

**Transforming whose lives? The portrayal of international sport for development volunteering by UK Higher Education Institutions**

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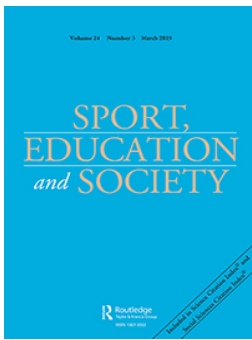
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# Transforming whose lives? The portrayal of international sport for development volunteering by UK Higher Education Institutions

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## ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the portrayal of sport for development (SfD) international volunteering by UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Volunteer tourism or 'voluntourism' is a popular experience in which individuals combine international travel with voluntary work in a destination typically in the Global South in a bid to offer support to those in need. A body of literature offers an optimistic view of volunteer tourism, suggesting that it can facilitate the development of cross-cultural understanding among volunteers and host communities. However, there is also critical literature which argues that if volunteer tourism programmes are not carefully developed and managed, they can lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding and reinforce negative cultural stereotypes; this latter critique provides both the justification and context for this article. Several studies have acknowledged the centrality of Global Northern volunteers to the delivery of sport-based programmes in the Global South under the banner of SfD [Darnell (2007). Playing with race: Right to play and the production of whiteness in 'development through sport'. *Sport in Society*, 10(4), 560–579; Darnell (2011). Identity and learning in international volunteerism: 'Sport for development and peace' internships. *Development in Practice*, 21(7), 974–986; Lucas & Jeanes (2019). Ethnographic reflections of the role of global north volunteers in sport-for-development. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 55(7), 953–974]. However, given the pivotal role that UK HEIs play in marketing and facilitating such opportunities for students, there is a lack of research that critically examines how such volunteer opportunities are portrayed by HEIs. The article draws from a sample of thirteen UK HEIs to examine how they discursively frame SfD international volunteer opportunities. The findings illustrate how student volunteers benefit and even socially transform because of volunteering in poor Global South communities. The article concludes by outlining a series of recommendations for UK HEIs to consider regarding their portrayal of international SfD volunteering.

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International; sport for development; neo-liberalism; volunteer tourism; networking; social capital

## Introduction

This article critically examines the portrayal of SfD international volunteering programmes by UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with the intention of generating a debate about the ethics of such practices. Encouraged to advance the interrogations of sport volunteerism, educational development, and community engagement as means toward improving social citizenship (Storr & Spaaij,

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2017), this article uses the lens of SfD volunteerism to help understand the role of sport volunteering and specifically issues concerning social transformation and the perceived acquisition of social capital. The article addresses two research aims; to examine the possible outcomes for student volunteers and to examine the HEIs motivations and practices in offering international volunteering opportunities.

Sport is embedded within society in many ways. From a functionalist perspective, literature has critically debated the perceived ability of sport to build a global civil society (Crabbe, 2008), generating social capital amongst volunteers and participants and enabling community-based development (Coalter, 2007; Giulianotti, 2012; Spaaij, 2012). Additionally, many argue that sport can foster social integration (Hylton et al., 2001); contribute to the regeneration of deprived urban communities (Ingham & Macdonald, 2003) and tackle issues connected to peace, development, and poverty (Collison et al., 2018; Giulianotti et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2017).

Set against this backdrop, the act of volunteering under the SfD banner to tackle issues connected to peace, development and poverty has become indicative of the growth of a lifestyle strategy intended to exhibit care and responsibility towards others less fortunate (Darnell, 2007; Clarke & Salisbury, 2017). This strategy is aligned with developing one's ethical identity and sense of global responsibility and citizenship. In addition, educational gains can accrue from volunteering and the social transformation that can transpire from the in-situ volunteer experience (Hayton, 2016).

Related to this study, university students are often encouraged as part of their studies to strive to become global citizens. One such way to make a difference involves students being solicited to travel to the Global South to help poor communities, to enjoy the sights and tastes of the distant and exotic other, the experience touted as a useful addition to the curriculum vitae (CV) (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). The need for students to enhance their CVs and develop global citizenship skills is important as employers have begun to recognise the importance of recruiting personnel with knowledge and understanding of cultural issues, as well as the capacity to manage international relationships and a culturally diverse workforce (Earley et al., 2006).

Many HEIs have recognised the importance of an international perspective by incorporating global or international elements into their graduate attribute statements (Cranmer, 2006). It is therefore unsurprising that the provision of international volunteering opportunities for students, either as part of credit bearing modules or as an extra-curricular activity, is a priority for many UK HEIs.

