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A Critical Analysis of Volunteer Tourism and the Implications for Developing Communities

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM
AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The practice of volunteer tourism has recently experienced a rise in both popularity and participation, along with research into the effectiveness of the approaches to service taken in foreign countries. This type of tourism is commonly described as an eco-friendly and economically sustainable alternative to traditional methods of international travel. Participants typically express altruistic motivations behind their desire to travel, as conventional touristic activities are paired with various forms of volunteer work. Though this paper describes significant benefits associated with this growing industry, many critiques have also explored the limitations of a voluntourism approach to community development. In contrast to beliefs that volunteer tourism is mutually beneficial to all those involved, recent studies have suggested that it also exhibits trends of egocentrism, ineffectiveness, and damaging behavior to host communities. My research provides a critical analysis of voluntourism through an extensive literature review, personal interviews with past participants of such programs, and an evaluation of organizations offering international volunteer opportunities. Through this research, I have established the argument that instead of approaching international community development from a touristic and paternalistic standpoint, reflecting tones of neocolonialism, this sector must begin to shift focus from customer satisfaction toward education and the creation of sustainable solutions. Therefore, I

propose more effective methods of engaging youth in community development and international education, through processes such as transformative learning, that provide equitable and socially responsible experiences.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, community development, service learning

Dedicated to my family and friends.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Included in the consequences of an increasingly globalized world is the growing

ability and popularity of international volunteerism. Citizens of wealthy Western

countries continue to shift toward service combined with touristic activities in foreign

countries. For example, Cross-Cultural Solutions, a leading provider of voluntourism

opportunities around the world, offers a trip to Guatemala ranging from 1-12 weeks

($2,250 - $8,968) where participants may contribute to a community through various

service activities, such as improving the education of children. This program also offers

numerous tourist activities during free time, including zip lining, hiking to volcanoes, or

touring ancient Mayan Ruins (Cross Cultural Solutions). Alongside the rise in

participation of volunteer tourism programs, however, is also an increase of research into

the practice, which has introduced critical questions involving effectiveness, morality,

and reciprocity, among other topics (Lyons & Wearing, 2012).

Various studies have uncovered the existence of negative outcomes, including

attitudes toward poverty, limitations to the sustainable growth of host communities, and

promotion of the "western-savior complex" (McGehee & Andereck, 2009). Even some of

those who take part in voluntourism programs have expressed varying levels of

discomfort toward their experiences. A post originally shown on Sociological Images by

Lauren Kascak and Sayantani Dasgupta describes the narcissism they discovered during

their volunteer visits to foreign countries, from which they concluded "voluntourism

is ultimately about the fulfillment of the volunteers themselves, not necessarily what they

bring to the communities they visit" (2014). This paper will provide a conceptualization

of the volunteer tourism industry, including notable benefits and explanation of major

issues associated with international volunteerism, and, lastly, recommendations for

improvement of the approaches taken by voluntourism providers and participants.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING VOLUNTEER TOURISM

As an industry that typically targets youth in wealthy, Western countries, growth

of volunteer tourism began with scholars' criticisms of mass tourism as having a negative

environmental, economic, and social reputation (Dykhuis, 2010). Following the spread of

mindfulness concerning tourism and social responsibility, volunteer tourism was able to

flourish "due to processes such as the development of a globalized economy,

establishment of international and bi-lateral trade agreements, and the expansion of the

international travel industry" (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Cooks, 2011, p. 2). A hybrid between

tourism and volunteerism, motivations and intentions were originally rooted in providing

"a more reciprocally beneficial form of travel in which both the volunteer and the host

communities are able to gain from the experience" (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 530).

The most commonly cited definition of volunteer tourism, created by Stephen

Wearing, describes participants as:

> Individuals who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake
>
> holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some
>
> groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects
>
> of society or environment (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011, p. 714; Wearing, 2001)

There has been some dispute on the strength of Wearing's definition, as attempting an overarching definition does not acknowledge the complexity and variation found between individual programs across the voluntourism industry. For instance, in later work Wearing is content with merely acknowledging that "volunteer tourism cuts across typologies of volunteering and tourism" and should not be described with a list of necessary characteristics (Lyons & Wearing, 2012). Despite the infancy of both the practice of voluntourism and research into the field, critiques have been formed that draw attention to deeper implications for developing communities, consequences that had not previously been considered. In order to provide an idea of the general nature and characteristics of volunteer tourism, I will briefly describe commonalities seen throughout the industry.

Medical Brigades

Programs that provide medical assistance to vulnerable communities around the world represent a sub-category of volunteer tourism. Though often associated with programs such as Doctors Without Borders, this form of voluntourism primarily involves students in training for positions in the medical field (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011). Examples of projects include mass vaccinations, specialized services, such as dentistry or optometry, and even minor surgeries in some instances (McLennan, 2014; Synder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011). Many participants who join medical voluntourism efforts are in medical, nursing, other specialized programs, or have intentions of attending in the future, but high-skill level is not necessary to qualify as a volunteer. For example, Projects Abroad provides numerous medical volunteer and internship opportunities in developing countries, but there are no specific requirements other than

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being at least 18 years of age for certain countries. Voluntourism medical clinics are also typically short-term, with a few exceptions of permanent clinics that consistently bring in new groups of volunteers.

Educational Component

Some voluntourism trips are offered as early as high school, but the majority of these opportunities are seen within university settings. Course-credit is often given as an incentive for these programs and some degrees may even require such an experience as part of the curriculum. The projects involved in educationally based volunteer tourism vary just as much as with programs provided by outside organizations, including activities such as housing and school construction, child-care programs, and working on an organic farm (Zavitz & Butz, 2011). However, the educational focus of these programs could provide higher levels of reflection and longer lasting impacts. Various critiques of voluntourism emphasize issues of participants not receiving adequate education or training in preparation for their trip, subjects that will be discussed more thoroughly in relation to benefits of educationally based programs. Though the level of educational instruction varies widely depending on the program provider, with some programs having none at all, there is growing attention on the importance of including training and learning as a major aspect of international voluntourism.

Vacation and Leisure

The adventurous characteristics of volunteer tourism are perhaps more popular and appealing to travelers interested in the programs for the sake of international and cultural experiences. No matter the program or providing organization, there are always aspects of conventional tourism involved in these experiences. Many volunteer projects

are set in areas with well-known attractions and plenty of opportunities to visit tourist destinations, though under the assumption that it will be a more authentic experience due to a volunteerism framework. Activities such as wildlife safaris, bungee jumping, or snorkeling are readily available to volunteers during their free time (Cross-Cultural Solutions; Projects Abroad). These adventures incorporate custom elements of traditional travel, offering exploration of the "arts, culture, geography, and history" (Projects Abroad) of exotic destinations. As seen on Global Crossroads' website, adventure is utilized as a technique of enticing potential customers to the glamour and adventure of volunteer tourism:

> See for yourself this magnificent country full of the history and the present. Visit the great ruins at Machu Picchu and explore its atmospheric sanctuary-city. Explore the amazing Amazon Rainforest and the famous Floating Islands of Lake Titicaca. Get to know the colorful people of Peru, descendants of a majestic race. (Global Crossroads, n.d.)

Combination of volunteer work and exciting expeditions promotes the predominant belief that voluntourism offers incomparable vacations for those who are seeking an experience to call both adventurous and socially responsible.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Assistance

An element of voluntourism that sets it furthest apart from mass tourism is an emphasis on improvements to the social and economic conditions of foreign developing communities. Though it is claimed that the industry alone provides stimulation of local economies, volunteer tourists often express further intentions of social responsibility and altruism. Unlike simple charity, goals aimed at socio-cultural and economic aid focus on

progress that spreads throughout an entire community, not just a single trade. With essences of community service and social movement activism, voluntourists tend to be motivated by hopes of reversing trends of poverty and improving the lives of community members where they serve.

Singularity of Programs

Though volunteer tourism programs contain both strengths and weaknesses, it is important to note that every program is unique. Each experience involves a different variety of projects, local community members, programs leaders, and individual volunteers, meaning that every program has a distinct context and diverse situational factors. The benefits received through one volunteer tourism experience may be completely irrelevant for another, as well as the negative consequences produced. I make this point to avoid quick assumptions and generalizations as I begin to discuss benefits and problems associated with the industry. Programs vary in design and intention, meaning that it is important to analyze them individually in terms of potential issues. However, for the purposes of this research, I will focus on consistent trends discovered throughout the practice, in the hopes of identifying potential methods of leveling the positive and negative effects to create a mutually beneficial system of international community development. As McLennan argues, "it is too simplistic just to list the harms…volunteer tourism is complex and need[s] to be examined in terms of the wider motivations of the voluntourists, the sending agencies and of the communities they serve" (p. 169, 2014).

CHAPTER 3

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM

Prior to the discovery of negative impacts involved with voluntourism, existing

research supported the industry, reinforcing claims that such programs provide authentic,

sustainable, and mutually beneficial experiences (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007). Both

travelers and providing organizations deemed volunteer vacations to be an ideal form of

alternative tourism, one that could escape the criticisms of mass tourism while continuing

to deliver the benefits and enjoyment of international travel. Offered as opportunities to

create relationships with locals, satisfy the altruistic goals of participants, and even fulfill

desires of self-discovery, voluntourism provides an extensive list of benefits for those

yearning for an unconventional vacation.

