

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL TO ISRAEL IN THE ETHNIFICATION OF AMERICAN JEWS^(*)

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Abstract

Globalization of contemporary life, which has been observed as having the twin consequences of, on the one hand, the homogenization of different cultures into one, while on the other, the commonality of all cultures, due to the intensive contact between them (Featherstone, 1995).

Globalization of the macro categories of cultural identity may serve to predispose the ethnification and cultural renewal of American Jews, through the medium of travel,

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by way of the individual choice to experience Israel. Israel (1997) and Horowitz (1994) have both shown in separate analyses that younger American Jews today share a set of common background experiences, *which can* be termed agents of re-ethnification. These include formal Jewish education, the celebration of rites of passage such as the bar/bat mitzvah, participation in informal Jewish youth groups, educational trips to Israel at all ages, and Jewish studies courses at universities.

Global tourism has yielded a large variety of tourism forms. One of them is Volunteer Tourism, which is a form of alternative tourism and driven by both ideological and self actualization motivations. Being a unique form of travel, it has never been extensively studied. However, it is clear that this kind of travel experience has some distinctive tourism characteristics which need to be explored more deeply (Wearing 2001). This paper will look specifically into one form of volunteer tourism – educational volunteer tourism to Israel

This study presents, through comparative longitudinal analysis, the changes in Jewish identity of North American college - age Jews from their arrival in Israel as volunteer tourists, the conclusion of their program, as well as after they have returned to their home country. The analysis utilizes two multi-stage longitudinal data sets: (1) data gathered in North America, through mail survey, from 362 alumni who participated in the Otzma program during 1987-1995, (2) data gathered from 269 Oren Kibbutz Institute alumni who participated in the program during 1989-1994 (a period of stable performance of the inbound tourist flow to Israel). The mail survey on which this data is based was conducted between 1994 (Oren) and 1996 (Otzma), with a follow up response rate of 52% among Otzma alumni and 54% among Oren alumni. It seems that during the years that have passed since participation in both programs, the participant's ethnic identity as American Jews has become stronger since their Israel volunteer tourism experience. Indeed, while participants in each program started out with quite different pre program scores, (Otzma being higher than Oren), the pattern and gradient of increase among alumni of both programs was found to be strikingly similar.

The visit to Israel is a potentially important agent of Jewish ethnicity, in the concretization of the imagined community, precisely because it stands at the interface between the private and the public, the religious and the secular, and the particular and the universalistic aspects of Jewishness. Israel contributes affect to Diaspora

symbolic ethnicity. It supports Diaspora Jewish identity by acting as the object of organizational efforts in the areas of philanthropy and politics. Ultimately, the effect of the Israel experience is to influence North American Jewish teens and young adults toward Jewish marriage, volunteer social involvement, and communal responsibility. Its normative and behavioral consequences may be termed the re-ethnification of American Jews.

Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the globalization of the macro categories of cultural identity, rather than leading to homogenization may serve to predispose the ethnification and cultural renewal of American Jews through the medium of volunteer travel, by way of the individual choice to experience Israel.

Introduction

Ethnicity has been understood as an outcome of macro and micro social forces under the condition of modernity (Mittelberg 1999). Globalization of contemporary life, which has been observed as having the twin consequences of, on the one hand, the homogenization of different cultures into one, while on the other, the commonality of all cultures, due to the intensive contact between them. Hence, the contemporary world becomes one in which ethnicity is not disappearing, rather one where post-moderns typically live through personal multiple identities in a pluralized world (Featherstone, 1995). The anthropologist Thomas Eriksen (1993) cites his colleague Benedict Anderson as defining the nation as an “imagined community” (1993: 99). Membership in this community is by self-definition rather than by personal acquaintance though what is shared by all members of the community is that . . . “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Eriksen 1993:99).

If the genesis and persistence of ethnicity has been traditionally understood as a residual outcome of migrant national ancestry and religious affiliation, the *dissipation of ethnicity* was then anticipated as a function of both generation-time and modernizing secularization. In contrast to this thesis of linear attrition, globalization presents an unanticipated contemporary macro genetic force which generates the invention or reinvention of ethnicity as a response to those very same global forces of cultural homogenization, social meaning deconstruction and the atomization of social relationships.

