



# The hedonic nature of conservation volunteer travel



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Conservation volunteer travel viewed as hedonic experience.
- The effect of environmental world view on participation in conservation volunteer travel.
- Ethical travel and 'inclusion of nature'.

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## ABSTRACT

Informed by the hedonic consumption value framework, this research explores the relationships between individuals' environmental views, consumption values, and intentions to engage in conservation volunteer travel, to argue that contemporary conservation volunteer travel needs to be re-conceptualized. Such perspective on conservation volunteer travel takes into account young adults' desires for hedonic travel experiences. The study results expose that hedonic and utilitarian values of conservation volunteer travel mediate the relations between of pro-environmental views on the intent to volunteer in conservation projects. In other words, through participation in conservation volunteer travel, consumers gain both hedonic pleasure as well as a sense that their actions are needed given increasing global environmental degradation.

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## 1. Introduction

"Volunteer tourism is ... an expanding sector of the tourism industry in many countries in both the developed and developing world." (Young, 2008, p. 207). One of the indispensable characteristics of voluntourists is that they "volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might include aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001, p. 1). Just as destinations vary, so do the volunteer activities in which young adults can engage. While many volunteer travelers focus on community-oriented experiences (e.g., Broad, 2003), others are more intent on supporting wildlife conservation, undertaking research, and assisting with rehabilitation programs as well as embarking on ecological projects in

endangered ecosystems (e.g., Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Lorimer, 2009, 2010; Schattle, 2008). Numerous factors have contributed to the expansion of conservation volunteer travel worldwide (Wearing, 2001), including the increased pressure on natural environments (Eagles, 1994) and the reduction of financial support of nature conservation (Eagles, 1994; Lorimer, 2009), leading to the increasing demand for volunteers.

With volunteer travel (in a general sense) (Wearing & McGehee, 2014) and conservation volunteer travel (in particular) (Lorimer, 2009; Wearing, 2001) on the rise; some important questions should be asked concerning young adults' motivations driving conservation volunteer travel. Are conservation volunteer travelers compelled by a desire for an enjoyable hedonic experience? Or are they driven by a personal duty to work toward a better environment? Moreover, how does environmental worldview influence young adults' intentions to participate in ecologically-focused volunteer projects while on holiday?

Recent research on the motivations for pro-environmental consumption suggests consumers weigh the benefits of hedonic

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pleasure with a need for meaningful experiences (Venhoeven, Bolderdijk, & Steg, 2013). Hedonic pleasure seeking is a widely-recognized framework explaining motivations to consume for the sake of both affective and cognitive pleasure gaining (Kubovy, 1999, in; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Venhoeven et al. (2013), in their examination of environmental motivations, argue that people are driven by a desire for well-being, but this sense of well-being goes beyond conventional feelings of hedonic contentment. They argue that pro-environmental consumption may actually reduce hedonic pleasure, but increase another variation of well-being, which they call eudaimonic (meaningful) well-being (Venhoeven et al., 2013).

Arguably, conservation volunteer travel functions as a hybrid of these two forms of well-being. It combines both the pragmatic and romantic notions of environmental engagement – young adults can feel as though they are making a concrete contribution while enjoying remote and pristine destinations, far removed from their everyday lives. In other words, through participation in conservation volunteer travel, young adults gain both hedonic pleasure as well as feelings that their actions are needed given increasing global environmental degradation. This study seeks to understand whether desires of hedonic experience of unique ecosystems can motivate young adults to participate in conservation volunteer travel and how respondents' environmental views relate to the perceived hedonic experience of conservation volunteer travel.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The pro-environmental act of conservation volunteer travel

Conservation volunteer travel is an important means by which young adults can aid in combatting the global effects of environmental degradation. By participating in global conservation projects, these individuals can engage in collective action based upon their beliefs and perceptions about the relationship between society and the environment. Such beliefs and views tend to be the product of societal knowledge about nature (Dunlap & York, 2008; Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000). As the knowledge advances, societal environmental views change accordingly. More recently this knowledge inspires young adults to pursue environmentally-focused travel behavior (e.g., Brondo, 2015; Luo & Deng, 2008).

With limited research focusing on the relationship between environmental views and conservation volunteer travel, only general conclusions can be drawn (e.g., Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975; Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Luo & Deng, 2008). In this context, the environmental views have mainly been used to understand pro-environmental travel behaviors. For instance, Dunlap and Heffernan (1975) linked environmental views with different types of recreational activities: consumptive (e.g., hunting, fishing), appreciative (e.g., hiking, camping), and abusive (e.g., snowmobiling, mountain biking) to demonstrate that participation in outdoor recreation is related to individual beliefs about the natural environment.

