourist buys what she/he sees when the product is promoted. 'Faking up' becomes a producer-driven activity where falsification increases the 'available store' in a commodity. If the producer is concerned with the well-being of the product only to the extent that it generates revenue, its authenticity will be of minor importance. Commercialism and commodification thereby reinforce this function by its own polluting presence that simultaneously connotes inauthenticity (Wang, 1999: 353; Olsen, 2002: 166; Kim & Jamal, 2007: 184). Olsen (2002: 166) insists the tourist role is antithetical towards intimacy and closeness. By entering the tourist role – which can be acquired by simply being a well-heeled unknown arrival – one is present to, but not a part of, the current activity (Radcliffe-Brown, 1964). What is at issue here is not how tourists judge what they see in others (for they are free to do this in any way they choose), but that they do so from the vantage point of an unequal set of power relations, particularly in the case of tourists from wealthy developed countries touring poorer developing countries.

Yet, despite what Olsen (2002) says, and even among tourists themselves, there is often a persistent resistance to being cast in the role of a tourist. The expression 'typical tourist' is a pejorative term and Wang (2000) has caught this mood in his descriptions of tourists attempting to leap out of their role in the hope of seeking more authentic experiences and identities.

The authenticity of objects in the tourist destination presumes an original, pure state that extends to cultures. Prior to the advent of tourism, the local culture had its own authority structure that used power for its own ends (Wearing & McDonald, 2002). Previously, a culture could choose and maintain its own values, but now it must accede to global capitalism, which alters infrastructure, employment and the environment through economic force (Ritzer, 2003).

Olsen asks (2002: 171–172): how does one get rid of the tourist role but keep the tourist? The theory of ritual as performance makes agency creditable to the actors; when tourists are brought into the role of participation in the joint work experience (for example, an exorcism) that usually belongs only to the host culture, it is shared and the typical distancing role of touristic observer is contracted. Other activities, such as assisting in shipbuilding (Olsen, 2002) overcome the alienation of detached observer. It is here that

we begin to glimpse some of the differences between volunteer tourism and mass tourism, where the former seeks to invite a more genuine contact through the tourist's active and mutually beneficial participation in local community projects.

## Existential Authenticity

Existential philosophy is a diverse set of beliefs and assumptions that is more often labelled an 'attitude' or an 'approach' to life, than a coherent set of philosophical principles (Friedman, 1964; Macquarie, 1973; Charlesworth, 1975; Cooper, 2003). Kaufmann (1975: 11–12) notes:

Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Most of the living 'existentialists' have repudiated this label, and a bewildered outsider might well conclude that the only thing they have in common is a marked aversion for each other . . . The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – that is the heart of existentialism.

Despite this lack of agreement (or indeed a willingness by certain philosophers to accept the existential label), there are a number of identifiable themes that characterize the existential concept of authenticity. These include freedom, responsibility, anxiety, choice, alienation, death, intersubjectivity, dogma, and meaning and purpose (McDonald, 2009). While the number of philosophers associated with existentialism is potentially large, our focus in this chapter will be on the two most influential figures of the 20th century – Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Existentialism explores the meaningfulness of human existence and the manner in which human beings attempt to overcome various forms of alienation (isolation and self-estrangement) from world, one another and oneself (Friedman, 1964; Cooper, 1999). Existential philosophers dismiss notions of an essential or inherent human nature, referring instead to conditions of humanness, which are not composed of essences but are instead grounded in existence (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 152; Sartre, 1948/1973: 26). This non-determinative worldview places each person in a position where they are responsible for defining self-identity. The idea of a reflexive self – a concept that has come to characterize modernity (Giddens, 1991; Beck *et al.*, 1994; Bauman, 1996) – is one that is also of great concern and interest to Heidegger and Sartre. Where historically self-identity was fixed by one's station in life, in modernity it is problematized and treated as a project; one that is created through choice and the totality of one's actions (Sartre, 1948/1973: 28). Self-identity has become a task or vocation; growth (or self-overcoming as some existentialist's term it) is grasped in the conditions of freedom, so that self-identity is a verb-like happening or event that is defined in terms of an ongoing life-story (Guignon, 1993: 224–225).

The concept of 'authenticity' lies at the heart of existential concepts of self-identity; it is a mode of being that periodically overcomes the alienating elements of the modern world. It is impossible to achieve a state of permanent authenticity; instead, it represents an ongoing dialogue between inauthentic and authentic modes of existence (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Ciaffa, 1987; Flynn, 1999). The conscious awareness of authentic modes of existence arises from a reflection on the contrasting mode of inauthenticity.

