VOLUNTOURISM AND THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS IT HAS ON RESIDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

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Chapter One: Introduction

Voluntourism can be traced back several thousands of years within various cultures, religions, and geographical areas throughout the world. Some of the earliest voluntourists included missionaries, healers, medical practitioners, sailors, and explorers (History of VolunTourism). It began to increase in development during the 20th century and spread greatly in popularity by the turn of the 21st. Voluntourism, or volunteer tourism, originally derived from slum tourism in an effort to explore foreign communities (Nandi). It has now developed into what it is today and serves as a form of service and tourism to a community, area, or group of people.

The study of voluntourism is important to the field of recreation because it is necessary to realize why people travel during their leisure time. Even though people have different motives for travel, it is important to assess the impact tourism has on the location it serves. These consist of both positive and negative impacts that can greatly help or harm a tourism destination. The place, location, and type of task being performed will affect the type of impacts on a destination. Volunteering is stereotyped as a positive term, but there are times when it may cause more harm than good to the residents and community. By studying the negative effects voluntourism has on a location, tourists can better educate themselves and ensure they are bringing more positive impacts than negative.

Statement of Problem

Voluntourism is often immediately thought of as a positive term and many believe it has no consequence. This leads to individuals donating money and participating in programs that may not be ethically correct. There are many voluntourism companies out there that say participant’s money goes toward the local community and provides certain supplies to these
areas, but the truth of the matter is, some of these companies are corrupt. Other companies work
their hardest to ensure the voluntourists and communities are happy, but in reality without the
proper research, these organizations may be doing more harm than good. Many local residents
and communities suffer each and every day due to the negative impacts voluntourism has on
their homeland. Without the proper research and education, voluntourist may make the mistake
of bringing more harm to a community when they initially wanted to participate in a positive
experience.

Overall the question is brought up, what are the negative impacts voluntourism has on
local communities and its residents?

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is designed to measure the negative impacts of voluntourism in two African
countries and compare the negative impacts of voluntourism to one another. By better
understanding these two voluntourism destinations, it will be easier to assess when and why
voluntourists need to be sent to a destination. Comparing these two will allow researchers to
make a generalization about a geographical area, and can use this research to compare another
geographical area.

At times volunteers are not necessary in these areas and they ultimately end up causing
more damage to a location than what they intended. Some of these reasons are due to carrying
capacity of an area, items they may have sent, and opportunities they may take from the locals.
This research will be helpful to agencies and individuals who send voluntourists to areas that
appear to be “needy”. They will be able to better assess the appropriateness of voluntourists in
certain situations and think about the larger impact it has on the destination.
Hypotheses

**H1:** Local residents who interact with voluntourists for community development will experience a positive relationship.

**Ho1:** Local residents who interact with voluntourists for community development will not experience a positive relationship.

**H2:** Local residents will experience a dependence on the voluntourists to their community after they have volunteered their time.

**Ho2:** Local residents will not experience a dependence on the voluntourists to their community after they have volunteered their time.

**H3:** Local communities will benefit economically from the voluntourists coming to their homeland.

**Ho3:** Local communities will not benefit economically from the voluntourists coming to their homeland.

**H4:** Local residents will experience an invasion of their culture by voluntourists who do not take the time to learn their way of life.

**Ho4:** Local residents will not experience an invasion of their culture by voluntourists who do take the time to learn their way of life.

**Operational Definition of Terms**

1. **Voluntourism** - the act of traveling and serving a local community through volunteer activities

2. **Volunteering** - serving an area, community, or organization through service that is normally not paid an hourly wage
3. Tourism- traveling to an area out of your daily travels for more than one day and less than one year
4. Residents- members who live in a community and play a part in the society of that area
5. Negative effects of voluntourism– impacts that affect an area, location, agency, or group of people in a way that diminishes their culture, economy, or resources
6. Farming (in St. Lucia)- gardening; planting foods in a sustainable way to later sell or use as feeding

Limitations

Following is a list of limitations that may occur while following through with this study.

1. There is not a lot of prior research. This makes it difficult to compare what has been done and discovered to what will be found.
2. There may be a difficulty in determining if something is actually a negative impact or not. While everything is explained and quantified, studies of this nature are always debatable.
3. The survey administration may not be consistent throughout the locations because several team members will be working to do this. It is a possibility some researchers will not act ethically responsible.

Delimitations

Following is a list of delimitations that will affect the outcome of the project.

1. Used African countries from a voluntourism program website that offered the most interaction with the locals of the community. This study is being done to measure what the locals think about voluntourism, so finding a program that involves local residents is important.
2. The locals asked to participate in this study had to be a citizen of South or East Africa and reside in the town the voluntourism was taking place.

