Expectations, Compassion and Confusion

- Volunteers’ experiences and perspectives

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Abstract

The roots of international voluntary work can be said to stem back to the 19th century missionary work. It is thus nothing new with westerners wanting to spread their knowledge or help the poor in other countries. However, relatively recently the international voluntary work or, as termed in this thesis, volunteer tourism have become more like an industry. Both the older phenomenon of non-profit organizers of volunteer travels and the newer, nowadays more visible, alternative of commercial companies are to choose from. Within this relatively new landscape of volunteer travels, this study seeks to understand the volunteers’ and the volunteer experience through a comparison of non-profit and profit organizers of volunteer travels. To do this, open-ended interviews were conducted with 14 former volunteers who had travelled with various organizers. The interviews took place in Stockholm, March-April 2015. The theoretical framework is based on critical theories, social movement theory and theories about (volunteer) tourism. The study showed that the experiences of and motivations for volunteering were quite similar between the groups. However, the volunteers’ who had travelled with non-profit organizers were in retrospect less focused on the aim of “helping” and they had to a larger extend revalued the aim and concept of volunteering. The most common least satisfactory part of the travel was the working situation. For all, the in general most valuable outcome of the travel was a cultural insight (exchange) rather than making a difference or helping, which is the common image marketed by many volunteer travel organizers.

Keywords: Volunteer tourism, volunteer travel organizers, neo-liberalism, post-colonialism, social movement theory
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Introduction

International voluntary aid work is nothing new. What is new is how the non-profit organizers of volunteer travels now share the space with a range of commercial organizers. Non-profit organizations have long been the strongest intermediates for volunteer travels, with a boom in the 1960:s for young Americans volunteering overseas through Peace Corps programs (Ong et al, 2011. p. 298). The increasing number of actors organizing volunteer travels to developing countries has been of emerging interest both for researchers and for the popular press, and the validity, aim and effectiveness of those have come under scrutiny. Since 1990 the phenomenon has grown exponentially both in form of participants and research. A study claims that 1.6 million people participate in volunteer tourism projects annually (Tourism Research & Marketing, 2008). It is mainly referred to as volunteer tourism and some researchers see it as an expanding new form of tourism, some as an alternative form of tourism and some as a sign of major societal changes (Wearing & McGehee, 2013. p. 121).

1.1 The concept of volunteer tourism

The majority of the research concerning the area of international volunteering is conducted within the tourism study area. The term volunteer tourism is used for volunteers travelling with a variety of organizers, and for both long-term and short-term volunteering. Volunteer experiences can “extend from short term projects of a few weeks to extended periods of many months but less than a year” (Tomazos & Butler, 2012. p. 178). The main parties in direct interaction involved in a volunteer program typically consists of; volunteer tourists, host communities and sending organizations (Ong et al, 2011. p. 298).

One relatively early definition of volunteer tourism was made by Stephen Wearing in 2001. The definition arose through his research Volunteer tourism: Experiences that make a difference. He suggests that volunteer tourists are “those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment” (p.1). This definition takes on the volunteers’ perspective, which is the most common one, while for instance Brown (2005) takes on the sending organizations perspective. Brown also includes cultural exchange to the concept as
she see volunteer tourism as a “type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers
travelers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer
component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people” (p. 480). However, the concept
of volunteer tourism in general includes a wide range of activities; from teaching in schools
and working on orphanages to working in environmental conservation projects and taking
care of lions, or conducting research on societal issues. Many, especially commercial,
volunteer travel organizers offer a variety of projects both with humans and animals (see e.g.
volontärresor.se & projects-abroad.se).

1.2 The emergence of volunteer tourism

The institutional roots of voluntary aid work stems from the British Volunteer Service
Overseas and the US Peace Corps, both established in the mid 20th century. Organizations
sending citizens for “unofficial” aid work is though older, traced back to the colonialist
missionary and educational work (Vrasti, 2012. p.2). In Sweden non-profit aid organizations
has been present since the late 19:th century, many in the form of missionary aid-work
abroad. Since the 1950s a part of the activity has been under governmental organization in
and in the 1960s- and 70s the solidarity movement established international aid work on
political statements about our exploitation of the development countries and the
“industrialized countries” duty to act (Jonsson, 2012. p. 5).

The emergence of commercial volunteer travel organizers took place approximately a decade
after an increase of the interest for international aid work. Under the 1990:s both scientists
and media devoted themselves to the non-profit organizations and sector (Jonsson, 2012.
p.25). The commercial companies as a new form of international volunteering originate
primarily from England and some other parts of Europe. Later it expanded to USA and
Australia (also including evangelical missionary trips) and is now growing in Asia and
Africa as well (Wearing & McGehee, 2013. p. 120). Since mid-2000 Swedish commercial
organizers offering volunteer trips to developing countries have emerged (Jonsson, 2012.
p.6), approximately ten years later than in England. The phenomenon of commercial
operators in Sweden is thus newer and less researched upon. Some commercial operators
cooperate with NGOs in different projects worldwide (Lo & Lee, 2010. p.332), in Sweden
for example Volontärresor AB and Projects abroad does (See volontärresor.se and projects-
abroad.se).
1.3 Previous research and questions raised

It is not only the definitions of volunteer tourism that differ, the views concerning the outcome of volunteer tourism for all involved also varies. Is it facilitating cross-cultural understanding and development in the local community (Raymond & Hall, 2008, Ong et al, 2011), or does it create more harm than good as a part of neo-liberalism and/or post-colonialism? (Mostafanezhad, 2013, Conran, 2011, Vrasti, 2012). Are the motivations of volunteers mainly altruistic or self-centered? How or if the commercialization affects the outcome of the trip is also debated, along with if NGOs is better to create real sustainability in the projects (Wearing, 2001).

Raymond and Hall (2008) write about how cross-cultural understanding is not a natural result of volunteer travels and that sending organizations have a major responsibility for this to happen. Lo and Lee (2011) on the other hand states that volunteer tourism “contributes not only to the personal growth and satisfaction of travelers but also to the development of the host communities and its culture” (p. 326). Initially after the commodification of volunteer travels many researchers saw volunteer tourism as a new form of tourism, or an alternative form of tourism, with almost only positive effects. Later critical theory introduced itself to the field, seeing volunteer tourism as for instance yet another form of neocolonialism (McGeehee and Wearing, 2012).

Concerning research about the motivations of the volunteers (see e.g. Sin, 2009, Lee & Lo, 2011, Tomazos & Butler, 2010, Mostafanezhad, 2013) one underlying debate is about if the motivations are self-oriented or altruistic. Another growing, and arguably important, research area is about the host communities experiences (see e.g. Raymond & Hall, 2009, Palacios, 2010). This could also be related to the critical, for example post-colonial, view on volunteer tourism and the issues concerning the commodification of it. According to Smith et al (2014) the commodification creates a situation where fulfilling the customers’ expectations becomes more important than asking the communities “in need” what they actually want (p. 959). On the same topic Mdee and Emmot (2008) claims that sending organizations are greenwashing “by communicating vague benefits such as “make a difference” to appeal to a wide range of potential volunteers and motivations, but with little resemblance to the real situation” (Smith et al, 2014. p 946). The popular press in many countries has also highlighted how it can be problematic with volunteering at for instance orphanages. That the children may be more
harmed than helped by the different faces staying for a short while, sometimes only for one or two weeks (svt.se, 2013, tidningenrepublic.se, 2014).

1.4 Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to put volunteer tourism in a larger societal development context and examine if there is any differences in volunteers experiences between those who have travelled with non-profit organizers and with profit organizers. An integrated part of the purpose is to see how/if the volunteers’ view of voluntary work has changed after the volunteer experience and in connection to that, how they look upon their own role. The questions used while conducting this study were:

- Are there any differences in the experiences of volunteers travelling with non-profit and profit organizations?
  1) How does the volunteer look upon her/his role and the purpose of volunteering in developing countries?
  2) Did the volunteer travel live up to the pre-expectations that motivated the volunteer?
  3) Was it a consciousness-raising experience and did it lead to further engagement in activities related to the volunteer experience?

During the work with this thesis a third category of volunteer tourists appeared, the, what I call, “independent volunteers” which have been volunteering abroad without going with any travel organizer. It showed they contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of volunteering, how the volunteers’ see themselves and voluntary work in general. Therefore I added that group as a part of the study, although not given as much space as the other two groups.

