

Voluntourism and the White Savior Complex: a critical analysis

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Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

Professor Catarina Lopes Oliveira Frois, Assistant Professor (with habilitation)

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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ABSTRACT

Voluntourism is conceived as the activity(s) carried out by the traveller and framed in altruistic actions related to education and health, aimed at the host community, regardless of the level of preparation that the traveller has for it. Currently, this activity has been put under the focus of criticism and debate among authors and people around the world, since voluntourism is sometimes associated with neo-colonialist ideas, with the perpetuation of stereotypes of the Third World, as well as with the White Savior Complex. The intentions of the voluntourist are called into question. From this, the need arises to investigate the discrepancy between the essence of voluntourism, with the real consequences that it can bring to local communities. The aim of this qualitative research is to observe the problems inherent to voluntourism, with the aim of creating awareness and ethical and sustainable character in those who decide to exercise it. The final result shows that the motivations of voluntourists mostly lack altruism, expressing the opposite: selfish and individualistic intentions were observed, together with the desire to stand out on social networks, with the publication of images of supposed volunteer tourism actions. These conclusions are obtained through theoretical research and descriptive analysis of the web pages *Plan My Gap Year*, which offers packages for voluntourists; *Humanitarians of Tinder* and *Barbie Savior*.

Keywords: voluntourism, White Savior Complex, third world, social media

RESUMO

O volunturismo é concebido como a(s) actividade(s) realizada(s) por um viajante, que se enquadram em ações altruístas relacionadas com a educação e a saúde, sendo dirigidas à comunidade que o acolhe, independentemente do nível de preparação que ele tenha para isso. Na atualidade, esta atividade tem sido o foco de críticas e debates entre autores e pessoas em todo o mundo, já que o volunturismo está associado, por vezes, a ideias neo-colonialistas, à perpetuação de estereótipos do terceiro mundo, bem como ao Complexo do Salvador Branco. Questiona-se as intenções do voluntário. A partir disso, surge a necessidade de investigar a discrepância entre a essência do voluntarismo com as consequências reais que isto pode trazer para as comunidades locais. O objetivo desta pesquisa qualitativa é observar as problemáticas inerentes ao volunturismo, com a finalidade de criar consciência e caráter ético e sustentável naqueles que decidem exercê-lo. O resultado final que as motivações dos voluntários carecem de altruísmo, expressando o contrário: foram observadas intenções egoístas e individualistas, juntamente com o desejo de se destacar nas redes sociais com a publicação de imagens das supostas ações do turismo de voluntariado. Estas conclusões são obtidas através da pesquisa teórica e análise descritiva dos sites *Plan My Gap Year*, que oferece pacotes para voluntários, *Humanitarians of Tinder* e *Barbie Savior*.

Palavras chave: volunturismo, Complexo do Salvador Branco, terceiro mundo, redes sociais

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ACRONYMS

SAIH	Norwegian Students' & Academics' International Assistance Fund
PMGY	Plan My Gap Year
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism, also known as “voluntourism”, is a combination of travel abroad that combines leisure and pleasure with volunteer work. It has become one of the most sought-after branches of tourism, as over the last few years there has been a growing interest in this type of experience, especially among young people who opt for these trips during the holidays between high school and university, the so-called gap year. Various organisations around the world organise such trips, and they have become the domain of travel agencies and individual companies. These journeys take place mostly in countries of the global south, where volunteers can teach English, work in hospitals, support orphanages, support wildlife and many other tasks that can be done during such a trip. Meanwhile, they can also go sightseeing, taste local food, relax, learn about the culture, visit exotic places and make lifelong friends.

What differentiates voluntourism from volunteering abroad is undoubtedly the fact that the volunteers can decide for themselves where they want to go and what they plan to do there, and they can also decide the duration of the volunteering. Moreover, in the case of voluntourism, no skills or experience of any kind are required, as the volunteer pays for himself or herself and finances the trip one hundred percent (Horoszowski, 2014; Denny, 2021).

Voluntourism has caused controversy in recent years due to various questions concerning the ethics of volunteering. It is questioned whether the intentions of the voluntourists are truly altruistic (Hustinx (2001), it is also criticised as it can reinforce colonial ideas (Bandyopadhyay, 2016) and thus reinforcing stereotypes of developing countries (Clark, 2021), and it can also unwittingly fall into the “White Saviour Complex” (Andersson & Höjer, 2020).

Another problem that voluntourism has faced is its exposure on social media. In recent years, as the world has become more digital, “altruistic” travellers have engaged in sharing images and audiovisual content featuring young children, people of colour and situations of extreme poverty, which has caused debates about the ethics of these actions. Such images can promote stereotypes and narratives of salvation and heroism. Also with this content on social media, the true motivations of the volunteers are questioned, as it seems that they use it as a tool to gain some kind of recognition or social validation.

I decided to study this controversial topic mainly because I had the goal of going on a volunteer trip to an "exotic" country. However, before I even had anything planned I came across a Youtube video "I Was a Humanitarian... and I Regret It". The video was so heartfelt and clear about how voluntourist actions can affect host communities, that I went on to find more material on the subject, and this inspired me not only to give up the idea of volunteering, but also to raise awareness of the possible consequences that voluntourism can bring on such trips and how the good intentions of some of the volunteers can be taken advantage of.

By addressing the issues behind voluntourism, this thesis aims to raise awareness and bring about positive changes in volunteering, thus promoting more ethical and sustainable approaches to both the local communities and the volunteers themselves. In addition, this investigation is intended to answer the following questions: What are the aims of people who participate in voluntourism activities and do these motivations contribute to the perpetuation of colonial ideas, stereotypes and the "White Saviour Complex"? What role do social media play in the promotion of voluntourism? Finally, what alternative strategies can be applied to address the negative consequences associated with voluntourism?

The methodology used in this work is theoretical in nature and is complemented by qualitative research. Various sources such as books, articles, papers and online blogs were used. These sources were used to build a solid theoretical framework that served as a tool for the analysis in the following chapters. A detailed analysis of the *Plan My Gap Year* website was carried out, including a study of the homepage, the information that the website offers about its projects, with the aim of demonstrating the variety of experiences that this organisation offers. Subsequently, I proceeded to analyse three specific cases that help to obtain a broader view of the aspects related to voluntourism and social networks.

The thesis is organized as follows: in Chapter 1 the concept of voluntourism is explored. Different definitions of the term are presented and the historical context of the term are examined. Furthermore, the main characteristics of this form of travel are highlighted. This chapter also addresses the problems associated with voluntourism, such as its connection to neo-colonialist ideas, the real motivations of the participants, the perpetuation of stereotypes and the phenomenon known as the "White Saviour Complex".

In Chapter 2, I offer a detailed analysis of the website *Plan My Gap Year*, a recognised platform offering such voluntary services. Here I examine the images used, the projects offered, as well as the reviews of some users, thus unravelling the way in which voluntourism is marketed and how volunteer experiences are sold.

Chapter 3 focuses on the impact of social media on voluntourism. Three significant examples will be explored such as the video *How to get more likes on social media?*, the *Barbie Savior* website and the website *Humanitarians of Tinder*.

Finally, in the Conclusion I present the findings and results of the theoretical analysis, taking into account all the factors studied in this work.

CHAPTER 1 - STATE OF THE ART

1.1 - Tourism: its origins

Old studies related to the term "Tourism" indicate that it is of English origin, perhaps as a Galicianism of the French term *tour*, and that it means "circular journey", "back to the starting point". However, some authors, such as Arthur Haulot (1961), suggest that the origin of this term is far more primitive, Hebrew, inasmuch as it appears in the Bible (Exodus 12:17), where it is mentioned that Moses sent representatives to the land of Canaan to visit it and report on its characteristics. It seems that in ancient Hebrew the word "tour" or "tur" means journey of reconnaissance or exploration, implying a logical return to the starting point (Acerenza, 2006).

However, the conceptualization of tourism can be complex because, although starting from the initial idea of a journey, outside the known environment, with the intention of returning to the place of origin within a stipulated time, the causes of tourism are what give it different perspectives: from an anthropological, psychological, sociological, academic, economic, political and even diplomatic nature, depending on the primary purpose of the journey.

Even the Catholic Church has a passage in the Second Vatican Council (1962) observing in this regard: "For with the generalized reduction of working time the advantages for many men increase more and more. Leisure should be used to relax the spirit, to strengthen the health of the soul and body ... by means of journeys to other regions (tourism) with which the spirit of man is refined, and men themselves are enriched by mutual knowledge" (Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 61). Tourism can promote genuine human and social development through the ever-increasing opportunity it offers to share goods, to engage in fruitful cultural exchanges, to admire the beauty of nature and art, and to encounter different mentalities, traditions and religions Frangialli (2006). From what has been described, the Catholic Church could be a pioneer in terms of volunteer tourism, where travellers do not travel just for pleasure, but with the intention of exchange and sharing.

1.2 - VolunTourism

Continuing with the idea of the previous paragraph, it is important to mention that one of the most significant representatives and pioneers of the concept of Volunteer Tourism is Krzysztof Przecławski, who has not only written several papers on the subject but also made

a worldwide call to form an "international association of creative tourism", a movement to which, on a voluntary basis, all those individuals, tourism organizations and even state institutions who wish to share their points of view could join (Acerenza, 2006). From the foregoing, the author concludes that "tourism is a means of facilitating encounters and communication between people, highlighting the advantages, especially of a cultural nature, that both the sending and receiving communities derive; all of which, in his view, helps to maintain knowledge and understanding among people from different geographies and backgrounds, and contributes to the strengthening of international peace"(Acerenza, 2006: 18).

The progressive and accelerated growth of volunteer tourism or also called "Voluntourism" in recent years has caught the attention of several researchers becoming the focus of their research. Among these researchers, Stephen Wearing stands out, whose definition of the term Voluntourism is one of the most cited by other researchers on the subject. He describes these types of tourists as: "Individuals who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized 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" (Wearing, 2001: 1). This definition highlights the practice of tourists who want to engage in voluntary activities that benefit the host community. With this concept, Wearing reflects that voluntary tourism is a kind of holiday combined with emotional payback in the country of destination.

Another definition is provided by Raymond and Hall, who describe Voluntourism as "a more mutually beneficial form of travel in which both the volunteer and the host communities can benefit from the experience" (2008: 530). Brown, also defines Voluntourism as "a type of tourist experience in which a tour operator offers travellers the opportunity to take part in an optional excursion that has a voluntary component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people" (2005: 480). However, one of the main reasons that justify this increase in interest in this area of research is not based only on a technicality of cultural exchange, but on the fact that voluntourism is perceived as another variable of "responsible" tourism, and the various implications that this entails. The tourist who seeks an experience different from that offered by mass tourism pays attention to a series of factors that include altruism in economic and cultural retribution to the host community.

1.3 - Historical context

The origin of voluntourism is not very well defined, but one could start from a fairly sustainable hypothesis, based on the existing information on voluntary service together with leisure travel, which dates back to the 19th century and has its roots in local and international missionary works (Callanan and Tomas, 2005). During this century, various organizations were created for altruistic purposes that were largely dependent on volunteers, a clear example of which is the Red Cross, which was established in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1863.¹ According to the most recent sources, the concept of combining holidays with volunteer work just appeared in the early 21st century, particularly after the events of 09/11 in 2001 and the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004 (Wearing and McGehee, 2011).

