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"Taking by Giving" – The Contradiction of Volunteer Tourism
A critical analysis of the possible impacts of volunteer tourism in the Global South

Abstract

During recent decades there has been a rapid growth of volunteer tourism whose nature and impact are increasingly questioned in both literature and media. This study aims to critically compare the intended positive impacts with the potential negative consequences of volunteer tourism. The objective is to gain insight into possible contradictions and harm of the practice. Furthermore, by applying a postcolonial theory and key concepts of discourse and the white savior complex to the findings, the thesis intends to explore potential neo-colonial tendencies. The study is conducted as a research overview with secondary data as the empirical foundation. Literature identifying the negative and positive impacts of volunteer tourism has been collected, compared, and analyzed based on the theoretical framework. The findings suggest there are multiple harmful contradictions stemming from volunteer tourism projects as the desired outcomes are being transformed into unintended harmful consequences. However, the main contradiction is the failure to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for both the volunteers and the hosts. The neocolonial tendency that can be perceived is the presence of a white savior complex that originates in colonial discourse. Volunteer tourism reinforces the colonial discourse of white saviors rescuing helpless communities in the Global South which subsequently becomes an unquestioned truth. The narrative told of the superiority of the West and the inferiority of the rest of the world is harmful as it produces unequal structures of power, similar to colonial times. There is a need for further critical analyses of volunteer tourism as well as increased research on frameworks for the evaluation of volunteer initiatives. The volunteer tourism sector must be reconstructed to increase the positive impacts and decrease the negative consequences to become sustainable by ensuring both volunteers and hosts benefit from volunteer projects.

Keywords: Volunteer tourism, voluntourism, post-colonialism, discourse, white savior complex

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Volunteer tourism (VT), or in some cases co-joined voluntourism, is an alternative form of tourism that broadly can be defined as individuals that travel and pay to volunteer in development projects (McGehee and Santos p 760, 2005). VT is rapidly growing as an alternative form of tourism with a market that includes a variety of destinations and volunteer activities (Bargeman et al, 2018). It is especially popular among young middle to upper-class individuals in Western societies that are motivated to "make a change" and "help those that need" (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2010). The rise of VT has led to increased research on the phenomenon. Initially, research took a positive stance toward VT, focusing on conveying the benefits (Wearing et al, 2017). However, contemporary research has shifted the focus to critical analyses of VT as multiple negative implications are being recognized. The volunteer encounter encompassed by the stakeholders of VT is complex as well as contradictory, which scholars aim to convey. It is however important to recognize that VT is not a homogenous product, meaning that there are varied forms of projects, organizations, and tourists (ibid). The lack of homogeneity complicates the study of VT, yet does not reduce the importance of assessing a critical approach to the phenomenon. The critique of VT is centered on the possible negative consequences on the local community and the uneven distribution of beneficial outcomes between the volunteers and the host community. VT is marketed as a project that benefits both the tourists and the local communities, and as an initiative that contributes to developmental outcomes. However, it has been found that VT may not be as mutually beneficial as initially believed (Aquino and Andereck, 2018). The way contemporary VT is carried out with short-term projects and the use of young unskilled individuals can contribute to issues such as neglect of locals' desire, rationalization of poverty, increased stereotypes, decrease in employment opportunities, and creation of dependency (Guttentag, 2009). Yet, by being active in VT projects, volunteer tourists can advance their skills, experience self-development, and the feeling of contributing to a good cause. It can be argued that VT does not live up to one of its sole purposes which is to be beneficial for both parties. VT is thus in many cases a contradiction as the initiatives are in many cases transformed into harmful consequences for local communities as well as reinforce neo-colonial tendencies.

1.2 Purpose and aim

This thesis aims to explore and critically analyze the consequences of VT projects by providing a comparison of the desired implications with the possible negative consequences. Furthermore, the objective will be to produce an understanding of the possible harms VT imposes on local communities as well as apply a postcolonial approach to investigate the connections to neo-colonialism. By illuminating aspects of neo-colonialism and harmful impacts, this thesis aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion occurring in both the media and research sector where VT is increasingly analyzed and questioned. The study will be a research overview based on secondary data and will utilize a postcolonial framework to analyze the findings. The focus will be to highlight the contradictions of VT by illuminating how the intentions and desired outcomes of VT easily can transform into harmful consequences as well as to connect the phenomenon to neo-colonialism. Acknowledging and avoiding unintended consequences and neo-colonial tendencies is crucial to protect local communities and to make sure the beneficiaries are benefitting from the VT initiatives.

Other literature has addressed similar topics, however, this thesis aims to further contribute to the debate on the impact of VT and hopefully contribute to additional knowledge. Continues critical comparison of the intended consequences and the possible negative implications of VT is highly relevant and needed as VT is rapidly increasing in popularity and has, in many cases, put the volunteers' interests and needs over the beneficiaries (Hernandez-Maskivker et al, 2018). By applying a postcolonial approach to the findings this thesis hopes that the issues of both contradictions and harmful neo-colonial tendencies will become evident.

1.3 Research Questions
- What are some of the contradictions of the implications of volunteer tourism?
- In which ways can volunteer tourism be harmful and reinforce colonial tendencies?

1.4 Terminology

Different concepts and keywords will be utilized throughout the thesis. To limit misconceptions of the definitions, this section will provide a description to create an understanding of the concepts.

The most common definition of '*volunteer tourism*' (VT) has been established by Stephen Wearing in his book 'Volunteer Tourism: experiences that Make a Difference' (Wearing, 2001). He states that volunteer tourism consists of "tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001). Wearing's definition will be applied throughout the thesis, as it is the most used interpretation of the concept in contemporary literature.

Volunteer tourism falls under the umbrella term of '*sustainable tourism*' which incorporates multiple different alternative forms of tourism. The 'World Tourist Organization' which is a United Nations specialized agency (UNWTO) has defined sustainable tourism as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (UNWTO, 2023). The three aspects of sustainability are the economic, social-cultural, and economic spheres and there must be a balance between the three dimensions to create long-term sustainability (ibid).

