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Widening the Scope of Evaluating Volunteer Tourism: Beyond Impact Measurement

Abstract

Tourism has a large environmental footprint and the economic, social and ecological effects of tourism have been investigated and measured in many contexts. However, there are limitations to impact measurement In this chapter, we focus on some of these challenges in the context of volunteer tourism: a unique subset of tourism that presents opportunities for volunteers to have immersive tourism experiences. While the impacts of volunteer tourism are being increasingly documented, there have been few attempts to measure these impacts in ways that account for the impacts on host communities, destination environments or broader supply chains. We argue that impact measurements in volunteer tourism are difficult to capture and we propose, that instead of quantifying impacts into universal (and Eurocentric) typologies, volunteer tourism impacts would best be evaluated in context via interpretative and community specific means that account for the emergent possibilities for connecting across cultural difference.

Keywords

Critical studies, evaluation, impact, qualitative measurement, volunteer tourism

Introduction

Volunteer tourism can provide substantial social and economic benefits to host communities but, if poorly planned, it can result in negative consequences. To date, much of the existing academic research has focused on measuring the various impacts on volunteers themselves (e.g. Alexander, 2012; Bailey & Russell, 2010; Matthews, 2008; McBride, Lough, & Sherraden, 2012) and a focus on host communities remains overdue (Griffiths, 2016; Zahra & McGehee, 2013). Measuring the impacts of volunteer tourism on host communities is important to facilitate a more equitable industry, however, it is difficult to quantify certain impacts into universal typologies for several reasons. First, the volunteer tourism industry is diverse. This industry contains heterogeneous organisations that cater to different market segments (Benson 2015) and require context specific measurements. Indeed, Taplin, Dredge, and Scherrer (2014, p. 882) suggest that appreciating context is more important than a "methods first approach". Supply chains and broader environmental impacts also need to be considered when evaluating volunteer tourism (Eckardt, Font, & Kimbu, 2020). Second, evaluation measurements are often framed within a Eurocentric development aid model. Such models fail to prioritise the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and perpetuate and normalise neo-colonial stereotypes of who are 'the helpers' and who should be 'helped' (Everingham, 2015, 2016; Wearing, Young, & Everingham, 2017). Third, measurement of impacts is based upon (and also implies) quantitative outcomes. Such measures obscure the context specific lived experiences and alternative narratives of the local community members involved in volunteer tourism programs and the potential for *emergent* cross-cultural understanding. Relationship building through participatory action should occur before appropriate evaluation methods are sought (Wearing et al., 2017).

The problematisation of these unique circumstances of volunteer tourism leads to our critique of traditional impact measurement models that conceal broader environmental impacts, impacts that arise along supply chains, and alternative narratives and experiences. Further, as one of the key tenets of volunteer tourism is to provide volunteers with cross-cultural, immersive tourism experiences (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011), it is also challenging to quantify the nuanced personal impacts and the myriad of co-constructed relational experiences between volunteers and host communities. These relational, emotional and affective aspects of the embodied encounters between host community members and volunteers are difficult to capture through measurement and evaluative systems (Everingham, 2015, 2016; Wearing et al., 2017). Without considering these relational and lived experience aspects, volunteer tourism impact studies also run the risk of erasing the agency of local communities (Chen, 2018).

In this chapter, we review and critique the various ways that the impacts of volunteer tourism have been traditionally measured. The difficulties of measuring volunteer tourism when broader environmental impacts and supply chains are considered, and the small but salient growing range of alternative approaches to impact measurement are examined. We argue that these alternative

approaches provide more insightful and contextual analyses of the intangible outcomes of volunteer tourism that account for host communities, volunteers, and volunteer sending organisations. These intangible outcomes are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify into traditional impact measurements in volunteer tourism, particularly when they are driven by development aid outcomes. To this end, we engage with Wearing and McGehee's (2013) analysis of Jafari's (2001) platforms of research and practice that have emerged in volunteer tourism over the past two decades.