3. Survey questions were asked about the voluntourism projects in relation to this study, and the practice as a whole.

4. This project will be conducted around the same time the voluntourism programs occur to ensure there has been voluntourism actually taking place at the destination.

Summary

Overall this study will measure the negative impacts voluntourism has on the two African countries. This will be important for future studies in order to determine if negative effects are geographical or situational.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study is looking at the negative effects voluntourism has on local communities in Africa. This information will provide more research involving the topic in the field, and be used as a resource for agencies to enhance their voluntourism programs, and ensure they are being implemented properly within the destinations. This chapter focuses on the literature that was used throughout this study and how these sources were helpful in analyzing information about the topic. These pieces of literature focus on the negative impacts of tourism and the specific effects the locals faced when brought forth with these issues.

Summary and Discussion of Related Research

There is not a lot of literature available about the residential perspective regarding negative voluntourism effects. This study will serve as an inspiration to others in the field to complete further field work regarding this topic. Much of the literature served as a general source to gain an overview about the topic and how these sources would best serve further
research with this study. Given more time and resources, more primary literature could be added to the study and used in analyzing the overall impact voluntourism has on local residents in Africa.

**Organization of Literature Review**

Voluntourism: An overview

- The information that was relevant to this study included a section about how dependency plays a role in voluntourism. For instance when voluntourists bring in outside materials and give them to the community members, after they leave these products are no longer available and a dependency may be formed by the local residents.

Voluntourism industry unethical?

- The point this article contributed to this study, is that it costs more to participate in a voluntourism program than it does a “normal” vacation or volunteering opportunity.

Volunteer tourism: Crushing ethical boundaries?

- In relation to this study, the relevant information included how voluntourism is a combination of service and travel, and how it originally stemmed from slum tourism and turned into volunteer tourism.

Is voluntourism doing any good? No!

- This article discusses more negative impacts of voluntourism on local communities.

Voluntourism: What could go wrong when trying to do right?

- This article discusses the negative effects of certain types of voluntourism programs and offers several examples from the author of negative experiences she has had with voluntourism agencies.
All for a good cause? The blurred boundaries of volunteering and tourism

- The support from this article included information on how the motives of travelers influence voluntourists to volunteer at certain destinations.

‘Pettin’ the critters’: Exploring the complex relationship between volunteers and the voluntoured in McDowell County, West Virginia, USA and Tijuana, Mexico

- This article discussed many of the different negative effects voluntourism has on local communities.

**Implications of Literature Review**

Studying voluntourism is important, because it is clear that there is not a lot of research about the negative impacts it has on the local communities; specifically focusing on the residential perspective. The literature sources that were used throughout this study so far served excellent in gaining a background to the field and getting a basic understanding for some of the negative effects that have happened in past studies and experiences. Given more time, and resources from other universities, this topic and study can greatly be expanded in order to produce a piece of information that can be used by third party organizations who implement these types of tours.

**Summary**

This chapter provided a list of literature that was useful in researching for this study. Much more information can be added as time continues, but the past studies serve as an excellent starting ground for this field and topic of study.

**Chapter Three: Methodology**

After having reviewed the literature on this topic, it is clear there is a need for more research on the negative effects of voluntourism. This particular study will use past literature
and research to introduce a new set of variables and compare the findings. The goal of this project is to show those interested in voluntourism how they may be doing more harm than good by volunteering in certain areas given particular circumstances. This information can then be used to improve the voluntourism field and ensure the programs provided are benefiting the local community.

This chapter discusses the methodology that will be used for this study in order to determine if voluntourism is providing more negative effects to the host communities, and what those affects may be. The following sections are included in this chapter; project background, study variables, subjects and settings, sampling procedures, data gathering, data analysis plan, study timetable, budget and human resource materials, and permission and human subjects approval.

**Project Background**

**Study Setting**

The locations for the study setting were chosen from the website African Impact. This program was chosen because it has received recognition from the BHP Billiton Achiever Awards, IMVELO Responsible Tourism Awards, British Youth Travel Awards, and World Travel Awards. This creates credibility with the agency and that they are not providing programs that scam voluntourists out of their time and money. This is important to the study because voluntourism programs must be present in each study location in order to gain the full spectrum of voluntourism impacts on the residents and communities they serve. Africa was chosen as a place of interest for this study because in 2008 Africa was chosen as the number one international desired destination for volunteer opportunities (24-7).
Those participating in this research must be a resident of the community being studied and over the age of 18. The main purpose of this study is to determine the negative effects of voluntourism and how that information can be used to improve the voluntourism field.