It has also been suggested that pro-environmental views are associated with a desire to experience nature by engaging in pro-environmental travel (Eagles & Higgins, 1998; Luo & Deng, 2008). Specifically, Luo and Deng (2008) established that nature tourists, who express concerns about an “eco-crisis”, were also likely to express a higher desire to be near nature and learn more about it. In contrast, Wearing, Cynn, Ponting, and McDonald (2002) found that environmental beliefs were not significantly related to environmental tourism purchasing behavior among international backpackers in Australia.

While studies show mixed results in terms of the relationship between environmental views and pro-environmental behaviors, it

is likely that environmental views affect young adults' choice of ethical, environmentally-friendly tourism such as conservation volunteer travel, thus motivating them to be part of this burgeoning form of tourism. As such, the following question was asked:

*RQ1: How do young adults' intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel relate to their environmental views?*

Following the critique that simply examining one's environmental worldview provides insufficient insight into a range of motivations for pro-environmental behavior (e.g., Johnson, Bowker, & Cordell, 2004; Pahl, Harris, Todd, & Rutter, 2005; Schultz & Zelezny, 1999; Schultz, Shriver, Tabanico, & Khazian, 2004), more research should be centered on how values may serve to explain pro-environmental behaviors (e.g., Schultz & Zelezny, 2003; Schultz, 2000; de Groot & Steg, 2009) and pro-environmental tourism behavior in particular (e.g., Doran, Hanss, & Larsen, 2016). Poortinga, Steg, and Vlek (2004) proposed, for instance, that environmental views and values act as filters for new information so that corresponding attitudes are likely to emerge. This means that different values should be associated with different environmental perspectives.

With a relatively small number of publications investigating the relationship between pro-environmental travel behaviors and environmental views in a tourism context, even fewer attempts have been made to identify values associated with travel to volunteer in nature conservation projects. In the following section, we explore the notion of conservation volunteer travel as ethical consumption and hedonic experience to offer a novel perspective to study the conservation volunteering travel phenomenon, which we further examine empirically.

### 2.2. Volunteer travel

People travel in search of meaningful experiences of self-discovery and self-understanding—which they cannot get from their daily routine (Kelly, 1983 in; Wearing, Deville, & Lyons, 2008, p. 64). Volunteer travel is one type of travel that provides young adults with unique opportunities to meet people from different parts of the world, learn about different cultures, live in another country, or broaden one's perspective (Benson & Seibert, 2009). Through participation in ecological projects, in particular, they can fulfill a need of self-actualization, relaxation and stimulation (Caissie & Halpenny, 2003).

Volunteer travel is focused on personal experience and self-development which corresponds with the notion of the vacation-minded volunteer (e.g. Brown & Morrison, 2003; Brown, 2005). ‘Vacation-minded’ volunteering is motivated mainly by opportunities to engage with different cultural contexts and establish new friendships with like-minded individuals (Brown, 2005). On the contrary, ‘volunteer-minded’ travelers tend to dedicate a significant part of their vacation to volunteer in activities; such pursuits are their key priorities (Brown, 2005). Callanan and Thomas (2005) arrived at a similar conclusion, proposing volunteer tourists could be classified along a behavioral spectrum ranging from shallow volunteering (i.e., pursuing personal interests and self-development), intermediate volunteering, to deep volunteering (i.e., showing a genuine interest in the well-being of a host community). Shallow volunteers prefer short-term volunteer adventures (i.e., a few weeks), tend to be less experienced, have fewer skills (Callanan & Thomas, 2005) and travel primarily for individual experiences (Wymer, Self, & Findley, 2010).

Much of the tourism literature on volunteer travel conceives of this form of travel across a behavioral spectrum ranging from commitment to attaining long-term conservation or development

goals to volunteering in projects for individual egoistic purposes (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Coghlan & Fennell, 2009). It appears that conservation volunteer travel, just like other volunteering activities, appeal to these opposing volunteer styles (e.g., Cousins, Evans, & Saddler, 2009; Lorimer, 2010).

### 2.3. Hedonism in conservation volunteer travel

Volunteer travel has been recognized as a moral and ethical consumption built on a person's desire to make a difference (Malone, McCabe, & Smith, 2014). Ethical consumption addresses a wide range of concerns such as animal welfare, labor standards, human rights, health/well-being, and sustainability (Lewis, 2012). Ethical consumers tend to distinguish themselves through pro-environmental purchasing behavior and concerns about corporate social responsibility (Harrison, Newholm, & Shaw, 2005).

