

VOLUNTOURISM: a Critical Evaluation and Recommendations for the future

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Preamble

Extract from article by Gabriella Civico CEV Director in “Voluntaris” December 2018:

CONTEXT

Volunteering and tourism are both phenomenon motivated by passion and interest in a particular subject and are both something that people generally engage with in their free time. Concepts and feelings such as excitement, memories, opportunities, entertainment, free time, travel, new experiences and pleasure are common to both. It is therefore no surprise that there is a growing trend towards linking the two concepts. As people’s time becomes increasingly under pressure, due to the vast range of opportunities that are available for them to experience, both on and offline, the idea to combine time that is available to be dedicated for tourism and a holiday, with time that could be committed for solidarity purposes, is increasingly attractive to an ever-greater number of people. As with many other phenomena, different individuals and organisations have identified a ‘business potential’ in this proposition. There is an expanding multi-billion Euro industry of what has now come to be known as ‘voluntourism’ sector.

CONCERNS

Many individuals and organisations, including the European Volunteer Centre (CEV), have identified concerns around the issue of ‘voluntourism’. CEV has recently adopted a [policy position](#) that highlights the features of ‘voluntourism’ that are at odds with characteristics that are generally considered to be intrinsic to, and essential for, good quality volunteering. It has been noted with worry that some voluntourism programs are mis-sold and participants can pay fees for experiences which are little more than a holiday and provide no real volunteering opportunities or involve actions designed to meet real local needs. Another issue identified is that many programmes, rather than being based on a real understanding of need and community partnership, that should be at the basis of all volunteering

initiatives, focus more on the presumed needs of the community, positioning the 'voluntourist' as a benevolent giver rather than someone genuinely able to bring sustainable added value to the resolution of challenges and problems.

At the Volunteering in Culture Capacity Building Conference in Rijeka (Croatia), organised by CEV in April 2018 and attended by more than one hundred volunteering stakeholders from across Europe, the issue of 'voluntourism', related in particular to the culture sector, was addressed. Participants were presented with the marketing material of the many entities, for-profit and not-for-profit, that offer 'voluntourism' opportunities and experiences. As can be expected, the marketing material and images present 'voluntourism' as a win-win situation for both the host communities where their well-intentioned activities would take place and the individuals and groups signing up for the experiences. Increasingly however, it can be observed, that 'voluntourism' experiences, particularly those that involve direct interaction with often vulnerable local populations, and particularly children, are doing more harm than good. So much in fact, that the Australian Government has taken steps to render illegal such activities under the [introduction of a modern slavery act](#), and some travel companies, after careful consideration of the evidence, have stopped providing such experiences.

'Voluntourism' experiences are sold in two ways. They can be sold as a complete holiday packages in advance of travel or alternatively as stand-alone experiences arranged in-situ, once people are in a particular location on their ongoing holiday. Motivations to take up these opportunities vary, but a common feature is a genuine desire to 'do some good' and/or obtain a genuine connection with the local host community. The idea that undertaking 'volunteering' experiences while on holiday is a way to mitigate any negative impact that holiday-makers might have on the local environment or people is being embraced by NGOs and tourism companies alike. However, there are a number of questions that must be asked about this approach of linking the concept of volunteering and, by extension, solidarity, with the objectives tourism companies & agencies and the tourists themselves. This paper will explore some of these issues.

1. Introduction

In the last decades, the industry of volunteering abroad, nowadays known as voluntourism, has grown stronger in a world where globalisation and the possibility of movement have shortened the distances between countries and communities. Voluntourism is normally associated with private agencies, but other institutions might support and promote this activity. Although there are several definitions of the practice, it can be seen in two modalities:

- The person is having a touristic experience in another country and, whilst being there, engages in a volunteering experience.
- The person uses an agency or an institution to go on a voluntourism experience.

This activity started gaining popularity in the nineties, and even more after ‘the gap year’ became more popular among recent graduates. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of industries and businesses that focus in this kind of activity. The practices and the choices made by the companies to draw more clients sometimes collide with the true needs of the afflicted communities and environments.

In this regard, the CEV designed a policy Statement in 2016 that provided some understandings and recommendations around voluntourism. In general, voluntourism was defined as a touristic experience in which “travellers participate in voluntary work” (CEV, 2016, p.5). In the statement, it is made clear that there are some good practices but also many concerns.