### ***Sport-for-development volunteering***

The past two decades have witnessed an exponential rise in the number of international sport-based charities, corporations, HEIs and non-governmental organisations (INGOs) utilising sport as a tool to tackle broader societal and health issues in the Global South (Collison et al., 2018; Lindsey et al., 2017). Despite such growth, a prominent criticism of the SfD sector is that such practices (as with international development more broadly) may be exacerbating unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South. Criticisms centre on the one-way exchange of tangible and intangible resources (e.g. money, people, equipment, ideologies) from donors in the Global North to partners and programme recipients in the Global South (Briggs, 2008; Mwaanga & Banda, 2014). Of relevance to this article is the delivery practice that many SfD programmes adopt which involves sending Global North volunteers, in particular university students to deliver such activities in the Global South. The practice of volunteer tourism has been considered within its own dedicated scholarly field (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Sin, 2009), the broader international development literature (Georgeou & Engel, 2011; Smith & Laurie, 2011), and the SfD field (Darnell, 2007, 2011; Forde, 2015). Within SfD literature, a range of scholars highlight the reliance on Global North volunteers to initiate, deliver and manage projects in the Global South (Coalter, 2013; Lucas & Jeanes, 2019). The reliance on Global North SfD volunteers has however come under increasing criticism as many have questioned the lack of understanding or skill that these volunteers have of the broader social and political context within which they work, which may

contribute to reinforcing neo-colonial inequalities (Clarke & Salisbury, 2017; Darnell, 2007; Guest, 2009). Here, studies position the Global North as a benevolent educator, and the Global South as the passive, deficient, and grateful recipient of help and aid (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012), with scholars arguing that it is the Global Northern volunteers who are the ones who are most changed by the volunteer experience (Darnell, 2007; Lucas & Jeanes, 2019). Banda and Holmes (2017) suggest that there is a knowledge hierarchy, where Global North knowledge is privileged, effectively ignoring the local voices from the local communities in the Global South. In summary, it is argued that projects are inadvertently designed to benefit volunteers who gain a stronger sense of their own privilege, as opposed to being designed in response to community need.

### ***Selling a 'development' experience***

The neoliberal practice of privatisation has commodified the activity of 'doing development'. Within this context, voluntourism organisations sell a development experience to consumers by appealing to their desire to make a difference (Heron, 2007), while at the same time enjoying an adventure amid the needy other, usually in a short space of time (Vodopivec & Jaffe, 2012). The notion of selling such an experience to a volunteer raises critical questions of who benefits most from these potential social transformations; is it the Global North volunteers, those who they are seeking to help in the Global South; this question is a central concern of this article.

The explosion of voluntourism companies has been linked to the rise of neoliberalism as the dominant logic underpinning current development practice (Vrasti, 2012), a linkage which has also been made to the rise of SfD INGOs and programmes which operate in the Global South (Hayhurst et al., 2011). Voluntourism operators tend to highlight the opportunities for intimate contact with the poor, promising an authentic engagement with communities. This approach enables voluntourist's travel experience to be marketed because it sells an up close and personal engagement with poverty – where getting your hands dirty is a selling point (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). This critical stance draws parallels to a body of critical SfD literature which has highlighted a range of widespread issues, specifically asymmetric power relations that underpin the global SfD sector (Black, 2010; Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012).

Considering the focus of this special issue, this study also notes literature which argues that the taught skills gained through volunteering not only fulfil motives surrounding altruism, but also provide professional and personal development opportunities (e.g. leadership skills) they are perceived to need to compete in an increasingly competitive job market (Bush et al., 2016; Hayton, 2018). However, considering the key issues/criticisms of the SfD sector (power relations/hegemony and lack of local agency/voice) which provide the lens for this article, there is a need for research which critically explores the portrayal of such volunteer practices and specifically examines who benefits from these potential social transformations to ensure that the issues mentioned are not exacerbated.

### ***Social capital: young people and volunteering***

For many years HEIs have promoted volunteering opportunities to students, encouraging them to stand out from the crowd. The key assumption of this promotion is that students benefit from volunteering (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010). Recent neoliberal community-development efforts centre on the development and enhancement of 'capital', including cultural, economic, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this article, we launch a debate about who gains 'social capital' because of international SfD volunteering. To understand the impact of volunteering on students an understanding of the concept of social capital is needed. In short, the concept of social capital has gained salience as a means of understanding how agency can be exercised in a positive manner by forging networks in society (Putnam, 1995, 2000; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Woolcock, 2001).