Malone et al. (2014) proposed that ethical travelers are likely to be driven by hedonic aspects of travel experiences. They argued that in the age of post-material consumption, the traveler focuses on positive affective experiences (i.e., consuming emotion during the holiday) rather than material goods (Malone et al., 2014; Pearce, 2009). This means that emotional desires can outweigh tangible benefits of travel (Alba & Williams, 2013). Thus, ethical travelers stand in opposition to tourists concerned with conventional consumerism, material possessions and the pursuit of personal pleasures (Fournier & Richins, 1991).

Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) hedonic consumption value framework makes it possible to examine those desirable experiential aspects of conservation volunteer travel. For them, hedonic consumption is about "multisensory, fantasy, and the emotive aspects of one's experience with products" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982, p. 92). If young adults indeed perceive conservation volunteer travel as a hedonic experience, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) framework helps to explain how these young adults experience conservation volunteer travel as a sensory-emotive stimulation process. Moreover, we are able to better understand whether hedonic motives strengthen or weaken the influence of environmental views on young adults' intentions to participate in conservation volunteer travel. In other words, we can assess the value of hedonic consumption for these young adults and its implications in terms of their travel choices. In this study, one of the tasks is to find out how hedonic experience of conservation volunteer travel influences the relationship between environmental view and young adults' intentions to partake in conservation volunteer travel. The following question was asked:

*RQ2: What is the influence of consumption values on young adults' intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel?*

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Participants and procedures

Participants ( $n = 503$ ) for this study were mainly young adults attending a large public university in the southwestern United States, recruited in 2015 during the months November and December. Additional participants were recruited via a snowball convenience sample from social media (i.e., Facebook and Twitter). The sample was largely comprised of females (70.6%), with some variation in race and ethnicity (e.g., 16.7% were African American, 4.5% Asian, 59.9% Caucasian, 14.3% two or more reported races, and 4.6% declined to answer). Of those, 20.9% reported to be Hispanic/Latino, regardless of race. Slightly more than two-thirds (66.5%) had traveled outside of the U.S., and 17.9% had lived outside the U.S. in

the recent past.

To collect self-reported responses from participants, the online survey platform, Qualtrics™ was utilized. The online questionnaire contained sections pertaining to self-reported environmental views and hedonic/utilitarian experience associated with conservation volunteer travel, intention to travel for conservation volunteering, and demographic information. The sampling procedure aimed to collect a pool of demographically-diverse participants providing an opportunity to examine scales for possible trends and ethical concerns surrounding conservation volunteer travel, among American college students. Given the growing concern for global conservation and climate change within the U.S. in general and among students in particular, such a sample was considered appropriate.

### 3.2. Measures and variables

**Hedonic & Utilitarian.** The hedonic/utilitarian value scale presented here asked young adults: *What is in conservation volunteer travel for you?* The scale was adapted from the seminal paper by Babin, Darden, and Griffin (1994) to depict respondents' attitudes toward *conservation volunteering travel* as an experiential hedonic consumption. The measure used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As a result of CFA (Table 1) two items were removed due to a standardized factor loading below a critical value of 0.50 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010). Reliability of the 6-item scale measuring *Utilitarian* value in conservation volunteer travel was good ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Reliability of the 10-item scale measuring hedonic value in conservation volunteer travel was excellent ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) (see Table 2).

**Behavioral Intention.** A self-reported consumer inventory scale was used to assess young adults' intentions to participate in future conservation volunteerism. The scale was adapted from previous consumer inventory (Zaichkowsky, 1985) and tourism behavior (Sparks, 2007) measures. Self-report inventories have been successfully used in past environmental research (Kormos & Gifford, 2014). The measure used items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not likely, 7 = very likely) to gauge likely participation behavior. From the CFA results (Table 1), one item was removed due to a standardized factor loading below critical value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Reliability for the measure was excellent ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ) (see Table 2).

**New Environmental Paradigm (NEP).** NEP is arguably one of the most popular frameworks utilized to examine the relationship between beliefs about the natural environment and pro-environmental behavior. NEP proposes that people hold a multitude of views regarding humanity's ability to affect nature, rights to control it, and limits to economic growth (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Dunlap et al. 2000; Hawcroft & Milfont, 2010). Greater knowledge about nature is associated with changing societal beliefs about the natural environment, perception of nature, and its relation to human beings (Dunlap & York, 2008; Dunlap et al., 2000). The NEP scale (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Dunlap et al., 2000) was designed to elucidate contrasts between the anthropocentric social paradigm and the promising new environmental paradigm (Dunlap et al., 2000). Arguably, it consists of items asking only general environmental topics that do not become outdated, measuring the overall relationship between humans and the environment (e.g., Dunlap et al., 2000; Luo & Deng, 2008). The scale originally consisted of 12 items on a 4-point Likert scale. To improve its psychometric soundness, it was later revised to include 15 items; sexist terminology employed in the previous scale was also eliminated in the revised scale. The measure employed in this study used 15 items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

**Table 1**

Confirmatory factor analysis for new environmental paradigm, hedonic, utilitarian and behavior.