Furthermore, the usage of '*volunteer encounter*' entails the social space where identities and relations between all individuals involved in a volunteer project are created. The encounters are context-specific and involve people with diverse social, personal, and cultural backgrounds (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2010). The concept of volunteer encounter is central to understanding how volunteering takes place and touches especially on the creation of volunteers' self-identity in comparison to the beneficiaries (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2010). With the creation of identities and relations within the encounter, the volunteers establish a clear distinction between 'us' and 'them' which impact the division between the Global South and the Global North

The division between the *Global North and Global South* will be utilized as a conceptual framework to discuss global inequalities of socio-economic development and political power. While there is a connection to geographical boundaries, the division is based on a combination of geographical, economic, and historical factors (encyclopedia.pub, n.d.). The Global North consists of economically advanced countries, primarily located in North America and Europe as well as East Asia. The Global South refers to developing countries mainly located in Africa, Asia, and Latin America where issues of political instability, social inequality, and economic

challenges often exist (encyclopedia.pub, n.d.). However, it is essential to note that the division between the Global North and Global South is not absolute as there are variations within the categories. Some countries in the Global North face economic and social challenges while some countries in the Global South have experienced a significant increase in development (Trefzer et al, 2014). Even though there are exceptions to the division of the Global North and Global South, the conceptual framework will be utilized as it highlights the disparities in wealth power, and development of the world. The conceptual framework of the Global North and Global South will be used interchangeably with the discourse of 'The West' and 'the rest'. Furthermore, individuals in the Global North will additionally be referred to as Westerners.

1.5 Background

VT is a rather recent phenomenon that became prominent in the 1980s and 1990s after extensive critique of the wave of mass tourism in the 1960s and 1970s (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2010). A collective understanding amongst people emerged where the negative social, ecological, and cultural impacts of mass tourism were the cause of the unequal distribution of wealth around the globe (ibid). The opposition to mass tourism instigated a wave of alternative tourism known as 'sustainable tourism'. Central aspects of sustainable tourism are that it is pro-poor, community-based, participatory, and respects natural, social, and cultural values in the host country. Furthermore, sustainable tourism aims to move beyond superficial social interactions and ensure that the encounter is mutually beneficial for both interactive parts, meaning the tourist and the host community (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2010). Ecotourism, ethical tourism, and volunteer tourism are all niche focuses within sustainable tourism that has gained popularity among the public. Development-oriented VT has quickly become one of the most prominent forms of sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, the theoretical connections to VT have been argued to be neoliberal. Privatization of development practices and commodification of development activities are fundamental for the emergence of the market of VT (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). Throughout the decades, mainstream development approaches have undergone changes in ideology which can be distinguished as different development paradigms. The consensus of the mainstream approach to development shifted in the 1980s during what is called the "Washington Consensus[1]" when

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[1] Washington consensus is a set of economic policies advocated for developing countries by international financial institutions, primarily International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Williamson, 2005).

new practices were proposed, accepted, and adopted. The new framework recommended policy reforms that would open national economies to the global market through trade and liberalization by privatization and deregulation (Gore, 2000). VT's emergence is thus associated with the shift from the mainstream state-led, top-down development approach to the neo-liberal discourse and practices of unregulated markets and privatized social services. The shift opened the possibility for other actors such as non-government organizations (NGOs), private organizations, and local communities to become active in development work which is essential for immersing development practices in tourism (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). Neo-liberalism has thus enabled development practices to not only be privatized but also packaged as a marketable commodity.

VT has transformed since its emergence in the 1980s and is today a diverse sector with varied destinations, activities, and tourists. Nonetheless, contemporary trends of VT exhibit the popularity of destinations in the Global South with programs that concentrate on teaching, environmental regeneration ventures, and building/community welfare projects (Pastran, 2014). VT is a popular type of tourism as there is a growing desire, especially among young people in the West, to escape traditional tourism. The main consumer consists of middle- and upper-class individuals in the Global North who can be described as globally conscious people that are aware of global inequalities and therefore sympathize with the global justice agenda that denounces neo-liberalism and anti-imperialism (Conran, 2011). The motivations of volunteer tourists have been studied by scholars who found that the underlying aspirations included the desire to escape traditional tourism, learn new skills, interact with local people, and "help those that are in need" (Pastran, 2014). The attractiveness of VT has additionally initiated a growing interest in the phenomenon in the research sector.

1.6 Delimitations

VT is a diverse form of tourism that includes varied destinations, activities, and organizations. To generalize all types of VT would be misleading. This thesis will therefore concentrate on a certain type of VT: Western volunteer companies that organize volunteer trips in the Global South. Furthermore, the focus will be on commercial companies that are profit-oriented as there is a growing number of these organizations in the global tourism industry (Godfrey et al, 2019). The reason why these characteristics of VT organizations are chosen is due to the issues they

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contribute to. The commercialized Western sending organizations that conduct projects in the Global South are driven by optimizing their profits and therefore adapt to the demand of the market which negatively impacts the host communities (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). Furthermore, these types of VT organizations tend to coordinate short-term volunteer trips ranging from one week up to six months, especially for young individuals who do not have any previous experiences which contributes to other issues that will be discussed more in-depth in the analysis (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011).

1.7 Disposition of Thesis

The first chapter of the thesis consists of an introduction to the topic of VT and gives insight into the current debate on the ambiguity of the actual implications of VT projects. After, the purpose and aim are presented as the objective to contribute to a clear and critical analysis of the desired consequences of VT and the possible negative impacts. The following section declares the research questions as "What are some of the contradictions of the implications of volunteer tourism?" and "In which ways can volunteer tourism be harmful and reinforce colonial tendencies?". To clarify the terminology that will be utilized throughout the thesis, the following section described definitions of central concepts relating to the topic of VT. The fifth section of the introduction is dedicated to presenting the background of VT with general knowledge of the emergence of the phenomenon as well as theoretical connections and contemporary VT practices. The first chapter is concluded by establishing the delimitations which are the limitations of researching solemnly Western profit-oriented organizations that conduct VT projects in the Global South. The second chapter covers methodology with two parts that present the process of research overview and the selection of literature and themes. The second part consists of limitations. The third chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework with explanations of the theory and key concepts that are utilized in the analysis. The subsequent chapter is the research overview which will present a summary of the common themes discussed in the literature on VT. The intention is to provide an introduction to important aspects of VT which then will be described and analyzed in-depth in the analysis. The first section of chapter five will describe the benefits of VT. However, the positive implications will not be discussed exceedingly in-depth as the research questions aim to understand the potential harm and the neo-colonial tendencies of VT as well as some of its contradictions. Yet, to be able to compare and gain an understanding of how the intentions and desires of VT can transform into unintended negative consequences, the proclaimed benefits of