Defining social capital is not a straightforward task as differing interpretations and uses of the term are noted between the four main social capital scholars; Bourdieu, Putnam, Woolcock and

Coleman. The interpretations differ because of the assumptions about the makeup of society, the motivation of individuals and associated social relationships.

Of relevance to this article is Coleman's (1988, 1990) concept of social capital which supports the idea that social capital is individually driven (rather than driven by communities as suggested by Bourdieu, Putnam and Woolcock). Coleman (1988, 1990) claims that social capital is embodied in personal relationships and social connectivity and that it holds value for all kinds of individuals, including the powerless and marginalised. Drawing on rational choice theory, Coleman (1988, 1990) outlines social capital to be a type of resource related to the social structure whose purpose is to facilitate meaningful and individually beneficial activity. In turn, this connectivity may translate into different acts such as reciprocity, building of relationships; and the development of social and emotional skills which can bring about individual benefits. For Coleman, social capital is productive, i.e. it is used so that actors can achieve ends that would have been impossible without it. According to this individual-orientated perspective, social capital is defined by the actions of actors in terms of what they do to develop 'capital' resources, (e.g. capital may include individual benefits such as social leverage and/or privileges). For this reason, it is argued that the possible positive outcomes for student volunteers (e.g. employability/CV building etc.) fits neatly with Coleman's individually orientated understanding of social capital.

In addition, existing literature has shown that providing leadership opportunities to students through international volunteering can link to a broad set of individual-orientated outcomes, including professional and personal skills, employability skills and expanding social networks (Finkelstien, 2009).

The manifestations of social capital presented in this article should be understood as 'perceived' appearances of social capital and associated outcomes (e.g. personal and professional benefits) taken from media discourse from selected UK HEIs and university students and should not be taken as over-zealous claims about the transformational nature of such social benefits. To summarise, previous literature has shown that international volunteering has the potential to broaden the perspectives and develop social capital of students if they volunteer in diverse, global contexts. In addition, the international focused volunteer opportunities are typically intertwined with leadership opportunities which may serve as a means of enticing new students and developing current students. However, given the critical literature relating to global power inequalities, SfD and volunteer tourism, there is a need to critically explore how such volunteer opportunities are portrayed by HEIs. Without such critical examination about the historical underpinnings of the SfD, international development and volunteer tourism sectors, HEIs run the risk of embedding imperialistic and neo-colonial assumptions about the role of the Global North, specifically student volunteers in 'helping' the Global South.

## Methodology

This article analysed externally facing web-based content on international SfD volunteering opportunities from a range of HEIs across the UK. The research poses questions not about the physical acts of international volunteering but how it is positioned on external facing websites on the internet (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010). Dann (1996) outlines how websites use texts and images to interact with potential customers and convert them into actual customers. Whilst this literature focuses on tourism websites, the premise remains the same if an externally facing website is being used to attract custom (e.g. potential students) then the framing of that information should be considered with a critical eye. Drawing on further tourism literature Choi et al. (2007) state that where a website is used to promote business objectives (in the case of this article the external portrayal of the HEIs) scrutinising that promotional material is important. Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) a total of thirteen UK HEIs were selected to be included in the study. The selection criteria was that all of the included HEIs offered international SfD volunteering opportunities to their students, to ensure a geographical spread across the UK, one HEI was selected from each of the UK's home countries and one

from each region in England. The HEI has been anonymised and have been assigned a letter A-M which is used in the findings.

A further criterion was that the HEIs had to have searchable, externally accessible web-based content on international volunteering at their institution, that content also had to be linked to the HEI in question. The data was gathered from ac.uk websites, student union websites, social media pages managed by the HEI or delivery partners approved by the HEI. It is important to acknowledge that HEI A, C and D have a partnership with an external provider for the delivery of international volunteering opportunities. The authors decided to include this data as the HEIs actively promote and direct students (both current and future students) to these organisations as providers of these opportunities. This data may not be directly within the control of the HEI but it is used to show the activities of the students at that institution, therefore is relevant to this study. [Table 1](#) identifies the type of web content available at each HEI:

This study utilises template analysis, a version of thematic analysis, which is deemed useful for large data sets as it offers an audit trail of selected themes, providing a clear explanation of the final codebook (King & Brooks, 2017). The analysis followed both an inductive and deductive approach to coding using template analysis.