1.5 Definitions

When discussing international volunteering the following definitions will be used:

**Volunteer tourism:** When talking about the phenomenon of volunteering abroad, in development countries, I use the term volunteer tourism. The term international voluntary work is used when describing the history of volunteering. However, I think the term volunteer
tourism is more useful for highlighting the development of the phenomenon of voluntary work abroad.

**Volunteer:** When mentioning the people participating in volunteer tourism, those who voluntary travel abroad to work in some kind of project, I use the term volunteer (tourist).

**Host community:** refers to the city, village or site where the volunteers’ works and stays. The host community is both the community in general, and the people living there.

**Developing countries:** In this thesis, developing countries refers to the countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America where most volunteers go. Development is thus a relative term which can been measured in many different ways and viewed on from various perspectives. Other terms trying to describe these parts of the world (the global south, the periphery or the third world) would also be possible to use. However, all terms can be problematic in different ways but using developing country in this thesis seemed least confusing as it is such an established concept.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Critical Theory; Post-colonialism, Neo-liberalism and Compassion

Post-colonial thinking is not one uniform theory, it is a field consisting of various issues related to what the impacts of colonialism, imperialism and the resistance against those has been. Historically we can see the European colonialism not only as a forced overtaking off land areas and economies, but also as turning non-capitalistic economies to capitalist ones in order to strengthen the European economic development (Loomba, 2008. p.34). It is though not only about the impacts outside Europe. As Pia Laskar (2007) puts it; “ it is as much - if not more - about what happened in Europe in connection with the conquest of other continents and economies” (p. 9). The postcolonial thinking is also about the consequences and the, conscious as much as unconscious, expressions of this history of conquest that lives on today, both outside and inside Europe. Volunteer tourism can potentially be seen as still another form of colonialism, “creating yet another layer of dependency between the developed and developing world” (McGehee, 2012. p.122).

Mary Mostafanezhad (2013) found that volunteer tourism is an element of creating a geography of compassion, where volunteers start volunteering in for instance Thailand with a plan to later go to Africa where the authentic, “real”, volunteer experience is going to take place. This geography of compassion is based on perceptions of the developing world as helpless, reinforced by for instance pictures of exposed children. This stems back to the mid-nineteenth century where missionaries, an arguably obvious predecessor of volunteer tourism, followed a “perceptibly similar geography of compassion where they have tended to target marginalized children”. (p.330). In a neo-liberal world where the strong belief of market forces creates holes in societies, these holes is not to be filled by governments but NGOs, companies and compassionate individuals (Vrasti, 2012). The competition and entrepreneurship of neo-liberalism puts a similar emphasis on aid, responsibility and care. Forces that can be seen as united in volunteer tourism where it increases young people’s employability and at the same time “taps into people’s genuine desire to do good, learn about foreign cultures and experience ways of being in the world which the rational, individualistic West has made impossible” (Vrasti, 2012. p. 231).
Mary Conran (2011) has examined the cultural politics concerning _intimacy_ within volunteer tourism in NGOs connected to development. Intimacy in this case refers to an experience that “arouses a sense of closeness and a story about a shared experience”, for instance thorough an emotional bond to children the volunteers’ work with (Conran, 2011. p. 1459). She suggest that intimacy is the main experience of volunteer tourism, for all involved, and that it overshadows the structural inequality that it tries to address. Like Wanda Vrasti and Mary Mostafanezhad, Conran see the development of volunteer tourism as a part of neo-liberalism and also post-colonialism. They in similar ways conclude that the _moral economy_, where political action is replaced by moral consumption, compassion or intimacy legitimizes colonialism and uneven development.

Smith et al proposes that the volunteer trip organizers should communicate how volunteering fosters international understanding rather than a real impact in a local community (2014. p, 960). The increasing commodification of volunteer tourism creates a situation where fulfilling the customers’ expectations are more important than creating real sustainability and asking the communities “in need” what they actually want (Wearing, 2001, Smith et al, 2014).

### 2.2 The post-experience of volunteering - Social movement Theory

Social movement theory has sprung from critical theory as a part of a possible solution to that critique. In general social movement’s takes place outside the mainstream society and some examples are the anti-apartheid movement and the anti-nuclear movement (Mcgehee, 2012. p. 91). It may seem provoking to put the anti-apartheid movement and volunteer tourism under the same lens. However, McGehee states that using this theory on volunteer tourism does not mean that volunteer tourism organizations themselves are social movement organizations. They can though possibly lead to the development of social movements (p.92), through increased _self-efficacy_ and _self-consciousness_ among the volunteers.

The, for my purpose, useful model within social movement theory is formulated by McGehee (2012) and illustrates how people after a consciousness-raising experience can start to, in their everyday life, adapt a more conscious behavior. This is referred to as _taking on the personal as political_. In the case of volunteer tourism this could possibly happen after exposure of social inequalities and political and environmental issues (p.101). The model thus shows how
“volunteer tourism participation can lead to a consciousness-raising experience, which in turn can cause a person to take on the personal as political and consequently lead to social change. In addition, taking on the personal as political will lead to continued volunteer tourism participation” (McGehee, 2012. p. 101).

Volunteer tourism participation and consciousness-raising (McGehee, 2012)

2.3 Role Ambiguities and performances of the “self”

Peter Smekal (2005) conducted research about practices and attitudes of tourists on a Greek Island and found a widespread discomfort with the tourism role from the tourists themselves. He even puts the “anti-tourism” phenomenon in a wider perspective as a current part of the western society with its idealized individualism. This notion has been present ever since the beginning of modern tourism and is hence not only a more recent reaction towards the possible backsides of mass tourism in form of environmental and social degradation. The anti-tourism notion has for decades been expressed in media and in the social sciences, where we repeatedly “have been encountered this strange mixture of critical antagonism against tourism, contempt for tourists, and a certain almost nostalgic veneration of and longing for alternative ways of ‘being abroad’” (Smekal, 2005. p. 302).

Are similar anti-tourism notions to be found in volunteer tourism? If it is correct that NGOs in general attracts "deeper" volunteers while commercial companies attracts "shallower" ones as Wearing & McGehee (2013) suggests, is there a value scale concerning the types of trips that are more or less valuable even in the eyes of others? According to Callanan and Thomas (2005) the “shallow volunteers are dominated by personal interest, while those at the ‘deep’ end tend to think more about the community” (Wearing & McGehee, 2013. p.123).
According to Smekal a "regular" tourist in most modern societies is seen as a person with a “certain type of personality (shallow, conformist, insecure), a typical lifestyle (mindless hedonism, consumerism)” (p.20) etc. At the same time, there is a strong desire to travel in our modern world. This desire together with the picture of the regular tourist forms a background of the need to look for good and bad ways to travel, to find ways and alternatives to tourism. With the concept of anti-tourism in mind this can thus be a part of the creation of paradigms such as volunteer tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism. In line with this Harng Luh Sin (2009) writes about how volunteer tourists see the other tourists as less enlightened and sympathetic and how the construction of identity for the individuals involved in volunteer tourism is a major part of the volunteering experience (p.489).

As Smekal writes about the “self-contradictory illusions” of anti-tourism and how the lines between different types of travels are becoming increasingly blurred, Harng Luh Sin (2009) suggests that volunteer tourists are located in heterogeneous spaces, spaces where “desired identities of the ‘self’ in comparison to the ‘other’ serves as a precursor to consider the tensions between desired outcomes of altruism, aid, and development in the host destination, versus personal development of the volunteer tourists” (p.488).
3. Methodology

This study is qualitative and open-ended interviews have served as the main tool for fact-finding. The open-ended interviews were conducted with former volunteers from both non-profit and profit organizers of volunteer trips. However, previous research has also been used as a way to put my results in relation to other similar studies, for example about the volunteer’s motivations. Why I chose open-ended interviews as form of interview is because I wanted the respondents to, with their own words, express their thoughts. I also wanted to minimize the risk of leading the interviews after my own expectations. A form of interview which is similar to a conversation is for that reason beneficial. At the same time some structure was important to assure some specific questions/topics would be raised, especially to simplify the comparison of the answers between the groups of respondents.

