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Volunteer tourism as a transformative journey

- “It's something that they still have, that many
have lost at home”

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Preface:

This is our thesis for the bachelors program in Service Management, Tourism and Hotel at the Department of Service Studies at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg. This thesis has been conducted in English according to Minor Field Studies guidelines, who granted us a scholarship to carry out this thesis. The thesis in its entirety is written in English with the exception of the abstract, which is written in both English and Swedish in order to follow the guidelines from Minor Field Studies and the guidelines of this final course (KSMK65) in the bachelor's program. This study was conducted by Isabella Axelsson and Nathalie Regestad during spring 2023.

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Sammanfattning

Volontärturism är en alternativ form av turism som ständigt ökar. Ökningen anses bero på trender om socialt ansvar, miljömedvetenhet och moraliska krav. Volontärarbete i utvecklingsländer har tidigare associerats med altruism och socialt ansvar, men på senare tid har volontärorganisationer använt personlig utveckling som en del i deras marknadsföring. Detta, tillsammans med knapphändig forskning om identitetsförändringar i samband med volontärturism, har lett oss till att ifrågasätta vad som händer med volontärers självidentitet under deras volontärresa. Med begreppen existentiell autenticitet, epifaniska upplevelser och den Andre undersöks dels begäret att engagera sig i volontärturism, men också hur mötet med den Andre i en okänd miljö genererar transformerande epifanier och förändringar i självidentiteten.

I studien finner vi att begäret att engagera sig i volontärturism inte enskilt kan förklaras av existentiell autenticitet utan även moralisk överlägsenhet, på engelska uttryckt som “moral grandstanding”, vilket differentierar volontärturism från andra former av turism. Inautenticitet skapar en längtan efter det existentiellt autentiska jaget och moral grandstanding grundar sig i begäret att andra ska bli imponerade av individens förmodade höga moraliska kvaliteter. Mötet med den Andre i en okänd miljö som ligger bortanför vardagen kan resultera i transformationer, ifrågasättande av förförståelser och värderingar, samt generera insikter konceptualiserade i epifanier. Slutsatsen är att interaktionen med den Andre i en okänd miljö genererar ett högt kulturellt, etiskt och historiskt utbyte som ligger till grunden för den epifaniska upplevelsen och som förändrar den uppfattade självidentiteten. Vi finner att självidentitet kan skapas på åtminstone två sätt i relation till den Andre. Turisters självidentitet kan skapas genom den exotiska bilden av den Andre, vilken genererar en strävan för turister att identifiera sig med den idealiserade Andre och deras eftersträvansvärda livsstil. Självidentiteten kan också skapas utifrån den fientliga bilden av den Andre, vilken innebär att identiteten upprätthålls och etableras genom distansen och skillnaderna mellan jaget och den Andre.

Nyckelord: Volontärturism, existentiell autenticitet, moral grandstanding, moralisk överlägsenhet, självidentitet, den Andre, exotism, epifani, epifaniska upplevelser.

Abstract

Volunteer tourism is an alternative form of tourism that is constantly increasing. The increase can be considered related to trends about social participation, environmental awareness and moral demands. Volunteering in developing countries has previously been associated with altruism and social responsibility, but more recently volunteer organizations have used personal development as part of their marketing. This, together with scant research on identity change in the context of voluntourism, has led us to question what happens to volunteers' self-identity during their volunteer experience. With the concepts of existential authenticity, epiphanic experiences and the Other, we examine the desire to volunteer and also how encounters with the Other in an unknown environment generates transformative epiphanies and changes in self-identity.

In our study, we find that the desire to engage in volunteer tourism cannot solely be explained by existential authenticity, but also by "moral grandstanding", which distinguishes volunteer tourism from other forms of tourism. Inauthenticity creates a longing for the existential authentic self and moral grandstanding is based on the desire for others to be impressed by the individual's supposed high moral qualities. The encounter with the Other in an unknown environment that exists beyond everyday life, can generate transformations, questioning pre-understanding and values, as well as generate insight conceptualized as epiphany. We conclude that interaction with the Other in an unknown environment generates a high cultural, ethical and historical exchange which forms the basis of the epiphanic experience that changes the perceived self-identity. We find that self-identity can be created in relation to the Other in at least two ways. Tourists' self-identity can be created through the exotic image of the Other, which makes tourists strive to identify with the idealized Other and their desirable way of life. The self-identity can also be created based on the hostile image of the Other, which entails that the identity is maintained and established by distancing the self from the Other.

Keywords: Voluntourism, existential authenticity, moral grandstanding, moral superiority, self-identity, the Other, exoticism, epiphany, epiphanic experiences.

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Introduction

One of the fastest growing alternative tourism markets is volunteer tourism, also referred to as voluntourism. Voluntourism is commonly defined as an activity where individuals choose to volunteer in development or conservation projects. Voluntourism has increased due to trends about public participation, moral demands and environmental consciousness. Working collaboratively with people from different cultural backgrounds brings essential understanding to global problems (Abreu & Ferreira 2021, pp. 16-17). Therefore, international volunteering has become a significant part in composing mobility across unequal global spaces. Many of the United Nations (2023) Sustainable Development Goals are considered in voluntourism i.e. projects involving clean water, education, zero hunger, among others. Voluntourism is primarily associated with altruism and social responsibility, but has increasingly become associated with personal transformations, an alternative way of life and viewing the world.

When reviewing volunteer organizations' websites, it is clear that personal development is used as marketing to attract volunteers. Volunteer organization 1 (2023), refers to a survey conducted by themselves regarding how volunteers are affected by their volunteer work. They claim that 97 percent of the participants have developed as individuals and view their life and the world differently after the experience. Volunteer organization 2 (2023) shows a video where one volunteer answers questions about the positive outcomes of volunteering. The answers included shifting priorities, changed consumption behavior and an understanding of the best way of life. Volunteer organization 3 (2023) claims that voluntourism allows encounters with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds, generating a developed global mindset. The volunteer experience in general is claimed to create higher self-confidence and challenge comfort zones resulting in personal transformations. This led us to raise questions about the transformative nature of voluntourism.

Previous research has focused either on how individuals' perceptions of their self-identity affect what type of tourism experience they choose. Others have focused on how self-identity is transformed in relation to the tourism experience (Syssner 2011, p. 59). A considerable amount of research is about what motivates individuals to engage in voluntourism and other tourism

activities. Some motivations are related to self-interest, e.g. the desire for adventure, to escape everyday life and find oneself. Other motives are related to altruism, i.e. being useful and making a difference (Abreu & Ferreira 2021, p. 25). Motivations driven by self-interest are common in tourism but the aspect of altruism distinguishes voluntourism from other tourism experiences. The differences between voluntourism and other forms of tourism makes voluntourism interesting to investigate. It provides an opportunity to examine whether existing tourism research about identity transformation is applicable on voluntourism as well.

Problem description

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of how volunteers' self-identity is affected by their volunteer experience. Bond and Falk (2013, p. 430) states that identity-related motives are fundamental to all tourism experiences and crucial to understand why individuals engage in tourism. Tourism is often used by individuals as a way to explore, maintain and emancipate themselves from particular aspects of identity. Expanded knowledge about voluntourism is useful for implementing sustainable, beneficial volunteer projects as a positive influence in host communities. We want to contribute with expanded knowledge about the complexity of identity transformations within the tourism field.

While previous research highlights the motivation among volunteers, not enough research has been done regarding what happens to volunteers' self-identity during their experience. We want to examine whether epiphanies can be used to describe the possible transformations that volunteers undergo. Previous research regarding epiphanies has been associated with religious awakenings and psychology to understand changes within individuals (McDonald 2008, pp. 90-91). The epiphanic experience can be described as a sudden change that causes positive transformations in individuals self-identity (Miller 2004, p. 457). By defining the volunteer experience as moments of interactions that affect the lives of individuals and have the possibility to construct changing experiences, the use of the epiphanic experience is enabled, which will deepen the knowledge of transformations within tourism. We will also use existential authenticity to understand individuals' desire to find their true self and the responsive relationship between self-identity and the Other. Although there is a perception that existential authenticity is a driving force for tourism, we intend to supplement and generate an overall

picture of the desire to volunteer. We propose that epiphanic experiences can be understood through its connection to the concept of existential authenticity and the Other. These concepts will be used to explore the transformation of self-identity and reach conclusions about the complexity of identity transformation within tourism that previously have been unrecognized. The aim of this study is therefore to contribute to the understanding of how the volunteer experience affects the sense of self-identity, which has led us to the questions:

- How can tourists' encounters with the Other change their sense of self-identity?
- How can existential authenticity explain individuals' desire to engage in voluntourism and is there an alternative explanation for the emergence of the desire?
- How does the epiphanic experience affect the volunteers' conception of self-identity?