The researchers used a deductive approach to identify the preliminary code book using critical literature on voluntourism and SfD practices. The preliminary codes were 'employability', 'skill development', 'social capital', 'personal development', 'student leadership' and 'the helping imperative', following observations from the data set an inductive approach was then taken to produce the

**Table 1.** Web-based content.

HEI	Type of web-based content used in the analysis
HEI A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> <li>• External delivery partner website – with links to the HEI</li> </ul>
HEI B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Social media page</li> </ul>
HEI C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• External delivery partner website – with clear links to the HEI</li> </ul>
HEI D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• External delivery partner website – with clear links to the HEI</li> </ul>
HEI E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> </ul>
HEI F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> </ul>
HEI G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• External page of the student portal</li> </ul>
HEI H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> </ul>
HEI I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student union website</li> <li>• University issued volunteering handbook (ONLINE edition)</li> </ul>
HEI J	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• University issued volunteering handbook (ONLINE edition)</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> </ul>
HEI K	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Blogs written by professional staff</li> </ul>
HEI L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> </ul>
HEI M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main university website</li> <li>• Blogs written by students</li> <li>• Social media posts</li> </ul>

final code book. The researchers followed Neuendorf's (2017) recommendation that coding should be completed by a minimum of two researchers. Independently both researchers familiarised themselves with an agreed subset of the identified sample including a 10% overlap as a quality check. The final code book consisted of themes shown in Table 2.

The analysis focused on two perspectives from which the media discourse was published; student-led discourse based on reflective stories and university-led media discourse. The discussion of findings is presented in two sections and the significance of the themes are discussed in relation to critical literature.

## Discussion of findings

### *Student-led discourse*

In this study, the student-led media discourse described how international SfD volunteering experiences of students helped the development of personal skills and enabled them to feel part of something bigger, through the practice of 'global citizenship'.

Student volunteer stories made frequent connections between personal development and international SfD volunteering. Like previous research (Lo & Lee, 2011), many student volunteers reflected that their soft personal skills improved significantly after their volunteer experience. Specific references were made to improved teamwork, leadership, organisation communication; cultural awareness, confidence; problem solving; ability to adapt sessions, self-efficacy, empathy, and networking were noted. A student from HEI C represented the views of many:

I became a lot more culturally aware and a lot more confident communicating with new people – this was especially developed through the 1-2-1s as you had to be really clear when explaining work to the students.

Other examples showed that students referred to their international SfD volunteering experience in developing transferrable skills to aid their future career. Two students from HEI D reflected on their volunteer experience in Zambia. The first student focused on their personal skills that had been developed because of the volunteering opportunity:

The project has given me a push to engage with a community and will provide me with valuable experience for fundraising and charity work in the future.

The second student focused on the personal connections made:

6-weeks fly by but leave an endless list of amazing memories along with having a lot more friends than when you arrived.

The concept of social capital is useful to capture the essence of friendships and professional networks and associated resources which come from the volunteer experience. The above quotes from students at HEI D indicate that students are open to seeking out mutuality beneficial relationships (e.g. trusting each other, sharing the experience of friendship, cultural dialogue, and open communication) in order that they can benefit from the resources available, e.g. new social networks. In this regard, the spirit of reciprocity did not refer to a physical resource exchange but imbued more of an intangible exchange. Following Coleman's (1988, 1990) interpretation of social capital, the 'perceived' development of interpersonal trust is seen as being important in bringing about action, or in contributing towards a positive action. In many ways the cultural exchange and dialogue

**Table 2.** Final code book.

Global citizen	Student leadership	Employability	The helping imperative	Taking up opportunities
Social capital	Personal development and transformation	Cultural competence	Skill development	Difficulties with cultural immersion



between other volunteers and host communities provided instances that enabled some positive characteristics associated with social capital to develop.

A student from HEI I echoed the connection between international SfD volunteering and her ability to gain future employment:

Going to The Gambia was an incredible, once in a lifetime opportunity ... I am certain that with this experience on my CV, I am well-placed to find my dream job after I graduate.