However the origins of voluntourism, according to other authors, can be tracked back to earlier times. In the second half of the 20th century, the tourist movement intensified, especially in relation to international travel due to the increase in the monetary income of the population from Western countries. Paid holidays were standardised and made available on affordable flights, resulting in what we now know as mass tourism, i.e. the mass movement of large numbers of organised tourists to popular destinations for recreational purposes, which, although not primarily aimed at volunteering, indirectly influenced the development of this practice. Following this boom of mass tourism, it is observed that since the 1980s, the population of Western countries began to demand and seek a type of tourism with different experiences. As a result, various types of unconventional tourism emerged at the time, such as ecotourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, and later on voluntourism. All these types of tourism began to grow on a large scale in European countries, and then expanded to other countries such as Australia and the United States (Wearing & McGehee, 2011; Clark, 2021; Callanan & Thomas, 2005).

According to other authors, voluntourism began in the early 1960s, with the creation of several organizations that provided voluntary services. A clear example is the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) in the United Kingdom, this organization was founded in 1958, when 16 Britons were sent to Borneo to teach English to locals. Since then VSO has been responsible for sending volunteers to different developing countries to help combat extreme poverty and inequality.² Another possible conception of this new way of travelling may have its roots, similarly, during the 60's but with the United States Peace Corps (Peace Corps). This organization was inspired by the President of the United States at the time, John

¹ <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/our-history/the-beginning-of-the-red-cross>

² <https://www.vsointernational.org/about/our-history>

Kennedy. On October 14, 1960, Kennedy gave a speech during his political campaign for the presidency in front of more than 10,000 students. During his speech, the President asked the crowd a question: "How many of you, who are going to be doctors, are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives travelling the world?".³ This was the basis for creating the Peace Corps. After this speech, more than 25,000 people applied to be part of it. From its inception, the philosophy of the Peace Corps was that volunteers could and should serve their country by living and working in developing nations, providing help and assistance in the peace process. Since then, voluntourism has evolved into volunteer travel and vacations merged with the leisure travel market (Valdez del Rio, 2008).

Kathe Duthie (2018) also agrees that voluntourism has its origins in the creation of the Voluntary Service Overseas and the Peace Corps, emphasizing that these two organizations were a pillar and example for the creation of similar ones in other countries and areas. However, after their emergence, several similar ones were created in Australia, Japan, Germany, and Canada; all were founded during the 1960s.⁴ Organizations in all these countries had a common goal: to help third-world countries develop (Butcher & Smith, 2012). Although it is true that several sources agree that voluntourism definitely appeared in the second half of the 20th century, tourism, in general, began to grow at an accelerated pace after the Second World War, allowing contact and exchange between different cultures of the world and, in addition, travel whose purpose was not pleasure but a "mission to be fulfilled", of a social, political or economic nature, scenarios closely linked to what is now known as voluntourism.

Overall, while there are clearly different opinions on the exact "birth"; of voluntourism, it is evident that the demand for this type of tourism have been growing over time, starting from the 21st century and with important developments in the 20th century and even earlier (Wearing and McGehee; Brown and Morrison, 2015; Callanan and Thomas, 2005).

³ <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/peace-corps>

⁴ Other examples of state involvement in promoting development volunteering include; Australian Volunteers Abroad founded in 1963, the Dutch SNV, founded in 1965, the Japan Overseas Corporation volunteers (JOVC) founded in 1965 and the Canadian Executive Service Organisation (CESO) founded in 1967 (Butcher & Smith, 2010).

1.4 - Characteristics of Voluntourism

- A. The main characteristic of voluntourism is that volunteers usually come from Western countries such as Germany, Switzerland, England, the United States, and Australia, which are considered developed countries (Torres, 2017).
- B. The most common destination countries are African, Asian, and some Latin American countries (Cowden, 2020).
- C. It is a type of short-term volunteering. The average duration is estimated to be two to three weeks (Garrison, 2015).
- D. Voluntourism also has the characteristic that volunteers do not need to have previous experiences or special skills (Denny, 2021).
- E. In this type of volunteering, much emphasis is placed on the discoveries of the volunteer. Because it is a combination of volunteering and tourism, volunteers are expected to have a good experience and enjoy their days in the host country (Garrison, 2015).

As can be seen, these characteristics are a brief but rich compilation of the particularities of voluntourism, being the same product of the research of various authors who in recent years have been interested in studying this social phenomenon, however, they could vary depending on the case, taking into account that it is an event that has been booming in recent decades, especially with the widespread use of internet and especially social media. As previously mentioned, it is a topic about which little is still known, but these characteristics allow us to have a slightly clearer idea of what voluntourism is.

Up to now several voluntourism conceptions have been formulated, not very different from each other. At first glance, this type of tourism seems a very good option for altruistic individuals from all over the world, especially those belonging to the so-called First World, since it makes tourism an activity that goes beyond egocentric enjoyment, but allows one to discover new worlds, new societies, other cultures; and also provide “help” to the needy hosts. However, there are some hypotheses that have emerged in recent years that call into question the benefits, motivations, and the intentions that drive voluntourists. One of this hypothesis assumes that in reality there are cases where the host communities do not need help, but instead take advantage of the goodwill of these benefactors for personal enrichment, this being the product of fraud. It is observed in other cases (although it may be linked to the previous one), that the voluntary practice is not altruistic but self-centred: an individual seeks to be praised for its actions, especially by making them public through social media, with the

intention of showing that he or she is superior in his or her abilities (physical, economic, intellectual, among others), and that in his/her superiority is capable of providing saving aid to those in need, colonizing, sharing magnanimity to leave a legacy during his short stay in the country that welcomes him/her (Hustinx, 2001; Mostafanezhad, 2016).

1.5 - Voluntourism, a form of neo-colonialism?

The first debatable issue is the ethics of voluntourism, which starts from the idea that voluntourism is just but a form of neo-colonialism. But before we go into it, it is important to define the term in question. "Neo-colonialism is the economic, political, cultural, ideological, and even educational dependence of one country on another. However, unlike traditional colonialism, neo-colonialism has the peculiarity that the neo-colonized country is not physically occupied by forces of the dominant country" (Macías Chavez, 2015: 88). Thus, neo-colonialism has been perceived as a modern manifestation of the colonization of the Third World. As mentioned above, neocolonial does not mean physical and military occupation from one country to another, neo-colonialism is more focused on political and mostly economic influence from the distance.

Taking into account this brief but contingent explanation, one can begin to understand why voluntourism is commonly related with neo-colonialist actions (Bandyopadhyay, 2016) since the majority of voluntourists are from western countries and travel to countries that were colonized in the past (Julia Andersson & Malin Höjer, 2020). This evidences the mirage of superiority that emerges from past events and has been perpetuated in the minds of the new generations but also creates an assumption of an imbalance of power between the Global North and South, perpetuating the idea that Westerners have the responsibility to "save" the people of the Global South.

The concept of North and South was developed in the second half of the 20th century, when Willy Brandt, the German Chancellor at the time, observed that the world was divided geographically between the richest and least favoured countries, which he called developing countries. According to the model he presented, he was able to show that the most economically advanced countries were located in the northern hemisphere, with the exception of New Zealand and Australia. While the least developed countries are located in the southern hemisphere (Less, 2021). Since then, this terminology has continued to be used to refer to the most developed and underdeveloped countries.

The idea of the first and third world grew stronger during the decades of the Cold World. During this period, the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, in 1952, presented a model that divides the world into three, this theory is known as "The three worlds model". The division of the first, second and third world was based on an idea of power, economically and politically speaking. The first world countries in this model were countries considered capitalist and major world powers, with the United States at the top of the list in this section. The second world consisted of the Soviet Union and its allies. And finally, the third world was made up of the non-aligned or neutral countries. The three worlds model continued to evolve, and became somewhat synonymous with developed countries, underdeveloped countries and developing countries. First world countries began to be described as highly developed nations, due to industrialisation, high living standards and economic stability. When referring to the second world, they are often referred to as underdeveloped nations, countries that are not at the top in an economic and political sense, but are not quite at the bottom either. In the past, this group included socialist countries and states. Finally, third world countries that fall into this group have several characteristics in common: low access to clean water and sanitation, low levels of education, government corruption and extreme poverty (Sporcle blog, 2019).⁵

Since the emergence of this new model of division, the idea of developed, underdeveloped and developing prevails in the current mentality of society, thus forcing in some way that separation of "us" and "them". During the era of the three-world model, ethnocentrism took hold in developed countries. Countries considered part of the first world often viewed second and third world countries with an air of cultural superiority. With this, first world, or Western societies imposed their own standards as the criteria for determining what is developed. Thus demonstrating once again colonial ideas. Driven by ethnocentrism, they used their own criteria to judge the rest of the world .

Another way in which volunteer tourism can be linked to questions of colonialism and power is through the economic relations it creates. Several volunteer programs involve international volunteers who pay substantial sums of money to have the opportunity to participate in charitable works, creating the image of voluntourism as a business and of volunteers as clients; thus reinforcing the idea that Westerners have the power and resources to buy their "entry" into the communities of the Global South, which can be seen as a form of economic colonization (Stein, 2017).

⁵ <https://www.sporcle.com/blog/2019/07/the-three-worlds-model-is-there-a-second-world/>

However, it is important to note that the influence and scope of voluntourism are not only economic but also have a prominent role in the culture and thus in the society where it develops. Thus, analyzing the postcolonial impacts in relation to voluntourism, we find Pastran (2014) who assures that voluntourism only intensifies the inequality between power relations and at the same time also reinforces cultural stereotypes between host people and tourists who carry out this type of activity. Thus, the author assures that it is a neocolonial relationship, through continuous impacts on the economic, political and social development of the "neo-colonized" country.

For this reason, tourism of this kind may add to another notion of dependence between developed and underdeveloped countries (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Volunteers usually take on the role of teachers, builders and sometimes even doctors without being truly qualified, representing once again a neo-colonial construction of the superior Western in race and knowledge or also called western ethnocentrism (Pastran, 2014; Costel, 2013). It is believed that Westerners assume that "primitive"; communities or "others" need to be civilized and that this can be achieved through direct encounters with those who are already civilized. In this case, an idea is shared that the First World has the solution to all problems, and this should be shared with the Third World, because they need it (Clark, 2021). Hultman and Lanevik (2020) also wrote about this, pointing out that voluntourism is clearly a millionaire industry, and that this is another way in which the Westerners continue to exploit and explore the global South.

1.6 - Stereotypes: "us" and the "others"

Voluntourism has been the subject of many debates and stereotypes of the Third World is one of the reasons. Previously, it was mentioned that voluntourism reinforces stereotypes of the "first" and "third" world. Mitchell (2018) has an explanation for this social phenomenon: the author starts from the premise that the human brain, by nature, tends to relate the idea of people belonging to other social groups and different from one's own as "strangers", or "not like us". Because of this, various stereotypes based on social class, skin colour or gender have emerged over the centuries, which today may look discriminatory and generate conflict from within a home to a continent. Claude Lévi-Strauss, an important French anthropologist, also examined the concept of "us" and "them". The anthropologist explains that diversity and the ways in which societies organise and structure themselves stems from ways of thinking. From

his perspective, cultural differences reflect the diverse ways in which human beings interpret and make sense of their world. Levi argued that the separation between us and them is based on the perception of other societies as different, or even threatening. This separation, the creation of stereotypes about others, stems from the need to entrench one's own identity (Lévy-Strauss, 1952/1971).

