Re-conceptualizing volunteer tourism organizations roles: A host perspective

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ABSTRACT

While volunteer tourism organizations (VTOs) remain important intermediaries in the practice of volunteer tourism, questions remain on the role they play in serving the interests of host communities. This paper explores the role(s) of VTOs in a rural volunteer tourism hub in Ghana from a host community perspective using a phenomenological inquiry. An integrated framework of Critical/Institutional Analysis and Development (C/IAD) was used to examine host community experience with VTOs' role. Data was collected through focus group discussion and in-depth interviews with 43 residents of Asebu - Ghana. The study revealed that while VTOs act as facilitators and interpreters of local culture, issues of over-regulation and protectionism isolate guests from the host as well as rob some host of any meaningful socio-economic benefits and interactions.

1. Introduction

The structure of the volunteer tourism process requires three main actors: volunteer tourists, host community(s), and volunteer tourism organizations [VTOs] (Benali & Ren, 2019; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Lo & Lee, 2011; Wearing, 2004). However, the extant literature tends to focus on volunteer tourists and VTOs, despite calls to address the dearth of host voices (Guttentag, 2011; Mostafanezhad & Hannam, 2016). Further, the current practice of international volunteer tourism seems not to live up to its ideal of fostering greater host-guest interactions (Guttentag, 2009, 2011; Sin, 2010).

VTOs represent a critical mediator between volunteer tourists and host communities. As purveyors of networks, VTOs have been discussed as cultural brokers (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011); mediators between host and guest (Lee & Zhang, 2019), and interpreters (Coghlan, 2008; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008). It is no surprise then that VTOs have attracted research attention although their specific roles as mediators are not properly understood (Keese, 2011; McGehee, 2014; Taplin, Dredge, & Scherrer, 2014). Thus, there are practical limitations to understanding the role of volunteer tourism in fostering cross-cultural understanding and altruism (Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2017).

In context, Africa remains an important recipient of volunteer tourists, and Ghana, a West African country, continues to attract patrons of international volunteer tourism (Agyeiwaah, Akyeampong, Amenumey, & Boakye, 2014; Otoo, 2014; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). As demonstrated in previous studies on Africa, the implications of volunteer tourism are so complex that statistics alone do not readily capture the intricacies of host-guest-agency interactions without VTOs (Agyeiwaah & Mensah, 2017; Barbieri, Santos, & Katsube, 2012; Nyahunzvi, 2013). Indeed, there are considerations such as home-stay accommodations as well as the contrasting cultural and economic realities participants are confronted with in Ghana (Agyeiwaah, 2013; Agyeiwaah, 2020). More than two decades ago, Gyekye (1996) noted that the social dynamics of hosting in many African cultures present a complex web of rules and norms. Illustrating this within the Ghanaian cultural context, a host is culturally obliged to serve food to the guest first before attending to his or her own needs; a cultural norm grounded in the belief that ancestors and gods visit as strangers (Adongo, Anuga, & Dayour, 2015; Idang, 2015).

Additionally, VTOs are typically categorized as Western profit and nonprofit volunteer-sending agencies (McGehee, 2012) and have local agencies in the Global South (Sin, 2010). These local agencies constitute part of the host community. As a result, there is a general lack of contextual examination of the complexity of VTOs within the local context. The literature on volunteer tourism in developing countries lacks an integrated explanation and has presented a fragmented

understanding of how the different aspects of the volunteer tourism process are connected (Tomazos & Butler, 2010).

Volunteers are known to travel from North-South to do altruistic projects (Agyeiwaah & Mensah, 2017). However, this travel pattern can lead to some unintended discriminatory tendencies. For instance, scholars such as Palacios (2010), Pastran (2014), and Zahra and McGehee (2013) indicate that volunteer tourism can lead to cases where unqualified and inexperienced volunteers are offered jobs which local people are denied. For example, in the local community schools, young volunteer tourists who do not have teacher training certification are allowed to teach, an opportunity that experienced local Ghanaians do not have. Thus, current approaches to volunteer tourism have drawn critique for romanticizing poverty and deprivation (Simpson, 2004). For others, however, it is a worthwhile endeavor to help humanity and to see value and agency for local communities (Frilund, 2018; Wearing, 2001). It is therefore surprising that limited attention has been directed to understanding the experiences of host regarding VTOs' roles. With the call for a more qualitative inquiry into the volunteering phenomenon (Conran, 2011), this paper attempts to further explore the role (s) of VTO in an African context using a phenomenological inquiry.

In pursuance of the ongoing discussion, the study seeks to find answers to the following research questions: (1) What is the nature of the volunteer tourism process in Ghana? (2) How does the host community perceive the roles of the volunteer tourism organization? Our objectives are two-fold; first to understand the nature of the volunteer tourism process and to explore the roles of VTOs from a host community perspective. As part of achieving these objectives, we employ a phenomenological inquiry to investigate host community perspectives of volunteer tourism organizations in Asebu community of Ghana.

