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Becoming an actor of small-scale development projects: A qualitative investigation into the experience of international volunteers.

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This research is a qualitative inquiry into the experience and everyday lives of international volunteers. Given the novel aspect of international volunteering in being a social phenomenon, this research was conceived with the aim to be an explorative study and to yield new elements with implications for future research. Indeed, the research participants account for a yet unexplored area of research which is their difficulty of becoming an ex-volunteer. This difficulty arises in social interactions in casual settings as they return to their original society, even years after the experience.

The research also aims at bringing about transformative knowledge in the inquired area of research and in the field of development. The research addresses these aims by providing invaluable insights that pave the way for future inquiry, even more so by contributing to prescriptive recommendations for the maximization of mutual beneficial impacts of international volunteering both for the volunteers and for the host communities. Most of these recommendations are directed towards acknowledging the role and responsibilities of sending organisations as gatekeepers between the volunteers and the communities.

Keywords: volunteer tourism; development; social interactionism; identity; grounded theory

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Globally, millions of people are travelling from Western to developing countries every year in a variety of ways, many with the intention of volunteering their time, energy and money in order to get involved in small-scale development projects. The variety of sending organisations and volunteering opportunities is immense and renders the estimation of the exact number of individuals who engage in these experiences more complicated. However, research has approximated the numbers to have risen from 1 or 2 millions in the 1990s to about 10 millions annually in the 2010s (McGehee, 2014; Benson & Wearing, 2011). The prevalence of participation in international volunteering projects seems to be ever growing and its discursive presence in the media, social media, and everyday life has generated increased attention on what has arguably become a new social phenomenon.

Small-scale development has had increasing interest and success over the past two decades in particular. Its popularity is connected to a shift in development approaches and practice, correlated with increased scepticism towards neo-liberal development strategies, for most of which economic development should be the focus and development is thought of as an end-result of linear progress[1]. Alternative approaches were formulated to counter such conceptions of development and "developing" communities. These alternatives arose from a number of paradigm shifts triggered by increasing concerns about the environment, global disparities, and by discourses inherited from the lessons of World War II and new social movements that first arose in the 1960s (Potter et al, 2004). Such alternatives to top-down practices of development advocate for a framework that would approach development as bottom-up, people-centred, inclusive, and participatory. Development ought to be apprehended by means other than economic growth and instead promote self-reliance, self-sufficiency, empowerment, and the realisation of human potential (Sen, 1999), accounting for ecological and social sustainability (Allen & Thomas, 2000).

These shifts in the discourse and practice of development occurred along with the increased presence of civil-based and non-governmental organisations in so-called

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[1] This is found is development theories such as modernisation theory, championed by Rostow (1960).

developing countries. The alignment with the reduction of barriers to travel, easiness to move around, and the acknowledgement of the opportunities and challenges of modernity indulged (mainly) middle-class people to embrace a cosmopolitan identity and seek unusual travel experience (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Bauman, 1998).

This research seeks to provide insights into the motivating factors for individuals to engage in international volunteering projects and to understand their experience in the field, as well as in their primordial social contexts.

Research aims

There are two main aims to this research: explorative and transformative. Indeed, this research does not wish to create knowledge in a void. Instead, it seeks to uncover unexplored facets of the international volunteering phenomenon that would bring about new foci of research and new information that could be used by the field of local development. In order to satisfy these overarching aims, the research also strives to create knowledge that is based on the provision of valuable insights which would be as encompassing in regards to the volunteers' experience as possible. Furthermore, this research provides an attempt at addressing the need for more sociological perspectives to contribute to this field of inquiry that has been expressed in previous research (McGehee, 2014).

Methodology used to address the subject

The methodological stance for achieving the research aim is that of an in-depth inductive qualitative inquiry into the experience of individuals implicated in the field of local development. This research seeks to include perspectives from a wide range of individuals in order to generate data that would be as rich and diverse as possible. Such data collection was conducted via the use of grounded theory, which allows for the minimisation of the researcher's influence on the data, in order to preserve the narratives gathered in the semi-structured interviews with the participants. Grounded theory also provides a framework of data analysis, which advocates the use of

constant comparative methods in order to produce flexible and adaptable theories in a dynamic fashion.

Significance of the findings

The findings of this research provide substantial implications for future research in volunteer tourism inquiry. They have brought a greater understanding on how to maximise mutual benefits in the practice of local development via the importance of building inter-personal relationship, of the length of the stay, but more importantly of the approach and pre-conceptions with which one ought to enter the field. One of the major findings that has been completely overlooked in the existing literature is that of challenges posed to ex-volunteers in their interactions with people that have never engaged in the same experiences as they have. My participants reported great disparities with their entourage and a malaise in evoking their experiences that forced them to engage in impression management techniques, at best, or to silence their experience, at worst. These findings stress a great need for sociologists to engage with this field of research.

The quality of the insights provided in this explorative research also suggest the need for inquiries that would adopt the same methodological approach in order to generate as much apprehensive knowledge on this new social phenomenon as possible.

Finally, the prescriptive recommendations that my participants greatly insisted upon, adding to the existing comprehensive ones found in the literature, suggest a pressing need to find systematic ways of insisting upon the responsibility of sending organizations in enlightening their volunteers, which would be beneficial to all parties involved.

The international volunteering experiences that are studied in this thesis belong to an area of research that is relatively new in academia and that developed mostly in the last decade or so (Wearing & McGehee, 2013a; McGehee, 2014). In the development cooperation discourse, the lives of individuals involved in development aid have beenwere relatively overlooked, especially that of volunteers[2] (Mangold, 2012). Research on this subject was tackled mainly by academics coming from the fields of tourism and management via the use of sociological and psychological approaches, where the experiences we are inquiring in this research are overarchingly described as "volunteer tourism."[3] This chapter seeks to give a theoretical review of how this concept was explored in the existing literature.

The chapter will be divided in 5 sub-chapters: the first one will provide a background of volunteer tourism, looking at its history and definition; discussing its terminology; its increased structural support; and how it is promoted and discussed via marketing strategies. The following sub-chapters will then address VT by following the chronological fashion of the experience (prior, during, after the experience), starting with the profusely discussed debate about the motivations of individuals to participate in VT programmes. This research will then provide an overview of the elements conveyed in academia about the experience itself. The fourth chapter will look at the perceived positive and negative impacts of VT, which were discussed mostly in reference to the impacts on the volunteer tourists. Lastly, this review will look at academics' suggestions on how to improve VT programmes, both for the sake of the communities they are targeting and the volunteer tourists.

I. Background of Volunteer Tourism

1) History and definition

Wearing (2001) was one of the first scholars to address the VT phenomenon thoroughly in an inter-disciplinary manner. He departed from the exploration of the

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[2] Unless specified otherwise, "volunteers" in this research refers to international volunteers.
[3] Thereon mostly referred to as "VT".

history and context of tourism and travelling, explaining how travelling used to be tedious and potentially life threatening up until the 19th century, when means of transportation developed and it became easier and safer to journey. It then became accessible for intellectuals and elites to embark upon such journeys for reasons other than conquests and gathering goods; rather, it became a means of reward associated with success and social status, to be able to experience life away from the Western World.

Since then, with fast growing technological advances in terms of transports and communication, the contraction of space has allowed for a more democratic, fast-paced motion of goods and people over long distances in a much shorter time span. It is around that same time that alter-globalisation movements boomed, mostly in the 1990s. Alter-globalisation movements advocate for a fairer globalisation[4] as a means to reduce inequalities instead of widening them. These movements create alternatives to neo-liberalism and instead promote other forms of development and criteria of well-being. Its main approach is to be inclusive, innovative, protective of the environment and cultural diversity, and people-centered (Martell, 2010; Pleyers, 2010).

The boom of organised mass tourism in the past decades brought increased attention, leading to intensified scrutiny, monitoring, and criticism. This, combined with changes in mentality in the development world, cynicism about neo-liberalism, as well as rising concerns about the environment and cultural preservation, gave rise to rather consensual arguments about the important drawbacks of the practice of mass tourism in a variety of ways (Griffin, 2013).

Wearing sums up the discourse regarding these issues at that time:

> Tourism in the free market economy uses and exploits natural resources as a means of profit accumulation and has been described as the commercialization of the human need to travel. This profits the tourism industry promoters and has led to the exploitation of host communities, their culture and environment. (2001:ix)

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[4] Unlike anti-globalisation movements who fiercely oppose globalizing processes, alter-globalisation movements believe in embracing globalisation and in utilizing all its technologies and innovations for purposes directed towards challenging neo-liberalism.

It is at this discursive turning point that "alternative tourism" emerged. Alternative tourism encompasses a variety of different forms of tourism, considered more "ethical" and less "superficial", and its most important features rely on sustainability and authenticity (Wearing, 2001; Wearing and McGehee, 2013b). Ecotourism, for example, became widely popular in the 1980s and 1990s (McGehee, 2014) and was described as a form of alternative tourism that relies on a way of experimenting "preserved" and "uncontaminated" nature and culture in a sustainable way (Boo, 1990:10). The uncontaminated aspect is crucial for it gives the tourist a sense that he/she[5] is appreciating something that is untouched, which makes the experience all the more unique and authentic to the individual.

It is quite consensual in the literature that VT has become a predominant model of alternative tourism (Mcintosh & Zahra, 2007; Hammersley, 2014) and that it represents perhaps the most sustainable of all forms of alternative tourism[6], given that it implies an intent to benefit both hosts and volunteers via engaging in meaningful interactions (Lyons & Wearing, 2008; McIntosh and Zahra, 2007). Hammersley (2014) is one of the scholars to inscribe VT in a framework of alternative tourism as well as one of alternative development. The latter is alternative in the way that it is local, people-centred, and opposing meta-narratives of development as linear progress (Devreux, 2008; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Volunteer tourists are pursuing a form of a more authentic, just, and sustainable way to travel and by doing so, were originally assumed to actively challenge the practice and promotion of mass tourism, as it reinforces neo-liberalism and its harmful consequences (Smith & Duffy, 2003; Wearing, 2001; Mustonen, 2007).

Perhaps the most quoted definition of VT is from Wearing's first extensive study on the topic, referring to volunteer tourists as:

> Those who for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to under-take holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some

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[5] Thereon in this thesis, the masculine pronouns will be used as a neutral reference to both genders for narrative reasons.
[6] Examples of other forms of alternative tourism, are eco-tourism, cultural tourism, or backpacking (Hammersley, 2014).

groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment. (2001:1)

McGehee and Santos (2005:760) define it as "utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need." The wording in each definition carries great revelations about the approach one has to development and what it means to volunteer – this matter shall be discussed further in the section below. Among all the definitions available, it is the existence of altruistic and pro-social motives that are the reasons why *volunteer*[7] tourism is considered separate from conventional tourism (Mustonen, 2007).

 Some key numbers are described in the Tourism Research and Marketing report from 2008, which provides a glimpse of VT still accurate today:

- Volunteer tourists are more likely to be women than men. [8]
- Seventy per cent of volunteer tourists are aged between 20 and 25.
- Motivations for volunteer travel include a mixture of volunteering, exploring other cultures, and working and studying abroad.
- Many volunteer tourists source their own placements once they arrive at their destination.
- Ninety per cent of volunteer tourists travel to Latin America, Africa or Asia.

(in Wearing & McGehee, 2013b:14)

2) Terminology

Since the sparkled interest in international volunteering, there were many debates in literature and popular culture to find the right terminologies and concepts for describing the phenomenon (Wearing, & McGehee, 2013a). Terminology is important since it is determinant in the construction of public imaginaries about a concept

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[7] "The concept of 'volunteering' is founded on notions of altruism and self-development, often involving working for a cause that the volunteers believe in so as to feel that they have accomplished something worthwhile" (McIntosh and Zahra, 2007:543).

[8] The fact that volunteer tourists are often women has been noted in the literature (Brown & Morrison, 2003; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Knollenberg et al, 2014), although there is no conclusive explanation as to why that is.

(Bailie Smith, 2013). Although "volunteer tourism" seems to be the popular consensus, it is not unanimous and certainly not consented by the people in the category it is supposed to represent (Mostafanezhad, 2014a).

> A variety of definitions of volunteer tourism and the volunteer tourist have been developed, but a singular agreed-upon definition has not been determined. (Knollenberg et al, 2014:924)

Sin proposes an alternative term for VT: "international service-learning" (2009:482). It marks a difference with "volunteering" – which bears the moral value of someone "granting", sacrificing their time and money for the benefit of others – because it suggests instead that there is an element of active learning and of personal development. To me, this represents perhaps the healthiest way to conceive and convey the role of these experiences.

Mostafanezhad (2014a) is one of the few scholars to actively look at and critique the terminology of VT. Her investigation brought to the fore the fact that almost no volunteer tourist knows or uses the terminology "volunteer tourism" (of 40 participants in her research, none used it). This is mainly explained by the fact that the label of "tourism" is pejorative. The participants of the study indicated that "tourism" suggested a highly superficial experience to them, contrary to the terms "volunteer" which suggests an active search for meaning and authenticity, and "travel" associated with independence and experience (ibid).

> Theoretically, volunteer tourists' self-perception as non-tourists contributes to emerging theories regarding the role of authenticity in volunteer tourism experiences. (…) Ultimately, despite the perhaps more nuanced and complicated understandings of tourism in academia, the concept of tourism continues to connote a certain level of superficiality among some groups that can undermine claims of authenticity by the volunteer tourism industry.
> (ibid:383)

Arguably, it is not only the term tourist that raises eyebrows. In the development sector – mostly among actors in national or supra-national institutions –, the term and role of "volunteers" are not taken quite seriously (Devereux, 2008), although much of the small-scale development sector relies on it. Devereux argues that, due to the

structure of development aid, "the development sector has generally found it hard to take seriously the work of 'volunteers' in an industry increasingly dominated by international agreements, high finance, large-scale programmes, and professionalism" (ibid:361).