This paper will present in *Section 2* a State of the Art on voluntourism, gathering some of the academic work that has been done on the matter. Some of the main lines of criticism that voluntourism is currently facing, along with some recommendations from the CEV in this regard will also be presented and discussed.

- *Section 3* will address some social approaches, including social distance and the marketing of voluntourism.
- *Section 4* will focus on legal-ethical approaches, including the white saviour complex, legality, corruption and social media.
- *Section 5* will provide some conclusions based on the research, complemented with aspects that should be avoided in order to improve the conditions around voluntourism.
- *Section 6* will present an initiative to remember key elements to improve voluntourism, CARE.

The main goal of this paper is to provide volunteering stakeholders and other interested actors with more information on voluntourism, as well as some insight from an organisation dedicated to the matter of volunteering. By studying the opinions that criticise voluntourism, there could be more opportunities of

truly developing solutions to make it become a more sustainable practice. It is important to note that although cultural and environmental issues are part of the spectrum of this kind of practice, most of the paper will base its chapters on voluntourism focused on community work that implies direct human interactions. Through the State of the Art, we will explore more deeply the ways in which voluntourism has been studied over the last decades.

2. State of the Art: Voluntourism in the academic field

Woosman and Lee (2010) note that the issue of voluntourism was not properly popularised until the nineties. The general idea among academics used to be that the benefits perceived by the tourists and the communities were reciprocal. This vision has been recently challenged by other authors, especially when it comes to cross-cultural relationships. McGloin and Georgeou (2015) have explored the sociology behind voluntourism and the recruitment processes for higher education. They include the phrase “looks good on your CV” as part of the title of their paper. Other authors have explored the reinforcement of national and cultural stereotypes (Simpson, 2005) and others have worked on the perceptions of the voluntourists and the idea of ‘lack of altruism’ (Raymond & Hal, 2008; Sin, 2009).

When speaking about voluntourism itself, there is a lack of general agreement in some of the concepts surrounding it. However, many do agree that voluntourists tend to come from privileged areas of the Global North and travel to less privileged areas of the Global South. In regards to concepts, voluntourism is normally understood as a situation where tourists “volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the 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, 2002, p.240). McGloin and Georgeou (2015) use a more critical definition by stating it is “an economic activity driven by profit occurring within an unregulated industry and operating without any accreditation process”. They also make a difference between voluntourism and ‘volunteering for development’ (McGloin and Georgeou, p.3, 2015) which is normally understood as a practice that tends to involve long-term development objectives. Another part of the concept is the commitment from the development volunteer sending agency. It is viewed in a more positive way, but there is no denial that both activities may meet at some points. Both interact, directly or indirectly, with communities or environments with particular traits and practices.

The field of academic research on voluntourism has expanded significantly in the fields that shape social sciences. This is due to the interactions between humans that occur during the development of the programs. The criticisms that have emerged in the academic field are mostly related to the ‘mistakes’ that voluntourists or the agencies make when interacting with the new environment or community, as well as the ego-boosting attitudes and unethical practices.

Most of the academic work in regards to voluntourism has been focused on specific case-studies where voluntourists participate in a specific community and researchers try to analyse the changes they achieved. However, there is no extensive information about the practice and how companies advertise it. More work needs to be done in the social sciences field to fill this gap regarding the topic.

To continue with some of the research that has been done, the next chapters will present some of the critical analyses concerning voluntourism. In this way, a more comprehensive view of the practice can be developed, as well as more channels for a better understanding of the possible solutions for the problems detected in voluntourism in the last decades.

3. Social approaches to voluntourism: a critique

3.1 Applying the concept of social distance: Perceptions of each other.

One of the characteristics of voluntourism is related to the concept of ‘Social distance’. This concept was introduced by Park (1924, p.339), who defines it as *“the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally”*. Thus, it could be said that these understandings shape the interactions of the voluntourists towards the communities and vice-versa. There have been attempts to create empirical scales to measure social distance but measuring perceptions in numbers is not an easy task.

Voluntourism supporters and agencies sometimes advertise themselves as ‘cultural enrichment experiences’. Therefore, in theory, they should help reduce the gap in social distance. However, more recent opinions and critics believe that voluntourism only increases the previously existing stereotypes that each side had of the other. In practice, both voluntourists and the communities tend to have little to no training, a situation that frequently results in the development of inaccurate understandings of each other.