2. Literature

2.1. The nature and evolution of the volunteer tourism process

The nature of the volunteer tourism process often studied solely from the perspective of the volunteer tourism organizations (VTO) has been described as complex and relational by Hammersley (2014). Complexities often stemming from poverty, power, globalization, and inequality have shaped discussions of the practice of VTO (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Thompson, Curran, & O'Gorman, 2017; Thompson & Taheri, 2020). In the instances where host perspectives are the focus, the discussion has been characterised by popular neocolonialist concerns (Frazer & Waitt, 2016; Kadomskaia, Brace-Govan, & Cruz, 2020).

As a discourse, volunteer tourism literature has gone through several phases (Wearing, Beirman, & Grabowski, 2020). From emergent (Alexander, 2012; Guttentag, 2009; McGehee, 2012; Wearing, 2001), consolidated (Hammersley, 2014; Ingram, 2014) to expansion (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). These evolutions have been driven by concern(s) of commodification, motives, and developmental impacts in its practice (Simpson, 2004; Wearing, McDonald, & Ponting, 2005). The literature indicates a mixed bag of positive and negative outcomes for the actors involved (Thompson & Taheri, 2020). In its simplest form, volunteer tourism allows people in the global north to travel to the global south to serve humanity whilst on holiday (Wearing, 2001). Whiles other types such as domestic volunteer tourism do exist, the focus of this paper is on international volunteer tourism. Within this dynamic, VTOs act as intermediaries and facilitate this process by seeing to placements and other needs at a fee for volunteer tourists (Frilund, 2018).

2.2. Roles and functions of volunteer tourism organizations

Although the role of VTOs within the system of volunteer actors is complex, their fundamental roles are four. They are facilitators, regulators, protectors, and brokers. As facilitators, VTOs act as intermediaries who see to placements, accommodation, food, and or

sightseeing for volunteer tourists (Ingram, 2014). VTOs are expected to create opportunities for the guest to experience the culture through various activities such as homestay arrangements. In the itinerary of many VTOs, cultural nights are often the highlight of guests' stay (Hammersley, 2014). Barbieri et al. (2012) revealed how this facilitation role enabled connecting with local people and lifestyles.

A natural byproduct of their facilitation is the regulation of the activities and processes of volunteer tourism. This is because while most international volunteer sending organizations operate in North America and Western Europe, far from the shores of Africa, it is these companies which determine which options of activities as well as which areas in the host country volunteers can choose to travel to (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). They make these decisions through their networks and partner organizations located in the destination region. As found by Wearing and McGehee (2013), it is these companies that also determine the ethics and codes of conduct for all the stakeholders in the volunteer tourism process.

As protectors, VTOs are the primary source of protection for the often young and adventurous volunteers (Steele & Scherrer, 2018). The VTOs ensure safe passage to placement communities and secure accommodation for guests (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Dimache, 2017), as well as placement into projects (Benson & Henderson, 2011). VTOs have an added role as guarantors of quality and safety for the volunteer tourist. They are expected to live up to the advertised safety and quality promises on their websites as found by Ong, Pearlman, Lockstone-Binney, and King (2013).

VTOs also function as cultural and interpretative brokers between the host community and the volunteer tourist. Cultural brokerage arises due to the cultural differences between the host community and the volunteer tourist (Zahra & McGehee, 2013). These differences can translate to cultural confusion, shock, perceived apathy of local community members, and in some cases, hostility towards the visitor (Butler & Tomazos, 2011; Otoo, 2014; Vrasti, 2012; Wickens, 2010). VTOs act as buffers between the culture of the guest and host and are expected to communicate the acceptable norms and values of the host to the visiting volunteer (Bochner, 2013). The interpretative brokerage role comes from the linguistic duties VTOs perform including interpreting symbols, lifestyles, and encounters at destinations; the interpretation of which fosters a sense of mutual and cross-cultural understanding for both host and guest (Srivastava, 2012). Frilund (2018) found that among volunteers, the cultural capital of a destination is often misunderstood as the state capital and the VTOs role is to provide clarity to such symbolism. The interpretive role also involves the translation of language for both host and guest. Where language is a barrier, interpretation provides both translation and meaning. Without such brokerage services, the language barrier between volunteers and locals can thwart efforts to get to know one another (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017).

Despite these roles, activities of VTOs are reported to create problems for both visitors and host communities. There are indications of the perpetuation of dependence and 'othering' in the global south (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008). VTOs contribute to a system that "benefits" from the deprivation of its host communities (Bargeman, Richards, & Govers, 2018; Sin, 2010). On one hand, the VTO benefits from the neediness of the host who lacks some material services such as schools and hospitals (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Thompson & Taheri, 2020). On the other hand, they appear to be the recipients of the material benefits from payments made by volunteer tourists with little or no accountability to either volunteers or the host community (Guttentag, 2009; Tomazos & Butler, 2009).