VT claimed will be mentioned. The second section will focus on the negative consequences of VT. The possible negative impacts will be analyzed in-depth by applying a postcolonial approach to gain insight into the possible contradictions, harms, and neo-colonial tendencies of VT.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Overview

This thesis is a research overview with secondary data as the empirical foundation. The secondary data that has been utilized are primarily academic articles and books. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will be the postcolonial theory as well as central key concepts that will operate as a tool to analyze the findings. The process has been systematic and has undergone preparation steps of justification of the subject, data searching, and reporting as well as conducting data analysis and writing a conclusion (Robson & McCartan p 88-89, 2016). Multiple studies and literature address different aspects of what will be discussed in this thesis. The aims are to further contribute to a clear and precise comparison between the intended consequences and the possible negative implications of VT while contributing with a postcolonial approach to the findings. By discussing how the aspired outcomes of VT can in some cases contribute to damaging impacts on host communities, this thesis hopes that the issues of VT will become more evident. The methodology of the research overview is suitable for the topic of VT as there is extensive secondary data on the subject. Additionally, there is a variety of valuable theoretical approaches applicable to VT such as decommodification theory, development theory, critical theory, and social exchange theory (Zahra and McGehee, 2013). However, this thesis has decided to utilize the postcolonial theory as this framework explores the legacies of colonialism and unequal power structures which is essential when understanding neocolonial theory.

The selection of literature is based on the relevance of the research questions. As this thesis aims to investigate the contradictions and harms of VT, the focus has been to utilize articles discussing the possible positive and negative impacts. However, literature addressing other components of VT has additionally been included in the literature review to contribute to in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon of VT and not only its consequences. The process of analyzing the literature has been to compare findings in different articles, and additionally by

mapping out the connections between the characteristics and intentions of VT to the possible negative impacts. During the process, certain themes were established. The themes of 'Tourists' motivation, perception, and the neglect of local's desires'; 'Short-term trips, unskilled labor, and decreased labor demand'; 'Conceptualization of the 'other' and poverty rationalization' and 'commodification and impact on culture' were used to investigate contradictory and harmful tendencies of VT.

2.2 Limitations

Secondary data that has been collected by another researcher creates the issue of interpretation. The data will be processed through multiple stages by different people which can affect the essence of what is being stated. Therefore, it is important to mention that what is presented in this thesis is an interpretation based on my understanding of the chosen secondary data. Furthermore, it should be noted that my positionality is not neutral seeing as my social position affect me as a person which can further impact the interpretation. Nonetheless, I have tried to be as objective as possible by aiming to be transparent throughout the process of writing this thesis.

Other aspects that should be stressed are the type of literature that exists on VT. The general focus of studies has been on the volunteer tourists, their motivation, and theoretical connections as well as the positive and negative impacts of VT. There is an overall lack of research on the local community's standpoint and experience of VT which inhibits this thesis to consider those perspectives. Therefore, it should be mentioned that when discussing impacts, it is taken from scholars' understanding and not directly from the perspective of local communities. Moreover, the findings in the articles are generally regarding individual cases of local communities and VT initiatives, making it difficult to generalize and apply them to other projects and locations. Additionally, there are issues with generalizing VT and referring to it as a homogenous product. VT is diverse in its actors, locations, and activities with organizations ranging from NGOs and private commercialized organizations to local groups. There is also a large difference in activities ranging from wildlife preservation to orphanage care. Yet, for the sake of conducting this research, the thesis has been limited to addressing the type of VT that in many cases has been found to contribute to negative implications for local communities in the Global South.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks and key concepts utilized to analyze the findings will be the postcolonial theory and the key concept of 'discourse' and 'white saviorism'. Both postcolonial theory and the concepts are relevant and useful when attempting to compare the implications of VT and discuss its potential harm and neo-colonial tendencies. Exploring the power hierarchies, colonial legacies, and the nature of relationships between the Global North and Global South is fundamental for the theories and is therefore applied to VT.

In the article "Volunteer Tourism: A Postcolonial Approach" Pastran summarizes the postcolonial theory by explaining that the main focus is on understanding how the legacies of colonialism, as well as structures of oppression, can be perceived in contemporary global relationships (Pastran, 2014). He states that the postcolonial theory addresses the fact that political, social, and economic legacies from colonial times are present in countries that previously were colonizers and colonized. Furthermore, resistance and deconstruction of the postcolonial tendencies that can be perceived in contemporary global trends is a central aspect of the theory (Pastran, 2014). Wijesinghe, Mura, and Bouchon discuss the postcolonial theory and the idea of neocolonialism in the article "Tourism Knowledge and Neocolonialism – a Systematic Critical Review of the Literature" (Wijesinghe et al, 2019). The authors continue the discussion on colonial legacies by describing the concept of neocolonialism which is the ongoing nature of colonialism in the contemporary global structure. They argue that neocolonialism in comparison to colonialism is subtle and not visible but can be perceived in the unequal power relations, continuing racial oppression, and global hegemonies. The scholars describe how contemporary global organizations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), The United Nations (UN), and the World Bank can control other countries by spreading a system of capitalism, free market policies, privatization, and deregulation to developing countries. Neocolonial structures are therefore still in place as structures of power keep influencing socio-cultural and economic arenas worldwide (Wijesinghe et al, 2019).

A central understanding of the postcolonial theory is that "development" is a means for the Global North to continue colonizing independent states in the Global South (Pastran, 2014). Postcolonial theory critiques the contemporary development sector and its origin in colonialism. During the late era of colonialism, the attention of colonizers shifted from the extraction of raw materials to the quest for development, which is known as the civilizing

mission. Western countries intended to transform their colonies and increase socio-economic prosperity (Pomeranz, 2005). However, the end of the Second World War marked a new era of newly independent states, and the civilizing mission transformed into development cooperation (Six, 2009). Previous colonial officers found new occupations within international development as they had previous experience working with development overseas (Kothari, 2006). The practices, policies, and especially discourse of development are therefore argued to be, shaped by European and colonial values of modernity. The European principles and desires are perceived as universal values that should be accomplished globally as the Global North considers itself as the desired outcome of the development trajectory (Six, 2009).