Findings indicate that it is the student volunteer from the Global North who reflect on their own benefits and social transformation because of volunteering and leadership experiences gained in the Global South. The student-led discourse focuses on their own personal transformation, this does not allow us to comment on the extent to which individuals in the Global South benefit from these programmes or not. It was unclear if the benefits of international SfD volunteer experiences were expected to translate into longer-term career success or if it merely enhanced initial employability as suggested by Teichler and Jahr (2001). What was clear was that student's personal development stemmed from taking up opportunities which put them outside their comfort zone and help them to stand out from the crowd by generating new contacts and networks in society.

The insights shown above from the students at HEIs are consistent with Cao et al. (2014) who argue that travelling expands social ties and trust and that international travel increases a sense of status and trust that not only extends to the groups that one may encounter abroad but also can generalise to their social status. This type of social status is a key element of successful societies and an effective indicator of individual-orientated social capital (Coleman, 1988, 1990). The quotations shown in this section illustrate that students are able to seek out beneficial connections and relationships during their international volunteer experiences (e.g. sharing the experience of friendship, cultural dialogue and 'on the job' skill development) in order that they can benefit from the resources available, e.g. new social networks, enhanced CV and skill development. In this regard, the spirit of reciprocity that Coleman (1988, 1990) refers to did not refer to a physical resource exchange as such, but instead an intangible exchange between students and locals. In many ways the cultural exchange and dialogue between students and the local communities provided instances that enabled some students to develop social capital 'currency' (Portes, 1998) which in this instance has been developed in new and unfamiliar geographical contexts and networks which students found themselves in.

Several student stories reflected on the lack of material resources in the local communities they volunteered in, which resulted in them cherishing more deeply their own luxuries and comforts of life after their volunteer trip. A student from HEI C offers a representative view found in numerous student blogs/testimonials:

As clichéd as it sounds the project really gave me a new view on life. Just seeing how content my Fijian family were with so little made me really appreciative of what I have and has taught me not to take things for granted.

The practice of international SfD volunteering was widely described by students as being a personally transformative experience and labelled by many as a global life changing experience. Learning as a form of social transformation is not conceptualised as a linear movement from one static state to another, but rather an ongoing process of interaction between the individual and their environment. A student from HEI L who volunteered in Tanzania reflected on her personal sense of pride and achievement following because of her daily interaction with school children and local NGOs in Tanzania:

It's a once in a lifetime experience ... This is something I never thought I'd do, I'm really proud of myself that I've actually achieved it.

Another student from HEI B commented on the importance of cultural immersion which helped inform his new world view:

My trip away to Fiji was honestly the best experience of my life. I learnt that the world is different and it's important to explore other cultures.

In the excerpts shown above, we see confirmation that it is the students from the Global North who are having their lives transformed by developing social capital 'currency' (Portes, 1998) which has the potential to transform their lives in a positive way. This finding supports the prominent criticism of the SfD, volunteer tourism and international development sectors that such practices of travelling Global Northern volunteers may be exacerbating unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South.

Linked to the international nature of the SfD volunteer experience was a strong connection to global citizenship. A global citizen is understood to be someone who shows an awareness of and understands the wider world – and their place in it (Oxfam, 2020). Student-led discourse consistently portrayed that students felt part of something bigger than just their own volunteer experience. Examples included the portrayal of various attributes such as helping, doing development, and showing a global awareness of their own positionality and western privilege when compared to individuals/communities who they encountered in the Global South locations where they were hosted. One student from HEI B reflected that it was a great experience to see the world and was interesting to see 'how the other half live'.

The divisive language chosen by this student is reflective of other student's reflection and shows misguided global citizenship, in that the language used reinforces some of the main objections to voluntourism. Criticisms of volunteer tourism suggest that people only volunteer in this manner to feel better about themselves, to act as the white saviour or to voyeuristically see the way 'the other half live'. In addition, such perspectives draw on as well as reinforce unequal power relationships between the dominant group (e.g. the voluntourist) and the subordinate group (local communities), and by doing so assume Global North cultural superiority (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012).

Other students reflected that cultural immersion and understanding new cultures was important but also challenging. Here, a student from HEI C shared their own challenges:

I think the biggest challenge was really throwing yourself into the back-to-basics experience. At times the Fijian lifestyle can seem far away from what we're used to but you just have to remember that this real and a full cultural immersion and the only way to make the most of it is to get over the small problems like the cold bucket showers.