Volunteer tourism and its impacts

Volunteer tourists are defined as 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, p. 1). Since Wearing introduced this definition two decades ago, the volunteer tourism industry has exploded and become increasingly commodified, with 'voluntourism' emerging as a term encapsulating this commercialisation. However, the volunteer tourism industry is extremely diverse, and those individuals who volunteer seek varying levels of engagement and experience with host communities. For example, Brown and Lehto (2005) argue that 'volunteer tourists' should be distinguished from 'voluntourists', with the latter being 'vacation-minded' rather than 'volunteer-minded'. For voluntourists, the volunteering component is often only a small portion of the whole trip. On the other hand, volunteer tourists tend to volunteer for the entire length of the trip, and the length of their trips are usually longer. While these definitions are perhaps arbitrary considering the lines between tourism and volunteering are blurry, and volunteer tourists themselves generally do not identify with the term 'volunteer tourist' (Gray & Campbell, 2007; Lepp, 2008; Mostafanezhad, 2013). This diversity needs to be accounted for when proposing evaluative frameworks.

Wearing and McGehee (2013) trace the *scientification* of volunteer research using Jafari's (2001) four platforms of tourism research. The first *advocacy phase* positions volunteer tourism as an ideal tourism activity, as an alternative to mass tourism, which benefits local communities. The second *cautionary phase* examines the potential negative impacts of volunteer tourism on local host communities. The third *adaptancy phase* prescribes specific ways for the industry to minimise these negative impacts. The final *scientific phase* calls for challenging and altering our approach to volunteer tourism research through, for example, the utilisation "of structured, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, transnational, and mixed method approaches for examining volunteer tourism" (Wearing & McGehee, 2013, p. 122). While these platforms are perhaps too linear, together they provide a useful framework for thinking through the broader context of how tourism scholars have evaluated volunteer tourism to date.

Much of the early literature in the advocacy phase examines the impacts of tourist experiences on the volunteer. For example, researchers focus on the ways by which volunteering in tourism has the ability to facilitate self-development, fulfil altruistic motivations, and provide young

people with experiences for their professional and career development (e.g. Bell, 1994; Broad, 2003; L. Brown, 2009; S. Brown & Lehto, 2005; Matthews, 2008). Such research coincided with the increased commercialisation and commodification of the industry, with greater focus on the transformative experiences of the volunteer tourists rather than on the needs and agency of the host communities (Godfrey, Wearing, Schulenkorf, & Grabowski, 2019; Sin, 2009).

As the volunteer tourism research moved into the cautionary phase, the literature increasingly provided evidence of a broader range of volunteer tourism impacts – particularly those that affect host communities and destination environments. Due to the diversity of the global volunteering programs available, and the often intense and immersive experience of volunteer tourism, these impacts can be both positive and negative. For example, in conservation projects the presence of volunteers can rejuvenate or rehabilitate flora and fauna (e.g. Broad & Jenkins, 2008) or enhance conservation awareness in communities (Rattan, Eagles, & Mair, 2011) while economically, volunteer projects can increase spending in the community (Hernandez-Maskivker, Lapointe, & Aquino, 2018; Sin, Oakes, & Mostafanezhad, 2015). Despite such positive impacts, the cautionary phase clearly highlights many negative impacts of volunteer tourism. For instance, Guttentag (2009, p. 537) observes:

> *'a neglect of locals' desires, a hindering of work progress and completion of unsatisfactory work, a disruption of local economies, a reinforcement of conceptualisations of the 'other' and rationalisations of poverty, and an instigation of cultural changes'.*

This quote highlights that serious ethical concerns relating to volunteer tourism exist, particularly in developing countries. Volunteer tourism runs the risk of taking jobs away from local residents, with some commentators suggesting that the money volunteers spend on their trips would be of greater economic benefit if directly channelled into the communities themselves (e.g. Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Others have argued that framing volunteer tourism as 'helping' host communities can reinforce stereotypes of the 'white saviour' and can lead to a reliance on development and aid (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Zahra and McGehee (2013), for example, found a disruption in the economic operations and opportunities of the community in a community in the Philippines. Volunteers requested food items that were difficult to source or were given tokens of appreciation that would normally be sold to tourists, meaning the community consequently suffered financially.

