Laura, Korkeakoski

DOES VOLUNTOURISM FULFILL THE CRITERIA OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

The objective of this thesis was to research a phenomenon called volunteer tourism (voluntourism) and compare it to sustainable tourism. The aim was to define whether voluntourism fulfills the characteristics of sustainable tourism. The purpose was to produce information that can be used by Reilun Matkailun yhdistys.

The research was based on theoretical information found in literature, articles and studies on voluntourism and sustainable tourism. The theoretical framework was founded on examining the principles of voluntourism, sustainability, development and management of voluntourism.

The research methodology of this thesis was qualitative. The study was done by conducting an online questionnaire in spring 2012. It was implemented in a form of semi-structured survey which was sent through various volunteering organizations to people with volunteering experiences. The results were analyzed on the basis of the theories on voluntourism and sustainable tourism. According to the results, voluntourism does not fulfill the criteria of sustainable tourism, though some similarities and matching themes were discovered. However, it has a potential to shape into more sustainable and responsible form of tourism in future.

According to this study, the importance of managing voluntourism in all its levels was found to be essential in creating more sustainable and responsible voluntourism experiences. This requires cooperation and involvement of voluntourism organizations, volunteers and local communities.

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THESIS
ABSTRACT

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli tutkia vapaaehtoismatkailua ilmiönä ja verrata sitä kestävään matkailuun. Päämääränä oli selvittää, täyttääkö vapaaehtoismatkailu kestävän matkailun kriteerit. Työn tavoite oli tuottaa tietoa, jota työn toimeksiantaja, Reilun Matkailun yhdistys, voi käyttää toiminnassaan.

Tutkimus perustui kirjallisuudesta, artikkeleista ja vapaaehtoismatkailusta ja kestävästä matkailusta tehtyihin tutkimuksiin. Teoreettisen viitekehyksen avulla tarkoituksena oli selvittää määritelmiä vapaaehtoismatkailusta, kestävästä matkailusta ja kehityksestä sekä tutkia vapaaehtoismatkailun kehitystä ja hallinnoinitia.

Työn tutkimusmetodina käytettiin kvalitatiivista eli laadullista menetelmää. Aineistonkeruu tehtiin Internet-kyselyn avulla keväällä 2012. Kyseessä oli puolistrukturoitu kysely joka lähetettiin useille vapaaehtoistyötä tarjoaville yhdistyksille, jotka välittivät sen vapaaehtoistyötä heidän kauttaan tehneille henkilöille. Vastaukset käsiteltiin vapaaehtoismatkailua ja kestävää matkailua kuvaavien tietojen perusteella. Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että vapaaehtoismatkailu ei täytyä kaikkia kestävän matkailun kriteerejä, vaikkakin paljon samankaltaisuuksia on havaittavissa. Vapaaehtoismatkailulla on kuitenkin mahdollisuus muokkautua yhdeksi matkailun kestävämäpään ja reilumpaan muotoon tulevaisuudessa.

Johtopäätöksenä vapaaehtoismatkailun hallinnointi kaikilla sen eri osa-alueilla on tärkeää, jotta tulevaisuudessa vapaaehtoiskokemukset olisivat kestävämpiä ja reilumpia. Tämä edellyttää yhteistyötä ja vapaaehtoisjärjestöjen, vapaaehtoisten ja paikallisten yhteisöjen kokonaisvaltaista osallistumista päätöksentekoon.

Language of Thesis	English

Keywords	sustainable tourism, voluntourism, local community, volunteer, organization
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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the biggest and fastest growing industries in the world. In 2011, there were more than 980 million international travelers. By the year 2020, UNWTO forecasts 1 - 6 billion tourists to roam the globe. As a result, the industry is constantly transforming and is disposed to changes. Tourism is affected by environmental matters, financial economy, new technological innovations as well as social and cultural impacts (WTO 2012).

Over the last few decades, there has been a growing interested towards sustainable tourism. In some areas, tourism can lead to cultural and environmental destruction. In order to reduce the negative impacts of tourism, sustainable tourism attempts to have a minimal impact on the environment and culture. Tourism should not degrade or harm the environment, local cultures or societies, but rather take into account the sustainable development of places.

Volunteer travel, also called as voluntourism, is a booming tourism trend and can be linked to sustainable tourism. Voluntourism includes volunteering for charitable cause and vacations vary from development volunteering that includes working with people to conservation and wildlife volunteering. Volunteers usually share a desire to do something good as well as experience new places they might not otherwise visit.

However, there is a debate as to whether voluntourism is sustainable or not. The emphasis of sustainable actions should not be underestimated and volunteer actions should be underpinned by empowerment rather than charity. Voluntourism actions rely heavily on input of volunteers, organizations and local communities; therefore the importance on managing all its levels is essential when creating meaningful, sustainable contributions.

As a conclusion, voluntourism is a wide, multi-dimensional concept that includes a variety of activities, volunteering contributions and types of projects, covering a diversity of travel and volunteering combinations. It is seen as part of a movement towards more authentic experiences and ethical consumption (Holmes and Smith 2009, 12-13).

The aim of this thesis was to find out if voluntourism fills the criteria of sustainable tourism. Environmental, cultural and ecological aspects are taken into consideration to create a comprehensive view of the matter. The findings are reflected to survey that was conducted to Finnish volunteer travelers, as well as contemplated in the view of responsible tourism. Responsible tourism concept places focus on destination level as well as on industry level, and it can be seen part of sustainable tourism model. However, the final results show that the emphasis is heavily on sustainability rather than responsibility. Even though both of the factors are connected and mentioned in this thesis, the sustainable approach was chosen to avoid confusion and broadening up the research too much.

As a literature review, the concepts of tourism in general, sustainable tourism and voluntourism were evaluated. The contextual part of this thesis covers the phenomenon of voluntourism and its responsible tourism related issues better. The impacts voluntourism has on host communities, the environment and the volunteers are addressed. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for the future using the material from the interviews and existing data are given.

To evaluate the sustainable impacts of tourism, it was vital to investigate what volunteer travelers think and feel about it. For this purpose, this thesis includes an analysis of qualitative interviews the author conducted in spring 2012. These interviews combined with theory and existing data were used for future recommendations on how to benefit from voluntourism without harming environment and culture.

2 THE FIELD OF TOURISM AND A TOURIST

2.1 Tourism industry

Tourism is a multi-faced industry that provides services to travelers, from transportation to accommodation, entertainment and economic services, such as currency exchange (Lominé and Edmunds 2007, 185-186). Tourism is a socio-geographical phenomenon and World Tourism Organization, UNWTO, defines it as "a movement of travelers between different geographic locations for any purpose and any duration" (WTO 2012). However, it can also be defined as traveling and staying temporarily in a place beyond familiar surroundings for leisure, business or other reasons, and the travel does not exceed a time of one year (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2005, 12-13, 85).

Modern tourism has become a major player in international commerce. It is closely linked to development and it is one of the main income sources for some developing countries. Since the spread of tourism has been global, it has produced benefits in many sectors, including employment, improvement in telecommunications and agriculture (WTO 2012). In order to travel, a tourist should have a motive for traveling, time and money.

2.2 A tourist

It is essential to know reasons why one travels. A tourist can roughly be divided into leisure or business traveler yet there are numerous of underlying factors that make one travel. Reasons for traveling can simply be traveler's individual needs or wants, for example traveling because of work, physical reasons, cultural or learning matters, social, entertainment or religious reasons. Internal motives which can be slightly influenced by tourism decision-makers can be listed as personal circumstances, attitude and perceptions, knowledge and previous experiences. External reasons, such as media, industry factors, global and political matters like wars, religion, terrorism, easily affect tourist's decision to travel to a certain destination (Verhelä and Lackman 2003, 22-37).

2.3 Trends and experiences

Tourist consumer behavior is constantly changing. Tourists are seeking for quality and experiences more than in the past and they are concerned about environmental factors. Personal values affect how one travels; authentic, personal experiences have become one important factor for traveling. Cultural encounter and environmental matters are taken more into account as people are getting more aware of the impacts of tourism and the choices they make (Verhelä and Lackman 2003, 30).

Tourism trends can be identified through forecasting. Pressure on the tourism industry and changes in demographics, as well as socio-cultural and economic factors result trends. As opposed to fashions that are usually short-term interests, trends last (Lominé and Edmunds 2007, 197-198).

Rising prosperity amongst consumers reflect to the state of tourism in the world. Travel is identified as one of the greatest desires amongst Western consumers. So called mega drivers are shaping the future of tourism and the effects can already be seen. Rise of cultural awareness and concern for the environment have created more conscious travelers. Globalization has broadened the knowledge of people but, as a result of that, fear of unknown in society has risen. Therefore, security issues and practices, such as biometric passports and visa restrictions, affect travel behavior enormously (Yeoman 2008, 31).

Worldwide tourism is significantly transformed due to economic factors. Growth in the Asian markets has especially affected traveling, and as the economies grow, outbound travel will increase. In Europe, however, the aging population is affecting the tourism markets and the economy.

Technology is constantly developing and people are increasingly reliant on it in advanced societies. Information technology has become part of people's everyday life. Media channels offer people information on destinations, wider choice, online booking possibilities to make traveling easier. In social media channels like Facebook, individuals create their own sites making consumer destination reviews more accessible and immediate (Yeoman 2008, 21-32).

3 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

3.1 Sustainable development

Sustainable development is described as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" by United Nations, UN. Sustainable development consists of socio-economic, political and cultural processes and structures. It is a global matter concerning policy-making at international, regional and national level. Its aim is to include environmental considerations on societal change and economy functions (UN 1987).