In this world, identity is privatized—an outcome of personal choice. Indeed, the preservation of this personal choice has itself become the metavalue of postmodern society. That is to say, in the emerging postmodern North America it need not matter what the content of your ethnicity is, rather most important is the fact that you can choose which ethnicity to assume as well as the timing, intensity and salience at any given time throughout the life cycle. Hence, the contemporary world becomes one in which the ethnic is not disappearing, rather one where post-moderns typically live through personal multiple identities in a pluralized world (Mittelberg 1999).

In the context of globalization and its effect on the homogenization of different cultures into one, versus their relativization, *the main purpose* of this paper

will be to investigate whether and to what degree the volunteer tourist experience in Israel contributes to the development of Jewish ethnic identity of American college students.

Theoretical Framework

Ethnification Among American Jews

Globalization of the macro categories of cultural identity may serve to predispose the ethnification and cultural renewal of American Jews, through the medium of travel, by way of the individual choice to experience Israel.

How may post-moderns accomplish this cultural feat, by using the construct of the “imagined community?”. The anthropologist Thomas Eriksen (1993) cites his colleague Benedict Anderson as defining the nation as an “imagined community” (1993: 99). Membership in this community is by self-definition rather than by personal acquaintance though what is shared by all members of the community is that . . . “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Eriksen 1993:99).

Modern American identity is characterized by a high degree of individualism and freedom of choice. The nature of American society itself is open, pluralistic, and multicultural. Americans, unlike the citizens of most societies, even other Western societies, exercise a substantial degree of personal freedom in choosing, or developing, a self-identity. Americans negotiate their way through the social and economic marketplaces in search of a mate, home, and community (Mittelberg 1999).

The ethnic identity of American Jews can only be understood within this broader global as well as American context. Americans born as Jews have the option of maintaining their inherited ethnicity in the same form, more or less, or of adopting a different form, religious or secular, or none of these. Although, the freedom to choose is not equally distributed throughout American society, especially when confronted by boundaries of race, it is less impeded by boundaries of religion, language, and least of all by national ancestry.

Developing and defining one's Jewish identity is, to a large extent, the end product of chosen opportunities and experiences. The range of choices available to the individual is of course not randomly distributed nor is it arbitrary.

What then is the role of Israel in this emerging ethnic culture of choice? Israel is at least the one place in the modern world where Jewish values are nominally those of the dominant culture of society. This situation is in contrast to the minority status of Jewish ethnicity in the Diaspora. Israel, therefore, has the potential for all Diaspora Jews to be a focus (partial or otherwise) of Jewish identification or as a locus of Jewish experience, whether physical or virtual, to be lived through. Denominational polemicists have predicted a narrowing basis of American Judaism, being transformed from a religion plus ethnicity to a religion alone. Since this decline in ethnicity is measured as an outcome of distance from generations of migration (Israel, 1997), its unchallenged objectivity takes on the form of historical inevitability and immutability. Yet this appears one-sided. Israel (1997) and Horowitz (1994) have both shown in separate analyses that younger American Jews today share a set of common background experiences, **which can** be termed *agents of re-ethnification*. These include formal Jewish education, the celebration of rites of passage such as the bar/bat mitzvah, participation in informal Jewish youth groups, educational trips to Israel at all ages, and Jewish studies courses at universities. All of these separately and together lead us to the conclusion that younger Jews have a more intensive Jewish background than their parents had, especially when considering measures beyond those of religiosity.

Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism as a concept derives from the wider concept of "alternative tourism" (Wearing, 2001). It is a unique form of tourist behavior driven by some kind of ideology. Its prime motivation is to contribute to society, and /or to a given community, by moving and living in it on a temporary basis, working as a volunteer to improve the quality of life of that community. Thus, a pure tourist experience becomes only a secondary motivation. Nevertheless, this secondary motivation plays an important role in constructing the overall travel experience. Hence, the intensive host-guest interrelations, the exposure to local cultures, the cross-cultural experiences and the local tourist attractions, are all perceived by volunteer tourists as a major

benefit alongside the fulfillment of their ideological urge to volunteer (Mittelberg 1988; Wearing 2001).