Wang (2009) argues that although individuals are generally against being labelled as tourists, they are juggling this with their will to preserve this status of observing outsider as a means to maintain distance, take time to witness events, and remain candid so as to be excused of cultural faux-pas. This status indeed provides them with the opportunity to be able to choose when to participate and when to be tolerated not to.

Throughout the review of existing research, I will mostly refer to the concept under study as "volunteer tourism", since it is the most commonly used terminology in the literature. However, this will not be the case in the rest of the thesis, since I do not find it the best fit to describe the phenomenon inquired and neither did my participants.

3) Organisational adaptation

Volunteer tourism is undoubtedly a booming phenomenon, as we have seen previously. This section concerns itself with indicating how the will for people to venture into these experiences is increasingly backed by structural support. This support is obviously interwoven with awareness about the rapidity of globalisation and about the need for people and structures to adapt to multiculturalism due to the contraction of space, and to the job market demands in terms of personal skills and experience.

This structural support is apparent in education – e.g. sending students for semesters abroad, as a mandatory or optional part of their formal learning process. Governments also offer opportunities for their citizens to complete civil services abroad in the form of sponsored leaves or as part of state-funded programmes (Mangold, 2012; Duportail, 2014; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Mangold (2012) argues that there is a significant rise in the offer of VT programmes in most of Europe, where more and more people take gap years before starting education or between graduation and a career (Simpson, 2004; Jones, 2008). This is manifest in examples such as the

popularity of Germany's *Weltwärts*[9] (Mangold, 2012), Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011), or the United States' notorious Peace Corp.

VT is also very much supported and facilitated by the corporate world in the form of sponsorships, corporate retreats, or sponsored paid leaves due to increasing focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in recent years (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011). There is a significant marketing aspect to CSR, as an increasing number of companies are looking to acquire good reputations and are pressured to be involved in philanthropic actions (ibid).

Given the boom of the volunteering sector, rising interest and structural support (educational, governmental, corporate), there is a very significant marketing aspect to VT that ought to be addressed in the next section.

4) Portrayal and promotion of volunteer tourism

VT is a phenomenon that is deeply embedded in the media and popular culture in general, which is especially significant given the age of its core population, for whom social media and the Internet are essential platforms for the formulation of public imaginaries and for marketing outreach. Marketing is crucial to look at given the instrumental role of the media in the creation of reality (Bourdieu, 1998). Mostafanezhad argues that there is a significant "humanitarian gaze" that transpired in recent years (2014b). Celebrities participating in poverty alleviation and catastrophe relief play a huge role in feeding this trend, along with their actions being highly promoted through a variety of media[10].

The discourse used by sending organisations is one of clichés, with catch phrases revolving around "making a difference" and perpetuating Western aspirations of saving the global South, oversimplifying poverty and development (Smith & Font, 2014; Mostafanezhad, 2014b). The discourse of making a difference – sometimes also indulging a "realistic" approach of suggesting that changing at least one person's life is possible – is well-articulated in social media, websites, and blogs in particular.

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[9] "Towards the world."

[10] Be it television, social media, or websites like "Look to the stars" – a website dedicated to news and information about celebrity philanthropists.

Although public marketing is often depicting volunteering as a way of taking the role of the saviours and portraying a "save the world" approach (Tiessen & Heron, 2012), the media platform also contains articles in blogs, social media, or online papers that are discouraging individuals to participate in VT, expose its negative impacts, or share negative experiences (Biddle, 2014)[11].

There is a certain consistency, however, in the images that represent humanitarian encounters in the media, which sustains "broader trends in popular culture where the conscious consumer may purchase cosmopolitan citizenship" (Mostafanezhad, 2014b:114). Mostafanezhad warns against the "starving baby advertisement" and the instrumental usage of children in developing countries to create aesthetics of poverty, overshadowing the real problems caused by inequality. She mentions the "photographic surveillance" (ibid:115) of the South by the construction of this imagery, which reproduces binary power relations between "the gazer and the gazee." This is related to Edward Said's production of Orientalism in opposition with the developing world via the propagation of stereotypical imageries of the South (1978). It's a way to project the colon with the "other" – something also perpetuated in early anthropology[12]. Mostafanezhad, in her extensive study on the portrayal of VT, identifies three main photographic patterns that volunteer tourists take as tokens of their experience: "(1) the volunteer tourist holding a single child; (2) the volunteer tourist(s) surrounded by several children; and (3) group photos of the volunteer tourists with the host community members" (2014b:115). This imagery contributes to false promises of authentic and intimate encounters through humanitarianism. This is portrayed profusely in travel blogs and social media that depict and advertise the "authenticity" of the world traveler (ibid). Such story telling and image propaganda play a huge role in lifting people's expectations regarding VT experiences.

Due to the attention to VT in the media and the humanitarian gaze, Mostafanezhad deplores the consequences of the normalisation of humanitarian action, supported by the affective aesthetic imagery and discourses promoting a commodified, apolitical

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[11] The list of advocates and sceptics of VT on the Internet in different formats is too immense to be dealt with in further details, but the source given here is a good representation of this view of VT.

[12] E.g. picture of Evans-Pritchard surrounded by Sudanese boys in the late 1920s, in Mostafanezhad (2014:115).

practice of development (2014b). These arguments are also found in most of the influential literature about VT, which stresses – and disapproves of – the commodification of VT (Wearing, 2001; Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Indeed, although VT started as a way to participate in alter-globalisation practices of development, it is now deplored that the mediatised humanitarian gaze contributes to its depoliticisation and individualisation (Mostafanezhad, 2014b). Since VT is a type of tourism where tourists pay to engage in development or conservation-oriented projects, it is now admittedly an outstandingly growing niche market (Wearing, 2001; Guttentag, 2009; Mostafanezhad, 2014b); which is the case nowadays for ethical consumers in general, not only applying to alternative tourism but alternative forms of consumption in general (Mustonen, 2007). Therefore, VT can be considered an international commodity that is consumed and marketed as such (Lyons and Wearing, 2008). VT organisations are considered as active agents of commodifying people and places for the aesthetic consumption of self-indulgent tourists, and contributing to a privatized and competitive industry with little actual regard for ecological values and sustainability (Lupoli et al, 2014; Smith & Font, 2014). "VT operators will use a range of market signals to suggest quality. Website layout (i.e. ease of navigation) and appearance (professional look) and content (photographs, testimonials and information) influence volunteers' company choices" (Smith & Font, 2014:946), and use approaches comparable to any other market, looking to appeal especially to youthful age groups (Lyons et al, 2012).

Bailie Smith and Laurie encapsulate the dreaded, observed by-product that "when a neoliberal emphasis on formalisation intersects with international volunteering, colonial and postcolonial imaginaries of development are simultaneously reinforced" (2011:546). The corroboration of this outcome is further explored in the "What Now?" section.

II. Motives for Becoming a Volunteer Tourist

The motives that trigger individuals to engage in VT experiences were extensively studied in academia since the early attempts at explaining the phenomenon, with the incorporation of theories coming from the disciplines of psychology and sociology.

The main themes addressed in this section correspond to the literature's dominant accounts of people's motives in doing VT.

1) Seeking authenticity in an uncertain world

It is often contended in the literature that one of the main factors of engaging in VT experiences is a pressing search for meaning and authenticity, as a response to post-modern insecurities and increasing existential anxiety caused by the felt lack of meaning, sense of self, and order in societal structures (May 1950). The literature has covered two overarching functionalities of engaging in VT: the first one is existential and the second is performative. Although these two theoretical approaches are interlinked, their motivating functions are somewhat different. The existential function is a *response* to the felt lack of authenticity and meaning caused by the current organisation of society. The performative function serves as an incentive to participate in VT by describing the participation as an act of consumption, thus providing a *means* of creating and performing one's identity.

Scholars who tackled the quest for authenticity and meaning as an incentive to engage in VT have used two interlinked theoretical approaches. The first one comes from existential philosophy, drawing upon the works of philosopher such as Heidegger, Sartre, and de Beauvoir, as a way of explaining the identity crisis triggered by increased individualisation that has been taking place in a context of modernity (Wang, 1999). Indeed, the argument rests on the idea that division of labour and society has become less relevant to one's identity. Individuals' identities are no longer fixed but have rather shifted from an external determination to self-determination. Such philosophy rejects the essentialist idea that something *is* and asserts that individualities are forced in a process of *becoming*. While self-determination can be liberating by freeing individuals from their social situatedness, it can admittedly be a source of great existential anxiety since individuals are forced to endorse great responsibility for finding meaning and taking action to construct their life narratives.

Wang (1999) argues that the search for authenticity in the act of traveling is a response to people's experience of a loss of authenticity of their own *self* in their society and daily existence. It has also been argued that the quest for authenticity is

stimulated by a will to sample life elsewhere (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Other studies interested in the phenomenon of (domestic) volunteering also argue that individuals would tend to volunteer in a search of meaning, often due to a certain alienation related to their current social or professional situation (Rodell, 2013).

Existential anxiety is also explained in the literature as a consequence of a loss of rites of passage, which are useful in establishing clear identities. A great array of research has been formulating theories relating VT experience to pilgrimage. Indeed, they connect VT and pilgrimage by using the concept of liminality, whereby the traveller follows the same steps as for a rite of passage: separations, liminality, and incorporation (Mustonen, 2007; Grabum, 1989; Van Gennep, 1960). The VT experience then occurs in this liminal state, after the exit of the individual's original context, and before he returns. Mustonen (2006) refers to this space as the *liminoid*: "tourists make a step into the liminoid when the transformation from everyday life (profane) to holiday (sacred) occurs. This shift resembles the process that pilgrims go through" (ibid:72). VT is here associated with the same intentions of a pilgrimage, where existential answers are found in a quest for meaning that requires a geographical separation from everyday life. This relates to a matter raised by McDonald and Wilson (2013), which is that volunteer tourists often ponder about the authenticity of the place they are about to enter and how much it has been protected from the profanities of global capitalism.

This quest for existential authenticity and identification (Bauman, 2001) finds its compensation by means of consumption. The process of *becoming* and self-determination is rendered possible – or forced – by the individual's existence in a consumerist society (Bauman, 1998). It is the social signification behind what we eat, wear, and buy (or choose not to buy) that we are in a constant negotiation of socially defining who we are through out audiences' eyes (Goffman, 1990). It is via "appropriativeness" that the "I" gets impressed upon others and that identities get negotiated (Cooley, 1909; Mead, 1997). Indeed, we continually create social, imagined selves that are projected outwards and exist by means of social interactions.

Sin (2009) argues that in regards to VT, all the choices involving the trip are ways to perform a "self" both for external audiences and inward self-actualisation. In fact, he notes that his participants seem to consider their experience as another thing under

their belt that they can use at any given time to enhance their performance in social encounters such as job interviews or casual conversations, as a token demonstrating their worldly and conscious self.

Consumption is all about liking and doing the *right* things. With technological advances such as Facebook, we can now also know what anybody likes in real time at any moment. New social media have increased the platforms for performing identities and disclosing our choices and actions. As we are constantly manufacturing different selves and taking on different roles in the variety of social interactions we are faced with, there is now also a pressing urge for individuals to consciously create virtual selves. Unfortunately, hardly any research has been concerned about the link between social media and VT (Wearing & McGehee, 2013), although it admittedly plays a huge role in the participation in VT. The amount of blogs and other forms of performative portrayals of people's VT experience should instigate further research inquiries. Mostafanezhad (2014b:111) touches upon such orchestration of the VT experience:

> One woman runs up to the group of children playing in the tires beyond the jungle gym and sits in the middle of them. She motions her friends to take a picture of her. Surrounded by several children smiling and playing games, she then picks one of the children up and motions to her friend to take another photo of her with the child. Undoubtedly, these images will become Facebook profile pictures.

It should be noted, however, that achieving self-realisation via consumerism, especially in relation to VT, is not accessible to everyone. As Bauman points out, not everyone can be in the ranks of the sensation-seeking travellers; the world is made up of *tourists* and *vagabonds* (1998). This is expressed more evidently in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in which self-actualisation at the top of the pyramid unconditionally depends on the satisfaction of all underlying needs (1943). In fact, consumption is a way of making *distinction* apparent (Bourdieu, 1984; Mustonen, 2007; Bauman, 1998). Consumption choices are ways of affirming and/or producing one's identity by distinguishing or assimilating himself from or to the others (Wearing, 2001).

The theoretical link made in the literature between VT and consumerism as a way of explaining and analysing participation has great implications for devotion to the special importance of marketing. Indeed, volunteers participate in certain projects more than others arguably because of the way they were marketed to them, as is the case for any other product. By consuming this good, the individual is also symbolically buying a lifestyle that is appealing to him,, and that he sees himself share and perform in given social contexts (Goffman, 1990; Bauman, 2001).

Another theme that has been evoked in the literature in relation to the concepts above is the idea of the "consumer redemption" (Mostafanezhad, 2014b), which consists in the legitimisation of consumption as a means of participating in a "global economy of repair", whereby ethical consumption is redemptive of destructive past actions such as disregards for the environment. This is exercised by participating in VT or by the consumption of "ethical" products: "the making of the empathetic consumer-cum-cosmopolitan can be observed at the grocery while purchasing a bar of ethical chocolate, drinking fair trade coffee and placing it in an eco-friendly burlap shopping bag while wearing RED jeans from the Gap" (ibid:113).

In the literature, the main critique that arose from the implications of existential anxieties and consumerist justifications for engaging in VT is that this pursuit is thus not directed towards the other but towards self-determination alone.