Though this work will address how these benefits may actually contribute to a

cycle of poverty in host communities, the advantages should not be completely

disregarded. Participation in voluntourism programs is not innately harmful, but rather

damaging through the consequences of well-intentioned actions. In order to gain a

holistic understanding of the still evolving field of volunteer tourism, it is crucial to first

consider the benefits associated with short-term, international volunteerism, as these help

in recognizing motivations behind participation and necessary steps toward improvement.

Professional Development and Self-Discovery

Though the majority of voluntourists continuously declare a desire to help those less fortunate as the prime motivator behind their involvement in volunteer vacations, these experiences have also evolved into resumé builders and opportunities to enhance professional experience. Students and professionals now consider the international experience of volunteer tourism to be an advancement technique that could push them ahead of competitors in their field.

Personal development, in the sense of self-actualization and fulfillment, is also a potential advantage of volunteer vacations. Program providers and past participants describe their experiences as bringing high levels of personal gratification through serving host communities and organizations in a meaningful way. Coghlan and Gooch found evidence of "a great sense of empowerment and independence, increasing self-awareness, and spiritual development" among volunteers (2011, p. 722). Most participants describe these trips as life changing, supporting claims that those who choose to do volunteer work abroad, instead of simply conventional touristic activities, gain a greater sense of personal identity. Companies' websites overflow with personal testimonies of unparalleled self-discovery, such as this participant who traveled with Projects Abroad: "I can only say that my time in Cambodia wholly exceeded my expectations and was, undoubtedly, the most rewarding and memorable thing I have ever done."

Authenticity of Experience and Interactions

Critiques of traditional tourism argue that these tourists are not experiencing the true culture of the communities they visit, nor are they engaging in genuine interactions

with local individuals (Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). The mainstream activities that most tourists choose to spend their time and money on are often associated with exploitation, done with clear motives to just meet the typical tourist expectation instead of providing realistic representations of the culture. Though such behavior is expected in communities that rely heavily on tourism as a major part of their economy, there have been calls for travelers to engage in more authentic activities that could even have a positive impact on communities (Raymond & Hall, 2008).

Many researchers believe voluntourism to be the solution to these problems, as the combination between service and tourism creates an ideal, genuine experience. Palacios, acting as a volunteer, found that "project participants never felt as simple 'tourists' while they were in the presence of the hosts" (2010, p. 866), supporting beliefs that more time spent with members of a host community will yield the benefits of authenticity and long lasting relationships. These relationships may act as the starting point for numerous benefits, as Dykhius explains, "that interacting with local community members promotes mutual understanding, interaction with travel peers fosters friendship and working with family members promotes bonding" (2010, p. 16; Brown, 2005). Volunteer tourism could create an environment of authenticity that leads to greater understanding, therefore a mutually beneficial experience for volunteers and community members.

<center>**International Learning and Cross-Cultural Exchange**</center>

Relationships between volunteers and locals are believed to lead to more authentic and empowering experiences, and are also emphasized as a way of fostering international understanding. Cross-cultural education is useful in personal growth,

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professional advancement, and potentially helpful in transforming attitudes regarding social problems. Universities and employers with a global mindset stress the importance of international experience because of the unique knowledge gained through these opportunities. Such benefits are closely related with personal and professional development, as programs that "enable progressive trans-cultural understanding between tourists and host communities" (Zavitz & Butz, 2011, p. 413) have transformative potential for participants.

Volunteer tourism goes far beyond traditional tourism in offering an international learning environment. Voluntourism programs claim to offer higher levels of cross-cultural exchange through their humanitarian and service-oriented framework. The unique nature of the trips and projects supposedly provide "engaging, genuine, creative, and mutually beneficial" (McLennan, 2014, p. 165) environments that enhance participants' abilities to learn about different cultures, further developing their global citizenship. Raymond and Hall quote the CEO of Global Volunteers, who strongly believes that "volunteer service engenders hope and friendship, both of which are critical to waging peace… The more people volunteer all over the world and make friends with local people, the more peaceful the world will be" (2008, p. 532). Many reflect similar ideas, believing that international understanding is a first step toward a more globally peaceful society.

Increased Levels of Social Activism

Increased involvement in social justice and activism is regarded as a more macro-level benefit of participating in volunteer tourism, as these benefits could help improve society as a whole. As a result of realizing the serious levels of poverty facing countless

underdeveloped communities around the world, volunteers may use these trips as

catalysts into future participation in social action movements (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

Some may continue to practice global service, while other volunteers may bring their

newfound development experience and knowledge back to their home communities.

McGehee & Santos published research finding "that participation in volunteer tourism

had a positive effect on both intended post-trip social movement activities and support for

activism" (2005, p. 760). Furthermore, programs also argue that despite limitations to

short-term international voluntourism, if programs prove to encourage consciousness-

raising and social awareness, they should be considered successful.

CHAPTER 4

PROBLEMS OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM

The benefits I have listed represent incentives underlying desires to take part in volunteer tourism. Having a clear understanding of how the advantages of volunteer tourism motivate participants is essential in connecting the positive effects to the negative outcomes seen as trends within communities. For example, claims of personal development through international volunteering is one of the most commonly used methods of persuading participants to choose a voluntourism program instead of traditional travel. Not only will volunteers be improving the lives of disadvantaged communities across the world, they will receive immeasurable levels of gratification. However, when understood holistically, these benefits are directly linked to the issues of egocentrism underlying involvement of volunteer tourism.

Though it is clear that there are both advantages and disadvantages to voluntourism, conflict arises when attempting to determine whether the positive effects outweigh the negative, or if it is the reverse. As previously stated, following the massive increase in participation of volunteer tourism, research continuously emerged that criticizes the approaches and methods of voluntourism for a multitude of reasons. Not only are these programs not accomplishing the developmental aid goals they claim to be working toward, but could be perpetuating a cycle of poverty and skewing Westerners'

understanding of poverty in a negative direction. The following section of this paper will describe major damaging consequences of volunteer tourism and the implications that these hold for both the industry and host communities.

Egocentric Motivations

As understood through the previous section outlining benefits associated with voluntourism, many participants are drawn to these programs through various forms of personal advantage. Benefits of professional enhancement, self-discovery, and simply a desire to travel to new places all demonstrate that pure altruism is not the leading motivator. Though it is not unnatural for the volunteers to consider some level of personal gain, many have begun to question whether volunteer tourism exists equally for volunteers and host communities, or if it is primarily driven by self-interest. This debate introduces an important flaw of the voluntourism industry, in that program providers advertise a community-focused approach, but fail to deliver such an impact (Cross-Cultural Solutions; Palacios, 2010). Egocentric motivations are not only flawed from a moral standpoint, but also contribute to various shortcomings of voluntourism community development efforts.

However, the issue with egocentrism in voluntourism goes far deeper than personal and professional advancement for volunteers. This problem perpetuates the internal desires of participants to feel needed by their host communities, therefore belittling the ability of communities to create self-sustaining solutions. Palacios summarizes his observations of egocentric behavior during his study of Australian student volunteers as "people wanting to do too much because they want to feel like they are 'making a difference'" (2010, p. 870). There is also potential that volunteers are

motivated toward voluntourism as a method of self-healing, with the idea that saving impoverished communities will somehow provide some form of validation to their own personal lives. In this regard, volunteers are using the poor conditions of vulnerable communities to discover meaning and satisfaction in their own lives "instead of serving first the community's identified needs and empowerment interests" (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011, p. 4). Volunteers will do only so much as makes them feel useful and appreciated, as is shown in the reflection of a participant in Palacios's study: "every volunteer is working for the glory of being involved" (2010, p. 870). Progress is limited when the intent of volunteers lies in personal development and glorification of their charitable actions, but consistently disguised as selfless work.

This criticism is not made to generalize all voluntourists as purely selfish, but analyses of the motivations underlying voluntourism show that egocentrism "sits in stark contrast to arguments that voluntourists show greater altruistic tendencies than other types of tourists" (McLennan, 2014, p. 170). Volunteers may not be aware of the narcissism associated with voluntourism, but it is nonetheless harmful to the communities they enter. As participants are clearly drawn to benefits of personal fulfillment, not only are the programs marketed accordingly, but also the activities and practices continuously shift toward the wants of volunteers rather than the needs of developing communities (Zavitz & Butz, 2011).

Emphasis on Customer Satisfaction

With a shifting focus toward self-interested motivations of volunteers, the voluntourism industry has become contradictory to the traditional idea of volunteerism. The UN defines volunteerism "as a set of behaviours which are undertaken willingly for

no financial remuneration and which benefit society rather than the individual undertaking the activity" (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011, p. 714). Volunteer tourism has removed itself from this traditional conceptualization of service, as programs are primarily designed around the volunteers, who equally take on the role of customer. Foreign volunteers are given priority over local community members, meaning "sending organizations and volunteer tourists alike tend to receive more benefits than the voluntoured" (Palacios, 2010, p. 861). The touristic side of voluntourism continues to become more prevalent in both the marketing of trips and program design, as the adventurous opportunities appear to attract a high number of participants.

Emphasis on volunteer satisfaction is not deliberate on the part of individual volunteers, but rather the result of good intentions "lost within a market system that shifted the focus on to the paying voluntourists rather than the community" (Dobrovolny, 2012, p. 58). However, the consequences of such mistakes are both damaging and enduring, as "organisations that rely on short-term volunteers must design their programs to satisfy volunteers' expectations" (Zavitz & Butz, 2011, p. 418). The communities are being pushed to the background, becoming more of an advertisement within a larger framework of tourism and adventure, created in order to appease foreign volunteers (Zavitz & Butz, 2011, p. 423). Being that these communities and people are already vulnerable, refocusing their energy toward satisfaction of short-term volunteers perpetuates their poverty and the many issues contributing to it.