Analytical framework

To expand knowledge about the transformative nature of the volunteer experience, we will use existential authenticity, the Other and epiphany which are self-evident in explaining transformations in self-identity. In this chapter we intend to provide in-depth knowledge about the chosen concepts, their connections, as well as how we understand and operationalize them. The chosen concepts will be used as a starting point for the analysis, in addition we will supplement with the concepts of exoticism and moral grandstanding to bring depth and new knowledge to the analysis. After reviewing all the concepts, our new understanding of the concepts and their connections is summarized.

Self-identity and the Other

Traveling and encountering the Other provides the greatest possibility for transforming an individual's self-identity by creating experiences that change our perception of the world (Wearing, McDonald & Ankor 2016, pp. 164-165). The concept of self-identity will be used to broaden the understanding of the changes of volunteers' self-identity and grants the possibility to treat the transformations as a responsive relationship between the self and the Other. The responsive relationship between the self and the Other will be treated on an unequivocal and simplified basis and encompass the tourist experience. The concept is well suited for reaching a conclusion regarding transformations of the self.

Throughout history identity was considered to be established by one's station at birth, but in late modernity this was problemized and examined as a narrative ongoing project (Wearing, McDonald & Ankor 2016, p. 161). According to Giddens (1999, pp. 13-14) self-identity is a reflexive project where individuals are responsible to consciously decide on experiences that contribute to the formation of identity that is conforming with the individual's self-conception. This self-reflexive project takes place in a context of many choices and consists of maintaining coherent narratives and constantly revising these narratives. In this thesis the volunteers are viewed as tourists who engage in a self-reflexive project that challenges their narratives and leads to revised narratives.

Self-identity is a developmental process in which individuals formulate their perception of themselves as unique individuals with unique relations to their surroundings. The individual's agency, freedom and choice as well as continuous interactions and negotiations with the cultural and social environment contributes to creation of the individual's conception of self (Giddens 2003, pp. 43-44). Identities are constructed and renegotiated in relation to difference, exclusively in the context with the Other. Individuals categorize themselves and others in in-groups or out-groups. Construction of Us is generated by including, accepting and confirming the individuals belonging, and by generating a safe space for the members (Bauman 1992, p. 679). What the Other is not, and what is absent in the Others, produces and conceptualizes identity. Individuals achieve self-realization when they reflect themselves in an image that they differ from (Galani-Moutafi 2000, p. 205; Syssner 2011, p. 65). By defining what we are not a part of, we also define our belonging, although it is conceivable that what we are not, is not always the Other defined. In this thesis self-identity is treated as relational, i.e. self-identity is created and reconstructed in encounters with the Other and voluntourism is considered a tool for realizing these encounters.

Both Bauman (1992) and Galani-Moutafi (2000) agree with the relational nature of self-identity but allege that identity can only be effectively created if the borders between Us and the Other are protected (Bauman 1992, p. 679). Galani-Moutafi (2000, p. 209) claims that tourists want to create space and distance between themselves and the Other and distance is maintained by portraying the Others as "foreign". The characterization as "foreign" is a way to exclude the Others from what individuals try to shelter as their own, a way of defining their self-identity. Both Bauman (1992) and Galani-Moutafi (2000) point out the need for protection and distance from the Other. We are questioning the hostile image of the Other, as well as the desire to protect the self from the Other. We claim that the responsive relationship between the self and the Other is more complex than previously shown in tourism research and that self-identity is not always created through a hostile image of the Other.

We intend to investigate how exoticism affects the responsive relationship between the self and the Other in the creation of self-identity. Moïse (2017, p. 120) explains exoticism as an idealized image of the unfamiliar Other where the Other is perceived as better than the self. Therkelsen

and Halkier (2004, p. 8) describes that exoticism involves attributing romanticized and positive characteristics to the Other and that the Other possesses qualities and a way of life that we lack in the modern world, an honest and authentic way of life. We argue that exoticism and the exotic image of the Other creates a will to identify with the Other which originates in a compensation for what is missing in the self and in everyday life. Volunteers, as well as other tourists, encounter environments where antecedent beliefs and values are not applicable and therefore tourists need to consider contrasting beliefs, values and behaviors. The contrasting beliefs, values and behaviors can be part of an exoticism and be perceived as better than the ones previously obtained by the self. Voluntourism is considered to generate experiences where different and revised narratives occur, a new way of being and viewing the world. Encounters with the Other in an unknown environment, away from everyday life could result in transformation, questioning pre-understandings and values.

Existential authenticity and the desire to travel

The concept of existential authenticity will broaden the understanding for individuals' desire to engage in voluntourism. A selection on existing and relevant theories on the concept of existential authenticity will be presented and operationalized. We will also use moral grandstanding as an alternative explanation to complement and deepen the understanding for volunteers' desire to volunteer.

Wang (1999) clarifies that existential authenticity can be divided into two concepts within tourism research. The first is the inter-personal authenticity which is attained by family tourism or touristic communitas and includes communicating the pleasure of travel with others sharing the same experience (Wang 1999, pp. 364-365). The second is the intra-personal dimension, which involves bodily feelings, self-making and self-identity as well as finding one's true self (Wang 1999, p. 361). The intra-personal dimension of the concept is considered more relevant for the aim of this study because of the obvious connections to self-identity, which provides the needed knowledge to analyze individuals' desire to find their true self. When existential authenticity is mentioned and analyzed in this thesis, it is in relation to the intra-personal dimensions.

Existential authenticity is not of relevance to all types of tourism. The most significant relevance regards tourism that involves ethical, historical and cultural aspects, which include representation of the Other. Existential authenticity is a particular state of being, where individuals are true to themselves and acts as an antithesis to the loss of true self. Existential authenticity is attained by tourists' bodily involvement and participation in tourism experiences (Wang 1999, p. 350). Wang's (1999) statements provide understanding of existential authenticity as an activity-based condition and the necessity of activity, rather than passive reflection. Existential authenticity is well suited for the empirical environment in which it will be studied, because it involves cultural exchange, encounters with the Other and active participation.

In everyday life individuals voluntarily fall into inauthenticity. Everydayness generates a consolingly reliable self-identity that is imperiled when routines and the security of the home vanish (Brown 2013, p. 180). The loss of true self occurs when individuals perform in public roles and operate in public spheres in modern society (Wang 1999, p. 358). Individuals become undifferentiated and a part of an Us that is homogeneous because everydayness enforces compulsory and monotonous routines that inhibits individuals to achieve self-realization (Brown 2013, p. 180; Wang 1999, p. 363). Voluntourism differs from other forms of tourism because volunteers work during the time. Volunteer work is similar to one's everyday life at home and often requires extensive time and a fixed schedule. We question why individuals perceive the routines at home as boring and the same routines abroad as developing. This can be examined in different ways but we want to explore the cultural perspective and examine whether a new everydayness arises due to routines that are similar to home.

Everydayness results in individuals questioning their life and reflecting on life purpose. This generates an aching need for meaning which motivates them to engage in adventurous and long term tourism. Individuals who are unsuccessful in realizing their true self in everyday life are liable to rely on tourism to attain self-realization. Tourists can use existential authenticity to experience the creation and affirmation of identity by encountering another culture to get a perception of their own place in time and space (Hirschorn & Hefferon 2013, p. 29; Reisinger & Steiner 2006, p. 306; Wang 1999, p. 363). Tourists confront different potentials of being in this world and being towards others, that differ from everydayness and generate knowledge about

their values, attitudes, behavior and true self. This understanding will be used as a foundation on which individuals' desires to find one's true self can be explored.

Reisinger and Steiner (2006, p. 303) explains that existential authenticity changes over time, because of the experience-oriented nature and because the existential self is transitory, not abiding or conforming to one category. Therefore, there is no existence of the authentic self, there are only moments of the authentic self depending on different experiences. This statement differs from both Brown (2013) and Wang (1999) because it emphasizes the shifting nature of existential authenticity and denies the existence of one true, authentic self. Existential authenticity will be examined through the knowledge that there is not one authentic self, only moments of existential authenticity. We will still refer to the authentic self, but in the context of this thesis it is understood that the authentic self arises in different situations and differs depending on experiences. By doing so, we ensure that existential authenticity is not treated as one true, abiding self, like a relic in a museum.