Factor and corresponding item	$\bar{x}$	Error	R	C.R
<b>Limits: limits to natural resources view</b>	<b>4.56</b>			
We are approaching the limit of the number of people the Earth can support	4.51	1.56	0.74	8.06
The Earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources	4.63	1.44	0.66	–
<b>Ecocentric: ecocentric view</b>	<b>5.47</b>			
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences	5.20	1.26	0.63	10.58
Humans are seriously abusing the environment	5.44	1.26	0.78	11.80
Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist	5.76	1.34	0.64	10.67
Despite our special abilities, humans are still subject to the laws of nature	5.5	1.27	0.59	–
<b>Human: anthropocentric view</b>	<b>3.70</b>			
Humans have the right to modify natural environment to suit their needs	3.72	1.51	0.51	8.72
The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations	3.69	1.48	0.64	9.88
The so-called “ecological crisis” facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated	3.59	1.54	0.71	–
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature	3.63	1.68	0.59	9.17
<b>Factor and corresponding item</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>Error</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>C.R</b>
<b>Utilitarian</b>	<b>5.23</b>			
I know I help communities by doing Environmental Volunteer Tourism	4.67	1.65	0.60	13.20
Environmental Volunteer Tourism is a desirable activity for a student	4.79	1.41	0.69	15.37
Environmental Volunteer Tourism has a positive impact on nature	5.77	1.26	0.70	15.40
Environmental Volunteer Tourism is a learning experience for me	5.45	1.38	0.80	17.64
Environmental Volunteer Tourism is a big accomplishment	5.19	1.37	0.78	17.50
Environmental Volunteer Tourism is good for my resume and job applications	5.56	1.41	0.76	–
<b>Factor and corresponding item</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>Error</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>C.R</b>
<b>Hedonic</b>	<b>4.72</b>			
It looks like a joy	4.74	1.50	0.81	22.26
Compared to other things I could do during my vacation time, it looks truly enjoyable	4.18	1.65	0.79	21.43
It looks like an exciting thing to do	4.91	1.46	0.87	24.83
I feel excited at the thought of participating.	4.37	1.56	0.88	25.45
It seems like an escape.	4.62	1.59	0.67	17.10
I would enjoy being immersed in Environmental Volunteer Tourism.	4.60	1.60	0.88	25.57
I would enjoy Environmental Volunteer Tourism for its own sake not just for skills I gain.	4.74	1.62	0.81	22.11
It seems like a meaningful use of my time	5.22	1.46	0.78	21.14
It would allow me to forget about everyday problems.	4.69	1.67	0.54	12.87
It would be a good time	5.14	1.45	0.84	–
<b>Factor and corresponding item</b>	<b><math>\bar{x}</math></b>	<b>Error</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>CR</b>
<b>Behavior</b>	<b>3.49</b>			
I would use my Spring Break to go on an Environmental Volunteer Tourism trip	3.09	1.81	0.80	16.67
If X sponsored an Environmental Volunteer Tourism trip, I would go	4.42	1.86	0.75	15.80
I would pay to go on an Environmental Volunteer Tourism program	2.79	1.68	0.77	16.18
I intend to participate in Environmental Volunteer Tourism	3.16	1.68	0.90	18.58
I will try to participate in Environmental Volunteer Tourism	3.53	1.76	0.93	19.12
I expect to participate in Environmental Volunteer Tourism	3.05	1.64	0.91	18.66
I would like to learn more about Environmental Volunteer Tourism	4.31	1.81	0.72	19.44
I will research Environmental Volunteer Tourism through social media	3.63	1.83	0.68	–

Measure of model fit:  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 503$ ) = 1255.40,  $\chi^2/df = 2.490$   $p < 0.001$ , CFI = 0.935, RMSEA = 0.055.

R = standardized regression coefficient.

**Table 2**

Construct reliability and validity.

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)
Human	0.70	0.37	0.11	0.71
Utilitarian	0.87	0.52	0.47	0.90
Hedonic	0.94	0.63	0.54	0.97
Behavior	0.94	0.66	0.54	0.98
Limits	0.66	0.49	0.35	0.98
Ecocentric	0.76	0.44	0.35	0.98

AVE = average variance extracted; CR = construct reliability; MSV = maximum shared variance.