Unskilled, Untrained, and Unprepared

A harsh truth often found in voluntourism programs is the reality that volunteers often have little experience, training, or preparation in regards to the work they are

attempting to accomplish in developing communities. Volunteers are given plenty of information regarding their living arrangements, tourism opportunities, and the precautions taken for their safety in a foreign country, which are all important. However, little training is provided in the areas of their volunteer work and understanding of the history or conditions of the community they are entering. Volunteers who travel across the world to join projects in which they have no prior experience or training may be counterproductive to the entire process, which contradicts the intended purpose of their presence. Palacios reveals the reality that "foreign students do not necessarily have the capacity to deliver aid or transfer skills and knowledge" (2010, p. 867) to the levels they expect, deflating their enthusiasm toward projects and connecting with locals.

Popular examples of potential volunteer activities include education for children or assisting in care for the elderly and disabled (Cross-Cultural Solutions). While these are noble causes, there are also innumerable problems that could arise when volunteers have no experience in education or elderly care. Projects are only as productive as the individuals working on them, and the outcomes appear neither positive, nor mutually beneficial, when volunteers essentially have no idea of how to accomplish their intended goals. Not only will unskilled, untrained volunteers have little impact on communities, but in some circumstances could even cause unintentional harm. Furthermore, though foreign volunteers may be unskilled in certain project areas, such as having no ability to construct a house or school, most people are capable in other, untouched areas. By focusing all of their efforts on projects in which they have minimal knowledge, volunteers are wasting time and resources that could have been better spent on their individual skill sets.

Volunteers are also often unprepared in the sense of understanding the environment and conditions of their host community. They know little about the cultural traditions and expectations, the economic, political, and social conditions, and often have only surface level knowledge of the poverty and inequality present in the communities. Without at least minimal level of pre-trip training and analysis of the community, "young volunteers do not have enough knowledge, reflection capacity, appropriate skills and qualifications, volunteering and international experience" (Palacios, 2010, p. 863) to play a significant role. Though social activism is acknowledged as an important benefit of volunteer tourism, it is clear that "before individuals can be mobilized and inclined to activism, they must first become aware of the issues and the inequalities that exist" (McGehee & Santos, 2005, p. 761). Without even a basic understanding of the interrelated problems and systems working against a community that is facing extreme poverty, voluntourists cannot expect to create an enduring impact. Blame should not be placed completely on volunteers, however, but potentially on "a lack of conscientiousness on the part of the facilitators in not prioritizing pre-departure preparation and discussion" (Dykhuis, 2010, p. 20). The typical short length of these programs limits the extent to which volunteers are able to become aware of these issues, therefore it is prior knowledge and research that could make the difference in effective contributions to a developing community.

<div align="center">**Short-Term Ineffectiveness**</div>

The typical short duration of these programs is a weakness at the core of the industry, connecting to and proliferating other problems within voluntourism. Zavitz and Butz are among the researchers who have found that "duration is a significant limiting

factor" (2011, p. 424) of voluntourism programs, for both participants and the host communities. Though organizations may offer experiences lasting up to twelve weeks, occasionally even a year, the price of the trip dramatically increases with more time spent abroad, reaching upwards of $10,000 (Cross-Cultural Solutions) and reducing the likelihood of participation in longer programs. Some programs may last only ten days, which severely reduces the sustainability of projects, potential for authenticity, and ability to participate in lasting cross-cultural exchanges and understanding, all of which are included in the benefits associated with voluntourism (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011). The idea that their time in a foreign country is limited and fleeting also encourages volunteers to focus more on the touristic aspects of their trip, prioritizing adventurous opportunities over their volunteer work (Zavitz & Butz, 2011). Opportunities for voluntourists to contribute and learn are not experienced when participants focus on having fun with fellow group members instead of interacting with locals. When examining voluntourism through such a perspective, short-term service "in a developing country can be seen as nothing more than a glorified form of tourism wrapped in a veneer of altruism, with no sustainable benefits for receiving communities" (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011, p. 4). Strategically marketed through depictions of an alternative, socially responsible form of tourism, participants are able to justify their desires for an exotic vacation by working on short-term service projects in a community of poverty. However, these projects may do little more than stimulate the economy of a community for a brief amount of time.

A direct consequence of short-term ineffectiveness is the perpetuation of a cycle of dependency of many host communities on voluntourism organizations and programs.

Though volunteer tourism may initially contribute to a community's economy, this prosperity will eventually plateau, if not reverse altogether (McLennan, 2014). Due to the average volunteer remaining for only a few short weeks, vulnerable communities are likely to become dependent on the constant arrival of new volunteer groups and the money they bring with them (Dobrovolny, 2012, p. 59). This economic gain may be viewed as merely an altered form of the traditional tourism industry, but this perspective ignores the supposed intention of volunteer tourism, which is to completely release communities out of poverty. The overwhelming reliance of these communities on voluntourism organizations is paradoxical to community development goals, as it diminishes the abilities of governments and community members to provide services and create solutions (McLennan, 2014). The direct impact of such dependency can be understood most accurately through the experience of a volunteer in Ghana,

> I realized that local people weren't purchasing health insurance, since they knew there would be free foreign health care and medications available every few months. This left them vulnerable in the intervening times, not to mention when the organization would leave the community. (Kascak & DasGupta, 2014).

The short length of these projects also interferes with the expected authenticity of interactions and development of meaningful relationships, which are frequently advertised by voluntourism organizations and companies (Zavitz & Butz, 2011). In a study of a volunteer tourism experience on an organic farm in Costa Rica, Zavitz & Butz found short length of programs to be a reason why volunteers "didn't feel comfortable wandering off the farm or interacting with locals who didn't work there, despite their stated motivation to experience local culture and forge trans-cultural relationships"

(2011, p. 425). Clearly, expectations of community interactions and relationship building do not typically align with reality.

Paternalism, Neo-Colonialism, and the Reinforcement of Stereotypes

Though each of these negative effects on the attitudes and perceptions of volunteers are separate from one another, paternalism, neo-colonialism, and reinforcement of stereotypes have similar origins and characteristics. The impacts of these problems may be less blatant than with other issues, such as an emphasis on customer satisfaction, but they are no less damaging to developing communities. The origin of these negative results may be seen in the popular notion instilled in volunteers that they are traveling across the world with a mission to save people. Whether it is through medical services, working on a sustainability farm, or, most commonly, caring for children, volunteers tend to adopt the role of savior in these communities, often referred to as the "White Savior Industrial Complex" (Kasack & DasGupta, 2014). Though it may be a subliminal mindset, it is still evident that volunteers, as a result of fixations on acting the hero, exhibit behaviors of paternalism, neo-colonialism, and reinforcement of preexisting stereotypes. An experienced volunteer of international aid programs describes what she learned pertaining to the issue of acting the white savior:

> I don't want a little girl in Ghana, or Sri Lanka, or Indonesia to think of me when she wakes up each morning. I don't want her to thank me for her education or medical care or new clothes… I want her to think about her teacher, community leader, or mother. I want her to have a hero who she can relate to - who looks like

her, is part of her culture, speaks her language, and who she might bump into on

the way to school one morning. (Biddle, 2014)

Though participants may have similar enlightening experiences, more often than not the

volunteers will leave a country with deepened dichotomies between volunteers and

locals, still understanding little of systematic poverty and systems of inequality.

Paternalism

By entering a community and assuming, as volunteers often do, that having a

Western perspective makes one more knowledgeable of the current problems and the

steps needed to find solutions, voluntourism automatically marginalizes the power of

entire group of people. The American mindset, specifically, may promote attitudes of

ethnocentrism and paternalism that are demeaning toward a community's history of

struggles, along with their strengths. The white savior complex encourages volunteers to

think of themselves and their team as the difference between success and failure within a

community, which is disempowering and limiting to developmental success. McLennan

identifies such patterns as having "the potential to entrench inequitable relationships and

which may undermine the skills, knowledge and resources" of local community members

(2015, p. 169).

Paternalistic behavior is also often rooted in the romanticism of poverty. In such

situations volunteers fantasize about the impact they will have on a developing

community, having been encouraged that even a limited duration will lead to life-long

changes for their host community. In connection with the lack of training and specialized

skills of volunteers, Western society naively assumes that even with minimal abilities,

volunteers are still able to improve the lives of poverty-stricken communities far beyond

the capacity of local individuals. Not only do volunteers feel that they are undoubtedly able to provide solutions to the problems and needs of communities, many also feel entitled to deliver volunteer work. Volunteers may approach projects with assumptions that they are authorized to travel across the world to solve issues of poverty and inequality, simply because they are from a wealthy, Western nation and have seemingly humanitarian intentions. At this point, however, "a helping intention becomes an imposition of directions and personal frameworks" (Palacios, 2010, p. 870). Realistically, when foreign volunteer programs attempt to take charge in communities, or lead these communities in a distinct direction, the efforts are rarely successful (Machado, 2014; Palacios, 2010).

Neo-Colonialism

More directly offensive to host communities is behavior reflective of neo-colonialism, which has been identified as a consistent problem of volunteer tourism programs (Palacios, 2010). Through controlling and paternalistic attitudes of how to achieve developmental aid and humanitarian relief, voluntourism experiences potentially impose systems of Western values upon the communities they visit. Palacios, among other authors, argues that the neo-colonialist approach to volunteer tourism "tends to reproduce the same global patterns of inequality and poverty, leaving intact—if not reinforcing—the dominant position of the North" (2010, p. 864). The assumed benefits of international learning and cross-cultural understanding may be more reflective of a Western mindset, as local community members are often being shown a Western-specific style of work, as opposed to partnership between voluntourism organizations and host communities. Common volunteer perceptions of their host communities as helpless

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promotes a "charity-based approach…rather than enabling an equal and collaborative partnership with communities for developing capacity to address the root causes of systematic social inequity and disparity" (Snyder, Dharamsi, & Crooks, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, authenticity and engagement may not exist at the levels that program providers and volunteers anticipate, as typical practices potentially encourage dichotomies between wealthy and impoverished individuals, industrial and developing communities (Coghlan & Gooch, 2011).

Reinforcement of Stereotypes

Voluntourism, though assumed to represent altruism and acceptance, still holds potential of reinforcing damaging stereotypes from both the perspective of the tourists and local community members (Raymond & Hall, 2008; Dykhuis, 2010). When visiting poor, developing communities, it is most likely a volunteer's first experience of extreme poverty. Therefore, participants will already have preconceived notions about not only the conditions of these communities, but the nature and character of the people living there. Raymond and Hall argue that instead of providing opportunities of cross-cultural understanding and global peace, "volunteer tourism, as with other forms of tourism, can sometimes be used as an opportunity for people to confirm, rather than question, previously conceived ideas" (2008, p. 533). In some cases, the perceived difference between volunteers and host communities may act as a barrier that limits the value of interaction between the two groups. This argument conflicts with promotions of cross-cultural understanding, and instead "affirms that many volunteer tourist projects lack critical engagement between participants and their surroundings," failing to challenge

preexisting assumptions and reexamine personal values and belief systems (Coghlan &

Gooch, 2011, p. 723)

Rationalization of Poverty

One of the most detrimental consequences of many volunteer tourism programs is

the failure of volunteers to understand the existence of pervasive and interrelated issues

surrounding poverty and structural inequality in the communities they enter. Though this

issue is connected to various aspects of the typical voluntourism design, such as short

duration and paternalistic attitudes, misunderstanding of poverty is most directly a result

of rationalization of the poor conditions and livelihoods seen within communities

(Raymond & Hall, 2008).

The reality of many volunteer tourism experiences is one that does not come close

to sustainable solutions or genuine understanding of the social and historical context of a

community. As a major flaw of short-term voluntourism, Zavitz and Butz identify:

> Disillusionment among volunteers regarding their prospects of achieving the high
>
> ideals of international volunteering, which led them over the course of the trip to
>
> give up on seeking opportunities for trans-cultural intersubjectivity and settle for
>
> enjoying themselves in other ways. (2011, p. 415)

With high expectations of helping communities and people, volunteers often become

discouraged upon discovery that a few weeks is not long enough to have an effective

impact or create lasting, intercultural relationships. Not all volunteers undergo such

blatant realizations, as many maintain their fantasy of reversing an entire history of

poverty, but most volunteers are ill prepared for the reality they must face upon arrival in

a developing country (Dykhuis, 2010). Disillusionment tends to shift the focus even further away from the communities and toward ideals of self-benefit, as opposed to mutual-benefits (Zavitz & Butz, 2010, p. 428). Participants of various studies have expressed feelings of discomfort upon realizing certain truths about volunteer tourism, such as financial dependence of the communities on volunteers' payment for their trip (Zavitz & Butz, 2010). Others have even accepted that "nobody can do good development work or aid work in a few weeks/months, especially not outsiders" (Machado, 2014). Recognizing the limits of voluntourism does not always create a deeper understanding of poverty and community development, however, but rather justification for disengagement from cultural experiences and interaction with the host community. Possibly in reaction to the discomfort toward poverty, along with their inability to change it, volunteers tend to focus more on building relationships within their volunteer groups (Raymond & Hall, 2008).

Rationalization of poverty may also lead to a voyeuristic, naïve experience closer to that of poverty tourism. By disengaging themselves from international learning, therefore increasing the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings, volunteers view poverty from a typical Western perspective, developing "assumptions that host communities accept their poverty" (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 533). Even worse is the acceptance of "lotto logic" (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 533;Simpson, 2005), where differences between wealthy and impoverished countries are accredited to mere luck. Such a mindset completely ignores the existence of systematic and historical factors that lead to poverty in a community. Adopting the mentality of lotto logic discourages volunteers from taking a deeper look at their own privilege and the role that they play in

the global system of poverty. Similarly, Dykhuis observed students adopting "the rationalization that happiness is relative because some of the people we encountered were 'poor but happy'," which indicates personal justification for the existence of poverty (2010, p. 20). Instead of learning more about poverty and developmental aid, volunteers typically return home feeling thankful and appreciative at the most. This trend is not completely the fault of individuals, though, as "poverty is often trivialized in sending organisations' marketing, and subsequently, by volunteer tourists themselves" (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 533). Programs that lean toward the side of poverty tourism are not only ineffective methods of helping communities, but are also demeaning and harmful to the individuals of these communities. Rationalization and justification potentially rejects shared responsibility of poverty and inequality, encouraging an overall passive attitude toward addressing these worldwide, multifaceted problems in society.

CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Volunteer tourism represents one of the most recent trends of international aid,

resulting from evolution into a globalized society, among other influences, though there

is evidence of minimal background knowledge of poverty and inequality within the

industry. Having described major benefits and problems associated with participation in

volunteer tourism programs; I will also attempt to offer potential methods of expanding

the voluntourism framework to create a more positive and collaborative experience.

Before proposing improvements, however, I will provide a basic explanation of

community development and factors contributing to poverty in various communities, as

such understanding is essential to the process of delivering effective community

engagement opportunities. Jim Cavaye provides a simple definition of community

development as "mean[ing] that a community itself engages in a process aimed at

improving the social, economic and environmental situation of the community"

(Understanding Community Development). Already, voluntourism is inconsistent with

ideals of community development, as most programs focus on the delivery of services

through foreign volunteers rather than from within a community.

Conceptualization of Poverty

An important aspect of volunteer tourism programs is the type of poverty at which

they aim to provide solutions, or as many organizations phrase it, relief. The developing

countries that are typically targeted by voluntourism are experiencing what Swanepoel

and De Beer refer to as "mass poverty where a whole country or large parts of society

and communities suffer poverty" (2011, p. 2). Such communities differ extremely in their

levels of poverty compared to communities that are described as having individual

poverty, in which case the community would ideally help the poorer individuals.

However, when a country or community experiences mass poverty, it then becomes the

aim and responsibility of community development organizations and workers to provide

resources and assistance. Recently, volunteer tourism programs have also joined these

aiding efforts, though not necessarily with intentions of long-term development.

There is also variation in the level of poverty faced by individuals or

communities, which is an important aspect to understanding why Western volunteers

travel across the world instead of taking interest in local problems. Relative poverty,

though still important, is mostly contextual and dependent on social situations

(Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 3). However, those suffering from absolute poverty

cannot maintain the basic essentials for survival, such as food, water, and shelter. These

people and communities are likely to also fall under the umbrella of chronic poverty, in

which people "are poor for all or most of their lives and pass on the poverty to their

children" (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 3).

No matter the level of poverty, attempts at alleviation by volunteer tourism are

continuously unsuccessful, as most projects achieve only short-term improvements, or

may not even address the main issues. Though communities that suffer from chronic and

absolute poverty are in need of help, it must be intentional and strategic in order to be

effective.

The Deprivation Trap

The concept of a deprivation trap, created by Robert Chambers, exemplifies how no problem is ever exclusive from other elements within a community or country (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 5). Deprivation faced by a community, in terms of poverty, cannot be attributed to a singular issue or event, but is a result of the combination and connection of many different problems throughout its history. The intersecting components of isolation, powerlessness, vulnerability, physical weakness, and poverty are the main issues identified by Chambers in the creation of the cycle of poverty found among chronically poor communities (1983, p. 112).

For example, if an individual community is isolated from clean, safe drinking water it will undoubtedly affect the physical health of most community members. As a result of physical weakness, people probably will not be strong or capable enough to complete important jobs within the community, such as those involving manual labor and strength. With a scarcity of these valuable skills, the community may then be more vulnerable toward coercion by outsiders to take advantage of their need for labor. Here we have three different components of the deprivation trap in just one hypothetical situation. However, it is important to note that these problems should not be seen as hierarchical, or having just one central issue, as the five main components are all equally connected. In terms of the community without safe drinking water, this means that the isolation of the community contributes to corrupt intervention by outsiders just as equally as the vulnerability to corruption perpetuates their isolation. Understanding this key

theory is essential to recognizing how many voluntourism programs are flawed in their simplistic approaches to addressing problems within developing communities.

Though the five main elements of the deprivation trap remain the same, each community has a unique combination depending on their specific problems. For instance, though two different communities may face issues of physical weakness, one may be a result of high levels of HIV/AIDS while the other due to extensive drought. Therefore, a project must be created through thoughtful analysis, specific intent, and, most importantly, collaboration with local community members who have thorough understanding of their unique deprivation trap. Though "a community development project cannot address, nor should it, all these issues at once," understanding the original issues contributing to the poverty of a community will help in identifying a sustainable focus (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 6). The tendency of volunteer tourism to address merely symptom problems of the larger struggles is insufficient toward creating long-term solutions that may be able to break the linkages of the deprivation trap, allowing communities and families to discontinue their cycle of poverty. Building homes for an impoverished community may be planned with good intentions, but when analyzed through the lens of the deprivation trap, probably has minimal impact if the actual problems are rooted in systematic corruption and unequal access to housing.

Swanepoel and De Beer define development efforts as "efforts to break the deprivation trap so that people can become free," and "not an effort to bring some relief to poor people or to improve their situation somewhat" (2011, p. 55). Considering the previously described problems involved with voluntourism, little attempt is being made toward having an actual impact on ending the equilibrium of poverty.

Creating Sustainable Solutions

Many of the shortcomings of approaches to developmental aid and alleviating poverty result from misunderstanding the importance of creating sustainable solutions. Organizations and people enter impoverished communities with the mindset of achieving immediate success, not considering that real progress takes time, long-term commitment, and potential to continuously grow. Poverty is complex and multifaceted, resulting from historical, systematic, and cultural issues that remain pervasive within communities and countries. The attempts to combat systems of poverty must be equally as powerful and persistent, as there will undoubtedly be many obstacles to face, requiring revisions and determination from project participants. Volunteers may leave their experiences thinking that any help is good help, even if it does not make a lasting difference, but sustainable community development work argues otherwise. As explained in the section concerning the problems with volunteer tourism, the combination of many characteristics of the industry fails to produce anything close to sustainable solutions. There are certain strategies to development work that are more likely to yield sustainable progress for an entire community, which will be briefly explained and connected to volunteer tourism.

Grassroots Organization

This type of community organizing utilizes a values system of bottom-up hierarchy, where ordinary people are the leaders in control. The government does not make all of the decisions, as they would not be successful in including the needs of their poorest community members (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 44). Therefore, foreign

volunteers from wealthy, Western countries are even further removed from the process of

identifying needs and creating sustainable solutions. Grassroots movements and

organizations originate within local community members, are asset based, and long-term

in overall goals. It is important to create projects where community members are not just

on the receiving end, but also in which "the main role-players are just ordinary and,

usually, poor people" (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 44). A service-delivery model, in

which volunteers treat host communities as merely beneficiaries, often creates

dependency, dissatisfaction for both parties, and disillusionment toward progress

(Mayfield, p. 3).

Local Leadership

Leadership from within the communities is a large component of grassroots

organization and sustainable solutions. If a project is to have a chance at success, local

leadership must take part in planning and motivating the community to work toward the

agreed upon goals. Cavaye lists local leadership as one of the key ingredients for

successful community development, emphasizing the importance of "committed formal

and informal leaders that can enthuse and support others, foster 'shared leadership',

accept criticism, and act as local champions for community development efforts" (p. 7).

In connection with paternalistic and colonialist behavior often seen from voluntourists,

community members are not going to listen to anyone who does not have knowledge and

personal experience with the problems contributing to their poverty. Local leaders know

their community, are trusted by their community, and will remain involved in a project

for more than a few weeks. Without the community investment created as a result of local

leadership involvement in development, the duration and success of projects quickly

falter. As evidence of the importance of such investment, James Mayfield, co-founder of

CHOICE Humanitarian non-profit organization, describes an experience he had while

evaluating a million-dollar water project in Indonesia:

> "I noticed that roughly 85 percent of these projects were not functioning due to
> poor maintenance, broken pumps, lack of resources to fix pumps, etc. When I
> asked one of the village leaders what had happened, he answered as follows:
> *"Well, it is very simple! We are waiting for you Americans to come back and fix
> your pump."*…The original NGO building these water systems never considered
> that villagers might fail to take care of the water system after they left. There was
> no ownership in the village! In the villagers' minds, it was the outsiders'
> responsibility." (Mayfield, p. 2)

In order to empower developing communities to become self-sustaining, volunteer

tourism programs need to reevaluate their methods in terms of the goals of true

sustainable development work. Little knowledge or appreciation for grassroots

organization, local leadership, or sustainability is reflected in the design of a typical

volunteer vacation.

Focusing on Community Strengths

As discussed with the deprivation trap, communities that are experiencing poverty

at levels that require outside assistance obviously have many different, interrelated

problems. However, the existence of problems does not mean the absence of community

assets. Every community, no matter their deprivation, possesses strength in various areas;

they may just not have the necessary resources to cultivate their skills. Entering a

community with a paternalistic attitude and focusing solely on the issues, which assumes

complete dependence of community members on foreign aid, is demeaning on an individual and group level. However, recognizing the value of "available resources, especially human resources in order to reach the objective" (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011, p. 44) presents the opportunity for creative, effective, and long-term change. Mayfield endorses this community development tactic through a history of personal experience in development work, arguing "that when people learn to mobilize their own resources, when they see themselves achieving results based upon their own efforts, there is a pride, a sense of self-esteem and dignity that is infectious and self-perpetuating" (p. 3).

Community Development and Volunteer Tourism

Though these short descriptions of various components of community development in no way serve as a complete explanation of how to bring communities out of poverty, it does help to show in what ways voluntourism is lacking. The industry has overwhelmingly proven to be unsuccessful in creating sustainable solutions, involving host communities in decision-making, and utilizing valuable techniques such as grassroots organization, local leadership, and an asset-based approach. However, the following analysis of interviews with WKU students will show how an educational approach to volunteer tourism may create an environment where the focus of volunteer tourism shifts away from development aid toward a greater emphasis on international learning.

CHAPTER SIX

STUDENT INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

As part of this study I conducted personal interviews with students from Western

Kentucky University who have participated in study abroad experiences with a service-

learning component. The following section will be an analysis and discussion of their

experiences in relation to the previous literature review on volunteer tourism and

community development. Though these programs are not perfectly representative of all

voluntourism experiences, they follow many of the common characteristics found across

the industry, such as inclusion of touristic activities, altruistic intentions, and involvement

in a variety of service projects. This study, however, focuses on the previously mentioned

educational component, or service learning, that is increasing in popularity within

volunteer tourism, and is most often found in university settings. The programs

represented in this study are not explicitly labeled as voluntourism, but rather fall under

broad definitions and conceptualizations of voluntourism models found throughout

literature. Much of the literature used in previous sections of this work include studies of

educationally based voluntourism, where students travel abroad to participate in service

projects, traditional touristic activities, and course-credit experiences. Therefore,

connections can appropriately be made between the following programs and the major

benefits and limitations of volunteer tourism.

Methods

An interview questionnaire was created that would gain an overall understanding of each participant's experience in regards to motivations and intentions, personal benefits, program structure, interaction with community members, and significant outcomes. After contacting the WKU Study Abroad Office, the staff provided the names and contact information of students who had relevant study abroad experiences and had given permission for their information to be released. There were a total of 16 potential interview participants, from which a random number generator was used to choose a random sample of 10 people. The sample was then contacted through email to schedule individual interviews, allowing them to choose a time and place that they were comfortable. Of the 10 people contacted about participating in this research, only nine interviews were completed. Permission was gained from each participant to record the interview and to use his or her full name in this work. The recordings were then used to transcribe the interviews and analyze trends found among the responses.

Analysis

The interviewees consisted of one male and eight females, in which there were six undergraduate students, two graduate level students, and one doctoral student. Six different programs were represented in this study, as there was some overlap, including programs in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Northern Europe (Sweden, Denmark, The Shetland Islands, Northern Ireland, and England), Tanzania, and Belize. There were three participants who completed two service learning abroad experiences through WKU, and eight of the participants had completed at least one of their programs within the last year. The durations of the programs range from one and half weeks to five weeks, all of them

having been completed during summer, winter, or spring break terms. Eight of the participants discovered their program through a professor, advisor, or other WKU faculty member, while only one person said she actively researched and sought out a program on her own. All of the students received some variety of course credit for their service learning abroad experience, including credits in their major/program, internship credit, and practicum credit.

Brief Description of the Programs

All of the programs were service learning oriented, with activities ranging in focus from childcare to environmental conservation. When asked about more traditional tourism, there were approximately 22 different activities mentioned by the participants, supporting the idea of vacation and adventure as a dominant characteristic of volunteer tourism.

The program in Costa Rica, which Kassie and Jenna both experienced, involved eco-tourism and sustainability through trail construction and conservation in national parks, lasting a total of five days. The Ecuador programs, experienced by Kassie, Jenna, and Ava, provided agricultural sustainability courses, but were characterized as service learning by spending one to three days at an elementary school applying dental sealant/fluoride to children's teeth (Ava's program visited three different schools, while Kassie and Jenna visited only one). Christian's program in Peru, leadership and community based, worked in Amazonian villages repairing a schoolhouse water collection tank, fixing school furniture, and donating school supplies. Sarah, Arden, and Christian were all part of the first Toppers at Sea: Climate Change Challenge across Northern Europe, which did not involve traditional volunteer work, but was designed

around the study of global effects of climate change. Every student in this program also participated in a $100 Solution project, which challenged classes to create and implement environmental sustainability projects within that budget. The Tanzanian program, which was the longest duration, included Trevor and Samantha, who both gained their healthcare administration practicum through this experience. They both participated in volunteer work in orphanages and women's health clinics, but also spent time shadowing and observing healthcare departments in hospitals, social services, and HIV/AIDS clinics. Finally, Julia traveled to Belize, where she received course credit for her nursing degree through medical clinic visits, checking the vital signs of community members, and distribution of medical supplies to the community.

The programs represented follow many of the major trends found within the voluntourism industry, such as environmental conservation in Toppers at Sea and the delivery of medical services in Tanzania and Belize. These programs differ from those offered by non-profit and for-profit companies in that they include an educational focus, where one of the main goals of participants is learning through service and cross-cultural experiences. The inclusion of course-credit and education should not be seen as a completely separate category than volunteer tourism, but more often as supplementary to common voluntourism programs. However, while educationally based voluntourism, or service learning abroad, falls under common voluntourism descriptions, the addition of educational goals has been argued to bring increased opportunities of international learning, authenticity, social activism, and ability to understand poverty within the communities. The following analysis of responses will explore how an added component of education into a volunteer tourism framework may improve practices of the industry.

Name of Program	Country	Length	Pre/Post Trip Study	Participants (From Interviews)	Touristic Activities
Sustainable Development and Ecotourism in Amazonian and Galapagos Ecuador	Ecuador	12 days	Orientation, Pre-trip briefing	Kassie, Jenna	Snorkeling, surfing, kayaking, hiking, biking, shopping, visited local churches, wild-life reservation
Ecuador: Agriculture at the Equator	Ecuador	10 days	Orientation	Ava	Visited the equator and various historical sites
Costa Rica: The Jewel of Central America	Costa Rica	12 days	Orientation, Post-trip reflection	Kassie, Jenna	Visited national parks, mountain biking, hiking waterfalls, visited beaches, zip lining, visited a coffee plantation
Toppers at Sea: Climate Change Challenge	Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Shetland Islands, Northern Ireland, England	17 days	Orientation, Pre-trip class meeting, Post-trip reflection piece	Christian, Arden, Sarah	Visited turbine farm, toured geothermal plant, swam in hot springs
Community, Place, and Leadership	Peru	3 weeks	Orientation, Pre-trip bi-term course	Christian	Tour of Machu Picchu
KIIS: Experience Tanzania	Tanzania	5 weeks	Orientation	Trevor, Samantha	Safari excursion, night clubs, visited beaches, weekend in Zanzibar, visited Tanzanian college campus
Belize Global Health and Service Learning	Belize	10 days	Orientation, Post-trip class meeting	Julia	Boat tour of manatees, drum school performance, jungle tour

Motivations & Incentives

When asked about their choice to participate in a service-learning/volunteer tourism program as opposed to traditional tourism or study abroad, responses reflected trends of altruistic motivations, course credit and learning opportunities, and desire for an international cultural experience.

Samantha (Tanzania): I have a drive for helping people… especially in third world countries, people who don't really have as much. (Personal communication, March 19, 2015)

Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru): I think it's a great way to learn while also having an impact on the community, right, I mean we all recognize that about service learning. (Personal communication, February 27, 2015)

Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica): Well I wouldn't have studied abroad if there wasn't a service-learning component. It's important to me to be a global citizen and, uh, to do good wherever I can. (Personal communication, February 27, 2015)

Trevor (Tanzania): The fact that I could knock out my internship was probably, um, the number one reason I did service learning instead of, you know, a different just class while I was there. And just having that cultural experience, like, working in a completely different culture. (Personal communication, March 3, 2015)

Julia (Belize): Well it had a health care focus and I was going to be able to take care of individuals in two different villages, and I as a nursing student thought that that would be a really good experience. (Personal communication, March 26, 2015)

Ava (Ecuador): Well, I mean, if I'm going to go to a third world country where they need services that I can provide, then I might as well provide them. (Personal communication, April 3, 2015)

Personal Benefits and Impacts

All of the participants recognize a variety of personal benefits that they gained from their individual experiences. The responses reveal commonalities particularly among feelings of personal growth and development, but also international experience, gratification, and building relationships, all of which mirror to the previously described benefits associated with volunteer tourism.

Personal Development

Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica): I've always been pretty open to other cultures and, you know, different customs from my own, but going down there, doing something for people I can barely communicate with. You know, um, just the humanity behind it, how they responded to it, didn't just change my mind about volunteerism, but just humanity, just having faith in humanity and appreciating people. (Personal communication, February 25, 2015)

Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica): Ecuador really built my self-confidence as far as social interaction and being personable and stuff like that.

Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru): It really makes you understand that the world is big, you know, and, um, that a lot of the thing that we spend our time on, um, especially spend time worrying about, aren't really things to worry about.

Sarah (Toppers at Sea): There was a lot of challenges on the trip that I, like, forced myself to go through…I'm very glad now because it makes me feel like a stronger person. (Personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Trevor (Tanzania): I was just more appreciative of everything I had. I've become less materialistic, just because, you know, when you're over there, it's like nothing material really matters, it's more about relationship and, relationships and values. So to a degree less materialistic, but when you come back you kind of get sucked right back into American society and the negative aspects of our society that we praise.

Samantha (Tanzania): I looked at the world differently than what I did before, just from being over there. I'm more sensitive to people of different cultures, different races, you know, stuff like that.

International Experience

Trevor (Tanzania): Just kind of opens your eyes, um, it expands your knowledge of working in a culturally diverse work force… You kind of gain a cultural understanding and I'll be a better manager realizing that, you know, everyone has different values and backgrounds that you need to respect.

Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica: It was really exciting while I was there and looking back on it I'm really glad that I did it. I mean it's wonderful to go to a new place and experience a different culture, but to do something and kind of give back to a community while you're there, it's, I can't even describe it.

Julia (Belize): It was the best experience ever. I learned so much about another culture. There were actually two different cultures that we serviced, so getting to learn about them and actually being immersed in that was a tremendous impact and still plays an effect how I care for my patients today.

Samantha (Tanzania): It really opened my eyes to a whole different, I don't know, part of the world. I mean, I really think it, like, changed my life for the better. I'm more aware of people around me and wanting to help people.

Arden (Toppers at Sea): I think it made me a more well rounded person. I think it changed my view on where I'm at locally and geographically, going to another part of the world and seeing how they live and seeing what they're doing differently. (Personal communication, March 2, 2015)

Sarah (Toppers at Sea): Going into another country and being a foreigner, I am, like my eyes are wide-open to, like, international students here. And like their experiences and what they're going through and their challenges right now.

Gratification

Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica): In both places it was extremely rewarding. It felt like you were there for a reason, and to get instant feedback and gratification from those people, it was phenomenal. I mean I've never had a feeling quite like that.

Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica): It's like a full circle type thing, you actually see what benefits are coming out of all of that work, all that mud and gravel on ya.

Samantha (Tanzania): The second day I walked in, all the kids would run up to you and say your name and they would hug you. And it was just great to hear them remember your name, and be so happy that you were there to play with them or talk to them.

Arden (Toppers at Sea): It felt impactful you know what I mean? It felt like you were actually accomplishing something. Not that learning for knowledge sake is a bad thing, but it felt good to feel like you were not just learning, but also making a difference at the same time.

Relationships

Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica): Just genuine friendships, um, you know you're going to sleep and waking up and spending every waking minute with these people and you get to know them so quickly. And with that many people, with that many different perspectives and backgrounds, you just, you learn so much and you learn to appreciate people for who they really are and the way they see things.

Julia (Belize): I really enjoyed the, um, relationships that I made there. Even though I didn't follow up with them, just, like, being embraced in that culture. Cause I had never traveled outside the United States before, so I was, you know, scared. I was excited, but I was scared. Just the, how they involved us, took us in.

Ava (Ecuador): It was really special to interact with such, like, happy little children who have nothing, but you know they're still delighted to see you and get a piece of candy and a toothbrush, and they think it's the greatest thing ever.

Community Interaction

When asked questions about their experiences interacting and working with local community members in the host countries, all of the participants regard them with overwhelming positivity. Though many of the participants completed different projects, their perception of the communities' responses, the level of authenticity, and the specific benefits to the community are quite similar. Especially interesting is the shared idea that a

lasting impact was made on each community, despite the lack in measurement of

progress and follow-up after returning home.

Community Response: Presence & Volunteer Work

> **Julia (Belize)**: They were very welcoming, very appreciative, um, worked very hard to make sure that we felt…wanted and that, you know, that we were like part of their culture.
> **Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica)**: While we were in Costa Rica, the locals were, they were extremely nice and very inquisitive, and, like, I feel like they just got a kick out of us. Like, I feel like they were just like 'these crazy Americans' you know? And in Ecuador everybody is just super nice, and I don't know that the niceness is there is because you are a tourist and you have money to spend, um, but they're, they are really super nice and very hospitable.
> **Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru)**: They're curious and incredibly sweet and welcoming, and just want to be—I mean, the children in particular, like they are all right around you all the time, just like, you know, holding your hand and giving you hugs.
> **Trevor (Tanzania)**: They are very nice and, you know, accepting and wanted to help us. They were happy to see us, they were happy to help.
> **Julia (Belize)**: They wanted to know more. Like, they wanted to know how they could take better care of themselves, what they needed to be doing.
> **Samantha (Tanzania)**: They were really appreciative of everything we did. They really enjoyed us being there and helping them out, and kind of giving them education that they might not have known.
> **Arden (Toppers at Sea)**: They were really, really excited to see us there also ready to do something about this issue, cause you know, we're a major contributor. So they were really excited to see that we were wanting to do something about it and that we were acknowledging that it was a problem, and a problem that we're all contributing to. They were excited to see that we were ready to help in trying to do something to change that.
> **Ava (Ecuador)**: Well especially with the children, they were really excited to meet white people. And some of them were excited to practice their English, some of them were shy and, you know, typical little children. And then the local community members that we met were really friendly, but I think that's a cultural thing.