2) Altruism versus egoism

Most of the research about VT has been conducted from the 2000s onwards. Generally, it went from an enthusiastic promotion of the positive impacts of VT, to rising scepticism, in-depth analysis and monitoring of the phenomenon, to adaptive prescriptions (Wearing & McGehee, 2013a). Most of the literature, however, remains primarily concerned with pre-trip motivations revolving around the altruism versus egoism dichotomy, with a general belief that they are the two over-arching motivations for participating in VT (Knollenberg et al, 2014; Wearing & McGehee, 2013b; Brown and Letho, 2005). These same debates are also transpiring in attempts to understand people's motives to do domestic volunteer projects (Manatschal & Freitag, 2014).

Becker (1976) defines altruism as the action of reducing one's own wealth to enrich someone else's. It is a concept bearing much moral value, which brings about the dangers of some scholars making unintended judgement on the honesty and intentions of the volunteer tourists, which is problematic in a context of scientific research. Mustonen (2007) gives such example of prescriptive altruistic motivation: "it should be performed voluntarily and intentionally and without expecting any external reward" (2007:98), also mentioning the concept of "pseudo-altruism", whereby the individual is not considered altruistic since he might actually expect a form of external reward. Much of the research in this area is actually concerned about finding ways to categorise volunteers by scaling how much altruism plays a role in their motivations to do VT (Mustonen, 2007). Volunteers are often put in one of two categories: the 'volunteer-minded' or the 'vacation-minded' individual (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Brown & Letho, 2005). The features of these categories are that "there are volunteer-minded tourists who really want to help and there are vacation-minded tourists to whom volunteering activities bring some interesting and entertaining elements to their holidays" (Mustonen, 2007:111). Each category possesses different underlying motivations for participating in VT. The one that has received more interest is the vacation-minded tourist, who possesses four major motivational dimensions: "cultural immersion, giving back, seeking camaraderie and seeking educational and bonding opportunities" (Brown and Letho, 2005:487).

Research in the literature has found ways to assess the levels of altruistic motivations of individuals. However, most of the scholars have sidestepped this by openly saying that their participants were endorsing egoistic motives. Dann (2007) contributed to academic narratives of describing such motives via the "push" and "pull" factors. The push factors account for socio-psychological motivations to engage in travelling experiences, whereas the pull factors are determinant of the destination where the individual imagines fulfilling these desires. He is one of the few scholars to explicitly suggest ego-enhancement factors as the main drives to undertake touristic activities. Main reported desires were related to: "the escape from a perceived mundane environment; exploration and evaluation of self; relaxation; prestige; regression; enhancement of kinship relationships; facilitation of social interaction; novelty; and education" (Brown & Letho, 2005).

The focus of investigation explored above has not rendered a consensual agreement as to why people volunteer (domestically or internationally). Rather, recent research has laid the grounds for a less dichotomous understanding of volunteer tourists' motives, which encompasses both altruistic and egoistic incentives, and which is more dynamic – accounting for the fact that motives are not fixed and evolve over time (Mustonen, 2007; Knollenberg et al, 2014).

> In volunteer tourism, altruism, ethical dilemmas, pursuit of individuality and sociality combine. Which one of these is the main motivator, depends on the situation. In many cases it is not possible to state whether behaviour of individual volunteer is motivated by altruistic motives or ego-centric motives. (Mustonen, 2007:105)

3) Volunteer motivations: A complex picture

Despite ongoing efforts to determine which factors are most influential in an individuals' participation in VT, the significant lack of consensus has led most scholars to accept the difficulty of the task due to the complexity of people's decision-making strategies.

Grabowski (2013) argues that motivations tend to vary from one individual to the other depending on their age, life experience, wishes for the futures, reflexivity, and education, among many things. Moreover, individuals themselves often report that their motivations are subject to change over time (Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). Furthermore, no volunteer tourists are likely to be influenced by just one motivator, but are likely to be affected by a number of them at any given time (Brown and Letho, 2005). This consideration is more comprehensive and more realistic given the dynamic nature of human motivation and self-justification for our actions. The specific character of VT as an activity comprising different undertakings, namely volunteering and tourism, obviously generates complex justifications for participating in it. This is particularly enhanced by what we have explored before concerning the conceptualisation of VT as a consumption product, which means that any individual consumes it in ways that he makes significant via performative social interactions. Mustonen comments on this matter that "consumers can fulfil their different needs at

the same time. They can be tourists, they can meet and help the Other, they can make friends - and this all with the 'clear conscience'" (Mustonen, 2007: 107).

McGehee (2014) expresses the wish that the dichotomy in the debate of self-interest versus altruism has hopefully passed and that scholarly authors can embrace a more complex apprehension of the volunteers' motives. This is especially relevant considering that actual consequences of the volunteers' actions might not be overly determined by their original motivations. Indeed, someone engaging in VT with a strong will to "help out" might have a far worse impact on the host community than someone who comes with egoistic motivations[13]. The "will to improve" does not guarantee actual positive results (Li, 2007).

III. The Volunteer Tourism Experience

This chapter will look at how the VT experiences of individuals were explored in previous research. Although this specific inquiry is not extensive in the literature, there are some aspects that need to be noted as they relate to the findings of the research. It will cover how volunteer tourists experienced interacting in a new culture and how the length of their participation might relate to their experience.

1) Interacting in a foreign setting

An aspect of the VT experience that was explored extensively in the literature is the – sometimes problematic – connection to host communities. Indeed, it is often reported by volunteer tourists that power relations in the field cause distance between them and local people (Hammersley, 2014). Mangold (2012) reports her participants' experience as sometimes discomforting. Everyday life is a challenge as volunteers are "struggling to do the right thing", "it's hard whatever you do" (ibid:1498). Choosing how to behave in any situation becomes an exhausting task. The new situation abroad puts individuals in a context in which they are forced to re-learn everything about how to behave and be themselves. They cannot get out of their apprentice position and are called upon their words and actions on a daily basis. Thus arises the difficulty

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[13] This is especially highlighted in the findings.

of determining the "right" things to do and the appropriate behaviours for different situation (ibid). The difficulty of knowing how to interact has been explained by some as a lack of "critical literacy" (Androetti & Warwick, 2007), which translates into the development of contextual cultural and political awareness, and denotes the lack of understanding and preparation as some volunteers approach the field (Hammersley, 2014). The volunteers' lack of understanding about the local culture and social codes thus becomes an issue in capacity they might have in benefiting from a meaningful, enriching, and life-changing experience.

2) Length of the experience: Implications

The amount of time spent in a community is also highly influential on the potential for cultural understanding and integration, which impacts cultural insight and inter-personal relationships (Raymond & Hall, 2008). There is no contestation in this field of inquiry that the longer the volunteer stays, the more mutual positive impacts are likely to arise (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). This is further supported by the emphasis in the literature on the importance of building good relationships with people in the field as a way to expand one's horizon and to achieve better results: "effective long-term international volunteering for development and sustainability is about people" (Devereux, 2008:368). Also, being in a foreign context for a fair amount of time allows people to step out of the "exoticism" and "holiday mode and begin to accept things as being normal and respond accordingly" (Wearing 2001:9).

The amount of time that people choose to go abroad is particularly significant as it reflects a change in volunteering trends (Raymond & Hall, 2014). Over a ten-year period, the number of people going on short-term[14] placements increased substantially (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Indeed, international volunteering is not in itself a new phenomenon. However, it was previously practiced in greater length and intensity in the form of missionary undertakings (often linked with the Church) or since the 1960s with state organisations such as Peace Corps. Peace Corp missions generated research interest in the previous decades up until today ("Examining," 2011; Colemen, 1965). However, the volunteers now seem to demand experiences that are shorter and

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[14] Six months or less.

demand fewer pre-requisites, which is of interest to this research as it is novel in the international volunteering practice. So much so that the US Peace Corp, which has a philosophy of only proposing long-term, highly immersing experience, recently considered changing their whole organisation and recruiting process in order to accommodate for people who seek more immediate and short-term experiences (Shapiro, 2014). The amount of time devoted to the experience appears to be reflective of the trend in the social phenomenon itself as being an immediate commodity and a way to go "vacationing like Brangelina" (Fitzpartick, 2007). When discussing time-spans, VT is often placed back in relation to its "tourism" aspect, where people exercise their immediate consumption as a means to assert being part of the "trend" of volunteering abroad (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). As Bauman (1998:81) puts it: "the consumer's satisfaction ought to be *instant* (…). Obviously, consumed goods should satisfy immediately, requiring no leaning of skills and no lengthy groundwork."\

IV. Now what? Impacts of the volunteer tourism experience

Research on the impacts of VT experience on individuals and host communities have primarily been concerned about how participating in VT had an effect on the volunteer's life and worldviews. The assessment of the actual impact of the volunteer's work on host communities has been rather overlooked up until recently, when academics started developing ways to monitor the work of volunteers (Taplin et al, 2014; McGehee, 2014). This section will thus cover the perceived positive and negative impacts of VT, as reported in the literature.

I) Growing up

The literature has mostly been optimistic regarding the benefits of VT experiences for individuals up until recently (McGehee, 2014; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a; 2013b). The main reported positive impacts were in respect to self-development, assuming that volunteers come back being empowered, feeling the satisfaction of having made a contribution, and having a more encompassing appreciation of their life (Tiesson & Heron, 2012; Wearing 2001). Self-development is reported to occur in 4 main

categories: "(i) personal awareness and learning; (ii) interpersonal awareness and learning; (iii) confidence; and (iv) self-contentment" (ibid:126). Devereux (2008) provides a representative account of the optimistic scholars' point of view that VT is about an inter-personal exchange and that globalisation offers a platform for human connectedness where "international volunteering has the potential to challenge the economic and technical focus of globalisation in favour of people connecting and relating with each other on a global scale" (ibid:358). Giddens refers to such encounters as "fateful moments" (1991), or "significant points of transition in people's lives where reflexivity is heightened because decisions have to be made about the self and self-actualization that will have repercussions for self-identity and lifestyle for a considerable number of years ahead" (Desforges 2000:935). Cross-cultural awareness is often mentioned as one of the biggest benefits of the experience for the volunteers (Tiesson & Heron, 2012). Raymond and Hall's study (2008) reported that the volunteer tourists perceive to gain a more authentic understanding of the host country that they ever could through conventional tourism.

Great emphasis is put on the instigation of a sense of global citizenship as a result of VT experiences, where individuals get to challenge their national pre-conceptions and their stereotypes through interacting with host communities and other volunteers (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Wearing, 2001). Bailie Smith et al (2013) praise a cautious approach to regarding global citizenship as an end point; they prefer to consider cosmopolitanism as a process of endless negotiation rather than an acquisition.

On a more practical note, some lines of research interested in the participation of individuals in volunteer projects (internationally and domestically) reported consistent results of increased well-being and happiness, as well as better physical health among people of all ages who had volunteered (Brown & Letho, 2005; Kwok et al, 2013).

Unlike a number of studies suggesting the benefits of the volunteer trip in post-trip decision-making and propensity to engage in other activities (McGehee & Santos, 2005), Sin (2009) noted that his participants, whilst presenting themselves as world-savvy and as having obtained greater senses of social justice and awareness, were not interested in engaging in further civic and social activities. Rather, he reports that "instead of grooming a generation of youths who are passionate about volunteer work, research for this paper seems to suggest that respondents interviewed are instead

passionate about travelling and going overseas" (Sin, 2009:494). Zahra (2011) appears to be one of the only scholar to have undergone a study in which participants reflect on their experience long after they partook in a project (up to 8 years)[15], and reported long-lasting positive effects in the participants' lives. The focus in the literature to assess the potential impacts of VT in relation to personal growth as a primary criteria poses the question of who matters in these experience, for who's sake these experiences are undertaken and who eventually benefits from them (Tiessen & Heron, 2012).

2) Volunteer tourism: Not all that good

In the literature, the critiques of VT and its impact were scarce until very recently (Griffin, 2013; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Only now, there begins to be increasing research to monitor the impact and sustainability of VT as the practice is expanding (Taplin et al 2014; McGehee, 2014; Lupoli et al, 2014). Guttentag outlined that there is a substantial lack of critical analysis on the potential negative impacts of volunteer tourism, encompassing:

> A neglect of locals' desires, caused by a lack of local involvement; a hindering of work progress and the completion of unsatisfactory work, caused by volunteers' lack of skills; a decrease in employment opportunities and a promotion of dependency, caused by the presence of volunteer labour; a reinforcement of conceptualisations of the "other" and rationalisations of poverty, caused by the intercultural experience; and an instigation of cultural changes, caused by the demonstration effect and the actions of short term missionaries. (2009:537)

Guttentag's remark encompasses most of the critiques that can be and were made regarding the negative impacts of VT. However, much of the studies have a focus similar to the ones explored above, linked to people's change of values and worldviews, although presenting opposite results. Indeed, it has been shown in recent studies that, although VT is considered an opportunity to challenge one's stereotypes,

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[15] Wearing and McGehee (2013a) note this lack of sampling variety as lacking in existing research.

it could have the opposite effect of reinforcing existing prejudices, which are often described, in the context of VT, as affirming colonial stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings (Griffin, 2013; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Knollenberg et al, 2014; McGehee, 2014; Wearing & McGehee, 2013a). In particular, literature relating to the gap year tradition in the UK asserts that international volunteering in fact reinforces existing stereotypes and deepens dichotomies of 'them and us' (Simpson, 2004; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Mostafanezhad argues for greater implications than individual miscomprehension of reality, denouncing VT as feeding "a popular humanitarian gaze that contributes to recurring geopolitical discourses of North–South relations that naturalize political, economic and social inequality" (2014b:112). This suggests that VT contributes to a structural legitimisation of inequalities that undermine the capacities and specificities of host communities, which are blended into one overarching theme of "developing" at best, or "under-developed", at worst.