Dunlap et al. (2000) have highlighted a series of studies to suggest considerable inconsistency in the number of NEP dimensions. For example, Albrecht, Bultena, Hoiberg, and Nowak (1982), Geller and Lasley (1985), as well as Noe and Snow (1990) identified three distinct dimensions—balance of nature, limits to growth, and human domination of nature, whereas within studies

conducted by Edgell and Nowell (1989) and Lefcourt (1996), all items loaded on a single factor (within at least one sample). Other studies found only two dimensions in one or more of their samples (e.g. Bechtel, Verdugo & Pinheiro, 1999; Gooch, 1995; Noe & Snow, 1990; Scott & Willits, 1994). Given these discrepancies, Dunlap et al. (2000) argued three dimensions should not be assumed. Thus, in order to explore a number of dimensions in the current study, an exploratory factor analysis using IBM SPSS v23 was initially conducted. EFA revealed three unique dimensions of the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the identified items was then run in AMOS 23 for the 3-factor NEP structure, resulting in 10 items total included: *ecocentric views* (4 items) (*Ecocentric*,  $\alpha = 0.76$ ); *anthropocentric views* (4 items) (*Human*,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ), *limits to natural resources* (*Limits*) ( $\alpha = 0.66$ ) (Table 1).

Construct validity was determined by examining convergent and discriminant validities. Convergent validity was shown by all CR values exceeding 1.96 at a significance level  $p < 0.001$  (Table 1). Discriminant validity was demonstrated through average variance



extracted (AVE) estimates exceeding the squared correlations between each factor (Hair et al., 2010) (Table 3). This test of discriminant validity ensures that each factor is unique by testing to see if the amount of unique variance explained by each factor (i.e., AVE) is higher than the amount of variance shared between different factors (i.e., the squared correlation). Overall, construct validity was established for the six factors within the measurement model.

#### 4. Results

To determine whether environmental views and hedonic value of conservation volunteer travel explain the degree to which young adults are motivated to participate in conservation volunteer travel, structural equation modelling (SEM) was undertaken. Several iterations of the model were tested. The parsimonious model revealed good fit:  $\chi^2$  ( $N = 503$ ) = 6.279,  $df = 6$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 1.046$ ,  $p = 0.393$ , GFI = 0.996 CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.01 (Byrne, 1994; Hu & Bentler, 1995) (Table 4).

Research question one (RQ1) asked how young adults' intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel relates to environmental views. To evaluate this, the analysis utilizes the NEP to gauge environmental views. Three factors within the NEP were distinguished: *limits to natural resource* view (Limits), *ecocentric* view (Ecocentric), and *anthropocentric* view (Human). In the parsimonious path model, only one direct path from *ecocentric* views to behavioral intent to participate in conservation volunteer travel (*behavioral intent*) was significant, yet negative and weak ( $\beta = -0.076$ ;  $p = 0.023$ ) (Table 4).

Research question two (RQ2) asked about the influence of perceived hedonic experience of conservation volunteer travel on young adults' intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel. Paths from *limits to natural resources* view to *hedonic* and *utilitarian* experience of conservation volunteer travel and from *limits to natural resources* view to behavioral intent to participate in conservation volunteer travel were insignificant. Conversely, paths from *ecocentric* view to *utilitarian* and *hedonic* consumer experience were significant. There was a moderate effect of *ecocentric* view on *utilitarian* experience of the conservation volunteer travel ( $\beta = 0.352$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a moderate effect of *ecocentric* view on *hedonic* experience of conservation volunteer travel ( $\beta = 0.261$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Both paths representing the relationship between *ecocentric* view and expectation of hedonic and utilitarian experience were significant. Finally, the effect of *hedonic* value of conservation volunteer tourism on the *behavioral intent* to participate in conservation volunteer travel was positive and strong ( $\beta = 0.665$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); likewise, the relationship between *utilitarian* value of conservation volunteer travel and *behavioral intent* to participate in such travel was positive but weak ( $\beta = 0.118$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ).

To further investigate whether perceptions of *utilitarian* and

**Table 4**

Structural Paths Examining Relationships between views, values and behavioral intent.

Regression paths	$\beta$	$p$	$R^2_{SMC}$
Ecocentric → Utilitarian	0.35	0.001	0.123 <sup>b</sup>
Ecocentric → Hedonic	0.32	0.001	0.101 <sup>c</sup>
Ecocentric → Behavioral	−0.08	0.023	0.521 <sup>d</sup>
Hedonic → Behavioral	0.66	0.001	
Hedonic → Behavioral	0.12	0.004	

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2 = 6.28$ ;  $df = 6$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.046$ ,  $p = 0.393$ , GFI = 0.996, CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.01.

<sup>b</sup>  $R^2_{SMC} = 0.123$ ; one path explaining 12.3% of variance in *Utilitarian*.

