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Dark Tourism

Dark Tourism – Exploring the experiences of voluntourists in disaster zones

Abstract

Tourism is one of the oldest traditions the people have taken part in and is relied on by governments as a means of job creation and to increase GDP. While traditional tourism has occurred for a long time there is a new alternative form which is dark tourism. Dark tourism occurs when tourists visit the site where a dark part of history occurred with disaster tourism becoming a subset of this. This thesis aims to explore and draw from the experiences of those who have volunteered in the aftermath of a disaster-stricken destination.

This paper intends to explore four research questions? (1) Uncover the role of religious effects on voluntourists, (2) Explore the effects volunteering had on character building, 3) Explore the idea of privilege and whether the participants felt this was a privileged experience and (4) explore the effect of self-serving attitudes within voluntourism such as taking part as a means to CV building and the effects it has on their career.

The subject of this thesis is to understand the effects volunteering at disaster sites had on tourists and will take sociodemographic into account. The gap in literature from current literature is how sociodemographic such as religion, ethnicity and gender though empirically evidenced is rarely qualitatively explored with those that are focusing on gap year students this allows for analysis to be conducted on those who have taken a career break and their experiences.

The literature review has focused exclusively on academic papers written about dark tourism, disaster tourism, post disaster resilience, tourism preparedness in the case of disaster and finally voluntourism. The researcher conducted online interviews with eight participants who have volunteered at disaster sites.

The results indicate that there is a move toward tourism operators and away from religious organisations, with the experience itself having a profound effect on character building specifically toward their feelings of resilience, the results also showed that the tourists were self-aware of their privileged lives and finally they found that it had a positive effect on their careers. Further research is needed with a wider scope, more participants, and a focus group.

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Introduction

When nature strikes it can cause more damage both economically and to the population than even the worst of human errors (Arceneaux & Stein. 2006) with governments expected to commit to recovery missions along with the long-term recovery of the stricken area (Chamlee-Wright & Storr. 2010). How well cities are prepared in the case of an imminent disaster plays an important part in the post recovery period (Daly, *et al.* 2017). The increasing number of private firms involved in the post and pre recovery process have exhausted funding and in turn will directly impact the lives of locals in regard to resources (Gotham. 2012). Tourism in disaster zones often leads to formatting plans for risk assessments and for tour operators outline the dangers perceived often at the expense of the tourist's anxiety (Kroepsch, *et al* 2018). This has led to specified disaster frameworks catered to specific risks (Hystad & Keller. 2008).

There is a growing need for aid around the world and due to increasing awareness of sociocultural pressure some destinations are under more travellers are willing to engage in volunteering (Han, *et al* 2020). This has led to an increase in tourists who travel in the immediate aftermath of a disaster as part of a volunteering group these are often known as "voluntourists" (Dykhuis. 2010). When a disaster occurs, it evokes a wanting to help from those who are unaffected by it (McMorran. 2017). The growth of volunteer tourism can be attributed to Non-Profit organisations (Meng, *et al* 2020) which used it as an act of fundraising with it being a creative means to target those who wanted a unique holiday experience (Lyons & Wearing. 2012). These tourists often tend to be split into two different groups: those who are volunteer orientated where they will spend their entire time focused on the volunteer work and those who take part as a means to vacation (Brown, 2005). International volunteering has become an instrumental in integrating people from the North and the South and allows for cross cultural experiences (Yea, *et al* 2018). These cross-cultural experiences can be beneficial but can also create issues specifically with selfie taking where western people may choose to do so for personal reasons (Hodalska. 2017) it has led to the "Barbie saviour" complex (Sin & He. 2019). These are leading the belief that this is done as a form of ritual where white people specifically believe it is up to them to help the world (Bandyopadhyay & Patil 2017).

Voluntourism is becoming more profit orientated (Anderson, *et al* 2013) with some tourists being allocated jobs in relief efforts which they are unqualified for (McLennan. 2014). There are many studies that support this theory of using volunteer work as a career choice (Rothwell & Charleston. 2013) but it has been argued that it is done in the hopes of a transformative

spiritual experience (Nelán, *et al* 2020). These trends are intriguing and this research hopes to understand the experiences of those involved with previous papers containing empirical evidence that women are more likely to participate in voluntourism (Bandyopadhyay & Patil 2017) along with it being a gap year experience (Simpson, 2004) there is limited research done on the experiences of males in their 20s who engage in voluntourism. The theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches in previous studies often turns its focus towards empirical data but interviewing participants we can learn more about what it is like to personally volunteer at disaster sites. The findings will be able to give a better insight to those who are tempted to volunteer at disaster sites and what they can expect to experience and learn from this.

