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Voluntourism: A Pathway to Sustainable Development or a Hidden Pitfall?

Eunike Martha Gegung,[1,]* Marisi Panggabean,[2]

[1] Business Administration Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Nusa Cendana University.
[2] Management Program, Faculty of Economics and Business, Nusa Cendana University."

*Corresponding author: eunike.gegung@staf.undana.ac.id

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Abstract

Voluntourism is the extension of responsible tourism or alternative tourism. Voluntourism is further reinforced by a belief that tourism allows community empowerment. It may revive and maintain the welfare of local communities through eco-travel experiences. Visitors may not compromise with undesirable attitudes, but serve as goodwill ambassadors and express their compassion towards local communities and the ecosystem of the destination attraction. However, is it true that this practice is as green as it is touted? This research aims to analyze the implications of voluntourism and focus on an array of triple-bottom-line concepts of sustainability, namely, economic development, socio-cultural inclusion, and environmental impact, and the scope of the practical standard of these ecotravel practices. This study adopts a library-based research methodology, with data examined through a descriptive qualitative approach to provide comprehensive and contextually grounded insights. This approach used constant comparative analysis when examining the data to meet the purpose of the study. The result showed there are multiple gaps in implementing volunteer tourism in practice. However, as there is no single significance of this concept, there are several alternative solutions that can be implemented. VTO's role could be one ultimate factor in increasing the effectiveness of volunteer tourism best practice in the area visited. Furthermore, fostering projects that may allow a process of co-creation and co-presence among locals, tourists, and volunteer tourism organizations, and a need to look at how volunteer tourism is perceived by locals through the involvement of locals in the decision-making process on how VT projects may impact their areas.

Keywords*: *volunteer tourism, sustainable development

INTORDUCTION

Tourism is often stated as an innovative solution for less-developed countries. This practice carries positive economic impacts on tourism development and activities. It triggers an increase in national incomes (Kumar et al., 2015). However, since tourism has been introduced, more often than not this practice generates hatred from host communities. This is like a two-edged sword; on the one hand, it enhances economic growth. On the other hand, it generates economic costs such as high consumer prices due to the increasing demand for limited resources and facilities (Gnanapala & Sandaruwani, 2016). Furthermore, the uniqueness of local cultures and the innocence of host communities are used as a magnet to attract visitors and collect astronomical amounts of money, while locals have little or mere benefits from this practice. However, a paradigm shift toward sustainability has echoed through the introduction of alternative tourism known as Volunteer tourism or Voluntourism in short. This sustainable tourism was introduced as opposed to mass tourism or conventional modes of tourism (Pastran, 2014). The idea of voluntourism is to convey mutual benefits not only for visitors and tourism agencies but also to the host communities (Pastran, 2014). Voluntourism is further underpinned by a belief that tourism may rejuvenate and maintain the welfare of local communities through eco-travel experiences. It promotes conservation, community development, and education as well as strengthens nature-based activities that are sensitive to both the natural environment and social systems. Voluntourism enables tourists to serve as goodwill ambassadors and foster compassion towards host communities and the sustainability of destination attractions. The locals are no longer seen as objects of exploitation and commodification, but rather respected and recognized as equals (Guttentag, 2011). Undeniably, Volunteer tourism is a complex phenomenon yet crucial to be scrutinized from a holistic perspective to have a better understanding of the dynamics of this practice (Bezuhla et al., 2022). Trends in voluntourism also changed according to political, social, and economic situations (Bezhula et al., 2022). In early 2022, volunteer tourism had a significant increase in European countries as a result of the Russian invasion of the territory of Ukraine. This volunteer tourism project is seen as a solution not only for individuals but also as a strategic work with authorities for implementing programs that solve crucial issues in communities, including preventive actions (Bezuhla et al., 2022).

