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Short-term Volunteer Tourism: an Opportunity for the Environment or an Ethical Pitfall?

Project submitted as partial requirement for the conferral of
Master in Tourism Development & Culture

Catherine Marie Sophie Ellen Mertens

Supervisors:

Professor Sílvia Cavalinhos, Assistant Professor,
Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management, ISCTE- IUL

Dr. Karl Agius
University of Malta

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July, 2022



**BUSINESS
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Abstract

Volunteer tourism has been extensively studied by academics, as well as NGOs and tour operators hoping to make a profit, but the specific topic of short-term volunteer tourism is scarce in the literature. This research aims to fill that gap by analysing the issues surrounding short-term voluntourism, as well as the opportunities it may present for the tourism industry, the volunteering industry, and conservation. Focusing on environmental voluntourism, it discusses its motivations, opportunities and ethics from the point of view of the volunteers. The research is based on semi-structured interviews with ten subjects, all of which will have been on at least one volunteer experience, most on environmental projects, but also social and educational experiences. Findings show that short-term volunteer tourism provides the industry with countless opportunities for growth, by diversifying and increasing their product to include a newfound group of volunteers. Results show that creating short-term projects would allow people who are no longer students and 'gappers' to volunteer during their limited holidays, by including the projects into their pre-existing holidays, or by volunteering domestically or in neighbouring countries, rather than travelling to the 'global South', as is the norm today. There are many ethical concerns surrounding volunteer tourism, such as commodification and exploitation of the environment, volunteers and local communities, perceived 'neo-colonialism', the spectacle of saving and more. However, the industry presents a vital opportunity for conservation efforts to increase their reach through volunteering.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, ethics, motivations, opportunities for development, domestic tourism

JEL Classification:

Z320 Tourism and Development

Z310 Tourism: Industry Studies

Resumo

O turismo voluntário tem sido amplamente estudado por acadêmicos, bem como por ONGs e operadoras de turismo na esperança de obter lucro, mas o tema específico do turismo voluntário de curto prazo é ainda escasso na literatura. Este estudo tem como objetivo preencher essa lacuna analisando as questões que envolvem o voluntariado de curto prazo, bem como as oportunidades que ele pode apresentar para a indústria do turismo, a indústria do voluntariado e a conservação. Com foco no voluntariado ambiental, discute as motivações, oportunidades e ética do ponto de vista dos voluntários. A pesquisa baseia-se em entrevistas semi-estruturadas com dez participantes, todos eles com pelo menos uma experiência de voluntariado, a maioria em projetos ambientais, mas também sociais e educacionais. Os resultados mostram que o turismo voluntário de curto prazo oferece à indústria inúmeras oportunidades de crescimento, diversificando e aumentando seu produto para incluir um novo grupo de voluntários. Os resultados mostram que a criação de projetos de curto prazo permitem que pessoas que não são mais estudantes e 'gappers' se voluntariassem durante suas férias, voluntariando-se no seu país ou em países vizinhos, em vez de viajar para o "sul global", como é a norma hoje. Existem muitas preocupações éticas em torno do turismo voluntário, como a mercantilização e a exploração do meio ambiente, voluntários e comunidades locais, 'neocolonialismo' percebido, o espetáculo da poupança, entre outros. No entanto, a indústria tem a importante oportunidade de aumentar os esforços de conservação por meio do voluntariado.

Palavras-chave: turismo voluntário, ética, motivações, oportunidades de desenvolvimento, turismo doméstico

Classificação JEL:

Z320 Turismo e Desenvolvimento

Z310 Turismo: Estudos da Indústria

1 - Introduction

The first definition of volunteer tourism appeared in Stephen Wearing's (2001, p.1) book "Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that Make a Difference". This book has remained the reference point for voluntourism research for over two decades. "The generic term 'volunteer tourism' applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment". Although Wearing's definition is the one most quoted among volunteer tourism academics, many other definitions have emerged since 2001. In 2005, for example, Brown (p.480) defined the term from the tour operator's point of view rather than the volunteers': a "type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people".

But when did the idea of volunteer tourism appear and where did it emerge from? What made tourists decide to spend their holidays volunteering instead of enjoying themselves on a beach, for example? Voluntary activities are not a new phenomenon, but rather have their origin in the local and international missionary and altruistic works of the nineteenth century, both locally and internationally (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). Many altruistic organisations created at that time relied heavily on volunteers, such as the Red Cross, established in 1863 in Switzerland. Then, the second half of the twentieth century saw a boom in international travel, due to the general rise in disposable income across a wide section of the population, a generally higher educational level across a wider spectrum of the western world's population as a result of the "democratisation of education" (Wee, 2005, p.20), the introduction of paid holidays and the availability of affordable flights. This led to the phenomenon now known as 'mass tourism', i.e. "the movement of a large number of organised tourists to popular holiday destinations for recreational purposes. It is a phenomenon which is characterised by the use of standardised package products and mass consumption" (Naumov & Green, 2016, pp.594-595).

The consequences of mass tourism on the planet have been dire: "A spectre is haunting our planet: the spectre of tourism. It's said that travel broadens the mind. Today, in its modern guise of tourism, it can also ruin landscapes, destroy communities, pollute the air and water, trivialise cultures, bring about uniformity, and generally contribute to the continuing degradation of our planet" (Croall, 1995, p.1). This is how Croall starts his report on tourism and the environment

- a bleak view of a situation which has been consistently worsening since the report's publication in 1995. It is therefore not surprising that many travellers are no longer looking for the typical city break or beach holiday, but are engaging in more sustainable forms of tourism; the main one is eco-tourism, of which volunteer tourism can be considered an off-shoot. Volunteering, as a form of sustainable tourism, has become increasingly popular in the past 30 years, especially among young travellers, who perceive it as a way of giving back to the planet as well as to local communities while also seeing the world. Indeed, in 2007, Mintel estimated that 75% of the UK volunteer market was aged 25 years or younger, 30% being pre-university 'gappers' and 45% being students or post-university 'gappers'. Callanan and Thomas (2005, p.183) have a more negative perspective on the rise of voluntourism, arguing that "this niche market is an inevitable consequence of a restless society, jaded from the homogeneous nature of traditional tourism products, and seeking alternative tourism experiences. As such, the 1990s saw the cultural and adventure tourism rush and the late 1990s and early 2000s are now experiencing the volunteer tourism rush influenced by an ever increasing guilt-conscious society".

Volunteer tourism has, in the last thirty odd years, become one of the major tourism industry market segments, especially among the young (16 to 35 year-olds). It has proven difficult to find statistics on voluntourists, as there has been no centralised research into it. However, to give an example, Earthwatch, one of the biggest operators offering international voluntourism experiences, involved 2126 volunteers over 39 projects in 2019 (Earthwatch Institute Annual Report, 2019), and re-starting in 2020 post-pandemic with 260 volunteers. Voluntourism.org estimated in 2008 that 1.6 million people participated in volunteer tourism every year, a number that was to grow to 10 million a year by 2014 (McGhee, 2014).

Volunteer Tourism, in terms of definition and context, is an incredibly ambiguous term (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). It rarely differentiates between eighteen-year-olds on a gap year teaching English in a rural community and qualified nurses helping to train locals in an understaffed rural hospital for six months. Yet this differentiation is vital, as it affects multiple issues, especially motivations and ethics. This dissertation will not be focusing on the definition of volunteer tourism, leaving that to future research, but it will attempt to fill the gap in knowledge on short-term volunteer tourism. This void has made it extremely difficult to find studies based on short-term volunteer tourism, meaning that most of the literature discussed is related to voluntourism in general. Even though short-term volunteer tourism, i.e. projects of one to fourteen days, is already offered by tour operators and independent projects alike, it is rarely

studied as separate or different to long-term voluntourism, and is often considered inconsequential as, supposedly, volunteers do not make a real difference over such a short period of time. This dissertation will attempt to fill this gap in the research by analysing the different aspects surrounding short-term volunteer tourism, from the opportunities it presents for the industry, to the ethical concerns surrounding it.

Furthermore, this study is focused on environmental, rather than social or educational, volunteer tourism. The main reason for this is that although social and educational projects may be among the most popular for volunteer tourists, they require volunteers to gain the trust of the locals they are attempting to help so as to make a real difference (Vrasti, 2013). In turn, this requires time, making those types of projects unsuitable for short-term projects. As will be discussed in this dissertation, environmental projects do require the participation of local populations, but mostly on a managerial level, making it easier for volunteers to contribute shorter amounts of time.

At the moment, most of the literature on environmental voluntourism focuses on its ethics, whether or not it is effective, how it can help or destroy specific environments, and so on, leading one to believe that the discussion is mostly an ‘ideological’ one. The situation is mostly analysed from the perspective of the locations, the projects or the reviewers. There are few studies reviewing what the actual volunteers believe, whether they see the benefit of their work, or what they think of the ethics of volunteer tourism. This dissertation will examine the issues at hand from the perspective of the volunteers themselves, thus giving a unique perspective to the research. Indeed, as the interviewees will all have been on at least one volunteer project, they will provide a different point of view on the questions that occupy researchers or academics who study them from very structured and theoretical points of view.

Volunteer tourism is often criticised in research and the press as doing more harm than good with stated issues ranging from neo-colonialism to simply bad workmanship, including volunteers' wrong motivations or profit oriented companies exploiting the environment and communities. However, it is important to understand that, despite its many issues, the volunteer industry presents many opportunities to do good, benefiting both tourists and local projects. As will be discussed, the volunteer industry does need to make many changes to minimise the ethical concerns associated with it, but it has the potential to become a major player in the fight for the environment, especially through short-term voluntourism, which is the main focus of this dissertation.

Based on the literature gap, the main questions of this research are: “Is short-term volunteer tourism worth investing time, effort and funds in? Does it present enough opportunities to counter most of its ethical concerns?”. As will be analysed in the Literature Review, there are several main issues surrounding the topic of volunteer tourism, leading to the following questions:

1. Motivations: “What are the motivations behind volunteer tourism and can they be applied to short-term voluntourism as well?”
2. Ethics: “Are ethical concerns surrounding voluntourism also relevant to short-term voluntourism and if they are, are those issues not more easily remedied in short-term involvement than in longer term voluntourism?”
3. Domestic Volunteer Tourism: “Would domestic volunteer tourism be a viable and productive way to lead to positive change for the environment?”
4. Awareness: “Is short-term volunteer tourism worth the effort simply because it helps raise and spread awareness about environmental issues?”

To pursue these questions, we developed an exploratory qualitative study based on in-deep interviews.

This dissertation will start by analysing pre-existing literature, to understand the main issues surrounding the topic of volunteer tourism. It will then present the methodology procedures, the interviews of ten volunteers to analyse the issues and research questions from their perspective. This dissertation will further use the literature and interviews in an attempt to answer all these questions above.