Sustainable development is a dynamic concept and the interaction happens between social, economic and ecological factors. The social section relates to human mores, values, relationships and institution. The economic concerns the allocation and distribution of resources, and the ecological involves both economic and social contributions and their effect on the environment. These are known as the three pillars of sustainable development. (Baker 2006, 1-8)

FIGURE 1. Three pillars of sustainable development: linking economy, ecology and society

3.2 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is said to be one of the most important ideas that entered tourism management field in the last 20 years. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such way that economic, social and aesthetic need can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems". Also, UNWTO states that sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices should be applied to all forms of tourism in all destination types, including mass tourism and niche tourism segments. Suitable balance between environmental, economic and social-cultural aspects of tourism development will guarantee that tourism can be sustainable in a long run (UNWTO 2011). As the definitions given are quite similar to the one defining sustainable development, it can be said that they are closely connected yet they are two different things.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is a global initiative promoting sustainable practices around the globe. As an international body for sustainable tourism, it represents members such as UN agencies, country tourism boards, tour operators and travel companies amongst other. They have adopted universal sustainable tourism principles (Figure 2) to protect and sustain the world's resources while ensuring tourism can be a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation (GSTC 2011).

To promote sustainable tourism, government, private sector, interest groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientific community, education system and media should cooperate in order to see the benefits of it (MEK 2011).

Aim of sustainable tourism is to minimize the impacts of tourism on the environment, to respect local people and cultures, offer economic benefits to local businesses and communities protect destinations for future generations as well as provide memorable experiences for travelers (MEK 2011).
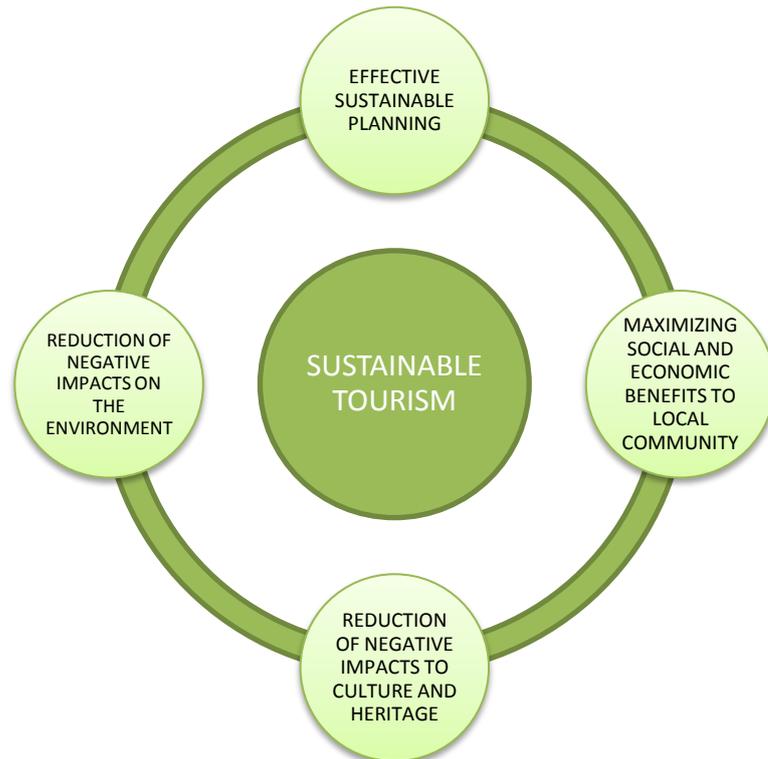
FIGURE 2. Sustainable tourism principles by GSTC

3.3 Responsible tourism

Responsible tourism has a double focus on responsible tourism in destination and in tourism business. Responsible tourism in destination concerns mainly a tourist who needs to behave in mature, responsible way, respecting the destination as a whole. A basic principle is to behave as in one's home environment. Moreover, responsible tourism business applies to the tourism industry, decision-makers having the key role. They need to understand the impacts of tourism and use responsible and accountable methods and decisions. (Lominé and Edmunds 2007, 163)

Cape Town Declaration in 2002 has been widely used as a universal definition of responsible tourism. It proclaims the importance of local communities in all levels of decision-making, maintenance, economic well-being as well as culturally sensitive actions (ICRT 2002).

Reilun matkailun yhdistys (Finnish Association for Fair Tourism) is one of the few associations working toward responsible tourism in Finland. The association's aims are to develop and release more equitable responsible tourism principles. One of its motives is also to enhance fulfillment of the principles and educate people's understanding about third world countries. To carry out its objectives, the association organizes cultural, conversational and educational events, works on the field of research and publishing and takes initiative to public authorities as well as works in cooperation with other organizations in the same field (Reilun matkailun yhdistys 2012).

The objectives of Reilun matkailun yhdistys are to provoke discussion on tourism industry and its ethics and mode of actions. Also, it attempts to change consumers' mindset in terms of their behavior when traveling especially in developing countries. The organization has developed responsible traveler guidelines that apply both in domestic and international travel.

To travel as responsible as possible, one should search information about the destination before traveling. Constant flow of travelers strains the destination less than large amounts of travelers within a short peak season. Therefore traveling outside the peak season is recommended. Preference should be given to responsible tour operators that can indicate how their actions benefit the destination and minimizes the environmental and social harms. In the destination, it is recommended to prefer local product and services in terms of food, accommodation, travel and shopping. Thereby most of the money stays inside the community benefiting locals.

Water and energy consumptions affect the most ecologic footprint of the trip. Choosing a responsible way to travel and accommodate and limiting water and electricity usage help reducing the consumption of water and energy resources. When traveling, it is important to minimize waste disposal. The garbage disposal affects directly the environment and therefore travelers should recycle and limit the amount of waste they create.

Travelers should respect local culture. Knowing the culture and the customs of locals can reduce misunderstanding between locals and travelers and increase intercultural communica-

tion. Protecting human beings, animals and nature is part of respecting the destination and its culture; taking part of activities that are disrespectful or harmful for any of them should not be done. Finally, one should share his experiences to increase the awareness and knowledge of responsible travel (Reilun matkailun yhdistys 2012).

In conclusion, all these terms are connected, though it can be hard to see the difference between them. They all may have a similar focus, but they are entities of their own. The focus of this work is on voluntourism and volunteer work, but the basis is on previously defined concepts.

4 VOLUNTOURISM

There is no official definition for voluntourism. Also, there are rather many synonyms for the word voluntourism which makes defining the abstract quite challenging. Volunteer work, volunteer travel, volunteer vacations, volunteer tourism and voluntourism can be used when talking about the same phenomena. However, it is often referred to international voluntary work as part of a leisure trip, characterized with new experiences, relatively short-term by duration and it often is somewhat linked to commercialized operators (Viljanen 2009, 1-6). The U.S. based nonprofit organization Voluntourism.org gives a quite straightforward description stating it as "the conscious, seamlessly integrated combination of voluntary service to a destination and the best traditional elements of travel – arts, culture, geography, history and recreation – in that destination" (Voluntourism.org 2011).

4.1 History of voluntourism

The concept of mixing voluntary service with travel has its roots tracked back for thousands of years in many cultures and religious order all over the globe. Where there once were missionaries, colonialists and explores, now there are international volunteers (Hindle, Cavalieri, Collison, Miller & Richard 2010).

Moreover, while volunteering is a well-established activity, the combination with tourism is relatively new. It can be said that the modern state of the movement got broadly recognized in the 1990´s. At the same time, people got more aware of matter of social responsibilities, following by the interest towards the trend gap year (a period of time student takes between leaving school and starting further education) in the late 90´s and early 2000´s. Also, a growing interest towards volunteer tourism research began in the 1990's, expanding around millennium. The development of global communications, media, increased wealth and time and interest in individual social responsibility and spirituality also have contributed to the growth of voluntourism. (Voluntourism.org 2011)

Mustonen explains voluntourism as a postmodern type of tourism, a pilgrimage of this time. It can be categorized as alternative tourism mainly because volunteer travelers choose a trip

according to their identities and the values they hold. When choosing a destination a volunteer traveler wants to be alternative and differentiate from a tourist in a real sense (Mustonen 2005, 120-124).

4.2 Characteristics of voluntourism

The development of global volunteering is influenced by social, economic and political factors. Holmen & Smith contend that some of the current key trends that impact volunteering are the ageing population, changing family and household arrangements, ascending education, financial independence, information and communications technology revolution and raised aspirations. As a result of these trends, people have become more selective when choosing of volunteering activities (Holmen and Smith 2009, 10-11).

Participating in voluntary travel is often a decision made by an individual with personal reasons. According to Wearing, the term volunteer tourist applies to those 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" (Wearing 2001, 1)

Volunteer experiences offered can extend from short-term projects of few weeks to many months, but less than a year. A majority of volunteer placements are organized through an intermediary called a sending agency which can be a limited company, non-profit organization or registered charity. These organizations offer organized volunteer packages within a certain cost and timeline. The organizations have a growing market to their products and it has become a successful mode that can be compared to mass tourism packaged holidays (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 3). Besides using the services of placement organizations, a voluntourist can plan and do volunteer travel independently without necessarily joining a group or organization. However, a tourist has to take a full responsibility for oneself, since there is no support network to fall back on. (Hindle et al. 2010, 215-216).

In 2008, the results of Condé Nast Traveler/MSNBC poll stated that number of volunteer vacationers has doubled since 2002 and those who have volunteered at least once has tri-

pled. In 2009, Green Traveler Study carried out by CMIGreen reports that 59, 1 % of the respondents said they were interested in taking part of volunteering during a trip in the future (Planeterra Foundation 2012).

In general, voluntourism has been dominated by young people, typically 18-24 year olds, and more specifically, females. Also, older participants are also important segment and tourism operators are responding to the need of more matured voluntourism products (Holmes and Smith 2009, 33).

4.3 Volunteering possibilities

The volunteer opportunities are extensive and there are placements available on each continent and the majority of volunteer placements being in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, although there are countries within these areas that are off-limits to volunteers because of security reasons (Hindle et al. 2010, 14). When looking at the most popular countries for voluntourism, the top five are China, India, USA, Indonesia and Brazil (in terms of population and number of volunteering projects) (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 9-10).