> Volunteer tourism therefore does not legitimize the rights of host communities and their rights outside of the tourism industry as an entity with its own history and sense of place, but rather provides another source of consumption that will only endanger the very communities and environments that the volunteer tourist seeks to protect. Further, the volunteer tourists themselves are complicit in this consumption and commodifying process and are then the economic 'units' targeted by the industry. (Wearing, 2001:15)

Other negative impacts that were reported in previous studies include: frustration due to a perceived lack of impact and output, "creating false hope in the community; perpetuation or creation of distrust or stereotypes of foreigners" (Tiessen & Heron, 2012:51). Another concern, more linked with development as a broader undertaking, is the creation of a dependency on development aid for poverty alleviation by increasing the number and variety of sending organisations on the field (Wearing & McGehee, 2013b). However, this critique is to be addressed to sending organisation in that it is mismanagement and the application of a development approaches not oriented towards empowerment and capacity enhancement that would be problematic, rather than VT in itself.

V. Recommendations: Improving the experience

For Wearing & McGehee (2013b), sending organisations hold a crucial role as gatekeepers between volunteer tourists and locals in host communities. As we have seen above, there are both admitted positive and negative impact to VT. Raymond and Hall argue that although VT can contribute to greater cross-cultural understanding, it cannot be considered as a guaranteed outcome of a VT experience:

> Instead, it is argued that the development of cultural appreciation and understanding should be approached as a goal of volunteer tourism. Significantly, this study suggests that sending organisations can play a central role in facilitating the achievement of such an objective. (2008:538)

Indeed, Raymond and Hall have made a great contribution in insisting on the role of sending organisations in enlightening the volunteers. They propose three recommendations for these organisations: first and foremost, giving the volunteer a job that would be appropriate for him and for the community - matching work with the volunteer's skills and competence that should not replace a local's job. Secondly, sending organisations should encourage the volunteers' reflexivity and make it clear that it is a learning experience. Thirdly, they should actually have the volunteers confronted to other cultures (either via encountering volunteers from other nationalities or through facilitating contact with the local community and its inhabitants). Essentially, the sending organisations should provide a platform for exchange (ibid).

Raymond and Hall (ibid) suggest that the above is inscribed in an educational framework called transformative learning (TL). Knollenberg et al. (2014:922-3) describe the three components of the transformative learning process as: "self-reflection, engaging in dialogue with others, and intercultural experiences." TL has been advocated in the literature as creating an opportunity for a radical shift in consciousness during the experience, leading the individuals to take on new roles and action when they return (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Hammersley, 2014). Hammersley also argues for the need for an opportunity to debrief and ease going back home, and the importance of post-project reflective tools.

If practices are well-managed, they can lead to greater participation and benefit for both the volunteers and the community, and contribute to greater cultural

understanding and openness from both parties, thus having long lasting changes on individuals (McGehee, 2014). It is agreed that much can be achieved through informing and educating the volunteers who "need to be aware of their greater role, motivations and expectations, and in response, develop an attitude based on 'here to learn' rather than 'here to make a difference'" (Hammersley, 2014:871) in order to create a real effort to contribute to local development instead of providing a space for adventurous tourists.

> At its worst, international volunteering can be imperialist, paternalistic charity, volunteer tourism, or a self-serving quest for career and personal development on the part of well-off Westerners. Or it can be a straightforward provision of technical assistance for international development". (Devereux, 2008:358)

Most of the scholars addressing the future of VT as a phenomenon are mostly arguing for its decommodification, although that is probably the hardest thing to hope for when looking at the turn the phenomenon has taken, unless there is a major discursive and practical shift. Lyons and Wearing illustrate the direction advocated by most scholars in regards to the future of VT:

> Current trends in tourism continue to move towards the increasing commodification of tourism in the search for global profits. The negative impacts of such a trajectory on the tourism experience require decommodifying actions, best informed by alternative philosophies and theoretical perspectives that include feminism, ecocentrism, community development and post-structuralism. (2008:8)

VI. Conclusion

This review of the literature sought to provide a comprehensive theoretical account of the literature tacking the topic of volunteer tourism. Firstly, it has led the grounds of the concept, by covering how it is defined in the literature and the context in which it has developed and is developing. Following the introduction of the phenomenon, it presented a chronological account of the volunteers' experience in the hope that it allows for an understanding of this experience, from the beginning to the end. It has accounted for what has triggered interest in academia, that is: pre-trip motivations to

volunteer, the experience in the field, and perceived impact of VT on the individual and the host communities. This chapter ended on the prescriptive recommendations that have recently been formulated as they relate to the aims of the research, to the participants' concerns, and to the implications for the phenomenon as it is currently occurring in this global context.

"Whether you feel that volunteer tourism simply represents an expanding tourism niche, an alternative form of tourism, or a sign of major socio-cultural change, its explosive growth is evident in academic literature, global trends, and the popular press" (Wearing& McGehee. 2013:120), which means that the research on VT is sensible to new findings that might fill the gaps in the existing literature. This is a reason why this field of inquiry needs explorative research. This can best be achieved by choosing methodological approaches that lay grounds for surprising data to emerge. The following chapter presents how this research proceeds to achieve those aims.

This chapter will detail the methodology of the present research following a logical order – departing from the research perspective, onto the collection and analysis of the data, and end on reflexive considerations.

I. Research perspective

1) Ontological and epistemological considerations

For the purpose of this research, it seems relevant to begin by establishing my own views on what type of knowledge can be gathered and how to go about it, with the objective that these views will contribute to a greater understanding of my choices regarding the collection and analysis of the data relevant for this precise research problem. In this chapter, I do not wish to discuss ongoing debates in the philosophy of social sciences or give an account of all possible meta-theories available, but I do wish to establish a relationship between my own views on the generation of knowledge and the justification for methodological choices for the purpose of this research. There is an apparent fragmentation in sociology when it comes to epistemology and practice (Brante, 2001) and never-ending debates in sociology that struggle to be resolved – this research certainly should no aspire to do so.

In terms of ontological considerations, this research seeks to sidestep the false dichotomy between positivism and constructionism and, rather, relate to critical realist[16] thinking. Indeed, critical realism presupposes the existence of a reality external to the researcher – distinguishing itself from constructionist trends of solipsism and extreme relativism (Sayer. 2000). One of the fathers of critical realism, Roy Bhaskar, describes in his thinking that there are observable facts relying on non-observable social structures, which are multiple in nature and should be organized in explanatory importance (1975). The social scientist should also be very aware of the fact that the "social world" is also in a constant process of change, and its role,

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[16] Bhaskar explains that the term critical realism comes from the mix between his general philosophy of science called "transcendental realism", and his special philosophy of human sciences called "critical naturalism" (de Souza, 2014). Substantive and rigorous accounts regarding critical realism can be found further in Collier (1994) and de Souza (2014).

according to Bhaskar, is to bring about knowledge that would be intended to contribute "favorably" to it – or bring it about. "Realists argue for an understanding of the relationship between social structures and human agency that is based on a *transformational* conception of social activity" (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010:3) and understand the importance of this relation in grasping society. This transformative element is crucial for this research given that the phenomenon under scrutiny is historically recent and currently at its peak, making its transformative potential extremely high.

Thus, reality is inscribed in a process of eternal change governed by observable as well as non-observable underlying mechanisms, in this way relating to the works of Marx (1987) and Durkheim (1895). Being aware of a degree of reality of social processes external to the individual does not imply here that laws or predictions can be made about this reality. Reality here is not equal to veracity, but rather to *existence*. However, much like in the study of chaos, it is not because something is *real* or has an underlying *order* that it can easily be made sense of (Gleick, 1987; Bhaksar, 1975).

The belief in an external reality is tempered by the relativist consideration that this reality can only be interpreted by researchers who are inherently situated and dependent on their positionality (Marx, 1987; Harding, 1993): "science is produced by the imaginative and disciplined work of men on what is given to them. But the instruments of the imagination themselves are provided by knowledge. Thus knowledge is produced by knowledge." (Bhaskar, 1975:185). Critical realists believe that knowledge is a product of prior contextual and intellectual situatedness. In fact, intersubjectivity presupposes that there exists a multiplicity of realities (Chalmers, 1999). As post-positivistic thinkers bring to light, the researcher is bound to emanate knowledge that can only be an approximation of reality (in all types of scientific inquiry) and subject to modification and falsification (Feyerabend, 1978; Popper, 1972). The world is subject to interpretations *only*. There is no such thing as an objective description of what *is*, since the reality is lived and narrated by individuals via language (Foucault, 1971; Winch, 1958). As Gadamer puts it, "all human knowledge of the world is linguistically mediated" (2006:48). This multiplicity of interpretations can be considered limiting but is also what makes the richness of any scientific inquiry and human activity. In social sciences especially, the subject of

inquiry is even more subject to change and diversity of interpretations. The researcher's present understanding is not only crucial in the interpretation of social processes, we need to remember that the actors within the social reality under study are themselves knowledgeable, reflexive and self-interpreting subjects, unlike in the inquiry of natural sciences (Giddens, 1984; Flyvbjerg, 2001). The researcher is not generating a first-hand understanding of something but rather is gathering knowledge from pre-existing interpretations about phenomena that already bearing social or personal meaning and explanations. As Berger and Luckman put it: "only a very limited group of people in any society engages in theorizing, in the business of 'ideas', and the construction of *Weltanschauungen*. But everyone in a society participates in its 'knowledge' in one way or another" (1991:27). This (double) hermeneutic element is where the social scientist should come in and conduct an interpretative understanding[17] of the richness of people's experience and interpretations[18].

Brante (2001:172) sums up the postulates of the ontological elements considered above, in which this research is inscribed[19]:

> 1. There is a reality existing independently of our representations or awareness of it (ontological postulate).
>
> 1a. There is a social reality existing independently of social scientists' representations or awareness of it (ontological postulate for social science).
>
> 2. It is possible to achieve knowledge about this reality (epistemological postulate).
>
> 3. All knowledge is fallible—and correctable (methodological postulate).

2) Research strategy

This research seeks to provide insight and formulate a transformative opinion on the subject of international volunteering. As presented in the introduction, the research

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[17] In line with Weber's *Verstehen* (Weber, 1948).

[18] A full account of the history and implications of hermeneutics for social science can be found in Gadamer (2006).

[19] Brante in his work refers to this philosophy as "causal realism", which differs to critical realism only in its terminology.

aims at providing an *exploration* of this recent social phenomenon, accounting for the fact that there are yet many unexplored facets of it. The research strategy relies on the fact that theories and concepts are to be *outcomes* of the research process rather than deducted from previously constructed theory. Knowledge is then produced through an inductive investigation and analysis of volunteers' meaningful interpretations of their social context and experiences, on the accounts of their life story. As Mills writes, "no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey" (1959:6).

One of the key elements in the explorative strategy of this research is also to conduct an inquiry that would allow surprising data to emerge by limiting the researcher's intellectual baggage to interfere with the reality described by the participants. This approach necessitates an extensive inclusion of the participants in the research process, where the researcher needs to let himself be guided by the participants' accounts and the emergence of theory from data. The limitation of the researcher's intellectual bias was further enhanced by the fact that I postponed the review of the literature until the last stages of data analysis, thereby letting concepts emerge from the empirical data and then comparing them to the literature, as opposed to fitting existing theoretical concepts onto the data. This approach rules out any relevance of using quantitative approach or notions of "measurement" – which require the creation of theoretical categories to "fit people in." As argued by Becker (1996), qualitative and quantitative approaches have in common the aim to explain and understand social reality but differ greatly in their focus of research, epistemology and methodology.

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative methodology seemed the most appropriate and relevant way of gathering stimulating knowledge. Qualitative research allows for developing in-depth insight into people's life history, which requires tools of data gathering and analysis that allow for sensitivity to be expressed in unbounded and meaningful ways. The search for knowledge concerned with the meaning individuals give to their action dismissed forms of qualitative such as observational methods, or open-ended questionnaires (that would not provide data as insightful as face to face encounters), and narrows the strategy down to in-depth interviews with international volunteers. These reflections justify the appropriateness of the use of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a data gathering and analysis method, in order to best serve the purpose of this research, thereby

acknowledging the reality of other people's experience and limiting one's theoretical bias in a hope to generate theories not too divorced from the realities of the participants' experience.

3) Criteria of assessing research

The results and methodology in social science research are commonly assessed in terms of validity, reliability, generalization, and replicability (Bryman, 2008). These criteria apply for quantitative inquiry where principles for assessing research are often interwoven with an idea of *measurement*. However, as explained above, qualitative methods are the chosen appropriate approach for the purpose of this research. "'Understanding' (…) is grasping the *point* or *meaning* of what is being done or said. This is a notion far removed from the world or statistics and causal laws" (Winch, 1958:115)[20]. Therefore, the same criteria do not apply for assessing qualitative research, accounting for the complex and unstable qualities of the subject, where the quest for stable and unchanging findings is neither realistic nor desirable (Bryman, 2008). Furthermore, it is now conceded that findings in scientific research cannot claim stability and veracity either (Popper, 1972; Bachelar, 2012; Kuhn, 1996). Instead of validity, I would prefer, as Becker (1996:13) suggests, to focus on how precise, accurate, and broad the data is: if it covers a wide range of material thoroughly, if it allows for unanticipated material to arise, if it is based on close observation of the subject under study.

The problems with replicability and generalisation that are often raised as critiques to the rigor of qualitative inquiry are not judged appropriate in this research. Indeed, qualitative data emerge in a very specific context that is not replicable and can thus be criticised because it sidesteps refutation by further data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bryman, 2008). The data presented in this research thus does not seeks or claim to confer internal or external generalisations. However, this research clearly aims at providing insightful understanding and hints for further research, not to create broader "truths."

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[20] Emphasis in the original text.

A way of ensuring the rigor and validity of the data that was used in this research was the constant comparative method derived from grounded theory analysis. This implies that data is constantly compared between interviews and that the researcher seeks the approval or further data from his participants when relevant. This enables the researcher to treat the data as a whole rather than fragmenting it, and as unanticipated themes emerge, to verify with the participants the accuracy of their existence, as to make sure not to over-interpret the data and force theory out of it.