During the development of this thesis a new concept emerged that can be used to question whether authenticity alone is the explanation for the desire to volunteer. According to Hill and Fanciullo (2023, p. 3) the moral grandstander has a desire for others to perceive him to have superior morals and be impressed by his supposed moral qualities. This desire is called recognition desire. Tosi and Warmke (2016, p. 200) explains that moral grandstanding contains two significant elements. The first element involves the recognition desire and the second element is the grandstanding expression. The moral grandstander must grant a grandstanding expression so that the recognition desire is successfully satisfied. The recognition desire should be a motivating factor to the moral grandstander in cases of grandstanding. There can be other motivations included, but the desire to be recognized as to have high moral quality should be of importance (Tosi & Warmke 2016, p. 202). Tosi and Warmke (2016, p. 203) account for different characteristics through which moral grandstanding is mainly manifested. The characteristics include piling on and ramping up, which will be further investigated in the analysis. We argue that volunteers could be motivated to engage in voluntourism due to moral grandstanding and to impress others by supposed high moral quality. This desire differs from other forms of tourism where moral grandstanding is not as evident. We do not claim that moral grandstanding is single

handedly motivating the desire to volunteer, but we claim moral grandstanding to be an important factor to consider.

In the analysis of this thesis, we will further explore how, and if, the compulsory and monotonous routine during the volunteer experience inhibits an existential state of being by inducing a new everydayness. We will use both existential authenticity and moral grandstanding to explore the desire to volunteer and investigate if the differences between voluntourism and other forms of tourism affects the desire to travel.

The epiphanic experience

Epiphanies have previously been used to describe religious awakenings and also by psychologists to describe developmental changes within individuals (McDonald 2008, pp. 90-91). We want to investigate whether the epiphanic experience can be used to describe identity changes in a tourism context. The concept of epiphany will be treated as a qualitative tool to deepen the understanding of how volunteers' self-identity is transformed during their volunteer experience. To do so, we have compiled existing theories on the subject to expand knowledge about epiphanies.

In contemporary contexts the epiphanic experience is described as a sudden and abrupt change that generates a permanent and positive transformation through reconstruction of an individual's fundamental beliefs about one's self and the world (Jarvis 1997, p. 1; McDonald 2008, p. 90; Miller 2004, p. 457). The epiphanic experience can be referred to as an experience that demolishes an individual's life and makes it forever changed. Epiphanies can also appear as a result of a series of events that have been built up in an individual's life or by underlying tension being revealed (Denzin 2001, p. 37). According to Miller (2004, p. 454), characteristics for epiphanies are previously strong ideas, emotions and attitudes that change when the individual undergoes a new understanding and gets new motives that are stronger than before. It can be a sudden awakening for the individual in moments where the individual senses a feeling of authenticity (Miller 2004, p. 457). Epiphanies are also described as an experience where sensation and comprehension are merged. The quality of the experience changes as a result of an

increased sense of the existence of something valuable (Mason 2007, p. 353). This provides the understanding to examine if the individual creates a consciousness that differs from the normal behavior and creates a sense of change within oneself. We want to examine whether events during tourism result in an epiphany occurring, generating a transformation in fundamental values and self-identity. The positive nature of epiphanies provides understanding for the creation of a new meaning in life. However, we dispute the positive nature of the epiphanic experience and claim that epiphanies do not always lead to positive transformations.

Denzin (2001, p. 34) describes epiphanies as interactional moments that have the potential to generate life-changing experiences. It can be influenced by cultural environments and occur when problematic interactions are experienced where individuals have to confront and live through a crisis. Epiphanies transpire within the core of the individual and also in the space of the individual's closest relations to others (Denzin 2001, p. 37). The individual's understanding of their inauthentic and authentic way of life, provides the necessary strength to apply their freedom and construct their self-identity. Epiphanies arise with experienced anxiety, depression or inner conflict, before the actual epiphany occurs, which prevents the individual from acting on all of the possibilities of being. After the epiphanic experience the individual is opened up and gains new insights on possibilities that were previously hidden (McDonald 2008, p. 102). The epiphanic transformation of the self is not viewed as fixed or static, instead it is recognized as something that changes due to previous and future experiences that cause new epiphanies to emerge, resulting in the possibility of transformation. Epiphanic experiences change how individuals define the self and the Others and generates a new recognition of self-identity. We assign that in relation to others and the surrounding environment, the individual needs to associate the epiphanies to their own individual identity to strengthen their personal understanding. Seeing that the tourism context often contains interactional moments and the interactional nature of the epiphanic experience, it is relatable.

The tourism experience contains a high degree of interactional moments and cultural exchange which fulfills the requirements for an epiphany to occur. Epiphanies derive from anxiety after realization about individuals' authentic or inauthentic modes of life. The realization provides the strength to act on opportunities that can generate a change in fundamental beliefs about the self

and the world. By engaging in tourism, individuals can seize the opportunity to create insightful experiences that can lead to epiphanies occurring. However, we question the positive nature of epiphanies and claim that epiphanies do not always lead to positive changes, which will be further examined in the analysis.

New conceptual understandings

The theoretical review of the concept of self-identity and the Other, existential authenticity and epiphanic experiences have resulted in a clear vision of their connections. Encountering the Other is in close relation with individuals self-identity and the interactions with the Other is crucial in both epiphanic experiences and existential authenticity. The narratives of the volunteers and their perception on revised narratives will be analyzed in order to reach a conclusion. We are questioning the stated hostile image of the Other and assert that the interactions with the Other are more reciprocal, open and desirable and stems from exoticism, which have not been described by previous research.

Existential authenticity can be understood as a particular state of being, where one is being true to oneself but is not considered a permanent, non-changing state. We claim that both existential authenticity and moral grandstanding could be used to explain the desire to volunteer, which differs from other forms of tourism. We also argue that volunteering and other tourism activities differ in a way that affects the existential state of being, due to homogeneous routines that are similar to home. Inauthenticity creates a desire or yearning for something more than everydayness at home. The desire to find one's true self is considered to result in experiences, such as tourism, in a quest to reach an authentic state of being.

Epiphanies stem from experienced anxiety, which prevents the individual from acting on all possibilities of being. The individual's anxiety and understanding of their inauthentic and authentic way of life, provides the necessary strength to apply their freedom and construct experiences that can generate transformations in self-identity. We argue that epiphanies can generate both positive and negative transformations that affect individuals' fundamental beliefs about the self and the world. We assert that encounters with the Other in an unknown environment, away from everyday life could result in transformations, questioning

pre-understandings and values. The interactions with the Other provide perspective for an individual's own authentic qualities and can generate insights, causing an epiphany to occur, which transforms tourists' self-identity. An in-depth examination of the concepts and their connections, will generate a broad knowledge of the complexity of identity transformations within the tourism field, which will be further examined in the analysis.

Method

In this chapter we account for our methodological choices in this thesis. This is followed by a discussion on reflexivity and reflexive considerations as well as a discussion regarding ethical considerations to ensure that we are following the ethical requirements. Finally, we summarize our methodological choices and analyze the results of our methodological decisions.

Choice of method

This study was conducted in Ghana, which is a former British colony. The colonial penetration in Ghana was joined by missionaries, who came to christianize the indigenous population. The colonial administration restricted missionary activities in the northern area and preserved the area as an asset of unskilled and uneducated labor. This led to inequalities in regional wealth and education (Boateng, Okoye, Amoyaw & Luginaah 2020, pp. 96-97). The former missionary activities in Ghana can be considered exchanged to voluntourism. Bargeman, Richards and Govers (2018, p. 1490) and Otoo and Amaquandoh (2014, p. 51) states that Ghana is the key receiver of international volunteers and represents a frequent form of voluntourism that constantly attracts volunteers. However, statistical evidence of this statement is limited and the reason for the popularity is unclear. The unclarity of Ghana's popularity amongst volunteers and their history of missionaries that caused inequalities in Ghana, made us question what makes Ghana the most popular volunteer destination and if volunteers reflect on the negative effects of their work.