To a great extent, volunteer tourism is a form of travel which allows the individual to pursue two goals: One is the urge to escape from one's social environment and experience different cultures with different norm and values systems. This form of escapism varies from the regular motivation to flee from routine and boredom. The second is the need to enrich our self identity by broadening our perspective on cultures and societies (Wearing, 2001). Although there is still a major debate amongst researchers as to what extent these types of motivations are too generalized and thus, perhaps, irrelevant, they can still be used to illustrate the sociological drive behind volunteer tourists (MacCannell, 1992, Mansfeld, 1992).

Types of Volunteer tourism and the prime ideological motivation vary. The typology could easily be explained by the "push" and "pull" factors that shape the decision to undertake such travel. While the motivational "push" factors identified above have been well documented in the literature, the "pull" factors have been mostly ignored, especially in the tourism academic literature. Mittleberg (1988; 1999) in his work on volunteers to Israeli Kibbutzim defined the "push" factors as inviting economic, socio-cultural and political settings that call for assistance or help. Thus, in most cases, the host community seeks low-cost manual workers to solve its workforce shortage and finds volunteering an appropriate solution. Hence, such volunteers are treated as inexpensive labor rather than mere international tourists in pursuit of fulfilling their travel motivations.

Research Framework

Research population:

The Volunteer Visit in Israel: Otzma and Oren

Project *Otzma* is a ten month program designed to offer Jewish adults, aged 18-24, an opportunity to live and volunteer in Israel in a variety of social settings, each lasting for a period of two to three months; **Project *Oren*** was established and continues to operate on the basis of a premise that the kibbutz community could serve as an authentic setting, thus providing an attractive resource for enhancing the Jewish identity of Diaspora Jewish youth. Project *Oren* provides college-level informal

educational learning programs in Israel, offering enrichment activities in addition to the standard Hebrew language Ulpan program. Project *Oren* is a five month program. The educational enrichment program includes a core curriculum common to all *Oren* Institutes (kibbutz society, Jewish identity, Jewish History and holidays) while, in addition, each Institute focuses on a particular subject such as: archaeology and Jewish history, contemporary Israel, Jewish art; and Jewish roots in a religious kibbutz.

Data and Methodology

Two data bases were used in this study: 1. data gathered from 362 *Otzma* alumni that participated in the program during 1987-1995 and 2. data gathered from 269 *Oren* Institute alumni that participated in the program during 1989-1994. For each data set we have another parallel data base that was collected through questionnaires that were administered to participants in both programs, upon their arrival. The multiple data sets enable us to study Jewish ethnic identity change for each participant before the program and several years after it.

The research population included 697 *Otzma* participants and 498 *Oren* participants answered the questionnaires at the initial stage. The names and addresses that were drawn from the questionnaires administered upon the participants arrival to the programs, served as a data base for the research population in the follow up survey. The follow up study was based on mail survey conducted during 1994 for *Oren* and in 1996 for *Otzma*. The response rate was 52% among *Otzma* alumni (N=362) from the total number of participants in the years 1987-1995. Among *Oren* alumni, the response rate was 54% (N=269) out of the total number of alumni that participated in *Oren* programs from 1990-1994. These response rate are relatively high for mail survey (Salant & Dillman 1994). The follow up survey was completed, for each program in one snapshot, so that some of the participants participated in the programs several years ago, while others were at home at least a year after their Israel experience in both programs. All data sets are based on closed Likert-type questionnaires.

Findings

1. Socio-economic Variables

As can be seen in Table 1, it seems that among both alumni groups the majority of respondents are female. This gender bias is common to all college-age, Israel experience programs (Mittelberg and Lev Ari 1995). Average age among *Otzma* alumni is 26, among *Oren* alumni 25. Most of them are not married. Socio-economic status is higher among *Otzma* participants, and perhaps an explanation for this gap is the fact that *Otzma* alumni are slightly older than *Oren* alumni, as well as their selective recruitment resulting in their higher socioeconomic status.