II. Research Design

This chapter will look into the tools and processes used in this research in its framework of data collection and analysis. This research is using a comparative design whereby a collection of cases were gathered in order to be put in relation to each other to generate theories.

1) Sampling

a) Sampling Approach

The findings of this research are the result of an inquiry involving 15 participants (see list and details in Appendix A). The participants for this research were chosen using purposive sampling based on the grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling whereby "the process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal"[21] (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:45), thus inscribing the research in an iterative process in the form of a constant comparative dialogue between the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2008).

This approach was chosen for several reasons. The field of research that I inquired in is an emerging one and the complexity of the phenomenon under study has yet to be understood. As mentioned before, this research comprises an element of explorative research, which made grounded theory the most adapted means of inquiry. The research approach also entailed an active effort to maximise the diversity of participants. Indeed, in order to discover surprising data and establish interesting

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[21] Emphasis in original text.

comparisons, I attempted to maximise the nuances among my sampled population, in the scope of the research and with relevance to the theoretical sampling approach. The pertinence of accounting for contradiction and searching for diversified opinions has been underlined in grounded theory research (Seale, 1999). It is useful and challenging to come back to the initial findings and explore elements that might not have been apparent before and that prove to work across the different groups – "the adequate theoretical sample is judged on the basis of how widely and diversely the analyst chose his groups for saturating categories according to the type of theory he wished to develop" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:63).

The data gathering process was proven to be very time consuming for three reasons. The first two derived directly from the requirements of grounded theory research: conducting theoretical sampling, and looking for negative evidence. The third was also that sampling processes do not run as smoothly as the researcher hopes, e.g. participants backing out, difficulty to reach desired participants (especially when some are in geographical spaces remote from technological access), length of time to arrange interviews, to name but a few challenges.

According to grounded theory principles, the data gathering process stops when the data becomes redundant, the researcher becomes satisfied in the concepts and theory he has comprehended, and he feels that a theoretical gap is filled or close to being filled, thus attaining theoretical saturation. As Glaser and Strauss put it:

> The criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category's *theoretical saturation*. *Saturation* means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated. (1967:61)[22]

b) Population

The explorative element of the research, coupled with a grounded theory methodology, meant that I started the research with a broad conceptual idea:

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[22] Emphasis in original text.

exploring the motives of individuals to engage in small-scale development project. This made me define my initial demographics as consisting of two groups of actors of local development: development workers and volunteers. It seemed that the relevant way to approach the gathering of the data was to start with the development workers, because of their assumed higher level of awareness and reflexivity due to the fact that they were more experienced and had received theoretical training. Consequently, my initial sample consisted of four development workers (Kim, Agnes, Simone and Samuel). I then interviewed another development worker who is also the president of an NGO in Kenya and who is a volunteer coordinator on the field (Marcus). This interview was a turning point in the research as it brought my attention to the particularity of volunteers in the field of development, and to the fact that it is indeed a sizeable phenomenon. I thus constituted a cluster of potential participants who belonged to the volunteer category and picked the ones that were assumed to be able to bring more valuable data to the emerging concepts as well as potentially contradicting them. This led to a wave of four interviews with volunteers of varying experience and background (Clementine, Emma, Anna, Laure). A tremendous amount of valuable insight was presented to me during these interviews. I went on to interview another development worker with vast experience in volunteer projects and working with volunteers (Liam), who was particularly helpful in discussing a lot of themes that had emerged thus far and who gave me tremendous amount of understanding of the volunteering phenomenon. Two more participants were then interviewed, a filmmaker that had spent 3 months in Kenya for a film project tackling the "voluntourism" phenomenon (Frederick), and a participant with volunteer experience who had a great age difference with the other participants I had interviewed (Sophie). Although at this point I had gathered a lot of data and understanding, I did not feel that I had achieved satisfactory theoretical saturation and was afraid that my participants had too much hindsight and reflexivity on their experience. This led me to conduct a final wave of interviews with three inexperienced participants, who were on the verge of having their first volunteer experience (Marie, Deborah and Hugo).

The inductive approach implied that I did not have set questions and theories that I wished to "test" with the participants. Every interview was unique given the variety of the background and experience of each participant. Also, my relationships with each

of them were very different. This matter will be discussed in further details in the "reflexivity" section.

2) Methods of data collection

The chosen method of inquiry was semi-structure interviews with topic guides[23]. Semi-structured interviews were used to account for people's *experience*, so process could make room for the unexpected and thick descriptions[24] to emerge (Geertz, 1993) whilst keeping its flexibility (Bryman, 2008). Indeed, intensive interviews permitted an in-depth inquiry into the deep meaning and richness of participants' experiences and give them the opportunity to express them the way *they* interpret them (Charmaz, 2006), thus allowing for surprising data to emerge.

The interviews lasted an average amount of one hour, except for the participants that had not had their volunteer experience yet – these lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a computer, using the Audacity software. The interviews were held over the course of a long period of time, due to the constant comparative method required by the grounded theory methodology, as explained in further details in the "analysis" section. Data collection was thus not only achieved through interviewing processes but also – following principles of grounded theory – via emails and further inquiry that arose once the analysis of the data had begun.

Some of the interviews were conducted via the Skype software since a lot of my participants were in very different regions of the world during the data gathering process. While making it harder to create a relaxed environment using this interviewing method, I tried to convey a trustworthy environment nonetheless via having casual dialogues before and after the interview, just the way I did with people I could interview face-to-face. Technological problems did not significantly occur.

A lot of my participants were people I had an established rapport with, which was

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[23] The topic guides were varying extensively according to the different participants and stages of the research, and were absent for some interviews. In general, the questions and topics covered very much depended on the participants, my relationship with them, their experience and knowledge of the topic.

[24] Thick description is the description of a phenomenon by looking at symbolic meanings imported from society and culture, and the personal or interpersonal meaning it bears.

perceived mostly as an advantage. For the other participants, I tried, as I mentioned above, to have an informal chat before starting to address the topic of the research and keep a relaxed tone during the interview, in order to minimize the interviewer effect (see "reflexivity" section), and power imbalances.

All the participants were given information about the research topic, aims, and format beforehand. They were also given an informed consent form (further explanations on this are in the "ethics" section).

3) The analysis process

In this research, data was analyzed via the use of Glaserian grounded theory (1978; 1992) based on Glaser and Strauss's original idea of grounded theory (1967). Its useful criteria are: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability (ibid). Charmaz (2006:182) also adds to this other criteria of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. As explained before, the advantage of grounded theory is that there is a constant dialogue between theory and data, allowing new elements to emerge, and keeping the researcher humble and preconception-ridden as far as possible. Blumer (1969) questions the fact that researchers can at all suspend their judgment. Indeed, I also argue that this is impossible and in fact, not desirable. Grounded theorists seek, rather than naively believing in the possibility of suspension of their judgment, to minimize it. Indeed, the review of the specific literature on international volunteering was done in the late stages of data analysis, in order to contain the intellectual bias on the data. It is, however, important to possess *theoretical sensitivity*. "Initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework", rather, they are based on a "general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967:45). This theoretical sensitivity is crucial to the uniqueness of the research and endorses the hermeneutical aspect of doing social research. Charmaz (2000) argues that data is not 'waiting to be uncovered' but rather that the researcher's personal interaction with the data is extremely important in the generation of concepts and theory, which is arguably what makes the richness of social inquiry.

The coding process that I followed is "Glaserian" by opposition to later suggestions by Strauss and Corbin (1990), who presented a more systematic, structured way of analyzing the data, which is considered by Glaser (1992) as forceful on the data. Scrutiny and distance from the data were crucial to avoid influencing it, especially

during the first steps of the coding. I used Glaser's coding process, starting with substantive coding[25], then, as the concepts started to emerge, I operated several waves of selective coding[26] leading to the memos, and organized the theoretical coding by using a constant comparative analysis (ibid), by going back and forth within and across the interviews. I tried to be as open as possible in order not to influence the data and went back to open coding several times even after the conception of memos[27]. Memos in that sense relate to Blumer's *sensitizing concepts* (1954) that represent concept guides during the research and help to determine what is relevant for the inquiry, whilst maintaining a fluidity and adaptability in order to allow for surprising elements to emerge and modify them. The constant comparative methods of analyzing data can be related to Popper's concept of falsifiability (1972), prescribing that theory should be able to be modified by the findings of new data, which is ensured by the flexibility of grounded theory analysis.

Themes gradually emerged through the comparison of the nature of the codes; their frequency or irregularities; my intimacy with the data; and through the theoretical sensitivity I gained through the exploration of emerging sociological concepts, the familiarity with the phenomenon and, later, the literature related to it.

4) Ethics

My participants were all given an informed consent form (Appendix B), to which they all agreed and received a spare copy. The consent form outlined BSA ethical guidelines for social science research (BSA, 2002). The participants provided me with either written or oral agreement, depending on whether I could interview them directly or via Skype. I made sure as much as I could that they knew what the research was about and what was going to happen to the data. Full anonymity in the research was assured through the allocation of pseudonyms. I also guaranteed my

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[25] Substantive or open coding is the first stage of data analysis, the first conceptualisation of data, and gives rise to an extensive amount of codes. It is a dynamic process: the more you analyze new data, the more you may have to go back, rename and reassess what has already been coded.

[26] Selective coding puts concepts in relation to each other and contributes to the emergence of theory.

[27] Memos are notes of emerging ideas about the theoretical relations between the concepts emerging from the substantive coding. They are a crucial part of making sense of the data and the emergence of a theory grounded in the data.

participants full confidentiality and allowed them to withdraw their participation at any time during and after the data gathering process.

A lot of the participants were interested in reading the final version of the thesis. One issue that arose with this is that the participants in the initial sample, consisting of those having received theoretical training, would be able to identify each other for the reason that, even by giving them a pseudonym in the research, some crucial details for the description of the participants were going to make them able to discern each other. However, being aware of this issue, I contacted all of them and obtained their consent over the issue, approval to carry on, and guarantee that they did not have any particular issue with this.

One other issue that could have arisen concerns the rapport I have with some of the participants. Given that they were arguably more open to discuss certain issues with me, I was in a position where I could have potentially have betrayed a certain position of trust. However, this did not come up as a concern.

5) Reflexivity

A few reflexive issues need to be addressed in relation to the methodology and to the data for this research. First of all, it is to be said that this topic came about based on my own experience of international volunteering combined with a theoretical training in development studies. However, as Mills (2000) notes on "intellectual craftsmanship", life and academia should not be dissociated but on the contrary, enrich one another. This topic was of interest to me due to my previous experience, but the awareness of it also led me to choose the appropriate methodology – grounded theory – which, as mentioned before, was a way to minimize the impact of my prior experience and knowledge on the data collection and research process as a whole.

I am also aware of the personal role I had as the researcher that might have caused interviewer bias. It was apparent that my participants were often concerned to give me "valuable" or "good" information. Some of my interviewees were asking if they gave me the kind of answers I was looking for or "if that helped".

Arguably, one of the problems that might have influenced the results of the research was that the experience I am investigating is bearing a lot of moral values – related to

being a good person, helping others, and dealing with post-colonial guilt, among other things. Essentially, when people talk about these experiences, it could be argued that it is socially one of the topics where it's important to *look good*. Goffman's theory of the presentation of self in every day life was felt to be particularly relevant to the interviewing process, at times. His words felt very close to the experience of some interviews:

> When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression he fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts his show "for the benefit of other people. (1990: 17)

Goffman's impression management concept was relevant here, in that I felt that it was sometimes applied to manage destructive information so as to not show discrepancy in the role that they have assigned themselves in relation to narrating these experiences – here, not passing off as a fraudulent good Samaritan (ibid).

I believe it was very beneficial that I had good rapport with most of my participants, since I think the connivance minimised role-taking and "keeping a good face". This was apparent in the data, where the participants I was close with used a much less controlled language, allowing for brutal honesty and unfiltered (or less filtered) discussions. This reflexive issue is rarely addressed in the studies I have read on the topic, although it is an important epistemological consideration to have, in this field of research especially.

Furthermore, as well as accounting for the interviewer effect, one concept that is relevant to touch upon is that of Freudian's manifest and latent levels (Freud, 1975). Indeed, this concept is useful in the sense that interviews were about people's life stories, thus the interviews that we had were mediated by their inner narratives, which some of them even acknowledged – e.g. "there are so many reasons for doing this stuff, I'm sure I'm not even aware of half of them!" (Clementine). I talk here about manifest and latent levels of awareness, and not the manifest and latent *functions* as

described by Merton, which provide an analysis of outwardly events in relation to an actor's intent (Merton, 1968; Helm, 1971).

Language was an issue that needs acknowledging due to the fact that my research tried to cover many different nationalities, thus most participants' mother tongue was not English. However, they were all very prominent in English and bilingual for the most part. The issue arose in a different way for the interview in French. Indeed, some of the concepts did not have the same terminology and while being bilingual, I am aware that my role in the translation is something to be noted in the resulted data, although none of the translation was done throughout the coding process but rather at the end, during the presentation of the data.

III. Conclusion

This methodology chapter aimed at presenting the research approach and design of the research. It has done so by explaining the greater theoretical approach of the inquiry, providing justification for the research strategy and design. Indeed, the critical realist approach discussed in this chapter corresponds to the explorative and transformational aims of the research. This chapter has explored how this research has adopted a qualitative data gathering strategy that rests upon a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory was particularly determinant in the sampling of participants and the analysis of the data. Furthermore, it supports the will to minimize the theoretical impact of the researcher on the data and aims at supplying prominent tools for discovering surprising data and include the participants in the generation of insightful knowledge. The following chapter is a presentation of these results.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this research aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the international volunteering experience, the motivations for partaking in local development projects, the impacts of the experience on the local communities as well as in the volunteer's everyday life in the way they interact with other people, and exploring potential ways to improve the overall experience. This chapter is going to look at the participants' contribution to the existing knowledge in this area and will present findings aiming at filling the gaps in the existing literature.