**Study Design**

This study will use a survey and a short casual interview process in order to evaluate the responses from residents about voluntourism in their community. First, the residents will be given a survey before a voluntourism group has arrived in their community. This survey will ask questions about their opinion of voluntourism specific to the programs in their community, and also as a whole. Next the voluntourists will arrive at their location and participate in their assigned programs for no more than eight weeks. After the voluntourists have completed their program, a post survey will be administered to the same residents as before and compare if they have a similar or different outlook on voluntourism. At this point, they may be asked a few questions by the researchers in order to gain a better understanding of the impacts voluntourism has on their community. Each survey question will be assigned a point value, and will be analyzed by the researcher at the end of the study.

**Study Variables**

Each part of the research study is dependent on one another in order for it to be carried out. The independent variable, voluntourism on locations affects the dependent variable, negative effects of each location. These two variables are related because the negative effects are determined by the residents of each location. If they believe the voluntourists help more than hinder in their volunteering efforts, than there may be no negative effects.

Residents of each location will be given a pre survey to determine the opinions of voluntourism in their residence, then the voluntourists will arrive and perform assigned duties,
then a casual interview process will be held with the same residents and they will be asked to then fill out a post survey once the voluntourists have left.

**Subjects and Settings**

Jambiani Village, located on the southern part of Zanzibar is where the voluntourist will spend most of their time teaching and assisting in community projects. This location features a tropical climate and the village stretches along the white sand beach coastline. Volunteers will teach pre-schools and primary and secondary school children, coordinate leisure programs, and maintain facilities for a period of two to six weeks. Prices for this experience increases the longer a voluntourist remains in the program (African Impact).

The second location takes place in the rural villages of St. Lucia. This program will have voluntourists assisting in the local day care centers assisting with education, HIV/AIDS awareness, facility maintenance, and farming. The main focus is to provide the children with individual attention, as they do not receive much of it due to lack of personnel. This program is offered for two to eight weeks, and prices increase as the number weeks increase (African Impact).

**Sampling Procedures**

This study will examine the negative effects of voluntourism in the village of Jambiani, Zanzibar, and the rural towns of St. Lucia. Subjects being asked to participate in the study will be residents of the location being provided voluntourism services. In the Jambiani Village of Zanzibar, the population is 8,000. Of these 8,000 residents, surveys will be sent to 1,000 of them. In St. Lucia this included 166,526 persons as of the year 2010 (Stats). Of those 166,526 residents, surveys will be mailed to 3,000 of them. Each subject must be a resident of their specified location and a home owner within that region. This will allow the researcher to acquire
contact information and an address from governmental agencies. Each resident will have an
equal chance of being chosen to participate in the study. Each resident will be assigned a
number, and then 1,000 numbers will be chosen from Zanzibar and 3,000 numbers will be
chosen from St. Lucia. Surveys will then be mailed to each address. Each survey packet will
include an introduction letter, set of instructions, survey, and self addressed envelope to return it
to the researcher. Prior to the survey packet being sent out a “pre survey reminder” card will be
sent to each residence forewarning them a survey will be coming. Approximately a week later
the survey packet will be sent out. The homeowners will have one week after estimated arrival
of the packet to complete the survey information. If they have not returned the packet after two
weeks from the estimated arrival date, a reminder post card will be sent out. A week after the
reminder post card has been sent out, a thank you letter will be mailed to those who fully
participated in the study.

The data will be mailed back to the researcher to 400 Currens Hall, 1 University Circle,
Macomb, Illinois 61455. This will help ensure not data is damaged/altered in the private home
of the researcher. Analysis will also take place while on the WIU campus for the same reason.
This also allows for easy access to faculty and staff that may be able to assist the researcher
while computing information, should a question arise.

Data Gathering

Participants will be informed about the survey prior to receiving the survey packet, and
will also be sent a thank you letter for participating. They will be personally asked if they will
participate in the study in hopes the return rate will increase with their stated commitment. The
survey will constructed by the researcher and by reviewing past literature from the literature
review.
The first section of the survey focused on questions related to voluntourism in general, while the second section will focus on demographic information. The third section will focus on voluntourism related to their specific community.

**Instruments**

There will be 50-75 questions included in each survey that will be sent to the residents. Each survey that is “sent” to residents will both be distributed to each individual by a third party and will be sent in a variety of formats in order to accommodate all language and literacy barriers. A third party will work with the researcher in order to ensure all communication barriers are overcome and questions are understood to the maximum potential of the subject.