Voluntourism further exemplifies stereotypes, as the perception of the "Third World" by the "First World" is determined by the unequal power dynamics between North and South. This persistent rhetoric of the "other" situates the global North as a homogenous culture against which all others are measured, often resulting in a diminished view of the South. Stereotype is an essential part of the power structure asymmetry, since the one that is "above" characterizes the rest as "without a voice" and without the ability to help oneself (Hultman & Lanevik, 2020).

This happens with Western society, thanks to the media and the lack of formal education, since there are planted ideas of "poor" and "exotic" countries, which are commonly described as tribal, destituted, places of disease, instability, misery, violence and corruption (Pietsch, 2013; Clark, 2021). Such perceptions ignore the historical causes of the social inequalities we see today: they are a consequence of colonialism that impacted the development of colonized areas. During these last decades, the media played an essential role in exposing communities (apparently) in need on a global scale, where the explicit divisions between the "poor" and the "rich" between the global "north" and "south" became even more entrenched. Thanks to these perceptions, voluntourism was created as a result of an "increasingly guilt-conscious society" (Callanan & Thomas, 2005: 183).

Another stereotype that is perpetuated in our times is the vision of the global South as a homogeneous region, rather than a diverse number of countries, each with their own unique cultures, languages, religions, and histories thus leading to a lack of appreciation of the diversity that is real and the historical complexity of the regions. This homogeneity allows the observation of another stereotype where the global south is conceived as a place of extreme poverty, where all people live in misery. While poverty is certainly a persistent problem in many parts of the global south (and, for this matter, of the world), this stereotype can create an image of hopelessness and inability for people residing there to help themselves. Stereotypes from the Global South can also be seen as a way to reinforce a sense of superiority among people from the Global North. For example, there may be an assumption that people who live in or come from countries in the Global South are less educated or less capable than people in developed countries, which can lead to a sense of

paternalism and the belief that Western countries have a responsibility to “save” people in the Global South (Alegria, 2022).

1.7 - True Altruism or Self-Interest?

One issue that needs to be discussed is the true intentions of the volunteers, as we are talking about acts that are presumed (and in some cases assumed) to be altruistic. Altruism in essence is based on acts that are performed with the aim of benefiting others and the main characteristic of altruism is that these acts are carried out selflessly and without expectation of any monetary reward but spiritual reward in return (Lopez, 1994). Nowadays, however, it is believed that the new generation of volunteers around the world tend to be less loyal to their altruistic causes and projects. Lesley Hustinx (2001) argues that voluntourists are very self-centered, meaning that many of young people who volunteer are purely focused on their own interests and experiences, leaving aside the true essence of voluntourism. The author points out that this is because young people are an easier target for this kind of cynicism; since they have a wide freedom of choice, younger generations are more susceptible to individualisation.

Hustinx continues her critique by claiming that today’s voluntourists do not commit themselves to long-term volunteering and that apart from this, volunteers expect something in return for their “efforts”. By comparison, the new generation of volunteers looks less loyal. Their volunteering is often temporary: a growing number of volunteers no longer wish to be committed on a long-term basis. They are fairly choosy and calculated, and they expect something in return for their” (Hustinx, 2001: 2). Likewise, another author who questions the altruistic intentions of voluntourists is Carlos Palacios (2010), who highlights that voluntourists decide to do this type of practice in order to obtain some benefit in their lives. These can be various, such as feeding the ego and feeling better about themselves for having done charity work; going on holiday to a place they may consider exotic, or simply for the purpose of improving their professional CV and accessing better job opportunities.

Collen McGloin and Nichole Gorgeous (2015) wrote about this in their article “Looks good on your CV”. The authors point out that acts of goodwill have become an indicator of good character on the professional CVs of Westerners. So, professionals from different fields seek to highlight their acts of charity and responsibility on their CVs. The authors explain that nowadays a CV that indicates that someone spent time with poor people in developing countries could make the difference between being employable or not.

1.8 - The White Savior Complex

The White Savior complex is one of the most relevant issues while researching voluntourism. This phenomenon was first presented in 2012 by a Nigerian-American novelist Teju Cole, based the concept of this "syndrome" on the "confluence of practices, processes and institutions that objectify historical inequalities to ultimately validate white privilege (Andersson & Höjer, 2020: 55). When considering this term, I am referring to white people taking advantage of their privileges to "save" people in poor countries. The authors who debate this issue express that the "saviors" who come from wealthy countries see themselves as superior to those living in the global South. This complex is often related to voluntourism, since voluntourists, for the most part, are western people who usually travel to "help" countries where non-white Caucasian people live, with a kind of colonialist mentality (United Nations Association of Spain, 2022). The white savior complex is also a term often used to describe a narrative metaphor common in cinema, literature, and other media that depicts stories of a white person, often from a Western country, who assumes the role of savior or hero in order to save people of color or non-Caucasian from their problems or from their oppressors. This discourse often reinforces the idea that white people are superior and more able to resolve conflicts than people of color (Bandyopadhyay, 2016)

In real-life situations, the White Savior Complex refers to a pattern of behavior in which a person from a Western country seeks to "rescue" or help people of colour in a way that reinforces their own sense of superiority and reinforces systems of power and privilege. This phenomenon can be seen in volunteer tourism, in those wealthy people from Western countries who travel to impoverished areas of the global South to provide aid without considering the long-term consequences or the root causes of poverty and inequality, leaving their aid and saving power short-term ineffective.

The White Savior Complex can undermine the social psyche and perpetuate stereotypes of people of colour as helpless victims who need to be saved, rather than recognising their abilities and potential to solve their own problems. It can also reinforce power imbalances and paternalistic attitudes, rather than promoting mutual respect and collaboration between people of different backgrounds. Certainly, there are countries with very deep political and economic problems, but it is also true that people should not be undervalued or undervalued as human beings because of their political, economic or social influence on their environment. Every human being is valuable and capable in his or her humanity, regardless of social class or ethnic group.

CHAPTER 2 - THE BUSINESS OF VOLUNTOURISM

2.1 - The business of voluntourism

After having presented different ideas involved in the concept of voluntourism, it should be noted, as mentioned in previous pages, that the voluntourism niche has grown exponentially in the last decades. It is believed that this "boom" is due to the high demand for new and different experiences. It has become clear that people who make this type of trips make them for various reasons, either to live enriching experiences, to make a change in society with altruistic intentions, to get out of the routine or simply to improve the Curriculum Vitae. Due to this great demand, organizations and agencies have seen the opportunity, considering it as a business idea, preparing and providing this type of services.

In this chapter, I carry out a detailed analysis of the *Plan My Gap Year* (PMGY) website in order to get an overview of how voluntourist experiences are sold, thus obtaining information on various aspects of the organisation. The analysis will cover several dimensions, including the homepage of the website, the information it provides about the activities it carries out, the range of projects offered, as well as the reviews provided by users. In order to make this analysis possible, qualitative methods were used, taking into account direct information from the website, as well as examining various public reviews of people who have travelled with PMGY.

2.2 – “Plan My Gap Year”

The website to be analysed is *Plan My Gap Year* (PMGY). In the information they offer about their organisation and services, they describe it as a safe, structured and social platform that offers volunteering, travel and immersion opportunities that provide hands-on experiences through direct engagement and interaction with the host communities. PMGY also describes their company as a world leader in affordable and reliable volunteer experiences, with more than ten years of experience in this area.

Plan My Gap Year, which offers its projects in the United States and the United Kingdom, offers on its website "structured programs for you to see the world and meet like-minded people, and most importantly, you are able to participate in meaningful volunteer work." On the information they provide about the company one can find different elements such as information about fees, training and support, and responsible travel.

2.2.1 - Affordable and honest rates

This is the first point presented on the PMGY website. In this section it is stated that the goal is to make volunteer programs accessible to travellers, regardless of their financial capacity. A very important point about the company is the transparency of the fees that volunteers pay, making clear that volunteers know exactly how much money goes to the local community.

This organization assures that the services offered are considerably more affordable than other similar organizations, due to the style of business they run: PMGY focuses on online presence, thus being an independent organization with no outside financial interests. This means that the company emphasises that they are an independent organisation, thus operating autonomously and not depending on external agents, which allows them to have more control over their financial processes and decisions.

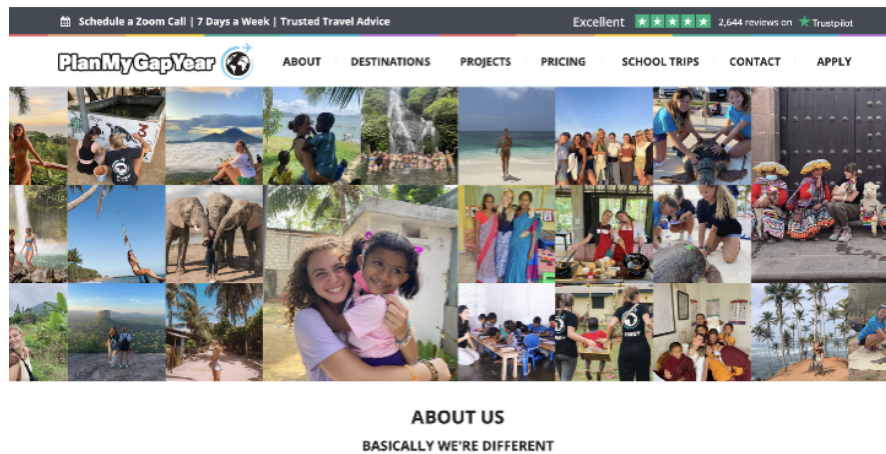
2.2.2 - Training and support

Plan My Gap Year emphasises that its team works constantly to support volunteers at every step of their journeys, namely online information, detailed manual guides and accessible means of communication, stressing that "no question should go unanswered". PMGY ensures that all volunteers will receive a sort of guidebook with tips on how to prepare for their trip, with information on what to pack or how to obtain a visa and general information about the local community.

2.2.3 - Responsible travel

A very important point that this organisation stresses is about responsible travel and volunteering ensuring that they work very hard to make the experience safe for the volunteers and the host community. One of the requirements to be a volunteer is that a criminal background check must be presented before travelling. This document must be issued by an official government or police agency. This is to ensure that volunteers are trustworthy and of good moral character.

2.3 - First impressions of the Website



Plan My Gap Year website

This is the first impression when looking for information about the organisation: a collage of photographs, which contains photos on the beach, photos of elephants, photos of adults hugging children and photos of volunteers with locals wearing typical dresses. Just below is the phrase "about us - basically we're different" wanting to demonstrate once again that they make the difference in terms of other similar organisations.

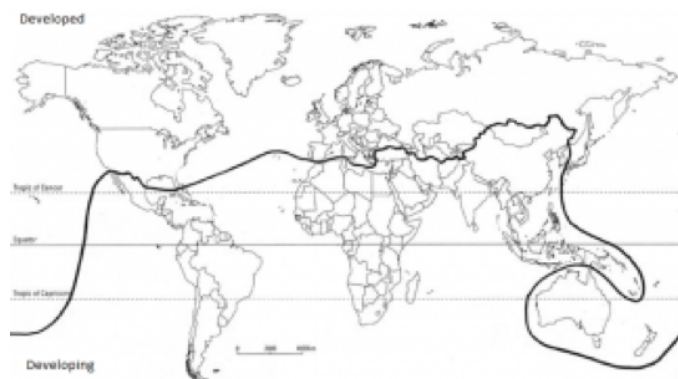
2.3.1 - Countries where *Plan My Gap Year* operates

This is a map that can be found on PMGY's website, where it is shown the different options for volunteering. Here the viewer can see that there are countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, areas that if we consider the information discussed in Chapter 1, are considered as developing areas. Another very important point clearly visible in this image is the idea of the Global South. All the countries marked in this list are below or near the line of the Southern hemisphere, just like the line stipulated by Willy Brandt.