The researcher argues that the concept of disaster tourism can have both positives and negatives, drawing attention to qualitative and empirical data within the literature review which shows that it may be “classist” activity, drawing attention to the cultural differences and how voluntourism can be perceived negatively. Firstly, the phenomenon of dark tourism will be discussed and how disaster tourism has become a subset of this. Secondly disaster tourism will be analysed and how tourist operators are relying on emotional appeal to target consumers followed by post disaster community rebuilding alongside examples of disaster sites which were successfully turned into tourist attractions. The need for tourism operators and governments to inform tourist of safety precautions whilst travelling and how it can be important to settle tourists into the recovery of disaster-stricken destinations will be discussed. This leads to the third part which will entail the subsection of disaster tourism which is voluntourism. Drawing on experiences of the participants through online interviews, the paper illustrates the ways in which those who have volunteered have felt a sense of community whilst travelling and how visiting a disaster hit destination transformed them spiritually.

The research will take demographic of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and employment status into consideration as they have rarely been applied to studies done on voluntourists who have been to disaster sites with focuses often being on females and gap year students. The influence of these demographics specifically age (under 30), employment (those who have taken career breaks) and gender (participant majority is male) on volunteer travellers’ experiences needs to be addressed.

The study uses a qualitative approach that looks into the experiences of those tourists who have volunteered at disaster sites by considering certain demographics which are often overlooked

with the interviews being conducted online. The current research is intended to (1) Uncover the role of religious effects on voluntourists, (i) The preference towards specific organisations, (ii) Relationships built between the participants and those within the disaster stricken community, (iii) The effects social media had on their experience (2) Explore the effects volunteering had on character building (i) Whether it improved their feelings of resilience (ii) effect it had on their spirituality (iii) The effects it had on their knowledge of politics and society (3) Explore the idea of privilege and whether the participants felt this was a privileged experience, (i) Where the tourists self-aware of their privilege, (ii) did they feel race or ethnicity was an issue (iii) The allocating of resources and (4) explore the effect of self-serving attitudes within voluntourism such as taking part as a means to CV building and the effects it has on their career (i) how it benefitted them, (ii) how they helped themselves whilst helping others, (iii) How they feel that tourism could affect disaster zones in the future.

This study aims to help both Non-profit and For-profit volunteer organisations in targeting a wider audience as they can cater their marketing strategies as a means to possibly create a niche within a niche as the market itself is particular it can become a profitable industry which could potentially benefit all those involved. The findings within the methodological section serve to contribute to existing literature by supporting or disproving current assumptions and findings. The structure to follow will include the literature review, methodology and results. This will be followed by the discussion, implications, and limitations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Dark Tourism

Humans have always been obsessed with the macabre in doing so they seek new ways to satisfy this obsession with death and have sought ways to depict this (Khapaeva, p.16. 2020), this is where dark tourism has become popularised with this form of travel being described as travelling with the purpose of visiting locations associated with death, disaster, and suffering (Stone, 2006). Traveling to locations where a dark event has occurred is nothing new and has been practiced since the 11th century (Dale, & Robinson, 2011, p. 95–957). The fascination with dark tourism began almost with the aftermath of World War 1 when monuments and graveyards were erected to commemorate the dead and tourists were shown around sites where battles had occurred (Lennon & Foley, 2010, p.8). Tourists will often create their own experiences and feelings regarding these locations (Azevedo, p.54-67. 2018). The aim of these sights is to create differing levels of emotional feelings amongst tourists to allow them to understand what others are going through (Laing, & Frost. 2019).

Tours relating to dark touristic sights should be focused on the interpretation of the tourist, their views, and their knowledge on the history of the sight (Magee, & Gilmore. 2015). To enhance the tourists experience it is suggested tour guides adhere to them in conversational practices with this they are able to identify key feelings (Zinelabidine, *et al* 2018) with the use of intense imagery often used to not only instigate learning but witnessing horrors through photographs laid out at the scenes where they occurred educates those on the past (Lennon. 2017).