The range of volunteer projects is wide. Working with people is usually called development volunteering, and working with animals and the environment is referred to as conservation and wildlife volunteering. According to Hindle, volunteer travelers can be divided into "skilled" and "unskilled" people, even though it is not as straightforward as it sounds. Skilled are often teachers, engineers etc. who work in their professions abroad. On the other hand, being without profession does not automatically mean one is unskilled; however, it impacts on the level of responsibility given on the area of voluntary work (Hindle et al. 2010, 11-12).
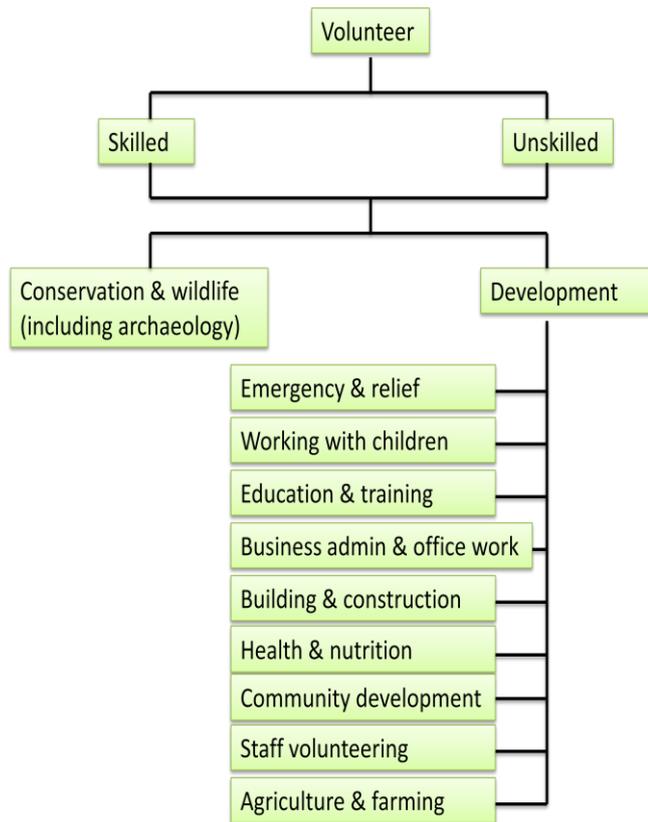
FIGURE 3. Areas of voluntary work (Hindle et al.)

As for development volunteering, it can be categorized for nine main areas (figure 3):

Conservation & wildlife volunteering: The majority of voluntary opportunities in this area involve short-term time periods that are part of a long-term community project.

Emergency and relief: This is usually option for highly skilled volunteers only. This is the respond for humanitarian crises, conflicts, wars and natural disasters abroad, when doctors, nurses, psychologists and so on are needed.

Working with children: This area ranges from volunteering as a sport coach, working in an orphanage or with street children.

Education & training: Most of the placements in this category are teaching English, with or without qualifications, in schools. However, depending on the placement and volunteer's skills, he can end up teaching almost anything.

Business admin & office work: Depending on the volunteer's experience, working for a local NGO is possible the tasks being writing fundraising proposals, managing a project or volunteering in their marketing and tasks in PR or finance departments. Often the aim of these placements is to train local people in the skills the volunteer possess so that they can become self-sufficient.

Building & construction: Manual labor often plays a big role in volunteering. Teams of volunteers help building schools, community centers, houses, bridges, dams or latrines. Also, skilled volunteers are needed in this area as engineers and construction supervisors.

Health & nutrition: Both skilled and unskilled volunteers are needed in this area of work. Non-medical volunteers can often help in promoting health and hygiene issues in a local community.

Community development: A wide variety of community and social programs are covered in this area, ranging from helping women's groups set up income-generating schemes (such as selling handicrafts), working with a local village on empowerment issues to establishing a recycling system in a village or a region.

Staff volunteering: Volunteer organizations, usually aimed at the youth market, need in-country volunteer staff to help manage and run their overseas programs. Volunteers are needed as medics on an expedition, interpreters at a field base or project managers working with youngsters.

Agriculture & farming: This area is almost exclusively for volunteers with skills. Communities often need foresters, agronomists and agriculturists.

Working in conservation area can be anything from constructing trails in national parks, studying flora and fauna in rainforest reserve to monitoring climate change in an arctic area. The options in this field are various and countless.

In addition, working in the field of archaeology and paleontology also is heavily relied on international volunteers. Working on sites such as ancient ruins or other historic areas are can benefit the community, especially if volunteers are skilled.

Wildlife volunteering is a big part of voluntourism. Volunteer opportunities are countless, such as monitoring sea turtle populations, analyzing the migration of whales or working in a home for neglected or orphaned wild animals. Usually zoological training is not required. Also, marine conservation is part of both conservation and wildlife volunteering, and the tasks can vary from underwater surveys of coral reefs or helping dolphin conservation amongst other opportunities (Hindle et al. 2010, 11-15).

4.4 Impacts of voluntourism

In this chapter, the impacts of voluntourism – both positive and negative - are discussed. The aim is to understand the phenomena on different levels, including volunteers, organizations offering volunteer travel services and the destination on its community level. Environmental, economical and sociologic factors have been researched to get as comprehensive outcome as possible (figure 4).
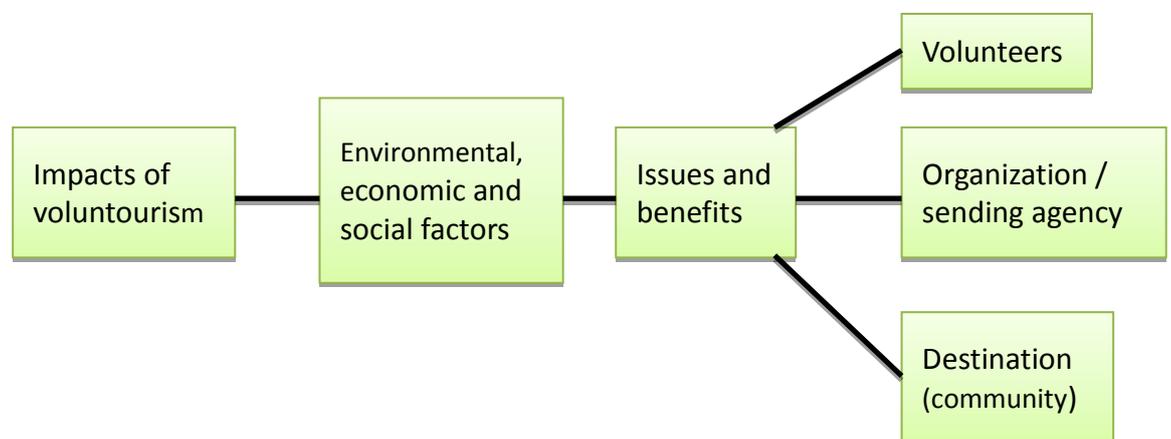
FIGURE 4. Impacts of voluntourism in different levels

4.4.1 Volunteers

One of the reasons for voluntourism being a growing market in tourism field is that many tourists have become bored with backpacking and "hanging around" when traveling. People are seeking other motives for their travels, some having intention to do something good and to compensate the negative side of traveling (such as pollution, waste and carbon emissions arisen from flying) (Kalmari and Kelola 2009, 163-164). However, people volunteer for different reasons. To name a few, a volunteer traveler may want to learn new skills, do something for a cause that is important to him, make a difference or simply just have fun. Thus, volunteering abroad is a meaningful experience for the volunteer taking him out of the comfort zone with unforgettable rewards (i-to-i 2011).

Volunteering abroad usually offer opportunities that are usually off-limits to regular tourists. Taking part in community projects gives an insight to the life of locals and the interactive learning experience allows the volunteer to view the culture from the inside. However, both residents and travelers are the necessary ingredients for making voluntourism possible. Travelers need to learn about service in order to understand their aim is to benefit the community, yet understand to be open to learn from the destination and its residents. On the contrary, residents need to learn what travelers are offering and serving them to make the process of voluntourism work (Voluntourism.org 2011).

The educational aspect of volunteering is as essential as altruistic and personal motivations. Many of the skills acquired and developed during the volunteer period can be useful in the future working life. Building up leadership and communication skills, understanding development issues, consolidating practical skills, gaining first-hand experience, developing self-confidence and adaptability can be valuable and recognized by employers (Hindle et al. 2010, 9-11).

Voluntary experience can shape up the character of the traveler. Becoming more concerned and aware of the problems as well as becoming more compassionate is usually experienced by volunteer travelers. Developing skills, learning new things, cultural exchange, a sense of accomplishment – these can be itemized as the benefits of personal voluntourism experience (i-to-i 2011).

Good intensions are not enough when volunteering abroad. A volunteer traveler may have unrealistic expectations that the experience is a win-win situation benefiting both volunteer and the destination, as well as believing that as a volunteer he is irreplaceable and his contribution crucial. Many volunteers travel to developing countries, hoping to make a difference in a short period (Papi 2010). Holmes and Smith claim that the lack of skills required and limited duration can make a little contribution to the local environment and community. Pre-departure information, training, time and skills are required to make a deep, meaningful contribution. (Holmes and Smith 2009, 36)

However, volunteering is not trouble-free. There might be questions how beneficial volunteering is if it last for few days only. Also, if locals are capable of carrying out a project and working on it themselves, the need of volunteers is questionable. When sending volunteers to destinations, identifying the needs of local communities is essential. Volunteer projects should benefit the local communities and create long-term development as well as empower and employ local people, develop sustainability and preserve nature.

Often the main problems are the sum of many factors: the sending agency might not even cooperate with local communities and NGO's and therefore cannot know what the actual needs of the destination are. A volunteer may think he is doing a great effort helping the community when in reality there is not much help of it. Therefore a critical searching should be done before using services of the sending organizations in order to actually do something that has long-term impact on the community (Kalmari and Kelola 2009, 169-171).