<sup>c</sup>  $R^2_{SMC} = 0.101$ ; one path explaining 10.1% of variance in *Hedonic*.

<sup>d</sup>  $R^2_{SMC} = 0.521$ ; all three paths explaining 52.1% of variance in *Behavior*.

*hedonic* value of conservation volunteer travel mediate the relationship between *ecocentric* view and *behavioral intent*, mediation analysis was conducted using a bootstrapping method (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Two-tailed significance was reported as an indicator of significant relationships between the two variables. The direct relationship between *ecocentric* views and *behavior* was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Next, the indirect effect between *ecocentric* view on *behavioral intent* was examined: the effect of mediating the path from *ecocentric* view through *hedonic* value of conservation volunteer travel to *behavioral intent* was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). With the *hedonic* value as mediating variable included, the direct effect between *ecocentric* view on intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel became insignificant ( $p = 0.065$ ). It can be concluded therefore that the effect of *ecocentric* view on *behavioral intent* to participate in conservation volunteer travel is fully mediated by *hedonic* values of the experience.

The effect of mediating the path from *ecocentric* view through *utilitarian* value to *behavioral intent* was also examined and was significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). After adding *utilitarian* value of conservation volunteer travel as the mediating variable, the direct effect of *ecocentric* view on intention to participate in conservation volunteering became insignificant ( $p = 0.854$ ). These results suggest that perceived experience associated with the conservation volunteer travel mediates the negative effect of the *ecocentric* views on young adults' *behavioral intent* to participate in conservation volunteer travel.

#### 5. Discussion

Conservation volunteer travel has received attention for contributing to solutions of global environmental problems (Lorimer, 2010; McDougale, Greenspan, & Handy, 2011; Peachey, 2008). These endeavors provide young adults with an opportunity to make a difference while supporting an economically appealing model of social enterprise (Lorimer, 2010). Past research, however, has largely overlooked this phenomenon; while few studies problematize conservation volunteer travel, they tend to conceptualize the phenomenon as a type of environmental activism (e.g., Lorimer, 2010; Schattle, 2008; Wearing, 2001). Our results, however, challenge this view as we propose to adopt a perspective that recognizes conservation volunteer travel reflects a more recent trend of ethical consumerism. As such, young adults are likely to conceptualize conservation volunteer travel as a hedonic experience rather than an environmental act that 'saves the world' (i.e., Malone et al., 2014). Ecological projects are seen as an opportunity for self-development via unique experiences in diverse ecosystems and cultures.

The study results suggest while three kinds of environmental views and beliefs exist among young adults: *limits to natural resources*, *anthropocentrism*, and *ecocentrism*, only the *ecocentric* view relates to young adults' intentions to engage in conservation volunteer projects worldwide. This result indicates that young

**Table 3**

Discriminant validity analysis from NEP, hedonic, utilitarian and behavior CFA.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Human	<b>0.37<sup>a</sup></b>	0.005 <sup>b</sup>	0.002	0.00	0.03	0.11
2. Utilitarian	−0.07 <sup>c,d</sup>	<b>0.52</b>	0.48	0.29	0.06	0.18
3. Hedonic	−0.04	0.69	<b>0.63</b>	0.53	0.05	0.14
4. Behavior	0.00	0.54	0.73	<b>0.66</b>	0.03	0.04
5. Limits	−0.16	0.24	0.22	0.17	<b>0.49</b>	0.35
6. Ecocentric	−0.33	0.42	0.37	0.19	0.59	<b>0.44</b>

<sup>a</sup> The bold diagonal elements are the measures of average variance explained (AVE) for each factor.

<sup>b</sup> Above diagonal elements are the squared correlations between factors.

<sup>c</sup> Below diagonal elements are the correlations between factors.

<sup>d</sup> All correlations were significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

adults with stronger ecocentric views were less likely to engage in conservation volunteer travel. Interestingly, in this study the two remaining environmental views (i.e., *limits to natural resource, anthropocentric*) were not related to young adults' intention to participate in conservation volunteer travel. This result is surprising should one think about conservation volunteer travel as pro-environmental behavior. However, when one understands conservation volunteer travel as a type of ethical tourism, the results highlighting the negative link between *ecocentric* views and this type of consumption along with the lack of association between the *limits to natural resource, anthropocentric* views and conservation volunteer travel are plausible because for those young adults who focus on unique experiences of remote ecosystems, their anthropocentric values or concern about global natural resources seems unrelated to their hedonic experience of conservation volunteer travel. These results however position contemporary conservation volunteer travel in opposition to the general notion that, '[the] underlying ideology of volunteer tourism represents a transition in society from an anthropocentric view, where the world is interpreted in terms of people and their values, to an ecocentric view, where the world fosters the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature' (Wearing, 2001, p. 157). Indeed one could argue these results manifest conservation volunteer travel as simply another project of ecomodernism.