⁶ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/about-us/>



Plan My Gap Year website



If we take a look at the countries listed on the PMGY website, we can see that the predominant countries on the list are Asian, African and Latin American countries. The only other option is Greece, a European country and a major tourism destination. In the same vein, it is important to note that this list includes countries that, according to the United Nations, belong to the group of least developed countries in the world, such as Cambodia, Nepal and Tanzania. This makes it evident once again that some of the most visited countries are still considered to be the poorest and most underprivileged areas.

2.4. - Projects of *Plan My Gap Year*

The website offers a wide range of projects in different areas, the options available on their official website are as follows: childcare, English language teaching, health projects, wildlife projects, living with elephants, local community projects, mental health projects, projects for under-18s, and one-week projects. It is important to analyse each of the projects separately, as each of them has very specific characteristics including the photographs they use, the

⁷ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/about-us/>

⁸ [brandt-line-after-forty-years-more-north-south-relations-change-more-they-stay-same](#)

language and the countries where they offer this particular type of service. This also demonstrates the breadth of options for these trips.

2.4.1 - Childcare Projects

Plan My Gap Year offers various options for volunteer childcare projects in countries such as Cambodia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ghana, India, Sri Lanka, among others.



CHILDCARE VOLUNTEER ABROAD PROJECTS

Plan My Gap Year offers a wide range of safe, meaningful, affordable childcare volunteer abroad projects in [Bali](#) • [Cambodia](#) • [Costa Rica](#) • [Ecuador](#) • [Ghana](#) • [India](#) • [Peru](#) • [South Africa](#) • [Sri Lanka](#) • [Tanzania](#) & [Vietnam](#). You don't need any experience, just 100% commitment to get involved.

PMGY programs start on two dedicated start dates every month throughout the year and participants can join us from 1-24 weeks. Volunteers are provided with an extensive pre-departure support service, airport pick-up, orientation, meals, accommodation, project transportation and local support throughout.

The majority of participants are first-time solo travellers, therefore safety and support is our top priority to ensure you have a positive volunteering experience.

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Plan My Gap Year website

As can be seen in the image, one of the first sentences that appears in the presentation of this project is that in order to be part of it, no experience is needed, it is only required that the volunteer show commitment. Following the information that is available, it can be seen that volunteers can decide the duration of their experiences, with a range of one to twenty-four weeks. It is clear that during this time participants receive a comprehensive pre-travel service, orientation, meals, accommodation and transport at all times. Finally, the main priority is that the volunteer has a positive experience.

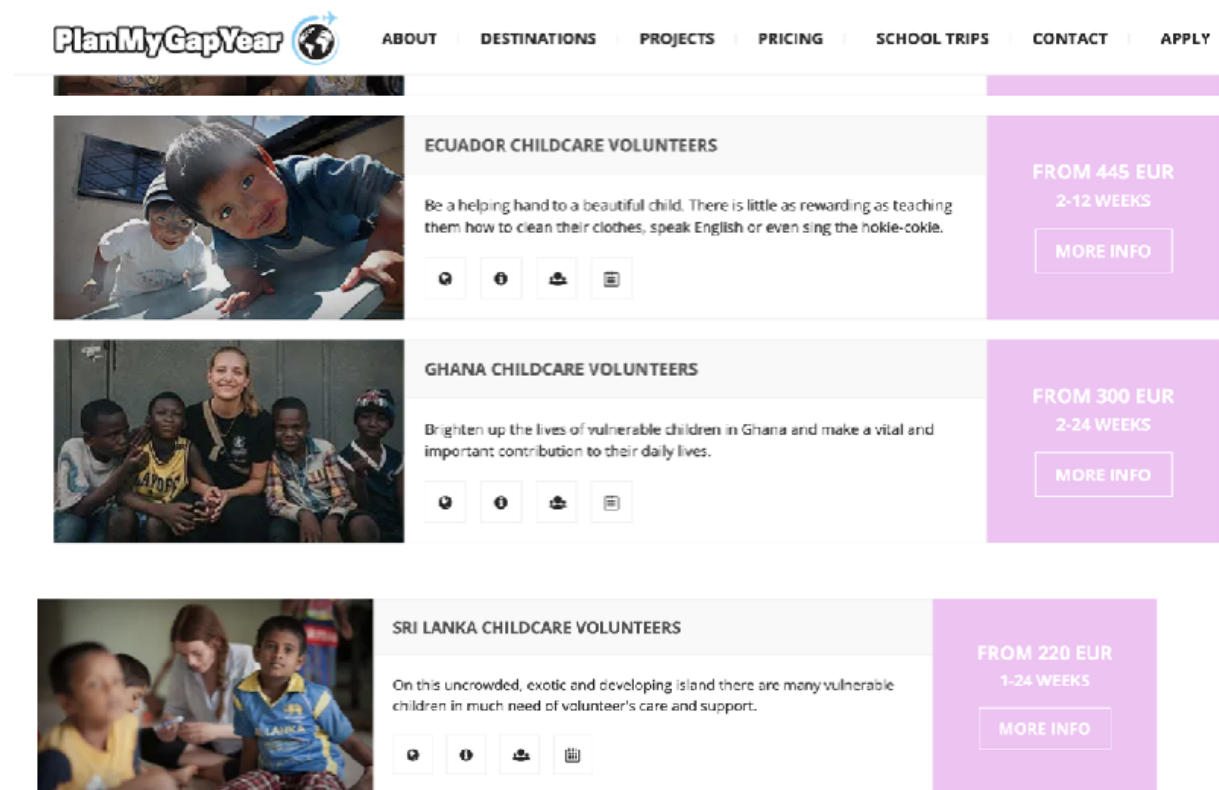
If one also looks at the pictures at the top of the image, they are mostly adults with children of colour. This point once again reinforces the connection between voluntourism

⁹ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/childcare-volunteer-abroad-projects>

with paternalistic ideas and the White Saviour Complex, as mentioned in Chapter 1, this "syndrome" is related to white people travelling to 'help' countries where non-white people live.

2.4.1.1 - Childcare "packs"

A more detailed overview of the childcare projects, allow us to know the "packs" available in various areas and prices. Each option has a brief description along with the country, price and a picture.



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Plan My Gap Year website

This image is an example of the above-mentioned structure. The first option presented is Ecuador, it has a brief description of the volunteer work that is done, which is about teaching children to wash their clothes, speak English and sing hokie-cokie. This is a description with a phrase that says "Be a helping hand with a beautiful child". The image of this particular project is a photograph of two children with painted faces.

The next advertisement is for a child care project in Ghana, the image of which features a young girl with white complexion, along with four black children. The description of the

¹⁰ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/childcare-volunteer-abroad-projects>

advert talks about “brightening the lives of vulnerable children in Ghana and making an important contribution to their lives”.

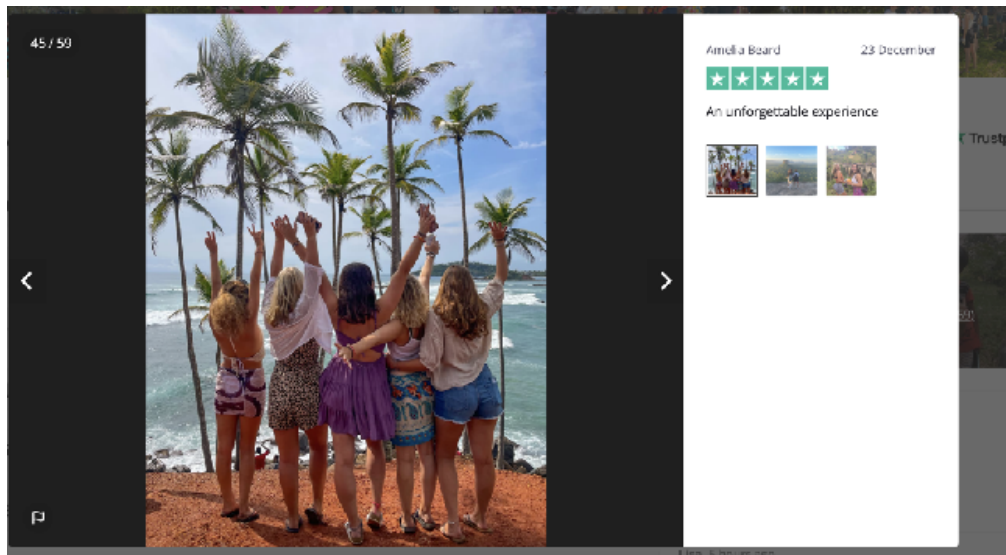
The third option to be discussed is Sri Lanka, which is described as an “uncrowded” and “exotic developing island”, where many vulnerable children are in great need of care and support. Along with this description, several children are seen together with a young woman. All options offer availability from 1 to 24 weeks of volunteering.

With these examples, several common factors can be seen, such as the images, where children and young caucasian people predominate. Another common factor among these are the descriptions, the words “vulnerable”, “help”, “exotic”, among others. As for the prices, these vary according to the destination and the duration of the volunteer placements, and as mentioned above, one of the most common factors is the duration available, which is from 1 to 24 weeks.

In analysing these factors, the undercurrent of reinforcing stereotypes and paternalistic ideas towards the Third World, as mentioned in Chapter 1, can be highlighted. Marie Clark (2021) discusses how the idea of the Global South as 'poor' and 'exotic' is accentuated, creating an image of power between North and South, while promoting a sense of guilt on the part of Westerners, with a need to 'save' the vulnerable.

2.4.1.2 - Childcare Project Reviews

Underneath these options for childcare volunteering opportunities, we find reviews from users who have already participated in these experiences. The structure of the reviews is based on the name of the person, the date the review was posted, the number of stars the person chooses to rate their experience (ranging from one to five stars) and a comment either describing or criticising the experience. In addition to this, some users add photographs that were taken during the time of their volunteering.



Plan My Gap Year website

In the image above we can see on the left side a picture of five girls overlooking the sea and palm trees in Sri Lanka. The rating the author of this review, Amelia, gives on the PMGY website for her experience is 5 stars, the highest rating, as well as commenting "An unforgettable experience". This type of review is very common on the PMGY website. Some photos of a beautiful view, photos of the walks that people do during the volunteering, with some short comment saying "magical experience", "I had a wonderful time", or as in this case, already mentioned above "an unforgettable experience".

FA

Freya Ashworth

1 review NP

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

✓ Verified

Apr 13, 2023

My experience at PMGY Sri Lanka was...

My experience at PMGY Sri Lanka was amazing. I loved the volunteering and we also got a lot of free time. My favourite parts were the weekend trips, some I did with PMGY and others the coordinators helped us organise ourselves. After spending six weeks I think I know Sri Lanka really well and I've seen everything I wanted to see. The coordinators are very helpful and kind, and the sisters are wonderful. The friends I made in Sri Lanka are genuinely friends for life. Thank you PMGY for a great experience.