There are plenty of other issues concerning volunteers. The main thing to remember is to understand that voluntary work is not charity and its aim is not to save the world. It is community development with sustainable development approach, and it should benefit the needs of local community, not the needs of volunteers (Papi 2010).

4.4.2 Organizations

The organizations vary in size, structure, mission and experience. Providers have different motivations for being involved in voluntourism market and it often reflects to the nature of the projects and operations of the organizations. While running their programs, the organi-

zations should concentrate on diversification, cost and direct contribution, skill requirement and involvement of locals. The market area of voluntourism service providers is characterized by inconsistency in structure, commitment and mission; therefore, it is crucial to find an organization that actually distributes money and contribution of volunteers to the communities in need (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 14-15).

There are variety of organizations in the market that differ in size, ethics and business conduct. Therefore it is important to ask what is the value and utility of volunteer projects to them. Is it to make profit as much as possible? Is an organization genuinely interested in benefiting communities and local projects? Unfortunately, the lack of control in volunteer tourism leaves an open door for opportunists. There are some organizations that appear to have good intension but in the long run their efforts are short-lived (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 16-18).

Commercial travel companies have begun to sell voluntourism packages and many of these may make a donation or payment to the host organization or community. However, most of these costs cover organizing, marketing and managing the program, including staff and administrative costs. The issue is whether the money actually reaches the host community or projects. An analysis made in 2007 by UK conservation volunteer tourism operators, the proportion of the fee reaching the destination varied from 35% to 80% (Holmes and Smith 2009, 37).

The size of the voluntourism market is hard to calculate because of diversity of providers, projects and positions. The market was previously dominated by not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations that were mainly set up as development or conservation organizations, but recently as for-profit operators entered the market caused the increased commercialization of voluntourism sector. Since voluntourism has become more popular over the last decade, it has transformed into commercial business because there is potential market appeal for voluntourism products. It can be argued that packaging, segmentation and other mass tourism models are adopted into voluntourism that are seen as pleasing the big crowds, diverging the phenomenon from its altruistic roots (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 18).

Increasing number of travel companies and organizations are adding volunteer opportunities to their tour itineraries. Local charities, travel businesses, NGO's with sending agencies around the world help volunteers find the right placement. Available programs usually include the placement, flights, food and lodging, travel insurance, visa, orientation courses and support in the destination. These all-inclusive packages are usually costly, but convenient for those who are looking for a structured and packaged volunteering experience. (Hindle et al. 2010, 90-94).

Some of the major international placement providers are UN volunteers, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), European Voluntary Service (EVS) and an American association Peace Corps. These organizations are long-standing, well-established volunteer travel providers offering organized programs with elaborate support system and decades old relationships with their host countries. However, there are many grass-roots organizations that offer qualified programs both on international and national level (Hindle et al. 2010, 94-97).

The experience and reputation of a company, price of the trip and knowledge of where their money is going are important factors to voluntourists who are looking for the most suitable sending agency (Cheung, Michel & Miller 2010).

The actions these organizations and providers take are crucial when it comes to the actions in a destination. Therefore guidelines and criteria for voluntourism management have been created. The set of criteria is reviewed more carefully in chapter (Sustainable development and management of voluntourism)

In conclusion, calculating the size of voluntourism market is hard because there are countless number of providers, projects and positions available. Also, the area of voluntourism is yet to be fully researched and therefore there is not much reliable data available (Holmes and Smith 2009, 33). However, the organizations are seen to be on a continuum in terms of their priorities between profit and altruism, and similar continuum applies to the volunteers themselves. Volunteers have to balance their participation between altruistic sacrifice and hedonistic pursuance when selecting a volunteer project (Tomazos and Butler 2009, 18).

4.4.3 Communities

Voluntourism is not possible without the active participation of destination's residents and communities. The residents and community representatives are the most important individuals ensuring voluntourism has a present and a future. Approval, commitment and involvement of the locals are essential in all stages of development process of voluntourism programs (Voluntourism.org 2011).

Voluntourism has the potential to advantageous contributions to local communities, yet it does not directly benefit them. Altruism, financial aid or any other form of "generosity" does not really get deep into the issues a community might face. The outcome and benefits are dependent on the residents, voluntourists and intermediaries (i.e. stakeholders) and their role and responsibilities are equally as essential. All parties are required to active, conscious and engaged participation in order the get beneficial outcomes (Voluntourism.org 2011).

The only reason why volunteer programs should exist is to meet the needs of a local community. Equally as important, it should be done in a sustainable way. The crucial question is what will happen to the projects done by the voluntourists. Is someone going to continue them? Is there a vacuum now that no one can fill – therefore, was the project more harmful than beneficial? Can a difference made in a short period of time? Can a volunteering project take away jobs from local people? These ethical questions are complex and no straightforward answers can be given (Hindle et al. 2010, 25-29).

Voluntourism can be as harmful as it is useful, if the voluntourism programs are not well-organized with well-targeted projects. In figure 5, the community benefits and harms are specified.

The aim of voluntourism is that volunteers work with local people, not instead of them. This is crucially important when voluntourists work with children; they need care and nurture that is consistent and culturally appropriate. Working together with local teachers, healthcare professionals and assistants, the skills are transferred to the locals making the practice more sustainable and ethical. However, childcare is very delicate matter, and abuse in this field is not uncommon (Grayson 2011).

COMMUNITY BENEFITS	COMMUNITY HARMS
• Many types of productive services are received • Increase in tourist income • Influx of special and expert skills • Cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect are promoted • People get glimpses of better living conditions and touchstone for their own development • Sustainable tourism is encouraged • Social and physical conditions are improved • Immediate concerns are addressed • Local Government and Administration are pressed to act	• Poor screening of voluntourists leads to reduced effectiveness and opens avenues for harmful activities • Short-term development, dependent solely on voluntourist, gives rise to 'new colonists' • Highlights the differences and hence, widens the rift between the developed and the developing communities • Hinders self-development • Ill-considered projects have less or no usefulness • There is adverse effect on local employment and markets

FIGURE 5. The benefits and harms of voluntourism on community level (Birru 2011).

Voluntourists can do more harm than good because children are vulnerable and cannot defend their rights. For example, Nepal does not have a law that ordains to search background of volunteers. Therefore it is easy for basically anyone to work with children there. However, there are many other countries in similar situation, and the fact that some of the sending organizations do not search the backgrounds of volunteers either, makes the situation even more serious. In many popular volunteer destinations, matter of child welfare is poorly developed and regulation systems do not exist. Therefore it is very important that organizations search volunteers' background and send only skilled volunteers for childcare projects to prevent abuse (Tapanainen 2011).

Abuse does not happen only in childcare projects. Majority of communities does not have policies or regulations concerning voluntourism. In practice it means that anyone is capable of entering a community and start organizing voluntourism activities. In many ways this can

be seen as a good side of the phenomenon; those, who want to see a change, can easily and without bureaucracy start working for the best of the community. However, this can lead to a situation where "the right hand does not know what the left is doing" (Viljanen 2009, 20-21).

The outcomes of voluntourism are influenced by the volunteers' attributes and individual abilities, such as knowledge, skills and motivations, the volunteer organization and program and the organization's capacity in terms of resources, training, access and financial incentives (Holmes and Smith 2009, 61). In conclusion, volunteers, organizations and communities are interconnected players in voluntourism field. Cooperation will lead to a better voluntourism experience that has long-term positive consequences, which in the end, is the core idea of the phenomenon.

5 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTOURISM

Sustainability in voluntourism can be reflected through voluntourists as conscious consumers; their role in fostering interaction and strengthening relationships and them being catalysts demanding communication and dialogue between various stakeholder groups. Procedure can be seen as an important factor to the success of any voluntourism operation, and therefore voluntourists can succeed on procedural engagement amongst stakeholders. The actions voluntourists take should be conscious, connected both in case and relationship levels. However, the potential of this is yet to be fully explored, but it is sure that addressing socio-environmental challenges can lead to better understanding of sustainability in voluntourism (Voluntourism.org 2011).

5.1 Destination development

Dr. Stephen Wearing is an expert on voluntourism and sustainable tourism field and explains how voluntourism can be used to increase sustainability of a destination. Wearing states that communities that have ongoing voluntourism projects organized by non-local organizations should take a more critical look at what they allow to happen within their communities. To benefit from these projects, it is essential to find assistance through the organizations that offer volunteer programs in that destination. Those projects that have input and control from the local communities are more likely to ensure the sustainability of the destination. The host community has a great role in creating a sustainable voluntourism experience (Milich 2011).

As the services and voluntourism packages offered by volunteering organizations are becoming more popular, they face a big challenge: how to work towards sustainability on organization, program and destination level. Organizations should offer projects that have long-term benefits and it is about empowering and helping local people rather than trying to solve their problems overnight. In a long run, volunteering is about helping people to help themselves rather than giving charity (Milich 2011).

The book "Volunteer – A traveler's guide to making difference around the world", gives examples of making volunteering more sustainable. Involvement of locals is essential when long-term sustainable benefits are wanted. Therefore training members of the local community in a needed occupation such as teaching, medicine, IT or anything else identified by the community is important. Volunteers should provide practical knowledge in things like nutrition or first aid, help to establish local, income-generating enterprises, assist in improving people's living conditions as a means of improving health and increasing confidence and help to set up ecotourism projects (Hindle et al. 2010, 246-247).

However, a project that appears to be sustainable can turn out to be different in reality. Even if the organization has good intentions and everything planned out, the host community may not be ready for the change. In some cases, the host community can get too reliant on volunteers. In a long run, it harms the local economy because locals are not recruited (Hindle et al. 2010, 245-247).