Furthermore, voluntourism has been the subject of several publications. Research related to this alternative tourism has been done by Pastran (2014), who presented the context of voluntourism and deeply utilized this form of tourism as a mutually beneficial practice, but at the same time questioned the validity of voluntourism's effectiveness and ethics as a development tool. Pastran argued that volunteer tourism may trigger the nuance of neo-colonialism in which *"a great power indirectly maintains or extends its influence over other areas or people"* (Pastran, 2014 as cited in Stein, 2017). Pastran emphasized that voluntourism may support stereotypes related to cultural differences and unequal power relationships between volunteer tourists and locals. The other study came from Wearing & McGehee (2013), which examined the real value of voluntourism and the area of pre-trip motivations (why a volunteer travels), including the experiences generated from this practice and the role of VTO (Volunteer Tourism Organization) as well as the community. It is said that a successful volunteer tourism program must be sustainable for both the social and natural environment of the destination. These two mentioned researches undoubtedly elaborate on the nuances of voluntourism and its downsides and benefits to local communities. Also, Wearing & McGehee emphasized two unique approaches to sustainable development. However, there have been few studies that contemplate the practical standard of this alternative tourism. Therefore, this article aims to explore the implications of voluntourism by examining it through the lens of the triple bottom line of sustainability, namely, economic development, socio-cultural inclusion, and environmental impact. It will also assess the practical standards of eco-travel practices within this context. Central to this analysis is a critical question: Does combining travel with volunteering truly drive positive change, or does it come with unintended consequences for local communities?

METHODOLOGY

This article aims to analyze the implications of voluntourism and consider whether this practice is a tool for sustainable development or carries problems for host communities. The phenomenon is then analyzed through the use of sustainability indicators known as the triple bottom line concept of sustainability, specifically in economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects, as well as the practical standard of this alternative tourism. The various databases were used to collect valuable information to enrich this article. The data collected through library and online research ranged from online articles, scientific journals, organization reports, and scientific publications, specifically in the area of voluntourism. Once the useful data was gathered then it was analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach used constant comparative analysis when examining the data to meet the purpose of the study. According to Kim et al. (2017), qualitative description is used in qualitative research for examining phenomena. It is identified as crucial and suitable for gaining insights to better understand the phenomenon. Furthermore, according to Glaser and Strauss (Kolb, 2012), the constant comparative method is employed to sort and organize extracted data into groups according to attributes and organize that information in a structured way to formulate useful information related to the above topic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Defining Volunteer Tourism

The word volunteer tourism or voluntourism was first coined around the year 1998 by the NTB (Nevada Tourism Board) and was associated with a promotion of the development of rural tourism (Clemons, n.d. as cited in APEC, 2018) Volunteer tourism has been widely recognized as a part of sustainable tourism or alternative tourism (Guttentag, 2009). This activity combines leisure travel and voluntary activities that are participated in by tourists across the globe (APEC, 2018). There was a prominent number of mostly younger generations enrolling in this eco-travel program. It is said that the main motivations for these types of visitors to travel range, including having a holiday, and also contributing to social and environmental activities through voluntary work. The characteristic of volunteer tourism projects usually happens in a short-terms, including flexible activities which are decided by the visitors and their genuine desires to alleviate poverty and contribute to society (Sherraden et al., 2006; APEC, 2018). It can be said that volunteer tourism occurs on a multiple spectrum.

To have a better understanding of this alternative tourism than the other forms of alternative tourism here is some guidance provided (APEC, 2018). Firstly, volunteer tourism is the mindful combination of voluntary work in host destinations with the strong traditional foundations of travel and tourism. Secondly, those tourists who are known as volunteer tourists for numerous reasons undertake holidays to aid and combat a material shortage of certain people in society, promote the restoration of environments, or perhaps do some research circling the aspect of social and environmental issues and bring positive impacts to host communities. Thirdly, volunteer tourism is prepared and arranged for tourist trips with a short-term duration, starting from a few hours, months, or a year. The main purpose is to work as a volunteer, and these volunteers offer their work without having to pay. Lastly, voluntourism is closely related to moral tourism, social tourism, volunteer vacations, and goodwill tourism, in which those visitors experience the feeling of doing good (APEC, 2018). Furthermore, according to ABTA Volunteer Tourism Guidelines – 2016 (as cited in APEC, 2018) volunteer tourism is described by four essential components. First, volunteer tourists may purchase a travel package that comprises flight, accommodation, and supplementary elements (work placement). Second, tourists may have valuable opportunities to contribute to social work to empower local or host communities while on a trip. Third, tourists are expected to do social work, which means the work delivered by tourists is free without any charges. Fourth, the nuance of this practice is to bring mutual benefits not only for host communities that experience genuine goodwill but also for visitors at the point of delivery. What is more, volunteer tourism projects are available across the globe, and some are conducted by multiple ranges of sending organizations such as private companies, environmental and humanitarian non-governmental organizations, charities, universities, academic groups, tour operators, governments and religious organizations (Guttentag, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Interestingly, the majority of sending organizations propose numerous volunteering programs and experiences including *teaching activities, animal welfare activities, building community facilities, skills development and training, environmental/ conservation*