In line with the adaptancy phase, it could be argued that many of the negative impacts of volunteer tourism can be linked to the framing of volunteer tourism as development aid (Everingham, 2015, 2016; Everingham & Motta, 2020; Wearing et al., 2017). While Wearing's (Wearing, 2001, p. 1) initial definition of volunteer tourism as "aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society" came from a place of advocacy in response to the irresponsible practices of the mass tourism industry, the definition has framed this form of tourism within a

problematic ‘helping’ narrative. This discourse works to reinforce binaries between privileged minority world actors as active and generous paternalistic ‘carers’, while majority world actors are portrayed as grateful and passive disadvantaged people ‘in need’. In these framings of volunteer tourism, binaries become reinforced and naturalised through a ‘geography of need’, and poverty becomes the marker of difference (Crossley, 2012; Simpson, 2004). For example, Bargeman, Richards, and Govers (2018, p. 1492) learnt that once volunteers left the schools they were ‘supporting’ in Ghana, the hand over procedures were so poor that local teachers were unable to continue, particularly as “volunteers do not teach in line with the Ghanaian teaching system”. Thus, the primary motivation of the volunteer organisations (and, subsequently the volunteers) was self-serving and not community driven.

On the contrary, when projects are framed beyond and outside a development aid discourse, there is significant scope to focus on mutual intercultural learning and cross-cultural understanding. For example, Everingham (2015) highlights the benefits of volunteering when it is connected to community development, creativity and language exchange rather than development aid. In her research at an interactive children’s library in Banos in Ecuador, she finds that when volunteer tourism organisations facilitate meaningful intercultural connections, the typical framings of volunteers as ‘experts’ and ‘white saviours’ can be subverted leading to mutual intercultural learning

Taking this perspective further, in line with the scientific phase, Wearing et al. (2017) call for a rethinking of how volunteer tourism is practiced and evaluated: away from development aid outcomes towards meaningful intercultural exchange and decommodification. They argue that this is a necessary shift away from unequal neo-liberal geographies that stereotype and perpetuate neo-colonial stereotypes and ‘white saviour’ narratives of ‘the helpers’ and ‘the helped’. Everingham (2015) argues that measuring volunteer tourism impacts within fixed, static and universal models reifies the power of Eurocentric development aid models and undermines the agency of local communities within volunteer tourism encounters. In turn, evaluative measurements can invisibilise the affective, emotional and relational aspects of the volunteering experience that contain possibilities for emergent decolonising connections across cultural difference (Everingham & Motta, 2020).

These studies reveal that for minimal impact to occur, the agency of the local communities is central to volunteer tourism. Benali and Oris (2019, p. 111) examine the everyday dynamics of volunteers and hosts to demonstrate how “initial power relations can be destabilized and reconstructed”. Their research includes the voices and perspectives of several different actors within the volunteer tourism experience: the sending organisations, the volunteers, and the local residents. In doing so, Benali and Oris (2019) demonstrate that local people can actually assume a dominant role in these tourism experiences, by engaging or disengaging with volunteers according to the volunteers’ willingness to adapt and share in everyday life. In critiquing the impacts of broader structural power dynamics and the related impacts in and upon local communities, the agency of

local communities must not be erased and the heterogeneity of host community perspectives must be acknowledged (Young, Reindrawati, Lyons, & Johnson, 2020). Thus, in much the same way that the conceptualisation and practice of volunteer tourism is multidimensional, several different approaches have been employed to measure the impacts of volunteer tourism.