5.2 Criteria and guidelines for voluntourism

Increasing number of travel companies and organizations are adding volunteer opportunities to their tour itineraries around the world. This trend is growing rapidly and interests many organizations. With this growth, many issues and challenges have arisen, as discussed before in the chapter 4. Therefore, there is an increasing need for effective tools for both providers and travelers to make conscious decisions (Planeterra Foundation 2012).

Developing guidelines and criteria for organizations that run volunteer tourism projects could increase product quality and benefit to local communities. Organizations would also get a framework for best practice for developing voluntourism programs. Additionally, it would give more confidence for consumers when they know the project they are volunteering with has been assessed and legitimated (Stain 2012).

There are some existing guidelines for volunteer organizations. For instance, Irish development organization Comhlmh developed voluntourism code of practice in 2004. It includes 11 principles relating to all aspects of volunteering: how projects are set up, monitored and marketed to the level of support, preparation and debriefing given to volunteers. Another

example of guidelines is Fair Trade Volunteering model which was launched in the end of 2011. It is a membership-based scheme with five criteria which organizations need to meet to gain the Fair Trade Volunteering mark. The criteria are to have a minimum local invest-ment level above and beyond the volunteer's time and work, a long term commitment to the project, honest project description and comprehensive volunteer preparation as well as sup-port in destination and volunteers expenses entirely covered by the placement organization, not the local community (Stain 2012).

In 2011, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and Planeterra, a non-profit founda-tion dedicated to sustainable community development and environmental conservation through travel, collaborated to develop a set of criteria for voluntourism to help internation-al voluntourism providers plan and manage their programs in a responsible and sustainable way. The guidelines are created based on research they have conducted with volunteer tour-ism industry stakeholders such as tour operators, NGOs and voluntourism organizations in destinations. The basis of the guidelines is a comprehensive global industry survey. TIES will publish the set of criteria in autumn 2012 (Planeterra Foundation 2012).

Volunteer organizations desire to show their commitment to make their projects to benefit local communities and raise standards for volunteers. As there are many standards and best practices created in voluntourism sector, there is a risk that it leads to consumer confusion and lack of recognition if there are too many sets of criteria available. The challenge that is yet to be seen is whether organizations will adopt the standards and guidelines and if they influence consumers' decision-making (Stain 2012).

6 RESEARCH PROCESS

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate how sustainable practices in voluntourism are carried out and if they fill the criteria of sustainable development and responsible tourism. Ethical matters, contribution, impacts on culture and host community can raise various issues and need to be taken into consideration when covering the matter of sustainable development.

6.1 Data collecting and analyzing methods

The research is done by using qualitative methods. Analysis for qualitative data is chosen to be used in this research as it is more subjective and interpretative compared to quantitative methods. Brotherton, the author of Researching Hospitality and Tourism, claims that data structuring, summarizing and reduction are main tasks within the process of analyzing qualitative data because they all help identifying categories, patterns, themes and relationships in the data (Brotherton 2008, 213-214).

A qualitative approach to this thesis was chosen because it is effective tool in obtaining specific information about the values, behaviors and social contexts of the research group (Finnish volunteers). Also, identifying intangible factors and interpreting and understanding the reality of voluntourism is easily accessed through qualitative research in this research.

The data for the research is collected using half-structured electronic questionnaire with open end questions and multiple choice questions. Demographics were asked by closed questions and the volunteer experiences were in form of open-ended questions. The electronic questionnaire form was chosen because the author wanted to reach respondents from everywhere in Finland and therefore it was the easiest way to acquire the target group.

The questions were checked by the commission party, Reilun Matkailun yhdistys, before the questionnaire was published. The aim was to create as clear and distinct questions as possible to reduce misunderstanding and misinterpretations, and to get the answer for the research problem. The questionnaire was sent with a cover letter attached (APPENDIX 1).

The author created the e-questionnaire on Google Documents software via personal Google Mail account. The program is user-friendly and therefore creating and publishing the questionnaire was easy. The respondents could open the link for the questionnaire that was mentioned in the cover letter, and the answers were saved to a table form that made reading and analyzing the answers easy.

The questionnaire was divided into different areas of questions. Firstly, demographical factors were asked, secondly the reasons and motives for volunteering abroad and thirdly, the volunteering experiences abroad in the light of sustainability. At the end the respondents had the possibility to give comments on the questionnaire and add something that they found important during their volunteering period. The questionnaire can be seen in appendices (APPENDIX 2). The questions were chosen to find out a volunteer profile (who volunteers and why), how aware the volunteers are in terms of sustainability and whether they think voluntourism and their personal efforts support sustainable tourism.

The answers were put into a table in Microsoft Office Excel program in a more readable form. The demographic factors were processed in graphical methods in terms of getting more understandable form. The percentages were calculated using the data and they were transformed into clarifying figures. The open-ended questions were analyzed one at a time because illuminating them on a graphical way would not necessarily work.

6.2 Target group

The target group of this research was Finnish volunteers that have done volunteering abroad. The group was approached via eight different organizations in Finland; Travel2help, Etelän vapaaehtoisohjelma (Etvo), Maailmanvaihto ry, Ekomatkajaat, Art in Tanzania, Kilroy, Kansainvälinen vapaaehtoistyö ry (KVT) and STA Travel. Some of them forwarded the questionnaire to the target group, but not all. The questionnaire was available for two weeks and the organizations sent it to volunteers' e-mail addresses they had in their database.

In one case the questionnaire was published on organization's Facebook site which did not lead to any responds, but probably it was not recognized by the users as there are constantly new posts by the admin and users.

The problem of an electronic questionnaire is that it is easy to skip and therefore it is challenging to get enough answers. Also respondents may misunderstand questions or leave an incomplete answer. Personal interviews would have increased the number of respondents but a lack of resources made this option quite impossible. However, reaching a wider responder group this way from all over Finland was more effective in terms of reaching people from wider geographical area. On the contrary, filling up an e-questionnaire is easy no matter the location or time, and answering as anonymous usually gives honest responses.

The examined material in qualitative research should be quite extensive. Brotherton points out that generalizing the results to a wider population is problematic because it is unlike the sample used can make such inferences valid and reliable (Brotherton 2008, 213). The material in this research is not extensive enough as the number of the responds was quite small. Therefore it has to be critically taken into account when analyzing the resources. However, the results can be seen directional, yet not being dependably generalized.

7 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

20 people responded to the questionnaire. Since the amount of answers was not large, the results cannot be reliably generalized. Though, the results can show a course of conduct of voluntourism experiences Finnish volunteers have had in light of sustainability. Most of the respondents had long-term volunteering experiences abroad and some felt it did not count as voluntourism experience. However, explaining duration of voluntourism journey is quite indeterminate as it can range from days up to many months.

The author thinks that there might have been some confusion with term "voluntourism" used in the questionnaire, because there is not much information about the phenomenon in Finnish and the term itself is quite unknown in Finnish language. Therefore the results may suffer in terms of it, but it does not mean some of the responses are valueless by no means. Also, there are many Finnish organizations with volunteering possibilities abroad, but differentiating the ones that are strictly voluntourism providers is hard because many of these organizations may cooperate with same destinations and local organizations.

The results are presented according to the structure of the questionnaire. Demographic factors are reviewed first, following the examination of motivations for volunteering abroad and lastly, the volunteer experiences in view of sustainability.

7.1 Data based on responses

7.1.1 Gender

The first question of the questionnaire was to find out gender of the respondents. 3 respondents were male and 17 female.

Holmes and Smith summarize the results of survey in general, saying that women are more likely than men to volunteer which can be linked to women's employment status, family and allocation of leisure time (Holmes and Smith 2009, 9).

According to a survey conducted by Raha-automaattiyhdistys (RAY) in 2008, women dominate helping and its different variations, and are more active than men (Pessi 2008). Voluntourism is one sector of tourism where the gender gap is significant, the percentage of women being 70 of all volunteer travelers. It is a huge gap in the tourism sector which is seen relatively gender neutral, apart from business travel (Palk 2010).

7.1.2 Age

The second question was about age and the respondents' age distribution has been represented in figure 6. The biggest amount of respondents fell into the age category of 20-29, referring to 40 % (8 respondents) of all respondents. The second biggest age group was 30-39 (35 %, 7 respondents) followed by two age groups, 50-59 and under 20 years old, both presenting 10 % (2 responses in each category) of the total amount. Only 5 % (1 respondent) of all answers were from 40-49 year old category. There were no answers from over 60 year olds.

Majority of the respondents are young adults. Probably this age group is more international and used to traveling abroad than older age groups. In general, volunteer tourism is dominated by young people but older participants are also an important segment in voluntourism (Holmes and Smith 2009, 33). This can also be seen in the answers.
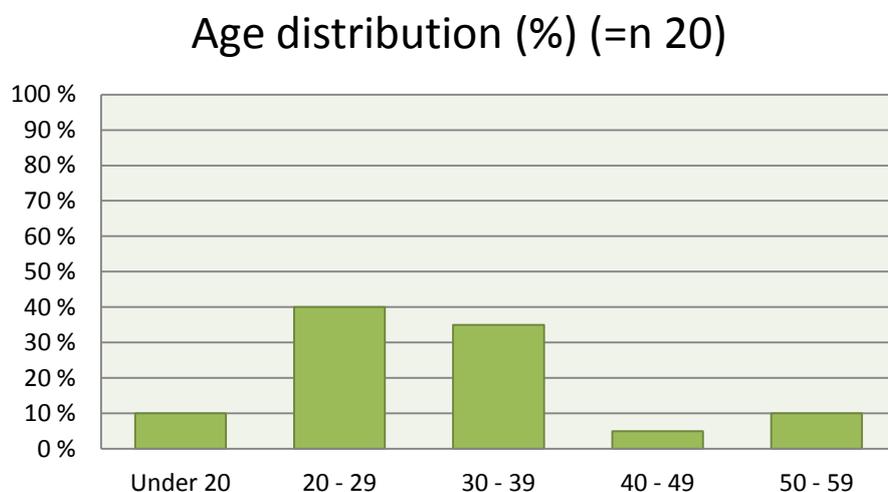
Figure 6. Age distribution of respondents

7.1.3 Organizations

The questionnaire was sent to eight different volunteering organizations in Finland. The organizations were chosen through Internet search. Organizations that offer volunteering projects and packages in Finland were selected to represent the Finnish voluntary work sector. However, the responses were divided with only four organizations. The results can be seen in figure 7. Most answerers are from Maailmanvaihto ry – ICYE Finland (40 %, 8 respondents) followed by Etelän vapaaehtoisohjelma (Etvo) with 30 % (6 respondents) of all responses. Share of Travel2help is 25 % (5 respondents) and Art in Tanzania 5 % (1 respondent).