Social distance could represent an important concept when trying to understand the intentions of voluntourists and voluntourism agencies. If we can understand the stereotypes and thoughts of the volunteers and the communities, better practices could be developed in response to the true needs of both groups. If there are no changes in the social distance during these voluntourism experiences, then we have to question the practice on whether they are working for development or just perpetuating the gap between the developed and the developing world.

The recommendation: In theory, the practice of volunteering abroad links the lives of both the tourists and the inhabitants of the program area. In this sense, voluntourism programs should aim towards expanding research on how to reduce social distance between the voluntourists and the communities they attend.

3.2 How voluntourism has been marketed: The CV booster.

In line with some of the ideas of social distance, some warnings about voluntourism are based on the role of ego and the pressure to add experience to a person's CV. In this sense, McGloin and Georgeou (2015) studied several faces behind the rhetoric of the companies that sell voluntourism to higher education students. One of the arguments that these agencies tend to add to their marketing is the idea that it will be a positive addition to the CV in terms of 'experience'. This has somehow become part of a general understanding around voluntourism, filling a very lucrative gap in the market and generating negative responses from volunteering organisations.

In the "Volunteering in Culture" Capacity Building Conference in Rijeka, Croatia, organised by the CEV in 2018, there were many concerns about how agencies present their voluntourists. By presenting them as 'benevolent givers', these agencies are undermining the true added value to the service that these people could give to a community. This also creates a stereotyped vision of communities and the volunteers themselves, increasing social distance between them.

Indeed, it is becoming more important to diversify the experiences within the CV, but McGloin and Georgeou (2015) wonder if the ways in which voluntourism has been advertised is creating misleading ideas in order to get more clients. In the process, these misconceptions could undermine the true value of volunteering and make it another marketing success. The places in which these agencies tend to promote themselves are normally academic grounds such as universities. They target young audiences, for whom the CV boosting promise serves as an attractive marketing bait. Narratively, the idea of 'development', 'CV boost' and 'traveling' become tangled in a speech where the necessities of the communities may be left unattended or completely forgotten at the expense of attractive marketing proposals.

The recommendation: Volunteering is an activity that provides and strengthens multiple skills that might look good on a CV. However, it is important to remember that this is not the goal of volunteering. There are many reasons why people could volunteer apart from the personal gains in terms of labour prospects. In this sense, instead of treating the CV aspect of voluntourism as a main reward, it should be mentioned as a complementary element to the services provided to meet the needs of communities.

4. Legal-Ethical approaches to voluntourism: a critique

4.1 Ego feeding and post-colonialism: The ‘white saviour complex’

Among the critiques against voluntourism, ego feeding and post-colonialism have received strong support in recent years. Regarding the ego, there has been an increase in stories from ex-voluntourists realising that their true intentions when going volunteering abroad were to boost their egos and not to help the communities. Ultimately, they don't know if they helped or if they were exploiting the developing community to improve their own feelings. This was the case with Leila Chambers (2012), whose trip to Kenya (that she used to refer to as ‘Africa’) to work with orphans turned out to be more helpful for her ego than for the actual children, she ended up wondering if she had actually done anything for these children, who challenge very traumatising lives. The same happened to Dorinda Elliott (2013), whose trip to Haiti to build houses made her wonder if her help was truly needed in exchange for a place to have her vacation. These cases are becoming increasingly common in opinion forums across the internet, raising questions on whether or not voluntourism is becoming an amusement to boost the egos of people who live in developed areas.

In relation to the second point, many detractors of voluntourism argue that it is just a perpetuation of post-colonialism in developing areas, mostly ex-colonies. This is the result of the introduction of voluntourists from developed countries into the lives of communities in the Global South. The way in which they are perceived and presented could contribute to the idea that these communities can only survive with the help of a person from a ‘rich country’. This can be materially perceived with the huge impact of voluntourists or associated organisations in the communities that they try to ‘help’. In many cases, the introduced activities may generate a deviation of the funding in local initiatives, where volunteers can be paid more than the locals for the same job. Also, there are some fears that voluntourism is making communities more dependent on the gifts and aid brought by voluntourism and no knowledge or true development is acquired. In general, post-colonial studies insist that voluntourism supporters must constantly challenge the connections with colonialism and make it truly sustainable in order to have a transformative status. (Pastran, 2014).