Measuring impact in volunteer tourism

The target of impact measurement in volunteer tourism typically focuses on volunteers and host communities (albeit with a deficit of research on the latter) as well as the type of host destination impact (social, cultural, environmental, economic). However, as outlined in this section, there are methodological and epistemological discrepancies in the variables under examination. For example, many studies that explore the impact of the volunteer tourism on the volunteering participants typically have a quantitative focus aimed at determining the satisfaction outcomes of the volunteer (Bailey & Russell, 2010; Hallmann & Zehrer, 2016; Lough, McBride, & Sherraden, 2009). This quantitative approach is evident, for example, in the International Volunteering Impacts Survey (IVIS) (Lough et al., 2009). This survey, aimed at measuring volunteer outcomes and impacts, identifies 11 categories of volunteer outcomes: international contacts, open-mindedness, international understanding, intercultural relations, global identity, social skills, life plans, civic activism, community engagement, media attentiveness, and financial contributions (Lough et al., 2009). The IVIS provides insights into the perceived impact of experiences on international volunteers (McBride et al., 2012). As summarised in the previous section, minimal impact requires community agency. Therefore, impact studies must be holistic and inclusive of stakeholders beyond the volunteer tourists who are ostensibly seeking beneficial outcomes through personal relationships with other cultures.

Certainly, as outlined above, the impacts of volunteer tourism development on the sociocultural fabric of host communities is an area neglected in much of the early volunteer tourism research (Freidus, 2017; Hernandez-Maskivker et al., 2018; Lupoli & Morse, 2015; Lupoli, Morse, Bailey, & Schelhas, 2014; Lupoli, Morse, Bailey, & Schelhas, 2015). The advocacy approaches to measuring volunteer tourism impact focus on the potential for empowering communities within capacity development models (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). For example, Irvin (2006) employs Alkire's (2002) participatory approach in her research on South African volunteer tourism projects to uncover seven potential development impacts to communities: empowerment, knowledge, excellence in work and play, health/security, relationships, inner peace, and religion. As a result of Irvin's (2006, p. iii) interviews with community members, she finds that volunteer tourism benefits host communities in four distinct ways: "making financial contributions, facilitating cultural exchange, building relationships with children who are project beneficiaries and filling gaps in the organisational needs of project hosts". These categories enable a broader impact measurement perspective by positioning development beyond simply increasing GDP to, instead, centre the

capability of volunteer tourism projects to meet the needs of communities, particularly in terms of whether communities seek and/or see value of the projects in promoting their sense of well-being. Irvin's (2006) study, therefore, offers valuable insights into how we measure and evaluate the impacts of volunteer tourism development on host communities.

Development is complex, it should not be imposed from above, and it is not simply about poverty alleviation. To achieve impacts beyond economic benefit, communities need to be engaged in the ownership of the projects that they are involved in, and value these projects for their cultural identity and wellbeing (Chassagne & Everingham, 2019). Volunteer tourism that negates the freedom of communities to decide *if* and *how* they want to participate in development must be critically considered. When volunteer tourism as an 'industry' commodifies forms of development there is a risk that problematic forms of development are offered as consumable products centred on the misguided and Eurocentric desires of volunteers who 'who want to make a difference' (Wearing et al., 2017).