Maailmanvaihto ry – ICYE Finland is part of ICYE, an international non-profit youth exchange organization that promotes youth mobility, intercultural learning and international voluntary service. In Finland, Maailmanvaihto ry sends and receives approximately 30 – 40 volunteers annually. Voluntary programs vary from 6-12 months, and volunteering is usually working with children in different destinations in all continents (Maailmanvaihto ry 2012).

Etelän vapaaehtoisohjelma (ETVO) is part of KEPA, the umbrella organization for civil society organizations in Finland that work with development cooperation or global affairs. ETVO sends Finnish volunteers to developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Voluntary work is done in local civic organizations and can be anything from environmental protection, children and women rights' to community development. The length of volunteering is usually 6-12 months (Etvo 2012).

Travel2help is a Finnish responsible travel provider and its' mission is to provide volunteer opportunities abroad for people who wish to travel and assist developing countries. Volunteers are sent to destinations like Peru, Brazil, India, Tanzania and Kenya. Voluntary projects are approximately from 1 week to 2 months of duration (Travel2help 2012).

Art in Tanzania is a non-governmental organization working in Tanzania, Finland and Ethiopia (as Art in Ethiopia). It has over 300 volunteering and internship placements in Tanzania, as well as a record label and a magazine targeted for Tanzanian youth. Most of volunteering opportunities are short-term community projects. Organization also offers adventure programs like safaris (Art in Tanzania 2012).
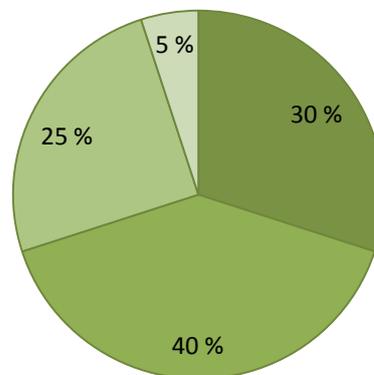

Figure 7. Sending organization of the respondents

7.1.4 Destinations

The results of the questionnaire show that most volunteers traveled to developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (figure 8). 7 respondents (35 % total) volunteered in African countries such as Ghana (5 %), Kenya (5 %), Mali (5 %), Tanzania (15 %) and Zambia (5 %) were mentioned. Cambodia (10 %), India (5 %) and Nepal (15 %) were the destinations in Asia, adding up to 30 % (6 respondents) of all responses. Bolivia (5 %), Ecuador (10 %) and Peru (15 %) represented the continent of Latin America with total percentage of 30 (6 respondents). Great Britain (5 %; 1 respondent) was the only European country where voluntary project took place and therefore an exception.

Respondents chose the destination because of various reasons: to learn a language, get different kind of work experience, interest to destination's culture, volunteering organization and project fitted personal interests among other reasons.

Volunteering opportunities are everywhere in the world, but most of the placements are in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Hindle et al. 2009, 15).

Destinations (%) (n=20)

■ Africa ■ Asia ■ Europe ■ Latin America
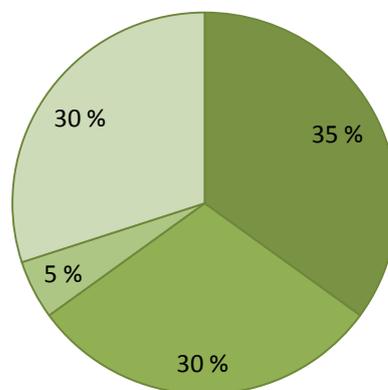
Figure 8. Destination distribution of respondents

7.1.5 Duration

The duration respondents spent volunteering abroad varied widely from 1-2 weeks up to 12 months (figure 9). The distribution can be seen in figure 10. Most respondents (45 %; 9 responses) volunteered for 2 – 6 months. 40 % (8 respondents) stayed for longer period also, from 7 to 11 months. Only few respondents did short-term volunteering; length of 1 -2 weeks and 1 month volunteering reached both 5 % (1 respondent in each category) of all responses.

The duration of stay is usually determined by the type of a project in the destination. Depending on a sending organization, they arrange volunteering trips and projects ranging from a week to months.
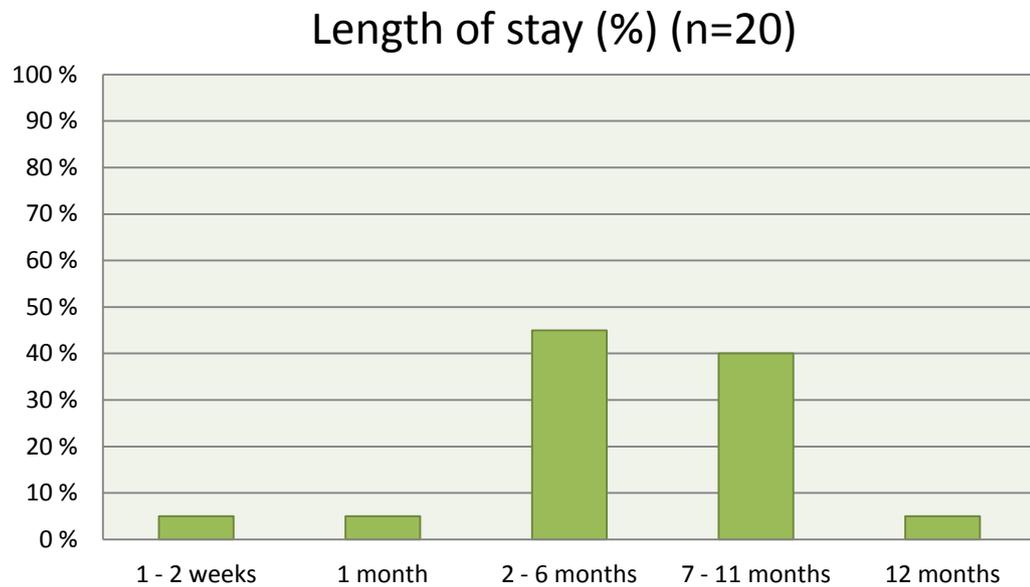
Length of stay (%) (n=20)

Figure 9. Distribution of length of stay in the destination

7.1.6 Purpose of volunteering

The purpose of taking part in volunteering abroad was asked in question 11. Majority of the respondents (95 %; 19 respondents) reported that volunteering was the main purpose of their travel. Only 5 % (1 respondent) said volunteering was part of their other travel plans. The results show that most of respondents' participation in voluntourism has emphasis on volunteer contribution rather than traveling.

7.1.7 Type of volunteering

Majority of respondents (65 %; 13 respondents) volunteered among children in schools and orphanages. 25 % (5 respondents) worked with community development related volunteer projects, such as conservation, teaching, educational and empowering programs. Minority of respondents (10 %; 2 respondents) worked on agriculture and farming projects. The results are presented in figure 10.

Areas of work (%) (n=20)

■ Community development   ■ Working with children   ■ Agriculture and farming
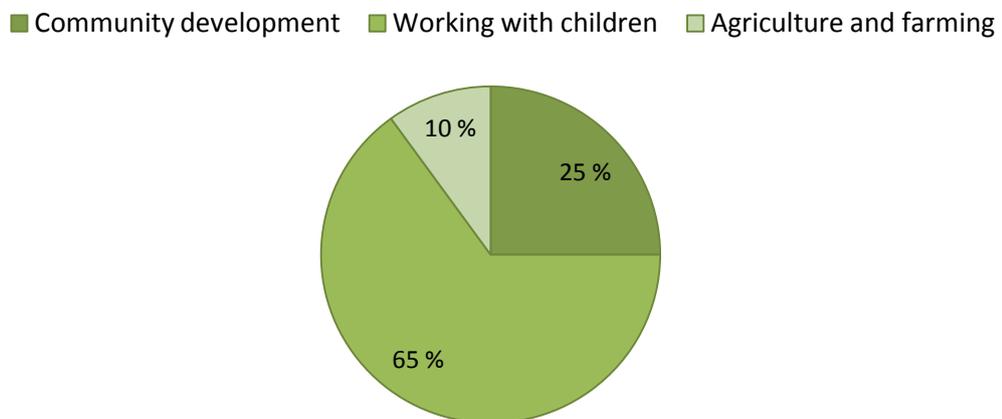
Figure 10. Areas of volunteering work

7.1.8 Motives for volunteering abroad

Altruistic motives and "to do something useful" came out as the most common reasons for volunteering abroad. Most respondents had a gap year from studies or work and the benefits from the experience would add extra qualification to one's curriculum vitae. Interest in new cultures, meeting new people, learning a foreign language, trying to exceed personal limits and personal growth recurred in many responses. Many respondents also have previous experience in volunteering in Finland and to try it out abroad felt like a natural move. Development cooperation and interest in indigenous cultures were also mentioned.

In a book called "Hyvä tahto. Auttamisen asenteet Suomessa" Anne Birgitta Pessi and Juho Saari have researched the motives of Finnish people towards helping. The Finns are motivated by desire to do good to others and 41% volunteers choose it as the main motive to do voluntary work. Also the fact that helping others will bring joy to the one who is volunteering, motivates one to act. Other important motives are to learn something new, find or deepen own identity and accrue experiences that may be useful in working life (Pessi and Saari 2004).