The notion of discourse is a central concept of postcolonial theory and is based on the word of Focoualt (Hall, 2018). Discourse contributes with an explanation of the creation of 'truths' and the division of power. Stuart Hall describes how discourse is the production of knowledge through language in chapter 7 "The West and the Rest" in the book "Race and Racialization, essential readings (Hall, 2018). The author describes that the way we make statements and talk about subjects becomes a discourse that produces a particular knowledge of a topic. Hall explains that statements that share commonality produce a narrative that becomes an accepted truth. This means that over time, how we depict and talk about the world becomes natural and considered an unchallenged reality. The author mentions that once a discourse has been established it is often difficult to create an alternative narrative that will become accepted. Hall stresses that "discourse is a crucial medium between the production of knowledge and the subsequent representation of reality" (Hall, 2018 p 85). The way we understand reality subsequently impacts the way we act and therefore discourses can have real implications. The very idea of "The West" or the "Global North" is a central topic of discourse in the postcolonial approach. Hall continues by explaining how the saying 'West and the rest' is a depicture of how the West has identified itself based on its difference from the rest of the world. The 'rest' which is often called the "other" is based on Edward Said's work Orientalism. This division can also be depicted in the differentiation of 'us' meaning us in the Global North, and 'them' as them in the Global South. The discourse of the 'West and the rest' was established during colonial times and is therefore shaped and molded by the motives of Western superiority and expansion of power. The West has thus established a discourse where they are deemed superior. Power comes from creating and dominating a discourse as it can become an unquestioned truth that shapes the way we perceive and act upon it (Hall, 2018). The colonial tendencies and production of knowledge are persistent till today with lines of exploitation, social domination, and

distribution of resources similar to those of colonial times (Quijano, 2007). The postcolonial theory aims to dissolute the Western discourse that was established under oppression and create the freedom to produce and criticize all discourses (Quijano, 2007).

Another key concept that will be utilized for the analysis is the white savior complex or also called white saviorism[2]. The term is based on the white savior industrial complex that was established by Teju Cole, a Nigerian-American writer as a result of the actions after Kony2012 (Asare, n.d.). While white saviorism can occur in everyday life, this thesis will utilize the concept in the context of humanitarianism and aid work. Healthline explains that the white savior complex is a term that defines white individuals who take the role of a helper to black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) but often result in doing more harm than good (Healthline, 2021). The issues with white saviorism are that it derives from the perception that BIPOC lack resources, willpower, or the ability to help themselves. The author means that without realizing it, white saviors deem themselves superior as they assume they can help BIPOC even though they lack might skills or knowledge. The characteristics of the white savior complex descend from a colonial belief that BIPOC are primitive and ignorant and are therefore in need of white people to act as responsible figures, leaders, and educators who can rescue people of color from their helplessness (Healthline, 2021).

4. Research Overview

The rapid growth of volunteer tourism perceived in contemporary tourism has generated an increasing amount of research on the phenomenon. Generally, literature on volunteer tourism tends to focus on volunteer tourists, their motivation, preferred volunteer activities, and the potential of the volunteer tourist's experience (Guttentag, 2009). However, other themes that are commonly discussed and researched among scholars are the theoretical connections of the phenomenon together with benefits as well as negative implications. Yet, there is less attention on the hosts of volunteer tourism, both individually and community-wise in existing literature (Lee, 2020). The reason behind the lack of focus on the hosts can be argued to originate from difficulties in identifying all stakeholders that construct the host or community as well as unequal power structures and oppression deriving from neo-colonialism and globalization

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[2] The white savior complex and white saviorism will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis.

which can prevent inclusion of marginalized groups (Zahra and McGehee, 2013). Furthermore, the focus on the volunteer's motivation and interest can be directly connected to a market-type goal to create better designed programs for tourists (Zahra and McGehee, 2013).

Studies investigating volunteers' motivations have found an array of reasons. It has been found that while tourists are partly motivated by altruism[3], studies have found that self-gratification is equally as influential in motivating individuals to partake in VT projects (Coghlan, 2008). The authors Clary and Snyder categorized the motivational foundations into reasons of value, meaning altruistic and humanitarian motivation (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Reasons for the quest for understanding people and other cultures. Reasons for self-development. Reasons for career advancement. Reasons for social relationships and connecting to other people with similar interests. Lastly, the reason to reduce negative feelings such as guilt or personal problems (ibid).

Numerous studies have been dedicated to conveying the benefits of VT. Some scholars argue that VT is a good alternative in comparison to mass tourism as it results in benefits for both the tourist and the recipient (Lee, 2020). The main benefits have been reported as the work that volunteers achieve, the revenue that host communities or sending organizations can generate, the environmental conservation, the personal growth that volunteers have the possibility to undergo, the intercultural experience that can foster a better understanding between cultures (Guttentag, 2009). It is believed that VT is mutually beneficial and therefore, the tourists will gain the assets of education, cross-cultural experiences, and personal growth (Hernandez-Maskivker et al, 2017). On the other end, the benefits for the community are the free labor and relationships between the locals and volunteers which can increase the mobilization of necessary resources as well as raise awareness of issues that can result in social change (ibid).

There is however a divide between scholars on the impacts of VT. It has been argued that the phenomenon has received a rather uncritical approach which has created an optimistic perspective toward VT. While there has been an increase in critique towards VT during recent years, numerous articles state the need to further critically analyze VT. Many scholars recognize the complexity of volunteer tourism and its effects by acknowledging the potential beneficial

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[3] Altruism can be understood as behavior that benefit other people which comes at a personal cost to the behaving individual (Kerr et al, 2004)

outcomes while at the same time conveying the possible negative effects. In the article "Possible Negative Impacts of Volunteer Tourism" Guttentag lists some of the negative implications connected to VT which can be seen as 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 labor; a reinforcement of conceptualizations of the 'other' and rationalizations of poverty, caused by intercultural experience (Guttentag, 2009). However, Guttentag states that "The list of volunteer tourism's possible negative impacts should not be interpreted as an unavoidable series of consequences that are produced by every volunteer tourism project" (Guttentag 2009, p 538). He argues that the consequences must be recognized and avoided so that one can develop volunteer tourism into projects that are beneficial to both the host and the volunteers.