2.3. Towards an integrated framework of institutional analysis development

As this study explores the roles of VTOs in the volunteer tourism narrative, we consider integrated applications of the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Ostrom, 1990) and Critical

Institutional Analysis and Development (CIAD) framework (Whaley, 2018). The IAD framework elaborates on the nature and analytical processes involved in brokering knowledge of commons and how those processes can inform strategy and collective action. In the IAD framework, participants within an institutional setup define, produce, and share managed resources (Frischmann, Madison, & Strandburg, K. J. (Eds.)., 2014). Traditionally, the IAD was developed to provide a comparative approach to understanding institutional commons within the context of an aftermath of a disaster.

A recent adaptation of the IAD framework, the CIAD framework, which was proposed by Whaley (2018) advanced that a critical and systematic analysis of the 'complex-embeddedness' within an institution, its environment, and its stakeholders offers meaning to resource use, and highlights the necessity of evaluative frameworks. For example, Laing, Lee, Moore, Wegner, and Weiler (2009) employed the IAD framework to explain the factors contributing to tourism partnerships in a protected park.

The principal components of the IAD and CIAD include the three major components. First is the rules and resources (resource characteristics in IAD) which embody the structural elements of the environmental and societal world within which institutions exist and for which actors draw upon within a social situation. Rules and resources comprise five subsets: biophysical and material environment (e.g. natural resources, ecosystems, and clothing/dress), political economy (power and interests), social attributes (sociodemographic elements), discourse (discussions on social life), and rules and norms (societal norms of behavior) (Laing et al., (Laing et al., 2009; Ostrom, 1990; Whaley, 2018).

Second, the social situation ('action situation' in IAD) concerns social space within which people relate in the visible and hidden social world including adherence to traditions, rules, and rights. A social situation occurs as a field, domain, or arena which collectively helps to identify different yet interrelated social situations. A third principle is interactions and outcomes which concerns evaluating the IAD and CIAD frameworks. Emergence denotes the institutional structures developed from largely unconscious or intended interactions, practices, and actions (Bhaskar, 1979; Elder-Vass, 2010). The dotted line connecting rules and resources to evaluation and outcomes depict emergence whereas the dotted boxes (social situation and evaluation) accommodate the possibility of circumstantial change.

The revision of IAD into CIAD as described by Whaley (2018) is depicted in Fig. 1.

Given the conceptual differences in the application of the IAD and CIAD, an integrated framework is particularly useful to examine and analyze specific empirical contexts (McNaughton & Rao, 2017). Any integration of the IAD and CIAD should, thus, consider that a bricolage of issues within both frameworks to provide better insight into the nature of volunteer tourism. Specifically, nature, processes, interactions, and dynamics as well as propose meaning to the processes within those interactions.

3. Methods

3.1. Study context – Central Region of Ghana

This study was undertaken in Ghana's Central Region, the nation's tourism hub (Adu-Ampong, 2017). The region is endowed with historic and natural attractions in addition to some accommodation facilities that draw many tourists seeking to volunteer for various reasons. Asebu is one of the specific towns within this region. The town hosts prominent NGOs such as *Projects Abroad, Alliance for Youth Development, and CARE international*. Asebu was chosen as the study site due to proximity to the target population and having considered three major criteria suggested by Kayat (2002) and Gursoy, Jurowski, and Uysal (2002), who assert community attachment as a strong predictor of host reaction to tourism. Consequently, the choice of the study context was based on the principle that the area must have had at least 2–5 years of contact with volunteer tourists; there must be evidence of projects in the communities (painted schools, hospitals, etc.); and the area must have volunteer tourists present during the data collection (ibid). The study targeted community members of the Asebu town including service providers; host families, taxi drivers, traders, shop owners, and business people, who had some experiences with both volunteer tourists and VTOs and had lived in the community for at least two years.

3.2. Research approach and instrument

Given the practical experiences of residents with VTOs, it was pertinent to adopt a phenomenological inquiry with a transcendental approach that provides a critical description of the target groups' lived experiences (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). This allowed the researchers to capture the lived experiences of residents of the Asebu community who were the main target group across five categories (see Table 1).

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to explore the subjective meanings of participants (see instrument in Appendix 1) (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2013). The appropriateness of the research instruments was ensured through expert review and progressive focusing of the instruments. As part of designing and ensuring the instrument appropriateness, the review involved five Tourism and Hospitality professors from the University of Cape Coast who have expertise related to the context and themes being researched. Each of the experts took one month to review the thematic areas being researched and made suggestions for deletion and inclusions of relevant issues related to the objectives of the study. In addition, we employed progressive focusing that emphasizes matching theoretical frameworks with reality to direct and redirect data based on abductive reasoning (Orton, 1997). This approach has the advantage of combining theoretical loyalty with new data (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). We embark on this pragmatic approach by focusing on an integrated framework of Critical/Institutional Analysis and Development (C/IAD) and interview data from residents
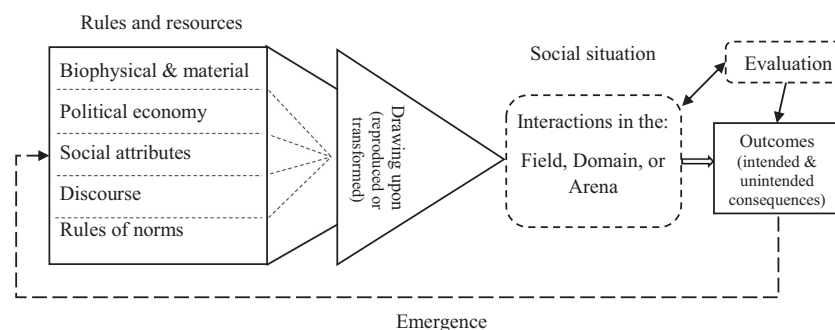

Fig. 1. CIAD framework for institutionalism.