**Procedures**

The researcher is hoping to secure at least half of the participants from Zanzibar and St. Lucia. Each resident will be sent a survey packet that will include an introduction letter, set of instructions, survey, and a self addressed envelope to return the survey. Confidentiality of the subjects will be ensured by assigning each resident/survey a number instead of their name. It is also a possibility to not even ask for their name on the survey as that information is not necessary. After the numbers are analyzed by the researcher, a summary of the results will be sent to each participant so they can see the outcome of their participation in the survey.

**Data Analysis Plan**

All surveys will be sent back to 400 Currens Hall, 1 University Circle, Macomb, Illinois 61455 to ensure neutral receiving grounds is provided for the surveys. This will help make sure results are not tampered with in the private home of the researcher. Depending what the results reveal will determine how the information is computed and analyzed. A possibility for this would be to use Statistical Package for the Social Sciences/Statistical Product and Service
Solutions, or SPSS. Each section of the survey will be analyzed, specifically the post test of what the residents now think about voluntourism in their homeland. Missing data will be dealt with after analyzing each individual survey. If too much data is missing, the survey will have to be “thrown out” and not used in the analysis.

These results will allow the researcher to determine what residents think about voluntourism in their local place of living. It will provide information about the negative effects voluntourists may have on the local communities. It may also reveal that the negative impacts are minimal and more good than bad is being done. This information can then be used for further study in other areas and to make comparisons to similar or different regions of voluntourism destinations.

**Study Timetable**

This study would take place during Western Illinois University’s academic year. First, after having gathered all the data and prepared the information, an information letter telling participants about

**Budget and Human Resource Materials**

This study will be paid entirely by the researcher and will be approved by all human resource committees. The materials used in this study were WIU faculty and staff, computers, mailings, traveling, and analysis software.

**Permission and Human Subjects Approval**

This study will be compliant with all human rights and treatment of human subjects. The researcher will take every effort to ensure no participants will be harmed in the process of this study and will be provided a debriefing after research analysis.
Chapter 4: Anticipated Findings

If this study was actually completed and followed through, I believe my hypotheses would be correct. Through my literature review I discovered that there is a tour company from Cambodia where a voluntourist can pay money to hand out food and clothes from an organization to “needy” children. Instead of turning the locals into a viewing ground for tourists, volunteers can donate these items and have them distributed by a third party to the communities in need (Papi).

In terms of local community development, voluntourists are sometimes on a time constraint and not able to complete a project as well as it could have been done by the locals, had there been more time (Papi). This is just one of the examples that show how voluntourists need to do their homework on the communities they are serving and make sure the agency they are working with is following ethical standards regarding what is best for the community.

Other findings that allow me to believe my hypotheses will be true is that the behaviors of voluntourists can influence the local cultures by changing how they react to situations, or offend the residents. This can down play the dignity of the residents and make them feel as though they can only survive with these voluntourists. Also, when voluntourists bring in outside materials and goods to the community, members may begin to form a dependency on the supplies and then have to deal with negative effects when the voluntourists go back home (McGehee, Lamoreux).

Many voluntourism agencies also focus on the effects on the voluntourist when they need to focus on the community effects. All too often it is seen that surveys are done to evaluate the volunteers satisfaction verses the locals. Voluntourists may also be participatin gin these
programs for the wrong reasons and have the wrong motives to be working in such an area (Lyons & Wearing).

Voluntourism is all too often thought of only in a positive light. This study is not trying to prove that there is no “good” to voluntourism, rather both sides need to be taken into context when discussing the impacts this trend has on communities and their residents. With more studies based off this ideal, a better understanding about voluntourism as whole can be used to help improve areas that need and want the help from others.

Appendices

Will include:

(A)- Introduction Letter: This letter will include a statement from the researcher explaining what the study is about and the goal throughout this research. It will also introduce the survey instrument and explain that assistance can be arranged when taking this survey.

(B)- Set of Instructions: The instructions will explain in detail how to answer the survey and what to do with it once it is complete.

(C-D)- Pre-Survey/Post-Survey: Pre and post survey contain the same questions in order to accurately compare the “before” and “after” of each location. Each survey will contain demographic questions to compare the answers between those with similar characteristics, questions about how the residents feel about voluntourism in general, and questions about how voluntourism has affected their area of living. Many of these questions will be set up in a Likert scale to better quantify each answer and make the survey instrument easy for subjects to select. There will also be a few essay questions to allow more opinions to be heard from the subjects. Researchers may need to assist subjects with answering these questions and should act ethically responsible at all times.
(E)- Self addressed envelope: Envelope can be used to mail the survey back to the researcher at no cost to the subject.

(F)- Summary of Results: A summary of the results will be sent to each participant so they can see firsthand the information they contributed.

(G)- Thank you letter: A thank you letter will be sent immediately after receiving the results from participants to show appreciation for having participated in this study.

(H)- Human Subjects Approval
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