activities, medical/ health care, volunteer work with children, agricultural activities, sports, research, business development, and events (sports/cultural/festival) (APEC, 2018).

A more conceptual framework that categorizes volunteer tourism projects was developed by Callanan & Thomas (as cited in APEC, 2018). They said there are three categories of volunteer tourism projects (VTP). These are shallow VTP, intermediate VTP, and deep VTP. Shallow VTP is defined as an activity that promotes experience from a tourist perspective instead of focusing on local benefits. In shallow VTP, tourists are offered shorter timeframe assignments that do not require specific competence or expertise. Those who participate in this project try to develop their personal growth, career advancement, and recreational activities for less than a month. Also, there is little or no pre-project training given to participants. This project's attention is on the enhancement of volunteer tourism instead of volunteering abroad. On the other end, deep volunteer tourism organizations are open for participants who have specific qualifications and skills. It also promotes long-term assignments and equips participants with pre-departure preparation and training material for the project (Wearing & McGhee, 2013). Deep volunteer tourists are devoted to providing thoughtful assistance and support by sharing their talents and expertise within the realm of volunteer projects. Locals may experience a direct impact from this project in which locals are involved in the decision-making process of the project (Brown, 20015 as cited in APEC, 2018). Meanwhile, intermediate VTP pretty much lies between shallow and deep spectrums. In terms of duration and flexibility, intermediate VTP offers a considerable degree of flexibility and choices for volunteer tourists, locals also benefit from this project while tourists may gain experience and skills. In the context of qualifications, skills are not mandatory for tourists but rather desirable. Meanwhile, the level of contribution to host communities is moderate for individuals but collectively can be beneficial for host destinations. Also, limited information is provided for local involvement in the decision-making process (APEC, 2018). Volunteer tourists are engaged in the project for numerous sensible reasons ranging from self-interest to altruism (Movstafa & Abdul-Aziz, 2023).

Economic Perspective of Volunteer Tourism

It has been argued elsewhere that volunteer tourism contributes to the economy of host destinations. The success of voluntourism has created a large number of commercial organizations and created a market. This echoes the survey made by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC, 2018) that stated a vast majority of responses (76%) agree that voluntourism may contribute to host economies. The survey was conducted around the APEC region *(Thailand, Peru, Viet Nam, China, Philippines, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, United States, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, Russia, Hong Kong, Korea, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Canada, Papua New Guinea, Brunei Darussalam)* and it is said voluntourism raised the development of community and the enhancement of living standard. However, responses are less sure related to the creation of jobs for local people only 43% agree and 26% per cent strongly agree but still, the number was highest than that of disagree (10%), strongly disagree (2%) and around one-fifth (19%) stated neither agree nor disagree (APEC, 2018). According to a survey done by NZTRI research in 2016, voluntourism has become the main reason for tourists to visit Vanuatu. These volunteer tourists spent around US$30 less than normal visitors. However, these voluntourists may spend longer than the usual tourists and generate almost the same money spent by normal holiday tourists per trip (volunteer visitors US1,191/trip/person and holiday tourists US$1,219/trip/person), perhaps the amount could be doubled than that of holiday visitors if the voluntourists chose to visit outer-islands or even remote communities (APEC, 2018). Similarly, according to a study done by Hernandez-Maskivker et al., (2018)., volunteer tourism contributes to local economic growth, one respondent from the host community also gave comments in the interview *"A large number of visitors spend money at local grocery, restaurants, arts and crafts stores and brought a huge amount of money for the community which has enabled new jobs opportunity for locals"*.