2 - Literature Review

2.1 - Motivations for Voluntourism

As presented before, in response to the criticism linked with mass tourism and its lack of authenticity and sustainability, volunteer tourism has been classified as a part of eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and altruistic tourism. An ever-increasing number of tourists, especially younger ones, want to ‘give back’ to the environment and communities they are visiting (Callanan & Thomas, 2005). They want to experience and engage with foreign cultures and the local communities they are visiting, as opposed to just being detached visitors. This rise of volunteer tourism has given birth to many debates around the motivations of those participating in this new industry. Indeed, researchers, market participants and other experts have been studying and interviewing volunteers over the past three decades, attempting to identify their motivations to gain a deeper understanding of the relevant market forces. That enables them to fine tune the relevant tourism products and marketing efforts (Butcher & Smith, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2011; Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

It is commonly agreed upon that the motivations behind voluntourism can be divided into two categories: egoism and altruism (Brondo, 2015; Helle, 2012; Wearing, 2001; Wearing & McGehee, 2013, etc). Callanan and Thomas (2005) offered a conceptual framework which aligned itself with these categories, consisting of three types of volunteer tourists: shallow, intermediate and deep. They argue that shallow tourists participate mostly for egoistical purposes, such as self-development and ego-building, while deep tourists are more interested in truly helping communities and leading to real change. These differences are of great use to tourism organisations offering volunteer experiences, as it can help them target the tourists they want to attract through their marketing, for example ‘deep’ tourists for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and ‘shallow’ ones for tour operators (Wearing & McGehee, 2015).

Han et al. (2019, p.551) divide these categories into five specific sub-groups: “1) altruistic community concern, 2) personal development, 3) education, 4) ego enhancement, and 5) escapism”. They link these to the motivations behind any touristic experience, arguing that volunteer tourists are simply alternative tourists who have found a way to enjoy authentic experiences while also directly contributing to the communities they are visiting. Except for the first, these motivations can all be considered as egoistical.

This is confirmed by previous studies such as Chen and Chen’s in 2011 about international volunteers in Chinese villages, where their results pointed towards a majority of egoistical

motivations such as wanting authentic experiences, interacting with locals and culture, and enhancing relationships (of families and friends volunteering together). Benson and Seibert's (2009) study of German volunteers in South Africa yielded similarly egoistical results, with the main pull motivations being the "opportunity for sporting activities", "good shopping" and "low cost of living". The main push factors (factors motivating people to travel outside of their own region or country) were mostly egoistical in nature as well, from escape from the mundane to self-exploration and education.

Of interest is the shift in motivations between different demographics, some experts having found a stronger altruistic motivation among 'older' age groups, i.e. 40 to 70 year-olds. According to Brown (2005), Lo and Lee (2011) and Wearing et al. (2008), baby boomers and volunteer tourists who are no longer students or young workers (typically 18 to 35 year-olds) are motivated by altruism, especially aspects such as cultural immersion, interaction with locals and a desire to give back, along with more egoistic motives such as bonding, meeting new people and escaping from everyday life.

One main egoistical motivation which deserves a deeper analysis is self-development (Brondo, 2015; Meng et al, 2020; Wearing, 2001; Wearing, 2011). A large number of volunteer tourists are students between high school and university, or young professionals (Vrasti, 2013; Wearing, 2011; Brondo, 2015). They are all being told that such an experience will enhance their Curriculum Vitae (CV), giving them an edge when looking for employment. Many volunteer tourists admit that self-development, both in skills and maturity, is a defining motivation for such experiences (Brondo, 2015; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Meng et al., 2020; Wearing, 2001). Volunteers believe they will 'grow' through these experiences (Brondo, 2015), gain valuable skills as well as confidence in themselves and their competence, meet people who will help them develop and mature, but also develop their network that might later be of help finding work, or advance in their chosen field of activity. Wearing (2001, p.3) argues that "volunteer tourism provides an opportunity for an individual to engage in an altruistic attempt to explore [his] 'self'. It has been built around the belief that by living with and learning about other people and cultures, in an environment of mutual benefit and cooperation, one is able to engage in a transformation and the development of self". Tour Operators and NGOs have learned to use this belief to attract an ever-increasing amount of youths, with promises of 'personal awareness', 'interpersonal awareness', learning, confidence and 'self-contentment' (Wearing, 2001).

Although most of the studies mentioned were conducted on social volunteering projects, the motivations can be applied to this study's focus group of environmental voluntourists as well. As Galley and Clifton's (2004, p.76) study shows, the main motivations (among the 22 discussed) of research eco-tourists are “‘to experience something completely new’ [...], ‘to take part in a rare opportunity’ [...], ‘to observe the diversity of animal species’ [...], ‘to stand out on my CV as invaluable experience’ and ‘to seek challenging things to do’”. These can mostly be categorised as egoistical, as almost all link to self-development and career enhancement. Lindberg (1991) identifies four categories of eco-tourists: (1) hard-core nature tourists are scientific researchers or participants in tours designed for education, removal of litter, or similar purposes; (2) dedicated nature tourists are people who take trips specifically to protected areas to understand local, natural and cultural history; (3) mainstream nature tourists are people who visit the Amazon, the Rwanda gorilla park or other such destinations primarily to take an unusual trip; and (4) casual nature tourists are people who partake of nature incidentally as part of a broader trip. These can be compared to the previous categories mentioned in this above, with categories (1) and (2) [above] in particular fitting into the more altruistic motivations of social volunteer tourists.

Most studies concerning volunteer tourism motivations have come to the conclusion that a central motive for joining such projects is the desire to see and experience something new, most often by travelling to a new country and culture (Benson & Seibert, 2009; Meng et al., 2020; Brown, 2005; Simpson, 2004; Lo & Lee, 2011) . As argued by Sin (2009, p.494), “instead of grooming a generation of youths who are passionate about volunteer work, research for this dissertation seems to suggest that respondents interviewed are instead passionate about travelling and going overseas”. In the interviews conducted for his study, results showed that most answers started with “I want to...”, thus perpetuating the idea of egoistical motivations. The idea of getting away from the mundane and discovering something new was present in most answers. This has been highly criticised by many academics in the field, as it is believed that volunteers in fact care very little about their chosen projects, and thus can do very little good for the community or environment they are allegedly helping (Benson & Seibert, 2009; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Meng et al., 2020; Wearing & McGehee, 2013). However, it can be argued that it would be rather unusual for a young person between the age of sixteen and thirty to have only altruistic motivations, as most are thinking about their futures, careers and experiences. Although young people are generally more concerned with environmental issues than older generations, when volunteering it seems they care more about what can benefit them

than the project they are working on (Brondo, 2015; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Wearing & McGhee, 2013)

Although most motivations might be egoistical, that can be considered ‘normal’, and does not lessen from their other, more altruistic motivations, or the good they can do during their projects. Indeed, it is of great benefit to all companies employing volunteers to realise that a main motivation is the love for travel and new experiences, as it can help them tailor their offers towards this, thus bringing in more volunteers. Whether these are motivated by the true need to help, or simply by adding a new line to their CV, their work is of no less value, and can potentially be a great asset to any project (Wearing & McGhee, 2013).

As argued by Butcher and Smith (2010, p.28), “the gap-year companies, charities and non-governmental organisations that organise volunteer placements explicitly link altruism to some of the more traditional pleasures of holidays. These trips amount to fun with a social purpose, that purpose being teaching, working with children or [...] community-oriented projects with a conservation or wellbeing focus”. It is important to remember that tourism is an industry like any other: main objective is to survive financially. This would be impossible without a large number of volunteers with mostly egoistical and less altruistic motivations. Indeed, in many instances, the revenues received from these volunteers are the funds that pay for the conservation and community development projects these tourists engage in. Without such tourist funds, there would be much less available for NGOs and other truly altruistic companies (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Projects need volunteers as well as their money to continue financing their work, thus leading to the conclusion that while, their motivations are important to study and understand, it is counter-productive to judge them.

2.2 - Ethical Issues

There have been many ethical issues identified by scholars with volunteering in general, and volunteer tourism in particular. Western countries send thousands of youths abroad each year to volunteer with more or less reputable companies, on projects that theoretically help the environment or local communities, but in practice are often an excuse for the volunteers to travel and party (Wearing & McGhee, 2013). Although, in most cases, the negative effects of volunteer tourism remain manageable and the funds received through their participation make the experience worth it for the locals, in some cases, the projects lead to serious problems within the local environment (Guttentag, 2009). The most common ethical issues will be discussed.

Perhaps the most common criticism against the volunteering industry is the belief that these (often) unskilled youths take jobs away from locals. Indeed, it is often beneficial for NGOs and project leaders to bring in volunteers rather than hire locals for certain jobs, especially on environmental projects, as they pay to be there, and work for free, saving the companies a significant amount of money (Smith & Font, 2014). The issue is highlighted by Guttentag (2009, p.544), who argues that “the problem when volunteer tourists perform work that could be performed by local community members is that volunteer tourists naturally work for free — and actually pay for the opportunity to perform the work — so they may undercut competing local labourers”. Another important consequence of this is the promotion of dependency of the local community on the volunteers, as it reinforces neo-colonialism (McGehee, 2014), but also leads to huge loss of income once the volunteer projects move on to a different community. The lack of communication between host communities and volunteer projects also leads to serious issues such as resentment on the part of the locals, mismanagement of resources, exploitation of both locals and volunteers, as well as the local environment (McGehee, 2014).

A typical reason for resentment on the part of the locals is the top-down approach often found on such projects. Companies come to a new area and attempt to explain to locals how to manage their own environment and community, negating the locals' own knowledge, traditions and beliefs (Hammersley, 2014, p.856). This is especially problematic for environmental projects, as locals often have a very different view and attitude towards wildlife and nature than the volunteers do. Indeed, a species of fish, for example, might be of great importance to a conservation project, one to be protected at all cost, but will also be a vital source of food or income to a local person. These situations will often lead to conflict, as locals are forced to adapt to ‘western’ thinking, and thus lose their traditions and occasionally livelihood. This can be seen in the example of Matthews (2008), who participated in a turtle conservation project in Costa Rica, and noticed that locals poached turtles for food and income. Indeed, although the local rangers they worked with were of great help and support, the rest of the population did not view their work as positive or beneficial.

It is vital to understand that communication between stakeholders is of vital importance, and local knowledge and lifestyle must be considered when creating conservation projects. Education is important in such cases as well, as locals must understand why ‘westerners’ are coming to their area to work, allowing them to participate and get involved in the projects. Understanding what local communities need and want should always be the first step in starting any volunteer-based project, to avoid conflict and accusations of poor management or neo-

colonialism towards project leaders and organisers. This is also vital for the sustainability of the project, especially in conservation work: if the locals are not included in the work, they will revert back to their old ways as soon as the volunteers leave (Matthews, 2008).