To find respondents I sent e-mails to 5 volunteer travel organizers to tell them about my research and see if they could help me get into contact with former volunteers. Three of them are non-profit organizers, AFS, IAL and Peaceworks. The other two are commercial organizers, Volontärresor AB and Projects abroad. In the e-mail I attached a document possible to send out to former volunteers, telling them a little bit about my study and asked those interested to take part of my study to contact me. Two of the organizers sent the mail out; while two told me it was not possible. The fifth placed an ad about me searching for former volunteers to interview in their monthly newspaper for members. I have also contacted three people I found in threads on a website named www.reseguiden.se which connects people interested in traveling. I searched for threads about volunteer travels and wrote to those who seemed to have participated in such a travel. One of them answered and has participated. My supervisor wrote about me looking for respondents on the course web for the program “Development and international cooperation” at Södertörn University. Six contacted me and have been interviewed. Three of the respondents stem from personal contacts, one of them is for example a friend to my friend, but I had met none of them before. I have also used the method of snowball sampling where one of my respondents told me after the interview that she has friends who have been volunteering and offered herself to contact them. One of them answered her and has been interviewed.

The interviews were conducted during March and April 2015. Most of them took place at the library of Södertörn University and at cafés in Stockholm. Three of the respondents did not
live in Stockholm and had no plan of going there. These interviews thus had to be made via phone or Skype, where the best option of the two is Skype because it is much more similar to a real meeting. Skype allows reflection and silence, and visual impressions which can be more valuable than an interview over phone. All of the three interviews were planned to be conducted via Skype. However, one had to be done over phone due to technical problems. The interviews took approximately one hour each and an interview guide was used as a backing. I used it as a guide which means I did not follow it scrupulously. The interviews varied and new questions came up during the process, even though most of the questions were asked to all respondents. All interviews were conducted in Swedish except one, which was conducted in English. I have translated the quotations used in the thesis from Swedish to English, and I have tried to translate as truthfully as possible. The original quotations in Swedish are to find in the appendix. The quotations with no number afterwards have not been translated because they were in English from the very beginning. The respondents are anonymous and therefore the quotations are not associated with a certain respondent, neither what organizer the respondent quoted travelled with.

All in all I conducted fourteen interviews. All of the interviewed are female and they were between the ages of 19-24 at the time of volunteering abroad (for more information, see appendix for a table over the respondents). The lack of male respondents and the lack of diversity concerning the age at the time of volunteering seem to correspond well to the demographic patterns of persons volunteering abroad. Approximately 80% of all volunteer tourists are female and 56% of all volunteers are between 20-29 years old (Mostafanezhad, 2013, TRAM, 2008). One of the respondents had travelled with both a non-profit and a profit organizer during one travel, and the interview considered both experiences. Three of the respondents did not go with any organization or company. However, they appeared to fit in to one of the theories which made the group of “independent volunteers” an interesting addition to the other two groups.

3.1 Methodological discussion

The disadvantage of open-ended interviews is the risk of misinterpretations and of some information getting lost. It can even be harder to, in a very structured way, analyze the information. To avoid as much as possible of this I taped all the interviews to be assured all information was captured and quoted correctly. A possibility for this study would have been
to use questionnaires instead of, or as a complement to, the open-ended interviews. Questionnaires or structured interviews may facilitate a comparison between the answers of different groups of respondents. Nevertheless, even if it creates clearer answers, I believe for the purpose of this study where I search for deeper answers, open-ended interviews were more suitable.

Six of the respondents study at the program Development and International Cooperation at Södertörn University, which potentially could be scientifically problematic. They may use terms and have other perspectives than the general population. However, these respondents are anyway quite typical for persons volunteering abroad, young people interested in global inequality issues, other cultures and travelling (Conran, 2011). Therefore, these respondents are less problematic in this kind of study.
4. Volunteer travel-organizers included in this study

The division of profit and non-profit organizers of volunteer travels is not uncomplicated. The organization of for instance non-profit volunteer travels does not look exactly the same; some have specific qualifications on their volunteers while others have not etcetera. What all profit organizers I have read about have in common is though that they do not require anything from their volunteers. The division of non-profit and profit organizers is thus a generalization which however makes it easier to sort the different operators.

4.1 Profit organizers

**Volontärresor AB**

The majority of the respondents of this study going with profit-organizers travelled with this company. With the slogan “A journey that makes a change” this company was established in 2005 and offer volunteer travels to Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. As a volunteer you can chose yourself from projects with children, animals and nature. Most of the projects last two months but it is possible to be away from two weeks to 6 months.

**Go Xplore**

Go Xplore is a company which combines travel and work. They have offices in Sweden and Norway and offer, in addition to voluntary work with humans and animals in developing countries, au-pair work, travel and farming, internships and teaching abroad (goexplore.se, 2015). The volunteers choose destination and activity by themselves and they choose how long they want to be away. Depending on country the volunteer can stay for a different long or short time. However, from two weeks to 52 weeks is generally possible.

**Projects abroad**

Projects Abroad was established in England in 1992 and have nowadays branches in a range of European countries, among them Sweden. They offer volunteer travels to Africa, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe. The volunteers choose from a range of projects in the country of interest and when they want to start. The volunteers can be away 1-12 months, and in some cases two weeks. The projects range from human rights projects, to working at orphanages, natural preservation or emergency aid (projectsabroad.se, 2015).
4.2 Non-profit organizers

**AFS- Interkulturellt samarbete (Intercultural cooperation)**

AFS was founded in 1914 as a voluntary ambulance corps during the First World War. After the Second World War they started with youth exchange programs. The Swedish branch was founded in 1948. Today it is, according to their homepage, the world’s largest non-profit exchange organization with 55 countries involved (afs.se, 2015). Most volunteers travel 5-6 months but the projects can last from 2-10 months. The volunteers do not need any special qualifications, but all are interviewed before excepted and AFS choose a suitable program and country taking account of the volunteer’s wishes (afs.se, 2015).

**Peaceworks:**

With the slogan ”peacework for everyone” Peaceworks is a Swedish organization for youths that works with “volunteer exchanges”, associations and education. It was founded in 1974 and by then worked with international culture exchange under the name IKU. As a volunteer you can go to Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America for 1 week to 1 year depending on the project. The volunteers’ works on orphanages, ecological projects, human rights projects etcetera depending on the choice of country and the volunteers wishes. No education or qualifications are needed but an interview and a letter determines if the volunteer is suitable in terms of “personal maturity and engagement” (peaceworks.se, 2015).

**Stiftelsen Skandinaviska institutet (The foundation Scandinavian Institute):**

This is a foundation which aim is to ”look after and develop opportunities for a international engagement” (scandinaviainst.se, 2015), where some of the programs have been running since 1968. They offer “volunteer placements” in Tanzania, Ecuador, Galapagos, India and Nepal, internships, “Work and Travel”, Au-pair placements etcetera. The volunteer projects involve for instance childcare, education, healthcare and natural preservation. The volunteer can stay from 3 weeks to 6 months depending on project. No certain qualifications are required and the foundation develops the project after the volunteers’ wishes.
**St. Sigfrids folkhögskola:**
This folk high school offers a course where you go to Tanzania to first learn Swahili at a university for 6 weeks, and then volunteer for 4-6 weeks in a school, at an orphanage, with computer support, with agriculture or with something else “depending on the volunteer’s knowledge and skills”. The course contains a preparing part in Sweden as well as presentations and discussions afterwards. To be accepted you have to write a letter where you explain why you want to attend the course (sigfrid.se/utbildningar-kurser/tanzania/, 2015).

**Charities Advisory Trust:**
This is an organization based in England which aim is to find “practical methods of redressing inequalities and injustice” and they are engaged in “setting frameworks in which charities could succeed”. (charitiesadvisorytrust.org.uk, 2015) They run different national (England) and international projects but does not, according to their homepage, offer any voluntary work abroad (for the moment). However, you can engage in volunteer work like knitting for “those in need both at home and abroad” (charitiesadvisorytrust.org.uk, 2015).
5. Understanding and comparing experiences of volunteer tourists

The majority of the respondents who travelled with non-profit organizations stated that they chose that kind of organizer because it felt good to know that no one was making a profit on their voluntary work, and because the alternative of companies is much more expensive. Two also stated that it felt more secure with a well-established non-profit organization. In comparison to these respondents who in much based their choice of volunteer organizer on opinions about profit and in some cases security, the majority of respondents who travelled with profit-organizers searched on the internet and looked at the first or some of the first volunteer travel web-sights that appeared. Many declared that the one they chose felt good because they had many alternatives and countries to choose from. Therefore it was easy to find a suitable project, and that it also felt easy because almost everything was included and set. One of these respondents expressed that she had wanted to go with a non-profit organization but that the date of application for that organization had past. Another respondent told she had considered going with a non-profit organization but said that “as she understood it, it is very hard to become a volunteer in an organization. That you need education and so on”. A third respondent had chosen very carefully between the different profit-companies based on project and price, but she had no idea of the possibility of going with a non-profit organization.