Inauthenticity is characterized by psychological defences and barriers that seek to protect and immure against the conditions of existence (Fromm, 1941/1994; Yalom, 1980). It is most vividly evident when one is forced to face the conditions of existence. Confronted with being-towards-death, the roles we have been involved with may seem superfluous when compared with the new need to uncover a meaning based on Heideggerian concern. Where inauthenticity is characterized by preoccupation with the everydayness of life, authenticity is gained by resoluteness and a sense of direction for one's life as a whole. The encounter between these two modes of existence has the potential to spark a dynamic dialogue, popularized by the well known expression 'angst', or what some might term 'existential anxiety' (May, 1950/1996). Change and growth are stimulated by anxiety and an attitude of openness, manifested by the renewal and reaffirmation of one's past, while simultaneously projecting oneself and one's possibilities into the future. The temporal condition of existence means that death is life's ultimate destination, stimulating a desire to create meaning and purpose in one's life (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 311; Farber, 1990).

Inauthenticity – sometimes described as bad faith – denotes the activity of denying one's essential freedom. It is related to self-deception where an individual may be conscious or unconscious of her/his inauthenticity. For Heidegger, anxiety is the product of *recognizing* that one does not provide for the basis of oneself. A person living an inauthentic life is damaging their possibilities of realising truly chosen goals; she/he knows they are free but does not acknowledge it. Although the facts of a situation limit freedom to act, they do not limit freedom to think and select an attitude. Inauthenticity is therefore an act of submission, a resignation concerning reaction to overwhelming forces, but nevertheless a decision, curiously, itself made possible by freedom. Feelings of guilt arise when one rejects this call to one's freedom, and awareness of one's ultimate destination, for failing to live up to one's possibilities (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 224: 341–343).

Immersion in the world (being-in-the-world) makes it impossible to avoid inauthenticity and the modern conditions of alienation; however, it is one's approach to the alienating elements of modernity that enables one to occasionally 'rise above it'. The authentic self, it is suggested, is located somewhere between the individual and their world; it is a balance between being-in-the-world and an ongoing reflection on one's consciousness as a free being (Guignon, 2004a). Authenticity is not a departure from social life but a process of individuation and relatedness that allows one to express oneself freely in the social milieu. It is an engagement with the public world,

not an avoidance of it. The task is to remain 'in-the-world' while willing a life higher than the average 'everydayness'. Guignon (1993: 228–230) writes:

It is important to keep in mind that authenticity has nothing to do with such romantic ideals as getting in touch with a deeper inner self or rising above the herd . . . Indeed, since our own life stories are inseparable from the wider text of the shared we-world, authenticity can be nothing other than a fuller and richer form of participation in the public context . . . Achieving the narrative continuity of authentic existence is what first makes possible personal identity understood as the 'constancy of the self' – its 'steadiness' and 'steadfastness' – stretched out across the life span.

Yet remaining 'in-the-world' requires the maintenance of a circumspect attitude, for authenticity is characterized by eschewing feelings of potency and tranquilization derived from dogmatic ideologies and the conveniences of socio-cultural conformity (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 163–168). Authenticity is a mode of becoming whereby the source of one's own power is located without the need to objectify and manipulate the Other in bad faith. Self-identity is bound up in the creation of meaning that brings purpose to one's life. One's life-story is given coherence in a chaotic world that has no pre-ordained meaning or destiny, by following a path or mission that one freely chooses to pursue.

This is never an easy prospect in a consumer society with its constantly evolving and changing fads and fashions, as well as media saturation. The individual is coaxed into a constant search for stimulation, new experiences, events and images, and the constant reinvention of self-identity (Smart, 2010). This contributes to identity confusion and fragmentation (Kellner, 1992). Steiner and Reisinger (2006: 302) wonder, 'whose self one is when not the real self'. Both Heidegger and Sartre contend there is no enduring self like *an object* – so there cannot be any 'real' self to aspire to or attain, but this does not mean one cannot make false steps during the struggle to achieve one. For Sartre (1943/1972, 1948/1973) individual choices define and constitute identity. Actions are not actions of the self; rather the self is a product of action.

For humans, identity is always something yet to be achieved. To try and escape the endless search for identity by embracing ready-made 'identities' is to adopt a *persona*, literally a mask and a role, with set speeches and patterns of behaviour. The genuinely free master, on the other hand, will experience continual striving and will always be in the process of becoming, never being. She is dynamic, fluid and ever creative, never ceasing to search for greater self-knowledge and self-transparency. She will always strive to become what she chooses to become, regardless of what others expect, demand or invite her to be.