Table 1

Sampling technique and sizes.

No.	Category	Sampling Population	Sampling Technique	Population	Sample size	Data Collection Technique
a.	*Work-based groups*					
1	Children's home of hope orphanage	Caregivers, and supervisors	Purposive	3	1	In-depth interview
2	Educational institutions	Teachers, and Headteacher,	Purposive	20	3	In-depth interview
					4	1 FGD
3	Summer school and Sports academy projects	Project coordinators & Liaison officers	Purposive	6	4	In-depth interview
4	Key Informant interview	Regional Director of the volunteer tourism organization	Purposive	1	1	In-depth interview
b.	*Casual workers*					
5	Residents of Asebu	Taxi drivers, traders, and households located close to the orphanage home and school	Purposive	Unknown	22	In-depth interview
					8	2 FGDs
	Total	43 participants				

Note: *FGD = Focus group discussion.*
Source: Authors' construct.

regarding the role of NGOs to allow theory development and refinement. Hence, while recognizing the chosen framework, we ensured that appropriate questions were asked to match theory with reality rather than imposing the theory on respondents.

Consequently, the interview guide for residents had two main themes, the first part sought to probe issues of residence and citizenship in the community (see Appendix 1) (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Holladay & Ormsby, 2011). The second section probed the knowledge and level of awareness about volunteer tourism in the community. Both focus group and in-depth interview guides had questions on host participation in volunteer tourism activities, challenges of interaction, and control of volunteer tourism activities by the VTOs.

The first focus group was made up of teachers that host volunteer tourists. As indicated by Freitas, Oliveira, Jenkins, and Popjoy (1998) having a more homogenous group yields better results, because of shared experiences. Gender, occupation, and citizenship were used as criteria for selection. The first focused group discussion (FGD) was made up of four (4) female teachers in the lower primary classes (class 1-class 4) between the ages of 30 and 55 years. They all had experience working with volunteer tourist teachers in their classrooms. The second and third groups were chosen based on their occupation in the informal sector as taxi drivers and businesspeople (McLafferty, 2004). Willingness to participate in the discussion was a major factor for selection. Based on the recommendation of Dawson, Manderson, and Tallo (1993), a minimum of four persons per group was used. Likewise, as was true in the case of this study, a smaller group size was used because of the need for optimum 'participation from each subject' (Wong, 2008). As the study aimed at the production of meaning from the perspective of the host, the generalizability of the findings was not a primary consideration (Bryman, 2008).

3.3. Sampling and data collection

The purposive sampling method was employed to recruit residents for the interview based on two main criteria: (1) Frequency of interaction with volunteer tourists and VTOs and (2) the nature of work concerning volunteer tourism. Based on these two suggested criteria, we identified five broad categories. Four out of the five categories were work-based groups that interacted with volunteer tourists and NGOs. These four categories of work-based groups included *Children's home of hope orphanage, educational institutions, summer school and sports academy projects,* and *key informant interviews*. Specific participants within these four categories included caregivers/supervisors, teachers, and headteachers and project coordinators & liaison officers, and the Regional Director of volunteer tourism organization (Table 1). The remaining fifth category comprised casual workers (e.g. Taxi drivers, traders, and households located close to the orphanage home and school). A

sampling frame was developed consisting of a list of host communities and work zones from the volunteer tourism organization. In the end, a total of 43 participants were purposively sampled for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. To ensure a valid data process, a conscious effort was made to adopt best practices using the Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) checklist as a guide. This checklist provides four aspects for demonstrating validity in qualitative research including design consideration, data generation, analytic, and presentation. First, as part of the design consideration, we ensured that each respondent is given a voice during the interview and focus group discussion. Second, the data generation employed in this study clearly articulates data collection decisions. For example, the use of a purposive sampling other than another sampling in this study was due to the experiential nature of the purpose of the study that warrants that respondents shared their lived experiences. Hence, the only participant with such experience was selected. Third, as part of the analytic procedures, the earlier expert review explained above was supplemented with member checking to ensure that only participants with the preferable experiences were interviewed. The fourth aspect of presentation involves an audit trail where biases of the researcher during the data collection are acknowledged.