Following up on the argument that volunteers take away jobs from locals, it must be noted that in most cases, volunteers are unskilled youths with no knowledge or experience in the field they are 'helping' or cooperating in. The idea of 'every little bit helps' is a common one among tour operators offering volunteer trips, but in reality, this is often incorrect. (Carey, 2001) Unskilled workers can often impede work progress, especially on construction and environmental projects, as they have no knowledge or skill, thus often doing a mediocre job that must be re-done (Guttentag, 2009). The president of one volunteer tourism organisation, Global Volunteers, is even quoted in a Wall Street Journal article claiming that, "if one views the volunteers' labour as the sole objective, then 'the cost of having the volunteers might outweigh the benefits'" (Carey, 2001, p.2). This shows that, in reality, many companies bring in volunteers for their funds and the export they gain through them, rather than their actual work. Even the classic English-teaching project in under-developed communities can create problems, as eighteen to twenty-five year olds (the typical age range) have no knowledge or experience of teaching or child management and development, and can cause more problems than positive outcomes in the long run.

Although the volunteers may not contribute much in the way of work, their biggest contribution to the projects is the money they pay to participate in the project. This in itself is also a big issue to be discussed, as the - at times excessively - high prices demanded by tour operators and even NGOs are out of reach for many interested potential volunteers. The idea of fundraising during the year to pay the high fees is not an option for many people who do not have access to funds within their family-and-friends circle or network. Most youths would greatly benefit from a volunteer experience, especially an environmental one, as they would discover the issues surrounding our planet and learn how to help. Unfortunately, many cannot afford it (Smith & Font, 2014).

One of the reasons behind the high prices is the addition of typical tourism activities to the volunteering trip, "blending the voluntary act of fund-raising with the more traditional hedonistic pleasures of a packaged adventure tour, positioning them as an ambiguous form of volunteer tourism" (Lyons & Wearing, 2008, p.151). Although it is not problematic to combine a tourism and volunteer experience, they should not be blended, but rather separated, both in

time, space and price. This would allow certain individuals to participate only in the volunteering experience at a much lower cost to them.

A further important issue to consider is where the money goes. Indeed, most companies are not transparent enough with the use of their funds, something that needs to change. If potential volunteers had more information on the use of their funds, and proof that they go towards the projects rather than the organising entity, perhaps more youths (with means) would be willing to pay the steep prices.

The ‘spectacle of saving’ is another ethical issue that must be dealt with, if environmental voluntourism is ever to be considered as a positive, rather than a problematic, activity. The belief that volunteers care little about the environment or community they come to visit is common among critics. Volunteers are often seen as actors, pretending to work so as to have close encounters with rare wildlife, areas and resources (Brondo, 2015, p.1414). This is associated with the rise of social media in the past decade, as volunteers will often post photos of themselves with endangered animals, under-privileged children, stunning landscapes, and so on, to show off their altruism, when in reality all they care about is showmanship. According to Brondo (2015, p.1405), this is encouraged by companies offering volunteer trips, creating a “fictitious conservation, surrounded by spectacle”. This also leads to the prioritisation of volunteers' needs over those of the locals, as the international volunteers pay to work and experience the environment, while locals would have to be paid (Brondo, 2015; Guttentag, 2009).

The fact that volunteers are a huge source of income makes them more important than both the locals and the very environment they are supposed to be saving. There is a need to change the conservation volunteer industry to move away from spectacle and towards real change; the most important change should be collaboration with local communities, whose knowledge of the local environment should be used as an invaluable asset, but is most often ignored (Hammersley, 2014).

Despite the many ethical issues listed above, environmental voluntourism does have certain positive ethical effects. There are two main factors to consider when studying the positive aspects of environmental voluntourism: emotion and awareness (Rattan et al., 2012). Having a hands-on experience can affect the way volunteers respond to the conservation message they are being taught, and can be much more effective in the long-term, as emotions and memory are intricately linked. People remember experiences that they associate with strong emotions much better, leading to a longer-lasting effect on themselves and beliefs than other experiences.

Volunteers who have created an emotional bond to the landscape or wildlife they were helping will make more of an effort long-term to continue their work. Indeed, “in studies on marine wildlife tourism, it has been demonstrated that educational programmes can create emotional affinity towards the species involved, thereby inciting changes in attitudes about environmental and conservation issues” (Rattan et al., 2012, p.2). This can be considered the true value of volunteering: the emotional aspect of it that allows for a different and more profound level of awareness and involvement.

Getting people aware of the issues at hand can lead to long-lasting positive effects, as volunteers will return home and potentially remain involved or interested in the project, perhaps joining a charity, spreading the message to friends and family ((Rattan et al., 2012). This is vital to conservation efforts, as making people aware of the issues at hand and interested enough to get involved is the first step towards change. This is one reason why short-term volunteer tourism could be considered an asset, as it only takes one short experience to gain awareness and interest, there is no need to spend weeks or months on site to learn enough to understand how critical a situation is.

2.3 - The Commodification of Volunteer Tourism

One specific ethical issue of volunteer tourism deserves its own section: the tendency toward the commodification of nature, conservation and voluntourism, for the profit of big corporations and to the detriment of local communities and the environment. Money plays a very big role in volunteer projects: price tags on volunteer projects abroad are ever-increasing, to the point of being unaffordable to most, while the money’s destination or usage is not always known. As argued by Smith and Font (2014, p.942), “as volunteer tourism grows in popularity, the true value and costs with regard to the triple bottom line are being called into question”. Companies offering volunteer trips are often tour operators specialising in gap year trips and other such products, and care more about their bottom line than the projects themselves. For this reason, it could be argued that participating in a project organised by the project leaders themselves, or independent conservation companies, would be both cheaper and more beneficial than booking through major tour operators with no tangible or direct link to the projects (Brondo, 2019).

Some experts have gone even further in their criticism of volunteer tourism, stating that it is no different from mass tourism, the very concept it is attempting to differentiate itself from the most. Wearing (2001, p.15) writes that “volunteer tourism [...] provides another source of

consumption that will only endanger the very communities and environments that the volunteer tourist seeks to protect. Further, the volunteer tourists themselves are complicit in this consumption and commodifying process and are then the economic ‘units’ targeted by the industry”. Looking at the specific example of nature-based volunteer tourism that this study is focusing on, Brondo (2019) argues that conservation voluntourism is just another industry making a profit off nature, out of people’s attempts to do some good for the planet.

In line with Wearing’s (2001) statement, Brondo (2019) writes that the social and environmental costs of conservation volunteering are hidden from the volunteers themselves, and the industry at large, or are not captured through defined data collection. Observing the volunteers at a shark counting project in Utila (Honduras), she noticed that the conservation project had in fact “enabled voluntourists to encounter whale sharks up close and personal, [but] their [the shark’s] value to the island fishing community as locators for tuna diminishes, and the ecological costs of increased travel and development pressure on Utila are hidden from view” (pp.591-592). Another example are wildlife rehabilitation centres in southern Africa. Volunteers work with lion cubs and other wild animals, feeding them, cuddling them, playing with them, never realising that these animals will, in most cases, grow up to be either sold to circuses or zoos, or hunted for sport, but never reintroduced into the wild. Wildlife has become a commodity to be used to attract more volunteers and thus more income, little of which trickles down to the local communities and the conservation effort itself (Brondo, 2019).

As argued by Ngah et al. (2021), the satisfaction volunteer tourists get from their project is of great importance to the NGOs and tour operators, as satisfied customers become return customers, as well as free marketeers through word of mouth and recommendations. Thus, the satisfaction of volunteer tourists is often considered more important than that of local communities and populations, leading to conflicts between locals and project leaders, or between locals and volunteers. This difference in value between paying customers and locals is another example of the problematic commodification of volunteer tourism, as their value should be the exact opposite, or at the very least, equal. Local populations and communities are the guardians of their own environment, and the volunteers and companies working on their land should be made aware of their role as guests.

2.4 - Domestic Voluntourism vs. 'Global North/South'

As previously discussed (section 2.2), volunteer tourism perpetuates eighteenth and nineteenth centuries colonialists' ideas of teaching 'less developed' people how to live within their own environment, which is extremely problematic. If managed properly, projects should and could be run with local communities and led by their own people; one could then understand how they view their natural environment, and work with that view rather than against it. Literature on volunteer tourism is full of references to the 'global North/South' divide, in particular youths from the 'north' volunteering in the 'south' on community, education or environmental projects (Hammersley, 2014; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Rattan et al., 2012; Lyon et al., 2012). Some experts pointed towards the positive outcomes of voluntourism: Sheyvens (2002) for example "identified volunteer tourism as a form of 'justice tourism' as it 'involves individuals from Western countries paying to come to the Third World to assist with development or conservation work, as they desire to achieve something more meaningful than a pleasure filled holiday'". Sheyvens' argument that tourists are doing something positive by going volunteering abroad is of course valuable, and must be considered, but it is also fairly naive, as it ignores many of the possible negative effects of 'well-off' tourists coming to 'teach locals'.

Another text putting forward the positive aspects of the 'global North/South bridge' is that by Lyons et al. (2012, pp.362-367), quoting Mark Twain's (1869) idea that "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness". They argue that volunteer tourism helps privileged people to open their minds to different cultures and lifestyles, turning them into 'global citizens'. They focus on the idea that tourism, and volunteer tourism in particular, "enhanc[es] international and cross-cultural understanding, tolerance-building, disabusing of stereotypes, the exchange of values and the mutual benefits of a global citizenry". However, they also note that most countries sending volunteer tourists abroad, especially in gap years, are the UK, Australia, Canada, the United States, and several other European countries, all of which happen to have had a long history and culture of colonialism.

However, such positive points of view are rare among volunteer tourism researchers, as most see it in a less complimentary light. Callanan and Thomas (2005, p.193) go so far as to argue that volunteer work "is associated with destinations of poverty and severe social, political and/or environmental conditions that constrain and often prevent economic development". This is certainly a radical view, but they are not alone in arguing that volunteers are, at times, a part of the problem, creating an environment in which it is made harder for communities to change than if they were not present. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between projects and

companies that perpetuate problems and those that attempt to lessen them, by working with local communities rather than against them, giving them a stake in the projects or giving them a voice in the decision-making process.

A solution that has been discussed in literature is domestic volunteer tourism (Rattan et al., 2012). Indeed, a fact many forget is that although a big motivation for volunteering is the travelling aspect, and the discovery of new countries and cultures, tourism does not have to be international. Domestic volunteer tourism may not be as exciting as international volunteer tourism, as it lacks the novelty and exotic aspect, but it can attract those volunteers with truly altruistic motivations (Rattan et al, 2012). The world is full of volunteering opportunities, even in the 'global North', and in particular environmental volunteering. The extreme loss of biodiversity is not limited to the 'third world' countries youths like to volunteer in, and there are countless opportunities in people's own countries that could be developed to attract locals to volunteer. This would alleviate many of the previously discussed ethical issues, and allow volunteers to discover their own countries, get involved in their area's issues, and potentially get involved long-term, rather than simply for the duration of their project or holiday.