Date of experience: April 05, 2023

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Trustpilot website¹³

¹¹ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/childcare-volunteer-abroad-projects>

¹² <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/6437a0e93aa5ae00126adb16>

¹³ Trustpilot is a review platform that many companies around the world use to ensure costumers their transparency

The review presented in this case contains more details than the previous one, the author is called Freya, who published her review in April 2023. Also with a 5 star rating and in Sri Lanka, the first word the user uses about her experience is “Amazing”. She talks about how she loved volunteering and how she had a lot of free time. It is important to note in this example that the author does not mention the work she has done during her volunteering, but only focuses on the tourism experiences she had in the host country.

Another of the most common examples of reviews that can be found, like the one shown above, is that people tend to describe what their personal experience was like while volunteering, describe how they travelled, how much free time they had, how many friends they made.

4.8 / 5 • 91 reviews

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Accommodation: The accommodation is okay but you can't expect western luxury. The food is every week the same. I generally liked it, but after a while it was not so exiting anymore to eat every week the same food. Breakfast and dinner are included with tea and coffee but you have to pay water by yourself. So fresh cold water is not included. The beds are okay if you're a man you have the advantage of a bigger bed. The blankets were to cold for the time of year I was there, in August and the beginning of September I needed two blankets to stay warm. The house isn't well isolated and quite cold. The doors are often noisy. The bathrooms are often wet because the shower isn't separated. If you don't expect a western standard you'll be fine. The mamas keep the house clean and wash the laundry for a small amount of money. However if you give your clothes into the laundry you got to be aware of some of it probably not going to return. This happened to me, so I'd recommend not to put valuable clothes into the laundry. There's a bar right across the street and they play really loud music most of the nights, the music doesn't help to fall asleep. There's also a dog which can be really loud at night. I liked about the accommodation that it some greenery in the outside area.

Verified, collected by Plan My Gap Year (PMGY) Chat 14

Plan My Gap Year website

The review at the top, in this case, is a little different from the previous ones. At first glance one can see that the rating is lower, this one is 3 stars out of 5. There are several sentences that are important to highlight in this particular review. The first point that is made in the review is about the accommodation: "The accommodation is fine but you can't expect western luxury". The author then goes on to comment about the food, which he says was fine, but every week it was the same menu. He criticises the water, the cold at night, the noisy

¹⁴ <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/63239b623b45b20012101329>

doors, the wet bathrooms. And again, he makes a comment about the West: "If you don't expect Western standards you will be fine". With this review it is clear that the social and geographical separation of the West, as an area with more comfort and higher living standards. Thus separating the global south as an exotic, less luxurious, uncomfortable destination; and on the other hand the global north or west (as mentioned in this review), luxurious, with higher standards of living.




The author of this review, like the author of the example shown above, does not mention the work he has done while volunteering. He also does not mention any details about the host community, the people he met or the things he learned during his trip. His commentary is only focused on the accommodation.

2.4.2 - Medical volunteer abroad projects

Plan my Gap Year offers a wide range of medical volunteer projects abroad, including nursing, physiotherapy, midwifery, dentistry, surgery and paediatrics. PMGY offers these programmes in various destinations such as Ecuador, Ghana, India, Peru, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Vietnam.

The organisation offers support services during the whole time before, during and after the stay. They offer airport pick-up, food, accommodation and local support at all times. It is not specified at any point what skills or type of experience the users who want to do this type of medical volunteering should have. The following is the information provided by the PMGY website on this kind of medical volunteering abroad.

2.4.2.1 - Medical volunteer projects packs

	<p>ECUADOR MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS</p> <p>As a medical student, witness a healthcare system unlike your own. A new insight into traditional beliefs will leave you well amazed and cultured.</p> <p>📍 ⓘ 📅 📅</p>	<p>FROM 540 EUR 2-12 WEEKS</p> <p>MORE INFO</p>
	<p>GHANA MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS</p> <p>A fantastic opportunity to gain experience and insight into the health care system. Learn from local staff and get involved in supporting them.</p> <p>📍 ⓘ 📅 📅</p>	<p>FROM 385 EUR 2-24 WEEKS</p> <p>MORE INFO</p>
	<p>INDIA MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS</p> <p>Gain practical medical experience and insight on PMGY's medical program in India, whilst bringing support to some of Delhi's poorest people.</p> <p>📍 ⓘ 📅 📅</p>	<p>FROM 300 EUR 2-24 WEEKS</p> <p>MORE INFO</p>

While analysing the Plan My Gap Year website

It can be observed that the presentation of the travel packages available in the website is similar in structure and design. Again, on the left side, there are images with photographs of women that are supposed to be related to the type of volunteering, along with the country, the price, the possible duration and the description of the volunteering in general.

The first option shown in the example is medical volunteering in Ecuador, with a picture of a woman in a doctor's or nurse's outfit checking a child. The description says that “as a medical student, you get to witness a health care system different from your own”. The description goes on to say that “you will be amazed” by traditional and cultural beliefs. As in the examples above, these travel options also match the length of time, which can be from 2 to 24 weeks. This experience costs from 540 Euros.

As for medical volunteering in Ghana, the description of medical volunteering in Ghana states that it is “a good opportunity to gain experience in the health system”, learning from, being part of and supporting the locals. This description does not specify that the volunteer should at least have some degree of experience or previous studies in the field of medicine. The photograph shows a woman with a stethoscope, checking a baby.



The last example from this branch is the medical volunteer package in India, the picture shows two Caucasian girls apparently examining a patient with features from the Indian sub-continent. The first information about this volunteering is that “you can gain medical experience” and also “support the poorest people in Delhi.” With the three examples


¹⁵ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/medical-volunteer-abroad-projects/>

presented, several common factors can be observed, such as the photographs, all of which feature women in medical uniforms treating children and non-Caucasian people. At the same time, words such as “medical experience” and getting to know a different healthcare system are repeated. The possible duration of the volunteering stays between 2 to 24 weeks and the prices vary according to the country.

2.4.2.2 - Reviews of health care volunteering experiences

The reviews available on the PMGY website from people who chose these programmes are generally very positive and with good ratings. Below are some of the reviews written by users who have had these experiences.

 **Aubrey Gibson**
1 review  US

 Oct 4, 2021

Highly recommend

I had an amazing experience participating in a twelve-week medical volunteer program in Quito, Ecuador. I lived with a host family and was fully immersed in the language and culture of Ecuador. In the hospital, I had the freedom to choose which department I wanted to be in and was able to explore a variety of specialties and learn a lot about healthcare. The program was incredible and there was always support available if needed.

Date of experience: October 04, 2021

Trustpilot website

The text above it is titled "Highly recommended". Aubrey Gibson, the author of this review, who puts the location in the United States, writes about how his 12-week volunteer experience in Quito (Ecuador) was “amazing”. Aubrey continues his text by writing how at the hospital where he volunteered, he had the freedom to choose which department of the hospital to work in, as well as explore the different medical specialties, thereby learning “a lot” about medical care. This review is considered important, since this user remarks that he had a wide freedom to decide between various medical specialties without the necessary qualifications and expertise.

¹⁶ <https://www.trustpilot.com/reviews/615b3a891a17d94a4006e3bf>


Lisa
 1 review • NL


 Verified Mar 15, 2023

Medical program PMGY Tanzania
 For 6 weeks I did the medical program with PMGY Tanzania and I had the best time ever. I've learned so much at the hospital, but also from all the people I've met. Made so many new friends! Also the coordinators and other staff are so nice and helpful.

Date of experience: February 18, 2023 17

Trustpilot website

On the other hand, Lisa from the Netherlands comments on her 6-week experience in the medical programme in Tanzania. In the summary, the author writes that she “had the best time”, as she “learned a lot in the hospital” and also made “many new friends”. This review is a clear example of the basic standard, top scores, and brief descriptions of and how many new people and friends they met. The common factor in many of these is that there is no detailed commentary on exactly what activities they did in the hospitals, what role they were assigned or how they positively impacted the local community.

2.4.3 - Wildlife conservation volunteering

Another of the projects with the highest visibility and participation in Plan My Gap Year are the wildlife and animal conservation volunteers. The essence of these volunteering projects is the contact with wild animals and animals of prey. PMGY offers such experiences in various countries such as Indonesia (Bali), Ecuador, Greece, Peru, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Thailand. The options are very varied, offering turtle, elephant and the “Big 5 projects”¹⁸. Like the other projects mentioned above, wildlife conservation programmes can last from 1 to 24 weeks, offering an extensive list of services before, during and after the volunteer experience.

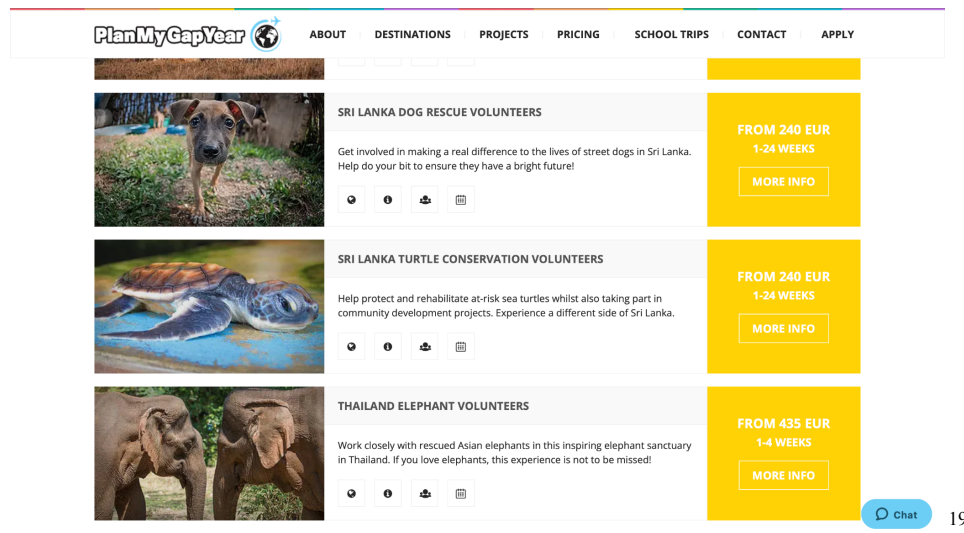
In the presentation of this volunteer programme there is a variety of photographs of people and animals, predominantly elephants and dogs, but also monkeys, turtles, ostriches, parrots and a llama. It is important to note that some of the animals that appear in the photographs do not appear in the list of options available on the main page.

¹⁷ <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/6411858f4db77b00121633ac>

¹⁸ The “Big 5” is a term coined in the late 19th century during the colonial period in Africa, it refers to the most difficult and most dangerous animals to hunt on foot. The animals that form part of this group are the Lion, Leopard, Brown Buffalo, Rhinoceros and the Elephant. Nowadays this term is used as a marketing strategy among safari companies to sell their “African Big 5 Safari Trips”.

2.4.3.1 - Wildlife and Animal Conservation Packs

Here is an example of the possible species conservation volunteering options available:



Plan My Gap Year website

The first option seen in the image above is volunteering with rescued dogs in Sri Lanka, the photograph representing this project is of a small dog looking directly into the camera. Next to it is the description that comments on how you can get involved in making a “real difference” in the lives of street animals, helping to secure them a “bright future”. In the second proposal, also in Sri Lanka, there is a photo of a small turtle, and it is described about how you can “help to protect and rehabilitate turtles at risk, and it also adds that there is a possibility to be part of “community development project”, without specifying this point in particular.