To remain consistent with the review of the literature, this chapter will address international volunteering as a phenomenon in a chronological fashion, starting with the motivations to volunteer; followed by the experience itself; the challenges of returning to one's original context; and finishing with the suggested recommendations for the field of development.

I. Motivations for Becoming a Volunteer

As acknowledged in the literature, motives for taking action are vastly complex and dynamic – they are numerous and evolve over time. However, my participants shared motivational narratives that somehow differed from the "typical" answers found in the literature or emphasised ones that had not been regarded as too important.

To begin, altruistic motivations that are so often praised in the literature as being the most common incentive to participate in volunteering were on the whole quite absent from my participants' data. Although a few of them gave "contributing" and "helping others" as partial motives for volunteering, these were outweighed by otherwise more insisted upon justifications. It was relatively present amongst the two females who had not yet been on their volunteer project, but rather absent from the others. The sense of helping out was often mentioned but tempered by a certain distance towards people's motivations. "It's always kind of a nice feeling to know that whatever we do actually does something for someone else but the job in itself, it's not like I'm sacrificing myself in any way because it's fun" (Marcus). Participants were cautious

in their reference to altruism, some saying that altruistic motives were not directed merely towards helping but were also sought because of the rewarding feeling that it brings: "also, definitely the sense of helping being rewarding, I guess. These were very short periods of time so it's hard to say 'well I just spent 3 weeks in Honduras and I'm on my way to saving the world'" (Anna); "there's maybe this feeling of 'I'm going to help other people but it's more egoistic in itself. When I present it like 'I want to feel useful', well that means you kind of want some recognition in a way" (Emma).

A lot of the discussions on altruistic motivations and desires to help were expressed in direct relation with terminologies such as "saving the world." That terminology came up in every single interview. Putting one individual's effort in relation to such concept is probably what led the participants to minimise their capacity to enact change, and thus, altruistic narratives, perhaps in fear of appearing overly naïve. "Then for the dimension of the classic volunteering speech of bringing something to people, I thought about it really swiftly, I quickly realise that's not what you come here for" (Laure).

Because of my closeness with the participants, which seems to scarcely be the case in most of the literature, some of them also honestly rejected the idea of altruism as an original incentive to engage in development projects and opposed it with ideas of "fun" and "curiosity" as being the first motivations – although these are subject to change once on the field. It is to be noted that the participants sharing these explanations had a lot of reflexivity and hindsight on the events, which made me inquire for how people who had not yet gone portrayed their motives, with no chance of hindsight. As mentioned before, whereas the girls without volunteering experience hoped to contribute, the young man I interviewed conveyed a very different approach:

> I am expecting a lot from this trip. I think I'll help there, probably. It's a little creepy to say but I almost don't care what I bring to them. Well it's not that I don't care but I am expecting a lot. I am not a great altruist who wants to save the planet and help all the Malagasy kids, you know. (Hugo)

1) Personal motivations

The participants evoke personal gain and personal reasons as main incentives for participating in volunteer projects. As a side note, I insist upon the fact that the data connected to people's motives for engaging in local development should *not* be used as a means to morally judge people's justifications, as this sometimes seem to be the case in the literature. This is especially the case since the motivations are not deterministic over the actual impact and achievement once on the field. It is however important for research and for the individuals themselves to be aware of these motives. As Kim puts it: "it's the problem with a lot of development practitioners. Perhaps they don't realise their own reasons for doing things and you have to acknowledge that you are also there for yourself and your own development. I find that a lot of development practitioners have this 'save the world' approach and think that they are there for other people and it's not like that."

As outlined in the literature, personal development potentially occurs thanks to the social, spatial and cultural distance that volunteer experiences provide. Some participants expect a form of personal change to happen thanks to being "at the other side of the world" (Marie), "elsewhere" (Clementine). They evoke the desire to put themselves: "in a different context, away from my little routine. Although I think you can be dépaysé[28] in your own country, but the aim here was really to leave… far" (Emma).

This space is described as being an escape solution for some. Laure describes that she was "stuck" in her job and saw volunteering at the time as a means to escape, reflect, and make things move forward. This was also greatly stressed by Hugo, who has been stuck not only professionally, but socially as well: "It was a shitty year, I was bored at work and in this city. My mates were also a pain. I felt the need to get away from it all. It's a bit mean but I'm hoping this trip will be a way to filter my friends as well." Hugo bluntly mentioned this will for social authenticity at his return, which a concept that would be worth further inquiry for future research.

Indeed, I believe that the search for authenticity in friendship is inscribed in the broader search for authenticity and meaning that has been extensively discussed in the

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[28] Word transposed from the French, which is defined by being removed from one's habitual surroundings (c.f. Oxford Dictionary of English)

literature. Not all participants mentioned actively looking for authenticity and identity, or anxiety related to modernisation. Kim, however, discussed it in a way that can be related to the concerns addressed in scholarly research:

> Usually there is a story behind everyone about looking for cultures that fit in with you. I think a common thread is perhaps you don't really feel like you fit in where you come from, so you are sort of drawn to these exotic places and you think: "Oh does this work for me? Do I fit in here?" Which also scares the hell out of me that you become this entity that just moves around and you're never static, you don't belong anywhere, and you're kind of going to this limbo. Which can be perhaps maybe safe because you never really have to figure things out and make perhaps even harder decisions about you know: "Oh I'm going to buy a house, I'm going to live in Berlin for the next 20 years." I think those kinds of things scare people that are drawn to this kind of work. (Kim)

Hugo evoked distinctly how participating in volunteering projects can be associated with a rite of passage (as touched upon in the literature review), as a way of proving something to one's self and to others that one is ready to enter adulthood and "leave the womb". This idea of "testing one's self" has been depicted by other participants (Emma, Clementine, Laure, Simone, Marie), whereby volunteering is a means to prove one's ability to be independent – to one's self and to others. Hugo also talked about that rite of passage in relation to gendered identity:

> You know, our fathers and their father before them… I think they became men at like 20-21, you knew you were a guy because you did your military service or whatever, but you had become a man. I think now we've basically become chicks, because of women actually. I mean men aren't men anymore. We're a bit womanly. And honestly I can't say I really feel like a guy, you know. So I think for guys, that's one of the reasons as well, to say that "now I leave infancy or adolescence and I will be a man when I come back."

For many participants in my sample, volunteering internationally was a way to combine desires of encountering other cultures, getting out of a routine, helping out or feeling useful, figuring things out for the future, building a CV, challenging themselves, travelling, and other personal reasons related to developing linguistic

skills, personal relationships, or discovering a country that has a particular meaning to them.

> I think that many people want to kill two birds with one stone, to put it crudely. Travel is part of the (Western) zeitgeist now and volunteering fits very well into that. As possibly most (Western) people consider travel to be something one needs to experience in there lifetime to be able to claim to have had a 'successful/happy' life, the volunteer experience is translated as a deeper, richer form of travel, topping the travel of those who just travel, therefore allowing one to say they had more life experience. (Liam)

2) Values & Beliefs

As seen in the literature review, scholars often deplore the commodification of VT, where participation is no longer value-laden but instead depoliticised and invidualised (Mostafanezhad, 2014b; Wearing & McGehee, 2013b). However, value-system, emotional responses to injustice and opinionated interpretation of mediated information were reported to be major motives for engaging in local development projects. These incentives were reported in this research only among participants who were active development workers, where social justice ranked high in the justification for doing local development. What was striking in each account was how the advocacy for social justice and a will to change things were greatly intertwined with emotional responses and "gut-feelings" linked with indignation.

> It boils down to why I'm doing this. Because I think there is so much injustice and that I don't like that. I don't know, it makes me very sad and very angry and very... it can't be true, we have to change it. And it comes from back home when I was a child I was the same, in my family it has always been that if you're not satisfied then you have to go in and fight. You can always argue or discuss or claim what you think is the right thing to do. I was raised like that so I think that's the main motivation of trying to make platforms for people to actually claim their rights. (Agnes)

It's the principles of establishing more social justice and equity. It's true that I'm working now with aboriginals and when they tell you their stories… you want to fucking shout, you know, you want to do *something* because you know that they have been massacred! And I'm sure that there are so many horrible stories that we haven't been taught and that happened all across the world. It's… you want to partake in this to make it more just. It pisses you off, you know! You can't stay here doing nothing! And it's true that this feeling that you are indignant and you can't stay there with your legs crossed, you think "I have to give more than just words, I have to give more of myself for these things to change." (Clementine)

Some of the participants also mentioned their upbringing as having a great influence on their choice to be involved in volunteering and local development as their parents were inspiring, encouraging, and brought them awareness that people do not grow up with equal chances and that it is possible to enact change (Samuel, Kim, Anna, Clementine, Marie).

Another aspect of the role of values in partaking in local volunteer projects is the disbelief in the ability of big organisations and structures to enact meaningful change. This relates to the literature in the way that volunteers oppose the "conventional" way of doing development by preferring small-scale, people-centred alternatives. Participants of this research, especially ones with theoretical training, discussed their scepticism towards greater structures such as the United Nations. "Because I don't believe in these huge institutions, I think they do more harm and I think it's more of national interest and transnational interest than for the people" (Agnes).

Also, although it is most often implied tacitly in the way the participants explained their approach to development and to inequalities, Clementine, for example, clearly acknowledged the major influence of political inclinations in choosing this way of addressing development.

3) External Pressure

Some of the participants mentioned having the intention to study or work in fields related to development, engaging in volunteering was thus a way to "try it out"

(Deborah, Emma, Laure, Anna). Frederick sums it up, having encountered many volunteers. He describes, in relation to future career consideration, that "some of them were not even having that background and were just kind of doing an adventurous trip and see if this humanitarian development social field is something that is good for them or not."

As seen in the literature chapter, technologies of consumption are put into place for the constitution of the self. In recent days, there is constant pressure on becoming the "best version of one's self", which transpires in the growing number of self-improvement books, magazines, blogs, websites, and inspirational videos. There is a paradox in the discourse around self-actualisation, which on the one hand advocates for limitless possibilities throughout the life course and, on the other, puts increasing pressure on youth to make the "right" choices fast, and acquire as much "identity capital" as possible (Jay, 2013).

> It's a combination of generational stuff. Like forever we've been told "you have to do *everything*". You know what I mean our generation grow up saying you gotta go to school but you gotta travel the world and do all these things. (…) And if you're doing jobs, a lot of people want to see well-rounded people these days, and so volunteering … people assume "ah, this person's committed" or whatever it is they used on the CV, but it's a token advantage to your CV, which in this competitive world seems to be more and more of a need. (Liam)

This pressure regarding expectations and the job market was mostly pinpointed by participants coming from Anglo-Saxon countries. That factor is also supported by Bailie Smith and Laurie (2011), especially amongst 'gap year' students – which is mainly a British and Australian trend. Although these findings are obviously not generalisable, it would be interesting for future research to have a greater sample to assess whether these concerns are linked to or enhanced by certain cultures. Anna also commented:

> Growing up in the states it was always kind of like very much encouraged "you should be a good citizen and you should volunteer, you should be part of an association" or whatever. So I was very much encouraged and especially

for college people were like "you will *not* get into college if you don't have any volunteer experiences on your resume."

II. The International Volunteering Experience

1) Building relationships

As it has been touched upon in the literature, some participants in this research felt strongly towards the importance of time on the field, the implication it has for the quality of the project, and for building meaningful relationships and platforms of exchange. Participant that had engaged in short-term projects did express great frustration and a feeling of not being finished with the field. "I went to Guatemala in 2005 and I worked for one month, which I think was maybe the worst thing I have done in my volunteer career. How are you supposed to work when it's only one month?" (Agnes). Time is necessary to develop a certain understanding of how the society one is within works, although that understanding remains limited. "Being there for 3 months I kind of felt that I made a progression in a way. And I think for those who were there only for a few weeks, they didn't even have that. Cause you're so overwhelmed in the beginning" (Frederick).

The participants that described having established meaningful relationships with people they worked with are also individuals who returned to the country – or even the same organisation – and maintain a continuing social and professional bond with people who are now their friends. These participants have also been describing the importance of humour and fun, i.e. casual social interactions: "I learnt pretty quickly that the people here are mainly my friends and not some kind of target group in a project. And to understand that people are still people and be able to kind of treat them like that. That means cracking jokes with them and just take it easy with your colleague and have a beer with him you know" (Marcus).

Many of these connections are related to an understanding of universality and normalcy, and a participative approach to development. Indeed, this ability to connect with people or societies seemed to be dependent also on the approach that the participants had regarding development and host communities, in general. To illustrate this, the participants in this research who had a discourse resulting from a

"needs approach", for whom there is typically less emphasis on universality, capacity and normalcy, had an approach where they seemed to consider themselves as educated individuals helping others fulfil a need:

> That's when I realised the need that was there... you know, in all those countries, developing countries (…). And I think I realise that it's nice to travel as a tourist but it's also nice to leave something behind and to fulfil a need, when there is one. And a lot of these countries really have needs. To me it's more important to go where there is a need and help out. (Sophie)

This relates back to the literature in that it seems to confirm that volunteer experiences do not automatically challenge one's worldviews. Although all my participants described being world-savvy and have perhaps a wider awareness and understanding of how certain things operate in the world, these qualities were not often reported to happen *as a result* of the experience. Rather, it seems that this awareness was already there and was merely enhanced by the experience. In fact, even the "volunteering" aspect was not new for most of my participants, who had volunteered domestically prior to their first experience; female participants reported having "always wanted to do it."

A summarizing table of the correlation between development approach and volunteering intentions hereby corresponds to the participants' perspectives.