Table 1. Frequencies (in percentages) of socio-economic profile

Variable	<i>Otzma</i>	<i>Oren</i>
Gender		
Male	37	41
Female	63	59
Family Status		
Never married	67	80
Married	22	11
Other	12	9
Educational Attainment		
Non-Academic	3	29
B.A	54	50
M.A.	26	11
Other Degrees	17	10

Table 1. Continued

Occupation		
Full time students	26	40
Professionals	34	22
Other	40	38
Total Household Income		
7,500\$ - 49, 999\$	26	39
50,000\$ - 124,999\$	42	41
More than 125,000	32	20

2. Jewish Background

Regarding forms of *formal Jewish schooling* , there is no distinct difference between *Otzma* and *Oren* participants, except for higher afternoon school attendance among *Otzma* alumni (Table 2).

With respect to their *religious affiliation* it seems (table 2) that *Oren* participants are drawn from the less affiliated and non-denominational sector of American Jewry. This is not surprising, of course, since while *Otzma* is a selective leadership development program, *Oren* is a broad based outreach College age program.

Table 2. Frequencies (in percentages) of formal Jewish education

Variable	<i>Otzma</i>	<i>Oren</i>
Formal Jewish Schooling		
Day school	15	20
Afternoon school	42	33
Sunday school	27	30
No formal Jewish education	16	17
Religious Affiliation		
Conservative	40	28
Orthodox	3	10
Reform	25	20
Reconstructionist	4	4
Just Jewish	15	18
Secular	3	9
Other	10	11

3. Longitudinal Analysis: Pre – Post Trip changes in Measures of Jewish Ethnic Identity, American identity and Attitudes towards Israel

a. Jewish Identity

In the analysis that follows we compared the pre and post scores of identical participants in both programs, measuring the change over time on measures of Jewish identity, from the beginning of both programs in Israel, to the follow up stage in North America (at least 2 years later).

As can be seen from both Tables 3 and 4, the Israel experience did make a difference, especially among *Oren* participants when Jewish identity was examined. For both groups their Jewish identity was strengthened when two points of time were compared, but for *Oren* participants it was more pronounced. Thus the two variables ("Being Jewish important to me" and "fate and future bound up with those of Jewish people") that measured components of Jewish ethnic identity of North American *Otzma* and *Oren* participants, before and after they completed the program and returned to the US, indicates a strengthening of Jewish identity among both *Otzma* and *Oren* alumni, since participating in the program.

b. Attachment to Israel

Here we measured the role of Israel, as the imagined community to which American Jews have a sense of belonging. The first question dealt with the participants' attitude to the following sentence: "To what extent do you think that Israel serves as a national, cultural and religious center of the Jewish people?" At the beginning of the program *Oren* participants scored slightly higher on this measure compared with *Otzma* participants. After several years the pattern was maintained so that *Otzma* participants are less attached to Israel than *Oren* alumni.

In the next item the participants were asked the following: "To what extent do you see Israel as a source of pride and self-respect for the Jewish people?" Similar high percentages among two groups of alumni perceived Israel as a source of pride to a large extent. At the follow-up, *Otzma* alumni expressed higher attachment to Israel (Tables 3 and 4).

In both cases we witness a minor decline in perceiving Israel as a source of pride to Diaspora Jews on the participants return home. However, the scores in this aspect remain relatively high.

c. Attitudes towards American Society

Finally, American identity was examined through the following items: first, participants were asked "Does being American play an important part in your life?" Secondly, participants were asked whether they felt that their fate and future is bound

up with that of the American people. It seems that in both alumni groups, American identity was weakened after their Israel experience. *Otzma* participants expressed higher decline in their American identity when compared with *Oren* alumni (Tables 3 and 4).

Summing up, the centrality and salience of the Jewish and Israeli ethnic components of self-identity were seen to be strengthened. However, while for *Oren* participants no attrition for the centrality of American identity was measured over time, it can be seen that for *Otzma* participants, the more intense (both over time and in comparison with *Oren*), Jewish identification was correlated with a decline in the weight of the American component of their identity. All in all, one can say that the volunteer visit to Israel changed the weight and the valence of different components of the ethnic identity of young American Jews on their return home to America.