Furthermore, a case study of youth as voluntourists in Guatemala showed that voluntourism is inherently positive for both tourists and hosts. It provides projects intrinsic for the development of host destinations (Dykhuis, 2010). Interestingly, more people believe that voluntourism may induce economic development and a positive impact on local communities than mass tourism. This is because voluntourism promotes the direct injection of resources into hosts with little leakage, leading to an increase in income among local people (APEC, 2018).

On the other hand, some argue besides the positive lights shown by voluntourism, more often than not, the presence of volunteer tourists may also upset the local economies. The intense passion of voluntourists to

give aid and support to locals may also bring a dependency problem or, according to Pastran (2014), "*neo-colonialist and dependency-producing pattern*"; residents may rely on economic support from volunteer tourists and create a *"Market of need"* (APEC, 2018). Volunteers may act as "White Savior" and echo the ethos of the "Expert" (Low, 2017; APEC, 2018; Bezuhla, 2022). This situation triggers unbalanced relationships that may undermine the capability and expertise of native people (Stein, 2017). Locals may depend on the knowledge and skills from outside, leading to the curtailment of self-sufficiency (Wearing, 2001; Bezuhla, 2022). In Honduras, the reliance on volunteer tourism projects brings up economic concerns. This is because after the 2009 Honduran coup d'état which continued until 2012, the number of voluntourists decreased significantly. Honduras and its economy already relied heavily on voluntourists and the valuable resources these people bring (Stein, 2017). Honduras depends on voluntourism projects to build buildings such as schools, and public facilities and services such as functioning water wells and medical care for locals.

Furthermore, the other negative impact is that volunteer tourists may not be aware of their actions to host communities. Their generosity in giving gifts such as sweets, and pens, and donating extra clothing, footwear or even money may encourage a begging behavior that unwittingly undermines the natural dignity of natives (Sin, 2009). Interestingly, a concern with the traditional practice of tourism for some reasons can be solved by volunteer tourism. A case in point is, the project in Costa Rica where volunteer tourists may support local suppliers and accommodation owners (Sin, 2010). Although the project in Costa Rica showed good progress of voluntourism, countries such as Indonesia, on the other way around, experienced limited economic benefits (Clifton & Benson, 2006). It means the benefits are seasonal and limited to local elites. One should not assume that the local community will inevitably benefit economically through a volunteer tourism project. Voluntourism may undermine local labor markets. This is because most tourists who take short-trip missions usually do work that the locals are capable of doing. When tourists carry out work that could be carried out by local members and do it for free without any charges then it may reduce job opportunities for locals (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Bezuhla et al., 2022). This statement is also supported by research done by Butler & Tomazos (2011), who said that the involvement of tourists in the local labor market causes displeasure and hatred among locals who find it difficult to compete with volunteer tourists. According to APEC (2018), another negative impact that may hinder the possibility of local economic development is the minor involvement of host communities in services and activities provided in voluntourism projects. Similarly, only a few volunteer tourism organizations provide clear information on how locals are involved and receive profit distribution. According to Tomazos & Cooper (2012), among 40 volunteer tourism organizations that have been examined, less than half (18 VTOs) provide information on their website regarding the voluntourism sharing revenue. Generally, the proportion of fees paid goes to local suppliers that provide transport, accommodation, and food. The money also covers staff and project placement. The rest is used for other services to increase tourist experiences. A further study was done in Thailand, where the voluntourism economy experiences "Revenue Loss". This happens due to the voluntourism sector being predominantly controlled by foreign/delivering countries, and the voluntourism organizations are mostly based in delivering countries; therefore, receiving/host countries may not be able to receive a huge potential profit (Conran 2011). This then promotes a cycle of dependence where voluntourism stimulates the economy, however, the stimulation runs to foreign powers rather than to receiving countries (Stein, 2017). Therefore, every VTP should follow up with a project evaluation. This means every impact on a project should be evaluated based on achievement and the original planned objectives. Gaining the perception of both host communities and volunteer tourists might be essential to evaluate the projects and evaluate the project impact on local communities (APEC, 2018).