This could also benefit local communities in the so-called 'global South', as a lack of international volunteers could potentially lead to these jobs being offered to locals, helping the local economy in a far more long-term way (Rattan et al., 2012). Training local youths in the importance of conservation is important and would be of much greater benefit to the environment, as they will ultimately have the power to make long-lasting change, both on the ground and through politics and social pressure, something international volunteers are usually unable to do. As argued by Rattan et al. (2012), getting local individuals to volunteer in their projects raises awareness among local populations, which can, in turn, affect those directly involved in policy-making.

3 - Methodology

3.1 - Qualitative Methodology

Finding the right methodology is challenging, but it is a vital part of the research process. It is important to find the adequate method to answer the research question, as it will affect the outcome and results, and thus their validity. The choice to use a qualitative over quantitative method was made due to the fact that this is an exploratory study in which research questions would best be answered by people with prior experience volunteering abroad, and their experiences would strongly affect their answers. Thus, it was decided that it would be more interesting and beneficial to hear their experiences and how they influence their answers. In this case, it is necessary debate and detailed discussions. People with prior experience in volunteering abroad, have better knowledge of the situation, and are more capable of answering difficult questions. However, as most people are subjective in their opinions and thoughts, it was important to use a qualitative research method, as it allows for subjectivity in a way that the quantitative method does not (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2021, p.10). Indeed, “within qualitative research, people’s experiences and perspectives are embedded in the contexts that shape their lives, and how people experience aspects of their lives and the world is subjective and can change over time” (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2021, p.10).

Another aspect of qualitative research is the way it allows for further research questions to emerge based on the data collected: “The data analysis plan should leave open the possibility that meaning unanticipated at the onset of the research may emerge from the data sources, producing new knowledge grounded in the research context. This is the particular strength of qualitative research as it offers an inductive approach, allowing for an iterative and ongoing pursuit of meaning” (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p.18). As seen in Figure 1 (Veal, 2017), an inductive approach allows the researcher to build theories and hypotheses from the data they collect, rather than collecting data with hypotheses already defined and needing to be proved (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2021).

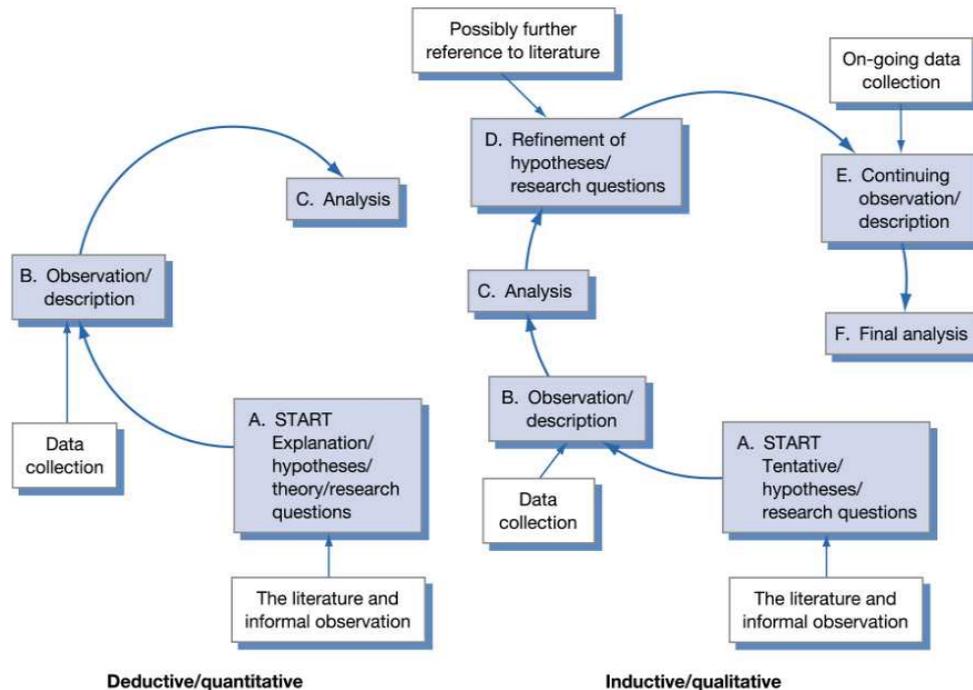


Figure 1 : Inductive vs. Deductive Research Methods

Source: Veal (2017, p.316)

As shown in the literature review, most research on volunteer tourism is limited to ‘typical’ trips such as Gap Year and sabbatical tourism, i.e. long-term in most cases. It has proven extremely difficult to find literature about short-term volunteering specifically, or volunteering as part of a ‘normal’ holiday experience. This has led to the conclusion that an exploratory qualitative study was best in this case, with, more specifically, an inductive research approach, as a deductive approach requires hypotheses to be made from the literature, to be proven by the data (Veal, 2017). Thus, this study will take an inductive approach, and attempt to find questions within the research data, to be discussed and proven or disproven in the analysis.

3.2 - Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

Qualitative research is an ‘umbrella term’ for a wide variety of research practices and methods, which include but are not limited to interviews, direct observation and the analysis of written documents. Several different methods would have been appropriate for this study, but in-depth interviews were chosen as they present the opportunity to deepen knowledge about under-explored subjects. Patton (2015, p.15) defines interviews as “open-ended questions and probes [that] yield in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, feelings and

knowledge. Data consists of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpreted”. Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) define the interview a little differently, as “a face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons”. In both cases, the key concept is the subjective and personal information one can gather from the person being interviewed. It is important to understand that any information gathered through an interview cannot be objective, and thus must be analysed as such, and cannot be taken as fact.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study, as they allow a lot more freedom to push for specific information within the interview process, but still have a structure to follow and provide clarity both to the interviewer and interviewee. As argued by Brinkman (as cited in Leavy, 2014, p.286), in semi-structured interviews, “the interviewer has a greater say in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project”. This gives agency and power to the interviewer to probe further into issues that arise that they deem important, rather than focusing on the same questions with every person, often leading to very shallow answers and a loss of potential data. In addition to the freedom of adapting the interview to the person and his/her experience, “semi-structured interviews incorporate both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research” (Galletta & Cross, 2013, p.45). This mix of theory and experience provides a good foundation onto which the researcher can base their arguments and theories. Thus, a set of questions was prepared (see Appendix A) and used as a basis script for all interviews, but were adapted to the person’s experiences and knowledge. The main focus was on the interviewees and their opinions, as they were asked to answer questions based on their own experiences within the volunteer tourism field.

There are many arguments against technology-mediated interviews, as face-to-face gives a lot more insight into the person’s feelings through their facial expressions and body language, as well as easier trust and comfort for both. However, technology does provide one major advantage: access to a bigger pool of participants, as it takes away the need for proximity (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2021, p.139). In addition to this, it also saves a significant amount of time, as there is no need to travel, and interviews can be scheduled back-to-back. It also proved to be helpful due to still-existing Covid-19 restrictions on travel and gatherings, making it easier to interview people without the worries associated to the global situation. These benefits were taken into account when choosing the methodology, and all interviews were thus conducted

over Zoom, leading to an interesting combination: video calls allow for a lot more visibility when it comes to body language and expressions, but the distance is irrelevant, thus allowing for more advantages than inconveniences. As prompted by all sources (Ravitch & Mittenfelner, 2021; Leavy, 2014), all interviews were recorded and transcribed, as these are considered much more reliable than interview notes, which are mediated by memory and thus biased. Despite being criticised by Ravitch and Mittenfelner (2021) for being a form of interpretation, the transcriptions were 'cleaned up' of natural speech patterns such as 'like', 'hum' and so on, to make the transcription clearer and easier to analyse. Apart from that, the transcriptions were kept as verbatim as possible, despite some difficulty in hearing at certain times due to background noise in the recording.

The interviews all took between thirty and an hour, and started with a brief explanation of the project and the confirmation of consent to use the recording for the research. There were several challenges encountered during the interviews, the most important being faulty memory and hesitation. Some interviewees had been on their projects several years prior to the interview, and had clearly enhanced or embellished certain memories of the project over others, making their testimony more biased. Another issue was constant hesitation in the answers, meaning the interviews did not flow as smoothly as hoped for. This would undermine their confidence and make for hesitant answers and confusion. However, these challenges were overcome both during the interviews themselves and the transcription.

3.3 - Sample

The interviewee sample consists of ten subjects of different ages, nationalities and occupations. All subjects had been on a volunteer experience abroad in the past. Since the objective was to gain insight into issues and opportunities surrounding short-term volunteer tourism through prior experience, it was vital for the interviewees to have been on at least one voluntourism project. Although the main aim of this study is to research short-term volunteer tourism, it proved very difficult to find ex-volunteers who had been on a short-term experience. Therefore, the length of the interviewees' projects varied from one to seven weeks. The focus of this dissertation being environmental voluntourism, six out of the ten subjects had participated in one or more environmental projects. Three subjects were in educational projects, and the last one in a social project. Some subjects had been exposed to multiple experiences of different types, allowing for a broader range of experience. One subject, Sabrina, provided great insight

through her experience both as a volunteer (in 2011), and as a volunteer coordinator for Leo Africa for close to a decade. This allowed her to answer both from the point of view of a volunteer, and from inside the environmental volunteering industry, making her an invaluable data contributor. The different nationality types also gave a broader understanding of different cultures' responses to the idea of volunteerism as well as opportunities for the future. Interviewees were found and contacted through a mix of online resources (Facebook and Reddit) and personal contacts. The low number of respondents is due to the difficulty in finding ex-volunteers that fit the criteria and were willing to be interviewed. As many respondents started giving very similar answers, it was decided that there were enough answers to make the analysis and get interesting results.

Table 1 - Interviewee Sample

Name	Nationality	Age	Occupation	Volunteer Project
Abigail	UK	26	Artist	Animal Conservation
Aimee	Canada	25	Student	Community Support; Beach Clean-ups
Caroline	Scot/Thai	21	Student	Community support and School Visit
Courtney	Canada	25	Nurse	Animal Conservation and School Visit
Emily	UK	21	Student	Community Support
Frida	Denmark	22	Student	Teaching English
Marina	Brazil	24	Student	Community Support and Eco-project
Sabrina	Italy	36	Ranger	Animal Conservation
Simona	Romania	24	Intern/Student	Teaching English
Viviane	Germany	45	Animal Physiotherapist	Animal Conservation

3.4 - Content Analysis

The software MaxQDA was used to analyse the interview transcripts. It was used to create codes to identify key themes and concepts within the data. Each transcript was worked through, in order to identify which topics and answers came up the most. Veal (2017) identified the key concepts to look out for when analysing transcripts. They included “repetition in and across various data items”, strong language, emotional responses, common thread or agreement

between different interviewees, disagreement between interviewees, direct and confident answers to specific questions, as well as the opposite, i.e. refusal to answer or squirting around certain topics or questions (Veal, 2017, p.321). All these concepts helped discern which parts of the data were important enough to be analysed further, and which were of little use and thus dropped.