Table 3. Pre-Trip and Post-Trip changes in Jewish Ethnic Identity, American identity and Attitudes towards Israel among *Otzma* Participants, N=323

Key: 1 to 5 scale; 1 = low degree, 5 = high degree

Identity and attitudes	Pre-Trip	Post-Trip	t-value	Probability
Being Jewish plays an important part in my life	4.17	4.58	-8.97	0.000
My fate and future bound up with that of the Jewish people	4.00	4.29	-5.18	0.000
Israel serves as a national, cultural center of the Jewish people	4.32	4.22	1.96	0.051
Israel as a source of pride for North American Jewry	4.14	3.96	3.27	0.001
Being American plays an Important part in my life	3.62	3.45	3.07	0.002
My fate and future is bound up with that of the American people	3.40	3.19	3.40	0.001

Table 4. Pre-Trip and Post-Trip changes in Jewish Ethnic Identity, American Identity and Attitudes towards Israel among *Oren* Participants, N=162

Key: 1 to 5 scale; 1 = low degree, 5 = high degree

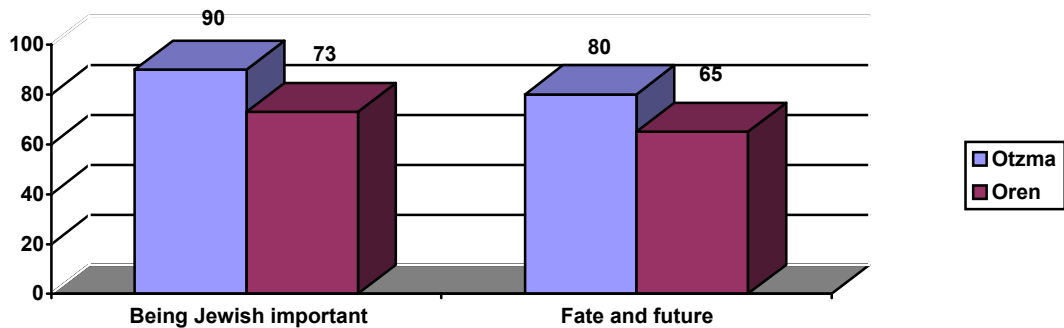
Identity and attitudes	Pre-Trip	Post Trip	t-value	Probability
Being Jewish plays an important part in my life	3.75	4.34	-4.50	0.000
My Fate and future bound up with that of the Jewish people	3.77	4.04	-3.68	0.000
Israel serves as a national, cultural center of the Jewish people	4.48	4.33	2.48	0.014
Israel as a source of pride for North American Jewry	4.111	3.93	2.11	0.036
Being American plays an Important part in my life	3.46	3.40	0.66	n.s
My Fate and future is bound up with that of the American people	3.27	3.23	0.46	n.s

4. Post-trip Jewish Ethnicity: Otzma and Oren Compared

a) Jewish Identity

As for their Jewish identity, being Jewish is more important to *Otzma* alumni. In addition, the feeling of common future with the Jewish people is higher among *Otzma* participants. To conclude, *Otzma* alumni report higher degrees of Jewish identity than do *Oren* alumni (figure 1).

Figure 1. Jewish Identity, *Otzma* and *Oren* compared (% large and very large degree only 4, 5 on Likert scale)



b) Jewish Communal Affiliation

Ninety percent of *Otzma* alumni, compared with 74% of *Oren* alumni, report a high or very high sense of belonging to the Jewish culture and tradition. For 86% of *Otzma* alumni and 62% of *Oren* alumni, it is important, or very important, to belong to the Jewish community. The majority of *Otzma* alumni or other members of their household together (83%) compared with 68% among *Oren* alumni contributed to Jewish philanthropies, charities, causes or organizations. Most of *Otzma* alumni (76%) and 47% of *Oren* alumni claimed that most or all of their closest friends are Jewish.