Taking an adaptancy stance, Lupoli and colleagues (Lupoli & Morse, 2015; Lupoli et al., 2014; Lupoli et al., 2015) engage participatory research methods to create an assessment tool for local communities to evaluate whether volunteer tourism is beneficial for their communities. Through an online survey of volunteer-sending organisations, they propose a list of indicators that seek to understand community impacts. They also facilitated workshops within communities hosting volunteers to further define these indicators, particularly those to be assessed in a sustainability framework. The results of their studies provide a useful framework for assessing community involvement in volunteer tourism, yet they are highly specific to each community. Importantly, education through intercultural exchange was identified as the most significant benefit indicator for communities hosting volunteer tourists (Lupoli & Morse, 2015; Lupoli et al., 2014; Lupoli et al., 2015). Education as a key outcome for host communities is also a key finding in Dillette et al.'s (2017) study of volunteer tourism in the Bahamas. Social exchange theory informed interviews and surveys with destination residents, and eight major themes arose in examining how community members perceive volunteer tourism to facilitate cross-cultural exchange and their desire to learn about other cultures. Dillette et al. (2017) findings reveal that the positive benefits of hosting volunteers (for example, community involvement, empowerment, sustainability, education and communication) appeared to outweigh the negative impacts (for example, dependency, neglect of community needs and loss of Bahamian culture). Their conclusion indicates that the results may be relevant for other small island destinations but that the contextual characteristics need to be similar. Yet, as prior research on island tourism has established, tourism may be at various stages of development and have altered destination communities to such extremes that any form of tourism may be seen as detrimental or unsustainable (Young et al., 2020).

Taplin et al. (2014) also takes an adaptancy stance in discussing the use of monitoring and evaluating volunteer tourism. They highlight the importance of social, cultural, historical, economic

and political contexts and, in so doing, find that there are far too many variables to establish a consistent method of volunteer tourism evaluation. These variables include, but are not limited to, volunteer tourism markets, stakeholders, organisations, and volunteer programme dimensions. Their critical stance leads them to conclude that any form of measurement is value-laden and always "embedded within uneven power relations, agendas and interests" (Taplin et al., 2014, p. 891). Therefore, critical and interpretative approaches can potentially facilitate a far greater understanding of the many nuances in stakeholder voices, and promote dialogue between them.

More recent cautionary approaches to measuring the impacts of volunteer tourism argue that environmental impacts on host destinations must also be considered when evaluating volunteer tourism. While the advocacy platform presents the positive effects volunteer tourism can have on wildlife, the carbon footprint of volunteers from predominantly wealthy minority world countries can negate these positive impacts. By employing a carbon footprint calculator, El Geneidy's (2019) study of volunteer tourism in India finds many significant indirect environmental costs. For instance, while aviation is a prominent contributor to CO_2 emissions, the transportation of products, and the consumption of food and other products in volunteer tourism also contribute to environmental impacts. Liu and Leung (2019) examine impacts of environmental biodiversity in Taiwan, arguing that while the intentions of volunteer programs on conservation projects are commendable, endangered species at the destination may be threatened due to cultural changes to community life.

The impact measurement studies described above demonstrate diverse ways that volunteer tourism impacts have been measured through a range of frameworks. Generally these studies, like evaluation, "can be perceived to come from outside the community's interests and control and based instead on an external agenda" (Price, McCoy, & Mafi, 2012, p. 33). Rather, in order to assess or measure the effectiveness of volunteer tourism, there needs to be understandings of exactly what the programme entails (Lough & Tiessen, 2018; Taplin et al., 2014) and the selection of culturally appropriate methods and indicators that are both community and programme specific (Lupoli et al., 2015). These studies show that quantitative methods may not be the most appropriate way to understand the impacts of volunteer tourism. If such approaches are used, they need to be culturally appropriate and context specific. However, we argue below that alternate approaches to volunteer tourism research are needed for understanding nuance and diversity of organisations, communities and local environments.

Alternative understandings of impact measurement

Castañeda (2012) argues that the notion of impact neglects the fact that tourism affects different groups in different ways. Likewise, in the case of volunteer tourism, traditional impact analyses homogenise the 'volunteer tourism industry' and its impacts "without taking into account long term sociohistorical processes or considering the multiple and different consequences and effect that [volunteer] tourism could have" (Castañeda, 2012, p. 47). As noted earlier, the volunteer tourism

industry is very diverse. The industry comprises heterogeneous organisations - from charities, private companies, social enterprises, brokers, non-government organisations and non-profits - catering to different segments of the market (Benson, 2015; Taplin et al., 2014). Homogenous and universal approaches to impact measurement therefore obscure the diversity of experiences, not only for volunteers, but also for host communities.