5.1 Experiences from travelling with a profit-organization

Motivations for travelling as a volunteer to developing countries

I found five main motivations for volunteering in developing countries among the respondents who travelled with a profit-organizer. They are to (1) get new experiences, (2) to help (make a difference), (3) to open the eyes (new perspectives), (4) to come closer to the culture and (5) to travel. All of the respondents had more than one motivation for volunteering with the most common combination of helping and getting new experiences.

*I think it’s more like you kind of make a good thing while you see something else. It’s useful for me that I can learn something; get new experiences, while I can do something for those who need it. (1)*
Expectations

All the respondents who had volunteered through a profit organizer except one felt that they all in all were very happy with their experience, that the trip lived up to their expectations even though some parts of it had not been what they expected. The most common part that differed from their expectations was their voluntary working tasks.

Then I at first ended up at a school, but I had said orphanage. So I was stuck at a school for two weeks before I called the coordinator at the place [...] So it was tiresome. That I ended up at the school was probably because they (the organizer) said they had no orphanage they collaborated with right then. (3)

In line with this some of the respondents more or less expressed that they wished the organizer would have come with clearer instructions about how the voluntary work would look like. One respondent who volunteered at an orphanage in Thailand experienced that the organizer did not really know that much about the place. One of the respondents was so disappointed with her travel that she wished she had never gone. She thought that she was going to work at the organizational part of a “women’s shelter”, something she thought would be a great experience for her future career. However, once there they worked in direct contact with the abused women and said that “it felt like just because we came from a western country we could do a little bit what we wanted”.

Some respondents expressed what can be interpreted as positive surprises like how friendly the people from the host community were, how “the orphanage looked much better (fresher) than expected or as one of the respondent put it; ”you like say that you go there to do something for them. But when you go, it is them who do something for you. They change you. They make you stronger”

The perceived relation to the host community

The volunteers had to a different extent contact with the host community depending on how they lived and what they worked with. For instance one of the volunteers worked with nature preservation and lived neighbor to a hotel but far from the local community, while other volunteers lived in host families. In general, from the volunteers’ perspective, they perceived
the people from the host community as very friendly, even though “culture clashes” appeared. Nevertheless, they, to a very different extent reflected over the relations, both between volunteers and those being “helped” and between them as westerners and the host community.

One of the respondents said “to know your positions as a white person, it has never been that obvious as there. What power it actually is”. She refers to how it felt like her money reluctantly gave her power, and that she was invited as an honorable guest to for example a funeral “only because I was white, it felt like”. This respondent put it as a problem lying on westerners while another interpreted it more the opposite:

Some, when they greet, say hello Mzungu (white person). You do not need to say that to me, I know I’m white. It could be a drag in the long run [...] in a way, the racism down there against whites is perhaps greater than it is here against blacks. Because they give special treatment to whites (there) in a way that you do not do as clearly here in Sweden, really not. Both positive and negative special treatment. (4)

Of those who expressed thoughts of the relations to the host community, for example regarding leaving children after a short while, generally came to the conclusion it had to be like that, that the children somehow get used to it.

It was one boy I got really attached to. You don’t like believe it when you go there. I’ll go there as a volunteer, I will not be attached to any one particularly because I will oblige everyone as much. However [...] then it’s these children who don’t have anyone, and then it’s someone who get attached to you. Exactly you. It’s you who means extra much and then it’s so hard to let go of the feeling for that child. [...] The first time I was there it was really hard because this boy who was extra attached to me became really sad when I was going to go home (to Sweden). When it was three days left he was constantly crying. (5)

This volunteer told that next time she visited it was much easier for this boy because he knew she was continuing coming back. So, as long as you come back she thought it was ok to volunteer with children.

The impact of the volunteer travel on the volunteer tourist

When I asked the volunteers who had travelled with profit-organizers about what they valued most regarding their volunteer travels, and if they felt that the volunteer travel had affected/changed them in some way, it was very clear that they experienced that larger cultural understanding was the most valuable experience. To stay longer at a place, work there, sometimes even live in a host family created a deeper understanding of the country and the culture, in contrary to normal tourism where you usually stay for a shorter period. This
message can be deduced from the majority of the respondents. This “cultural experience” seems to go hand in hand with a notion of getting a broader world view which in some cases was brought home in form of looking with new eyes on the society at home. As two of the respondents put it:

I think you above all learn a lot about yourself, not to take things for granted. [...] It is very strange to come home after 6 months and go to the supermarket where it is packed with chocolate bars when you’ve lived on beans and lentils and showered in cold water. It’s a hell of a conversion when you come home. I guess it's primarily at home you understand. When you are down there, you are in it so much. (6)

If I had not gone I would not be who I am today. It may sound like a cliché but it really is the truth. This thing with getting to know a culture, it was incredibly strange for me to know another culture than the Swedish culture. And only by that I think you learn an awful lot, [...] that things are different in the world. I cannot say that my life is normal and someone else's is abnormal. (7)

Four in this group of respondents also mentioned that they felt they had done something important in the host community; however none of them started telling about that as the most valuable aspect. Many of them also related to the volunteer trip as something that had guided their direction in life back home in form of choice of education. Some expressed how they had gained fortitude and a will to travel more.

The view on and aim of voluntary work in developing countries

On the question what they think the aim of voluntary work in developing countries is, the majority of the respondents answered that the aim is or should be to help, to do good for the local community.

The aim is perhaps to be a helping hand. I do not know, but at the same time, you cannot change their culture in any way but you can be ... nah but as with corporal punishment, that we tell them we do not want to do that. It may make them to get another view (on it). We are there to help [...] and to give love, because we have the time. We put money on going there and give them love. To give them things that they cannot get in their everyday life. (8)

This respondent had worked at an orphanage and said that it is much up to you, if you go away every weekend and travel even in the weeks “as many did” it may be more a tourist trip than helping. In line with that many of the other respondents stated that helping should be the aim, even though that was not always the case. For instance because they had “very free hands” to for example travel when they wanted also because they had paid so much, or that it
felt like “it was more important” from the organizers side to “give the volunteers a pleasant
time” than to “do good”.

On the question if they thought volunteer travels are closest to aid work or tourist trips, two
answered that it was closest to tourist trips because it was so expensive, and out of them one
was very critical and it felt like the organizer only wanted her money. However she
thought”volunteer travels which have requirements for those who go is another thing. They
actually run development work that is serious and that contributes to something”. Seemingly
unusual for this group of respondents one of them said she had become digested to the
concept of volunteering in development countries. That before she went she was “naive” and
“that one's perceptions before you went were poor children in Africa”. Nowadays she thinks
that you always go for egoistic reasons and that a truer name for these travels would be
“cultural travels”.

5.2 Experiences from travelling with a non-profit organization

Motivations for travelling as a volunteer to developing countries

The motivations for going on a volunteer travel to developing countries among the
respondents who travelled with a non-profit-organization, where in much the same as for the
other group. However, one more motivation was present: To learn a language. Three of the
respondents started telling about that motivation.