These codes were then turned into main categories or themes, and relevant keywords as well as direct quotes were assigned to them. They were divided into themes and sub-themes. Some codes were dropped to keep only the ones most relevant to the research questions. Once the codes were divided into relevant themes, they were analysed based on commonalities and differences, as well as relationships between certain themes or issues (Harding, 2019). This helped create a better understanding of the key concepts and their relations to the research questions, leading to the building of theory, and identifying answers for each research question.

4 - Results and Discussion

4.1 - Results

Table 2 - Main Interview Themes

Theme	Keywords	Output	Interview Quote
Motivations	Give back; travelling; boost the CV; escapism; challenge; hands-on education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - volunteers want to travel and escape their daily routine at home; - volunteers want to learn new skills and knowledge to add onto their CV; - volunteers are interested in conservation and want to learn about it/experience it; - volunteers want to visit a country while also giving back, contributing something good to it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Because I am interested in nature, and I know the way I live here is not always good for nature, I like to give something back" (Viviane) - "At the time when I did the first project, it was mostly just escapism" (Frida) - "I think for me it was a challenge. Around that time, I did a lot of things, everything I took on was a way of growing as a person, and also in a sense padding out my CV" (Emily) - "We were on the lookout for a conservation project, because it's something we're both passionate about" (Abigail)
Ethics	Jobs; skills; top-down approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - volunteers are taking jobs away from locals - yes/no; - just because volunteers don't always have the relevant skills does not mean they are of no use on VT projects; - volunteers and project leaders have to be careful about the way they interact with locals, specifically stop the top-down approach; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "If you wanted that job to be done by a local, you would have paid for that" (Simona) - "There are certain jobs in the community of some places where there are volunteers coming in and obviously taking away that role in their community. But for the most part I think that when you are establishing a volunteer project, it is for something that has not been dealt with by the

			<p>community prior to that." (Frida)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Even if you are unskilled, you still come with your own experiences, the willingness to learn something" (Frida) - "[...] can harm the community through imposing values or imposing needs and then if the community doesn't need it or doesn't know how to use it, or it can completely change the environmental landscape of the place" (Aimee)
Domestic VT	<p>conservation; engagement; easier; less appeal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - conservation is important around the globe, not only in exotic countries; - getting engaged in local issues is beneficial to both the volunteer and the issue; - it's easier to volunteer domestically as there are less issues to deal with, such as long travel, culture shock, etc; - there is less appeal in domestic VT, as a major interest is the travelling aspect, the exotic locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Maybe young people with less possibilities would be more interested" (Simona) - "I think that the travelling side, and the being abroad is one of the things pushing people to do that" (Marina) - "You get to engage with things that are directly relevant to your situation" (Emily) - "I think it's less nerve wracking, or it seems like less of a big deal. You don't have to go through getting jabs and worrying about cultural differences or learning a new language, it's just easy" (Emily) - "I think a lot of the appeal is it's novel, like a new experience, you experience a different culture" (Caroline) - "Conservation starts at home, the more you can do at a local - in your

Short-term Volunteer Tourism

			own country, the better. And then I suppose it's probably going to be more effective" (Abigail)
Time volunteering	Getting involved; ideal vs. realistic; project-dependent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - volunteers need time to learn the job and get properly involved in order to make a difference; - although ideally volunteers might want to stay longer, realistically it is difficult to find the time; - some projects require more time than others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I think it always takes some time to get into the project, and get involved, and to learn how the project works" (Viviane) - "6 weeks is great if you are a student and you have long vacation time, but I don't know if that will fit my life anymore, so 1 week or 2 weeks maximum" (Marina) - "I think the ideal length will depend on the project itself, So with the example of the garbage clean up I did it was very short-term (...)but if it was something more substantial like building schools, creating infrastructure or wells, I think that's more of a long-term commitment"(Aimee) - "Some projects don't need to last forever" (Frida)
Opportunities of short-term VT	awareness; more volunteers; energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - short-term projects mean more people have time to volunteer, increasing the pool of participants, which in turn spreads the awareness further; - volunteers have more energy on short-term projects than during long-term, where they may get tired or bored of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Short-term provides more people the opportunity to volunteer, because maybe you don't have 6 weeks, you have 2 days, 3 days, maybe a week. So yeah, it would make it possible for more people to engage in this type of work" (Marina) - "You can reach more people" (Marina) - "People who aren't able to take a lot of time off in their life can do

			<p>something that they feel passionate about" (Frida)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "It might give people the opportunity who don't necessarily have time to invest in a long-term volunteering position" (Emily) - "Maybe they wouldn't get tired as fast, they would have more energy, because they're fresh" (Courtney) - "Short term projects tend to be a lot less daunting and obviously less time consuming for people. So, I would like to think that that would encourage people to participate more, especially skilled workers." (Caroline) - "The more people make small changes, the better off we are going to be (...) we need more people to get further than just one really committed person. (...) the wider goal is, as I've said earlier, conservation isn't a project at a time, it's as many as you can get. The wider you go, the better, so it's more accessible with a shorter amount of time" (Abigail)
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4.2 - Opportunities created by Short-term Volunteer Tourism

The interviews indicated that short-term voluntourism would present several advantages compared to longer term projects, and could potentially resolve certain issues that long-term voluntourism projects often suffer from.

The first opportunity short-term volunteer tourism presents are shorter time commitments. When asked about any possible opportunities provided by short-term volunteer tourism projects compared to long-term ones, the most common answer was 'time'. Despite most interviewees having been on long-term projects in the past, and arguing that long-term is better, finding the time to go on a project remains an issue for most. For young people still in education, finding two months to volunteer abroad is relatively easy, but for employees with a limited holiday allowance, it becomes very complicated indeed. The options for employee volunteers are, for the most part, taking a sabbatical or taking the entire years' worth of holiday allowance at once, both of which can be extremely impractical, thus leading to a loss of interest. It is also difficult for people with commitments at home to get involved, as from a certain age, it becomes more complicated to leave home for extended periods of time. Indeed, spouses, children and elderly parents become a serious concern. This has been especially remarked upon by Sabrina, who has worked in the field of voluntourism since 2011 with volunteers of all ages (18 to 74): although older (35+) volunteers would often like to stay longer and get more involved, obligations at home make it impossible; hence this appreciation for the opportunity to come for only two weeks, as it allows them to pursue their interest in the environment within their respective time limits.

Short-term volunteer opportunities could help projects reach into a considerable pool of potential volunteers who are older, and thus more skilled than the typical gap-year students they most often get. This would be a great asset to many projects, as it could allow specialists in conservation, for example, to donate their time, thus contributing real help to the project. Although there are certain projects advertised specifically for mature and skilled volunteers, they tend to be the minority. If this were to change, 'gappers' could continue to offer their unskilled labour, but skilled volunteers could also donate their skills and experience (Callanan & Thomas, 2005).

Another opportunity brought up by interviewees is the idea of the 'taster session', or the idea of trying out several different projects for a few days to a week, and then committing to the one they are most interested in long-term, whether as a volunteer or through a charity back

home. This would be a great opportunity for younger volunteers who are still deciding what they are most interested in - after all, there is a large variety of environmental volunteer projects, and finding the right fit is not always straightforward. As mentioned by Caroline, it can be very daunting to go on a volunteer project abroad for the first time, especially at a young age. It takes preparation, a lot of learning, adapting to a new culture and possibly language. If the volunteer then arrives and does not enjoy the project, but is forced to stay for another month or more, it could lead to strong negative feelings towards volunteering in general. However, allowing volunteers to participate short-term could make the entire process a lot easier and less scary, and would allow volunteers to move between projects so as to avoid negative feelings and situations. This opportunity of a 'taster session' is one of the only benefits that could also translate to other types of volunteering, especially social work, allowing volunteers to try out different projects without getting intellectually and emotionally involved, before committing to a long-term project of their choice. This comes with its own set of challenges, such as distance between projects for example. However, many NGOs and tour operators have more than one project in any specific region, making it possible to hop between different projects without too much time and effort, albeit perhaps for a higher price. This allows volunteers to remain fresh and interested in the different projects, which links to the next opportunity: keeping volunteer's interest high and their energy levels up.

As mentioned by several interviewees, "some projects don't need to last forever", for several reasons. First, some jobs cannot be done for extended periods of time by the same person, such as beach clean-ups, planting trees, and so on, as they get bored and tired, leading again to negative feelings that need to be avoided. Other reasons include: "it might be more efficient if it's very short and you have to get everything done and it's a lot of time pressure" (Emily); or "they wouldn't get tired as fast, they would have more energy, because they're fresh" (Courtney). This last idea in particular is very pertinent, as volunteering can be physically and morally exhausting, and for physically demanding jobs it would be of great benefit to receive a constant influx of fresh volunteers. This would however require a strong management team of long-term employees who are able to effectively keep track of the work done. Moreover, it is important to note that this need for short-term volunteers cannot be extended to social or educational volunteer projects, in which there is more often than not a need to immerse oneself into the community and job to make a real difference, a feat difficult to achieve in a short period of time (Callanan & Thomas, 2005).

The last great opportunity of short-term voluntourism mentioned by interviewees is the lower price, as money is one of the main deterrents for potential volunteers. Unfortunately, many projects, especially those sold through tour operators and travel agents, are too expensive for a lot of interested people. As mentioned by Sabrina, certain operators selling Leo Africa almost double the price of the experience, the extra money going to the company rather than the project. This makes it difficult for many under-privileged people to get involved in volunteering, leading to the argument that the entire system is exclusive to a certain extent. Of course, there are opportunities for fundraising and grants, but these are hard to come by, and there are always expenses that are not covered (Simona). Short-term volunteering, especially if it can be included into a pre-existing holiday plan, cuts the expenses considerably, potentially even becoming free of charge. Certain projects could create short-term alternatives, thus being funded by long-term volunteers, but allowing others to participate as well, for a shorter amount of time and a much lower price. This would mostly cater to volunteers who are interested in the work rather than those with egoistic motivations, as the latter most often need to be entertained with other activities, and are less willing to work long hours.

Including a short-term volunteer experience within a pre-existing holiday plan is an opportunity for many to get involved in volunteering without many of the pressures associated with it. This trend in combining volunteering with tourism experiences is not new, as Brown (cited in Wearing & McGehee, 2013) identified a difference between ‘vacation-minded’ and ‘volunteer-minded’ volunteers in 2005, differentiating between different motivations and interest within the industry. In this study, six subjects were asked whether they would be willing to add a volunteer experience into their holiday plans, and four answered ‘yes’. When asked the question in a different way, i.e. “would you be willing to donate a few days of a holiday to a project on-site (offered by a hotel for example), of the six asked, four said ‘yes’, one ‘no’ and one was hesitant. Interestingly, Caroline answered yes to the first question, but no to the second, saying that integrating it into holidays provided a great opportunity for people who only want a taste of volunteering, but she would not want to donate a few days, as it would go against the idea of a holiday. Marina argued the contrary: she would not be willing to integrate it into a pre-existing holiday, but she would be willing to donate a few days on-site. From this, one can gather that people perceive a real difference between the act of planning to add a volunteer experience into their holiday, compared to donating a few days on-site, i.e. accepting the challenge when presented at the location, with no planning involved. These answers suggest that although people are different in their preferences (between wanting to plan or trying things

spontaneously), most would indeed be interested in turning a part of their pre-existing holidays into a volunteer experience.