(Sartre, cited in Golomb, 1995: 145)

In the final section below, we discuss authenticity, voluntarist ethics and how these relate to modes of authenticity in the volunteer tourism experience.

## Authenticity, Voluntarist Ethics and Tourism

One of the most powerful criticisms levelled against existential philosophy is that its orientation produces an alienated state that constantly verges on solipsism. Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov, Camus's Meursault and Sartre's Roquentin make charismatic anti-heroes but fail to make any difference to the world. Nevertheless, the relation of the individual to society occupies Heidegger and Sartre's thoughts considerably, and it is through their thinking that we are able to offer an interpretation of volunteer tourism and the changes to self-identity that it potentially precipitates.

Volunteer tourism involves working with local communities, without financial remuneration, on social and environmental projects around the world; it 'aims to provide sustainable alternative travel that can assist in community development, scientific research or ecological restoration' (Wearing, 2004: 214). Volunteer tourism differs from other forms of tourism in that it offers much greater opportunities to negotiate the fundamental conditions of existence, and therefore modes of authenticity. In most forms of tourism, the tourist is chaperoned and protected in the countries, regions and cities they seek to travel through (Olsen, 2002). In contrast, volunteer tourism ideally dissolves the barriers that exist between tourists, locals, culture and the environment. By its very nature it fosters intimacy and closeness when volunteers find themselves working and living alongside their hosts; it affords a degree of mutual exchange and interaction that is uncommon in other forms of tourism (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007).

For Heidegger, however, our engagement as social beings is a double-edged sword. Although it is possible to experience ourselves as inauthentic when adopting 'the they' as a surrogate legitimacy pandering to convention, it is also the participation in 'the they' that gives us enabling resources for being fully human, as a richer form of participation in the public context. Heidegger's *Dasein* (being-in-the-world) therefore lives in an ambiguity where one may be enlivened or quashed by one's possibilities (Guignon, 2004b: 226–228). For Heidegger's being-with-others, existence arrives already imbued with others and there is neither question of the solipsist's 'discovery' of other people, nor can we disentangle ourselves from relationships and attempt to exist 'on a higher plane'. The relationship with others is a priori because being is always a being-with, whether it is with others, or with the world itself, so *Dasein*'s world is always a co-world. We may attempt to escape and ignore others through indifference and the building of defence mechanisms. However, Heidegger (1927/1962: 85–86) insists that we are being-with-others, even when they are physically absent, as with sentiments such as nostalgia or resentment. When the possibility of authentic or inauthentic relations with others arises through being-at-hand, he says both must be conducted through solicitude. One can solicit relationships with others as 'taking over' where one acts for the other in a position of control, or one can solicit relationships through helping others solve things in their own way (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 158–159).

The latter approach is a circumspect and respectful solicitude, which allows and encourages the Other's right to self-determination. In seeking to work with

and contribute in some constructive way to the aims of a local community, the volunteer tourist eschews the alienating activity of 'gazing' from afar. This has been elaborated by Sartre in his concept of 'the look', which disempowers the observed by turning them into objects (Sartre, 1943/1972: 276–282). For Sartre, the gaze is that which *imprisons* the observed within an objective judgement they cannot see and from which they cannot escape.

When Heidegger (1927/1962: 158) speaks of interrelationships where one does not leap in for the Other, there would be a correspondent diminution of unequal power relations and the poor behaviour of the tourist as exemplified by backpacker tourism (Scheyvens, 2002a: 148). Gone would be the demand that tourist and host engage in a largely commodified transaction. Instead, the world becomes an intersubjectively constituted totality in which it becomes possible for the tourist to encounter other entities in reciprocity, whether this is other people or the physical environment.

Heidegger believes that when one 'leaps in', for another, one removes the other's possibilities by solving the other's problems for them, and thereby dominating their concerns. People for whom one leaps in are dominated, 'dis-authenticated' and rendered dependent. Arguably, many tour operators do this 'leaping in' when orchestrating services, transport, accommodation and eating for their clients. Hosts, in situations like this, may be inauthentic because they feel they must pander to tourist and organizer expectations (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006: 310).

In *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre (1960/1981) showed what would be necessary to approximate a we-subject. These features involve: a commonly perceived external exigency, a renunciation of absolute individual freedom, reciprocity, and a pledge amongst others. In the case where some tourists and hosts maintain contact with each other after the event (Kim & Jamal, 2007: 192), we can see the germinations of such a united group, but these reunions do not have the characteristics of the fused group (no pledge); they are, at best, an *emerging* en fusion where temporality and physical separation (after the tourist goes home) combine to throw the tourist back into the disconnected serialized state. This is an unavoidable and sudden isolation from new-found friends, and a physical and cultural environment that is different from home. As difficult as this separation is for tourist and host, it has the potential to provide both parties with a template for negotiating future and inevitable experiences of loss and bereavement.