Alternative approaches to measuring impact in volunteer tourism are emerging, including research that engages methodologies that are more conducive to non-western host community perspectives, and that prioritise the voices of host communities, and/or are community-driven. For example, in a study of volunteer tourism in Ghana, Bargeman et al. (2018) employ a practice approach to investigate the effects of interactions between volunteers and local community members. By engaging an alternate approach through practice theory their findings unpack the ways by which social practices can better account for the embodied, emotional, and affective dimensions of volunteer tourism experiences. Relationality between actors is key, as well as their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, taking in account the context-specific dimensions essential to understand when exploring a phenomenon of practice. Bargeman et al. (2018) argue that interaction is central to immersive volunteering experiences. When positive and negative consequences of interactions are identified, these are relational and dependent on each of the 'guest' and 'host' actors, their backgrounds, their routines, and other context specific factors.

In line with this context specific approach, Eckardt et al. (2020, p. 647) argue that "supply chains within the volunteer tourism industry need to be examined in order to explain what works, for whom, under which circumstances". For Eckardt et al. (2020) the voices of the supposed beneficiaries of volunteer tourism (that is, the host communities) are often unheard because they are too far down the supply chain, and the root causes of the exploitation of host communities, as well as dissatisfied volunteers, often occurs within the supply chains themselves. The supply chain acts like a black box that nobody truly understands and for sustainable change to occur, project evaluations need to be context sensitive, particularly in relation to "contextual components of supply chain management mechanisms" (Eckardt et al., 2020, p. 650). Traditional linear supply chain models are, therefore, insufficient in capturing and measuring these collaborative relationships in volunteer tourism supply chains. This is particularly the case in volunteer tourism because it is ultimately an intangible product related to "level of exchanges in knowledge, expertise and resources, and the formation of personal relationships and cultural exchanges" (Eckardt et al., 2020, p. 657) which are significant during the volunteer placement.

In a holistic manner, Zahra and McGehee (2013) examine impact from the perspective of a Filipino host community employing a community capitals framework. They find that while young volunteer tourists affect changes to the financial, human, built, natural, cultural and political environments (or capitals) through the different projects, these changes were generally perceived in a positive light. For example, the volunteer's persistence in keeping the area clean flows onto the

community members who consequently insist that the younger members of the community should do the same.

However, in this discussion of alternative impact measurement we cannot ignore extreme world events which have had devastating effects on communities that rely on tourism. Everingham and Chassagne (2020, p. 2) argue that the Covid-19 pandemic offers us an opportunity to "rethink the hyper consumption endless growth model" of modern neo-liberal capitalism that is tourism. Their alternative model is based on *Buen Vivir,* a communitarian view of wellbeing with roots in Latin American Indigenous cosmology. They argue that having a Buen Vivir mindset can create growth in wellbeing, environmentalism, and social connection, and that this would lead to degrowth in socially and environmentally damaging tourism sectors. Connecting Buen Vivir to the 'slow tourism' movement (which has similarities to volunteer tourism (Heitmann, Robinson, & Povey, 2011)) challenges our notion of a post-assessment of impact to one in which the potential outcomes of volunteer tourism are embedded in designing community-led programs.

The studies examined in this section demonstrate the importance of context when measuring impact from a community perspective. Specifically, the studies reviewed indicate that evaluating volunteer tourism is complex and context dependent, connected to relational social systems which include individuals, social structures, organisations and processes. However, there still remains a significant omission in terms of ways to understand the intangible aspects of the volunteer tourism experience. Indeed, this may be one of the most pressing challenges in evaluating the impacts of volunteer tourism, and is discussed below.