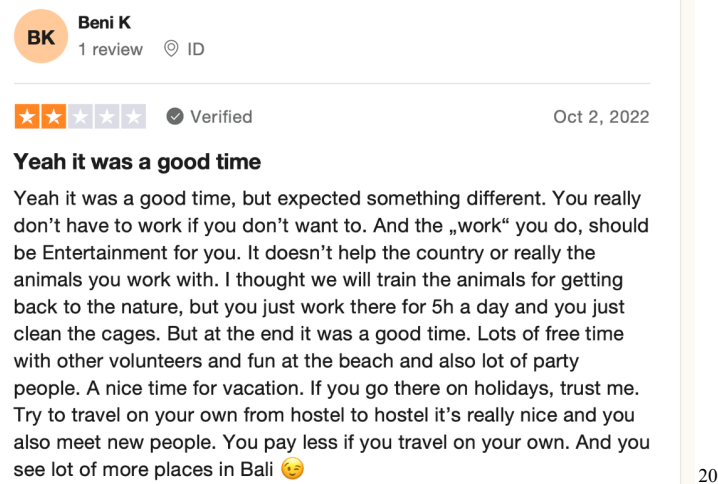
The third option in the example is that of elephant volunteers in Thailand. It talks about how you can work closely with rescued Asian elephants in an elephant sanctuary in Thailand. The brief description concludes with the sentence "If you love elephants, this experience is not to be missed!". This is accompanied by a photo of two elephants.

2.4.3.2 - Reviews of species conservation volunteer experiences

The reviews from users who participated in these types of volunteering experiences are undoubtedly the most diverse in terms of ratings and opinions. These types of volunteering

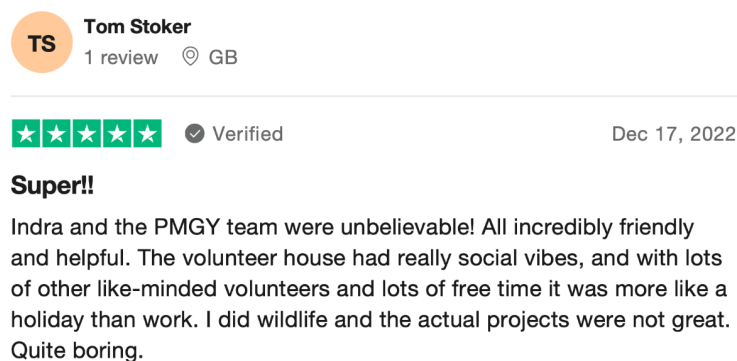
¹⁹ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/wildlife-conservation-volunteer-abroad-projects>

have undoubtedly received the most criticism and low "stars". Predominantly comments of complaints due to the exaggerated time off from the "tasks", some people also comment on their concerns about whether these projects are actually generating any real or positive impact on communities and species. Here is an example of this:



Trustpilot website

User Beni K. writes in his review published in October 2022 about his Wildlife volunteer experience in Bali with PMGY. Beni starts by writing that he had a "good time", but that his expectations were different. The author states that "you really don't have to work if you don't want to", and that the work you do during this time is a kind of entertainment. He goes on to say that he does not believe that this volunteering really helps the area or the animals there. The user mentions that he had a lot of free time, and that he felt that his stay was completely a holiday rather than volunteering. Because of this, he rated his experience with two stars.

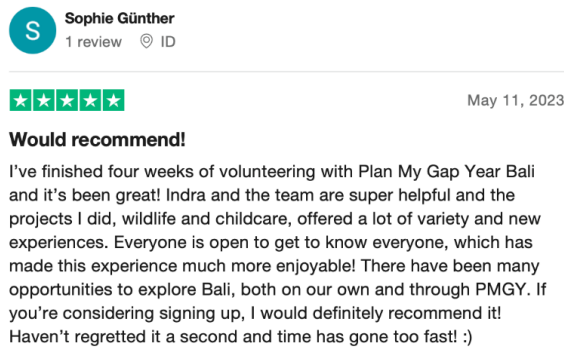


²⁰<https://www.trustpilot.com/users/633957e6fc6590001360b2ba>

²¹<https://www.trustpilot.com/users/633957e6fc6590001360b2ba>

Trustpilot website

Tom Stoker, on the other hand, gives the highest rating to his wildlife volunteering experience, but agrees with the previous user about his experience, saying that he had a lot of free time and felt "it was more like a holiday than work" time. He concludes his review by saying that the projects he did were boring.



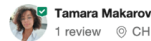
A screenshot of a Trustpilot review. At the top left is a circular profile picture with the letter 'S' and the name 'Sophie Günther'. Below the name, it says '1 review' and 'ID'. To the right of the name is a five-star rating, with all five stars filled in green. To the right of the stars is the date 'May 11, 2023'. Below the stars is the heading 'Would recommend!'. The main text of the review reads: 'I've finished four weeks of volunteering with Plan My Gap Year Bali and it's been great! Indra and the team are super helpful and the projects I did, wildlife and childcare, offered a lot of variety and new experiences. Everyone is open to get to know everyone, which has made this experience much more enjoyable! There have been many opportunities to explore Bali, both on our own and through PMGY. If you're considering signing up, I would definitely recommend it! Haven't regretted it a second and time has gone too fast! :)'. At the bottom right of the review snippet is the number '22'.

Trustpilot website

Another common factor that can be found in the reviews of these volunteer placements is that people do several volunteering projects at the same time, either several animal conservation projects or even combine them with childcare volunteering.

These combinations are most common in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Ecuador, where there are different projects such as childcare, health projects and wildlife projects; PMGY offers packages to do several of these in the same destination country. I consider the example below as one of the most detailed reviews of such projects:

²² <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/645cad780076810013ffce11>



Tamara Makarov
1 review CH



Apr 4, 2023

Unsure of it's sustainability

I volunteered in Bali (wildlife program) and in Sri Lanka (turtles) for each 2 weeks.

The accommodation, the food and the staff were great, as well as the touristy and social opportunities.

However, I do not feel like I have made a big difference, if any at all especially when it comes to turtles programs in both destinations :

In Bali, I have understood that they do not get released except if another turtle is rescued to take their place. They are kept there for educational purposes, and personally that's not why I came for, and it made me really upset to learn that we don't actually help the species in the wild but just help imprisoned ones to survive in their rather small buckets. Also, some of them were born in there and are probably going to grow up there, which is revolting.

In Bali, I also quite didn't understand the dog's project's purpose since a lot of them were born in the sanctuary. The other ones (Wildlife center and Mangrove project) are quite good according to me.

About the Sri Lanka's turtles project : I liked the fact that baby turtles are released 1-2 times per week, and I found the whole program better organized. Nevertheless, only baby males are released. Females are kept for 3-5 years apparently but I do not have any evidence that it's true (it probably is though, but I wonder : how can animals that lived their whole life in a bucket, fed with dead fish, can expect to survive once released in the wild ? In the same way, we have no data about the survival rate of the released turtles. We therefore don't really know if the project is efficient or not). They also kind of breed the turtles and it is pretty unclear to me why.

Otherwise, I found it pretty decent (especially the beach cleanings). For all these reasons I think that PlanMyGapYear is for sure a good experience if you want to travel somewhere in a comfortable and fun way, but not necessarily the organization to choose if you want to make a real impact. I think the programs should be examined by specialists of sustainability on a regular basis and improved in some ways to make sure that it is the well-being of the animals that is targeted and not of the tourists/volunteers.

It was still an positively unforgettable experience for me.

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While analysing the Trustpilot website

The most relevant comments from this user are about the sustainability of the projects in which she volunteered. She writes that she feels she did not make a big difference in the two projects she participated in. In Bali, the turtles in the wildlife project facility "are not released unless another turtle is rescued to replace them." Apparently, the turtles at this site are used only for educational purposes. Something that disappointed this user about her experience is that they do not help the turtles in their natural habitat, but mainly help them to survive in the small buckets where they are kept.

About a similar project that this user went to for two weeks in Sri Lanka, she admits that she liked it a bit more, as some turtles were released every week, but only the male turtles, which was a bit confusing for her. Another very important thing to consider in this review is that the author says that PMGY are a very good option if people want to travel in a "comfortable and fun way", but continues saying that if volunteers want to make a "real impact" it is not the right organisation to choose.




²³ <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/642c5f9bada94500129001a8>

2.4.4 - Volunteering abroad under 18

Plan My Gap Year has a section offering volunteering opportunities for people under the age of 18, taking into account that 18 is considered the age of legal adulthood in many countries. The experiences offered for under 18s are very varied, covering all the experiences that have been presented in the previous projects. The general presentation of this project, as in the previous ones, is a collage of photographs, in this particular one predominantly group photos, photos with children and photos of people with landscapes in the background. A different element that is found below this collage is a strip that says and has the logo of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically highlighting the goal of quality education, life in water and life on land. However, when you try to "click" on the Sustainable Development Goals, no information is displayed.

PMGY offers options in destinations such as Bali, India, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Tanzania. The presentation repeats again that no previous experience is required, only commitment.

2.4.4.1 - Volunteer packs for children under 18 years

	GHANA DISABLED CHILDREN VOLUNTEERS Do your bit to help care for Ghanaian children with special needs. Assist local staff by getting involved in essential education and rehabilitation sessions.	FROM 300 EUR 2-24 WEEKS MORE INFO
	GHANA ENGLISH TEACHING VOLUNTEERS Help young children develop the skills that will help improve their future job prospects. Teach a variety of subjects such as English, Maths and Art.	FROM 300 EUR 2-24 WEEKS MORE INFO
	GHANA MEDICAL VOLUNTEERS A fantastic opportunity to gain experience and insight into the health care system. Learn from local staff and get involved in supporting them.	FROM 385 EUR 2-24 WEEKS MORE INFO

24

Plan My Gap Year website

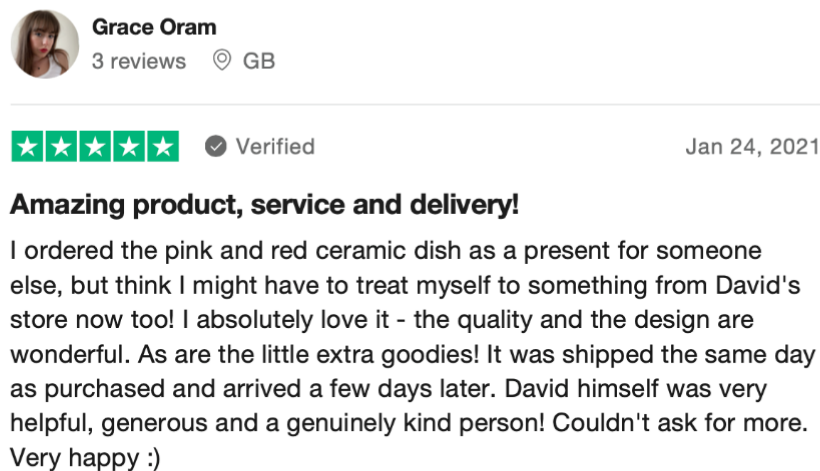
These are some of the volunteering options available for children under 18 at PMGY. First on the list is volunteering with "disabled" children in Ghana. The picture of this offer shows two blonde girls playing in a park with three non-Caucasian children. The description of this volunteer placement talks about how you can help "children with special needs" in Ghana, assisting local staff "by getting involved with education and rehabilitation sessions".