These ideas are tied to the concept of the “white saviour”, which has been explored especially through media. Bex and Craps (2016) describe it as a form of self-validation of privilege through an emotionally impacting experience, usually related to problems of the Global South. They also call it the ‘white savior industrial complex’ in relation to corporative and charity actions of self-help. As a result, these practices perpetuate the idea that “Africans live outside of civilization until white saviors rescue them” (Bex and

Craps, 2016, p.48). As mentioned, this complex has been explored mainly in the media, where actors and other mainstream figures present themselves as the ‘saviours’ of poor communities, often in Africa.

When analysing the three elements, the result is that voluntourism may have become a tool for agencies to make money by profiting from the egos of people and perpetuating the post-colonial dependency system. The result is a cycle of exploitation that generates profit for companies at the expense of the communities. These notions are tied to a general believe that has been spread by the mainstream media in which the ‘poor’ people from the Global South need the ‘saviours’ of the north. Indeed, this might not be a conscious decision by the person who engages in voluntourism, but the social construction under which they are raised could be exploited by agencies and other fundraising institutions. As a final result, these institutions exploit the communities and trick voluntourists into believing they are going to ‘save’ them. These tourists then contribute to unsustainable models of volunteering abroad, perpetuate the stereotypes and damage the communities they get in contact with.

The recommendation:

- It is important to question whether or not the intentions to go volunteering abroad are for the benefit of others or for our own egos. Exploitation must be completely eliminated from the voluntourism practice.
- When looking into agencies and projects, it is important to check the conditions and the presentation. If the institution is presenting a stereotyped side of the community without prospects of development, don't support it. In order to be sustainable, a project must generate a well-prepared base of contributors and volunteers that nurture the program on a long-term basis.
- Volunteering is not about who ‘saves’ whom. There must be a shift in the marketing of the conditions of the communities and those who decide to engage in volunteering.

4.2 The problem with multiple national legal frames

In general, every country has sovereignty to decide on certain laws that are not necessarily enforced in other countries or established in international treaties and covenants. These areas may include some health or privacy regulations, as well as penalties and laws that must be respected. The essence of voluntourism relies mostly on multinational interactions. In this sense, voluntourism promotes the contact between different sovereignties that surpass the classic tourism laws. This has generated many questions on whether or not some of the practices promoted by voluntourism would be allowed or ethical if the voluntourists were located in their home countries. Additionally, the lack of facilities in some developed countries might generate complications in relation to the services offered by voluntourists.

One common volunteering abroad experience is related to health services or practices. In numerous occasions, volunteers in medical fields have been brought to developing areas to train, attend emergencies or epidemic bursts. Smith (2015) discusses the effects of voluntourism in health and analyses how the intervention of unskilled volunteers would be illegal in their countries of origin, mainly because of hazards related to the lack of experience. In addition, Smith (2015) discusses how the introduction of medical volunteering to developing communities can damage the already existing gap between tourists and locals. The international portray of the inhabitants as 'defenceless' or 'incapable' is sometimes essential to any governmental or non-governmental campaign. This creates a feeling of resentment that the volunteers sometimes become unaware of due to the isolation of their installations, which count with materials that some national institutions would not be able to afford or match.

McCall and Iltis (2014) address this issue with a more ethical perspective. Initially, they agree that language is a barrier towards true respectful interactions, which already represents a problem. Additionally, medical volunteering might affect local development, since people will stop attending local institutions in the wait for the next free care, which could not entirely help them. Most of these volunteers come for a short period of time in the believe that their quick presence "fixed something" (McCall and Iltis, 2014, p.289) and only focus on doing 'groundwork' that could delay the supply of basic aid to the actual population in need. As a final result, while many believe that medical volunteering might help the communities short-term, it seems like it is becoming an unsustainable practice where other actions could fulfil these needs.

While the medical side of voluntourism has drawn as lot of attention in the last decades, the same principle could apply to any other kind of voluntourism. In the developed world, there are normally many permissions and qualifications needed in order to proceed to participate in a career-related activity. Environmentally, educationally, medically, etc. unskilled work represents a risk both for who practices it and who receives it. The consequences of ignoring these basic preparations and risk mitigation could undermine the true development work that is being done or could be done with the afflicted community or environment.

The Recommendation: Evaluate the skills and the permissions required for the advertised voluntourism experience. If there is no information, it is better to check the national laws regarding the issue. If it is banned in the country where a voluntourist comes from or seems ethically conflictive, it should not be promoted. Although the agencies should follow this advice as well. Both issuing and receiving countries must endorse more specific laws regarding the conditions around the qualifications for certain kinds of voluntourism. This would ensure not only the quality but the sustainability of the projects.