Authenticity

> **Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica)**: I think that if it were longer relationships could easily be formed, if I ever saw any of those people again it would be like seeing an old friend.
> **Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru)**: Just really, really positive. I mean it wouldn't have been the same experience had it not been for the community interaction,

particularly in Peru. Because it was really—I mean like the best part was the children. Like they were tickled to death with all of the stuff that we brought.

Julia (Belize): I have not been in touch with anybody there, but I still think about the individuals often and I wonder what happened to the people that we cared for down there.

Samantha (Tanzania): I mean it was difficult to interact with them just because of the language barrier, but other than that I feel that I was able to communicate with them pretty well. I mean they're the same people. Even though they're half a world away they're the same people.

Ava (Ecuador): It depended, like when we went to the markets and things they were obviously really excited cause they could charge us lots of money for the things they were selling, even though you bargain. I think for the most part they were very happy to have new people in their environment, they were really willing to help us experience some major cultural aspects of Ecuador, and also they like taking pictures with white people.

Benefits to Community

Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica): You know, the park, the trails have probably been weathered down and they may not show all of the work that we did, but we, I have a feeling that there are still things there that we did. You know, um, we did make a difference for the time being. Everything requires maintenance, so yeah, it'll have to be touched up, but we did help in some way.

Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica): The last night that we were there we all went to the Soda, which is like a little restaurant, and we spent a bunch of money, so there was that economic boost.

Christian (Toppers at Sea): They just needed some resources and somebody to be interested, and just a helping hand. And, um, now they're prepared to better maintain what they've got, you know. Um, but I think they also benefitted just from interacting with us and, I mean, so they were exposed to new people and new perspectives and new culture, you know, and so, um, by us coming there, hopefully they got a little bit of a better world view.

Trevor (Tanzania): So when we were at the orphanages we brought a ton of donations, and we also did, like, health presentations. So we were broken up into different groups and we would teach kids, you know, proper hygiene, proper dental practices, you know, good values like respect, treating others how you like to be treated. So, I mean I would like to think that that made a lasting impression, and the services and donations, at least at the orphanages.

Julia (Belize): Because a lot of their health care systems are private, and if they don't have the money to pay up front they didn't get treated. And we were there regardless of—they didn't pay us anything, we were there to just give them care, and so they were able to seek medical services.

Ava (Ecuador): I hope that maybe some children's teeth won't rot out, maybe they'll use their toothbrushes, but it's hard to say, you know, because the things that we did for them can't last a lifetime, but it can certainly help for a while.

> **Samantha (Tanzania)**: I feel like I wasn't over there long enough to make that big of a difference, but the time that I was there I definitely did. And I miss the kids in the orphanage so much.

There is also a trend of intention to continue communication with members of their host community, but only minimal follow through, with only the occasional correspondence through mediums such as Facebook and email. Though this could be attributed to the lack of communication ability in the developing communities, it does reflect the idea that relationships and friendships are limited to the time spent in a community.

Educational Component

A characteristic of the programs represented in my interviews that differs from voluntourism opportunities offered through outside organizations is the emphasis on education. Along with intentions of travel and volunteering, the participants knew that they would be spending time abroad with the specific purpose of learning through service. Adding this intention to the voluntourism framework could potentially change the entire design of a program, in regards to projects, touristic activities, and time spent reflecting on the experience. For instance, on the Toppers at Sea trip, Christian explains that they "really made an effort to not do touristy things, like, explore real places" and spent time on more academic related activities, such as touring a geothermal plant and turbine farm, that would enrich their service learning on climate change.

Debriefing & Reflection

Important additions that educational programs bring to volunteer tourism are reflection and debriefing exercises. Though varying in level of structure and effectiveness, as some educational programs lean more toward informal reflections, the intention of examining an experience and the often unnoticed effects is more likely to

yield positive results. The programs represented utilized a variety of reflection

techniques, including personal journal entries, daily or weekly assignments, pre-trip

briefing assignments, and verbal reflection.

> **Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica)**: When I did my service-learning brief it was—a
> lot of it was reflective and on what we were doing in-country at the time, what
> benefits we saw coming from it, and whether or not all of the other students
> actually thought we were doing service-learning.
> **Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru)**: Not only did we have these written
> reflections, but he is the kind of instructor that he will have, in his class, he will
> have people stand up and just give a verbal reflection. Not just students, like he
> expects me to do one, you know, and he expected the other faculty to reflect.
> **Trevor (Tanzania)**: A lot of the learning came into play when we would write
> papers about, we would compare, you know, the hospital in Tanzania to one in
> America. And there would just be different prompts that would kind of help us
> engage what we learned in class with what we saw in Tanzania, and also, like,
> comparisons between their health care system and the United States, which is big
> for an administration student.
> **Julia (Belize)**: Every night we debriefed about things that we saw and we were
> posed questions by our instructor that allow us to critically think about issues and,
> like, discuss our feelings and how we, um, viewed certain things that we were
> exposed to there. And then whenever we came back we had a meeting to discuss
> overall how it had impacted us.
> **Samantha (Tanzania)**: Our instructor asked to do a SWOT [strengths,
> weaknesses, opportunities, threats] analysis on each of the agencies that we were
> with. So I did one on the orphanage, the HIV/AIDS clinic, and then the private
> and public hospitals. I was able to see, you know, piece together things.
> **Sarah (Toppers at Sea)**: I think a lot of us wanted it to be a vacation, but at the
> same time we were there to study. But even when we weren't on the ship, in class,
> or in class period, we were learning.

Understanding of Poverty & Inequality

Though these programs did offer structured reflection and debriefing exercises,

when asked what they learned about issues surrounding poverty and inequality in the

communities, some of the responses suggested a surface-level understanding. All of the

participants that spent time in developing communities acknowledged the existence of

poverty, and some even seemed to have a general understanding of the variety of issues

contributing to the poverty. Whereas volunteer tourism programs that do not include an

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educational component probably do not make it beyond recognition of existence, the

learning environment and reflection efforts of these programs help them to see further.

However, it is important to note that there were no mentions of potential solutions or

progress that could be made on the part of local community members.

> **Ava (Ecuador)**: We took a tour of Old Quito and we saw some of the churches and that was where we saw a lot of the poverty, and sort of, uh, got a better grasp on what it's like to be impoverished in Ecuador. Because there would be really grand churches, and they would be, you know, encrusted with gold and elaborate paintings and things like that. And then you would walk outside and be met with the great contrast of poor people lining the streets just begging, sitting on the stairs.
>
> **Kassie (Ecuador; Costa Rica)**: You just learn exactly what is affecting each culture uh, and how we play into it, how other countries play into it. Um, and in both places, I mean you had very, very rich people and very, very poor people. I think that's everywhere you go. But, yeah, we learned about different things with that environment that stands in their way.
>
> **Jenna (Ecuador; Costa Rica)**: You're like 'oh my gosh this is—it would be so cheap to live here because, like, a bottle of water is twenty-four cents,' and you know all this stuff. But, when in actuality, like, if you're making seven dollars a day, like I don't even know—other than doing subsistent farming… how do you feed yourself?
>
> **Christian (Toppers at Sea; Peru)**: I mean Peru you're looking at people that are just, they're just surviving, you know, but they're happy and their lives are full. And they just, you know, live off, off what they've got and, you know, it just makes you… feel so blessed and so grateful, and it makes you look at the world differently.
>
> **Trevor (Tanzania)**: Just seeing, specifically being in a developing country, seeing how those people, they hardly have any money, but they're so much happier than a lot of people I see in America who are obsessed with materialistic things. Like, they had nothing and they would break their necks for their neighbors. It was just, really just one big community. Everyone just wanted to help, you know, their neighbor, help everyone get along.
>
> **Trevor (Tanzania)**: We learned what services were offered specifically to insured patients vs. the majority of people hospitals and health care facilities see, which is uninsured. Um, how they price their services, you know they need to be affordable if people are going to utilize them. Community outreach to people who are discriminated against, you know, women and those suffering from HIV.
>
> **Julia (Belize)**: Those people, you know, they may be doing good to have electricity and running water in their house, but their culture is so much more, um, it's wealthier, as in they have a stronger value on relationships with each other. Where we find a lot of investment of our time spent with, like, Internet and things

like that, they don't do that. They really value relationships, so that was pretty neat.

Samantha (Tanzania): I could definitely see the poverty issues, and, um, the ways that they live over there, I can see the way that diseases can spread more easily than here. Just with like, the drinking water and all that stuff.

Discussion

Though only nine interviews from a select population of WKU students cannot be considered generalizable or significant, these responses do enhance understanding of the general design of educational volunteer tourism programs. The stories told also provide realistic connections between the benefits and limitations described in the literature section. My sample is not generalizable, but because all of these students were personally interested in participating in this study, their responses were more likely genuine and truthful. The questions asked gained an overall understanding of each program, but without actually participating in these programs, it is difficult to identify strengths and weaknesses with complete certainty.