²⁴ <https://www.planmygapyear.co.uk/volunteer-abroad-under-18-projects>

The next option is volunteering to teach English to children in Ghana. Again there is a picture with a white girl next to children of colour and a description that talks about helping the children to improve their skills so that they can have better job opportunities in the future. The third option is also in Ghana, the photograph of this volunteering opportunity is the same offer that appears in the Health Care project.

2.4.4.2 - Reviews of volunteering experiences for under-18s

The reviews for these particular projects are not very abundant, but of the few that can be found, the ratings are high and there are very good comments on the experiences of the participants. A clear example is the following:



A screenshot of a Trustpilot review. At the top left is a circular profile picture of a woman with long brown hair. To her right, the name "Grace Oram" is displayed in bold, followed by "3 reviews" and a location pin icon with "GB". Below this is a horizontal line. Under the line, there are five green stars, a verified badge (a checkmark in a circle), and the date "Jan 24, 2021". The review title is "Amazing product, service and delivery!". The main text of the review reads: "I ordered the pink and red ceramic dish as a present for someone else, but think I might have to treat myself to something from David's store now too! I absolutely love it - the quality and the design are wonderful. As are the little extra goodies! It was shipped the same day as purchased and arrived a few days later. David himself was very helpful, generous and a genuinely kind person! Couldn't ask for more. Very happy :)"

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Trustpilot website

This user from Great Britain, comments that she spent two weeks volunteering in Sri Lanka. She says that in the first week she did about 4 activities, and in the following week of "volunteering" she did entirely recreational activities, trips to the beach, going on a safari, and visiting the local villages. This review may go some way to show what the author Lesley Hustinx (2001), wrote in her article "Individualisation and new styles of youth volunteering: an empirical exploration", about how the younger generation is not able to commit to such programmes for longer periods of time, and how they expect something in return after doing some altruistic deed, in this case, after a week of supposedly multiple acts of good charity, a week of fun and adventure awaits them.

²⁵ <https://www.trustpilot.com/users/5b75a0a44de5666d341e192b>

In this chapter an exhaustive analysis of the website of Plan My Gap Year was carried out, it was possible to see in an overview how services that combine tourism with voluntary work are sold. The first conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that voluntourism sells like any other recreational tourism experience, depending on the budget the client has to purchase a package that suits their desires. If we compare the main characteristics of voluntourism presented in Chapter 1 we can find some similarities. First, we can notice that most of the volunteers come from the Global North, and in some of the reviews exposed in PMGY it is possible to observe the countries where the volunteers come from, countries such as the United States, Holland or England. With the same order of ideas the most visited countries are countries that are considered part of the Global South such as Ghana, Sri Lanka or Ecuador. Another feature that could be observed that agrees with the information in Chapter 1, appears on the main page of Plan My Gap Year, where it is written that no previous experience is needed to become a volunteer (Denny 2021).

Another factor worth mentioning is about the images used to promote these services. The images fulfil a kind of pattern, there are photographs of non-Caucasian children (reinforcing again the reason why voluntourism is related to the Complex of the White Savior), photographs of baby animals and photographs of landscapes. Also along with the advertising images, words or phrases are often found that are related to stereotypes of the Global South such as “exotic,” “poor,” or “vulnerable.”(Clark, 2021; Pietsch, 2013).

With regard to the user reviews that took part in the PMGY volunteers, these can be linked to several points that were also mentioned in the previous chapter. A common element is that users only focus their comments on how their personal experiences were, how much fun they had, how many friends they made, or focusing only on the tourist factor. In the examples analysed, it was not observed that the participants talked about the positive change they made or what tasks they did during the volunteering work. This may be linked to the ideas of the first chapter, "True Altruism or Self-Interest?", which quotes author Hustinx (2001), who talks about how volunteers are more focused on their personal interests rather than purely altruistic motivations.

CHAPTER 3 - VOLUNTOURISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

3.1 - Voluntourism and social media

We currently live in an era that is dominated by the internet and social media. These tools have completely transformed the way we communicate, the way we relate to each other and above all, the way we share information about our lives. In the last decade, millions of people have dedicated themselves to sharing their lives through Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter and a myriad of other platforms. From "ordinary" people with a few followers, to influencers and celebrities, people are dedicated to showing what they eat, where they travel or whom they are with at any given moment. In the world of voluntourism, these trends have not been left behind, as we can currently find different photographs and videos of people who carry out this type of experience.

Clearly photography is one of the most common components of touristic actions, as photos are a good tool for capturing moments and keeping important memories (Larsen, 2006). It is very common to see photos or post photos on the most popular apps of social media experiences of encounters with friends. But when it comes to experiences of volunteering, the issue becomes more sensitive. The use of social media in volunteering has opened a door for volunteers to share their experiences. However, this window has opened space for challenges that relate to inappropriate representation of vulnerable communities. The publication of photographs or even videos during volunteering experiences has developed several ethical debates among authors, as it involves exposing poverty, exposing minors, and intensifying stereotypes (Sin & HeVer, 2018; Sara, 2017; Mostafanezhad, 2014; Donohue, 2021).

A term that Tyler A. Donohue (2012) uses to criticise the voluntourists and media who share photographs during their volunteering is "poverty porn". When she refers to this term, she talks about how the world's most vulnerable communities are exposed through photographs or videos that are posted on social media. This practice refers to the display of material of poor and vulnerable people for the purposes of entertainment, attracting an audience or superficial activism (Donohue, 2021). This term is also used to describe the material that some people post to gain "likes" and positive reactions on their social networks (Griffin, 2021). Although voluntourism is considered to be a practice that is altruistic and comes from good intentions, it can be related to "poverty porn", as some volunteering

organisations may use important images of poverty in order to attract people or raise funds. In turn, some of the participants in this type of volunteering end up sharing visual material seeking some kind of social validation in their environment and to generate sympathy or recognition.

A very controversial issue related to the type of photographs that voluntourists publish is the reinforcement of stereotypes about the Global South. As mentioned in Chapter 1, some voluntourist actions are a consequence of stereotypes of developing nations. Visual representations can emphasise the poverty and dependency of local communities. On the other hand, a hotly debated topic is the publication of photographs of children during volunteering experiences. This raises concerns about ethics and child protection, as non-consensual publication on social media can violate the privacy of individuals, especially children, and thus can also put their safety at risk (Gharib, 2017; Biddle, 2014).

Due to the debate and these problems related to voluntourism and its visualisation on social media, several campaigns and online accounts emerged; in a sarcastic and engaging way, they expose the negative side of voluntourists and influencers who expose pictures during their volunteering trips. Three examples will be analysed, first the campaign "How to get more likes on social media", then the case of "Barbie Savior" and finally the website of "Humanitarians of tinder".

3.2 - "How to get more likes on social media"

"How to get more likes on social media", is the title of a campaign created by the Norwegian Students' & Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH). Every year, the organisation runs an audiovisual campaign in a satirical style to raise awareness of poverty and development issues. In 2017, a video was published offering guidelines for young volunteers who want to capture and post every moment of their experience on Instagram or Facebook. This campaign in a funny way tries to raise awareness about how volunteers show images that portray local residents as helpless and passive.

The video is designed as a kind of "guide". It starts with a girl who posts a picture of herself and realises that she doesn't get many reactions, so she makes a plan to get more "likes" on her posts: to travel to Africa. From the beginning of her trip, she starts taking pictures of everything she sees, and she realises that just by writing in her post that she is in Africa, she starts to get more positive reactions. The video shows how the girl is taking

pictures with children, feeding them and teaching them. In one part of the video, it is written that "Suffering will give you twice as many likes", so the girl goes to the hospital and takes pictures with the sick. Finally, it is written that putting hashtags like #charities, #volunteerwe, #dogood and #children in the posts will boost the visibility of the posts even more.

This sarcastically styled video aims to convey a strong message about volunteer travel. A closer look at what this campaign is promoting suggests that they are sending out a warning to future voluntourists, so that they do not fall into the mistakes that many have made in recent years. The first message that can be obtained is about the true intentions of the volunteers; in this case, the girl's personal motivation was to get more recognition and reactions to the photographs she posted on her social networks. This point is consistent with information presented in Chapter 1 about the intentions that voluntourists have when undertaking these trips; it seems that it has become common for people to volunteer putting their personal interests before the interests of local communities in states of vulnerability. But it is also possible to connect with the analysis of the reviews presented previously in Chapter 2. Most of the users only talked about their personal experiences, but only a few of them took the task to expose the changes they made during their volunteering.

The second point made in the video is about the dignity of the local people. The girl from the beginning of her trip starts taking pictures of everything and everyone around her and immediately shares them on her social media. These actions may imply that the voluntourists consider poverty as some kind of exotic attraction and especially see local people as tourist attractions. By talking about dignity, *Raid Aid*²⁶ aims to encourage voluntourists to stop posting pictures that further propagate stereotypes. Another of the key points of the film is about the consent and privacy of local communities, especially children. *Raid Aid* also emphasises in this case how voluntourists post photographs on their social networks of people in vulnerable or degrading states without taking into account the privacy of the people photographed.

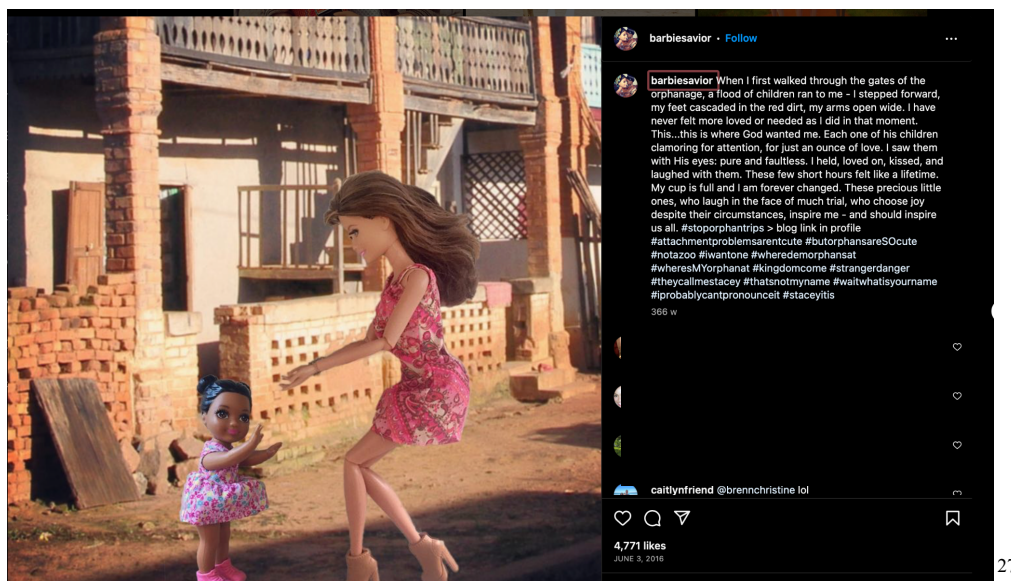
3.3 - "Barbie Savior"

Barbie Savior is a 2016 Instagram account. The account was devised as a satirical parody to give voice to issues related to representations of voluntourism on social media. The Barbie Savior account publishes photographs of a Barbie doll doing different volunteer activities in Africa, these photographs are recreated with inspiration from real photographs that

²⁶ <https://www.radiaid.com/about>

voluntourists have posted on their social media. Barbie Savior's posts are accompanied by ironic descriptions and hashtags that mock the stereotypical attitudes associated with volunteering. Through these posts, the idea that volunteering in areas of the global South could be reduced to simply a fashionable experience or an act of self-interest is exposed.