4.3 Paying for voluntourism and corruption

There is a common assumption that the nature of agencies related to voluntourism act like charities, especially when related to community development. Albeit there are some organisations and institutions that can provide non-paid services, many of the activities offered by agencies require big payments and donations from the volunteers. This is a point where there is a lot of controversy due to the nature of voluntourism and the dilemma of paying for it. Nevertheless, this is an important topic when speaking about voluntourism. Along with the increase of the agencies and the payments, the allegations of corruption have increased as well. In many cases, there are no ways in which the voluntourists can see the true investment of the money they paid.

In 2017, Lumos produced a publication about Haitian orphanages and the conditions around them. They found that many business people had opened orphanages in bad conditions to attract more pity and more money from the volunteers, to ultimately keep most of the profit for themselves. Other orphanages just profit from the free labour and the big donations they receive both from foreign and national volunteers. In order to do this, many children are trafficked and illegally adopted. Lumos (2017) was concerned about the psychological effects that both the environments and the volunteers have on these children. The constant afflux of people and mistreat generate long-term traumas on the children. In general, it would seem like the true benefit of voluntourism is for the agencies that exploit the misery of their communities in need rather than help them in a sustainable way. This is done at the expense of the good will of many of the volunteers that assume they are there to help.

The recommendation: It is important to know where the money spent for a volunteering experience is going. Voluntourists have to challenge whether or not the presence of the project has indeed improved the conditions. If the situation is similar to what it has been like for years, this project might be profiting from misery. Projects that involve children or other vulnerable people must be very carefully evaluated and the general recommendation would be not to undertake these kinds of short term volunteering opportunities in any institutional setting involving children or other vulnerable groups.



5. Social media and voluntourism

In the era of social media, the way in which people portray themselves has started to raise questions and restrictions on what to and what not to show. In many countries, there are instructions and regulations on privacy, especially in regards to children and health-related spaces. However, as a continuation of the

‘white saviour’ complex, there have been situations in which voluntourists upload pictures and content that leave questions on their true intentions or if the practice itself is exploitation.

This particular issue has been addressed mainly by opinion forums and bloggers on the internet. Parodies and satire have gained momentum to criticise the behaviour of certain voluntourists on their ‘chase for likes on social media’. The image shows an extract of Radi-aid’s video where a woman takes a ‘selfie’ with an ill child in a developing country. In the video, they show what to do (in a sarcastic way) if voluntourists want more likes and reactions on social media. This is a representation of real pictures that some voluntourists post online. Along with the video, Radi-aid also uploaded a check-list of the things to do before posting in social media during the volunteering experience, if ever done.

On the picture posting app Instagram, two women founded @barbiesavior, an account that uses the famous doll to make a satirical depiction of a cliché white saviour. On their website, they explain that Barbie saviour was created when the creators got tired of the “acclaim of the White Savior on social media”. In a picture posted the 1st of January 2017, the caption reads:
2016. What a year! It was my first year taking up residency in the country of Africa. Some may say I have done good, but there is still so much to do and so many to save! I am excited to share my New Years resolution with you all. By the end of 2017 I will love on 153 million orphans. It's a lofty goal, but I believe I am up for the challenge.



These are not the only examples of criticism of voluntourism related to social media, there are other blogs and websites dedicated to similar exposure of people who post these pictures. Humanitarians of Tinder expose posts by people who have used pictures during voluntourism in developing countries to ‘boost’ their dating profiles. They seldom blur the identities of these evident minors.

This issue could be linked both to the concepts of the ‘white saviour’ and ‘social distance’, as these representations of developing countries contribute to a construction of stereotypes and not a true understanding of the culture and the identities of the people in the posts. For instance, pictures with unknown underage children are not allowed in many countries without proper authorisations and cautions. The same happens with people in hospitals, orphanages, and other institutions in the health and care sector. Going back to the legal flaws topic, these are not pictures a person would be allowed to post

without authorisation in many of the home countries of voluntourists. Social media is a true expression of how people perceive the world, without proper education and awareness, these people and projects end up being more a 'prop' than something sustainable and valuable.

The recommendation: Evaluate the message that is conveyed in a picture before taking it or posting it. Always ask for authorisation for the picture and offer copies of it. Know the person, their names and the stories. Social media is a tool that can be used to raise awareness of important topics of the world, if a person wants to use it for personal reasons, they have to avoid using the situations of other people to boost their own.