In the tourism literature (e.g. Olsen, 2002: 167), there is a frequent eschewal of the role of the tourist. This sense of discomfort, closely aligned to inauthenticity, and dissatisfaction with 'just being a visitor', suggests pressure is being exerted on the commonplace role of tourists to transform themselves into a more responsible ensemble. Were tourism to become not so much a temporary escape into *divertissement*, where authentic experience is optional, but more a voluntary decision, complete with the renunciation of unequal power relations – there would be a new space for a different kind of relationship conducted at the local level (Olsen, 2002; Scheyvens, 2002b; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Kim & Jamal, 2007; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Butcher & Smith, 2010).



One representation of the less responsible ensemble is the often self-centred, unkempt, immoral, drug-taking backpacker, who may be found treating the host community as a fun theme park (Scheyvens, 2002a). In contrast, volunteer tourists in the truest sense desire interaction with hosts and the environment in order to contribute something meaningful that has direct local benefits (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Sin, 2009). As a result, tourist and host share day-to-day lived experiences where they often learn something of other cultures and people (Montuori & Fahim, 2004). The tension between the values of mass tourism and volunteer tourism is expressed very well by Gray and Campbell (2007: 479) when they write:

At one end, tourism is commodified; it resembles mass tourism, economic values equate to profits accrued by non-local companies, local environments and people are aesthetically consumed, and tourists neither question these values nor seek to demonstrate more ethical values. At the opposite end, tourism is decommodified; economic benefits are locally retained, tourists engage in meaningful experiences with local environments and people, and they seek such 'ethical' engagement with local culture rather than the enhancement of their own 'cultural capital'.

Nevertheless, the volunteer tourist may lack empathy when they trivialize poverty, or use host locations as training grounds to develop professional and career-related skills (Raymond & Hall, 2008b: 533–538). Notably, they have a marked preference for exotic locations. 'Earthwatch has a good handle on what sells – proposals involving coral reefs and tropics are likely winners, as are furry animals and pretty birds' (Speer, 1994: 21). These problems may be compounded by the volunteer tourists themselves who may not have useful skills, not be familiar with the local culture (or wish to understand it in any meaningful way), and only stay for a short period – perhaps with the ethics of a new kind of 'noblesse oblige' (Tomazos & Butler, 2009a: 198). The mutual benefit and reciprocity advocated by McIntosh and Zahra (2007) implies: 'The narrative and traditional interaction between host and tourist is thus potentially rewritten as the tourist experience is actively constructed by the host as well as the tourist' (p. 554), especially where communal activities such as singing, dancing and storytelling promote reciprocity (Raymond & Hall, 2008b: 540).

The theme of voluntarism (as contrasted with volunteering) has been a disposition within existentialist thought for a long time (Olafson, 1970: 35–37). Arguably, an existentially motivated and voluntarist ethic has been taken up by volunteer tourists who, in the absence of a previous generation's 'left wing, right wing' political orientation, see themselves as simply wanting to make the world a better place (Butcher & Smith, 2010). Here the ethics of the volunteer tourist do not find a frame in any particular ideological creed, avoiding the alienation and reification of dogmatic beliefs. Other motivations are more self-serving and include furnishing one's CV with laudable accomplishments, and a gap-year that promises time off, relaxation and fun. Some 350,000 annual placements made by 800 organizations suggest that young people are indifferent to traditional ideologies that characterize institutionalized spiritual and political outlooks of past generations. Rather, they are reacting to a more fundamental 'life politics' by seeking to engage in morally justifiable actions that

simultaneously contribute to the construction of a life narrative (Giddens, 1991: 209–231; Butcher & Smith, 2010: 29–30). Underpinning this narrative approach to life is a focus on ‘becoming’ via an immersion into an alien culture (Montuori & Fahim, 2004).

By choosing to place themselves in alien environment, often far from the securities of home, and where the normal touristic comforts and securities do not exist, the volunteer tourist is much more likely to be confronted with the conditions of existence and the possibility of experiencing modes of authenticity. The initial experience of the volunteer tourist is naturally one of anxiety. It is in the experience of anxiety that one is able to recognize alienation in the form of idle talk, contentment and tranquillization (Heidegger, 1927/1962: 232). Sartre (1939/2002: 61) adds:

Emotion is not an accident, it is a mode of our conscious existence, one of the ways in which consciousness understands (in Heidegger’s sense of *Verstehen*) its being-in-the-world.