If implemented, the opportunities discovered through the testimonies of the interviewees could lead to positive results. Volunteer tourism could become accessible to a large new pool of candidates, which, where environmental issues are concerned, is crucial, which leads us on to the next section.

4.3 - Raising Awareness on Environmental Issues through Voluntourism

When asked 'Is environmental short-term volunteer tourism worth it if only for the awareness it brings to environmental issues?', all interviewees responded 'Yes'. Despite many respondents being against short-term voluntourism for ethical or personal reasons, they all accepted that 'raising awareness' was a positive and a necessary result. Abigail, for example, mentioned "I think regarding projects, you're probably going to be able to contribute more to them if you're there long-term. But perhaps the wider goal is, as I've said earlier, that conservation isn't a project at a time, it's as many as you can get. The wider you go, the better, so if it's more accessible with a shorter amount of time (...), it can make the whole global conservation community or situation a bit better than just gap years".

Conservation isn't about convincing one person, it's about convincing as many as possible, who will in turn spread their ideas to friends and family, and they in turn too, and so on. The more people are made aware of a specific issue or situation, the bigger the response will be, and thus the easier it will be to fix the issue. Sabrina also argued for short-term over long-term in some cases, saying that it's all about the organisation and the way the project is run: gap year students can spend two months on a project and spend their time partying and having fun, thus learning nothing, while a truly committed person can spend a week getting involved and passionate, returning home with knowledge and a will to help in the future. All six interviewees with experience in environmental voluntourism claimed they attempted to change their ways when returning home, adapting their lifestyle to their newfound ideals. Although for some these changes were not long-lasting, the fact that they did change in the first place and attempted to teach those around them is an important positive aspect of voluntourism.

This positive aspect of short-term volunteer tourism echoes previous studies, such as Ballantyne et al.'s (2011) analysis of visitors' memories of wildlife tourism led to a theory of learning through experiences which can be adapted to short-term volunteer tourism, as time is

not necessarily relevant to the strength of the experiences and emotions felt. As argued by Ballantyne, Packer and Sutherland (2011, p.777), emotional responses to conservation issues are the best way to get people involved, as humans respond to emotions much more than to education: "specialist animal-watching experiences, where humans venture into the animals' environment, can capitalise on the sense of privilege and awe that people feel when approached by animals in their natural habitat, and the opportunity to see first-hand the effects of human impact". This emotional response can be created within minutes, and built upon with time, but the initial spark of awe and privilege mentioned above does not necessitate an extended period of time. Thus, as confirmed by Kolb's (1984, below) experiential learning cycle, short-term environmental and especially conservation volunteer tourism can be a great asset by getting tourists emotionally connected to a cause, and thus more prone to building upon this new interest when returning home, getting involved in charities or further volunteer experiences.

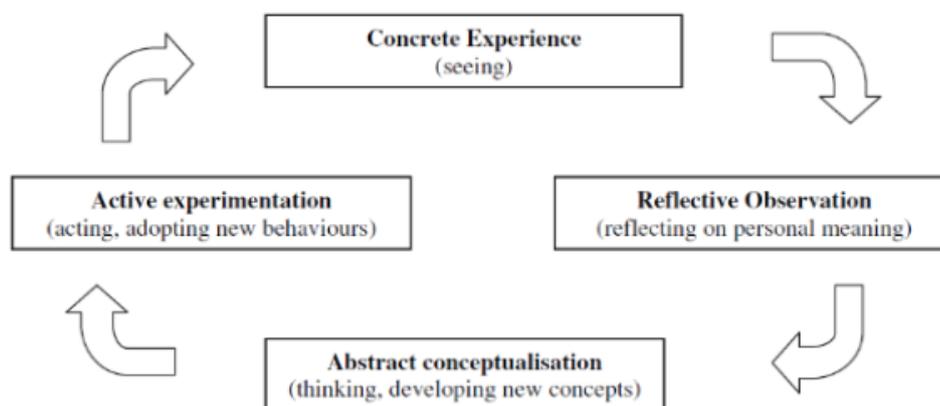


Figure 2 - Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

Source: Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Educating volunteer tourists about the importance of conservation can be done either through experiences, or through education. Most conservation volunteer projects are led by professionals, passionate about their work and willing to share their knowledge and interest. Although some projects are less well organised, or do not provide any kind of education (as experienced by Abigail for example), most take their job of teaching volunteers seriously. Although education is an on-going process, and a longer period of time is often better, short-term projects of up to two weeks do provide the necessary starting point for volunteers. Teaching them enough to get them interested and willing to return at a later time is one of the best and most positive consequences of short-term projects, and must be made more popular

and accessible to attract as many volunteers as possible. As discussed by Weaver (2005), effective interpretation of experiences can have a 'transformative effect by inducing among participants a deeper understanding of the attraction' and thus a change to a more ethical understanding of said experience.

Conservation and environmental issues may be known around the globe, but, practically speaking, many people are not particularly aware of individual problems, or the opportunities around them to help and reach solutions. As clearly remarked by Emily, "I definitely think that a lot of issues don't get the attention they deserve because people don't know about them". Creating more awareness would not only help share knowledge about these issues, and thus provide more help from individuals, but it would also possibly spread to charities and NGOs, as well as local and international governments. "I think young people are more likely to get involved, they're more likely to mobilise" (Emily) with the help of social media and technology. And indeed, young people are getting involved in an ever-increasing number of issues thanks to this crucial human resource of the 21st century, which, if and when it is used correctly, can bring important issues to the forefront of media and society. Then, short-term voluntourism can take that initial awareness to a whole new level of understanding of and involvement in the issues at hand.

4.4 - Including Volunteer Experiences in Holidays

Including several days of volunteering into a pre-existing holiday plan could be beneficial for all parties involved. On the one hand, the tourists would get the experience of volunteering, of contributing positively to the environment they are visiting, as well as getting more involved in local life. On the other hand, project leaders get a constant influx of fresh and willing volunteers to do the heavy lifting, as well as an opportunity to spread awareness on the issues they are dealing with. Furthermore, local communities get not only visibility and support from projects, but also a steady income through the spending of the volunteer tourists. Indeed, the latter will not only be spending their time and money on the project, as is the case in most long-term experiences, they will also be visiting the area, paying for accommodation, food, activities, and so on, thus providing the usual tourism benefits to the region (Sin, 2009; Butcher & Smith, 2010).

The main issue with this is the lack of offers for such opportunities. As short-term volunteer tourism is a relatively new concept, there is a need for more awareness of this opportunity, and

for more projects to be organised around the world. If volunteering several days of a holiday became the norm, the number of volunteers would potentially increase exponentially, as well as the benefits for local communities, the environment and tour operators. Judging by the interviewee's responses, if hotels, hostels or other accommodation providers were to offer such short-term volunteering activities in their respective areas, there would be a considerable amount of interest. There would be no need to organise it pre-trip, it could simply be an activity on offer to discover once on-site. Partnering especially with eco-friendly and sustainability-oriented accommodation providers would guarantee that travellers, who value sustainability, have the knowledge of their existence, thus making their involvement more likely than through traditional accommodation providers catering to mass tourists. As mentioned by Marina, the main issue is the lack of offers as well as the marketing communication: there needs to be more information circulating about such offers, whether through tour operators when booking a holiday, accommodation providers, or tourism websites. "When I go on holiday as a tourist, I don't really see activities being offered in that way (...) but maybe if there was more advertising about these kinds of activities, people would do it more" (Marina).

Another issue related to this is timing, but it is easily dealt with. Certain projects, especially in animal conservation, are only needed at certain times of the year, for example turtles only nest for a specific amount of time, and hatchlings tend to emerge during an even more limited number of days. This would require for tourists interested in this type of volunteering to plan their holidays at specific times. Although this can be a potential problem, all it requires is communication and planning both on the side of the provider or project leader and the volunteers themselves.

Thus, it seems that if hotels, backpackers and lodges offered various volunteering opportunities, ranging from a few hours of cleaning a beach to a full day of helping build a school or clinic in a nearby village, there would in all likelihood be substantial interest. All it would really require is a leap in the communication and marketing of said accommodation providers, as well as a small logistical adaptation (mainly for transport to and from the project).

4.5 - Domestic Volunteer Tourism

The Covid-19 pandemic has had many effects on the world, most of them devastating, but it has also contributed to several positive changes in the world and in tourism in particular. Apart from the positive impact the lack of tourism has had on the environment, such as "reduction of

air pollution and GHGs emission (...), reduction of water pollution (...), reduction of noise pollution [and] ecological restoration" (Rume and Islam, 2020, pp.3-5), one main effect the pandemic has had on tourism is the rediscovery of domestic tourism (Arbulú, Razumova, Rey-Maqueira, Sastre, 2021). Indeed, judging by the visible increase in domestic offers by tour operators over the past two years, tourists have started rediscovering their own countries rather than going abroad. The lack of international travel has helped tourists realise that their own countries were worth visiting, as well as countries close by, and that tourism does not necessitate a flight to be enjoyable. Although tourists may return to international travel in the future, good marketing and lower prices can keep interests in domestic tourism high.

This change in interest can and should be used to promote volunteer tourism on the same continent, or even domestically. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) classifies domestic tourism as "compris[ing of] the activities of a resident visitor within the country of reference, either as part of a domestic tourism trip or part of an outbound tourism trip". This states that travel within the country of residence classifies as tourism: it is not necessary to cross borders to be a tourist, and thus volunteer tourism can be led within one's own country. Volunteer tourism is most often associated with far-away countries, especially in the 'global South', as mentioned before (in section 2.4). Interviewees confirmed this tendency through their reactions to short-term volunteer tourism as well as questions about possible domestic voluntourism. Viviane stated very clearly "when we are talking about conservation, do you want people to fly from Germany to South Africa to stay there for 5 days? For nature, that is so bad (...) for me, if I think of volunteering, it's always in Africa".

For most interviewees, the simple idea of volunteering in Europe was almost inconceivable, despite most mentioning that there are indeed similar environmental issues in Europe or the U.S as there are in South Africa or Thailand, for example. Part of the issue, as presented before (in section 2.1), is the motivation of visiting an exotic place, of escaping mundane life, and volunteering in a new culture or environment, which does not apply to domestic tourism. However, this applies only to egoistically-motivated voluntourists. Indeed, if volunteers want to travel as much as they want to help, domestic volunteering would not be of interest. But if the main motivation to volunteering is to do some good for the environment, then domestic tourism seems like the perfect solution, as it allows the volunteer to help and get involved, without the negative environmental effects of flying half-way across the world. However, judging by interviewees' responses, there are enough altruistic volunteers to make domestic volunteer tourism worth investing in. Nine out of ten interviewees responded 'yes'

when asked whether they would consider travelling within their own countries or continent to volunteer. Indeed, travelling to a neighbouring country seemed to be the most common compromise between wanting to travel and wanting to volunteer.