"The best way to learn a language is to live in the country, and then I think it is
a good way to learn about the world, open up your eyes a bit. It's hard to sit
here and just study things, you do not learn in the same way. If you go as a
regular tourist you will not come in there into it in the same way at all, you
only see the surface. To stay there for a long time makes you see a lot more
layers of the society and the culture."(9)

Expectations

As in the case of volunteers who had travelled with profit organizers the most tangible part
differing from the volunteers’ expectations was their working situation. For instance one
respondent thought that she would work at an ecological farm while it was a farm focused
agricultural tourism. Another thought she would work at an orphanage focused on
empowering women and girls while it was an “ordinary orphanage” for girls. Two of the
respondents expressed that they would have liked to help more. One of them had got
information from the organizer indicating that the trip was more about an exchange than helping. Nevertheless, this respondent who worked as an English teacher stated that:

*I would have liked to have a lot more responsibility. I might have been able to hold, if not the entire days so anyway parts of days. Have full lessons. Now they taught very stiffly from a book. So it was not so much of a lesson I thought actually. It was difficult, when you have no teaching experience or knowledge; it is difficult to know how to tackle it.* (10)

However, the biggest difference from those who had travelled with a profit-organizer, was that some of these respondents expressed that they did not have or had not wanted to have so many expectations

*I didn’t have too many expectations on how it would be. I mean, it was a brand new country and I was still learning about development so I didn’t have too many expectations. But the biggest difference was that I don’t know if I being there did much good, if that makes sense, apart from the good it did for me.*

This respondent together with another had clearly revalued the aim or concept of voluntary work in developing countries. The other had become so critical she wished it would not exist, not because of her own experience which she valued as an eye-opener, but because she thinks that it is unequal that she as an uneducated 19-year old can go to a developing country to teach and “help” and come with demands. However, all the respondents except one was happy they had gone. The one very disappointed with her working situation expressed that she at least “got a very good insight into how it can be in these kinds of countries and how little chance girls has to influence their future”.

**The perceived relation to the host community**

As with the other group of respondents the extent of contact and relations with the host community depended on how they lived and worked. One of the respondents who both lived in a host family and worked on a school with no other volunteers only socialized with people from the host community, while others travelled in a group and was together with other volunteers most of the time. A difference from the other group of volunteers was that more of these respondents clearly expressed that they during or after the travel had problematized volunteering in development countries, that the relation of donors and receivers never can be equal (if you view volunteer travel as helping).

*If you think about this perspective and imagine a group of Indian kids (young adults) coming over here and working in a school. If you picture how shocking that is. That’s how I imagine we where for them, except that it happen so often*
and that’s the way people don’t think about it when they decide to go volunteering.

Another respondent declared that it was really interesting to get to know the host family, but that the relation to the host community also was complicated because the volunteers own roles in the society was so diffuse. She had wished to be accepted with open arms, but said that “of course they had no reason to do that, it would not happen in Sweden either” and told:

We also met people who said THANK YOU, great that you’re here. It was not unusual but it's because you (they) have been taught that. It's like people say also, "they're of course happy that they get help." But they should not be happy that they get help, because we have no help to offer. It is also about how our knowledge is valued. (11)

Some of these volunteers, similarly to the other group, seemed to have experienced some “cultural clashes” especially concerning the view on women in the host community. However, most of them were clear with that they had to respect it and that it was not a problem in the end.

The impact of the volunteer travel on the volunteer tourist

Similarly to the group of respondents who travelled with a profit-organizer the most valuable experience of the volunteer work seems to have been a cultural and “deeper” understanding of the host community. Notable differences from the other group were however (1), that the majority of these respondents had continued with some kind of engagement related to the volunteer experience, (2), that they to a greater extent have revalued the purpose of volunteering and (3), that only one of the respondents in retrospect seemed to put much emphasis on the part of helping or “doing something important”. For instance two of the respondents had continued to engage in voluntary work related to particularly volunteer travels, but both of them worked for a changed view of these kinds of travels. I will write more about that in the chapter called “the view on and aim of voluntary work in developing countries”. However one of these respondents told that what she got from her two month volunteer travel, working with street children was:

Well, I think it was how much I didn’t want to intrude. When you are into development you are more often than not involved in a society that is not yours. I think that was the point that I learned. [...] With all our degrees and everything, all our good will it’s still some times inappropriate because we never actually have the same perspective as they do.
This respondent had also after and during the trip become very critical about volunteer working with kids because it means leaving them after a short while.

The one respondent who was very disappointed with her travel and felt useless because she “felt like” she “did not help so much”, and that they (the couple running an orphanage) just wanted her money, wished she had never went but she however felt she is “more conscious now” (eats less meat, thinks about where the clothes she buys comes from etc). Similar to the other group of respondents many of these had started on educations in one way or another connected to their volunteering experience. One respondent had for example started studying social anthropology; which in her own words is much about “questioning the dominance of the Western world”. She had become regretful about her volunteer travel when getting new perspectives from the course and felt that she had contributed to power structures she did not want to participate in. Also in terms of what pictures she mediated afterwards:

There was some kind of awakening [...] a much more nuanced picture. This super-nice university we were on. And the family, sure, they had earthen floors in the kitchen but they also had a TV in the living room. Four phones each. That I can also regret in retrospective I did not intermediated more, because I took pictures that were carrying water on the heads and earthen floors. But there was so much more that could have explained instead. This is there but no one like thinks that. (12)

The aim of voluntary work in the south

Contrary to the other group of respondents, only one of these respondents expressed that volunteering in development countries should fill the purpose of helping. The other respondents had, if they thought they were going there to help, in different ways revalued the aim of volunteer travels during or after their trips. However one expressed that she had the same view on it both before and after, that “the aim should be to learn about yourself and others”, something the organization she travelled through also stands for according to her.

Two of the respondents who had changed their views about volunteer travels have afterwards engaged in voluntary activities connected to volunteer travels (as mentioned in the chapter “the impact of the volunteer travel on the volunteer tourist”). Both of them also consider volunteer travels as tourist travels rather than aid work.

Closest to a tourist trip I think because it's so self-centered, it's not about what someone else needs. It's about what you yourself wants and believe. So [...] it’s a tourist trip just at another place. It’s not the beach you want to see, but it is children or something you want to see. But at the same time, in the best case, it will be some sort of cultural journey where one can learn more about people
and how people live in different parts of the world, what people feel and think. Then I guess it will be a little bit more, at least to learn something, rather than only being a tourist. (13)

This respondent do not even want volunteer travels to exist, and instead she wants to work for “creating equal encounters for people from different countries” through for instance international camps. Another respondent would like more people to volunteer in their own countries, but think volunteer travels will develop to the better using more research and long term planning:

Long term planning that’s what I mean. It’s a little bit unfair to those receiving our help if you are hungry and you are vegetarian and somebody gives you a steak, it’s food but it’s not helpful. That’s the best way I can put it, good intentions, there’s just need to be channels.

5.3 The independent volunteers’

The three respondents who volunteered without any organizer were all doing it as a part of a longer travel. One of them decided spontaneously to volunteer, when she during her travel heard that a center for poor children needed help over Christmas. In general she was quite skeptical towards volunteering (in developing countries) but said she got curious, also because she wants to work with development issues in the future. The other two knew they wanted to do voluntary work during their travels, and they also knew that they did not want to go with an organization or company. One said that she did not want to pay for it and found a page where private persons or organizations posted if they wanted volunteers to help them with something (see helpx.org), which she felt was “more equal or more democratic”. The other one wanted to find a way to volunteer without the risk of ending up somewhere and not being able to contribute that much, only for a company to earn money on it. On the question if she would consider going on an organized volunteer travel she answered:

No, I guess it depends on how well it is designed. But first, I don’t like to go on these organized travels within frames and to have a program [...] and then it is very important what kind of organization it is. What they earn money on, what they do with their money, how they affect like the local community. If they contribute at all, or if they just take tourists there and take all the money themselves. (14)

In line with this statement the other two was critical to go on organized volunteer travels, especially the commercial ones because, as one put it, “it would be hard for me to trust that activity and its purpose”. Overall the independent volunteers seems to be closer to the volunteers’ going with non-profit organizations than those going with profit ones, in terms of
skepticism towards profiting on volunteer work and a more diverse picture of the concept of helping. Like one of the respondents said "I do not know if I believe in this way of doing it. What are we doing? Spreading our knowledge? It is not sustainable.” Nevertheless, all the respondents felt they got a deeper insight to the country (as the other two groups of respondents) than if they only had travelled as tourists. Another respondent declared that she thinks it is a difference between tourism and traveling, and that is how you “let yourself be influenced by the new place”.

*Ultimately, it's about learning something about yourself by traveling to new places. While tourism, then you are only moving to the site. You might affect it, you might litter or contribute financially to the development, but you do not let the place influence you, you maybe stay at your hotel, go to a few restaurants but you don’t really interact with the (local) population. (15)*

Concerning the motivations for volunteering these independent volunteers all expressed curiosity as one of their main motivations, this was different from the other two groups.