The personal benefits identified by the participants align with those gathered from previous studies and various organization websites. These nine participants seemed to reflect high levels of personal growth and development, even through other types of benefit, such as international experience and relationships. For example, Samantha describes her cross-cultural immersion as changing her life for the better. Individual motivations behind participating in service learning also correlate with the personal benefits, such as combinations between earning class credit and wanting to travel internationally. It is interesting that while participants mentioned course credit as an incentive, no one specifically stated professional advancement or resume building as reasons to why they chose service learning. The responses do exhibit some of the

problems identified with egocentric motivations and even paternalism, as even when participants described altruistic intentions, there was an underlying desire to feel needed and valuable.

It is also noteworthy that, while participants felt they had positive and authentic interactions with community members, there has been little communication between them since returning home. When considering the short duration of the programs, and the variety of limitations that accompany that, it is unlikely that continuous, long-lasting relationships were formed. The tendencies of these participants to assume authenticity and friendship could also be linked to customer satisfaction, as several of the relationships specifically mentioned were with local tour guides or organization leaders.

Another significant trend found through these interviews concerns the perception of community benefits, in that the participants assume that their work was impactful and long lasting. However, there were no methods of measuring difference or follow-up after returning home, with the exception of a few second-hand updates of Peru for Christian. Though it is impossible to know, as some of the participants directly mentioned, it is unlikely that these programs were able to produce long-term, sustainable benefits for the community. These assumptions of effective aid correlate with major problems described throughout the existing research and literature, such as short-term ineffectiveness, paternalism, egocentrism, and rationalization of poverty. For example, while the health services and programs provided to community members delivered some form of assistance and education, it cannot be certain that an American framework is the ideal solution in these situations. It also cannot be assumed that the locals on the receiving end were completely receptive to the volunteers.

While the debriefing and reflection efforts provide a higher level of learning and understanding concerning the problems faced by host communities, more can always be done. The Ecuador program was the only one to include a pre-trip study, which appears to have been valuable in Jenna's interpretation of the service-learning component, as well as her ability to recognize existing problems upon arrival in the country. Julia was the only participant to mention a structured post-trip meeting to reflect on her experience, which could contribute to the permanence of learning objectives and goals involved with service learning programs.

Though the participants of this study show an understanding of poverty and inequality beyond that of poverty tourism, their overall conceptualization of the issue remains one-dimensional. There was recognition of the existence of extreme poverty and of various issues contributing to poverty, but no consideration of how the problems were connected to each other or how the communities could participate in finding solutions. Several of the participants also mimicked the idea of these communities being 'poor but happy' in their rationalization of poverty. Though these rationalizations may be rooted in the recognition of cultural differences in value systems, it does lean toward trivializing poverty and regarding it as relatively acceptable. It is important and beneficial for students to see examples of extreme poverty in order to understand it, but it does not always offer a holistic understanding of poverty and community development tactics. More efforts must be centralized on understanding why communities are experiencing their poverty and how community development work, such as grassroots organization, local leadership, and strength development, could play a role in creating sustainable solutions.

Though there are still obvious limitations with the programs represented in this study, it is also important to acknowledge how the educational component can be positive. While their understanding of poverty and inequality is not complete, these students did not reflect experiences of poverty tourism or reinforcement of stereotypes. The debriefing and reflection efforts were beneficial in gaining a better cross-cultural understanding, challenging traditional American values, and digging deeper into the experiences of their program. Educationally based volunteer tourism, while not perfect, has potential to develop into a collaborative learning experience between students and local community members. The existence of a learning framework provides possibilities for realistic experiences and long-term activism, with the key to successful programs lying in the intention created by both program providers and participants.

From the responses gathered in this study, it can be understood how educationally based volunteer tourism programs, also referred to as service-learning abroad, offer increased opportunities for reflection and cross-cultural understanding. Though still reflecting limitations in major areas, such as authentic interaction and sustainable solutions for host communities, these programs have intentions that extend beyond vacation and adventure. It seems as though programs with longer duration offer better opportunities of learning and understanding poverty. The two participants who traveled to Tanzania for five weeks show greater understanding of the work they were doing and of the problems they found within the communities they visited, such as the spread of disease from unsafe drinking water. The programs focusing on environmental conservation seem to offer less opportunity for identifying issues of inequality and poverty, though this limitation can be attributed to a focus on environmentalism over

socio-cultural and economic assistance. Furthermore, the programs in which the participants gained internship or practicum credit in their specific field of study, such as in Tanzania, appear to yield more positive results due to extensive experience and appropriate preparation prior to traveling abroad. The two programs that offer more emphasis on learning and reflection opportunities, Tanzania and Toppers at Sea, rather than delivery of manual labor or other services provide more authentic and long-lasting learning experiences. These students reflect greater appreciation of the subjects they studied, along with integration of what they learned into their lives and work after returning home.

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Possibility of Further Research

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Further research into service learning study abroad programs, specifically, would help to fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of such programs. Implementation of more structured reflection and intentional study would discern whether or not it has an effect on understanding poverty and community development tactics. These studies would be most effective through actual experience with students and volunteers, not just post-trip interviews. Furthermore, research into the development of an effective model for service learning/volunteer tourism programs would also be valuable in distinguishing a balance between strengths and weaknesses, along with defining appropriate role expectations for participants.

It would also be most ideal to research the effects of volunteer tourism from the perspective of the host community. Current research focuses almost entirely on the experiences of volunteers, with little knowledge of how host communities feel about foreign presence. Not only could this improve the approaches and practices of

voluntourism, but could create more of a partnership between communities and volunteers, as opposed to trends of hierarchy and neo-colonialism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: IMPROVEMENTS TO VOLUNTEER TOURISM

Through the review of literature and analysis of interviews with WKU students, I

have found evidence to suggest the importance of an educational component within

international volunteerism programs, when it is effectively completed. Because it is

apparent that short-term, customer-based voluntourism is not designed to achieve true

developmental progress within foreign communities, the paradigm must shift focus on

attainable, yet still beneficial goals. Though still not creating sustainable solutions to

alleviate chronic poverty, effective implementation of education through international

service has a greater likelihood of providing genuine, valuable experiences to serve as

foundations for future activism and development work.

A shift in the intention of volunteer tourism is significant, as volunteers would no

longer be simple tourists under the guise of altruism and service to developing

communities. Instead, students and life-long learners may travel internationally to

communities with the expectation of gaining knowledge, cross-cultural understanding,

and witnessing the accomplishments communities are creating for themselves. Coghlan

and Gooch emphasize "the importance of cultural exchange and the creation of new

narratives between host and volunteer tourist that are engaging, genuine, creative and

mutually beneficial," which is made possible by applying the ideals of a transformative

learning framework (2011, p. 720). Yona, Sipos, Battisti, and Grimm identify such an

experience as "learning that facilitates personal experience for participants resulting in profound changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes related to enhancing ecological social and economic justice" (2008, p. 74). By following steps toward creating such an environment, problems such as paternalism and rationalization of poverty could be combatted. Participants would gain a more extensive understanding of poverty, while also taking part in building relationships with locals that would intentionally be continued after the program is over. Desiring a socially responsible, international experience is not enough to make it happen, therefore including educational components could bring participants closer to such goals.

Community development work should be left to development workers and professionals, as it is evident from research and experience that even non-profit voluntourism organizations do not possess the necessary knowledge and capabilities to provide real, sustainable help to impoverished communities. Therefore, a focus on education, including intentional reflection and complete study of a community, could provide an experience with appropriate expectations and effective preparation. Though it is clear that educational voluntourism is in need of improvement, future research into the development of an ideal model for such programs would help in solving these issues.

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Appendix

WKU Student Interview Questions

- Basic information about program/motivations:

  - In what country did you participate in voluntourism/service learning?

  - What was the official title of the program in which you participated?

  - How long was your program?

  - How did you initially find the program?

  - What motivated you to participate in a program such as this instead of traditional tourism?

- Information about work/projects:

  - What type(s) of work did you perform during your time in the host community?

  - Did you have any prior experience with the type of volunteer work that you participated in?

  - How did you feel about the work you were doing during your time there?

  - Looking back, how do you feel about the work now?

- Relationship with locals:

  - How much contact did you have with local community members?

    - How would you describe those interactions?

  - Do you feel as though you created authentic relationships with any of the local community members during the program?

- ▪ If so, do you still have contact with any of them?

  - ▪ How often? Through what medium?

- o How did the locals respond to your presence in their community?

  - ▪ What were their reactions to the work you were doing?

- o How involved were locals with the volunteer work?

- Assessment of experience:

  - o Before your international volunteering experience, had you ever been involved in any community service or social activism projects?

  - o Have you become more involved in any community service or social activism projects as a result of volunteering abroad?

    - ▪ If so, please provide a brief description.

  - o Do you feel that you have undergone any major personal changes as a result of volunteering abroad?

    - ▪ If so, please elaborate:

  - o How did you personally benefit from your international volunteering experience?

  - o Do you feel like you made a lasting difference in the host community?

    - ▪ How so?

    - ▪ Were you able to measure this difference?

  - o In what specific ways do you think the host community benefited from the volunteer work of your program?

  - o Did you participate in any group/personal debriefing/reflection efforts concerning your work while you were abroad?

- - After returning home?

  o Did your program leaders provide any debriefing/reflection procedures before, during, or after your program?

  o What did you learn about the issues surrounding poverty and inequality through volunteering abroad?

  o What was your favorite part about this experience abroad?

  o What ways do you feel the skills you developed will help you in the work world?

- Other activities:

  o How often did you participate in touristic activities during your program?

  o What activities/expeditions did you participate in?

Did your program provide these opportunities?