Following these processes, data collection continued until no new information was gleaned from the interviews. Interviews were designed in English and translated back into "Fante", the indigenous language of Asebu. Each interview lasted a minimum of thirty minutes and a maximum of two hours with information collected from both the individual and community levels. This was in line with good practice as there is a distinction between interpersonal contact and community contact (Ap, 1990). To ensure that research ethics were adhered to, respondents were first informed of the objectives of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their data such as addresses or names. Then, they were informed of their ability to disengage at any point in the interview process.

3.4. Data analysis

The recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim. The responses to each of the questions from both the in-depth interview and focus group discussion were listed. QDA Miner, a qualitative data software, was used to facilitate this process through the creation of codes. Using the research objectives as a guide, the first level of coding was done by reviewing the transcript data line by line and identifying key issues. The coding followed Corbin and Strauss (1990) three coding procedures of open, axial, and selective coding. The initial open coding generated 47 codes. These codes were subsequently collapsed into 14 focused codes. The coding frequency, text retrieval, coding co-occurrences, and cluster analysis tools in QDA miner software

facilitated this process. The open coding was followed by further analysis of possible relationships within the data as the second stage of axial coding. At this stage, visual tools in the software such as dendrograms and bubble charts helped to see the interrelationships between coded sections of the data.

At the final selective stage (Charmaz, 2006), the emerging themes were categorized into units of meanings. This was done by exporting all the codes into Microsoft excel and pasting all the verbatim responses under each code. After that, the textual descriptions and 'ad verbatim' quotation responses for each of the objectives were singled out and studied on their own and in the light of the other responses to see the emerging patterns, similarities, and differences. This process enabled a structural description of the phenomenon as given by the participants. Some of the most used strategies during the process of validation under phenomenology include corroboration by participants and agreement between coders (Creswell, 2013). In keeping with best practice, a colleague was asked to verify codes used in encoding the data. As indicated by Padilla-Díaz (2015), the agreement between coders is an important means of validating the information obtained.

In our initial data analysis of the *attributes of the community*, we found volunteer tourism to occur in a heterogeneous space. In total, 43 residents with varied characteristics participated in the study. The youngest was a 19-year-old female, the oldest was a 78-year-old male. The professions of participants varied, with nine persons in the educational sector while the rest were in the informal sector as businesspersons (13), taxi drivers (10), and seamstresses (2). Five of the respondents worked in the volunteer tourism organization as coordinators and liaison officers. Four of the participants were unemployed, two were students. All participants had a basic level of education. Out of the 43 respondents, more than half (24 respondents) were born and raised in Asebu while 19 were from other towns in the Central Region of Ghana. Most of those from other towns were workers in the volunteer tourism space as liaison officers and teachers. While most liaison officers and coordinators had temporary accommodation in Asebu, their permanent residence was in Cape Coast, a Metropolis in the Central Region of Ghana. However, during the peak season of volunteer tourist flows, they would stay at Asebu for up to two months at a time. Those who came from Cape Coast (liaison officers and project coordinators) were seen by some residents as being a part of the volunteer tourism enterprise. The findings support earlier claims by Teye, Sirakaya, and Sönmez (2002) and that individual characteristic such as age, level of education, and citizenship status played a role in determining one's level of participation in the volunteer tourism process (Canan & Hennessy, 1989; Um & Crompton, 1987).

4. Results

4.1. The nature of the volunteer tourism process

In the study area, volunteer tourism originated from the VTOs. According to the key informant, who served as the regional manager of the local volunteer tourism organization, their company was a *'hybrid' company and not like an NGO* located in the West. In this sense, being a hybrid organization meant they had offices in and out of Ghana. While the mother organization was in the West, their local representative in Ghana had their head office in Cape Coast. The role of the local VTO was to receive the volunteer tourists once they arrive in Ghana and convey them to their respective project sites based on the pre-arranged bookings. As the Regional Manager, he had oversight responsibility for the entire operation once tourists arrived in Cape Coast;

> *The tourists pay abroad to the mother company. When they arrive in Ghana, I place them based on the details sent before they came. They are placed either on educational, medical, community service, sports, or social work programs* (Key Informant, 45 years).

The volunteer tourism process was controlled and regulated at different levels of operation by different stakeholders; coordinators, liaison officers, teachers, and host families (for homestay arrangements). Coordinators were usually full-time employees of the VTOs while liaison officers were casual workers. Host families were scouted and employed by the local VTO as third-party service providers. Their work was regulated closely by the VTO through reports and feedback taken from the volunteer tourists during and after the trip. There were instances where volunteer tourists by-passed the local VTOs and made complaints to the 'mother 'organization in the West;

> *Instead of calling you directly when there is a problem, some volunteer tourists will call their parents or the mother organization. They won't talk to you about any problem until you see it on the feedback form. When there is a problem in the host family, ideally the host mother should be the first point of call …*(Key Informant,45 years).

This often made the host families feel uncomfortable about being reported on by their guests. In such cases, the local agencies had to act as 'buffers' to diffuse the tensions that these kinds of incidents brought. During such occurrences, host families perceived the local VTOs as their mediator in managing any reputational damage that such reports may cause with the 'mother' organization in the West. Thus, while Agyei-waah and Mensah (2017) found this conciliator role between the host family and the guest, this study found the local VTOs playing this role with the mother organization.