The importance of intangible outcomes in volunteer tourism impact measurement

There are contextual factors that present challenges in measuring the impacts of volunteer tourism. These include the large variety of intersecting experiences, in terms of the volunteer organisations (whether they are for profit, not for profit, non-government organisation, charity, service learning, religiously orientated, etc.), the volunteers and their various motivations (including their levels of skill and cross-cultural awareness), the broader environmental impacts, the impacts inherent within supply chains and, of course and most importantly, the impacts on host communities.

However, as the volunteer tourism experience is packaged and presented as an intangible and experience-orientated product, analysing impacts must also consider the on-the-ground practices, positionalities and experiences of volunteers and host communities. The relationalities make measuring impacts highly context specific. Impact assessments of community driven programs are more likely to succeed if the tools are locally specific and designed. In the context of a global pandemic, such as Covid-19 when international tourism halted, there is an opportunity to reset tourism when the borders reopen according to the desires of local communities. For example, research by Scheyvens and Movono (2020) on tourism dependent economies in the South Pacific highlights how during Covid-19, many of those in the tourism industry affected by shutdowns are

experiencing the benefits of a less-stressful lifestyle. They have returned to land and found strength in their communities and family life. This reinforces the importance of reframing development aid – away from growth models, towards collective well-being, as well as the importance of being clear about what local communities actually want in terms of tourism and development more generally. Alternative models to growth are required that focus on the welfare and well-being of the collective to work towards sustainable futures. For example New Zealand is now utilising well-being measurements rather than relying solely on economic indicators such as GDP (Ellsmoor, 2019). Buen Vivir is one such model that can be used by the tourism industry to 'reset' and 'rethink', towards the collective well-being of people and nature – with emphasis on plural and culturally contextual pathways. We argue that volunteer tourism also needs to (re)consider how development is framed, the broader impacts of well-being more generally, and most importantly to centre the needs and wants of the local communities that are hosting volunteers

While universal typologies can be useful for assessing broad patterns of behaviours, our concern is that the methodologies that underpin these typologies tend to be Eurocentric. The issue here is that impact measurement studies privilege the frameworks of western understandings of development and do not necessarily account for the cultural differences in values and well-being. When we look outside of tourism research we find that Indigenous social impact research aims to decolonise the research process. For example, in using a co-designed, community-based participatory research approach in Australia, Denny-Smith, Loosemore, Barwick, Sunindijo, and Piggott (2019) showed that a yarning (Aboriginal cultural conversation) discussion group is culturally appropriate, and emphasises oral histories, knowledges and perspectives of Indigenous people.

When measuring and evaluating volunteer tourism, researchers also need to attend to the actual encounters themselves. Examining such encounters requires specific methodologies that prioritise the relationalities of these encounters, specifically the emotional/affective realms of the experience (Wearing et al, 2017). The intangible aspects of volunteer tourism, such as intercultural learning and mutuality, cannot always be quantified into outcomes that are measured in terms of development. As Everingham (2015) argues, many other experiences occur in volunteer tourism that require analysis and need to be acknowledged and emphasised if they are to be mutually beneficial for both volunteers and the local communities. For example, Everingham and Motta (2020) illustrate the problems associated with applying singular monological and ethnocentric logics to the embodied intercultural encounters that happen on the ground in volunteer tourism. Whilst 'meaningful' and 'experiential' encounters with host communities is a key selling point within volunteer tourism promotional discourses, much of the academic analysis can ironically skim over the lived experiences of these encounters. How these encounters will play out post Covid-19 is difficult to know. Will the volunteer industry continue with face to face to encounters, and to what extent will volunteers be travelling around the globe? For example, during Covid-19 the Australian Volunteer Program, run

through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), began promoting remote volunteering and Impact Fund initiatives. Remote volunteering allows repatriated volunteers to complete their interrupted assignments and stay connected to their host organisations. Impact funds provide eligible partner organisations access to small grants that will help communities respond to and recover from the impacts of Covid-19. A more strategic approach involved exploring new ways of working through an Innovation Fund – which "identifies, develops and pilots new ideas and solutions to increase the impact of the program" (Australian Volunteer Program, 2020). There is scope for the volunteer tourism sector to respond to these challenges in innovate ways – however considering the importance of the embodied experiential nature of volunteering internationally it remains to be seen how the industry will move forward post Covid-19.