5. Analysis

5.1 Beneficial Impacts

The positive benefits that have been provided by the VT sector are stated as the work that volunteers achieve the revenue that host communities or sending organizations can generate, the environmental conservation, the personal growth that volunteers have the possibility to undergo, the intercultural experience that can foster a better understanding between cultures (Guttentag, 2009). The last-mentioned benefit of cultural understanding is extensively discussed and seen as a major benefit of VT. Raymond and Hall mention in their article that the cross-cultural exchange between participants and the host community has been suggested to contribute to an increased understanding of the local culture which subsequently could contribute to understanding, tolerance, and social awareness (Raymond and Hall, 2008). The cultural exchange of VT projects is proclaimed to create a global citizenry that fosters a sense of mutual responsibility for people around the world which can instigate social change (ibid). Not only has VT been argued to contribute to increased cultural understanding, but also increased social awareness. The researchers Nancy McGehee and Carla Santos found that VT projects can provide volunteers with the opportunity to expand their knowledge of social inequalities, injustices, and the global nature of social issues (McGehee and Santos, 2005). They claim that committing to VT projects enables volunteers to recognize the complexities of social issues and challenges impoverished societies face (ibid).

Based on the postcolonial approach, one can question whether VT is inevitably neocolonial. When VT is conducted in a way that empowers local communities by giving them the right to be involved in development-oriented volunteer projects, the needs of communities can be addressed. Wearing challenges the idea that VT is inevitably neo-colonial (Wearing, 2001). He means that a postcolonial approach can be incorporated into the practice of VT which can maximize the negative potential benefits and minimize the possible negative. By applying a postcolonial approach to the practice of VT, the tendencies of neocolonialism can be recognized and avoided. Wearing claims that VT opens up spaces where people are equal which produces a suitable environment for the education of colonial history and unequal structures of power (Wearing, 2001).

5.2 Negative Impacts

5.2.1 Tourists' Motivation, Perception, and Neglect of Local Desires

Studies have investigated the interest of volunteers and found an array of different reasons ranging from seeking authenticity, partaking in a cultural exchange, and to 'make a change' and 'helping those in need' which is associated with altruism (Brown, 2005). However, studies have recently focused on personal advantages as a motivation for tourists. Wanting to achieve personal gains such as professional advancement, self-discovery and the desire to travel is not an issue per se as VT focuses on contributing to benefits for the volunteers as well as the beneficiaries. However, in the article "A Critical Analysis of Volunteer Tourism and the Implications for Developing Communities" Garrison mentions the issue that arises when volunteers are motivated by egocentric aspects such as the internal desire to feel needed by local communities (Garrison, 2015). The issue with the aspiration of feeling needed can be associated with the white savior complex where Westerners romanticize themselves as heroes and their role in saving people in impoverished areas. Similarities can be found with the colonial discourse of 'the white man's burden' which portrays the responsibility of Westerners to interfere to aid in civilizing the societies in the Global South that were considered primitive and unable to help themselves (Badyopadhyay, 2019)(Kipling, 1899). The white saviorism connected to VT and the desire to feel needed is problematic as it reinforces the discourse where the host communities are perceived as unable to create self-sustaining solutions (Anderson et al, 2021). The discourse undermines the skills, knowledge, and power of the host community when assuming the locals require white people to rescue them from their helplessness. The

colonial discourse of Western superiority and the inferiority of 'the rest' that is embedded in white saviorism is problematic as it can be an underlying motivation for volunteers. While this might not be the thought process of the volunteer tourists, they still perpetuate colonial tendencies by reinforcing a harmful and stereotypical discourse of locals being helpless and in need of Westerners' aid. It reinforces the idea that development is something that comes from the outside and is in the hands of powerful wealthy Westerners, similar to the belief during colonial times (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). From a postcolonial perspective on discourse, the issue with the reinforcement of colonial discourses is the power that is given to the West. The acceptance of the narrative that is being told of the division between the 'West and the rest' can become an unquestioned truth that people will subsequently act upon. The continuation of perpetrating colonial discourses can thus enable the West to remain superior while the 'rest' will be perceived as inferior. (Hall, 2018)

Furthermore, Garrison mentions that it is problematic when VT becomes a motivation and method for self-healing in the sense that volunteers want to experience poor conditions and meet impoverished individuals to discover meaning and satisfaction in their own life (Garrison, 2015). The culture and circumstances in host communities in the Global South are vastly different from the lives of volunteers in the Global North which is one of the appeals of VT. Being appreciative of the lives at home is a common narrative found in literature that investigates the impacts on volunteer tourists. In the article "Poor but Happy: Volunteer Tourists' Encounter with Poverty" Crossley mentions how the host community of VT often becomes an exotic and stereotyped 'other' whose culture and impoverished circumstances become a product that can be consumed through VT (Crossley, 2012). Utilizing the experience of meeting the 'other' as a means of gaining life satisfaction is problematic. The author argues that it is often the stereotypical categorization occurring during the volunteer encounter where the difference between the volunteers and the host is distinguished and established into a clear division between 'us' and 'them'. She continues by explaining that the distinction between 'us' and 'them' and the exotification of the 'other' is part of a colonial discourse that is harmful. The discourse of 'us' and 'them' is connected to the idea of 'the West and the rest' which has the underlying connotation of Western superiority (Kothari, 2006). The pursuit of gratitude and appreciation could also be argued to be a defensive function for volunteer tourists. Instead of being swallowed by feelings of guilt when perceiving poverty firsthand, volunteers can transform a negative experience into feelings of appreciation for the lives they have in the Global North (Crossley, 2012).

Nonetheless, one of the main motivations for volunteers is 'to make a change' and 'help those in need'. There is, therefore, a belief among individuals from the Global North that the knowledge and actions they bring will aid in solving the host communities' problems relating to poverty (Garrison, 2015). However, the issues the impoverished communities face are often greater than what volunteer tourists understand (Aquino and Andereck, 2018). The perception that individuals can come as an outsider and 'save' a community from their issues is also a notion based on the white savior complex. Westerners romanticize their role and assume they will contribute to solutions to the impoverished circumstances which further reinforces the colonial tendencies of white superiority as the Western blueprint for development (Garrison, 2015).