The aspiration to be a global citizen is indeed a positive step to help break barriers in development as student volunteers view themselves as citizens of the world, and in turn advocate for the need to promote its 'development'. On this level, it could be viewed that international SfD volunteer programmes play a crucial role in building global citizens. Yet, it is important to return to critical literature reminds us that the discourses of global citizenship are typically centred on individuals travelling from the Global North and tend to not focus on the impact this has on people living in the Global South. As such, the argument remains that the voluntourism industry (and by association the international SfD voluntourism) plays an active role to reinforce unequal relationships between the Global North and 'South' (Butcher & Smith, 2010; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). This perpetuates a thin or misguided form of global citizenship, premised on the volunteer's ability to make a difference, and on a white saviour complex rooted in neo-colonialism and neoliberal individualism (Heron, 2007; Vradi, 2012).

### ***University-led discourse***

Over the last decade, employability has been repositioned within HEIs. Debates have focused on the marketisation of Higher Education; students as consumers, and whether the learning from their studies will be enough to maximise the postgraduate employment opportunities for students (Morley, 2018; Williams, 2013). The purpose of HE is increasingly being questioned and the raft of measures around graduate employment has only muddied the waters further (Speight et al., 2013).

The findings concurred with Holdsworth and Quinn (2010) that students can personally benefit from taking on international volunteering experiences. For example, HEI B stated that:

Volunteering abroad can be one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences of your life and can be hugely beneficial for you and the community you visit.

Similarly, HEI I indicated that 'volunteering programmes could be a significant and memorable experience to carry with you for the future'.

According to Coleman (1998, 1990), information channels, in this instance HEI websites, are recognised outlets for transferring information within a social structure which will deliver certain information benefits. Findings re-enforce the assertion that skill development is an important facet of employability for graduates so that they can make immediate contributions in the workplace (Clarke, 2018).

The analysis shows that HEIs maintain a considerable focus on the allure of 'leadership' experiences and personal skill development opportunities and link these potential outcomes to graduate employability as a means of enticing potential new students. There is a difference in approaches, however. For example, some HEIs are specific with the skills students develop and others take a more generic approach. HEIs which take a specific approach include HEI I which outlines in a volunteer handbook a list of the transferrable skills their students will develop during volunteering, they include – community awareness, physical fitness, teamwork, citizenship, verbal communication, and cultural awareness. Likewise, HEI B outlined the skills that its students could expect to develop:

You can expect to experience diversity and different lifestyles, gain intercultural communication skills, increase your independence and adaptability and maybe even see life and learning in a new way.

Other HEIs take a far more generic approach, an example of this generality is the analysis from HEI J refers to the gaining of transferable skills. Early in the employability debate Bennett et al. (1999) refer to transferable skills as core skills, these personal core skills are valued by employers because they are 'skills which are assumed to transfer readily across a range of contexts' (p. 71).

Another prominent feature in the discourse was that international volunteering experiences were deemed a valuable contribution to a graduate's CV to ensure they 'stood out from the crowd' in the eyes of a potential employer. Several the HEIs within the analysis referred to standing out from a crowded graduate marketplace by having interesting opportunities on a CV. For example, HEI C illustrates the recurrent theme found within the data stated that 'All types of employer's view volunteering as valuable, and in some cases more valuable than paid work. It is worth putting on your CV.'

Another aspect of standing out from the crowd and having an attractive CV that one of the HEIs in the analysis offer is the ability to gain extra credit for taking part in international volunteering. For example, HEI E offer a certificate for students that take part in international volunteering. Students graduating from this HEI will have additional recognition on their certificate adding value to their CV. This highlighted a topic that is not been discussed within existing UK centric literature and echoes a US style of education. Extra credit is not common language in UK HEIs and much of the literature surrounding it comes from American studies. Stack (2005) identifies that there has been very little research done on the impact of extra credit projects on learning, and that study focused on an additional academic piece of work rather than the learning gained through a student experience. The gaining of additional credits provides an interesting platform for debate and perhaps addresses some of the concerns raised by McGloin and Georgeou (2016) that international voluntourism experiences reinforces the perceived image that poor countries in the Global South require the support of affluent Westerners to develop their countries. The Certificate in International Volunteering provides students with extra credits at a Level 5 (second year of UG study) and includes content around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and ethical and effective volunteering best practice. The conundrum is that this extra credit works alongside partners that are 'selling'

development which forms part of the criticism levelled at voluntourism (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016; Simpson, 2004).