This account quickly gained popularity in 2016 and also generated a lot of debate about the ethical issues related to voluntourism. Many people found the concept of Barbie Savior as a way to expose problematic practices in the way volunteering experiences are represented on social media.



Instagram account of "barbiesavior"

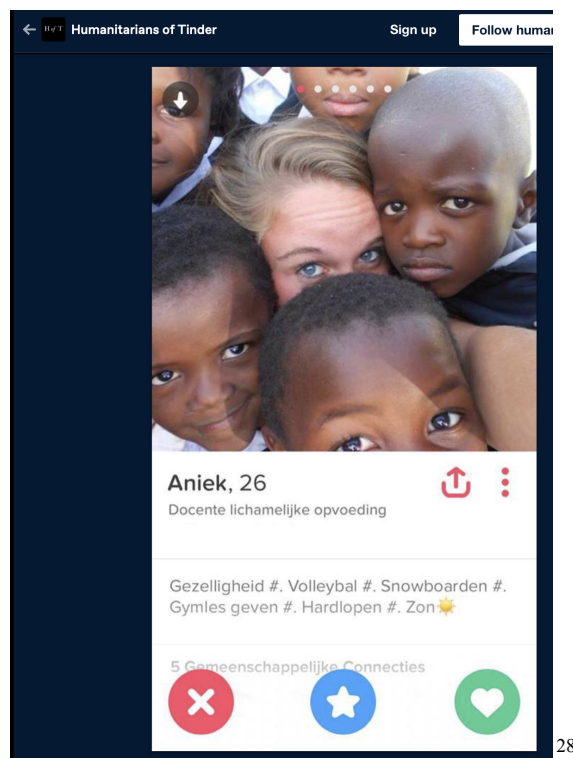
This is an example of the posting style of the Barbie Savior account. The image shows a Barbie doll next to a smaller doll that portrays a black girl, with a background that looks deteriorated. The most important thing about this image is the description. Sarcastically, the account writes the typical phrases that many volunteers put in their Instagram or Facebook posts when they publish photographs with children in an orphanage in a developing country. In addition to writing phrases romanticising this kind of experience, it emphasises the cheek of some voluntourists to post pictures with young children who have no connection to them. The hashtags show that this is clearly a post with ironic intent, the first reads #stoporphantrips. The Barbie Savior account wants to raise awareness of the issue of the White Savior Complex and how these volunteer trips are romanticized and exposed on social media.

²⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/p/BGMbwbZsfZk/>

3.4 - “Humanitarians of Tinder”

The most common social networks for sharing experiences through videos and photos are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tiktok. But voluntourists have also come to share this material on other less conventional platforms, such as dating apps. It is common knowledge that Tinder was created with the idea of providing users with a tool where they can connect and interact with other people in a romantic way. People using Tinder can decide the age range in which they are looking for compatible people, they can decide the range of their location, the description about themselves and also some profile pictures. What is expected when engaging with this kind of platform is to find pictures of the person in some nice scenery, portrait pictures or even pictures with their pets. But some people have taken to sharing pictures of themselves during volunteer trips, which has also become a focus of criticism among users.

Humanitarians of Tinder is a website that also shares its posts on Facebook and Instagram. The structure of the page is simple, it has the images that users share when they find a photograph of this style on Tinder:



Humanitarians of Tinder website

²⁸ <https://humanitariansoftinder.com>

The image above is a paradigmatic example of the type of images that can be found on the Tinder humanitarian website. The images posted are submitted by the public and chosen by the creator of the website. There are no statistics on how many photographs of this style are published on Tinder or similar platforms, but Nisha Toomey (2017) carried out an analysis of 100 photographs that can be found on Humanitarians of Tinder, concluding that at least 50% of these are published as the first photo of the 6 that Tinder allows, or even as the only photo. Regarding the descriptions, these are some examples of the postings Toomey analysed:

“Sam, 30, clad in a vest that displays his sizable biceps, appears to be rescuing a young child who wears a life jacket. Caption reads: Humanitarians, adventures, listener, part-time philosopher, chocolate coach” (Toomey, 2017: 155).

“Melanie, 23, carries a little boy in her arms: Down-to-earth do-gooder, I do what I can to give less privileged children the education they deserve” (Toomey, 2017: 156).

Given these examples, the author reveals that of the 100 photographs she studied, 96 per cent of the people who posted such photographs and descriptions are caucasian. As for the people posing next to them, 76 percent are black and the remaining 24 percent are brown or Asian. The author emphasises that of the 100 photographs, none of the authors pose next to another white person. Another important point that stands out is that 95 percent of the "others" are children (Toomey, 2017: 116).

Together with this information, the imbalance between the volunteer and the "other" becomes evident, raising an important ethical issue, because once again the intentions of the voluntourists, focusing on finding love by publishing stereotypical photographs with black children, come to light. The White Saviour Complex is also evident in this situation, taking into account that 96% of the people posting such photographs are white people trying to portray themselves as altruistic saviours.

After analysing these three examples of campaigns and accounts that in some way criticise the actions of voluntourists on different digital platforms, it is clear that the common point of view is that volunteers sometimes may not do not take into account that posting photos of their experiences together with locals can generate different consequences. Posting a photograph of people in a vulnerable state can perpetuate the aforementioned stereotypes of the global south, as well as impinge on the privacy and integrity of those involved. A photo that seems innocent or that is not published with any malicious intent can still affect the communities of the countries that are frequently visited on these volunteering trips.

CONCLUSION

This thesis provided a basis for observing several facets of voluntourism. I have examined how the phenomenon of voluntourism has become a sought-after business, allowing people who wish to perform altruistic acts access to populations in vulnerable conditions. The real motivations of volunteers are questioned, as well as whether Westerners travel to the global South because of inculcated colonialist ideas, the reinforcement of Third World stereotypes, and whether this may be connected to the White Saviour Complex.

From the first pages, this thesis describes the theory of voluntourism, its origin, main characteristics and possible inconsistencies between theory and practice. Through the analysis of different sources of information such as books, articles and opinions of organisations, on the one hand, and a detail analysis of the information retrieved from the websites of travel and tourism agencies offering voluntourism packages, it can be concluded that voluntourism, although apparently motivated by good and altruistic intentions, it can have a different impact.

The phrase so well known among world travellers – “take only the memories, leave only your footprints” - by Jefe Seattle, has become a meaningless phrase, as many people, when engaging in a type of tourism that “gives back” to the local communities, focus mainly on their personal experiences and adventures, without thinking that these actions may be related to colonial ideas or inculcated due to third world stereotypes, thus generating repercussions opposite to the true essence of volunteer work. Furthermore, the business of this type of tourism is extremely sectarian and classist. By this I mean that voluntourism is limited to people from rich countries who often go on voluntary holidays to developing countries or countries with high levels of poverty. This is also known as the global north “visiting” the global south.

It is complex to single out people for wanting to enjoy this form of tourism, as most often they are young people who want to do something good in order to do what they can “to save the world”. But this need to be saviours does not arise spontaneously. Colonial ideas and stereotypes that were created during the years of the global south are constantly transmitted by our environment. A cliché news item: "in Africa children are starving to death". But where exactly? Africa is a vast continent, not a country. And it is important to note that in North Africa there is wealth, there are elite countries where there is no famine. And this is just to mention one example, because there are films and documentaries about Africa and starving

children, but not only from African countries, but also from countries that are part of the global south, Southeast Asian countries and South America. All these ideas of the stories we are told or shown in audiovisual productions have contributed to sustaining the “white saviour complex” in the psyche of the western world.

Voluntourism is sold as a “life-changing experience”. The possibility of going on these trips is just a click away. As I have shown in the previous chapters, the most important websites in this niche offer travel packages with a wide range of possibilities, such as these agencies that offer an “all inclusive” experience. They use of eye-catching images in their offers, pictures of small children, images of baby animals and beautiful landscapes. These images are complemented by phrases such as: “be a helpful hand to a beautiful child” or “get the fantastic opportunity to get experience into the healthcare system”.

Without any educational training, volunteers can teach a language, without taking into account that many of the countries they travel to are former British colonies, so it is likely that the children speak better English than the volunteers themselves. Voluntourists pay money to go and loaf around in a hospital where the medical staff are likely to be poorly paid and where the volunteers may not even have medical experience.

Another palpable and undeniable reality is that of those tourists who volunteer with wildlife, who enjoy carrying out activities with animals that may be in captivity and who will probably live like this for the rest of their lives; perhaps they even live like this because of the high demand for voluntourism. In this regard, it is possible to observe this in the reviews that users share on the website showing their experiences where they visited Africa. The most common descriptions talk about how amazing and life changing it is to share with the wild animals, with the children, with the communities, the wonderful safari, the beaches and parties, the friends they made; but what is not observed in these reviews is how they contributed positively to the orphanage, or what changes they achieved in their two-week trip, or how many animals they saved and released from captivity; in other words, the contribution that the volunteer tourist makes to the host community.

It is also noted that only a few reviews spoke negatively about the experiences “three stars because it was a bit uncomfortable, don't expect western luxury” or a couple that can be found talking about how they did practically nothing productive in the few weeks they were frustrated about it.

It is imperative to mention that these reviews do not just stay on the websites and organisations that promote this type of "package tour". Voluntourists commonly share these memories with the rest of the world through their social networks, leaving publicly accessible evidence that they travelled to an exotic location and also went to 'help'. Sharing photos of locals reinforces stereotypes and entrenches social divisions, such as the white saviour complex.

Of course, the real intentions of the volunteers are also criticised, as when looking at these photographs, there is no other motive than to get some social recognition. The three campaigns analysed in Chapter 3 on "How to get more likes on social media", "Barbie Savior" and "Humanitarians of Tinder", aim to raise awareness about this issue, demonstrating that many of the volunteers may make this type of trip to get attention or find love; reinforcing once again the idea that the global north must take care of the global south so that they can save themselves, thus intensifying colonial ideas.

I conclude, quoting Sarika Bansal, editor of *The new humanitarian*²⁹: "If you struggle to assemble a basic IKEA bookshelf, think twice before signing up to build a house for a stranger in another country". The arguments that have been mentioned in this article demonstrate by far that voluntourism drives a lot of unhappiness and economic and social inequality for the host community, and that this should be an issue that should be talked about loudly in order to raise awareness. There are other ways to help people in other countries, without going on holiday and buying local products. If tourists want to contribute to the education of that community, approach the relevant authorities and find out ways to help. It is also worth considering, in the case of volunteering, that tourists really think about what they want, whether they just want to help to create an altruistic image in front of a social group and feed their ego through praise and feel better about themselves, or to bring about real and positive change in the host community, without the desire to be praised and famed.

Finally, it is recommended that before embarking on a trip of this kind, one needs to keep in mind that people of different races are not a tourist attraction, nor are children, and that no one should take advantage of the social or economic vulnerability of a person or group just to generate likes on their social networks. Travelling abroad and making people and communities in situations of poverty and vulnerability a tourist attraction is an insult to their human dignity and freedom.

²⁹ The New Humanitarian (formerly IRIN News) was founded by the United Nations in 1995. It is an independent, non-profit news organisation. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/content/about-us>

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