Environmental Perspective of Volunteer Tourism

As a matter of fact, volunteer tourism has existed for many years, however, people have started to think about this type of travel and the opportunities to have a holiday that involves volunteering since the tragedy of September 11th and the tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). According to a study done by APEC (2018), voluntourism has spread and strengthened environmental awareness. Programs in VT are naturally inclusive. More voluntourists were involved in building community facilities, environmental scientific research, and preservation. Volunteer tourists may return home and have a greater desire to play an active role in addressing environmental issues. What is more, according to data gained from APEC (2018), the majority of VT organizations in the APEC region offer a broad spectrum of programs and volunteering experiences. These activities range from animal welfare activities, environmental/ conservation activities, agricultural activities, and teaching activities related to environmental and animal health. Based on

a survey done by APEC (2018), animal welfare activities stood for almost a fifth (15%) in most APEC member economies. These welfare activities include animal rescue, animal sanctuary, and protection. Interestingly, every APEC region has its own programs. Members such as Australia, Malaysia & Thailand offer sea turtle preservation; others, such as Thailand, mainly focus on elephant conservation, while China concentrates on panda conservation. Indonesia and Malaysia have a higher focus on protecting orangutans. There were also some activities, such as providing a domestic animal shelter for dogs and cats in Thailand. Moreover, a further 11% of the volunteer programs in the APEC region emphasize environmental activities. These activities are mostly related to revegetation, nature conservation, wilderness restoration, and conservation research. However, just because voluntourism is part of responsible tourism, one should not deduce that this project is always environmentally friendly. The idea of wasted resources could be one issue attached to this practice. The reason could be that VTOs often promote projects according to their interest and only a little too unclear involvement of locals in making decisions about "*when volunteers can come, what projects they can do or where they will go*" (McLennan, 2014 as cited in Stein, 2017). Also, a short project, less than 3 months, often leaves unfinished projects behind. These undone projects might be a pile of unused sources. Therefore, in achieving the best practice, voluntourism programs should be well aligned with the needs of locals.

Furthermore, the constant and continual visitors who initially desired to bring positive impacts on the destination may demand more limited sources and lead to an increase in carrying capacity. Using the 2010 post-earthquake in Haiti as an example, when undergraduate medical voluntourists trip in large numbers with the initial purpose of assisting others in need and giving aid to earthquake survivors. However, all the basic supplies such as water, food, and fuel, which were in short supply at the time and should be prioritized for locals, surprisingly, were provided for voluntourists. Some said it is vague to balance the motivation of altruism and personal gain. The desire of these volunteer tourists may not just give help or support, but to be seen helping (Stein, 2017). Evidence of this can also be found in many articles. Numerous authors have come to the same conclusion that voluntourism projects may have little impact on communities as a result of not having enough knowledge, capacity, qualification, experience, enough time to get along with locals and where tourists main goal is not for assisting or supports only but they may wish to be seen as helpful as well (Palacios, 2010; Bezuhla et al., 2022).