Personal values usually guide volunteers' choice of work; helping underprivileged people can feel natural to some, when some feel stronger about environmental issues or disaster reconstruction. It can be said that volunteering expresses the personal principles of a volunteer. Another broad motive is a quest for knowledge; some people volunteer because they want to go to developing countries to gain different perspective in life and broaden their worldview, while others do it to add it to their CV as an extra merit. Identifying with a specific group or an issue of a community can lead to getting involved in volunteering; it can be for the sake of acknowledging rights or raising awareness of a specific group of people (Kuntz 2001).

Generally speaking, motives for volunteering are altruistic or egotistic. These motives are not exclusive of each other and most of volunteers are driven by combination of motives, though some can be more dominant than others (Haski-Leventhal 2009, 280).

7.2 Voluntourism and sustainability

In the questionnaire, most of the open-ended questions had emphasis on sustainability in the destination. The primary interest was to find out about local community participation in sustainable development, locals' participation in decision-making and management of volunteer projects. Equally important, volunteers' involvement and the significance of sending

organizations' impact for the whole process of sustainability were asked to get as comprehensive understanding of sustainable voluntourism.

7.2.1 The role of locals in decision-making

According to the results, involvement of locals in volunteering projects and work was mainly dependent on sending organization and the project itself. Most of the results show the importance of cooperation between the sending organizations and locals; those projects with little local involvement were usually more troublesome than the ones that were run by locals. On the contrary, majority of answers showed that locals acted as the organizing party for any kind of volunteering activities. The role of the volunteers was to enhance and support the projects which were set up to meet the needs of local community. Minority of the respondents said there were little cooperation between the locals and the volunteers; in these cases, the work was clearly divided into volunteers' tasks and locals' tasks, whereas most of respondents felt there were no separation between tasks.

Community participation in decision-making raised various points of view. Most of volunteering projects operated with approval of local people and decision-makers. Some issues were mentioned: slowness of decision-making process, structural issues in organizations that impacted organizational operations (e.g. late payment of salaries for local employees, only those in higher position in charge of decision-making), missing initiatives and responsibilities falling on few active locals. In one case, an organization was funded by Finnish trusted party and during an operational period, those funds were cut down. As the project was sustained for that money, it affected the organization with disastrous consequences.

However, a majority of respondents noted that volunteer work and projects were local community-oriented and the needs of such projects were designed by host communities. Communication between locals and volunteers was mentioned by most of the respondents. The most beneficial outcomes of voluntary work and projects were achieved through effective intercultural communication and understanding between both parties.

7.2.2 Cultural issues

Almost all responses showed there were some problems with cross-cultural encounters. Language barrier, misunderstanding each other and communication problems as a whole were familiar to most volunteers. Getting used to climate, food and accommodation was not easy for some respondents. Though, it was mentioned that many of these problems occurred in the beginning of a volunteering period and vanished gradually. Many respondents felt that adjusting to the new surroundings and work was easier with good preparations and information gained before the volunteer period.

Issues concerning volunteering itself were mentioned by few respondents. Some felt the locals looked up to them or felt jealous because they were foreigners. Few respondents said locals assumed foreigners are rich and therefore expected financial support from them. One respondent said there was no need for volunteers at all and the volunteering organization was only benefiting by getting money. Support and help of locals were important to volunteers but while working all volunteers did not receive it. It was important to do same work as the locals, but sometimes it did not work out, even though there was the know-how and wish by the volunteers' side.

Different cultural aspects, hierarchy, slowness of bureaucracy, corruption and passivity of local people were also mentioned as issues the respondents experienced.

7.2.3 Ecological contributions

Traveling, especially air travel was seen to be most harmful stage of the whole volunteering experience. When most of the volunteering placements are in the developing countries, usually in another continent, the usage of air travel is often the only possibility. Most of respondents lived simple, ecological life in the destination and summarized that the carbon footprint created while volunteering was still smaller than it would be when living in Finland. Traveling within the destination and touristic visits stressed the local environment. Though, most of the short-distance traveling was mostly done on foot, by bike or public transportation. Most of the destinations lacked of proper recycling and waste control possi-

bilities. Even if such drawback was noticed, volunteers had limited power to intervene to those issues.

When living in a destination, many respondents felt they could have made the experience less harmful by living in a more ecological way; to think carefully what to buy, limit water consumption and travel environmentally friendly. Usually there was a desire to travel more eco-friendly but money and time set limits to such actions.

Respondents took part in various environmental concerned projects, such as sea turtle conservation to monitor nesting and deter hunting. The endangered and threatened sea turtle species' nests are protected to ensure the continuation of the species. Some planted saplings and grew large amounts of edible plants for the usage of local households to verify the essential nutritious requirements. One respondent educated and helped locals to reduce logging and unnecessary use of land that creates erosion and desertification. Addressing these kind of issues and changing the harmful customs can lead to positive impacts and sustain the land for the use of future generations as well.

7.2.4 Economic contributions

While volunteering, respondents felt they could have made less impact on the host community by their own actions. Choosing a volunteering program and sending organization is important, and few respondents said they could have chosen "do-it-yourself" volunteering trip instead of using organization. Therefore knowing where the money and effort actually goes is more distinguishable. Also, knowing sending organizations' operations (e.g. who benefits from the money a volunteer pays to volunteer organization, what the aims of the projects are and do volunteering benefit local community) beforehand help finding out whether the missions and values meet yours. Staying longer in the destination would have helped to increase having an influence on the project and its future.

Some of the volunteer projects rely on third party funding. The operations of such projects are dependent on external money. Limited or lacking funds were seen to hinder the future of such projects and the nature of sustainability suffered from that kind of fluctuations.

Some respondents educated local organizations of the benefits of cooperation and partnership with other local organizations. Volunteers shared their know-how with local businesses to give new ideas and different perspectives for more successful operations. Respondents also felt that educating local people on the importance of alternative and ecological sources of livelihood will ensure community's future. Also, volunteers educated the locals to empower local women through education in order to take part in decision-making and opening businesses in community. One respondent took part in building a university for indigenous people to preserve the aboriginal culture for future generations to come.

7.2.5 Socio-cultural contributions

Respondents were almost unanimous in intangible advantages of volunteering. Raising cross-cultural communication and meeting, uniting and understanding different people with different backgrounds, humanity and tolerance were mentioned to be more important and perhaps more easily accessed than tangible advantages. Humanity was seen as uniting power between locals and volunteers and mentioned one of the most positive outcomes of the whole experience.

Volunteers shared new possibilities, ideas and ways of thinking for local workers to improve local operations. They created new, versatile activities for children, giving them compassion and attention when no one else could. Respondents felt supporting children leads to more stable growth and development. Also activating, educating and inspiring local young people to take part in community projects and campaigns (e. g. HIV education campaign) was done by some respondents to create awareness and open new possibilities.

Most respondents worked with children and according to the results, there were both tangible and intangible benefits for the kids. Educating, creating and leading various activities, teaching and supporting the usage of English as well as financial support (money was used to more diverse diet, clothing and school trips) enriched the operations at schools and orphanages. As the institutions were big and there were only limited number of staff working with many tasks, children needed extra care and love badly. Volunteers felt they could help to fill in that space and to benefit the normal growth of children. Also, it was mentioned that the presence of a European "teacher" motivated parents to send kids to school.

Those who did not volunteer among children felt their value was being role models to locals and sharing new thinking tools for more effective actions now and in the future. Encouraging influence on locals helped to reduce passivity on current issues within the community. One respondent worked together with local and Finnish organizations to inform and suggest ideas for better cooperation with long-term sustainable approach.

Most respondents believed that supporting existing activities and operations and increasing the cross-cultural understanding enriched both locals and volunteers' life in sustainable way. Many of these actions do not belong to one group of benefits only. Society, economy and ecology create a cycle where all of them are interlinked. One of the most important tasks of volunteers is to educate locals on the importance of education and environment to sustain the land and its resources.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Volunteer tourism is a global phenomenon which in recent years has grown in scale and scope. It is a niche type of tourism in which tourists volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve in aiding, restoration and research projects in local community. In general, voluntourism is seen as a movement towards more authentic experiences and ethical contributions. International volunteering emphasizes on promoting cross-cultural learning that helps create global awareness and understanding between cultures as well as provides a platform for positive change. Moreover, it is a multidimensional composition of environmental, economical and social factors that influence multiple stakeholders with multiple needs and agendas.

Voluntourism can be a move for a change within communities. Positive outcomes can vary from environmental benefits, social development outcomes such as improvements in education, political outcomes like community empowerment and increased awareness and understanding to other benefits. Despite the potential benefits, there can actually be more negative outcomes for the communities. Voluntourism may be ineffective and even contribute to existing or new inequalities. Voluntourism should aim for meaningful, sustainable, long term contributions to benefit the local community most instead of satisfying the needs of volunteers and organizations. Also, volunteer projects may not be the best means of solving some of the problems in the communities. Local communities should never rely on the contributions that volunteers bring. Volunteers can also carry out well-intentioned but misguided actions that can offend local residents or create dependency issues. Therefore there is a need to control and track volunteer activities to maximize the benefits for the local communities and minimize the negative outcomes.

The aim of the research was to examine whether voluntourism fulfill the characteristics of sustainable and responsible tourism. It was found out that both responsible and sustainable tourism have identical goal of sustainable development. Both phenomena are emphasized with environmental integrity, social justice and local economic benefits. This research emphasizes sustainability, rather than responsibility, of voluntourism.

The respondents of the questionnaire had different motives for being involved in volunteering projects. In most cases, the main reasons for volunteering were to get positive and meaningful experiences and to do something good for those in need. The results showed that most of them believed volunteering can, if it is thoroughly managed, influence local communities both socio-culturally and economically through different projects.