The way voluntourism is organized in Ghana, creates an opportunity for a wide range of volunteers, which have benefited this study. Unlike other studies about voluntourism that involved a mixed method comparative research about the before and after the volunteer experience (Abreu & Ferreira 2021; Magrizos, Kostopoulos & Powers 2021), this study focuses on the interactions while they are ongoing and has the possibility to transform the self-identity. We took methodological inspiration from Bargeman, Richards and Govers (2018) who conducted a qualitative study in Ghana. Gaining acceptance from the volunteers can be identified as a problem within their research, since they only visited the volunteer project occasionally. To achieve mutual confidence between us and the participants and to allow in-depth exploration of

voluntourism, participant observations were conducted while we worked as volunteers at an orphanage/school during eight weeks.

The fieldwork focused on how the impacts of the volunteer experience were perceived by the participants and how these impacts affected their self-identity. Therefore, qualitative methods that included participant observation and eye-to-eye interviews were used. For the aim of this thesis, we chose a purposive sample which was determined based on which volunteers were on site. Four individuals from different backgrounds and previous experiences were chosen, whom we worked alongside with. Fangen (2005, p. 33) states that the purpose of participant observations is to enable descriptions of what individuals say and do in contexts that are not structured by the researcher. Participant observations allowed us to engage in ordinary and prolonged interactions. This was done in order to seek knowledge about the obvious and non-obvious aspects of their experiences and granted the opportunity to construct the analysis on other than verbal behavior.

We also conducted unstructured interviews with elements of a semi-structured form with the selected group of volunteers. The interview started with open-ended questions, followed by supplementary questions and specific questions based on the purpose of the study. Ehn and Öberg (2011, p. 58) states that this interview technique gives an "inside perspective" on the participants life and view of the world by allowing participants to talk freely about their lives based on their own perception. We assert that unstructured interviews with semi-structured influences are most effective to give participants freedom in their wording and minimize our impact. The goal was to let the interviews form a biographical story based on the open-ended question. In reality, the participants were shy and some of them explicitly requested more specific questions. We did what the participant was most comfortable with but not in a way that influenced the participants' responses, feelings or perspectives. In this way we were still able to ensure a biographical narrative with some initial guidance with relevant questions.

Göransson (2019, p. 120) points out that precisely as participant observations, interviews are a key component in ethnographic research. This mix of empirical material made it possible to investigate the relation between what people say they do and what they actually do, along with the possibility for deeper understanding and intimate dialogue. To achieve in-depth knowledge

about how existential authenticity, epiphanies and the Other creates transformations in self-identity, we collected participants' descriptions of their previous life narratives and gained information about the participants' unraveling sense of self-identity.

Reflexivity

The authors of this thesis had different approaches to the project. One of the co-authors grew up with relatives who were involved in different volunteer projects in Africa and the other co-author has no prior experience of volunteering. Our pre-understandings and subjectivity set high demands on constantly reflecting on why we do what we do and how we perceive situations. In order not to risk that interpretations could be lost or that situations could be overlooked, reflexivity is needed. Thomsson (2010, p. 37) explains that by adopting a reflexive approach, attention is allowed to the subjectivity within, in which the empirical evidence is interpreted without letting any of the subjectives dominate. Reflection involves careful considerations and constant questioning which enable recognition of the analysis weaknesses and measures. We do not consider reflexivity as an apology for subjectivity and the goal was not to accomplish an impartial representation, which Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio and Kahlke (2023, p. 242) points out is both impossible and undesirable. Instead, reflexivity was treated as respecting and valuing subjectivity to benefit the study.

To eliminate the methodological problems identified and take advantage of solutions, we have used an autoethnographic approach. Autoethnography pursues describing and systematically analyzing personal experiences to create an understanding (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, p. 273). To capture this we wrote a diary every two days, answering predetermined questions such as:

- What surprised me today?
- How do I reflect on this surprising situation?
- How do I refer to volunteer work today?

This approach allowed us to acknowledge subjectivity, emotionality and our own influence on this thesis as it created a reflexive element. The questions were chosen because they allowed

capturing of the transformative encounters with others, reflect on experiences, interactions and problematize our own identity development in order to analyze the transformations that occurred. This approach allowed us to compare and contrast personal experiences to both participants' experiences and existing research, as well as accessing impressions that could be difficult for others to answer in detail.

Olmos-Vega et al. (2023, p. 246) presents different approaches for reflexive research. One being autoethnography and another being a structured team-reflexive discussion where the researchers answer questions to achieve collaborative reflexivity. We conducted a team-reflexive discussion in the early stages of this thesis to maximize the potential of the exercise. This exercise gave us the opportunity to freely reflect on experiences and understandings that had the possibility to influence the study. This gave us an understanding for our co-writers' perspectives, expectations and pre-understandings and a tool for detecting each other's influence on the study.

Ethical considerations

It is crucial to ensure that those who are studied are not compromised by the research or made uninformed and involuntary participants of the study. Researchers have to follow ethical requirements to secure permission from the relevant gatekeepers and be transparent about the research aim to the communities being studied. Ethnographers also need to ensure anonymity of participants and use coded names in field notes and other writings (Adams 2012, p. 342). The participants were informed about the aim of this thesis, their function and that the participation is voluntary and their right to terminate the participation at any time. Prior to the interviews we ensured that the participants provided consent to be interviewed and recorded and we informed the participants that their participation is anonymous. This was done both verbally and through a consent form. We also made sure that personal data is documented, stored and handled in a way that individual participants cannot be identified by outsiders and used for anything other than the research purpose. To ensure that the organizational sources remain anonymous, we chose to encrypt our digital sources, i.e. instead of mentioning the name of the volunteer organizations, we mention them as volunteer organization one, two, etc. Upon request, an encrypted key will be given to the examiner or opponents. We also made sure to handle the participants' time with respect and create a safe and comfortable environment for all participants.

Finding our way in the methodological jungle

To capture detailed data from our in-depth interviews, these were recorded using a dictaphone. Notes were taken continuously during interviews to enable returning to important themes that arose and ensure that important information was not lost. We interviewed the participants in both English and Swedish and adapted the language to the participants comfort. According to Widodo (2014, p. 105) speech data should be interpreted in a methodological way where two methods can be used; naturalism and denaturalism. We used the naturalistic method of transcription which implies that the transcribed interviews are in colloquial language, word by word and pauses, laughter, etc. have been included. This allowed us to interpret both verbal and non-verbal language that shape the meaning of communication. The naturalistic method was important in order not to miss the correct meaning in the colloquial language. We chose to color code our transcribed material to find themes based on our chosen concepts and research questions. The color coding was used to reduce irrelevant and useless information, which facilitated the processing of useful empirical material and to overcome what Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015, p. 82) calls the chaos problem and the representation problem. Color coding is something that we recommend to others. A detailed transcription of the interviews as well as reducing and sorting of the collected material, facilitates the processing and analysis of only the most important and relevant material.

During our observations we continuously made small field notes and more in-depth and detailed descriptions after the observations were done. Notes that contained relevant observations were selected for the analysis. To complement and strengthen our participant observations we were inspired to use an autoethnographic approach. This provided an opportunity to find unexpected angles by comparing and contrasting personal experiences against participant experiences and existing research. Prior to our empirical collection we decided not to discuss our autoethnographic reflections with each other before it was written down. This gave us the possibility to detect where our interpretations differed and examine if our pre-understandings affected our interpretation. To further handle our reflexivity, we conducted a team-reflexive discussion in the early stages of this thesis. This helped us in analyzing the impact of

pre-understandings for both co-authors. We recommend others doing a team-reflexive discussion and autoethnographic reflections because it increases reflexivity and the understanding of each other's pre-understandings, in order to carry out an analysis where pre-understandings do not become a burden for the study, but rather an asset.

In the analysis of this thesis, observation notes and autoethnographic reflections will be treated equally and references to respective material will be made to show transparency towards the provenance. The interviews were in Swedish with one exception in English. When we translated the interviews to quotes during the analysis, we translated them verbatim as much as possible. Due to the differences in languages, we had to change certain sentence constructions so the meaning was not lost in translation. This has been done in a way that does not erode or change the content to ensure that our quotes convey the correct purpose and meaning of the statement.

A transformative experience

In this analytical chapter we will intertwine the analytical framework with the collected empirical material to examine the connections between epiphany, existential authenticity, the Other and self-identity. This analysis will be carried out in close relation to the aim of the study and research questions. The analytical chapter will be divided based on the three research questions and presented in the same sequence as they have been presented in the problem description.