Domestic voluntourism could also solve one of the main issues linked with the idea of short-term volunteering, which is that the travel time, cost and effort are too big for a week-long trip, for example. However, if the volunteering industry could change people's perception of volunteering, creating experiences and projects in the 'global North', volunteers would not have to travel as far, making it possible to volunteer short-term, on long weekends or short week trips for example. There are already projects around Europe, especially in re-wilding (e.g. Rewilding Europe), forest clearing, beach clean-ups, planting trees, and so much more, all projects that do not necessitate an extended period of time to get involved, and are easy to access. If these could be marketed to volunteers in an appealing manner, it would not only give access to volunteering to a large new pool of people, but it would also solve some of the existing ethical issues of volunteering, such as clashes with local communities and 'neo-colonialism', as will be discussed further. Families, in particular, could find such activities appealing, and would be particularly susceptible to a well-made marketing campaign. Volunteer activities that can involve and interest children as well as adults are rare, but physical activities such as the ones mentioned above can be done by people of all ages, and are a great bonding exercise. This could have the added advantage of raising awareness about important issues from an early age.

One important advantage of domestic voluntourism is the power it gives people to make real changes by getting involved in local policy making and politics. As seen in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle (Figure 2), the last stage of learning is acting upon what one has learned, and adopting new behaviours. This can be followed by getting involved in charities and governmental agencies that can create 'real' change by creating laws and rules that can affect the issues on a bigger level. This would be impossible to do abroad (except in EU elections for EU citizens), thus making domestic voluntourism much more effective in the long-term, compared to international volunteering, where the positive effects of volunteering often end with the volunteer's departure.

4.6 - Short-term Voluntourism Motivations

As discussed previously, there are many different motivations for participating in volunteer tourism, but these can be sorted into two main categories: altruistic and egoistic motivations

(Brondo, 2015). However, there has not been any research specifically about motivations for participating in short-term voluntourism, which this section will discuss.

First, it is important to understand that having egoistic motivations does not have to be negative. It is natural to think of oneself when choosing activities to engage in, especially during one's free time; wanting to pursue an activity that will, for example, enhance one's CV or benefit morally is not reprehensible. The most common motivation for participating in voluntourism is the wish to travel, to see something exotic, discover a new culture or environment. This motivation can and should be used to attract more tourists, as it is the best way to get people involved and spread awareness about the issues at hand (see section 4.2). As argued by Harnng Luh Sin (2009, pp.494-495), "there is no harm in placing volunteer tourism's objectives as "travelling" in a meaningful manner where participants are put in suitable positions to encounter "other" cultures and contexts—as long as these encounters are taken positively and reflected upon critically by volunteer tourists". Travelling for egoistic motivations will help tourists discover new cultures and peoples, and thus grow and mature, and the work they produce during their project will still be of benefit.

Motivations for short- and long-term voluntourism can certainly be similar: people want to do some good, they want to get involved in conservation or environmental projects to help (altruistic motivations), but they also want to travel and escape mundane life (egoistic motivations), only closer and shorter. The main motivation that does not apply to short-term voluntourism is self-development, in the sense that it is difficult to add a short-term experience onto a CV, unless the person volunteers on a regular basis (Meng et al., 2020). Although one may still gain some valuable skills and experience during a short project, it is of little to no benefit officially, as it is difficult to market a week-long experience as a worthy of being on a CV. This is an important aspect to consider, as it takes away one of the main egoistic motivations, thus leading to the conclusion that perhaps short-term voluntourism is better suited to altruistic travellers.

On the other hand, it can also be argued that short-term voluntourism is well suited for volunteers who care more about the 'spectacle of saving' than the actual work, as they can offer a short amount of time and still fill their social media with photos of themselves 'helping' (Brondo, 2019). Furthermore, most of the interviewees mentioned that short-term volunteering would mostly benefit the volunteer rather than the project, making it very egoistical. Emily, in particular, was against short-term volunteering, stating the following: "I think it's probably useless for the community, but it might be useful for you [the volunteer]. [...] I don't know if

that's fair, like it's not supposed to be about you, you're not the point". Two points can be made here: firstly, Emily came from a social volunteer project background, as social projects are indeed a lot harder to imagine as short-term, as they involve people and communities rather than animals and the environment, thus requiring more time and effort to get involved and contribute in any meaningful way. Secondly, Emily mentioned several times that short-term would be mostly beneficial to the volunteer, and it would all be for show, for social media, rather than to help. However, when asked about her own motivations for becoming a volunteer, her answer was "I think for me it was a challenge. Around that time, I did a lot of things, everything I took on was a way of growing as a person, and also in a sense padding out my CV. But mostly, I became a social care worker when I was 17, and I could have worked in a shop, or a supermarket, or as a barista, but I decided I wanted to really stretch myself to grow". All the motivations she mentioned were egoistic, about her own personal growth, CV and interest, not once did she mention anything about wanting to help communities or the people she worked with. From this, one can conclude that even those volunteers who criticise the 'spectacle of saving' are susceptible to egoistic motivations. Thus, short-term voluntourism may be an easy way for egoistical volunteers to get involved, but with good management, it will nevertheless provide the results and numbers necessary to make a real difference.

4.7 - Ethical Issues applied to the Short-term

As shown above, there are many ethical concerns surrounding volunteer tourism, but do they all apply to short-term voluntourism as well? Does short-term voluntourism create more problems than it solves, or can it be considered a better form of volunteering than long-term, ethically speaking? Do voluntourists themselves agree with the ethical concerns studied, or are these mostly issues for academics and theorists who have not necessarily been in the field? Despite ethics being a common research topic concerning volunteer tourism (e.g. Guttentag, 2009; Hammersley, 2014; Matthews, 2008), it has proven difficult to find any research concerning the opinions of the volunteers themselves, and their views on such issues. The interviewees were each asked the same three questions about the ethics of volunteer tourism:

- Do you believe volunteers take away jobs from locals?
- Do volunteers harm local communities through a top-down approach (neo-colonialism)?
- Are unskilled volunteers of any use due to their lack of knowledge, experience or useful skills?

For the first question, only three out of ten respondents gave a definitive 'yes' answer, another three a 'maybe', and four answered 'no'. This is an interesting response as taking away jobs from locals is perhaps one of the most important and wide-spread issues linked with voluntourism. Volunteers are often criticised in the media (Guttentag, 2009; Brondo, 2015) for doing jobs that could easily be done by locals themselves. The issue with this question is the way it is completely dependent on individual situations. The respondents agree that in most situations, it would be possible to hire locals or at the very least nationals, rather than youths from 'developed' countries, but they also mention the fact that volunteers are not paid. And this is the main issue: why pay locals for a job that volunteers pay to do? Interestingly enough, most respondents do not see this in a negative light. Frida summarised the issue in the most valuable way: "for the most part I think that when you are establishing a volunteer project, it is for something that has not been dealt with by the community prior to that. And, therefore, there are also no roles that are being occupied by the volunteers, because they are roles that the community hadn't filled in themselves". This answer, as well as other comments in interviews, show that the volunteers themselves are loath to think critically of voluntourism, and want to see the positive aspects of their work. This is a natural reaction, as one rarely wants to think negatively of one's impact on a community or environment, especially when doing a job, one hopes will help, and giving up personal time to do so.

However, it is important to realise that their view is also naive. Simply because communities deal with certain situations differently does not mean they are wrong, as their culture or lifestyle may simply have a different view on the issues at hand (Matthews, 2008). This ties into the argument of neo-colonialism: NGOs and charities go to 'underdeveloped' countries attempting to show the locals a better way of living with and caring for their environment or community. In so doing, they are assuming that they know better. Frida's argument lacks background knowledge and realism, as many projects are created without the involvement of locals (Guttentag, 2009). In addition, the fact that locals are not hired is often not because they cannot do the job, but simply because the companies prefer not to pay for labour that can be had for free. It is a very naive belief that NGOs and charities do not care about their profit as, clearly, they are happy to profit from volunteers (Brondo, 2019). Voluntourism is a business like any other, and cannot be considered to be 'better' or more ethical than others simply because it alleges to help communities and the environment.

Short-term volunteer tourism would still be confronted with this issue, as most jobs on environmental projects could indeed be performed by locals. This is an important change that

must be made within the volunteer industry at large: involving local stakeholders at every level of the project, from its initial organisation to all the paid jobs at ground level. Using volunteers as free labour does not have to be negative, as seen through all the positive aspects that come from their contributions. However, it is vital to create an industry in which local stakeholders are at the forefront of every project, as they have the knowledge necessary to complete them without harming their communities and lifestyle (Hammersley, 2014). This is especially true on projects in the 'global South', as in 'first-world countries', short-term conservation volunteer activities would simply allow tourists to help locals on their projects.

This would also be of benefit regarding the second ethical question, i.e. neo-colonialism and the top-down approach (Hammersley, 2014). Indeed, seven of the ten respondents answered that volunteers, or more accurately the projects themselves, were harming local communities through their top-down approach. Again, this issue cannot be solved through the change to short-term voluntourism, it is an issue that must be solved throughout the volunteer industry in general, and can be done through more local involvement in project leading and management. Another way of eliminating this issue completely is through domestic volunteer tourism, as mentioned previously (section 4.4). If volunteers from the 'global North' volunteered in their countries or their continent, within their own cultures, and more opportunities were created for locals to volunteer on projects in the 'global South', perceived issues of neo-colonialism and forced development would disappear.

When asked whether volunteers were of much help on projects, six out of ten respondents answered 'no', as most are unskilled youths who cannot contribute much. However, the remaining respondents all made the point that on certain projects, especially environmental ones, skill isn't always necessary. Two main points were made during the interviews: first, that a good project can teach the volunteers the necessary skills (particularly on environmental ones), and second, skill isn't always as important as interest and enthusiasm. Although the latter can be considered as naive and optimistic, it is indeed true that motivated unskilled workers can do better work than unmotivated skilled ones, at least on projects that do not require any specific skills, such as wildlife monitoring, bush clearing and other such environmental tasks.

With this issue, it is vital to differentiate between environmental projects and others. Two of the most popular fields for young volunteers are education and construction, both of which require skill and experience to be of any use. Social projects such as community outreach do require knowledge and tact, both of which are often lacking in the typical 18 to 25 year-olds age bracket (Guttentag, 2009). The advantage environmental projects have is that a lot of the

work to be done does not require any specific skill, as long as the supervisor or project leader knows what they are doing. As Sabrina said, skills come with experience, and volunteers acquire those by doing. Moreover, Abigail said that interest is the most important asset a volunteer has: "They may not have qualifications, but that does not mean they don't know anything or that they're not passionate about it. Also, they may not be skilled, practically speaking, but then you can educate them, and then they go back [to the project with the necessary skills]".