Drawing on Coleman (1988, 1990), this section has shown that information channels, in this instance HEI websites detailing SfD volunteer opportunities can deliver certain benefits to its students. Specifically, data from HEI websites indicate that having an association with international SfD volunteering functions as an important information resource in the construction of social status, because it determines those able to claim it as it indicates an elevated position in the existing social hierarchies (e.g. CV building, graduate attributes). As with the student-led discourse, the HEI-led discourse also focuses on the potential transformation of its students and does not consider the effect on or benefits to host communities. The lack of consideration for localised insights considering the impact of Global Northern volunteers on visiting host communities is a cause of concern as it privileges global north knowledge over southern knowledge.

These findings directly contribute to the focus of the special issue as this section has highlighted how HEIs portray the role of sport volunteerism and how it can link to the social transformation and the acquisition of social capital by university students.

## Conclusion

The research has shown that UK HEIs portray SfD international volunteering as a positive experience that directly benefits students, with little concern shown towards the experience/social transformation of local communities. The study has shown that HEIs portray SfD volunteering to be a useful mechanism for students to foster stocks of social capital and socially transform regarding their global outlook, it also provides a useful strategy through which valuable employability skills can be gained. However, while it is clear that students gain lots from the experience, existing literature, as well as this study, raises a series moral and ethical questions regarding this type of volunteering, which in this study shows that the HEIs are selling a development experience to students in the Global North with pledges of travel, volunteering and helping communities in the Global South through sport-based programmes. HEIs are epicentres for the construction and dissemination of knowledge and following the assumption that 'truth and meaning do not exist in some external world but are created by the subject's interactions with the world' (Gray, 2014, p. 18), it is argued that HEIs have a responsibility to not just privilege Global Northern knowledge, but to portray knowledge, in this case knowledge related to SfD volunteerism from multiple perspectives (e.g. including input Global South communities).

Saichaie and Morphew (2014) identify that the HEIs website is a primary method of communicating with prospective students, Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015) support this and identify that HEIs use a promotional discourse, falling in line with the debate on the marketisation of HE. Anctil (2008) uses the term a digital handshake, referring to the students first impression of the HEI they are researching. All HEIs made a clear branding link between the international experience that its students went on by calling them '[HEI name] students', stating their level of study and the course they were studying. In a crowded HE marketplace this illustrates a tactic that HEIs are using to sell their student experience in a bid to attract prospective students by stating how important international experience would be in addition to gaining a degree.

This research highlights three key considerations for HEIs, specifically regarding the HE sector's role in selling development under the banner of students gaining SfD volunteering experiences. Firstly, only programmes that are ethical, e.g. in that they provide genuine value for the local communities should be promoted by HEIs. While there is substantial evidence of HEIs selling a student experience by selling development in the Global South, the study did unearth some examples of good practice, or at least an acknowledgement that students need to be ethical in their approaches. For example, several HEIs did raise the need for students to consider the ethical nature of the volunteering. However, the message is that this responsibility is passed to the student which raises the question – should the HEIs complete due diligence on opportunities they promote to their students?

The researchers are not suggesting that due diligence is not undertaken, but that HEIs are failing in their responsibility to make prospective students consider their ‘truth’ and how it may differ from the local voice. If indeed ethical underpinning is common practice, then HEIs should be promoting their ethical practices not hiding it behind the student stories of personal transformation and developing employment skills. Secondly, offering students an experience is not enough. Embedding this type of volunteering as a more holistic learning process, for example as an (extra)curricular module, rather than a one-off fly in, fly out short stay volunteer experience should be considered. Third, preparing students ahead of interaction with other cultures should be more carefully considered, as this study found examples of students experiencing culture shock as well as examples of students re-enforcing colonial stereotypes of us and them.

This study also points to several areas for future research. While volunteerism and sport volunteerism scholars have interrogated issues regarding social transformation and leadership, this study has provided a critical insight on social transformation and leadership, by showing that it is the Global North volunteers who benefit from such opportunities, with little consideration given to the host communities in the Global South. To further this insight, it is suggested that research is needed to develop a set of best practice ethical standards by HEIs would help to ensure that programmes which offer genuine value to local communities are promoted. The discourse examined has led to questions about what ‘type’ of students take up international volunteering, for example does the cost of such ‘experiences’ exclude widening participation students? In addition, the pre-travel support provided by HEIs need to be examined in greater detail, as the study has shown that students often struggle to adopt to new cultures when volunteering internationally. It is hoped that continued research into these topics will contribute towards a fuller, and more ethical understanding (and promotion) of volunteer tourism practices promoted by HEIs.

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