The anxiety that stems from such a forthright being-in-the-world creates the conditions for insight and reflection on the conditions of existence, yet over-indulgence in reflection and introspection can act to poison the self and degenerate into solipsism (Golomb, 1995: 136–137).

We cannot create our selves by looking inward into our seemingly given selves, by indulging in emotions or by imagining. Only by action, by changing the world, can the self be created.

(Golomb, 1995: 140)

The initial volunteer tourist experience of anxiety is gradually transformed as they learn to understand and accept an alien way of life, and where action in the form of work connects them to people and the physical and cultural environment in unique and intimate ways. In most forms of mass tourism, the tourist is unlikely to experience any form of anxiety that may precipitate insight and greater understanding of self and world, lest their travels be deemed unacceptable. In striking out for authenticity, the volunteer tourist becomes a law unto themselves in the absence of everyday norms and cultural sanctions (Sartre, 1943/1972). At first sight, this is an anxiety provoking experience, which is resolved by assuming a responsibility for one’s life greater than previously imagined. If there are no pre-ordained values, then choosing a value becomes one’s own responsibility – there can be no appeal to a higher authority at a later date if things do not turn out well. This is what Sartre (1948/1973) referred to when he suggested that human beings are ‘condemned to freedom’. The seeming liberation from convention brings with it unpredictable consequences, and an unforgiving measure of accountability. The volunteer tourist is placed in a situation where previous values cease to exist and where new values need to be examined and tested. For Sartre, this freedom brings a liability towards one’s perception of oneself without equivocation. The opportunity to vacate, to be somewhere else, provides the opportunity to experiment and construct alternative selves. As Montuori and Fahim (2004) note: ‘The encounter with another culture . . . becomes an opportunity to understand who we are, what we value and hold dear, and what we feel strongly about’ (p. 254).

## Conclusion

Volunteer tourists express a desire to move away from forms of travel that disempower local communities and turn them into objects (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011). However, as previously noted, the volunteer tourist must be careful to not leap in for the Other by imposing their own personal aims onto the people, communities and environments in which they seek to travel and work (e.g. Palacios, 2010). These ideas fit nicely with existential philosophy where the search and creation of a justified self surfaces as paramount. Yet the notion of global citizenship (which, in many ways, the volunteer tourist embodies) in a post-traditional world is an idea hard to place within thetic concepts contiguous to knowledge and belief, as proposed by religious or political ideology, particularly capitalist ideology with its emphasis on capital accumulation and commodification. However, it is easily accommodated within an existentialist ontology that prioritizes *attitudinal* dispositions created in the unavoidable conditions of freedom, choice, responsibility and anxiety to which the volunteer tourist chooses to expose him- or herself.

It is not difficult to see where the existential perspective is leading. Volunteer tourists in search of existential authenticity are not simply in search of a *knowledge* of the touring location, nor do they seek to pilfer or assimilate a sculptural slice of the destination for their shelves at home on returning. Yet neither should they be glibly fooling around with playacting. Existential volunteer tourists are seeking modifications within their own selves, and their own sense of being, as a result of experiencing being and difference through relatedness to alien peoples and environments. The implications for this are that these volunteer tourists are breaking down the commodified notion of separateness between 'tourist' and 'destination'.

Volunteer tourists are doing this through a mutual concern for locals and their environment, a renunciation of absolute individual freedom (denying the liberty to get drunk and stoned on the host's beach and to make a nuisance of oneself), reciprocity (mutual caring), and where one can appreciate the notion of 'seeing oneself in the other' (Sartre, 1960/1981: 634). Furthermore, when volunteer tourists have peak experiences, or as Wang (2000) says, become 'mystically ecstatic', there is an aimed for (though probably fleeting) fusion of self within the target culture – and a concomitant depletion of separateness between the tourist as guest and the host as provider we suggest that with volunteer tourists this is more likely to occur. Volunteer tourists who interact with a sense of commitment, and have, beforehand, sought an informed deference towards the norms of the host culture, do not just return home with souvenirs, photographs and other artefacts that are evidence of cultural capital: they enjoy a modification within their own being through a humanized internationalism that moves towards being-in-the-world as one authentic being relating to another. Taken to its fullest extent, they confront a new authentic mode of existing that they will eventually have to acknowledge, and may find on returning home they have created new attitudes, beliefs and values.