6. Conclusions

The CEV is highly concerned with the protection of the rights of the communities that receive volunteers and the importance of achieving sustainable development through volunteering. It is important to note that there are some actions that should be completely avoided when setting a voluntourist program or when going volunteering abroad.

As seen in the previous chapters, the last decades have proved to be the perfect grounding for voluntourism to become a marketing success. Initially, organisations have been more engaged towards promoting humanitarian work, which has been visually more accessible through the use of internet and other modern mass media tools. This opened a gap in the market where agencies started offering alternative humanitarian experiences in the ways described within this paper. The marketisation of volunteering has started to affect the true achievements of sustainable humanitarian work through the distortion of the goals and the means. When dealing with people, there should be little to no contact with populations susceptible to long-term trauma or further trauma unless having the skills or the correct long-term management. This is the case with children (especially ill or orphaned) and people in physical or mental health institutions or war conditions. CEV strongly recommends against engaging or creating programs that do not properly assess the real needs of these groups. If done, they must have long-term engagement and skilled personnel that could enable these populations to truly improve their conditions and further train other generations.

In the same way, any programmes related to volunteering abroad should enable the communities and the volunteers to learn from each other and reduce social distance. This could be done by educating and raising awareness for both parties on the cultures and sustainable ways of continuing the projects from outside and within the geographical area of the activities. There must not be a promotion of dependency from the developing community but instead an empowering experience for the sustainability and

empowerment of all the participants. In this sense, both parties need to know, if paid, where the money goes and how fair the distribution is. If done well, voluntourism can be used as a tool to produce knowledge on the reduction of social distance and corruption.

Agencies are more likely to try to contact young students or graduates in universities. As seen in previous chapters, part of the rhetoric of some agencies regarding voluntourism relies on the promise of good experience for the CV and the idea of the saviour who visits the developing world. This is an idea that must change in order to reshape the way in which volunteering abroad is perceived and performed. Social media plays an important role in shaping the ideas around voluntourism. Pictures and other forms of exposure should be avoided. If done, they must have authorisation and a purpose for the future development of the program or awareness raising. If the action is banned in the country of origin, people volunteering abroad should try to abstain from these doings in the countries they visit.

Voluntourism as an industry has drawn a lot of attention for diverse reasons, which is why it should be better addressed and directed towards development. Indeed, not every voluntourist engages in this activity to harm communities, but more awareness and preparations need to be done in order to improve the quality of the programs. Voluntourism is a business that will not lose popularity any time soon and will attract more controversial ideas and practices. Because of this, the CEV encourages governmental, non-governmental and academic institutions to put their efforts towards better regulations for the safety and effectiveness of voluntourism for the benefit of future generations.

6.1 CARE: Caring as an initiative

CEV has presented several aspects in a critical analysis to voluntourism. To summarise the recommendations, we developed a simplified way of thinking to improve the conditions around voluntourism: *CARE*. Caring is an important element of volunteering. By changing the perceptions around the goals and means of volunteering abroad, we could lead voluntourism towards a more comprehensive way of achieving sustainable development. *CARE* is explained in the following sections:

C is for challenge:

- Volontourist:
 - o The legal aspects. Is the paid money being used for good? Ask how it is invested and if communities are benefitting from it.
 - o Yourself. Question the true intentions behind voluntourism, is it for ego? Is it to be a saviour?
 - o The agencies and projects. Is this agency making the communities dependent? Is the project sustainable?
- Agency:

- The stereotypes. Work towards reducing the stereotypes between communities and voluntourists.
- The lack of information. It is important to be transparent about the operations and activities of the projects so they can be sustainable.

A is for Adapt:

- Learn how to adapt the privileges behind voluntourism and the lives of the communities that this activity interacts with.
- Different cultures don't mean different worlds. Adapt to the differences and use voluntourism as a tool to learn and make a sustainable change of the social perceptions and social distance.

R is for Research:

- Use voluntourism to research new tools to decrease social distance. Research is an important part in the process of achieving development.
- As a continuation to 'Challenge', research serves as a source to be able to question many aspects around projects or voluntourism itself.

E is for Engage:

- Use knowledge to empower the communities and achieve sustainable development.
- Become an advocate of the projects before and after participating, making it long-term is part of sustainability.
- Let communities interact with new aspects of the culture of voluntourists and vice-versa. Ask for authorisation when taking or posting pictures and let them be a true part of the advocacy process.

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