5.4 Summarizing results

The experiences told by the various volunteers were all in all more similar than different between the groups. Nevertheless, to summarize the experiences of the volunteers (in first hand those traveling with volunteer travel organizers but also the independent volunteers) the generally most obvious common experience for all groups was that the most valuable experience (sometimes the “only” one) was a deeper and closer contact with the country and culture they visited. This could though take different forms, from gaining an insight of the lives and people of the host community, to developing an emotional relationship to the children worked with, to developing a more critical view of the relationships between the developing countries and the West.

To continue with similarities, the motivations for volunteering abroad for those travelling with both non-profit and profit organizers were largely the same (to (1) get new experiences, (2) to help (make a difference), (3) to open the eyes (new perspectives), (4) to come closer to the culture (5) to travel and (6) to learn a language), with the addition of the motivation “curiosity” from the independent volunteers. Another similarity was how the volunteers experienced that their working situation was different than they thought. However, those travelling with non-profit organizers, and the independent volunteers’ generally had fewer expectations.
The biggest differences in the told experiences of volunteers between those who travelled with non-profit and profit organizers, was that those travelling with non-profit organizers to a greater extent had: (1), continued with some kind of engagement related to the volunteer experience, (2), revalued the purpose of volunteering and (3), in retrospect put less emphasis on the part of helping or “doing something important” in the host community.

The group of independent volunteers was more similar to the group travelling with non-profit organizers; however, they were in general more critical to the concept of, at least organized, volunteer travels and/or the commercialization of volunteering in developing countries.
6. Analysis

6.1 To travel while doing something of importance

I want to travel, or I want to get new experiences, or I want to come closer to the culture \textit{while doing something of importance}. This urge is expressed by many volunteer tourists, both those travelling with profit and non-profit organizers. Callanan and Thomas (2005), along with many other scientists, discuss the volunteers’ based on their motivations where they become categorized as more altruistic or individualistic. However, as Harng Luh Sin (2009) also found, it seems to be hard to categorize the motivations of volunteers’ because, as shown in this study, the volunteers’ motivations are often a combination of those only gaining themselves and an expressed will to help others. Nevertheless, in general the volunteers’ in the end did not feel that they contributed that much to the local community. Instead they got a deeper insight to the culture, experiences, and a travel etcetera. However, they were still generally delighted with their travels. On the other hand, many (especially those travelling with profit organizers) thought volunteering should be about helping.

This contradiction between the expectation of doing something important but in the end gain more yourself, still be happy with the travel but think it should gain the locals is interesting. How come especially the commercial industry of volunteer travels is growing more and more when the volunteers’ feel they cannot “contribute” that much, which is what most companies sell (Smith et al, 2014)? Answers can be found within the critical theories. As Wanda Vrasti (2012) points out volunteer tourism, as a sign of a neo-liberal society, is combining the competitive parts of neo-liberalism while it also alludes to a genuine desire to do good. It offers young people to live and work in a foreign country enhancing their employability while it also alludes to the wish to “meet new people, learn about other cultures and understand the causes of global poverty” (p. 234). This genuine desire to do good has gone from a matter of structural inequality in the world to a question about individual morality (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Here volunteer travels becomes both a channel to do good/“giving back in neoliberal times” (Vrasti, 2012), and a way to morally ease your conscience while doing something that, importantly, also gains yourself. Many, especially commercial volunteer travel organizers also see the volunteer tourists as one off customers (Smith et al, 2014).

Some of the volunteers expressed in different ways that they \textit{just wanted to do something}. Maybe they had seen pictures from orphanages in Africa on television since they were
children where after some, as one respondent expressed, “just felt” they “needed to go there to help in some way”. This compassion, as Mary Mostafanezhad (2013) points out, finds its way through the colonialisms old wheel tracks where the “good westerner” can come and save for instance the “poor children in Africa”. They are often young women without suitable experience and for certain less experience in teaching than people from the host country itself. Good intentions become capitalized in a neo-liberal world where a moralization of tourism has created a situation where tourism is a part of development work, which is an example of the privatization of development work in general (Conran, 2011).

How the volunteers’ expressed the will to travel while doing something of importance could also be connected to the moralization of tourism and the anti-tourist notions highlighted by Peter Smekal (2005). We do not only see the “real” backsides of mass-tourism in form of for example environmental and cultural degradation, but (un)conscious notions about tourism and the tourist. Even though most of the respondents did not explicitly express a distance to tourism, a part of travelling while doing something of importance could be that they do not want to identify with the regular tourist role. Of interest is that the volunteers with a more positive attitude towards volunteer travels in general said the travels are closer to development aid, while those with a more negative attitude in general felt it was more like tourism. The independent volunteers were critical towards organized volunteer travels and were combining the volunteering with “backpacking”, or “travelling” or “touristing or what you should say”. As Smekal points out, “the boundaries between different types of travel are becoming ever more unclear” (p.122). People combine different activities and there is no such person as the tourist. Still, the romantic picture of a way of traveling far away from tourism lives on. In the case of volunteer tourism, it has found a way in our individualistic modern society to combine tourism with something “better”, or more “altruistic”. In reality it however seems more beneficial to the volunteers than to the hosts (Vrasti, 2012. p. 234)

6.2 Expectations, compassion and confusion

When the volunteers’ talked about the time of volunteering many, both those who travelled with non-profit and profit organizations, expressed that their voluntary working tasks was not what they had expected. Either they had different tasks than anticipated or they felt a bit useless and wanted to do more, or had started contemplating about their role as a volunteer and what they actually did there. Many of those travelling with profit organizations also
seemed to have a large degree of freedom concerning when they could be free from work and for instance travel. One respondent put it: “when you have paid so much for volunteering, it becomes more up to yourself how much you want to work”. Another felt some kind of peer pressure to follow the other volunteers and travel in the weekends, and a third (who had to leave the volunteer site every weekend) felt it was a strange feeling to come and go and that it would have been better to stay all the time.

The situation where volunteers’ where not, at least at first, happy with their placements could of course be due to bad communication from the organizers side. However, it could also be due to expectations from the volunteers’ side, fueled by the organizer, which do not comply with the reality. As Smith et al (2014) concludes, organizers, especially commercial, are more interested in fulfilling the customers’ expectations than create real sustainability in the projects. By trying to fulfill the expectations of “helping”, without putting too much effort on what kind of “help” is needed, a situation where the volunteers’ feel unnecessary occur. Another aspect is how volunteers can be put in situations they feel they cannot handle or where it is inappropriate to be, because of lack of experience or education.

The volunteers’ feelings of compassion and of wanting to contribute while it in reality can be hard create a situation of confusion about the volunteers’ role. Tomazos and Butler (2009) found that volunteer tourists with looser boundaries constantly need to find the right balance between commitment to the project and other activities. These heterogeneous spaces where volunteer tourists need to “perform their identities, rather than gazing from a distance” (Sin, 2009. p. 483), can also be connected to the romanticism (Vrasti, 2012) surrounding doing a difference in the world, and perceptions about stereotypes of how the “help” is going to look like. This brings about the question of for who the volunteer work actually is. Many volunteer travels are marketed through a neo-colonialist development aid language presenting the westerner as a savior, a language securing volunteer placements through “clichés, where the public face of development is dominated by western ‘good intentions’ which trivialize poverty and become the framework of reference for participants” (Smith et al, 2014. p. 946). With this in mind, it might be quite obvious that volunteers’ get disappointed if they had heard that they can do a difference when they actually cannot, or when the work is not as beneficial to their career as thought. They might also have an inner picture of how you “help” best and of stereotypes they (un)consciously want to witness.
6.3 Taking the personal as political or moral economy

That volunteers’ gain themselves from their volunteer travels more than they help does not necessarily mean it is something bad. The gain in form of a wider world view, of cultural understanding and of meeting people from other parts of the world can lead to what Nancy McGehee (2012) refers to as consciousness-raising, something that could bring about positive effects not only for the former volunteers’ themselves. Several volunteers’ expressed that they after the travel valued what they have at home more, as one put it “maybe it is not the whole world if you have forgotten your lunch box, you probably have some money to buy food for”. Numerous of the former volunteers’ had also continued (or started) to reflect upon for instance global inequalities and power relations between people and countries. According to McGehee’s model, consciousness-raising experiences in form of volunteer tourism participation can lead to taking the personal as political (to use locally owned enterprises and shop fair-trade whenever they travel and continue participating in volunteer tourism) (2012, p. 101). However the majority of former volunteer tourists had not participated in a similar travel again and those still involved in volunteer travels wanted to change the concept and make it more “equal”.