Environmental projects are best-suited to short-term volunteer projects, as the ethical issue of doing more harm than good through a lack of skills and knowledge does not apply in the way it does to social or educational projects. A common existing example of short-term volunteering is that of animal monitoring. For example, volunteers spend an evening with a guide and a conservation professional on the beach looking for laying turtles or hatchlings, finding nests, counting eggs, measuring temperature, and so on. None of these tasks require any skills, as they are told what to do by the professional. However, the volunteers have a chance to get involved, to see the animals, to learn about the difficulties they face in reaching maturity (Jasveen et al., 2012). They will get the emotional connection and the interest in finding out more, without harming the animals in any way, and it all requires less than a day (Ballantyne et al., 2011). If such opportunities were more common, short-term voluntourism could become an important way of raising awareness and creating interest in tourists about conservation and the environment, which could have positive long-lasting effects. No skills required.

5 - Conclusion

5.1 - Main Conclusions

Short-term volunteer tourism is an under-researched topic which presents an important number of opportunities, both in practice and in academics. Indeed, this research has found that it would be worth investing time, funds and effort into the creation of short-term volunteer tourism projects, and even more importantly into its marketing. There were many issues found with volunteer tourism in general, including several important ethical ones, but these must be worked on in the entire volunteering industry, and do not affect short-term projects more than long-term. As seen both in previous literature and through the interviews, some of the main issues of voluntourism come from the NGOs and tour operators, rather than the actual volunteers. They also come from the governments exploiting their local communities and environments to make a profit. This main ethical concern must be dealt with to create a better industry, one people are more willing to contribute to. An industry's ethical issues do not have to be terminal; it is simply vital to be aware of them and find ways to work towards eliminating them. Thus, the answer to the research question concerning ethics is that short-term volunteer tourism seems to make most ethical issues surrounding volunteering redundant, making it more positive than long-term volunteering.

In the case of short-term volunteer tourism, there are many opportunities presented which make it worth investing in, most importantly the huge pool of participants it opens up to. Indeed, most people past their university years do not have the possibility to take long holidays, and thus short-term projects would give them a chance to pursue their interest in volunteering in a more realistic timeline. It would also allow for tourists to include the projects into their normal holidays, thus making it easier to organise and fit into the available time spent with family or friends. As argued by academics and volunteers alike, it is important to raise awareness on environmental issues, to get people involved in conservation at home as well as during volunteer projects themselves, and in this case, the more the better. Short-term projects allow for more people to get involved. Awareness grows and can be spread. Conservation is an ever-evolving process, and short-term volunteering can give it the vital boost it needs. Short-term volunteer tourism does seem to be worth the effort for the awareness that it spreads on such issues. Another opportunity that must be investigated and marketed is domestic volunteering, or volunteering to nearby countries. Although most people associate volunteering with far-away countries, especially in the 'global South', environmental issues can be found all over the planet, and thus volunteering projects can be created in 'first-world countries' as well, allowing

volunteers to get involved in their own countries or continents. This provides several benefits, from getting people involved in local policy-making to lowering travel costs, whether financial or environmental (CO2 emissions of flying, etc.). It would also allow more people to get involved, especially on short-term projects around long weekends for example. Judging by the responses of interviewees, domestic volunteer tourism would be of great interest to people interested in environmental issues. As such, one can conclude that domestic volunteer tourism would certainly be a productive way of contributing positively to the environment, and lead to positive change.

Concerning the research question of motivations behind volunteer tourism, one can conclude that they are varied, but can be classified into two main categories both for long-term and short-term volunteers: altruistic and egoistic. Both can be useful though, and egoistic volunteers cannot be judged or ignored, as they continue to provide funds and they do work just as much as altruistic tourists. Short-term volunteering motivations are similar to long-term, as it allows for both categories to get involved: altruistic tourists have more opportunities to volunteer, and egoistic tourists don't have to sacrifice as much time to get the results they seek, i.e. recognition and photos for their social media presence for example. Some egocentric motivations cannot be satisfied by short-term voluntourism, however, such as skills added to CVs, making short-term volunteering perhaps more suitable for volunteers with altruistic motivations.

A safari guide working for one of the biggest private reserves in South Africa said "If we can't make money from the animals, then the animals will disappear", alluding to the fact that if the reserves in Africa stop making money, the land will be bought up for farming. This is an important aspect of conservation to consider: conservation tourism can often be regarded as unethical, as profit is of huge importance, and not all motivations behind it are 'good'. However, it does provide the funds necessary to continue the conservation work. So even though volunteer tourism may have many negative sides, it does provide the funds and workforce to continue with positive work.

One can thus conclude that short-term volunteer tourism could become a vital part of the volunteer industry. However, it must be kept within the bounds of environmental volunteer projects, as social or educational ones, for example, usually necessitate a bond of trust to be created with locals, thus needed longer periods of time. Although short-term voluntourism can be criticised for not allowing volunteers time to get properly involved, it can be considered a

stepping-stone towards long-term commitment, either as a returning volunteer, or by getting involved in charities and NGOs at home. As Frida said, "Any volunteer work is worth doing".

5.2 -Contributions to Theory and Practice

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of research into short-term volunteer tourism specifically. This study has contributed a starting point into the research of short-term voluntourism, which future research can build upon, to study this important aspect of the industry properly. Current theory into the field of voluntourism focuses specifically on the ethics and motivations of voluntourism, mostly from the point of view of academics and companies. This dissertation has focused on the point of view of the volunteers themselves, the opportunities and issues they see around voluntourism, and the solutions they believe can be found. This new point of view can advance the knowledge and research of the topic of volunteer tourism, which can be built upon by future research

Regarding managerial contributions of this research, it could be used by tour operators as well as individual volunteer projects in order to re-evaluate their products, and adapt them to short-term and domestic tourists. This research has highlighted the interests and opinions of existing volunteers, which could be used by product and marketing experts to adapt and create new products and campaigns. As concluded, short-term and domestic volunteer tourism could become a vital part of conservation efforts, and this study could be the basis upon which to start changes within the industry. It could be of potential interest to any start-up attempting to understand the emerging topics and issues surrounding voluntourism. One possibility would be to create a website where tourists can look for short-term projects in the locations they are planning their holidays. Rather than pushing tourists towards a specific destination, let them choose, and push them towards a project.

5.3 - Research Limitations and Future Research

Using a qualitative research methodology has opened up the research to a set of limitations that must be acknowledged. As argued in all qualitative research methodology handbooks, "the quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological training, skill, sensibility, and integrity of the researcher" (Patton, 2015, p.15). Conducting interviews is more than just asking questions and transcribing answers, it is about looking out for physical cues, changes in the tone of voice, adapting questions to the specific subject, and so much more. It

takes training and experience to become a skilful interviewer, and to get meaningful results. Another issue to consider is researcher bias: again, it takes skill and practice to rid oneself of any preconceived notions both when assembling the interview questions and analysing the results (Ravitch and Mittenfelner, 2021). It has proven challenging to rid oneself of any bias during every stage of the research, in particular during the analysis. Another issue with the methodological tool of interviews is reactivity on the part of the interviewee: "this most commonly refers to when participants change behaviours as a result of being observed but can also refer to when the interview participants change responses due to perceived reactions from the researcher" (Ravitch and Mittenfelner, 2021, p.143). This is important to consider during the analysis, as interviewees can potentially answer what they believe the researcher wants to hear, leading to skewed results. Although researchers can attempt to mitigate this by keeping impassive, it remains an important issue. Nevertheless, we believe that the interviewee's responses are valuable enough to be used in this study, despite its possible flaws.

Regarding the choice of Zoom, i.e. an online platform, for the interviews, it is important to notice that it can also alter the results in two significant ways. First, even with the camera on, it does not allow for the same observation as face-to-face interviews. It is difficult for the researcher to see and notice physical cues that could be of interest when interpreting the interviewee's answers through their state of mind. The second issue is the difficulty in creating a bond with the subject. Indeed, trust is vital in an interview so as to get truthful answers, and trust is much easier to build face-to-face than through a computer screen. Less rapport means lesser answers, and thus less valuable results.

The last limitation to be mentioned is the sample size and composition. Since it was hard to reach the target population, the sample consists of only ten interviewees, which could be considered problematic. It proved difficult to find ex-volunteers with the right background willing to be interviewed, and time was an issue. Then, all ten interviewees were female, due to the lack of difficulty in finding potential interviewees. While it is unknown whether having male subjects would change the results, it is something to consider. The ages, occupations and origins of the subjects were all different enough to provide a varied sample. The same can be said of the volunteer projects they had taken part in, from social, educational and environmental, to different companies, different lengths and in different countries.

There are many avenues open for future research into short-term volunteer tourism. As it is an under-researched topic, students and academics alike interested in the subject will find no end to subjects and issues to study. Regarding methodology, it would be of potential interest to

do similar research with a different sample, regarding demographics and socioeconomic background. This research focused on people who had already volunteered abroad, as it was focused on analysing the issues through the lens of past experiences. However, a study conducted on people who have never been volunteering would provide valuable data on the pool of potential future volunteers. It would also be of interest to study this through quantitative research, to provide much-needed statistics to the field of volunteer tourism. This research only scratched the surface of short-term volunteer tourism, and has left many new opportunities for future researchers to get involved.

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Appendix A -

Basic Interview Script:

- I - Please state your name, age and occupation for the record ?
- I - Have you ever been on a volunteer tourism project?
- I - Can you tell me about your volunteer project?
- I - What were the most positive and negative aspects of the project you participated in?
- I - Is there anything you would have liked to change about the project?
- I - What were your motivations for participating in the volunteer projects?
- I - Would you ever consider going on another volunteer tourism project?
- I - If you were to go on another project, how long do you think the ideal project is?
- I - If you were to do another volunteer trip, would you consider integrating it into your pre-existing holiday, or would you rather travel to a destination specifically for the project?
- I - How important is the price tag when looking for a project?
- I - Would you rather book an individual project or would you rather go through a tour operator?
- I - Would you be willing to donate a part of your holiday to an environmental project on-site? I.e. going to a beach clean-up, coral reef clean-ups, taking notes on an animal count, etc?
- I - Do you agree that the volunteers are taking away jobs from locals?
- I - Do you agree that volunteer organisations and projects can harm local communities through a top-down approach
- I - Do you think that unskilled volunteers are of little to no use on volunteer projects?
- I - For short term volunteer tourists, would you agree that even though they don't have a big impact, they can still benefit the local economy by providing income to local businesses?
- I - Do you agree that short-term projects can benefit simply through raising awareness in tourists interested in the issues at hand?
- I - Do you think that short-term volunteer projects provide opportunities that long-term does not?
- I - What do you think of domestic volunteer tourism?
- I - Do you believe that a volunteer can truly make a difference on a short-term project?
- I - Do you think that a volunteer can truly make a difference on a long-term project?
- I - How environmentally conscious are you in your day-to-day life? Has that changed since your volunteer experience?