4.2. Volunteer tourism space as an action arena

The nature of volunteer tourism experiences among stakeholders were fourfold: technical, commercial, philanthropic, and no connection. For residents, these experiences influenced their feelings and opinions regarding volunteer tourism. As De Kadt (1979) put it, those who experienced volunteer tourism as technical people served side by side with the volunteers. These were staff with technical expertise (mainly teachers in VTO schools) as well as liaison officers who worked for the local partner organization;

> *We work with them on the projects so virtually we are always together with them wherever they go…it's our job!* [Coordinator, male, 28 years].

These liaison officers were aware of the positive and negative sides of the phenomenon and accepted both sides as a complete package. For instance, two participants in this category indicated that some volunteer tourists were in the program as *punishment* from their parents, some were genuinely interested in the projects, whilst some were in Cape Coast, Ghana, because it was fashionable and in vogue;

> *It is like a fashion… they come because their friends were here, they took good pictures, had a good time, so once they are here, they need to experience the same thing,* [Coordinator, male, 24 years].

Participants whose experiences with volunteer tourists were "commercial" in nature included traders, taxi drivers, and seamstresses. They reported brief encounters that were often mediated by persons working in the VTO organization. There was a sense of displeasure when the coordinators kept them from using their dual price systems because they communicated actual prices with the volunteer tourists:

> *…the VTO coordinators tell volunteer tourists the prices before they even get here so you cannot charge the way you want, so really, they do not bring any added benefit for me.* [Taxi driver, Male, 38 years].

Residents who met the volunteer tourists in the commercial sphere were mostly indifferent. Although they admitted that the volunteer tourists were good for business, they asserted that they did not buy enough from them for their absence to be a bother. Largely drawing from the perception of low financial benefit, they saw themselves as independent of the volunteer tourism process (quite reminiscent of the

economic necessity and negotiated economic capital) found by Thompson and Taheri (2020).

The mediation of representatives of the VTOs such as project co-ordinators, liaison officers, and members of the host families was viewed as part of the job because these representatives felt responsible for the safety of their guests. As recounted by one host mother, she had to ward off some young males in her community who '*preyed*' on the female volunteers. She issued a stern warning in the native language 'Fante' to one young man who tried to date her Irish guest.

There were varying levels of contact and interactions, even though they shared the same geographic space and used similar public facilities such as vehicles, churches, and market, their interactions with the volunteer tourists were mostly superficial. Thus, despite being 'immersed in the host community' as indicated in the literature (Raymond & Hall, 2008), volunteer tourists are rather immersed in a limited portion of the host community and their access seems to be controlled or mediated by persons working in the VTOs. Inadvertently, elements in the volunteer tourism setup seem to restrict contact with other members of the community in a bid to protect volunteer tourists. This restriction seems to directly contradict assertions of volunteer tourism ensuring 'mutually' enriching cross-cultural contact between the host and the guest (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Palacios, 2010; Wearing, 2001).On the other hand, it reinforces Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai's (2015) assertions of the risk of intercultural insensitivity.

4.3. Tensions over shared resources as a result of non- compliance with cultural rules

There were indications of tension in the community as a result of the activities of the VTOs. The first indication of this tension was how the local authorities and towns' people forcibly asked the orphanage workers to leave their first premises permanently:

You know the orphanage used to be up there on the hill, but they thought we were making money because they saw white people coming here and they sacked us from there. They took the building from us and we had to find another place. [Liaison officer, male, 22 years].

The second indication was the repeated vandalization of the sports equipment by some unidentified persons in the community:

Can you believe that these courts were repeatedly destroyed overnight? It happened more than once, they would destroy it and we would rebuild … Eventually, we stopped rebuilding…. [Teacher, male, 33 years].

The cause of these tensions seems to steam from perceived noncompliance with traditional norms and entry protocols. Residents indicated that they felt that VTOs did not follow the accepted form of community entry, which principally begins with the 'courting' of traditional authorities such as chiefs, elders, and local government officials of the town.

4.4. VTOs interpretative roles

VTO coordinators performed interpretative and cultural brokerage roles for the guest. One coordinator explained that **the guest sought explanations from them only**:

…what they do not understand they ask for further explanations. Sometimes when they go out to town and they see something or experience something they come home and tell us about it and ask for an explanation [Teacher, Male, 32 years].

On the other hand, most residents who are peripheral to the VTO indicated that their interactions with the guest were curtailed because their conversations could not progress beyond the usual 'hello' or 'hi'. The lack of a common language was probably the reason for the truncation of conversations. Traders indicated using signs and gestures to

communicate. So typically, if the guest wanted to buy something that does not have a common generic name like Coca-Cola or sprite or biscuit, they had to either point to the item or use gestures.