However, the belief of the possibility to contribute to solutions can be changed once volunteers have taken part in VT projects. A study conducted by Aquino and Andereck aimed to investigate the volunteer's perspective on their effect on a local community once they had initiated a project (Aquino and Andereck, 2018). The study found that the volunteers were unsure about their overall impact. The authors state that the volunteers felt as if they were the main beneficiaries of the VT project. The experience of the volunteers, therefore, contradicts the notion that VT is equally beneficial for the tourists and the hosts. Furthermore, the volunteers expressed the realization that the problems the community faced were so vast in comparison to what an individual could do. They were therefore unsure if they had any impact whatsoever on the community (ibid).

Similar findings have been established by Wright who did a comparative analysis between hosts' and tourists' perceptions of VT and its impacts (Wright, 2013). The study found different awareness of negative consequences among volunteers. Tourists with previous volunteering experience were aware and believed there were negative aspects of VT while volunteer tourists without previous experience believed there were no negative impacts of VT (Wright, 2013). When entering the volunteer experience there is a risk that volunteers imagine they will solve many issues the community faces and believe there are no negative consequences of VT. The issues that arise from the lack of awareness of limited impact are the reinforcement of colonial discourse and potential disappointment among volunteers once they realize they were able to help less than they initially thought (ibid).

Furthermore, Guttentag discusses the possible issues of motivations and interests of volunteers in the article "Possible Negative Impacts of Volunteer Tourism" (Guttentag, 2009). As

mentioned, being motivated by self-interests is not an issue, however, it becomes problematic when VT organizations are influenced by the interest of the tourists. Guttentag means that when profit-oriented VT organizations are driven by competing in the market, they aspire to increase the attractiveness of VT trips for volunteers. The author mentions that the problem with valuing the volunteers' motivations and desires is that in some cases the needs of volunteers may be considered before the needs of the host community. The prioritization of the interests of the volunteers over the locals illustrates the unequal distribution of power that can be perceived in the competition on the free global market. One can thus argue that there is a connection to subtle neo-colonial tendencies of enforcing a system of capitalism, free market policies, and deregulation that impact the global structures of power. Guttentag states that when the design and focus of VT projects are oriented around the volunteer instead of the local community, the project might not address the most vital issues or desires of the hosts and is instead tailored to benefit the volunteers. The author explains that a negative impact of the profit-oriented commercialized organization is thus the influence volunteers' motivation has on the project which subsequently results in a neglect of the local's needs. The focus on the volunteer's aspiration is thus a possible harmful factor as well as a contradiction as the increased focus to tailor the trips after the interest of volunteers goes against the purpose of contributing to equal beneficial outcomes for everyone involved.

5.2.2 Short-term Trips, Unskilled Labor, and Decreased Labor Demand

During recent decades VT commercialized has expanded rapidly and the low requirements of skills needed to partake in projects have made the trips accessible to the public. Garrison states that volunteers tend to have limited little experience, knowledge, or awareness of the host community or the work they will do (Garrison, 2015). The author further states that "projects are only as productive as the individuals on them, and the outcomes appear neither positive nor mutually beneficial, when volunteers essentially have no idea of how to accomplish their intended goals" (Garrison 2015, p 17). However, VT trips have adapted to the tourists' needs and can therefore take place from one week up to a longer period such as six months. Garrison means that the short-term commitment to projects is problematic as it reduces the ability to contribute to sustainability, cross-cultural exchange, authenticity, and social awareness.

There is less ability to create sustainable solutions when there is a constant cycle of volunteers entering and leaving the community and the project. The cycle contributes to a constant flow of economic revenue from tourists which positively impacts the economy. However, the ability to create long-lasting self-sustaining solutions coming from the

community itself is reduced when there is a dependency on tourists and their constant flow of money (Hernandez-Maskivker et al, 2017). This is another aspect that is contradictory and harmful when it comes to VT. Creating dependency and diminishing economic self-sufficiency is contrary to the goal of contributing to sustainable development outcomes. The contradiction is therefore that the activities that are aimed to better the circumstances in communities and increase independence instead transform into harmful dependency on VT projects and aid from the Global North. The dependency that is created perpetuates a colonial structure with unequal power distribution and an imbalanced relationship between the hosts and Westerners. Furthermore, cross-cultural exchange and authenticity are also limited during short-term trips as it takes time to establish understanding and relationships with new people. The relationships that are created may not be as authentic as tourists hope as will be. The volunteers will occupy a privileged position in the host community as the economic and political power of the Global North together with their racial identity contribute to a high status (Conran, 2011). The status that the volunteer will receive can impact the relationships with the locals. It has been found that there is a tendency for individuals in a host community to establish close relationships with Westerners as it can contribute to social capital[4]. The issue with the focus on creating relationships between the volunteers and the hosts is that it overshadows the persistent structural inequalities and does not address the power inequalities. The racial, economic, and political power that individuals of the Global North have is something originating in the unjust distribution of wealth and is a reminder of the inequality of colonial times (Kothari, 2006). Lastly, the short-term trips and lack of knowledge decrease the ability to create social awareness. The short time volunteers spend in the host community is often not enough to create awareness of the economic, political, and social conditions the community faces. Without genuine understanding, volunteers will struggle with spreading awareness that can positively impact the host community after their trip ends (Garrison, 2015).

Guttentag also discusses the possible negative impacts of unskilled volunteer work and the impact on the labor demand in host communities. He states that the lack of skills of the tourists may in some instances result in unsatisfactory work and therefore diminish the possibilities to contribute to benefits for the local community. Furthermore, the presence of volunteer tourists

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[4] Social capital is centered on social relationships and elements of social networks, civic engagement, and generalized trust. It is the collective asset such as trust, networks, institutions that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefits (Bhandari and Yasunoba, 2009)

and lack of skills can in some cases hinder the work process in local communities. Without knowledge or skills, the local community must teach the volunteer tourists which takes both effort and time, which might outweigh the overall benefits (Guttentag, 2009). It is thus contradictory as the tourists may benefit from the volunteering experience while the hosts spend time and energy to enable tourists to do their job.