One insight into the negative relationship between *ecocentric* views and intention to participate in conservation volunteering comes from the work by Schultz (2000) who proposed that different types of environmental views are linked to the degree to which people think of themselves as "interdependent with all living things" (p. 394) and include nature within their cognitive representations of self. A high degree of inclusion among young adults would, for instance, translate to an *ecocentric* view where self and nature are interconnected, thus nature becomes inherently valuable (see also Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001). Alternatively, at low degrees of inclusion, self and nature are separate and "nature is valued only to the extent that it affects the self" (Schultz et al., 2005, p. 459).

Schultz (2000) noted that individuals who engage in pro-environmental behavior will likely differ in terms of the degree of inclusion. Our study results show that young adults who subscribed to the *ecocentric* view of environment were also less likely to pursue conservation volunteer travel. This means that those who were less likely to pursue conservation volunteer travel could be characterized by a higher degree of inclusion. Since they did not consider conservation volunteer travel a pro-environmental behavior, this is precisely why they were less inclined to engage in it. Arguably they viewed this form of travel as a manifestation of consumerism rather than a solution to global environmental problems.

When one views conservation volunteer travel as an ethical consumption phenomenon rather than a pro-environmental behavior, it becomes intuitive that the negative effect of *ecocentric* view on behavioral intent may be cancelled out by hedonic/utilitarian values of conservation volunteer travel. Specifically, for individuals subscribing to *ecocentric* views, conservation volunteering can be pleasurable, fun, and high quality while being a concurrently useful way to contribute to global environmental awareness.

In consequence, conservation volunteer travel is, in a sense, destined to engage a rather 'shallow' volunteer (Callanan & Thomas, 2005) who focuses on pursuing personal interests and travels primarily for individual experiences (Wymer et al., 2010). This type of volunteer tends to be less experienced and have fewer skills (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). Thus, given the environmentally unsustainable nature of travel, such a 'shallow' conservation volunteer contributes to the global environmental problems rather

than providing solutions.

Low degrees of inclusion would be seen in *anthropocentric* views. Arguably, self-enhancement may dominate and it is reflected in valuing nature only to the extent it serves individual well-being. As suggested by the results, these *anthropocentric* views are not related to intentions to participate in conservation volunteer projects. Arguably young adults with a low degree of inclusion are likely to agree with the *anthropocentric* view in which nature is valued because exploitation of nature has a direct impact on their quality of life and should be monitored (Schultz et al., 2005). It could therefore be argued that young adults find the value of 'unity with nature' to the extent that it allows humanity to better monitor how nature affects quality of life (Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001).

While Schultz's (2000) concept of 'inclusion of nature' has been useful in discussing *anthropocentric* and *ecocentric* views, it provides a rather limited opportunity to explain the lack of a relationship between *limits to natural resources* view and intention to volunteer in conservation projects. Intuitively this result makes sense as those who subscribe to the view of limited resources and planetary boundaries are not likely to think conservation volunteer travel increases awareness of global environmental problems and planetary limits of natural resources through this behavior (e.g. Benson & Seibert, 2009). Future research could examine this issue in a greater detail by interviewing conservation volunteers about their values and utilitarian motives to participate in conservation projects. One could potentially investigate whether volunteering is seen as a form of global citizenship.

Similarly, while the 'degree of inclusion of nature' thesis provides some valuable insights to the question about the relationship between *environmental* views and young adults intentions to volunteer in ecologically-based projects, it does not offer an explanation concerning why conservation volunteer travel is becoming more and more popular. Thus, that perspective alone offers rather limited potential to elucidate conservation volunteering in terms of consumption values. To problematize the participation in conservation volunteering even more, one could apply the concept of hedonic and eudemonic well-being (Venhoeven et al., 2013). Young adults may be attracted to conservation volunteering because it offers hedonic pleasure via a meaningful experience. The notion of conservation volunteering as meaningful activity aiding global environmental problems corresponds with utilitarian value, which is seen as a 'useful' consumption act. Furthermore, these two seemingly independent concepts appear to coincide well with the notion of ethical consumption and ethical travel (Lewis, 2012; Malone et al., 2014).

Overall, this study provides evidence in support of the Malone et al. (2014) argument that conservation volunteerism needs to be re-conceptualized in order to account for young adults' desires for hedonic travel experiences. In our sample of young adults, hedonic and utilitarian values mediate the effect of environmental views (*natural resource limits* and *ecocentrism*) on the intent to volunteer in conservation projects. Hedonism exemplifies positive emotions and pleasure associated with volunteerism, whereas utilitarianism represents a focus on the obligations to give back to and protect nature. Volunteers desire both hedonic and utilitarian experiences while participating in conservation projects.