To continue as usual but buy for instance fair-trade products can in another view be seen as moral consumption, the new (not very political) form of activism in neo-liberal times (Mostafanezhad, 2013). This moral consumption or continuation with volunteer travels as they are today is maybe not leading to a major social change, which is the goal in McGehee’s model (2012), because it is working within the same paradigm as causes the problems (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Nevertheless, as pointed out earlier, the consciousness-raising component of volunteer tourism is for some of the volunteers’ also shown as a new view of the whole concept of volunteer travels. Some volunteers’ for instance felt ashamed about the role they got as a volunteer, or they gained new perspectives and therefore a will to change the concept. However, this together with a broader worldview could be a way to the goal of social change. As Mary Conran (2011) points out “even though volunteer tourism will not individually solve the issue of global inequality, we should not overlook its potential to become a platform for contributing to peace and broader global justice movements” (p. 1466).

So, if volunteer tourism could lead to social change, how should the travels be designed and what responsibility does the volunteer travel organizer have concerning how the volunteer look upon her/his role? The volunteer tourists who had travelled with non-profit organizers
where in general those who had continued with some form of engagement, plus they were more critical and reflective over the concept of volunteer travels and also less focused on that the aim of volunteering should be to “help”. Since the impact a volunteer travel do for the host community is very limited (smith et al, 2014 and Vrasti, 2012), the notion that these travels are not about helping is closer to the truth. The profit organizers of volunteer travels needs to, to a higher degree than non-profit organizers, market themselves on expectations of making a difference (Smith et al, 2014). This could be an explanation to why volunteer tourists travelling with non-profit organizers were less focused on helping. Another explanation could be that they, since they in general seemed to have made a more active choice than those who travelled with profit organizers, where more “informed” from the beginning. As Conran (2011) writes, volunteer tourists tend to be “conscious individuals who sympathies with popular global justice agendas such as anti-globalization, anti-neoliberalism and anti-imperialism” (p. 1456), where after it could be seen contradictive to participate in profit-searching volunteer tourism. Those choosing to go with a non-profit organization or even independently could therefore be seen as even more “conscious”. Generally concerning the volunteers’ view on themselves and other tourists anti-tourist notions can be present. This can be a part of (un)consciously not wanting to identify themselves (as ordinary tourists) with something that could be perceived as the opposite of what they stand for (pro-globalization, neo-liberalism and imperialism).

Last but not least, Wearing and McGehee’s assumption (2013) that “deep volunteers” would be more attracted to non-profit organizers while “shallow volunteers” would me more attracted to profit organizers, does not seem to be correct. It is at least not correct if, as Callanan and Thomas suggests, “deep volunteers” are more focused on helping the host community. Then it rather seems to be the opposite. As explained, the motivations for volunteering of the two groups were very similar, but when it came to the aim of volunteering those travelling with non-profit organizations in general were talking more about cultural understanding or exchange than actually helping. A picture that, what it seems, also is closer to the truth.
Conclusions

In this study, the empirical material of interviews with former volunteers has met critical theories, social movement theory and theories about (volunteer) tourism. This in order to see how and if there are any differences concerning the experiences of volunteers’ who have travelled with non-profit and profit organizers of volunteer travels. Questions about how they look upon their own role, expectations, and their perceived aim of volunteering have been raised, with several outcomes.

- The volunteers’ experiences were more similar than dissimilar between the different groups, especially concerning their told motivations for volunteering. The motivations were to (1) get new experiences, (2) to help (make a difference), (3) to open the eyes (new perspectives), (4) to come closer to the culture, (5) to travel and (6) to learn a language. Concerning the independent volunteers’ an additional motivation, “curiosity”, was important. The motivations were most often a combination between helping others and learning/gaining yourself.

- Nevertheless, the volunteers’ did often not feel that they could contribute that much to the local community. Still, they were in general happy with their travels with a cultural insight and/or exchange as the most valuable part of the travels.

- The part of the travel that differed most from their expectations, if something did, was their working situation. They wanted to work with something else or “help” more. This shows a contradiction between wanting to do something good, but within the spectrum of the volunteers’ own perception of what helping in developing countries looks like. It also shows a confrontation with the volunteers’ view of their own role, where the belief of being able to make a difference shows to be unrealistic or post-colonial.

- The biggest differences between the groups of volunteers was that those who had travelled with non-profit organizations (1), continued with some kind of engagement related to the volunteer experience, (2), revalued the purpose of volunteering and (3), in retrospect put less emphasis on the part of helping or “doing something important” in the host community.

- The choice of volunteer travel organizer was in general more conscious among those who had travelled with non-profit organizations, often based on not wanting a company to earn money on volunteering. This could be an explanation to the found
differences between the groups, together with non-profit organizers generally lower use and need of marketing a, in our society imprinted, picture of “helping” in development countries.

- Consciousness-raising among the volunteers’ was present as a wider view of the world, but more explicitly among the volunteers’ travelling with non-profit organizers as a changed view on volunteer travels and the volunteers’ role. The possible consciousness-raising experience of volunteer tourism as a way to broader social change could therefore be said to lay in a change of the concept of volunteer travels, moving away from “helping” to instead creating equal cultural exchanges. This also seems to already be closer to the truth, where a goal of “real impact” through volunteer tourism in developing countries seems far away.
8. Discussion

Volunteer tourism is situated within the paradigm of alternative tourism, usually seen as a more sustainable alternative to ordinary tourism, a way of travel that is more beneficial to the local communities (Sin, 2009. p.482). However, the phenomenon of volunteer tourism is, as the rest of the world, nor black or white. There are as many different organizers of, or opportunities for, volunteering as there are motivations for going on a volunteer travel. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the phenomenon and the volunteers’ in a wider societal context to examine and to achieve better practices, or a whole new concept. Is it for example at all okay to send young people to schools and orphanages in developing countries, often with lacking language skills? These schools and orphanages, with a constant flow of faces working there would not be accepted in for instance Sweden, is it then suitable “help” in developing countries? Volunteer tourism is based on a picture of fixed roles of receivers and donors, something that always needs to be problematized to find the way forward.

The volunteers’ of today often have a middle class background, an interest in global questions and a will to travel and see the world (Jonsson, 2012. Conran, 2013) which has made it almost obligatory to travel before starting at the university. Backpacking in Thailand is not that unique anymore, and to be unique when everyone want to travel but no one want to be an ordinary tourist, volunteer tourism is a good option. It does not seem to be hard for commercial companies to sell these kinds of travels, opening up a previously more closed area of development aid (Smith et al, 2014). In comparison to ordinary travels, volunteer travels also have the dimension of getting an experience worth putting on the CV. If the institutional roots of international voluntary work in the 1960s and 1970s were based on political visions and a consciousness about the structural inequality in the world, the present generation of volunteers can be said to be more knowledge seeking and “individualistic-realistic” (Jonsson, 2012. p. 209). As this study also shows, the volunteers’ are individualistic in the sense of knowing how they could gain themselves from the volunteering experience and realistic in the sense they were, or became, quite conscious about their limitations of “making a difference” during their volunteer stay. Where many researchers has concentrated on if the volunteers’ motivations are more altruistic or more individualistic (see i.e. Wearing, 2005 and Lo & Lee, 2011), this study, similar to for instance Harng Luh Sin’s (2009) findings, found that the motivations often are a mixture of altruistic and egoistic ones. The importance for future research might, rather than concentrating on to what extent the volunteers’ want to help,
concentrate on what kind of signals volunteer travel organizers send out about helping and the aim of the travels. It would also be important to continually and to a larger extent study the host communities’ view on and outcome of the volunteer travels.

Apparently, many people are willing to pay a lot of money for volunteering (with profit-organizers), so the question is how to seize this urge in the best way. The organizers should have a responsibility to raise questions about power relations and stereotypes about developing countries in order to contradict the spreading of a post-colonial world view. As Raymond and Hall (2008) points out about cross-cultural understanding, it is important not to assume that these positive outcomes happen automatically. Therefore “it is essential for programs to be carefully developed […] so stereotypes can be broken and not strengthen” (Raymond & Hall, 2008. p. 247). However, when it comes to commercial organizers which have the aim of making a profit, the road is longer. In the society in general corporations increasingly use the term “sustainable development” as a pretext for maintaining growth.