Alternative participatory approaches have been uncovered earlier in this chapter. Although some of the abovementioned studies are alternative in their theoretical frameworks, they continue to employ research designs and methods *prior* to establishing relationships in the host communities. There is a need to take alternative methodological approaches that account for the contingencies and relationalities of various actors within these tourism spaces. In Everingham's (2015, 2016) research in South America, she engages an autoethnographic approach to fieldwork on the ground within two volunteer tourism organisations. Autoethnography allowed her to consider her own embodied positionality in these projects, as well as her own attunements to emotional and affective registers. These methodologies provide insightful articulation of the many ambivalences of these encounters that can both perpetuate neo-colonial stereotypes as well as subvert them. When intercultural exchange is deliberately fostered by volunteer tourism organisations, neo-colonial stereotypes of 'the helper' and 'the helped' can be disrupted. Similarly Zahra and McGehee's (2013) work in the Philippines recognises the importance of embeddedness in community prior to any form of data collection. An obstacle such as Covid-19 therefore should have little effect on the impact evaluation process.

Arguably, the potential for volunteer tourism to delegitimise 'geographies of need' (Simpson, 2004) should be fundamental in evaluating the transformative potentials of volunteer tourism. However, particular methodologies that are attentive to these transformative aspects – and occur within the intangible affective realms of the experience – are needed. As Griffiths (2018, p. 117) argues, much of the critical literature on international volunteering focuses on structural framings of power dynamics and skims over the actual encounters themselves, thereby creating silences around the "body's intersubjective capacities" and the "political potentials of the body in terms of forging positive possibilities". Following Wearing et al. (2017), we propose that in order for volunteer tourism to be sustainable and decommodified, the agency of volunteers and local communities must be at the centre of the activity. Spaces must be facilitated for the outcomes of deep intercultural exchange and then volunteer tourism research and impact measurement can engage beyond Eurocentric frameworks.

Conclusions and Implications

Measuring impacts in volunteer tourism is useful when context specific approaches and methodologies are undertaken. Adhering to the triple bottom line in terms of economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts is useful for ensuring volunteer tourism is beneficial for local communities and the environment, and for volunteers themselves who are often looking for meaningful tourism experiences. However, as we have argued throughout this chapter, the scope of evaluation must be widened to include or be driven by the local community actors, the various contextual aspects of volunteer tourism supply chains, and the inequalities (as well as mixed messages) inherent within such international business models. The volunteer tourism experience itself is ultimately intangible and is, therefore, difficult to assess, particularly when non-interpretative methodologies attempt to account for the lived experiences within these programs.

Volunteer tourism impacts would best be evaluated in context-engaging interpretative methodologies focusing on community specific means. If methodologies are not connected to the emotional and affective realms of the concurrent lived experiences of tourists and communities, there is a risk that measuring volunteer tourism impact will erase the agency of local communities and continue to reinforce neo-colonial stereotypes that underpin the geography of need in volunteer tourism. By moving beyond development aid assessment models in ways that account for the heterogeneity and emergent possibilities for decolonising connections across difference, volunteer tourism research can uncover possibilities for intercultural connection. Evaluative measures must, therefore, focus on individual context specific examples that are cognisant of the diversity of organisations, experiences and impacts (Benson, 2015; Wearing et al., 2017). The scientific platform of volunteer tourism research (Wearing & McGehee, 2013) can be further epitomised through ongoing engagement with interdisciplinary and interpretative approaches to impact measurements. In so doing, evaluations of volunteer tourism should foreground the need for organisations to facilitate programs that foster the importance of intercultural exchange and connecting across and through cultural difference.

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