Among *Otzma* alumni married or living with a partner, seventy-eight percent are married or live with a life partner who was born Jewish, compared with 81% among *Oren* alumni. Among *Otzma* alumni 4% are married or living with partners converted to Judaism compared with 6% among *Oren*. Eleven percent of *Otzma* alumni and 9% of *Oren* defined their partner with no religion and the rest are living with Catholics or Protestants (4% among *Otzma* and 3% among *Oren*).

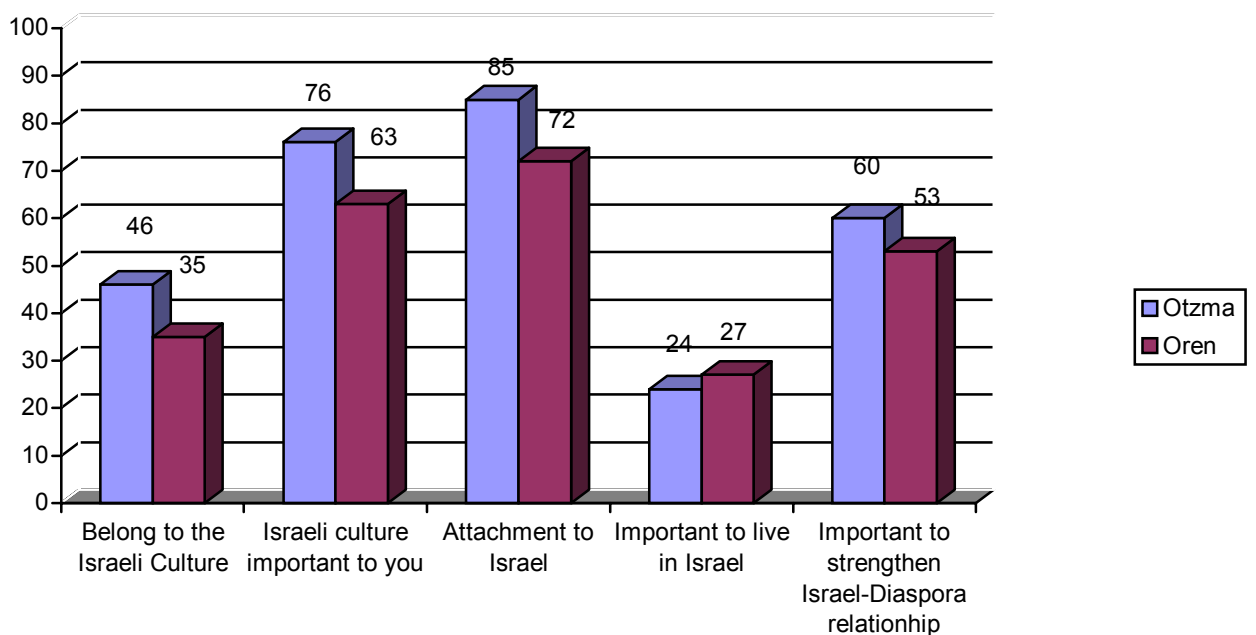
Summing up, *Otzma* alumni report higher rates of affiliation, namely, feelings of belonging to the Jewish culture, tradition and community as well as having more Jewish friends, in addition to making philanthropic contributions to Jewish organizations. While more than two thirds of all respondents are single, *Otzma* alumni report a slightly lower rate of in-marriage than do *Oren* alumni.

c) Attachment to Israel

Prior to *Otzma*, almost similar percentages among both *Otzma* and *Oren* alumni had never been to Israel (48% and 46% accordingly), while the rest have been there at least once. However, when controlled for denomination, 50% among *Otzma* Conservative and 35% among *Oren* Conservative have never been to Israel before the program, while among Reform in each group, 44% of *Otzma* and 37% of *Oren* have never been to Israel before the program. Among those who claimed to be Secular or "Just Jewish" or "Other", 40% of *Otzma* and 44% of *Oren* have never been to Israel before the program.

From figure 2 we can conclude that attachment and feelings towards Israel and the Israeli culture seem to be very intensive and positive, especially among *Otzma* participants. At the same time, when respondents were asked to report on the degree to which they feel a sense of belonging to Israeli culture, the response were less intensive. Finally, when it comes to actually living in Israel, among the alumni of both groups' the trend is similar and not very high.