Socio-cultural perspective of Volunteer Tourism

Some studies have found that the practice of voluntourism may enhance social value among tourists and locals. Voluntourism promotes cohesion and networking through the coordination between volunteer tourists who come from different walks of life, working together with locals and VTOs to reach common goals. These people may stay in touch and create strong networks. As claimed by most APEC member economies (APEC, 2018), around (39%) agree and (44%) strongly agree that voluntourism promotes skill development, international networks and cross-cultural exchange, while (15%) showed neither agree nor disagree and just a mere (2%) expressed their disagreement. The interaction between voluntourists and indigenous people may also strengthen cross-cultural understanding and reinforce the identities of local culture. Some volunteer tourism programs induce cultural exchange and more benefits that voluntourists and locals may encounter (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Volunteer tourists may become culturally educated and have a greater desire to promote and foster cultural values (Andereck & McGehee, 2008). A case in point is voluntourism target communities in Costa Rica that experienced enrichment in cultural aspects through the implementation of voluntourism projects, which have meaningful and visible benefits (Schneller & Coburn, 2018). In Carpe Diem Education, volunteer tourism organizations offer a cultural experience along with service education. Whereas, in Nepal, voluntourism projects are from grassroots organizations that have focused on various projects including women empowerment (APEC, 2018). Volunteer tourism has also positively impacted countries such as Ukraine, which was affected by the war. Many volunteers showed their support by providing assistance and medical support for Ukraine (Bezuhla et al., 2022).

Interestingly enough, a large number of studies showed that volunteer tourists' motivation to be involved in voluntourism is not merely driven by altruism, but also motivated immensely by personal reasons such as self-gratification. As Wearing mentioned in his research mentioned a quote from a volunteer tourist:

"Most people would be lying if they didn't say there were some benefits for oneself (selfishness) in why they were going. Because voluntourism truly benefits not only local communities but tourists as well" (cited in Guttentag, 2009).

Even though not all volunteer tourists are motivated by humanity, this situation may not be perceived as a reason for concern. Tourist products may not only shape the interest of visitors but also their intrinsic motivation. Volunteer tourism tourists are interested to join in joining VT projects if the products confirm these tourists' motivations (Muharto & Jauhar, 2022). Satisfying tourists' motivation is crucial in designing a successful voluntourism program, as this project heavily depends on volunteers as the main labor source. Voluntourism may shape a new paradigm and increase social awareness among volunteer tourists. It offers a realistic and creative way of mobilizing people globally for development (McLennan, 2014).

However, some may also be concerned about other impacts generated by this alternative tourism. The interaction between volunteer tourists and host communities may also bring undesirable impacts. One example could be the "unequal relationship" between the one who is giving aid (voluntourists) and the one who is receiving support (Indigenous people) (Andereck & McGehee, 2008; Pastran, 2014; APEC, 2018). As an illustration, when volunteer organizations send privileged students from developed communities/ countries to work in less developed communities/countries. The increasing gap in education may expand the rift between economically powerful communities and economically disadvantaged communities. Daldeniz and Hampton (2010) and McLennan (2014) highlight potential stereotypes in voluntourism. The absence of cultural understanding between the host and volunteer tourists may lead to a rude attitude among volunteer tourists during the interaction. Voluntourists may become ignorant and undermine local cultural and social values. People-to-people connectivity in voluntourism may be presumed as a positive sign in promoting cultural values and building social networking globally. However, when there are no appropriate plans, voluntourists may undervalue the dignity of Indigenous people and portray them as unfortunate, helpless, and always demanding support from outsiders (Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Stein, 2017; APEC, 2018). Not enough post-trip-briefing or a lack of prior understanding may leave volunteer tourists with a feeling of "superiority" (Stein, 2017). If VTOs provide visitors with appropriate pre-departure training material about host countries and when the feeling of giving and gratitude are infused in cultural interaction, this then may strengthen the emotional bond and solidarity between hosts and guests (Palacios, 2010). Perhaps, it hinders the socio-cultural conflicts within this practice.

The Practical Standard of Volunteer Tourism

A limited amount of research has been conducted on volunteer tourism best practices. Some would argue elsewhere that VTOs are the ultimate factor in increasing the effectiveness of good practice. As Palacios (2010) mentioned in his study, VTOs can be perceived as the potential substance to boost positive socio-cultural change and to clear a fixed general image that voluntourism promotes neo-colonialism and reliance (Pastran, 2014). Therefore, volunteer tourism organizations need to put more focus on a wider range of programs that support local communities and change the face of tourism to be more sustainable and inclusive. VTOs are expected to act as gatekeepers between voluntourists and locals, shifting the inherent hegemony and label of neo-colonial thinking towards societies with a greater sense of emancipation (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