The first part will contain an analysis regarding how self-identity is challenged, renegotiated and transformed in encounters with the Other. In the second part we want to examine whether existential authenticity and moral grandstanding can be used to explain the desire to engage in voluntourism. In the final part we will examine how the epiphanic experience transforms individuals self-identity and changes individuals conception of the self. The reason for this division is to enable different sub-results from the research questions that can be used to reason about the overall purpose. The empirical material contains interviews, participant observations and autoethnographic reflections and throughout the analysis the empirical material will be presented with both summaries and quotes, followed by an analysis using the analytical framework.

The borders between Us and the Other

In this part we will expand knowledge about how the responsive relationship between the self and the Other is constructed, whether it is constructed through fear and protection from the Other as previous research claims or also in close connection through the exotic image of the Other. We will also examine how encounters with the Other in the context of a volunteer environment leads to renegotiation of values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior and ultimately the self. Partly we want to convey the transformations that take place in the encounter with the Other, but we also want to present the complexity of the responsive relationship between the self and the Other. We claim that the exotic image of the Other drives the self closer to the Other and past the boundary of what is different between the self and the Other. We acknowledge that distance and the interface still carry weight in the construction of self-identity, but we also assert that transformations in

self-identity are connected to exoticism.

Continuous interactions and negotiations with individuals' surroundings contributes to renegotiation and creation of the individual's conception of self. By interacting with the surroundings, an individual's agency and freedom is strengthened, which can result in reconstruction of self-identity (Giddens 2003, p. 44). During the interview with one of the volunteers, he reflected about the differences between him and the Other.

The people here are very different and I think I wanted to broaden my horizons and see what life is like in other places and such. I feel that I have received that and I feel that the people here are very different from back home and you have a lot to learn from them and I feel that I have done that. [...] It is interesting how much they appreciate things here, things that you take for granted. We have too much at home, everyone is too rich to appreciate things. For example, nowadays if I buy a new phone I don't even get excited about it. But here, if I were to give them [...] for example this recording device, they would have been overjoyed. [...] Life is more about living here and now, rather than having a lot of things, money etc. It is more about what is happening now and what you like now and I think I relate to that extremely much. (Interview, volunteer 1)

The volunteer has encountered situations where antecedent beliefs and values are not applicable and the volunteer had to consider different beliefs, values and behaviors, which the volunteer expressed as more relatable than the antecedent beliefs about money and material happiness. In this way voluntourism is a tool for both realizing encounters with the Other and also reconfiguring the self-identity. During our fieldwork the volunteers discussed the children's generosity and expressed fascination over the fact that they do not have a lot to give but still share everything they have (field notes 2023-04-28). Volunteer 2 states in the interview that she has become more generous by seeing this first hand. This shows a reconstruction of the self due to long term interactions with the Other. According to Giddens (1999, pp. 13-14) the self-reflexive project includes individuals consciously choosing experiences that contribute to the formation of an identity that is conforming with the individual's self-conception. By

navigating between many different choices individuals must maintain and revise their narratives to harmonize with their perception of the self. A tourist's interaction with the unknown and the Other can construct meaningful insight in which self-identity is reconstructed. Acting on this possibility entails taking an active part in the self-reflexive project and identifying differences between the known and the unknown surroundings, to generate transformation in self-identity.

Both Bauman (1992, p. 679) and Galani-Moutafi (2000, p. 205) argue that identity is maintained, constructed and renegotiated in the borders between the self and the Other and is only effectively constructed when the borders are protected. What is absent in the Others produces and conceptualizes identity and in order for identity to be created, there must be a boundary towards what is different. To maintain identity and define one's self, Galani-Moutafi (2000, p. 209) states that tourists create distance by excluding the Others. Our empirical data indicate that boundary setting and exclusion of the Other do not occur to the extent previously demonstrated by research and the complexity of the responsive relationship between the self and the Other is greater. During one interview, volunteer 3 revealed that she deliberately changed her dialect to sound more like the locals in order to achieve a sense of closeness and belonging. Volunteer 1 declared that he did not want to participate in activities that separated him from the local population. Traveling in a nice car, which the majority could not afford, created a fear within him of offending the locals and therefore not being accepted by them (field notes 2023-04-21). Volunteer 1 also expressed during the interview that he was feeling more in tune with the locals than the people from his home country. All participants expressed a willingness to do things the native way, wanting to learn from them, their culture and their history, to achieve a sense of closeness. This shows the opposite of creating distance between the self and the Other, which contradicts previous research. Instead, our empirical material indicates that the volunteers endeavors to connect with the Other and obtain a mutual exchange. It also indicates that self-identity is challenged in the encounter with the Other, but it is not always created in the distances, but in the new found solidarity.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with their home situation, often related to stress linked to technology, constant connectivity and an abundance of material things. "You're almost a little jealous of those who live here [...] It's something that they still have, that many have lost at

home” (interview, volunteer 1). The longing to find what is lost, drives the tourists close to the Other in the hope of learning from them. This indicates an exotic image of the Other. With the exotic image, the Other is perceived as better individuals who possess a better way of life which is more honest and authentic (Moïse 2017, p. 120; Therkelsen & Halkier 2004, p. 8). The Other and their way of life acts as a complement to what is considered lost in everyday life and generates an urge for tourists to identify with them (Therkelsen & Halkier 2004, p. 8). In encounters and interactions with the Other, tourists renegotiate themselves, their way of life, values, behaviors and attitudes with the ambition to obtain what the Others possess. In this renegotiation, tourists strive to get close to the Other, to be fused and accepted as one. With renegotiation and consideration, one's self-identity changes and the new self emerges. Instead of raising boundaries and excluding the Others, the barriers between the self and the Other are dissolved due to the exotic image of the Other, closeness and a high emotional and cultural exchange. Bauman (1992, p. 679) states that the Us is constructed through inclusion, acceptance and confirming members belonging. Our empirical material indicates both inclusion, acceptance and an affirmation of belonging between the Other and the new self as the renegotiated self is fortified. A fusion between the Other and the self arises and a new form of in-group is established. This displays the importance of the tourist's image of the Other which is decisive for whether the identity is created through distance or whether it is created through a desire to be identified with the Other.

In-groups are the group that individuals consider themselves belonging to and identifies with and the out-group is the group that individuals do not consider themselves belonging to (Syssner 2011, p. 65). Volunteer 1 states in his interview that the locals way of life is more relatable with his new found values and beliefs than the demands and social roles he plays at home, which he cannot relate to anymore. All volunteers have expressed in both interviews and during participant observation, that their relatives at home will not be able to understand what they have experienced and what happened within them. A sense of disconnection between the former self and the former Us arises as the new self is constructed. The participants express a deeper connection to the previously unknown than the well known home. This indicates that self-identity is not only effectively constructed within the protected borders between Us and the Other, but also in the fusion between the renegotiated self and the Other.

An individual's interactions with the unknown and the Other can construct meaningful insight in which self-identity is reconstructed. Voluntourism is considered a tool for realizing meaningful encounters with the Other as well as taking an active part in the self-reflexive project. Our empirical material illustrates a willingness to learn from the unknown culture, history and way of life to achieve a sense of closeness and identification with the Other which derives from exoticism. With inclusion, acceptance and an affirmation of belonging between the Other and the self, a new form of in-group is established and a disconnection between the former self and the former Us arises. This shows that the complexity of the responsive relationship between the self and the Other is greater than previous research suggests. We are aware that the transformations may not be as profound as they appear when the individuals themselves narrate them and that the altruistic aspect of voluntourism can affect the transformations in a way that differs from other forms of tourism. Questions can still be raised regarding whether the transformations are location-bound, away from the spheres of everyday life and whether they are permanent. These critical considerations are present but can not be answered within the framework of this thesis, however there is still a reason for reflection.

A pursuit for something greater

In this part we will investigate whether previous theories about existential authenticity related to tourism are applicable to voluntourism or whether the differences are too great to be able to apply directly. Therefore, we will explore whether a new everydayness arises due to routines that are similar to home which could inhibit finding one's true self. We will examine if existential authenticity can be used to explain the desire to engage in long-term travel and adventures, such as voluntourism, or if there is another motivation for the desire. Many researchers (Hirschorn & Hefferon 2013, p. 29; Reisinger & Steiner 2006, p. 306; Wang 1999, p. 363) suggest that inauthenticity is a major motivation to travel, we claim otherwise regarding the desires for voluntourism.