The research question of this thesis is: does voluntourism fulfill the elements of sustainable tourism? According to the results, voluntourism mainly fills the criteria of sustainable tourism but cannot be fully referred to it. Voluntourism comprises many same elements as sustainable tourism, but lacks coherence in management of organizations, volunteers and local communities. Volunteers are clearly central to any volunteer program and it is essential that volunteers' contribution is organized properly. Effective organization of volunteers' activities is therefore important to creating a satisfying and sustainable experience for all beneficiaries of volunteering.

Sustainable tourism is about re-focusing and adapting. Sustainable tourism should be managed through continuous changing, monitoring and planning. The emphasis should be on the long-term future and the focus should be people-centered. Development should be fair and equitable for all people (including indigenous people, local communities, visitors, industry and government) within and between generations. The challenge is, however, finding a balance between these factors. However, the author believes that through more conscious and responsible actions, voluntourism can result in more beneficial outcomes. When creating sustainable voluntourism experiences, careful planning, training and management of volunteers and projects are in key positions.

Volunteers' contribution is often viewed to have only positive outcomes for local communities. Western culture and Westerners are often looked up to in developing countries, despite the skills and abilities they hold. For instance, many volunteers work with children and mainly at schools teaching English among other subjects. It is controversial, whether they have enough know-how to actually act as teachers and if they are qualified enough to teach (in) English if it is not their native language. Volunteers' incompetent contributions can do more harm than good on the destination's communities. Therefore the importance of volunteers' skills and qualifications cannot be underestimated.

The importance of organizations' contributions on sustainable actions is unquestionably clear. An organization with poor socio-cultural and economic operations cannot deliver responsible and sustainable contributions. The relationship the organization has with the host organization usually defines the quality and sustainability of the project. Patronizing and colonialist attitude to its partners are far off sustainability and ethical contributions. A good organization will want to assure they are matching the volunteers to their placements, not just sending a right number of people to maximize profit. However, there are organizations who engage commendably with these issues and work to design properly reasoned volunteering engagements.

The number of for-profit voluntourism providers is growing. Attention in relation to the payments made by voluntourists and the impact they have on the local communities have been criticized in the media as it seems to be controversial whether it is right to charge for something participants do voluntarily. Because of that, volunteer tourism organizations need to be more transparent in how they spend volunteers' payments in the future.

Voluntourism can, however, be more sustainable and responsible in the future. Compared to many other forms of tourism, such as sun-sea-sand holidays (a form of mass-tourism), voluntourism can be viewed to be sustainable. Voluntourism can promote mutual understanding, appreciation and friendship, whereas in mass-tourism, contact between locals and holiday-makers is usually very limited. At its best, voluntourism can have positive, long-lasting and life-changing impact on volunteers who continue supporting the projects after the trip and spreading information about responsible and sustainable tourism.

8.1 Summary of the research

Studying the results of the questionnaire the author observed that most of the respondents appeared to be conscious volunteer travelers. Most answers showed how realistic and aware they were regarding on the contribution they made to the host community. There was a lot of reflection as to their contribution can have a positive effect on host community and if the actions they took will have long-term and sustainable consequences within the local communities. However, cross-cultural exchange was mentioned to be one of the most important contributions. Both positive and negative experiences were mentioned, though positive ones being dominant. Many respondents describe the experience being combined with many dimensions: exploring new cultures and people, learning new things about life, work, personal growth and being part of something that does good for others. On the basis of the results, the motives for taking part in volunteer travel were both altruistic and egoistic for most of the respondents.

The following response illustrates very well the overall feeling of researched volunteering experiences: "Volunteering is part of entity, in which the participation of many helps raising the standards of living of locals with long-term objectives". Most of the respondents felt the experience was valuable, enriching experience and worth doing but understood a contribution of one volunteer will not change the dominant structures in the destination and erase problems. Only governments and bigger power players can change the economy and actually work towards eliminating the problems in the society.

Because the response rate was low, it reduced the sample size and lessened the confidence which findings can be accepted and generalized to represent the overall target group (Finnish volunteers). The author believes that if there had been more responses the outcomes would have been more versatile and profound, since high response rate is important to legitimizing the questionnaire's results and the larger percentage of the target group usually lead to more accurate findings.

8.2 Evaluating the process and future recommendations

The author is satisfied with the research process as a whole, even though the small number of respondents hindered creating reliable outcomes. Even one answer can distort the results in such small number of results and therefore generalizing the results is difficult.

Generalizing the results to represent all Finnish volunteer tourists is not reasonable because volunteers through only four organizations took part in the questionnaire. Different providers have different motives for being involved in the market and it often reflects in the nature of the offered projects as well as the business operations. For instance, some organizations are specialized in long-term volunteering projects; others offer combined travel and volunteering opportunities yet some individuals participate in do-it-yourself volunteering. Therefore, generalizing cannot be reliable because the backgrounds, motives and possible sustainable actions vary considerably.

Conducting this research and the writing process was a challenging and educating experience. The process required time and work, patience and critical thinking, yet it was very rewarding. While working on this thesis, there were things that could have been approached differently. However, noticing deficiencies and finding different perspectives, the author realized the process has developed and broadened her way of thinking and seeing things. The topic has become more interesting the more knowledge is collected, and the author hopes that anyone who is interested in volunteering abroad should gather versatile information about the possibilities and apply critical thinking before going.

Based on the results of the research, the author believes all voluntourism providers should create basis for sustainable actions in their operations for more deeper and meaningful outcomes. To educate staff to work towards sustainability, to train volunteers to become more conscious and aware of their actions and to deliver these results to local communities could help creating more sustainable, meaningful achievements.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

COVER LETTER

Tämän kyselyn tarkoitus on selvittää sinun, vapaaehtoistyöhön osallistuneen, kokemuksia kestävän matkailun näkökulmasta. Jokaisen vastaukset ovat arvokkaita ja auttavat minua selvittämään täyttääkö vapaaehtoismatkailun kestävän / reilun matkailun periaatteet. Vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja tulokset käytetään ainoastaan opinnäytetyötäni varten.

Kyselyn täyttämiseen menee noin 15 - 30 minuuttia. Kyselyyn voit vastata 4.3.2012 saakka.

Linkki kyselyyn:
"https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/embeddedform?formkey=dC1ndlM1bWx1b29IRzJiVy1FSENGQkE6MQ"

Suurkiitos etukäteen!

Aurinkoisin terveisin,
Laura Korkeakoski
Degree programme in Tourism
Kajaanin amk

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Sukupuoli

Mies   __
Nainen   __

Ikä

Alle 20   __
20-29   __
30-39   __
40-49   __
50-59   __
Muu   __

1. Minkä järjestön kautta lähdit vapaaehtoistyöhön?

   _____

2. Missä teit vapaaehtoistyötä (maa,kaupunki) ja miksi valitsit ko. kohteen?

   _____

3. Kuinka pitkään vapaaehtoistyö kesti?

   Alle viikon   __
   1-2 viikkoa   __
   1 kuukausi   __
   2- 6 kuukautta __
   Muu   __

4. Oliko vapaaehtoistyön tekeminen päätarkoitus matkustamisellesi vai osa muuta mat-
   kasuunnitelmaasi?

   Matkan päätarkoitus   __
   Osa muuta matkasuunitelmaa   __

5. Mitkä olivat pääsyyt/motivaatio lähteä vapaaehtoismatkalle? Perustele.

   _____

6. Minkälaista vapaaehtoistyötä teit?

Lasten parissa työskentely (orpo- tai lastenkoti, koulu jne.)   __
Eläinten suojelu / hoito   __
Luonnonsuojelu & maatalous   __
Yhteisön hväksi (esim. rakennusten /
kaivojen rakentaminen, taide ja käsityöt)   __
Avustustyö & jälleenrakennus (maanjäristyksen yms luonnonkatastrofien
uhrien /yhteisöjen avustus)   __
Muu   __

7. Mikä oli paikallisten rooli vapaaehtoistyössä (osallistuivatko / järjestivätkö he ko. toimintaa)?

_____

8. Mitä lisäarvoa mielestäsi vapaaehtoisista oli kyseisessä kohteessa?

_____

9. Pystyivätkö paikalliset mielestäsi vaikuttamaan projektia tai työtä koskevaan päätöksentekoon? Miksi / miksi ei?

_____

10. Mitä ongelmia / hankaluuksia kohtasit tehdessäsi vapaaehtoistyötä?

_____

11. Onko mielestäsi projektista tai työstä, jota teit, hyötyä paikalliselle yhteisölle, luonnolle ja ihmisille? Perustele.

_____

12. Onko työpanoksestasi mielestäsi hyötyä (kohteeseen / paikallisille) pitkällä tähtäimellä? Miksi / miksi ei? Perustele.

_____

13. Oliko vapaaehtoisprojektin / työn käytännön työskentely mielestäsi ympäristöystä-vällistä (luontoa / resursseja säästävää)? Miksi / miksi ei?

_____

14. Majoituitko projektin tai työpaikan läheisyydessä, työpaikalla vai jouduitko matkus-tamaan vapaaehtoistyöpaikallesi?

_____

15. Oliko projektista ja omasta osallistumisesta mielestäsi hyötyä paikalliselle taloudelle? Perustele.

_____

16. Oliko mielestäsi projektilla tai työpanoksellasi ympäristöön ja yhteisöön liittyviä hyö-tyjä / haittoja? Luettele molemmista 3 esimerkkiä, jos mahdollista.

_____

17. Olisitko voinut tehdä omilla valinnoillasi kokemuksestasi vähemmän ympäristöä tai yhteisöä kuormittavaa? Miten?

_____

18. Jos osallistuisit vapaaehtoistyöhön ulkomailla uudestaan, mitä tekisit toisin? Peruste-le.

_____

19. Muita kommentteja / vapaa sana.

_____

20. Lisätietoja

_____