It has been argued that the significant number of commercial operators driven by profit motivations may also change the initial practice of voluntourism. Some believe the impact on local communities may be different when voluntourism is organized by profit-driven companies instead of NGOs. Profit-making organizations pay more attention to satisfying the primary needs of their customers than to meeting the needs of local communities. This notion is certainly supported by an empirical study done by Wearing & McGehee (2013), who said that voluntourism products become more aligned with the experience of visitors rather than the needs of indigenous inhabitants. Moreover, the absence of locals with real authority and control over voluntourism projects might be one issue that needs to be addressed. The decision-making still lies in the hands of volunteer tourists, whether they want to volunteer in some particular areas or not at all (Sin, 2010). Undeniably, more programs are generated to subjugate guests' desires to fulfill the organization's desire for profit. Therefore, it is important that voluntourism practice can benefit many people and allow a fluid multi-

way process of co-creation and co-presence between voluntourists, local communities, and volunteer tourism organizations (Wearing & McGehee, 2013).

Another issue related to this practice is the limited amount of funding to support volunteer tourism projects. A case in point is wildlife voluntourism in South Africa, where the operator has to find it difficult to obtain necessary funding to support voluntourism projects (Hermann & De Klerk, 2024). According to Cilliers & Hermann (2023), VTOs from public sector institutions are usually struggling with financial support, and these organizations mainly depend on funds received from voluntourists, social media and fundraising. Wild Volunteer Tourism organizations may need financial support for funding their operational costs, conservation projects of wildlife and the natural environment, and science education.

Therefore, facilitating collaboration between other institutions/organizations abroad could be one essential solution. It allows VTOs to work in partnership by recruiting appropriate human resources where finances are not obtainable (Hermann & De Klerk, 2024). What is more, VTOs should be transparent about their profits and ensure that money from VTO projects is distributed appropriately. This openness and transparency will encourage more volunteers to donate and spread positive word of mouth related to volunteer tourism activities, which in turn may inspire other visitors to come and make contributions.

CONCLUSION

Many debates are emerging from many works of literature on whether voluntourism belongs under the sustainable tourism platform or whether it has a problem in itself. Still, it is debatable. On the one hand, voluntourism may help less privileged communities by providing some aid and support. It rejuvenates and strengthens local culture, provides job opportunities, builds community facilities, supports conservation activities, develops skills and gives training for locals, and supports hosts in research, health, and education areas. On the other hand, tourism may also upset the system in the host destination. Locals may rely on the knowledge, support, and skills from outside, leading to the curtailment of self-sufficiency. In terms of environmental aspects, this practice may increase carrying capacity in host destinations when the influx of tourists may compete with locals in using limited facilities and resources. Whereas the lack of pre-departure training for tourists related to locals' values, customs and practices may contribute to rude attitudes among visitors. Oftentimes, volunteer tourists may undervalue the dignity of indigenous people and portray them as unfortunate, helpless, and always demanding support from outside. While in terms of practical standards, the significant number of commercial operators driven by profit motivations may also change the initial practice of voluntourism. The impact on locals might be a handful when VTOs' primary focus is to satisfy their customers' needs and demands. Still, some should highlight the possibility of volunteer tourism to be seen as another form of aid that continues to echo the existing power relationship between the privileged and the less privileged. In closing, it is essential to mention this article does not intend to stop or even go against the trend of volunteer tourism, but to highlight the need to look at how VT is perceived by locals and the impacts generated from this practice for sustainable development. Therefore, voluntourism projects must allow a fluid multi-way process of co-creation and co-presence between voluntourists, local communities, and volunteer tourism organizations (Wearing & McGehee, 2013) and involve locals in the decision-making process on how VT projects may impact their areas. Furthermore, every VTP should follow up with a project evaluation. This means every impact on a project should be evaluated based on achievement and the original planned objectives. Gaining the perception of both host communities and volunteer tourists might be essential to evaluate the projects and the impact on local communities (APEC, 2018). VTOs indeed had to survive and maintain their coping mechanism through the combination of monetary gain and business with a social mission. However, still, the success of voluntourism depends on the sustainability of its programs.

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