With a better understanding of ethical consumption in the context of nature conservation volunteering, we suggest that future studies seek to explain the negative effect of eco-centrism on this type of volunteering as well as examine how consumer values relate to a more general set of individual values such as those proposed by Schwartz (1994). This is an especially interesting topic as desires for positive hedonic consumption of conservation volunteer travel appear to be strong; volunteers believe they will have a positive experience derived from their participation.

### 5.1. Limitations and future research

This research is not without limitations. In terms of the sampling procedure, steps were taken to recruit a more diverse participant pool of young people, outside of university students. Just like with any convenience sample however, this research faces issues of external validity. While the participants represented a variety of backgrounds, including a high percentage of respondents who had traveled outside of the U.S., respondents in this study were more likely to have the money and privilege to participate in conservation volunteer travel. Future research should expand the pool of eligible respondents to allow for comparisons across different groups and even countries. To provide further support for our findings, it would be advantageous to consider numerous universities concurrently within the sample, as well as young adults who do not attend any university through national and international panel samples.

Many online survey designs such as surveys formulated to capture hard-to-reach populations using social media or surveys targeting specific populations through social media in general have limitations in terms of response rate. While a low response rate could be seen as problematic, future research on conservation volunteer travel should be targeted at specific population groups (e.g., Facebook interest groups, Instagram subscribers) of past and potential participants interested in this experience so that response and completion rates can be calculated.

In relation to the sampling procedure, future research should pay additional attention to the construct validity of the New Environmental Paradigm scale (Cordano, Welcomer, & Scherer, 2003). This study identified three factors of the NEP scale and each present some construct validity problems with average variance explained by each factor slightly below 0.50 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). Dunlap et al. (2000) discussed some challenges to the construct validity of the NEP scale, arguing that the construct of an environmental worldview is inherently amorphous. The most important evidence of the NEP scale's construct validity, they suggest, comes from studies theorizing that the NEP forms a primary component, along with values, of environmental belief systems and then have found this expectation empirically confirmed (Pierce, Lovrich, Tsurutani, & Takematsu, 1987; Stern, Dietz, & Guagnano, 1995). The scholars brought up a work by Zeller and Carmines (1980) to point out the difficulty of judging the construct validity of this instrument. Overall the NEP has demonstrated sound psychometric properties in the way of reliability and validity, indicating a general acceptance of its continued use (e.g., Mobley, Vagias, & DeWard, 2010; Widegren, 1998).

Another area for improvement lies in the nature of self-reported behavioral intentions. When talking about ethical consumption it is important to pay attention to the attitude-behavior gap. This attitude-behavior gap in conservation volunteering concerns the gap between travelers' willingness to participate in ecological projects internationally and their actual behavior. The discrepancies between declared consumption and the actual consumption have been found to exist around the globe regardless of the cultural context (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011; De Pelsmacker, Driesen, & Rayp, 2005). Future research could aim to recruit individuals who have previously participated in conservation volunteer travel. Given this was an initial study in promoting conservation volunteering, researchers relied upon participant projections of potential future behavior. This is an acceptable, albeit limited, method in marketing and communication research (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

This study is one of the first to examine conservation volunteer

travel as a hedonic consumer experience, finding consumer values mediate the effect of ecocentric views on young adults' intentions to engage in conservation volunteer travel. The contribution this study makes to the tourism field could be summarized as follows: the study offers a consumer perspective and specifically hedonic experience framework to understand a pro-environmental volunteer. Moreover, the study contributes to a better understanding of young adults' travel choices. It is argued that examining conservation volunteer travel from an environmental perspective only provides, therefore, an incomplete perspective and in fact. The contribution the environmental perspective makes to better understand why young adults travel to volunteer in conservation projects should be questioned. In addition to, or even regardless of, environmental predilections, conservation volunteer travel taps into the essence of the consumer experience (i.e., are people benefiting and enjoying the product they are consuming?).

It appears that conservation volunteer travel is viewed as an exciting and interesting activity for these young adults. This has implications for those who coordinate conservation volunteer projects in terms of promotion and recruitment criteria. Perhaps participants in these projects are not necessarily looking for an opportunity to 'save the environment' and are more skeptical about the actual contribution of their efforts to nature conservation. Instead they desire an enjoyable experience. Marketing and promotion should take these factors into consideration.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

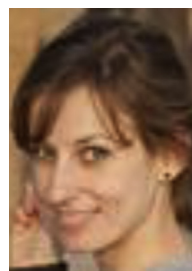
Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.06.022>.

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