In the article "Evaluating Volunteer Tourism: Has it Made a Difference" Wearing, Young and Everingham mention a VT project reported in the media where the issue of unskilled labor is evident (Wearing et al, 2017). The VT project that was being conducted was building a school in Tanzania. However, the volunteers did not have any previous knowledge of construction work. The report explains that the volunteers saw themselves as helpers to the host community while the locals were perceived as lazy. The reason why the locals were seen as lazy was because local constructors worked during the night to tear down the defective construction being done by the volunteers to then rebuild it properly which made it difficult to be as active during the day. The lack of skills among the volunteers contributed to unsatisfactory work which became a burden for the local community (Wearing et al, 2017). The example mentioned by Wearing, Young, and Everingham illustrates issues that may arise when tourists lack the skills needed to conduct certain types of work. Stereotypes were reinforced and volunteers became the main beneficiaries of the project while the hosts' workload was increased.

Furthermore, Guttentag mentions that one of the intentions of VT is to provide free labor to help locals to improve aspects of their community. However, the presence of free labor may do the contrary by negatively impacting the labor demand or promoting dependency. He argues that the work conducted by unskilled volunteers is usually jobs that could be performed by local people instead. The author mentions that the issue arises because volunteers work for free and even pay for the opportunity to work, which may challenge competing local laborers. Free labor will naturally be chosen over local workers which negatively impacts local individuals as well as the community (Guttentag, 2009). While VT can contribute to increased economic revenue, the diminished labor demand and often short-term projects create dependency where locals will become dependent on VT. The host community will adapt to relying on external assistance and aid which can reduce the capacity to create self-made sustainable development. The dependency will make the host community vulnerable as VT projects can be discontinued which leaves the community without access to external assistance (Guttentag, 2011). Contributing to communities' dependency on VT is harmful as it reduces

the possibility to create self-sustaining solutions and is contradictory as it is the opposite of what volunteer projects intend to do.

5.2.3 Conceptualization of the 'Other' and Poverty Rationalization

One of the main positive impacts of VT is argued to be cultural exchange. It is believed that a better understanding between cultures can foster a sense of global citizenship which subsequently produce a sense of mutual responsibility for the development of all. The increased sense of responsibility can then instigate social activism to create change for people in impoverished areas (Kirillova et al, 2015). However, it has also been suggested that the cultural exchange during the volunteer encounter might lead to the contrary by reinforcing stereotypes and deepening the dichotomies of 'us and them. Western commercialized VT organizations tend to convey a simplistic and generalizing picture of host communities when marketing the projects (Raymond and Hall, 2008). VT organizations also advertise the local communities as people in need which simplifies and identifies the hosts by their hardships which additionally strengthens the hosts as an undermined society (Guttentag, 2009). Many young tourists enter the volunteering projects with preconceived notions of the culture, society, and especially poverty. Poverty becomes a part of the seductive and exotic landscape of 'other' places which contributes to the colonial discourse of the West being superior while the 'rest' remain inferior. However, it has been suggested that tourists do not seek the real experience of the authentic 'other places', but rather their idea of the real experience (Wright, 2013). Meaning they want to confirm the romanticized and stereotypical picture of impoverished and primitive societies. The romanticization of the culture, people, and poverty that volunteers perceive in the local community becomes a seductive otherness that is an exotic fantasy that is a vast contrast to the ordinary life in their home countries (Crossley, 2012). The origin of the stereotypical perception of 'other' people and places is usually from colonial myths that remain today (d'Hauteserre, 2004). The stereotypical simplification of the 'other' that can occur during VT trips only reinforces the colonial narrative of the West and the exotic, primitive, and impoverished Global South, and additionally the dichotomies of 'us' and 'them'.

Furthermore, issues arise when unskilled citizens in the Global North take the role of expert or teacher as it contributes to the notion that Westerners are racially and culturally superior (Garrison, 2015). Similarities can be perceived with the 'white man's burden' narrative during colonialism. The white societies in the Global North were perceived as superior and had to aid in civilizing people in the Global South (Bandyopadhyay and Patil, 2017). While VT

organization and volunteers have the motivation to help due to altruistic reasons, it is problematic when unskilled citizens come as an outsider and takes the role of 'teacher' or 'helper'. Garrison argues that it further contributes to the white savior complex that indirectly assumes communities in the Global South cannot create self-sustaining solutions and needs to be saved by Westerners. The clear distinction between helping individuals from the Global North and the passive communities in the Global South further generalizes the hosts as the 'other' which reinforces neo-colonial tendencies of the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them'.

Moreover, the rationalization of poverty can arise when there is a lack of awareness among the volunteers. The low requirements of skills and short-term trips can cause limited possibilities of either knowing or learning about the circumstances the host community is facing (Garrison, 2015). When in-depth complexities of the political, social, and economic systems of the host community are not recognized, poverty is easily trivialized. The lack of knowledge and trivialization of the circumstances in host communities can further reduce the understanding of global injustices (Raymond and Hall, 2008). The lack of understanding of poverty results in the perception that the difference between wealthy and impoverished countries and areas is due to luck which can be argued to rationalize poverty (ibid). Volunteers tend to perceive host communities as 'poor but happy' meaning that locals accept that they are poor but remain happy. In some cases, volunteers even romanticize poverty by associating it with social and emotional wealth (Guttentag, 2009). The 'poor but happy' mentality further contributes to the rationalization of poverty which subsequently enables the rejection of shared responsibility for poverty and inequality (Garrison, 2015).

5.2.4 Commodification and the Impact on Culture

While VT trips are rarely marketed by directly stating they are development initiatives, the organizations wrap indirect messages of development in slogans such as 'make a difference' or 'helping' local communities. Selling trips to especially young inexperienced tourist while indirectly marketing it as development legitimizes VT as a development solution (Vodopivec and Jaffe, 2011). As previously mentioned, the neo-liberal paradigm of development has enabled development practices to not only be privatized but also packaged as a marketable commodity. The indirect advertising of VT as development and the low requirement of skills necessary to partake in VT trips contribute to a skewed picture of development. Development becomes an experience you can purchase, and the short-term trips signalize that it is something that can be done while on vacation and will automatically benefit the recipients (ibid). Not only

is it problematic that development is marketed as a commodity, but VT has also been critiqued for commodifying local communities. The process of commodification is of transforming material or non-material items into a purchased good that can be sold on a market (Shepherd, 2002). VT utilizes the exoticness of landscapes, culture, social problems, and poverty by transforming it into a product that can be sold and purchased on the market Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe, and Aquinto argue that commercializing destinations can have negative impacts on culture, autonomy, and sustainable development (Hernandez-Maskivker et al, 2018). The authors discuss the risks of VT on local communities such as diminishing traditional economic activities, abandonment of customs and traditions, deterioration of sacred places, and damage to the environment (Hernandez-Maskivker et al, 2018). The negative impacts of commercializing destinations can be connected to the exploitation of locals by wealthy Westerners. The unequal distribution of power and wealth enables the Global North to utilize spaces in the Global South for their own advantage which can leave detrimental impacts on communities. Although this phenomenon is subtle, it can be connected to the exploitation and extraction occurring during colonial times. Guttentag also mentions the possible negative impact VT can have on local communities (Guttentag, 2009). The author mentions that one proclaimed positive aspect of VT is the possibility for volunteers to access direct contact with locals. However, the direct contact between volunteers and locals should also be considered a risk due to the demonstration effect. Guttentag described how the demonstration effect occurs when the host culture is impacted by the tourists' lifestyles and items of wealth. VT tends to be consumed by wealthy individuals in the Global North who want to volunteer in impoverished communities. While globalization has enabled people from all around the world to be exposed to other cultures and lifestyles, VT contributes to a very intimate cultural exchange. Guttentag explains that with a constant stream of volunteers entering the community and some even living with the hosts, there is significant exposure to culture. He states that the demonstration effect can become an issue if locals try to imitate the tourists' consumption pattern and are discontent when exposed to wealth that is out of reach for the host community (Guttentag, 2009). When Westerners that come from a culture of materialism and consumption meet poverty which can signify the opposite, the differences between the volunteers and host may once again become prominent which strengthens the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' (Crossley, 2012).

6. Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to explore and critically analyze the consequences of VT projects by providing a comparison of the desired implications with the possible negative implications. To achieve this purpose, a research overview of literature discussing the implications of VT has been conducted. The secondary data that has been collected has laid the foundation for the findings that have been analyzed through a postcolonial approach with key concepts of 'discourse' and 'white saviorism'.

Before concluding the findings of this thesis, a few key points will be mentioned. Firstly, it should once more be stated that the negative implications discussed in the analysis are not inevitable consequences of VT. The negative unintended consequences are often associated with projects carried out by Western profit-oriented organizations. Secondly, although the discussion has focused on the negative impact caused by volunteers, it is important to acknowledge that they are not the sole problem. Volunteer tourists are part of a bigger system with many stakeholders that contribute to the issues regarding VT. Lastly, the aim of this thesis is not to blame the possible negative impacts on any stakeholder. The topic has been chosen to highlight how VT can be contradictory and harmful. Yet, this thesis does not deny that VT can contribute to positive outcomes. However, it is essential to critically analyze the negative aspects of VT, so the sector can address the issues and develop the practice to maximize the benefits.

By conducting a comparative analysis of the implications of VT, this thesis has aimed to investigate "What are some of the contradictions of the implications of volunteer tourism?" and "In which ways can volunteer tourism be harmful and reinforce colonial tendencies? ". This research has chosen to investigate VT in the Global South conducted by Western profit-oriented organizations. The consequences of VT were organized into four themes that illustrate the central issues with VT. The analysis suggests that multiple possible contradictions of VT cause harm to the local community. The well-intended desires can be transformed into harmful consequences, often due to the way the projects are carried out. VT intends to aid impoverished local communities by developing aspects of society but the short-term trips, low requirement of skills and commodification of VT, and access to free labor can contribute to the contrary. The short duration of the trips risks generating dependency on risk creating economic dependency as well as dependency on the continuation of external aid. The labor performed by

unskilled volunteers can result in unsatisfactory work as well as be a burden for the community. The commodification of VT and the presence of volunteers risk damaging the culture and landscape. Free labor negatively impacts the labor demand and once again risk generating dependency on a constant stream of volunteer. Furthermore, one of the main benefits of VT is claimed to be the cultural exchange. However, scholars argue that instead of creating understanding and responsibility, the cultural exchange can do the contrary by reinforcing stereotypes and rationalizing poverty. The examples of negative outcomes suggest VT can contribute to the contrary than what is intended. The multiple suggested contradictions constitute the main contradiction of VT which is the failure to ensure both the tourists and the hosts benefit from the project. While the volunteers aspire to help the local communities they are situated in. The volunteers tend to 'take more than what they give' and 'cause more harm than good'.

The analysis suggests that the neocolonial tendencies of VT can be perceived in the continuation of the colonial discourse of the 'West and the rest' and 'us and them'. The discourse established on the West and their differentiation from the 'other' conveys a narrative where the West is superior and the rest inferior. The postcolonial theory suggests similarities can be perceived in VT with the white savior complex. The white saviorism of VT can be argued to be the desire to feel needed by impoverished communities and the belief that Western outsiders can contribute with solutions in the Global South. It portrays the colonial discourse of primitive and helpless communities in the Global South as in need of white saviorism to lift them from poverty. The clear distinction between the 'West and the rest' supports the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them' which is only strengthened by the increased stereotypes that might be confirmed during the volunteer encounter. Furthermore, a continuation of unequal dependency that might erupt from VT projects and the exploitation of host communities for the benefit of volunteers from the Global North are also neo-colonial tendencies that can be perceived in VT. The harm of reinforcing colonial discourses is the unequal distribution of power that comes from creating and dominating a discourse as it can become an unquestioned truth that shapes the way we perceive and act upon it.

VT has been argued to be a sustainable form of tourism. Sustainable tourism is defined as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" (UNWTO, 2023). Yet, the findings of this thesis suggest that VT can in some instances be

contradictory and lead to harm to the economic, social, and environmental structures in host communities as well as reinforce neocolonial tendencies. As VT continues to increase in popularity, this thesis suggests that research remains critical. Furthermore, studies exploring frameworks for better evaluation of VT are recommended as they can contribute to the development of more sustainable practices that ensure benefits for all parties involved.

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