Even NGO:s that works with for instance environmental issues has increasingly found it vital to link their projects to the market if they are going to be visible (Butcher, 2006. p. 308). As Khan, former UN High commissioner and UNESCO officer put it: “sustainable development has been diverted by business, which has equated it with sustainable growth – an oxymoron that reflects the conflict between a mercantile vision of the world and an environmental, social and cultural vision. (Khan, 2002: 8)” (Wearing et al. 2005 p.427).

To create real “sustainability” and equality within volunteer travels we may ask, as Mary Mostafanezhad does (2013): “what if volunteer tourism and alternative consumer products more generally, focused instead on the deleterious policies and practices of western nations and its citizens rather than praise the compassionate Western consumer for doing their part?” (p. 333). For people from different parts of the world to meet and to achieve cross-cultural understanding is nevertheless positive. “The further away you are from your own reality, the more you realize that we are the same everywhere. People sit and eat their lunch box at the office, people are tired in the mornings…” as one former volunteer explained her “greater understanding” after the volunteer experience. However, the concept of volunteer travels should try not to be located within the same paradigm as cause’s global inequality.
References


Appendix

Table of respondents

Respondents who volunteered with profit organizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex, age at the time of volunteering</th>
<th>Year of volunteering</th>
<th>Volunteer travel organizer</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of voluntary work</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 23</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>GoXplore</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Center for abused women</td>
<td>1 ½ Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 22</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Projects Abroad</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>School, children 3 years old</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 22</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Volontärresor AB</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>Orphanage/School</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 19</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Volontärresor AB</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 20</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Volontärresor AB</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 22</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Volontärresor AB</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Game (nature) reserve</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who volunteered with non-profit organizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex, age at the time of volunteering</th>
<th>Year of volunteering</th>
<th>Volunteer travel organizer</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of voluntary work</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 23</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Stiftelsen Skandinaviska Institutet</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 22</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>AFS</td>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 19</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>St. Sigfrids Folkhögskola</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>School, children 7-12 years old</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 19-20</td>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>Peaceworks</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>English-teacher, 6-14 year olds</td>
<td>12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 21</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>AFS</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Enlish-teacher, 16 year olds-grown ups</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 21</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Charities advisory trust (based in London)</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents who volunteered independently (without organizer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex, age at the time of volunteering</th>
<th>Year of volunteering</th>
<th>How they found a place to volunteer</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of voluntary work</th>
<th>Length of stay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 24</td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>Through volunteersonthameric.net</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Orphanage</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 20</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Through helpx.net</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Clinic for reproductive health</td>
<td>½ month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman, 20</td>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>Through friends she met while travelling in Asia</td>
<td>Kambodja</td>
<td>Orphanage/English teacher</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview guide

This guide was used when conducting the interviews. I used it as a guide which means I did not follow it scrupulously. The interviews varied, even though most of the questions were asked, in some way or another, to all respondents. Questions were also added during the process.

Bakgrundinformation (Background information)

Ålder (age): Kön (sex): Volontärrese-organisatör (volunteer travel-organizer):

Specifik bakgrundsinformation (Specific background information)

Hur länge var du borta och volontärarbetade? (For how long were you abroad conducting voluntary work?)

Vad arbetade du med under volontärresan? (What did you work with during your volunteer travel?)

Hur var upplägget, hade du mycket tid för annat etc.? (How was the arrangement, did you have much time for doing other things etc?)

Var du med en grupp andra volontärer eller ensam? (Were you together with a group of other volunteers’ or alone?)

Hur bodde du? (How did you live?)

Hade du rest utanför Europa tidigare? (Had you travelled outside Europe before?)

Teman (Themes)

Motivation (Motivation)

- Varför ville du åka på en volontärresa? (Why did you want to go on a volunteer trip?)
- Hade du något mål med resan, något du ville uppnå? (Did you had any goal with the trip, something you wanted to achieve?)
Val av land och projekt? (Choice of country and project?)

- Tyckte du om platsen/landet? (Did you like the place/country?)
- Vad tyckte du om/inte om? (What did you like/did not like?)
- Skulle du kunna tänka dig att volontärarbeta i Sverige? (Would you consider performing voluntary work in Sweden?)
- Exempel: (om volontären arbetar med barn) Skulle du kunna tänka dig att volontärarbeta med vuxna? (Example: (if the volunteer works with children) would you consider to perform voluntary work with grown-ups?)

Organisatören (The organizer)

- Hur kom det sig att du åkte med just denna organisatör? (How come you travelled with this organizer)
- Vad är din uppfattning om denna organisatör? (What is your opinion of this organizer?)
- Hur var informationen innan och under resan? (How was the information before and during the travel?)
- Hur var stödet på plats? (How was the support once there?)

Upplevelsen av resan (The experience of the trip)

- Vad skulle du säga att du fick ut av din volontärresa? (What would you say you got out of your volunteer trip?)
- Vad var mest/minst värdefullt? (what was most/least valuable)
- Hur upplevde du relationen till lokalbefolkningen? (How did you perceive the relation to the locals?)
- Hur upplevde du relationen till andra volontärer? (How did you perceive the relation to the other volunteers?)

Förväntningar (Expectations)

- Var något annorlunda än vad du hade tänkt innan? (Was something different than you thought?)
- Levde volontärresan upp till dina förväntningar? (Did the volunteer travel live up to your expectations?)

Möjlig påverkan (possible impact)

- Känner du att resan har påverkat/förändrat dig på något sätt? (Do you feel that the trip has influenced/changed you in some way?)
- Engagemang, andra livsval? (Engagement, other life choices?)
- Skulle du vilja åka på en liknanderesa igen? Om ja, var? (Would you like to go on a similar travel again? If yes, where?)
- Hur var det att komma hem igen (omställning)? (How was it to come back home (conversion)?)

Syn på volontärens roll (The view on the role of the volunteer)
• Vad anser du att syftet med en volontärarbete i fattigare länder är? (What do you consider the purpose of volunteering in poorer countries is?)
• Skulle du vilja resa som ”vanlig” turist till samma plats? (Would you like to travel as an ”ordinary” tourist to the same place?)
• Har din uppfattning om volontärarbete förändrats? (Have your perception about voluntary work changed?)
• Är volontärresor närmast biståndsarbete eller närmast en turistresa? (Are volunteer travels closest to aid work or to a tourist trip?)
• På vilket sätt gynnades lokalbefolkningen (de du arbetade med) av din vistelse? (In what way did the locals (those you worked with) gain from your stay?)

Ideell eller kommersiell (Non-profit or profit)
• Skulle du kunna tänka dig att åka med den andra typen av organisatör? (Would you consider going with the other type of organizer?)

Quotes in original language (Swedish)


Nr 3: Då hamnade jag först på en skola, men jag hade ju sagt barnhem. Då var jag fast på en skola i två veckor innan jag ringde koordinatorn på plats [...] Så det var tråkigt. Det att jag hamnade på skolan var nog för att de (the organizer) sa att de inte hade något barnhem som de samarbetade med just då.


Nr 13: Närmost en turistresa tror jag för att det är så självcentrerat, det handlar inte om vad någon annan behöver. Det handlar om vad man själv vill ha och tror. Så […] det är en turistresa bara att man turistar på annan plats. Det är inte strand man vill se utan det är barn man vill se typ. Men samtidigt, i bästa fall blir det någon sorts kulturelsa där man kan lära sig mer om människor och hur människor lever i olika delar av världen, vad folk tycker och tänker. Då blir det väl lite mer, i alla fall lära sig nånting, än att bara var turist.

Nr 14: Nej, alltså det beror väl på hur den är utformad liksom. Men dels så tycker jag inte om att åka på sådana här uppstyrda resor inom ramar, och ha ett program […] Och sen är det jätteviktigt vilken slags organisation det är. Vad de tjänar pengar på, vad de gör med sina pengar, hur de påverkar liksom
lokalsamhället. Om de bidrar dit överhuvudtaget eller om de tar dit turister och tar alla pengar själv.