Table I   Genealogies of international volunteering and development

Development approaches	Volunteering goals
Modernisation	Benevolence and service
Basic needs	Technical assistance/knowledge transfer
Participation	Mutual learning
Governance/civil society	Citizenship and empowerment
NGOisation/ professionalisation	Professional development
Rights-based development	Global citizenship, social justice, personal development and community building/strengthening
'Niche' paradigms (e.g. fair trade ethnodevelopment, faith-based development)	

(Bailie Smith & Laurie, 2011:549)

Capacity to relate to and befriend people outside of one's culture is also obviously linked to language, for the practical reason of possessing the ability to communicate. For Clementine, for example, having linguistic skills was not necessary to her project, but having them allowed her to meaningfully connect with the people she was working with, understand jokes and establish trust and complicity. This contributed significantly to the success of the project.

> My experience working with youth and trainings in Nepal is quite different [to Central America], because I didn't have the chance to understand their local language so of course I was positioned differently. I mean, it makes it a different experience, you don't feel that close to them, it's harder to actually try to become equal and make an equal exchange I think. (…) To me it's very much about personal relationships. Our partnership with our local partners has been built very much on friendship. (Agnes)

The participants' adaptation to foreign cultures and societies they then went back to have also led them to: acquire features of the culture they were immersed into, grasp some cultural codes and gain understanding – although admitting not being able to know everything –, feel at home there, and partially integrate that culture in their identity. This also applied to Liam, although for him it did not occur only in one place but the genuine link with people from different communities and cultural immersion was tangible.

It is the possibility of having these meaningful interactions that lead to making volunteering a platform for significant positive, liberating, and enlightening learning experiences advocated by optimistic scholars:

> It allowed me to pick what I considered to be good out of the cultures that I met, what I found to be healthy, what I found to match the way I see the world, and break out of my Australian … you know the things that I found limiting or the things I didn't match with that come from the culture I'm supposed to be like. Yeah, what I liked about seeing so many different places and learning the aspects, was that I could understand that the world is made up of a million different things and then I can see what I consider has the most

value and try to enrich my life by sticking to the ones I found to be the better. (Liam)

2) Frustration

One other aspect of the volunteering experience that is seldom touched upon in the literature is the sense of frustration caused by unrealistic expectations and/or the limited time spent in the field. "Personally, I was willing to do more. But you know, the time constraint just didn't allow for it" (Anna). Some of the frustrations were also related to the absence of a sense of usefulness or purpose, often caused by mismanagement from the sending organisation. "At the beginning, I felt like we were completely useless" (Emma).

> We didn't have much support. We started in a project that was actually going nowhere, we weren't welcome in the village by the coordinator. After that I was told: "Nah, actually you can't work there so we'll find you something but we don't know what yet." So they put me in another place and I quickly felt useless, really quickly. Because there was no real project and actually they didn't need an extra pair of hands. So yeah, over there the experience was not that great. I came back frustrated, you know, you don't really have the feeling to have accomplished anything. You leave with this idea in your head, thinking that it's easy, that we'll bring money and start to do stuff and maybe change something but actually, not at all. But you don't know that, nobody tells you that. That's why it didn't go down so well. (Laure)

3) Lack of preparation

Some of the professional development workers and the observing filmmaker noted that one of the obstacles to a meaningful learning experience was the lack of preparation from the volunteers. This has seldom been explored in the literature and is potentially difficult to assess, but it has definite consequences on how people approach communities and is perhaps revealing of their interest to really apprehend new cultures. "I was actually surprised that there was not a lot of… or I didn't have

the feeling that there was a lot of preparation, that people were not really trying to get informed before going there and trying. It's not that big of a deal to get informed. But I got that they just weren't interested in it and just going there with kind of... show up and see what happens. (…) I asked every volunteer and I think *no one* prepared themselves for going there. I think maybe reading an article here and there but not really getting informed about stuff. That was surprising to me" (Frederick). This can again be linked to the findings in the literature that, for Frederick, many individuals did not challenge their existing stereotypes and worldviews as a result of the experience.

> People, wherever I've ever been, travelling or working or volunteering, there's consistently been a lack of effort to understand the culture which people are working within, and the ease or readiness to judge it or criticise it or bigger about it. Seriously, a lot of people bond over the nuances of things they don't like about where they are. And that's been any volunteer experiences, any work experiences or any travel experiences I've been on. And that irritates me immensely. Because why they… and I even want to start my own consultancy firm to educate people about the culture they're going into and how to be fucking semi-nice about it. (Liam)

Prejudices are a great hindrance not only to have a meaningful experience, but also to be equipped to contribute in the host communities. Participants shared their thoughts about the good attitudes to have on the field, at some point. This, in particular, was one of the unexpected recurring themes that my participants insisted upon in a lot of interviews, and gave many anecdotes about. Furthermore, all of the ones who made suggestions agreed on how people should behave in the field, which is essentially to be in the position of an active learner, observing, absorbing information, participating, and being humble. Marcus gives a valuable account of this:

> If I was to generalise about how the person that come down as a volunteer is I would say that: it's a girl, she is very well aware of this related to gender, to vegetarianism, and close in a way – I wouldn't say hipster – but often very middle class, Swedish, aware kind of girls that come down. (…) The reason is that many of those girls that I'm talking about (it's like 95% of them are girls that's why I'm saying girls), they come down and they have already made up

their minds about a lot of things. When it comes to values, when it comes to opinions about gender, when it comes to political opinions, and all these things. So that makes it… kind of their cup is already full when then come. And then it's hard for them. You find that very often they start giving opinions before they try to understand. I understand that you come with a will to change things, but to change things you also have to understand things. And I think it's good to learn to be humble and to understand that… I mean, I usually say that one of my biggest kind of lessons that I've learnt here is that I still don't understand everything. (…) You kind of learn to understand that … just be humble about stuff! Learning for instance: whatever you react to when you come down, you have to know that that reaction is caused by what you see, but it's also caused by what you know already. And it's not always only the situation it's also a lot of yourself in that reaction kind of. And those things are so important. And I think some people have it and they don't maybe need that much education for it, but most people I think need to kind of learn and understand this. (Marcus)

4) Continuing bonds

It was surprising how participants insisted on the importance of continuing bonds with the field and the idea to "leave a trace" (Emma, Clementine); "what's important too is what kind of a link you maintain with that community or that group of that experience after it's finished" (Anna), and to not "come and go" (Agnes). This was achieved thanks to new technologies – such as sending emails or asking for pictures –, through continuing to be involved in projects from the distance (Samuel), or by sending more people to the organisation. The participants who returned to their former organisation or host community to work full-time also achieved a similar idea of continuing bonds. For the participants in this research who returned to the same place, this was explained clearly to be the case thanks to their social ties with the local people involved in the project and the host society as a whole. Participants who had experiences in multiple countries maintained a continuing bond with the country they were more likely to have established ties – this was influenced by linguistic skills and identification with the host culture. This is a feature that would be worth exploring in

further research as it has not been touched upon in the literature and could provide significant findings.

III. Coming Back a Volunteer: Challenges and Consequences

1) Managing social interactions

One of the major findings of this essay that has almost not been touched upon at all in the research on international volunteering is the difficulty it creates for some people to socially interact in their society when they come back: "and I think the... What is the word when you re-enter your original culture? That's hard, extremely hard for people to do, and they really struggle" (Kim). Indeed, some participants underline the discomfort of talking about their experience with other people that have not been subjected to similar undertakings. Some of the participants experience great disparities with their surroundings, which are triggered or enhanced both by the fear of conveying a false, over-simplified image of their project and experience, or to be misinterpreted because of people's lack of understanding. This was reported not only when returning but also long after they have returned, and was cause for anxiety. "Sometimes depending on my energy levels, I choose what I say to people, because it's a whole… because I think it comes with so much baggage, you kind of have to explain your whole life story, almost, for people to understand why you do this work. You can't just summarise it in a sentence" (Kim). Emma summarises what many participants felt:

> After I got back… I didn't really talk about it. Because there was… a major disparity. To talk to someone to whom it has never occurred to do humanitarian work, or to whom it has occurred but who didn't do it, it was tough. You'd *like* to talk about it but you think: are they going to understand? Or maybe when I tell it won't look like anything really… so no, I didn't really talk about it.

Symbolic interactionist interpretations were very poignant in the accounts of my participants when it came to managing ways to present themselves and managing their audiences' reactions (Cooley, 1909; Goffman, 1990; Mead, 1997). There was an

anxiety about how people were going to respond to this international volunteer feature in my participants' lives and identity, and most of them tried to present it in a way that their present audiences would be receptive to.

> I never try to present it like that, my aim is to always try to present it as in it's great to go and meet people and learn stuff. But Australia is a weird place as well because… have you heard of the tall poppy syndrome? England has it a lot too. If you're good or cool, people want to cut you down, like it's not good to be smart, it's not good to have travelled a lot. But you cant talk about it without people thinking "ah…" It's really shitty to try to manage that so I just pretty much don't say anything (Liam)

> I also kind of try to give another view of the whole thing. Like I don't try to put it as me being a Saint going down saving people, I just kind of put it in a way that its fun to go down and experience something new. In this case, the development field, then I kind of almost unconsciously try to put it to them in a way that I think will be more acceptable to them. And I don't like to throw… you know, around a lunch table throw stuff in their face about "you know how many people live under 2 dollars a day?" or, "you know how much this lunch would cost you?" You know all these things, I try to stay away from that. And maybe not so unconsciously I also try to change people's image about these things, that it doesn't have to mean changing your whole life and identity going down and you know, starting to live in a mud hut and "going native". I would say… when it comes to what people imagine about development workers I've always tried to put myself in a different light and tried to be diplomatic about it. (Marcus)

A common feature of my participants also is that few people grasp what it is they actually do in these projects or as a job (for the active development worker), especially in their family (Clementine, Simone): "my family is a very good example because they are very different from me. So they don't understand what I'm doing" (Agnes).

The difficulty of interacting with certain people about these experiences has impacted some participants' social circles. Kim gives a good example:

> No, it's only changed for the last... well I think it's changed since I came back from Laos actually, now that I think of it. And I've had a couple of friendships that have dissolved because... I haven't really thought about it but if I think about it now I think that were the issues, that they didn't really understand why I went there, or not really interested in it. I had one particular friend that I was quite close with her, and she even helped me write my application to go there. But then when I came back she just didn't get it and I haven't really spoken to her since. And if I think about my circle of friends now, it's connected to this development practitioner stuff.

She also mentions the crucial relevance of this in personal relationships and intimacy.

My participants have described great discomfort when it comes to interacting with people in casual social contexts whenever the volunteer experience is touched upon. This was probably one of the most exciting findings of this research since it has never been covered by the existing literature and seemed to represent a major part of the implications of the volunteer experience in my participants' lives. Participants felt rather strongly about this, some being able to cope with it better than others. Their experience seems to be met with misunderstandings, which increases the frustration and *malaise* of the individuals. Firstly, they are often forced to deal with stereotypes about local development or about volunteering. The most common stereotype they are faced with is one of the "saviour." While some reported getting admired for what they do to be quite satisfying at first, the satisfaction quickly changed into miscomprehension, or irritation, as illustrated below.

> There are so many stereotypical views of people who do this kind of work. It is a little bit sometimes this US Peace Corp kind of thing, and I've had comments from family or friends who don't really understand the work and that's ok but I've had those 'oh you're doing such a good thing and you're a real missionary' and you're just kind of like 'what?' (…) It kind of bothers me in a sense because it feels like it's a little bit glorified in a way, but I think people are also quite… I think they also admire you for doing it, which is nice but I don't want people to react that way. But I think they don't know what

else to say, cause it's like 'why do you want to go and live with poor people, what's wrong with you" and it's very hard I think … (Kim)

I think throughout both ones, before, during and after, people were putting me up on a pedestal, being like "this is so amazing what you're doing, I could never do that, this is so beyond what I could do, and whatever" to the point where I was uncomfortable and I was like… I think it was meant to be flattering, I understood that, but people kind of make a big deal out of it. To the point where I was like 'thank you… But that just shows how much you don't understand, really what this is all about'. (Anna)

I think they see me exactly as that, as the 'saviour', somebody who is kind of sacrificing their whole life for the good of others, I guess. (…) I guess it bothers me because it's wrong. It bothers me because it makes me think of what people actually think of development aid and how it's totally wrong. (Simone)

Some female participants also reported hearing quite often in their social surroundings remarks about how courageous engaging in these experiences is, and how strange of a remark it is to them. Kim's comment sums it up: "I did have one of my aunts say to me, 'I don't really know what to say but I would never have the courage to do what you do' and it really made me reflect cause I'm like 'I don't think this is courageous, I think this is stupid!'"

The stereotype my participants were faced with creates a tangible discomfort, which is clearly deplored. "If you really want to contribute or to help out because you think that it's possible to do it, I don't think it's fair that you should feel ashamed or avoid or just hide it just because you think people might consider you… see you as a certain type of person" (Samuel).

The narratives used by the participants to describe the difficulties met in socially interacting in Western social settings can be linked to the ones described by Ebaugh's participants at the stage of acquiring an "ex" status (1988). This finding suggests a great need for more sociologists to gain interest in this social phenomenon.

2) Consumption and awareness

The literature concerned with long-term impacts of volunteering on individuals, as we have seen, is often optimistic as to the changes that people adopt upon their return. Reported changes were those of increased awareness leading to lifestyle changes and relativism towards "First world problems." My participants' opinion on that matter is in line with the few scholars that have contested the actual impact of these experiences. Indeed, they often reported no change in consumption patterns or lifestyle. *"In my daily life in Sweden, I haven't changed my habits I would say. And I don't have this kind of thing where I stop complaining about ridiculous stuff in Sweden, I'm still the same, I complain about the same things"* (Marcus); "It's amazing how you get back to your old habits. I mean you come back and if you want to take a bath… well you just take it, haha" (Clementine). Agnes evoked the significance of these experiences for her lifestyle, it being "also a very huge part of your identity, this thing that you want to change stuff. And that makes you that you also have to make some choices for what you do in your life. I mean, I eat organic food, you think about how much water you use and what soap you use, and how much you travel, and don't travel that much with airplanes, what bank you use, what pension you use, and all that, it really comes into how you want to live your life, I guess" (Agnes).