I've lived in my hometown all my life. I was bored of socializing with the same people, tired of my job [...] I was tired of everything and did not want to study [...] That's why I was like, then I'll go out into the world and hopefully figure out what I want to do. (Interview, volunteer 3)

Performing in public roles and engaging in public spheres can induce an inauthentic state of being and relating to the world (Wang 1999, p. 358). All participants express similar thoughts about needing something new in life and also feeling lost in the everydayness at home, which can be linked to inauthenticity. As noted by Reisinger and Steiner (2006, p. 306), existential authenticity can create and affirm self-identity by interacting with another culture, which generates a consciousness about direction and decisions in one's life. The volunteers all attested that they needed a change in life and turned to tourism to find that. In this way, tourism acts as a quest in finding their true self.

I feel some kind of calm come over me [...] When I'm home my brain is full of other things. You start thinking about things that are not real. You are surrounded by people who are stuck in that hamster wheel and then you also become a part of it because you take part in the conversation [...] You hear talk about jobs and talk about the future and so on. I just feel like I can't relate to it anymore and I find it so sad to hear when someone talks about that. You get stuck in it and then you start to become a part of it yourself. (Interview, volunteer 1)

Volunteer 1 continuously expressed a fear of getting stuck in everydayness. He describes the life and conversations at home as “not real” as well as a longing for something greater and states that Africa "somehow is full of authentic life" (interview, volunteer 1). Wang (1999, p. 363) and Brown (2013, p. 180) states that individuals voluntarily fall into inauthenticity in everydayness and allow themselves to become undifferentiated from one another. Individuals who can not find their true self in everydayness have to rely on tourism to realize their authentic self. Although the participants perceive the experiences as permanent changes and express a difficulty to relate to the life of everydayness, it is still expressed that everydayness engulfs you as you return from your travels and circumstances change. Whether individuals fall into inauthenticity voluntarily

can be questioned, and instead be interpreted as being experience-based. Wang (1999, p. 359) proclaims the necessity of activity and the importance of tourists to be bodily involved in activities to activate the existential state of being. When the experience changes, from traveling to returning home, the existential state of being is imperiled because the activities of everydayness do not activate or uphold the existential state of being. We do not claim that it is impossible to obtain one's true self at home, instead we mean that depending on which activities and choices the individual makes and engages in, the opportunity to attain an existential state of being changes. This creates situations where the authentic self emerges and is lost alternately and therefore there is no existence of one abiding true self.

During participant observations the volunteers discussed the village in Ghana being considered their home. One volunteer stated that it is because the differences from home are not very big. "We have everything we need, shelter, water, food, we can basically do the same things here as at home and we go to work" (field notes 2023-04-22). Another volunteer described the difficulty of adapting to routines at home after travel, but after volunteering the routines are already established (field notes 2023-04-22). According to Reisinger and Steiner (2006, p. 301) and Wang (1999, p. 363) everydayness involves monotonous and compulsory routines that inhibits individuals from gaining realization about the self. It is obvious that the participant experienced a new everydayness emerging due to the routines at the project. Even though the routines while volunteering are monotonous and compulsory in a similar way as at home, tourism generates challenges that are rare in everydayness. During the interviews, all participants describe differences between past tourism experiences and voluntourism. Some highlighted the altruistic aspect of volunteering and others highlighted closer interactions with the Other than being a leisure tourist, experiencing culture, values and behavior first hand. The high ethical, historical and cultural exchange and the close living conditions generate challenges and perspectives that lead to tourists gaining knowledge about their true self. One explanation for the authentic self being contrived despite monotonous routines is the challenges that tourism brings that generate the trial of the self and ultimately self-realization.

Although existential authenticity is one explanation for tourists' desire to travel, there is an alternative explanation for voluntourism. Tosi and Warmke (2016, p. 200) explains that moral

grandstanding entails both the recognition desire and the grandstanding expression. When the participants were asked why they chose Ghana the answer was exclusively because Ghana was considered the safest country in Africa, no altruistic motives were mentioned. When asked during interviews why they wanted to engage in volunteering the answers varied more. One stated that it was purely because of personal development and the other participants accounted altruistic motives. At the end of their stay no participant could answer what they had contributed with and merely two of them had reflected on the negative impacts on the host-country or the project. Volunteer 1 even stated that it is not possible to make an impact that truly matters at the project. Tosi and Warmke (2016, p. 202) states that grandstanding expression is a pursuit to get others to admire and assign moral superiority to the grandstander to successfully satisfy the desire to be perceived as morally superior. Although claims of altruistic motives is a grandstanding expression itself, other evidence of grandstanding expressions can be found.

During participant observations three of the participants proclaimed that they individually conducted a fundraiser to collect money for the children and some questioned why we did not do the same. This is one example of grandstanding expressions and it is also an example of piling on. Piling on means that the moral grandstander reiterates a topic that has been previously said to announce his own involvement in what he considers as the right thing to do (Tosi & Warmke 2016, p. 203). This was evident in our field notes, when one stated their fundraiser, another one filled in or reiterated the topic later to tell about their own fundraiser. The characteristic of ramping up is also evident in our field notes. Ramping up means that the moral grandstander tries to surpass the previously expressed moral stance. The moral claims increasingly get stronger to show that one is more aware of moral justice and that others lack knowledge or not grasping the severity of the situation (Tosi & Warmke 2016, p. 205). Volunteer 2 bought toys and clothes for her fundraiser money. Volunteer 1 later argued that this was stupid. He bought medicine, malaria tests and school supplies with the money he raised, which he stated as the smarter choice according to what was needed at the project. Volunteer 4 stated that she gave her fundraiser money directly to the project owner and other volunteers claimed that she did not understand that the money will not be beneficial in the hands of the owner (field notes 2023-05-01). The lack of reflection towards their own contribution, the negative effects on the host country and the project, together with the need for uplifting one's generosity towards the

children makes it conceivable that the desire stems from not only authenticity, but also moral grandstanding. Tosi and Warmke (2016, p. 202) claim that the recognition desire does not have to be the only motivations for acting morally and expressing it. We claim that moral grandstanding, finding one's true self and escaping everydayness, together is an explanation for volunteers' desire to engage in voluntourism.

Long term tourism can cause a new everydayness to occur, that differs from everydayness at home because of the cultural, ethical and historical exchange. This generates challenges and a trial of the self in which the true self can be obtained. Despite the monotonous and compulsory routines that are similar to the ones at home, volunteers can confront different potential of being in this world and being towards others and gain knowledge about their values, attitudes, behavior and their true self. The existential state of being is neither abiding nor fixed, but changes depending on the experience taking place. In some situations tourists are willing to reach existential authenticity and in other circumstances the same tourists may choose not to. This emphasizes the tourists' own involvement in finding their true self and the significance of responsibility towards self-realization. An inauthentic state of being is one explanation of an individual's desire to travel, but this thesis indicates that at least voluntourism can be driven from another desire. Moral grandstanding and the recognition desire together with the desire to find one's authentic self, differentiates voluntourism from other forms of tourism.

Unexpected and sudden transformations

In this part we will examine whether epiphanies occur during tourism experiences and if epiphanies impact the self-identity and change fundamental values. We will also examine how epiphanies can be affected by the interaction with others and the surroundings. Many researchers (Jarvis 1997, p. 1; McDonald 2008, p. 90; Miller 2004, p. 457) claim that epiphanies are sudden changes that result in positive transformations within individuals. We assert that epiphanic experiences do not always result in positive transformations and want to investigate how epiphanies during tourism can cause negative transformations in self-identity. Epiphanies can be used to describe the transformations in identity that occur within tourism. Apart from voluntourism and especially in adventure tourism such as backpacking, epiphanies can be used to understand sudden insights that have the possibility of reconstructing the tourists' self-identity

and can therefore be used as a qualitative tool for understanding the transformations occurring within tourists.