As indicated by Bochner (2013), representatives of the VTO act as cultural brokers to create 'bridges to understanding' between other members of the host community and the guest. Our key informant indicated that cross-cultural communication skills were important and the ability to communicate intelligibly in English was a requirement to work with his organization. Thus, language served as a restriction for some residents and added to their isolation from the volunteer tourism activities in their community.

4.5. Agency in the host-guest interaction

We also found host community members working as liaison officers, asserting themselves in the community as those persons to whom the volunteer tourists turned to for education and direction once they arrived:

It is about teaching them what to do and training them, giving them tips and ideas about what they will be doing and the different kinds of projects that the organization undertakes. …we educate them on what to do… [Coordinator, male, 24 years].

Their position also gave them access to information that the guests needed before, during, and after their project. Before they arrived in Ghana, it was the coordinators who helped the 'mother' organization with details such as areas where volunteers were needed, the number of volunteers required, etc. Their position also gave them opportunities to assist the guests to choose between the care program, teaching, or hospital program.

Again, by their relative permanence and stability, as opposed to the continuous flux of the guests, the coordinators and liaison officers facilitated the continuity of projects through record keeping and reporting. Volunteer tourists relied on the teachers for information about the children, their progress in addition to interpreting into *Fante* (which is the local language of the area) what the volunteer tourists taught in English. There were instances where teachers wrote reports on the performance of some of the volunteers who visited the schools as part of their teaching practice. The dependence of the guest on their expertise, knowledge of the culture, and language fostered their collective agency.

Other members of the host community did not have any such collective agency to report. As described by VeneKlasen & Miller (2002:43), 'power with' comes from a collection agency when different people with different interests build collective strength. Again, drawing from De Kayat (2002), when the host and volunteer tourist guest work side by side, to exchange ideas to address a problem, each group draws on the power of the other.

5. Discussion and implications

5.1. An integrated framework of institutional analysis development

The integrated Institutional Analysis and Development framework is composed of a four-stage module: the attribute, agency, action area, and the interaction evaluation stage. Based on our findings, a framework is developed to contribute to the understanding of VTOs' paradoxical role. Fig. 2 exhibits a complex volunteer tourism institutional framework comprised of adaptation of IAD and CIAD frameworks to understand institutionalism within the volunteer tourism context. As depicted, the dotted line connecting attribute, agency, action area, and interaction evaluation represents reappraisal feedback for assessing success or otherwise of a volunteer program. Because of word parsimony, repetitive explanations are avoided (see Fig. 1).

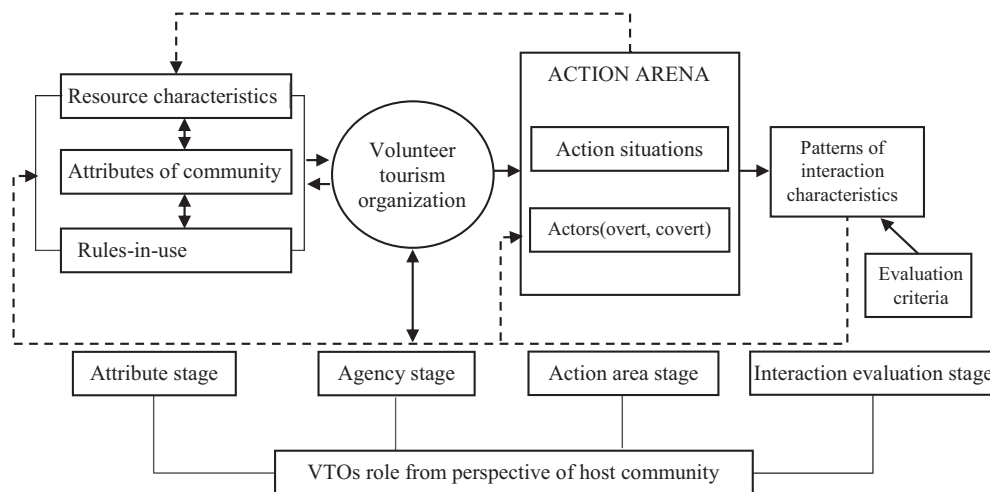First, attributes of a volunteer resource relate to the nature of the

Fig. 2. An integrated framework for volunteer tourism.
Source: Authors' construct.

volunteering phenomenon. They include the volunteer resource characteristics, the attributes of the community within which the volunteer tourism phenomenon occurs, and the rules in use. As found in this study, noncompliance with entry protocols was perceived to be a negative attribute of the volunteer tourism enterprise and compounded feelings of mistrust on the part of residents. Natural resources and communally owned resources such as the sports field provoked covert contentions as hinted elsewhere (Warren & Dinnie, 2018). This confirms Whaley's (2018) proposition that components of the attributes stage do not operate in isolation but are rather interrelated. Therefore, characteristics, attributes, and rules can reside in a spectrum of feelings and opinions of the volunteer stakeholder in question. The characteristics of the volunteering phenomenon constitute resource characteristics. Volunteer tourism within the context of the developing South (notably Africa and South-Eastern Asia) (Thompson & Taheri, 2020) involves travel to provide material, financial or advisory assistance (Benson & Henderson, 2011; Mensah et al., 2017; Wearing, 2001). Typically, patrons possess unique sets of motivations, traits distinct from mainstream tourists, and their intention formation influences the volunteer outcome (Han, Meng, Chua, Ryu, & Kim, 2019; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). These characteristics tend to influence their adaptations and success within the communities they visit.