3) Education

An interesting element that kept coming back throughout all interviews was the will of participant to find ways to educate people in their original context upon their return. This was expressed in spite of the participants' apprehension to discuss their experience. This can perhaps seem contradictory, but the problems participants have in sharing their experience are mainly due to the miscomprehension of development and of the kind of people that might get involved in international volunteering projects. Therefore, it did not seem so opposed to their apprehension, but was rather expressed as a means to correct the stereotypes and bring in new ways to appreciate development issues and cosmopolitanism, as the accounts of Marcus and Liam

provided a glimpse of in the above section, regarding the management of people's responses.

For my participants, informing people about development was the main purpose of this educational aspect. This was performed in different ways according to the participants' everyday surroundings. Sophie for example, being a teacher, brought her experiences back in her classroom as a way to enlighten her students. For other participants that do not have this platform, however, sharing their experiences with other people in the hope to inform and motivate them was merely expressed as a wish or an urge. The four most commonly reported ambitions behind this urge were to inform people on a specific country or region of the world; to make people take some perspective and make them more appreciative of what they have; to change people's perception of development, host communities, and volunteering projects; and more importantly to prompt a desire in other people to engage in international volunteering.

IV. Prescriptive Remarks

The participants in this research all agreed that international volunteering was effectively a phenomenon that had grown tremendously in the past decade. Some participants referred to it as a "trend" (Simone, Emma, Samuel, Clementine, Laure) or a "norm" (Liam). Liam also discussed the terminology as hugely problematic, hoping that "volunteerism will become one of those old terminologies that we're like 'how did we ever use that? How patronising, how colonial is that?'" The actual contribution of volunteers on host communities was sometimes met with scepticism. "For the volunteers I think it's really great actually. But I don't think the beneficiaries of the programme gain that much you know" (Simone). Although admitting "it's probably one of the more healthy versions of tourism" (Marcus), some of them expressed distrust in the consequences of it being a "trendy thing to do":

> It's been slipped in into that, you know the YOLO[29] bullshit of your life. So
> you have to have done it to be able to go back and talk about it. And it's
> falling into its own trap because they need to advertise like that to get the

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[29] "You Only Live Once".

money, this is their justification anyway. And it's probably hopefully what may change in any future is that… it's a misrepresented story. Which is not healthy for either side. (Liam)

There were immensely important prescriptive narratives in the interviews with the development workers in regards to the sending organisations' role in educating volunteers and providing efficient platforms for facilitating cultural exchange and participative local development. They corroborated the pressing needs expressed in the literature in making international volunteering projects more meaningful and productive. These prescriptions can be summarised in the following statements:

I think volunteer organisations that receive volunteers should be much better in enlightening the volunteers coming down beforehand. Just telling them what they can expect and what they can't expect cause I've heard so many volunteers coming back from these trips, being disappointed that they weren't able to change anything and they're like 'it's so hard, nothing can work, and it's going to take so much time'. Yeah! It's not that strange those things take time, it takes time to transform a society and you should kind of know that before you go down. And if you want to do something then you kind of have to more than just spending 6 months at a day care centre or at a school or whatever. And I think the problem I would say is that many volunteer organisations benefit from this urge that people have to go down and do something for others. And then they charge them like 2 000 Euros to go down for a couple of months and put them in a child centre or an orphanage for that time. They go home, then they can say they've been to Africa and tried to save children and of course they can see a lot of stuff but... they don't actually contribute that much to a change. (Marcus)

IV. Conclusion

As we have seen, there is a significant amount data that contribute at contradicting, refining, or filling the theoretical gaps in the existing research, which has been reviewed in the first chapter of this thesis. I believe that the great diversity of my participants, the levels of rapport I have with them, and the methodological approach

of this research have allowed for new and surprising data to emerge. The research findings have been presented in a similar fashion to the one of the literature review in order to facilitate their comparability. Indeed, this chapter has covered the chronological experience of what it is to become an actor of local development projects. This translates in the assessment of pre-trip motivations, the experience itself, and the return from the field. This research has brought to the fore issues that have not been inquired in the literature thus far. In regards to the motivations, it has outlined the potential generational character of insecurities that are linked with external pressures to engage in volunteering projects. Concerning the altruism versus ego-centrism debate, it has been noted that altruism as a main motivation was very much absent from my participants' accounts, which can be related either to the levels of reflexivity of my participants or to their honesty facilitated by the rapport I had with some of them. Indeed, some of the ones I did not know personally were more inclined to convey some form altruistic narratives, especially among the ones that had not been in the field.

The most groundbreaking findings of this research were concerning the participants' social interactions upon their return. Indeed, their account suggested a great difficulty in talking about their experiences. They were often met with paradoxical reactions that had in common the misunderstanding of their volunteer experience. The participants had trouble finding the appropriate narratives but also expressed a great wish to change people's perception about development and to find ways to bring educational elements into their social interactions with some people. These difficulties accounted for a great malaise in becoming an ex actor of development in Western social settings, in spite of the growing awareness about the phenomenon. These findings seem very relevant to the field of academia concerned with volunteer tourism programmes but also, I would argue that these findings testify for a tremendous need for academics from the field of sociology to develop further interest in this growing social phenomena.

This research has also corroborated existing inquiry on some aspects, most significantly regarding the importance of inter-personal relationships in the field and how these are highly dependent on the potential for acculturation in the host communities, which is assessed in terms of the length of the trip and of the mindset of

the individual. The influence of preconceptions in the way to handle the experience in the field and be incline to change corresponds to the academic knowledge that "in the case of volunteer tourism each individual will construct the meaning of their experience according to their own cultural and social background, the purpose of the visit, their companions, preconceived and observed values of the host culture, the marketing images of the destination and, above all, the relationships of power between visitor and host cultures, as well as within the host culture" (Wearing 2001:3). However, development approaches and pre-conceptions can be subject to change via an educational undertaking. The potential frustration of volunteers at their return and the lack of preparation before they leave are also issues that can also be dealt with by means of education.

Furthermore, the prescriptive remarks made by the participants were also along the lines of the ones presented in the literature, which suggests a pressing need for action in these regards.

As stated in the introduction, this research has aimed at providing a comprehensive qualitative account of the experience of individuals engaging in international volunteering experiences. This research has done so by conducted an in-depth inquiry into the everyday lives of volunteers, their motives for participating in local development, their experience on the field, and their experience coming back from the field. Having conducted a grounded theory research, most of the findings correspond to what participants felt relevant about their experience, without being guided by previously constructed concepts that I imposed on them. The varieties within my sampled population and the rapport I had or established with some of them allowed for diverse and insightful data to emerge. The chosen methodology granted the achievement of the explorative aim of this research. Given the fact that research about this phenomenon is relatively new, I suggest that more studies looking to inquire about international volunteers, their experience, impact and understanding adopt similar methodological approaches.

This research has sought to provide an understanding of international volunteering as a new social phenomenon by providing an overview of the literature concerned with this subject, most often referring to it as "volunteer tourism". The overview originally issued a definition of the concept and it is contextually embedded in society and went on to provide the literature's interpretations of the volunteering experience in a fashion following the chronology of the experience to finish with prescriptive recommendations recently outlined by scholars in order to better the experience. The following chapter laid out the research approach, methodological strategy and research design that were deemed appropriate to tackle the research aims. This thesis then brought forth the research findings by organising them in a fashion similar to the overview of the literature. This was done in an attempt to give a more realistic vision of the participants' experience and in order to ease the comparison with the literature.

The implications of the research findings for future research are two-fold. On the one hand, it mainly opens a new area of inquiry that would focus on individuals' interaction in Western social contexts. Indeed, the paradox that arisen from the

participants' accounts is that although international volunteering is an action that is potentially highly regarded socially and professionally, it can be met with scepticism in casual social contexts, which causes a definite *malaise* for some people. In spite of the fact that people who participate in these activities arguably possess greater adaptation skills and are able to cope with it by means of impression management and diplomacy, it undoubtedly has consequences on some people's social circle and can create apprehension in mentioning their experiences or cause them to silence it if they do not find the right narratives to convey. This ought to be explored in further research.

The other implication lies less in the field of academia and relies on the transformational aspiration of the critical realist approach of this research. Indeed, the second suggestion is in relation to the field of development. The participants expressly indicated a great need for sending organisations to educate the volunteers about the field and about the experience itself. It is necessary in order for all parties to benefit from theses experience that there is a more comprehensive and systematic way to enlighten volunteers about what they can or cannot expect from these experiences, but also how to interact with host communities and, I argue, how to re-enter their original social environment and interact with their peers at their return. Although a lot of organisations are now trying to provide a form of education before their volunteers leave, it is important that this practice is monitored and expanded. There is a great need for sending organisation to support their volunteers, not only for the benefit of these individuals, but also to allow them to interact meaningfully and respectfully in the host communities. Raymond and Hall's (2008) prescriptions for sending organisations to set realistic tasks for their volunteers, enhance their reflexivity, and provide platforms for exchange are indispensible but incomplete. I suggest, based on my participants' concerns, that sending organisations should also provide the volunteers with knowledge about the culture they are to enter, enlighten them about development approaches that would be inclusive, tolerant and humbling towards the host communities. Further inquiry would need to be done regarding the issues encountered by my participants in regards to the challenges they might face in engaging in social interactions.

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Appendix A

<center>Participants details[30]</center>

Kim
29 year old female of Australian nationality. She is a trained development worker with theoretical background in development and has done long-term[31] development related work in Laos and one short-term volunteer experience in Asia, 6 years ago.

Samuel
27 year old male of Swedish and Tanzanian nationality. He is a trained development worker with theoretical background in development who has participated in short-term local development projects in Tanzania that ended 3 months prior to the interview.

Simone
30 year old female of Brazilian nationality. She is a trained development worker with theoretical background in development and has done long and short-term local development projects in Nepal for the past 4 years.

Agnes
30 year old female of Danish nationality. She is a trained development worker with theoretical background in development and has a lot of development and volunteer working experience in Latin and Central America, as well as in Nepal, she has done long-term and short term missions. She has been involved in projects for 10 years.

Marcus
27 year old male of Swedish nationality. He is a trained development worker with theoretical background in development, he is the president of an active NGO in Kenya, where he currently works and also coordinates incoming volunteers. He has been involved in projects for 10 years.

Clementine
26 year old female of French nationality. She is a skilled professional who

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[30] The order of the participants list represents the chronological logic of the interviews.
[31] Short-term experiences refer to anything between 2 weeks and 6 months. Any amount of time over 6 months is considered long-term.

volunteered in Argentina for 6 months and went back to do long-term work for the same NGO as an employee. Her first experience happened a year prior to the interview

Anna
25 year old female of French and American nationality. She has had two short-term volunteer experiences in India and Honduras a year prior to the interview. She is now including development training in her education.

Liam
31 year old male of Australian nationality. He is a trained development worker with theoretical training in development with extensive short and long-term experiences from various regions of the world, which he has been doing for over 10 years.

Emma
21 year old female of French nationality. She has done a short-term volunteer experience in Nepal 2 years prior to the interview.

Laure
27 year old female of French nationality. She is a skilled nurse who volunteered for a short-term experience in Burkina Faso 2 years prior to the interview.

Frederick
28 year old male of German nationality. He is a filmmaker who spent 3 months in Kenya to investigate the concept of "volontourism" where he observed and interviewed a range of volunteers and sending organisations.

Sophie
60 year old female of French and American nationality. She is a high schoool social studies teacher in North America who is getting education in development, she has done short-term volunteer experiences in Cambodia, Egypt, and Haiti in recent years – starting in 2009.

Hugo
21 year old male of French nationality. He just finished his undergraduate degree and has no previous volunteer experience. He was on the verge of his first long-term volunteer experience in Madagascar.

Deborah
20 year old female of French nationality. She is a medical student and has no previous experience and was on the verge of her first short-term volunteer experience in Nepal.

Marie
19 year old female of French nationality. She has no previous experience and was on the verge of her first short-term volunteer experience in Tanzania.

Informed Consent Form

Acting local – becoming an actor of grassroots development projects: a qualitative investigation of volunteerism.

Purpose: The data collected during the interview will be used for a Master thesis in Development Studies with Sociology major. The purpose of the research is to investigate the experience of volunteers, their motivations in choosing to engage in volunteer projects in a globalised social context, as well as to understand the way they assessed the outcomes of the experience. The research seeks to understand the discursive and social contexts in which these processes are undergoing.

The interview will be of approximately one hour and will be unstructured with a topic guide, to allow participants to orientate the debate in a way they feel is most important. The interview will be recorded. However, the interviewee is guaranteed that no one apart from the researcher will listen to the interview or see the transcript. After gathering the data, the name of the interviewee will be changed to remain anonymous and to respect his/her privacy and confidentiality.

The researcher also guarantees you the right to:

- refuse to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering or that you feel is invading your privacy
- withdraw your data, if you want to take back anything you do not want to be used in the research or anything you believe was private, irrelevant, or inaccurate
- have a look at the transcript of your interview and also, at the written thesis

Researcher's details:

Charlotte Branchu
Email: dvs12cbr@student.lu.se
Telephone: +33 6.85.71.00.83

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I also:

    *   consent to the interview being audio-taped,
    *   reserve the right to refuse to answer any question I do not feel comfortable with, without having to give any justification
    *   acknowledge that no one else apart from the researcher have access to the recorded interview or see the transcript
    *   retain full anonymity and confidentiality and will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research,
    *   will be able to have a look at the transcript of your interview and also, at the written thesis on demand

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____
                                          .
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature