VOLUNTEER TOURISM IN THE PHILIPPINES: A LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATIONAL TOURISM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
In response to the pandemic's impacts, the Philippine Department of Tourism has incorporated volunteer tourism into the nation's tourism offerings, blending traditional travel with service opportunities. This paper offers a fresh perspective on volunteer tourism in the Philippines and introduces a framework designed to maximize its potential as a catalyst for sustainable development and conservation. It specifically details the role of various organizations within this volunteer tourism framework while considering the local and regional dynamics of voluntourism that were present prior to the pandemic. The Department of Tourism offers valuable insights and identifies key focus areas for the advancement and effective management of volunteer tourism programs in the Philippines. This framework positions volunteer tourism as an intervention that enhances the value derived from tourism. The advantages generated by tourism can benefit not only the region that attracts tourists but also the destination area and the local community. Volunteer tourism transcends the typical travel experience by connecting tourists with the realities of the host community. Through their voluntary engagements, tourists develop a deeper understanding of the day-to-day lives of community members, experiences that are often overlooked. This understanding extends to the domestic and community aspects of households in the area, granting visitors insights into the residents' aspirations and communal life that may not be openly shared with outsiders. Volunteer tourism offers participants opportunities for self-reflection, fostering an exploration of their interpersonal relationships and facilitating meaningful personal growth and transformation. The framework seeks to improve volunteering outcomes and facilitate more effective management of volunteer tourism. As a means of personal development, volunteer tourism is beneficial for recent graduates. With proper management, these volunteering opportunities yield valuable experiences for participants, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards to benefit both volunteers and host organizations. Additionally, the framework aims to steer initiatives towards a more impactful form of tourism. Rather than merely serving as a tourism product, effective management of volunteer tourism can play a crucial role in promoting positive societal change.

Keywords: Conservation, Life-Long Experience, Philippines Volunteer Tourism, Sustainable Development, Volunteer Tourism and Volunteer Tourism Management.

Introduction

The global tourism industry is experiencing a strong rebound, indicating a solid resurgence despite ongoing economic and geopolitical hurdles. This revival is particularly significant in the Middle East, Europe, and Africa, underscoring the resilience of global tourism demand (Pompurová et al., 2018). Key metrics, including tourist arrivals, revenue, airline activity, and hotel occupancy, demonstrate this steady recovery (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024). While there is a prevailing sense of optimism, the tourism sector remains cautiously optimistic. It recognizes potential obstacles, including an expected slowdown in global growth, ongoing core inflation, geopolitical tensions, and the increasing impacts of climate change, all of which could undermine traveler confidence.

Tourism, closely tied to the movement of people across local and international borders, catalyzes intercultural exchange, facilitating social interactions and broadening personal perspectives (Giango et al., 2022). Furthermore, tourism is vital for community education and social advancement, as it encourages collaborative learning and knowledge exchange between visitors and local service providers, thereby enhancing the sustainability of tourism destinations (Bawagan et al., 2019).

Tourism's capacity to generate export revenues, create jobs and businesses, and boost infrastructure development underscores its importance as a key driver of socio-economic advancement (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024). Many countries, particularly those with limited economic alternatives, find the pursuit of tourism as a development strategy particularly appealing due to its potential to positively influence local and national economies (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024). The increasing impact of globalization and competition among destinations further underscores the importance of tourism as a vital strategy for economic development; nations that successfully enhance their tourism sectors experience growth in GDP, foreign direct investment, job opportunities, and foreign exchange earnings.

The expansion of tourism is intricately tied to a growing environmental awareness, a sign of a worldwide surge in concern for the natural world. As economic growth accelerates, the sector is poised to face numerous new challenges. While these trends could foster economic advancement, job creation, and enhanced living standards, it is vital to acknowledge the potential for adverse outcomes, such as environmental harm, social disparities, and cultural uniformity (Graciá & Cerviño, 2024). Tourism can yield both beneficial and detrimental impacts on the environment, underscoring the importance of careful management and sustainable approaches. Robust tourism governance, characterized by collaborative efforts among governments, civil society, and the private sector, is crucial for overseeing tourist destinations and ensuring that

tourism contributes to achieving sustainable development objectives (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024).

Tourism is crucial to the Philippines' national economy. In 2023, it accounted for 8.6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as reported by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This increase was the highest among all sectors that year. The sector generated PHP 5.3 trillion in economic activity, creating 11.2 million jobs. Domestic expenditure reached PHP 3.6 trillion, while international spending amounted to PHP 644.8 billion. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) anticipates a record PHP 5.9 trillion contribution to the GDP by 2025.

The tourism sector in the Philippines plays a crucial role in driving economic growth, preserving culture, and promoting environmental sustainability, in line with the nation's long-term development vision (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024). The National Tourism Development Plan for 2023-2028 provides a strategic framework for sustainably advancing the tourism industry, outlining essential objectives, strategies, and initiatives designed to boost the sector's competitiveness, inclusivity, and resilience. The Philippines offers a rich variety of tourism assets in natural and cultural heritage, alongside a burgeoning selection of beach and urban leisure and entertainment options that are regionally competitive (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024).

Acknowledging tourism's role in facilitating sustainable and inclusive growth, the Philippine government focuses on developing competitive products and destinations, implementing sustainable practices, and enhancing tourism governance and human resources (Mena & Villamejor-Mendoza, 2024). Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines are tasked with promoting and developing tourism. The National Tourism Act of 2009 urges them to create and execute tourism development plans, enforce standards, and gather statistical data for tourism-related purposes (Prado et al., 2004).

Prior to 2020, volunteer tourism expanded into a multi-billion-dollar sector within the tourism industry (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018, p. 1). Although the rise of volunteer tourism is often regarded favorably due to the altruistic motives of volunteers, it can hurt host destinations if not correctly managed. Various initiatives aim to establish guidelines for organizing volunteer tourism, taking into account its potential effects (Raymond, 2012; APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018). The temporary halt caused by the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to reflect on the sector's experiences with volunteer tourism. To create well-structured volunteer tourism programs, a thorough understanding of what volunteer tourism entails and its place within the larger tourism framework is essential (Wearing, 2001). This period also presents a unique

opportunity for significant institutional transformation (Brouder, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), fostering a more compassionate approach towards those reliant on tourism (Cheer, 2020; Haywood, 2020).

In response to the pandemic's impact, the Philippine Department of Tourism has incorporated volunteer tourism into the nation's tourism offerings. This form of volunteer tourism combines traditional travel with service, providing a distinctive way to support development and conservation, especially in biodiverse and culturally rich countries like the Philippines (Polus & Bidder, 2016). It involves participants engaging in organized volunteer efforts during their travels, aimed at aiding communities, restoring environments, or conducting research (Garrison, 2015). This approach shifts tourism from purely profit motives to initiatives that emphasize the social, cultural, and ecological health of local communities and environments (Pompurová et al., 2018). Furthermore, volunteer tourism enables local community empowerment, promotes cultural exchanges, and yields tangible benefits through active involvement in development projects, setting it apart from traditional tourism (Vrasti, 2012).

However, the rise of volunteer tourism has raised concerns about potential negative consequences, such as the displacement of local jobs, reinforcement of power disparities, and disruption of traditional ways of life (Guttentag, 2009). Additionally, the growing commercialization of volunteer tourism prompts doubts about the authenticity of these experiences and whether such initiatives truly prioritize altruistic goals over profit (Tomazos & Butler, 2009).

This paper discusses a reconceptualization of volunteer tourism in the Philippines. It presents the volunteer tourism framework for the Philippines, aiming to fully realize its potential as a catalyst for sustainable development and conservation. In particular, this paper defines a volunteer tourism framework for the Philippines to explain the involvement of various organizations, considering the local and regional dynamics of voluntourism prior to the pandemic.

The framework is expected to improve volunteering outcomes and the management of volunteer tourism. As an activity for personal growth, volunteer tourism is viewed as a way of gaining an advantage among graduates. Properly managed volunteering opportunities provide valuable experiences for volunteers while ensuring compliance with legal and ethical requirements and mutual benefit for both volunteers and hosts (Lithgow & Timbrell, 2014). The framework can also inform actions for a meaningful form of tourism. Effectively managed volunteer time can impact the frequency and satisfaction of volunteer services (Cheung & Ma, 2010). Beyond being a tourism product, managing volunteer tourism can be instrumental in promoting positive change. Due to the networks

involved, VT serves as a venue to promote social change, particularly when it fosters a community that provides consciousness-raising opportunities (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

The paper is organized in this manner: it starts with a concise overview of the literature on volunteer tourism products and their organization; then, it addresses the factors contributing to the growth of volunteer tourism; next, it presents a discussion on the framework of volunteer tourism in the Philippines; and ultimately, it analyzes the conclusion and implications of this framework.

What Is Voluntourism?

Volunteer tourism is an activity where people pay to volunteer (McGehee & Santos, 2005; Conran, 2011) and can be generally understood as the engagement of tourists in volunteer work (Alexander & Bakir, 2011). As an alternative form of tourism, volunteer tourism projects offer a structured way for tourists to undertake holidays that may also involve aiding or alleviating poverty, restoring the environment, or supporting relevant research on aspects of society and the environment (Wearing, 2001). Participants in a volunteer tourism program are involved in a set of activities that contribute to the local or broader community (Hammersley, 2014). Conceptually, it can be visualized as the intersection of tourists who travel for leisure and individuals involved in volunteer work (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018).

Volunteer tourism activities are not recent developments. Volunteering and tourism have long-established histories, with roots dating back to the nineteenth century, when missionaries, doctors, and teachers traveled to aid others (Benson, 2011). Over the years, the development of voluntourism has led to various types of voluntourists, differing in terms of setting, contribution, and time commitments (Holmes & Smith, 2009). In the Asia Pacific region, the following VT activities have emerged (APEC Tourism Working Group 2018, 9):

- Teaching activities;
- Animal welfare;
- Building community facilities;
- Skills development and training;
- Environmental and conservation activities;
- Medical and healthcare;
- Volunteer work in childcare and orphanages;
- Agriculture;
- Sports;
- Research;
- Business development; and
- Events.

The volunteer tourism possibilities go beyond this if voluntourism is viewed as a form of alternative tourism. While volunteer tourism programs incorporate both leisure and volunteering components, they also encompass areas where tourists develop awareness and knowledge that enable them to become actively involved in issues (Wearing, 2001). The volunteer tourism phenomenon has an inherent learning process that exposes tourists to realities beyond the conventional leisure and recreational elements of mainstream tourism. This attribute makes volunteer tourism a venue for tourists to contribute to social change by completing a set of voluntourism activities (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

How Is Volunteer Tourism Organized?

Volunteer tourism is broadly defined as a combination of leisure tourism and the activities of individuals involved in volunteering (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018). However, there is a need to nuance the "tourism" and "volunteering" components, as well as the interactions between these components, as starting points for understanding the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. According to Alexander and Bakir (2011), the properties of volunteer tourism can be explained by the presence of three key elements: tourist elements, volunteer work, and engagement.

Tourist elements are explained by the following factors: expectations, assumptions, issues, motivation, and the impact on participants (Alexander & Bakir, 2011). Tourism is a form of human mobility, and economies have established mechanisms to manage the movement of people within a specific zone. Understanding these attributes qualifies VT as a part of the tourism sector. It determines the areas that need attention to ensure the welfare of visitors involved in this form of tourism.

Volunteer work refers to the range, choice, purpose, time, and payment involved in the VT program (Alexander & Bakir, 2011). This element distinguished VT from other tourism products in the area. Engagements refer to activities and encounters within a volunteer tourism program. This element is associated with the following concepts: integration, penetration, immersion, involvement, interaction, action, and participation. (Alexander & Bakir, 2011). The nature of engagement articulates the core principles of volunteer tourism, ensuring it aligns with the expectations of target tourists and the destination hosting volunteers.

Volunteer tourism is a diverse component of the tourism industry that offers a range of activities for volunteers to participate in (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018). Like other forms of tourism, volunteer tourism relies on stakeholders to support its development. The volunteer tourism network is a social network of individuals and organizations that share common ideas to

promote participation and support for voluntourism (McGehee & Santos, 2005). The APEC TWG on Voluntourism (2018, p. 12) identified three (3) significant routes for holiday-goers to be part of VT programs-

Route 1: A volunteer tourist engages a Sending Organization to arrange volunteer tourism programs. The Sending Organization then coordinates with a Host Organization that organizes the volunteer tourism program and links the tourist to the hosts or communities where the program will be implemented.

Route 2: Alternatively, a volunteer tourist approaches a Servicing Organization to obtain links with available Sending Organizations and Host Organizations. The tourist then deals with them and is sent to the Hosts and Communities where the volunteer tourism program will be implemented. Route 3: Volunteer tourists coordinate directly with their desired hosts and communities to participate in volunteer tourism programs. Because of its volunteer component, volunteer tourism can be approached through frameworks that guide the organization of volunteering programs. In the Philippines, the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency (PNVSCA) is mandated to promote and coordinate volunteer programs and services. The PNVSCA prescribed a Volunteer Management Cycle (VMC) to guide organizations involved in volunteer activities (PNVSCA, 2020). The VMC has the following components (PNVSCA, 2020):

- Strategy development. This involves developing a strategic plan for engaging volunteers in community development projects or initiatives.
- Partnership development. This element covers partner identification, partnership building, and relationship management.
- Activity planning. This covers the development of activity or project plans for volunteer-related initiatives.
- Volunteer recruitment. This involves the processes and management practices necessary for recruiting volunteers.
- Volunteer mobilization. These outlines activities related to the mobilization of volunteers, including pre-deployment training and orientation for volunteers.
- Volunteer support. This covers the support and management of volunteers on assignment
- Volunteer monitoring. This covers the tracking of volunteers on assignments. It also includes the documentation of volunteer contributions or outputs.
- Assignment completion. This includes the processes related to volunteer assignment completion, conducting exit interviews and debriefings, and granting awards and recognition.

- Support activities. These are steps taken in all VMC components. This includes Communication, Risk Management, and Stakeholder Management.

Why Promote Volunteer Tourism?

The involvement of volunteer tourism participants in volunteering projects represents the apparent contribution of voluntourism. As a civil society initiative, volunteering is expected to fill the unmet gap between the public and private sectors. In the Philippines, the most prevalent volunteer tourism activities before the pandemic included building community facilities, teaching, medical and healthcare services, and environmental and conservation programs (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018, p. 65).

One of the situations where volunteers have made a significant impact on addressing community needs is in disaster response efforts. The Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries, with one-third of its population living in poverty and being vulnerable to natural calamities (UN OCHA, 2013). During the tragedy caused by Typhoon Yolanda, the Philippine government launched the most extensive logistical operation, calling for many volunteers and donors (Gagalac, 2013). Weeks before this disaster, a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck parts of the Central Philippines, prompting the mobilization of 1,036 volunteers to assist in repacking goods for relief (NDRRMC, 2013).

Aside from direct project contribution, volunteer work has been recognized as a contributor to economic and social gains in the Philippines. Volunteering in the Philippines has been valued at PHP 44.5 billion, up from PHP 20.1 billion in 2000. This constituted about 0.6% of the Philippine Gross Domestic Product from 2000 to 2009 (Virola, 2010).

Aside from the benefits of volunteering, there are opportunities where volunteer tourism can make a meaningful contribution. Because of the volunteer work element of this type of tourism, volunteer tourism can become a social force, enabling institutions to focus on specific societal concerns. Participation in volunteer tourism can drive social movements and support activism (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Volunteering can be instrumental in raising social awareness to address the concerns of vulnerable population sectors (Liu, Ching, & Wu, 2017). When managed effectively, VT can drive social change by creating a community that raises consciousness through tourism experiences (McGehee & Santos, 2005).

Volunteer tourism is claimed to be a transformative experience for volunteer tourists. Volunteer tourism serves as a venue to raise consciousness (McGehee & Santos, 2005). According to Coghlan and Weiler (2018), transformational change

is an individualized process that can lead to a critical awareness of the self, leading to a new self-definition. Personal transformation is brought about by new and unfamiliar settings (the voluntourism experience) that require radical self-examination, forcing the individual to reflect on and change what they know and how they relate to others (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018).

Apart from the tangible aspects and outcomes of voluntourism projects, volunteer tourism creates opportunities to build relationships and foster understanding among individuals from diverse settings (Hammersley, 2014). For households from other locales or those isolated due to various circumstances, the organizing of volunteer tourism provides a connection among people with shared interests (McGehee & Santos, 2005). With volunteer tourism, the potential for volunteering strengthens resources for social change. Volunteering is an indicator of civic engagement and social capital (Holmes & Smith, 2009, p. 7). Through volunteer tourism, a functioning democratic society is reinforced, where citizens can realize their aspirations as a community.

At the broader level, volunteer tourism provides an opportunity for institutional change. Tourism, as we know, has been associated with the negative notions of consumerism owing to destination mismanagement and irresponsible tourist behavior (Sharpley, 2012). Volunteer tourism can be viewed as an ethical form of consumerism, aiming to make positive differences in the communities (Butcher & Smith, 2015). More importantly, it allows tourists to explore the concept of self through activities where participants interrogate their experiences and shape their sense of identity (Wearing, 2001). This shaping of the understanding of the self is due to the assembly of organizational, community, and cultural contexts that characterize volunteering (Liu, Ching, & Wu, 2017). Furthermore, volunteer tourism raises the tourists' awareness of existing issues and inequalities (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Ultimately, it promotes a sense of 'moral rule' that other forms of politics cannot offer (Chaisinthop, 2017).

The Philippine Department Of Tourism Volunteer Tourism Framework
The Philippine Department of Tourism offers valuable perspectives and focus areas for the development and management of volunteer tourism programs in the Philippines. This framework views volunteer tourism as an intervention that enhances the value created by tourism. The benefits generated by tourism can extend to the region that attracts tourists, the destination region, and the local community. Volunteer tourism goes beyond the typical tourism experience by engaging tourists with the personal realities of the host community. When tourists participate in volunteer work, they gain intimate insights into the daily lives of the destination community, which they do not typically encounter. This exposure extends to the domestic and community aspects of households within the destination. Becoming familiar with these aspects offers glimpses into the aspirations and community life that residents usually do not share with those

they have no close affinity with. Volunteer tourism offers participants the opportunity for reflection on their knowledge and exploration of their relationships with others, creating a platform for meaningful personal growth and transformation.

The transformative power of voluntourism is driven by five key factors that contribute to voluntourism-induced value:

- Destination readiness: This encompasses the availability of venues for volunteering, the amenities to support volunteer tourists, and the logistics for transporting tourists from the destination region to the destination community.
- Tourist readiness: This refers to the willingness and competencies of tourists, as well as the mechanisms for preparing and matching volunteer tourists with suitable volunteer work.
- Host readiness: Refers to the willingness and capacity of hosts within the destination community to organize and support voluntourism programs.
- Nature of volunteer work: Encompasses aspects such as the range, choice, purpose, time commitment, and payment involved in the voluntourism program.
- Volunteer engagement: Pertains to the focus of activities that allow volunteer tourists to interact with program hosts and make sense of their experiences.

The volunteer tourism model aims to enhance the value of tourism through volunteer engagement. The model recognizes the significance of these five drivers of voluntourism-induced value, emphasizing their importance in program planning, addressing concerns related to volunteer tourism, and ensuring the realization of benefits while prioritizing the welfare of the destination community.

Conclusion

While planning is crucial for ensuring positive outcomes in voluntourism, it is also necessary to acknowledge the potential for addressing future issues that may arise from the relationship between tourists and destination communities. In response to this, Hammersley (2014) proposed enhancing the educational aspect of voluntourism. To mitigate the impact of volunteer tourism, programs should be structured as educational experiences that benefit both participants and the communities they serve. The structure of voluntourism programs and the involvement of organizations should be reexamined to incorporate a structured educational component into voluntourism (Hammersley, 2014). It is essential to consider the role of various organizations in shaping volunteers' attitudes and expectations (Raymond, 2012). This alignment can help manage undesirable outcomes by ensuring that volunteer tourists' expectations align