Figure 2. Israel Attachment, *Otzma* and *Oren* compared (% large and very large extent only)



4. Israel Travel and its impact of reethnification

Seventy-one percent felt that the *Otzma* program contributed, to a large or very large extent, to their Jewish fulfillment, compared with 48% of *Oren* alumni. As for learning about the Israeli society, 93% felt that during the *Otzma* program they accomplished this to a large or very large extent, compared with 68% among *Oren* participants. Finally, half of *Otzma* alumni, compared with only 30% among *Oren* alumni, felt that the program contributed to strengthening ties between Jews in Israel and North America.

It seems that when it comes to actual evaluation of the program impact on their Jewish identity, the *Otzma* program achieved a higher rate of ethnic impact compared to *Oren*. Both groups differ in their initial background characteristics as well as in their pre-trip Jewish identity and attitudes towards Israel, so that the pattern and direction of impact of the program on Jewish ethnicity, while positive in both groups, is not equal. As we have shown elsewhere (Mittelberg 1988; Mittelberg and Lev Ari 1995), the primary factors of the volunteer experience that contribute to this ethnic impact include: close social interaction with the host and the sense by the participants that they contributed to the host society, and finally high satisfaction with the educational and social program that was provided for them.

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to investigate whether and to what degree, does the volunteer tourist experience in Israel contribute to the development and choice of Jewish ethnic identity of American college students.

The visit to Israel is a potentially important agent of Jewish ethnicity, in the concretization of the *imagined community*, precisely because it stands at the interface between the private and the public, the religious and the secular, and the particular and the universalistic aspects of Jewishness. Israel contributes affect to Diaspora symbolic ethnicity. It supports Diaspora Jewish identity by acting as the object of organizational efforts in the areas of philanthropy and politics. Ultimately, the effect of the Israel experience is to influence North American Jewish teens and young adults toward Jewish marriage, volunteer social involvement, and communal responsibility.

Its normative and behavioral consequences may be termed the *re-ethnification of American Jews*.

The participant's ethnic identity as American Jews became stronger during and after their Israel volunteer tourism experience. Indeed, while participants in each program started out with quite different pre program scores, (*Otzma* being higher than *Oren*), the pattern and gradient of increase among alumni of both programs was found to be strikingly similar. Even though the data report findings of two different volunteer experiences in Israel, both the duration and intensity of the educational program, as well as in the pre-trip background of the participants, it was found that a similar pattern and gradient of impact was observed in both groups. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the globalization of the macro categories of cultural identity, rather than leading to homogenization, served to predispose the ethnification and cultural renewal of American Jews through the medium of volunteer travel by way of the individual choice to experience Israel.

The visit to Israel for American Jews is made possible by the globalization of travel and tourism, allowing integration of American Jews with Israelis in time, without sharing permanent place of residence. This process results in the relativization of American identification as part of global Jewish identity, within which belonging to a wider *imagined community* is incorporated.

Ultimately the burden of integration of the different worlds of experience into a pluralized American Jewish identity remains incumbent on the participant-alumni, as he or she renegotiates their identity in the pluralized world of the community on their return home.

Although volunteer tourism to Israel still comprises a small fraction of the overall inbound tourist flow to Israel, it is a vital tourism component of the Israeli tourist market. Its importance derives first from its potential to generate return visits especially for those who realized that, through their first volunteer experience, the encounter with Israeli society and its landscape strengthened their sense of belonging and Jewish identity. Secondly, the tourist behavior demonstrated by the studied volunteers is characterized by long staying periods and tourist experiences involving many visits to tourist sites. Thus, a major contribution to the Israeli tourist industry is achieved. Thirdly, the uniqueness of the volunteer tourist experience is shared by the alumni of those programs with other potential participants upon their return to their

countries. Hence, these tourists become ambassadors of good will and promoters of this product. Lastly, as Israeli tourism is frequently subject to crises as a result of security and geo-political turmoil, it is imperative that it will concentrate its market development on small yet less security sensitive segments. Volunteer tourism that is based on educational and cultural motivations, as discussed in this paper, seems to be more culturally committed to visiting Israel and, thus, an appropriate target segment.

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