In the early stage of the autoethnographic reflection, it emerges that one of the co-authors initially felt that closeness and affection towards others was uncomfortable, because her life did not include much closeness and affection before (Autoethnographic reflection 2023-04-03). Miller (2004, p. 454) declares that epiphanies can create new understandings and new motives in life that can be stronger than previous ones. These new motives and understandings can be characterized by previous feelings and attitudes that define the experienced moment. At a later stage in the autoethnographic reflection the co-author restates the subject again:

What surprised me today is how important love and closeness is, I really learned that from the children. Seeing how little [closeness] they get, how much they appreciate it and how much they seek closeness, has made me realize how important it really is. I no longer feel at all uncomfortable or scared of it, I now find it very nice and so valuable. I know I will bring this home with me. (Autoethnographic reflection 2023-05-13)

Miller (2004, p. 457) describes that individuals can create a consciousness that differs from what is considered to be previously normal behavior. The susceptibility to transformation within individuals is influenced by the personality and is decisive for the change. Jarvis (1997, p. 1) explains that the change that occurs in connection with the epiphanic experience, reconstructs the fundamental idea of what the individual sees in himself and his view of the world. A positive transformation has taken place within the co-author where the effect of the epiphany has created a new understanding of the self which changed previous values and behavior regarding closeness and affection. This results in an awakening where new insights emerge in the moment that generated the epiphany.

Denzin (2001, p. 34) describes how interactional moments have the potential to create transformative experiences and are often perceived as a major turning point in life. One

volunteer describes how his view of happiness has changed after spending a long time in the host country.

You search for happiness and such in objects, status and money. [...] I had a good career, I had a nice home with everything you could think of, still I wasn't satisfied. You are never satisfied and all this was probably what resulted in a breaking point for me. The more you acquire, you get further away from your goal. It is rather that you get further from happiness the closer you think you are to reach your goals. [...] to have money, things and status, instead of focusing on something I would really, really like to do. It has changed. (Interview, volunteer 1)

The volunteer never felt the sense of satisfaction before his volunteer experience. Epiphanies generate life-changing experiences which reshape how individuals define the self and the Others by creating a new understanding of their self-identity (Denzin 2001, p. 34). Denzin (2001, p. 37) explains that a series of events can result in individuals gaining new insights that generates an epiphany. These epiphanies initially revolve around the self and affect personal and social life in close interaction with other individuals from different cultural backgrounds. For the epiphany to occur individuals must undergo a personal crisis where problematic interactions arise and individuals begin to confront and question themselves. The volunteer's insight of what is valuable stemmed from a personal crisis regarding previous values and insights. The development of the epiphany is not based on the fact that the epiphany aroused suddenly, since it was smaller events and the surroundings that affected him for a long time. The volunteer's fundamental values and beliefs have changed and he no longer wants his standard of living revolving around status and money, but instead wants it to be based on quality. Close interactions with other individuals in the environment of the volunteer project, made him realize that there is more to life that generates happiness and satisfaction than what he previously thought.

Jarvis (1997, p. 1), McDonald (2008, p. 90) and Miller (2004, p. 457) describe epiphanies as positive transformations that are abiding and occur suddenly. Although the authors jointly assert that the epiphanies generate a positive transformation of the self-identity, it can be considered that the epiphanic experience can generate a negative transformation as well based on the new

insights.

When the children are teased and when they hit each other [hard], it doesn't bother the volunteer anymore. The volunteer reasons that this is how they raise each other, which he claims is not at all strange. (Field note 2023-04-25)

I think I'm less sensitive to it now. I think that it is wrong [hitting the children]. But I think a lot of people and me as well, have had a slightly wrong picture of it, that it was so terrible. [...] But the vast majority are quite... It's almost kind of fun. [...] And it doesn't affect me much anymore. It probably did in the beginning. Well, I guess it's because you've seen it. (Interview, volunteer 1)

The quotes above regard the children being beaten by adults and by each other and how the volunteer now laughs at it and chooses to ignore these happenings. The volunteer made a major change in behavior and fundamental beliefs where previous views on similar situations have been erased and replaced with new insights. It also emerges how the surrounding environment and behaviors by the locals affected the experience. If the surrounding environment and the individuals that are included, displace values and behaviors that were previously considered negative, the individual can be affected and transform accordingly. Epiphanies may be of a negative nature, which contradicts Jarvis' (1997), McDonald's (2008) and Miller's (2004) positive view of epiphanies. McDonald (2008, p. 102) describes how the individual's life and perspective before receiving an epiphany differs from after the epiphany occurred. After experiencing the epiphany, a new world opens up and what was previously hidden begins to be questioned. These new epiphanies can therefore arise in connection with a previous internal conflict that the individual is dealing with. The insight the volunteer gained after his epiphany, is connected to how he previously considered it wrong to beat children and the normalization of it may be due to having to endure these events repeatedly during his stay. The feelings discovered after the epiphanic experience, can generate new values, beliefs and behaviors by replacing previous epiphanies with new epiphanies. This created a negative transformation in the volunteer's fundamental beliefs, values, behavior and therefore in self-identity.

When asked if the volunteer himself has thought about beating the children, he describes that he has thought about it but would not act on the idea in any other context than in a joking jargon (interview, volunteer 1). Mason (2007, p. 353) explains how epiphanies are a fusion between understanding and sensation. Epiphanies change the individual's view of the world, i.e. that epiphanies can be seen as a drastic change that is beyond the individual's awareness. The negative epiphany is based on events that the volunteer witnessed, simultaneously the previous insight and understanding of the event results in him never acting on it physically. In relation to this, we want to suggest a new form of touristic epiphany. The ambivalent epiphany is the epiphany that arises and results in a perceived negative insight that is contradicted by previous values and behavior and creates a feeling of ambivalence. In the case stated above, the volunteer experienced an epiphany that changed his feelings, values and beliefs, as well as thoughts and perception of beating children, but still his previous values and learned behavior contradicts his new insight which generates ambivalence and discomfort.

Individuals who experience encounters with the Other in an unknown environment, can be considered inclined to immerse themselves in the social environments of the tourism experience and therefore be more likely to experience an epiphany. Epiphanies can change previous feelings, fundamental beliefs, values and attitudes and generate an insight into what is important in life which transform the self-identity. Epiphanies appear suddenly under different conditions, but are also created during longer time periods, depending on various events that take place in the surrounding environment. The arising epiphanies can affect the individual's identity negatively and can be considered the new normal for the individual himself.

Discussion and conclusion

In this final chapter, we will draw conclusions about our research questions and answer the aim of this thesis. This will be conducted in the same order as the questions have been presented in the problem description:

- How can tourists' encounters with the Other change their sense of self-identity?
- How can existential authenticity explain individuals' desire to engage in voluntourism and is there an alternative explanation for the emergence of the desire?
- How does the epiphanic experience affect the volunteers' conception of self-identity?

After answering the research questions, we will draw conclusions about the aim of this thesis. The end of this chapter will include a discussion on the conceptual apparatus and previous research, which ends with a recommendation for future research.

The transformative encounter with the Other

Tourists who encounter the Other in an unknown environment confront situations where antecedent beliefs and values are not applicable. In these situations individuals need to consider different beliefs, values and behaviors that can be more desirable by the individual than their pre-understandings and a renegotiation of the self arises. With renegotiation and consideration, one's self-identity changes and the new self emerges. The initial uncertainty and negotiation, transpires into an understanding, glorification and acceptance of the local culture, behaviors and way of life. The initial barriers between the self and the Other dissolves due to closeness and a high emotional, ethical, historical and cultural exchange.

When tourists have an exotic image of the Other, the Other and their way of life becomes aspirational and idealized, which generates a desire to identify with them. Exoticism leads to tourists striving to be close to the Other, to be fused and accepted as one. Previous research suggests that identity is most effectively constructed in the distance between the self and the Other. This stems from the hostile image of the Other, which the self needs protection from. We found that identity is also effectively constructed in the fusion between the self and the Other.

The fusion occurs when inclusion and acceptance towards the Other is established and a new in-group is formed, in which the self and the Others belonging is confirmed. For this fusion to happen there must have occurred renegotiation of the self in order for the two groups to form as one. A sense of disconnection between the former self and the former in-group can arise as the new self is constructed.

The interface between the self and the Other, the distance between them and the hostile image of the Other is still of relevance to identity transformations during tourism experiences, but the exotic image of the Other must not be forgotten. Exoticism can be assumed to exist within all fields of tourism and also within various sub-tourism genres. The exotic image of the Other influences tourists to seek identification and fusion with the Other and the unknown in order to find an authentic and honest life. Just as the interface and boundaries between the self and the Other are maintained by some tourists, exoticism and the desire to identify with the Other can be found in other tourists.

This concludes that the responsive relationship between the self and the Other, transforms and creates self-identity in different ways, in the distance or in the connection with the Other. There is not a coherent image of the other within one field of tourism. The image of the Other can be either hostile or exotic which affects the way identity is constructed in relation to the Other. This illustrates that self-identity, in relation to the Other, is created in different ways, even within the same tourism field or sub-tourism genre.

Existential authenticity and other explanations for the desire to travel

A reliable, homogeneous and consolidating self-identity is created in everydayness, due to homogeneous and compulsory routines, social role playing and a feeling of meaninglessness. This reliable self-identity generates anxiety and a need for something greater than everyday life, which forms the basis for the desire to travel. This thesis has shown that the inauthentic way of life due to everydayness, has great significance for the desire to travel, discover the unknown and the Other in order to find one's true self and create meaning in life.

Parallel to an inauthentic life, the moral demands in society have become extensive which involve social responsibility, environmental consciousness and assisting others in need. The high moral demands create another desire. Moral grandstanding has been found to be another driving force behind voluntourism that separates voluntourism from other forms of tourism. The desire to be recognized as having superior moral quality leads to individuals choosing voluntourism instead of other forms of tourism to find their authentic self. If the desire to be perceived as morally superior surpasses the desire to find one's true self, the individual is more likely to engage in voluntourism. This concludes that there is not only one explanation for tourists' desire to travel and that the desire could be motivated by more than one factor. The desire could stem from different emotions and different end goals, which ultimately affects what type of tourism individuals choose to engage in.

The epiphanic experiences reconstructing nature

Through the occurrence of epiphanies, transformation of the individual's self-identity and view of the world is possible. Epiphanies can be rooted in feelings and ideas that were previously meaningful or anguished and can result in new values and understandings that exceed previous epiphanies. Epiphanies emerge from anxiety, inner conflict or dissatisfaction with the self and everyday life which prevents individuals from acting on all possibilities of being. Perceived personal crisis and problematic interactions during tourism, can lead to individuals beginning to confront and question themselves before the epiphany occurs. After the epiphanic experience the tourist gains new insights on possibilities that were previously hidden.

Our thesis illustrates how interaction with others and the surroundings strongly affects the individual, where the time frame is a contributing factor. Touristic epiphanies can occur suddenly, but also over a longer time perspective. When a new epiphany occurs in an unknown environment, the tourist begins to question himself and what was previously valuable in his own everyday life. Epiphanies generate transformation, which in the creation of self-identity, makes tourists gain new understandings about the self and change fundamental beliefs, values and behavior. Epiphanies can generate positive transformations but can also change the individual's identity negatively. What was previously considered wrong, influences the view of previous epiphanies and generates a new epiphany emerging. The previous epiphany becomes blurred and

replaced with a negative insight. Epiphanies' impact on the tourists' self-identity can lead to a transformation that is beyond the individual's awareness. This concludes that the epiphanic experience can be used as a qualitative tool for examining transformations in self-identity during tourism. Touristic epiphanies can generate both positive and negative insights, which changes the fundamental beliefs about the self and the world.

Tourism as a transformative journey

The aim of this thesis was to create understanding of how the volunteer experience affected the volunteers self-identity. Our contribution to knowledge of identity transformations during tourism experiences is threefold and include the desire, the Other and an insight conceptualized as epiphany.

The journey of creating self-identity through tourism begins with an emerging desire. The desire stems from both an inauthentic living, a longing for an authentic true self and also from the recognition desire. The recognition desire and the desire to find one's true self emerges from anxiety and reflection about the past, present and future and the tourism experience becomes a quest for finding one's true self or being perceived as morally superior. With the experienced inauthenticity in everydayness, tourists can form an idealized, exotic image of the Other and the unknown, which makes tourists strive to identify with the Other and their authentic way of life. During tourism experiences individuals encounter the unknown and the Other, in which antecedent beliefs and values are not applicable and renegotiations of the self arise. Self-identity can be created in relation to the Other in at least two ways. Through the exotic image of the Other, which makes tourists strive to identify with the idealized Other and their desirable way of life. Identity can also be created based on the hostile image of the Other, which entails that the identity is maintained and established by distancing the self from the Other.

During close encounters with the Other, epiphanies are likely to occur. The individual's understanding and anxiety about their inauthentic and authentic way of life, provides the necessary strength to apply their freedom for the epiphany to occur and ultimately transform. Encounters with the Other allows tourists to discover higher consciousness and self-realization which enable epiphanic experiences to generate changes in the self. By interacting with the Other

and by increasing awareness about past epiphanies, the individual creates a meaningful self-identity in the present and the future. The insight from the epiphany determines individuals future values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. When the epiphany results in a transformation in the self that is cohesive with the Other, a fusion between the self and the Other occurs and the new self-identity is established.

Theoretical discussion

The selected concepts are considered to be relevant and closely connected to the aim and research questions. It is conceivable that the concept of liminality could have been used as a supplement to gain a deeper understanding of the different stages of identity development. The thesis could also be supplemented with a study after the participants returned home, on whether the identity transformations that stem from epiphanies are as permanent as researchers claim or if they are location-bound to a place away from everydayness. The timeline and the framework of this thesis made these supplements impossible. Our suspicion about previous research jumping to conclusions about certain dimensions included in the concepts has turned out to be correct, which will be accounted below.

Previous research on transforming encounters with the Other clearly emphasizes the individual's willingness to distance oneself from the Other and the importance of protecting the self from the Other for identity to be effectively constructed (Bauman 1992, p. 679; Galani-Moutafi 2000, p. 209). In relation to this, we expected our empirical material to indicate the participants distancing themselves from the local population. Instead, we found indications of the opposite. Self-identity is not solely effectively created in the boundaries and distances between the self and the Other, but also in the fusion between them. A reason for our contradictory result may be that the participants, who chose voluntourism over other alternative forms of tourism, are more willing to create bonds across the boundaries of their own self and in-group. However, our assessment is that exoticism has not been accounted for in the responsive relationship between the self and the Other, which is needed to understand the complexity of the transformative relationship during tourism. The tourist's image of the Other can be either hostile or exotic, which affects the way identity is constructed in relation to the Other. The image of the Other

varies within the same field of tourism and determines whether self-identity is created in the distance or connection between the self and the Other.

According to previous research on existential authenticity, compulsory and homogeneous routines are the cause of inauthenticity in everydayness (Reisinger and Steiner 2006, p. 301; Wang 1999, p. 363). In regards to this, it was conceivable that the monotonous and compulsory routines of the volunteer work would inhibit an existential state of being. During the analytical work it unfolded that the routines did not hinder the search for an authentic self. Wang (1999, p. 350) states that existential authenticity is more relevant for tourism that include ethical, historical or cultural exchanges. Based on Wang's (1999) statement and our empirical evidence, the most reasonable explanation is that the high exchange in close interaction with the Other prevents the emergence and maintenance of the reliable and homogeneous self-identity that inauthenticity induces. In reference to this we found that previous research on existential authenticity and the desire to find one's true self, is applicable on voluntourism but existential authenticity is not responsible for the desire to engage in voluntourism alone. To explain the desire to volunteer complementary dimensions must be included, such as moral grandstanding. By combining the desire to find one's true self and the recognition desire, one can create a fundamental understanding of individuals' desire to engage in voluntourism.

Touristic epiphanies have not been researched enough and previous research should therefore be further developed. In previous research epiphanies are described as permanent and positive transformations that occur suddenly where the fundamental beliefs and values change (Jarvis 1997, p. 1; McDonald 2008, p. 90; Miller 2004, p. 457). In this thesis we present that the touristic epiphanies does not always have a positive outcome and can result in negative transformations of the self. It is conceivable that epiphanies that are studied in a tourism context could have a different outcome than it would in another context. However, we claim that our assessment about negative epiphanies remains, as it is conceivable that individuals interpret situations differently and that transformation in self-identity is therefore not homogeneous. In situations where antecedent beliefs and values drastically contradicts the new found values and beliefs that occurred after the epiphany, we suggest ambivalent epiphany as a complement for future research.

Future research

Given the conclusions of this thesis it is conceivable that the prospect for future research being conducted on whether the transformations involving epiphanies and the Other are permanent or bound to a location existing beyond everydayness. Additionally, the research on negative epiphanies stemming from tourism activities should be researched broader to examine the touristic epiphanies' versatility.

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