with their respective capacities (Palacios, 2010). Furthermore, establishing meaningful engagement and relationships between hosts and tourists can be an area where the impacts of voluntourism can be effectively managed. Achieving this will require steps to bridge gaps in understanding. As a good practice, Mostafanezhad and Kontogeorgopoulos (2014) recommend developing linguistic competence to facilitate cultural learning among volunteer tourists, as a means of delivering lifelong learning activities that foster the appreciation of new ideas and fresh perspectives, ultimately contributing to human flourishing. The concept of lifelong learning acknowledges that learning is not confined to a specific period or stage of life, but is a continuous endeavour that promotes personal growth, professional development, and social engagement (Eynon & Malmberg, 2020). Lifelong learning experiences encompass a wide range of learning activities for individuals of all ages, across various life contexts and through diverse modalities, meeting diverse learning needs and demands (UNESCO, 2023). Lifelong learning empowers individuals to acquire new knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their lives, enabling them to adapt to changing circumstances and contribute to sustainable practices (Ilgaz & Eskici, 2018). Consequently, lifelong learning is a crucial aspect of both personal and professional development, fostering sustainability.

Voluntourism can be designed to provide opportunities for learning and development. Through various volunteer work and engagement activities, participants have the chance to acquire new knowledge, skills, and competencies, leading to personal growth and professional advancement. This approach is also essential for addressing the concerns associated with voluntourism. By integrating learning activities from diverse life contexts, including those derived from destination communities, a program can be developed that is valuable to the host community and promotes growth among volunteer tourists.

Implications

Although the positive impact of volunteer tourists suggests advantages to volunteer tourism, its unintended effects need to be addressed (Guttentag, 2012). Volunteer tourism raises concerns due to its adverse effects on host communities (APEC Tourism Working Group, 2018, 16; Fee and Mdee, 2011). Some issues associated with volunteer tourism are:

- Volunteer tourism initiatives can create dependency, hindering the host community's ability to sustain itself;
- The presence of volunteers can limit local job prospects because of free labor, and
- Volunteers often lack the skills needed to fulfill their roles effectively (Guttentag, 2012).

Volunteer tourism is often criticized as exploitative when it occurs in developing regions (Dhruvarajan, 2000, as cited in McGehee & Santos, 2005). Critics have argued that the way volunteers make sense of their volunteer tourism experience reinforces stereotypes that perpetuate problematic perceptions about the tourist-host relationship (Hammersley, 2014). Moreover, volunteer tourism reframes the question of structural inequality as a question of individual morality and perpetuates apolitical cultural politics (Conran, 2011).

Despite criticisms, it can be argued that volunteer tourism offers opportunities to garner support for social justice agendas. Volunteer tourists are a group who are open to supporting political and economic plans to address local issues (Conran, 2011). When volunteer tourism is pursued to make a difference, the notion that it superimposes Western ideas of progress and modernity is mitigated, as it allows tourists to reject dominant development models (Butcher & Smith, 2015). However, this could be achieved only when the educational component of volunteer tourism is highlighted in tourism offerings. Hammersley (2014) recommends incorporating pedagogical and developmental perspectives into the pre-, during, and post-project phases to highlight the educational potential of volunteer tourism.

While volunteer tourism aims to nurture equal opportunities, achieving balance can be challenging. It is difficult to attain equality when a privileged group (the volunteer tourist) donates to an underprivileged sector (Guttentag, 2012). To address this, Hammersley (2014) suggests improving the educational potential of volunteer tourism by viewing participants as Facilitators and Knowledge conveners rather than privileged providers. Additionally, Volunteer Sending Organizations (VSOs) should be reexamined to add a structured educational component in VT (Hammersley, 2014). Volunteer tourism organizations can influence volunteers' attitudes and expectations (Raymond, 2012) to manage undesirable outcomes by aligning expectations with capacities (Palacios, 2010).

Establishing connections between hosts and tourists through meaningful engagement is a way to manage the effects of volunteer tourism. Actions can be implemented to address misunderstandings. Alongside the aforementioned suggestions, Mostafanezhad and Kontogeorgopoulos (2014) advocate for enhancing linguistic skills, promoting cultural education for volunteer tourists, mandating orientation sessions, and notifying hosts of the intentions and backgrounds of prospective visitors as effective practices to adopt.

While structures to manage voluntourism are crucial, incorporating genuine care improves volunteer tourism outcomes. Voluntourism has faced challenges for neglecting host community aspirations (Lee & Zhang, 2020). It benefits tourists through personal growth from volunteer programs (Wearing, 2001).

However, attention to host community concerns is essential, or personal transformation may harm host communities (Guttentag, 2012). Care is fostered through communication, dialogue, mutuality, and solidarity by co-creating relationships with locals (Lee & Zhang, 2020). Incorporating care ensures stakeholders address each other's needs and the long-term well-being of society and environment (Lee & Zhang, 2020).

Prioritizing community welfare and transforming tourists' impact are key concerns in managing volunteer tourism's adverse effects. Ideally, organizing volunteer tourism allows organizations to assess needs and find suitable tourists, though this isn't always feasible (Raymond, 2012). A top-down approach can still address impact effectively. An appropriate matching mechanism can identify communities that will benefit from tourists (Raymond, 2012). Proper matching also fosters educational initiatives and aligns personal and institutional expectations with actual volunteer capacities, reducing public criticism and negative outcomes (Palacios, 2010). Addressing competition between volunteers and job opportunities due to free labor availability is an issue in volunteer tourism (Guttentag, 2012). Assigning volunteers differs from paid labor due to various decision model attributes. The solution lies in recognizing the differences between the two labor types. A mathematical modeling approach can reframe the issue as a business case (Falasca & Zobel, 2012).

Policies may promote volunteer tourism as a key product. Reflecting on Thailand, Mostafanezhad and Kontogeorgopoulos (2014) suggest short-term volunteering can support learning for volunteers and hosts under the right conditions. However, involvement from conventional tourism firms and the State can turn longer-term VT into mass tourism, undermining its benefits (Mostafanezhad & Kontogeorgopoulos, 2014). They emphasize the need for responsible voluntourism organizations to sustain VT as an alternative to more complex voluntourism forms (Mostafanezhad & Kontogeorgopoulos, 2014). This underscores the importance of understanding VT to develop effective VT programs (Wearing, 2001).

Volunteer tourism serves as an effective educational tool, fostering community learning and social responsibility (Bawagan et al., 2019; Trunina et al., 2019). Integrating educational components, such as language training and workshops on environmental conservation, enhances volunteers' understanding of local contexts. Partnering with local schools and research institutions facilitates knowledge exchange and skill development within host communities. Involving volunteers in community-based research, environmental initiatives, and cultural preservation yields valuable data for policy-making. Sustainable tourism destinations benefit from collaborative learning between tourists and service providers (Bawagan et al., 2019). Volunteer tourism should promote social

responsibility by encouraging cooperation with international organizations and fostering volunteerism in society (Trunina et al., 2019).

To ensure the long-term viability of volunteer tourism and to have a positive impact on the growth and preservation of the Philippines, impact assessment frameworks must be implemented and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. These frameworks will enable the tracking, assessment, and reporting of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of volunteer tourism programs by utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. This entails gathering baseline data, establishing monitoring indicators, and conducting routine evaluations to identify areas for improvement, ensuring that initiatives align with community needs and preferences. Moreover, transparency and accountability in volunteer tourism operations can be enhanced by involving local communities in the impact assessment process, seeking input from stakeholders, and sharing the findings with all parties concerned.

Greater collaboration between researchers and businesses will create a sustainable industry to address challenges like transformative learning. Volunteer tourism organizations should work with academic institutions and industry experts to conduct rigorous research on its impacts, identify best practices, and develop innovative solutions. This approach ensures volunteer tourism programs are evidence-based, ethically sound, and align with sustainable development principles (McGehee, 2014). A comprehensive theoretical framework is also necessary to explain variations in altruistic intentions for volunteer tourism (Han et al., 2020). Additionally, commercialization is a crucial factor, and future research can help organizations engage with the sector pragmatically (Coghlan & Noakes, 2012).

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