Second, VTOs are pivotal brokers of what McDonald, Wearing, and Ponting (2009) describe as "third space"; the intersection of the agency of the volunteer tourist, volunteer sending/receiving organizations (both the 'mother' organization and the local partner), and the host community (Zahra & McGehee, 2013). In this space, the local VTOs played a conciliatory role between the host family and the mother organization. This is in addition to the conciliatory roles they already play between the host community and actors working in the volunteer tourism enterprise (Agyeiwaah & Mensah, 2017). Further, the agency of the host-guest interaction was found to play a significant role in the success of volunteer programs. Thus, residents employed in the enterprise felt a collective agency that was empowering for them. However, this was not the case for other segments of the community. Additionally, it appears that VTOs have evolved from non-profit to for-profit or social enterprise organizations (Soulard, McGehee, & Stern, 2019; Wang, Duan, & Yu, 2016). The VTOs in the Global South have typically operated as "partners" of foreign actors. This raises questions about their loyalty towards local communities (Frilund, 2018; Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe, & Aquino, 2018).

Third, the action area, revised as a social situation, is composed of an action situation and the actors involved in volunteer tourism (Thompson & Taheri, 2020). Actors included residents working in the enterprise,

third parties such as teachers who hosts volunteers as well as casual service providers. While these are the overt actors, there were covert actors whose actions (of displeasure) influenced the nature of VTOs and their activities in the community.

Fourth, resource attributes and action area arbitrated by the nature of the volunteer agency determines the pattern of interaction within a volunteer tourism framework (Whaley, 2018). Regarding the nature of volunteer-community-agency interactions, our findings indicate the evaluation of interactions determines future relationships with VTO. Our inquiry revealed emotional, social, and cultural imperatives. We argue that these imperatives need to inform the VTOs' directions. A major weakness of the IAD and CIAD frameworks remains the absence of an evaluation and feedback criteria. Our proposed framework thus inserts evaluative interactivity.

6. Conclusion

As volunteer tourism reaches its unsustainable commercialisation due to mass niche expansion (Bargeman et al., 2018; Thompson & Taheri, 2020), destination management organizations are seeking ways to ensure a sustainable volunteer tourism experience. One possible way is by understanding the host perspectives of the volunteer intermediation process. This paper has explored VTOs' role in a rural volunteer tourism hub in Ghana from a host community perspective using a phenomenological inquiry. Based on our findings, the nature of the volunteer tourism process is complicated in the case of the Asebu community. While the complexities of poverty and inequality have shaped the narrative in the literature (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017; Kadomskaia et al., 2020) our findings indicated collective agency in the volunteer tourism arena with overt actors (Fig. 2) (Thompson & Taheri, 2020).

On the question of host community perception of the roles of the volunteer tourism organization, we found limited negotiated cultural, economic, and emotional capital and relationships between host and the volunteer tourism enterprise (Fig. 2.). Local VTOs were perceived to play mediation roles between the host family and the VTOs in the West. Our study found that some sections of the host community (covert actors) perceive VTOs and the volunteer tourism enterprise as closed off from them. It appears that the protectionism of the VTO was seen to stifle interactions between host communities and the volunteer guest. The noncompliance with entry protocols as well as perceived lack of transparency of the actions of VTOs compounded feelings of mistrust in the host community (Ezra, 2019; Thompson et al., 2017).

Reflectively, VTOs working in an African context must take

cognizance of the social and cultural structure of the host communities in which they operate. Ignoring such structures as traditional entry protocols will create problems for cross-cultural interactions. This is perhaps a contributory factor for intercultural insensitively found in this study and confirmed by Kirillova et al. (2015). While the activities of VTO can engender collective agency, they can also lead to the isolation of some segments of the host community and create or deepen existing power dynamics (Bargeman et al., 2018; Bernstein & Woosnam, 2019; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Thompson & Taheri, 2020). VTOs must pay attention to resource sharing and covert power dynamics in the communities in which they work to ensure positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

Despite these contributions, however, we acknowledge the following limitations. First, this is a qualitative study, a mixed-methods approach could be used to expand the understanding of these issues to quantify the phenomenon (Magrizos, Kostopoulos, & Powers, 2020). A mixed-methods approach that examines the experiences of residents elsewhere in the country and Africa where volunteer tourism is prevalent would be appropriate. Next, our focus was on the experiences of residents regarding volunteer tourism organizations in the Central Region of Ghana, specifically Asebu. Because of this, our findings are context-based and does not lend itself to generalization (Gibson, 2017). Further, given the focus on host perspectives, other stakeholders like the volunteer tourists, and VTOs in the West who were not included in the study should be considered in future studies to provide a more holistic understanding of the issues raised.

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