Destinations will often market the fascination with dark events and death with countries adapting and building attractions surrounding these events which shows how resilient the tourism industry is (Korstanje, & Clayton. 2012) with these attractions used to educate visitors on the event itself (Lennon, 2007). The image of destinations can evolve over time and can change for a number of reasons (Kesić, & Pavlić. 2011). While it is often disputed whether sites of disaster should even be considered dark tourism with it not being mentioned in Stone's book on dark tourism (Stone. 2006) other researchers believe that it is an offset of dark tourism and tourists who visit these sites should be considered dark tourists (Tucker, *et al* 2017). This study supports Tucker's view that dark tourism is not limited to specific locations but rather the site of death itself (Bongkosh Ngamsom, 2008).

Natural disaster on the other hand occur not due to human error but by a variety of different natural occurrences Strömberg, D. (2007) and they have been increasing due to climate change steadily over time due to climate change (Rosselló, *et al* 2020).

2.2 Tourist destinations and disaster tourism

Popular tourist destinations are often hit by disaster with destinations such as Chile which is known for high seismic activity with them suffering some of the highest magnitude earthquakes in world history (Reyes, *et al* 2013) which can often damage visitor's perception of the destination (Huan, *et al* 2004). These destinations are often beside potential natural hazards such as the sea or on cliffs (Tsai & Chen. 2011). While dark tourism often focuses on historical events disaster tourism involves travel to disaster-stricken destinations in the present or immediate aftermath (Kelman & Dodds 2009). Disaster tourism which is derived from this can attract visitors who wish to see the event unfold such as crowds flocking to see Lockerbie to witness the crash site of the Pan Am in the immediate aftermath (Stone. 2006).

Governments have always relied on tourism with all countries having specific sights in which they are known for which are known as unique sights and then there are common sights which are found throughout the world (Nowacki & Niezgoda. 2019). Tourism is a resilient industry and adapts well to change. Resilience though difficult to define in focuses on how those who have experienced hardships can overcome them (McCleary, & Figley. 2017) with this its resilience is strongly associated with sustainability along with the ability to adapt (Cochrane. 2010). The internet has allowed for a higher influx of tourists to these sights as it has allowed tour companies to be able to target tourist who are travelling for a variety of different reasons (Hoonsawat. 2016). This study found that there is a lack of creativity in the tourism industry with the current ongoing epidemic COVID19 there is a chance to change the tourism industry (Gretzel. 2020).

Interactive technology can be used to recreate events and allow tourists to see and experience what occurred which evokes a more emotional response than simply witnessing the location (Sterchele, 2020). The use of virtual tours is done by means of using a GoPro which allows for 360 degree turn points which will then allow the user to feel as if they are present due to website builders and videographers then editing these to enhance the experience (Wu, & Lee. 2018). Virtual reality often evokes a larger empathic response with a higher feeling of being present relating to that (Schutte & Stilinović. 2017). Emotions such as empathy play a huge part in

consumer behaviour and influence the choices they make (Gregory-Smith, *et al.* 2013). Digital media is often used as a means to raise awareness and gain attention to ongoing problems (Jane. 2017) but it has been shown in some studies that interest in disasters is lost over time (Fukui & Ohe. 2019). Learning about history can be difficult and sometimes unwanted but it is one of the most important factors in the implementation of social policy change and future government decisions (Charania. 2019).

2.2.1 Post disaster resilience and commemorating disaster sites

Memorials are erected as a means to remember both the event and the victims of it with consumers enthralled at the prospect of “experiencing history” (Doss. 2016). They are often used especially on the date of the event as a means to raise awareness of key issues and policy measures and instil a need for change (Kroepsch, *et al* 2018). This is a key strategy to bringing the destination back to its original state post disaster (Mair, *et al.* 2016) with disaster sites becoming a huge tourist attraction and cities ravaged by these events have sought out tourists as a way to rebuild in the aftermath (Gotham. 2017). This has become an attractive way to market the disaster and to bring in international tourists some of whom may revisit the location as a means to remember a loved one who perished and with a site to visit they will likely come more than once (Kelman, *et al* 2008).

Commemorating disasters often shows the resilience of those who have suffered through the tragedy (Eadie. 2019). This is supported by this study which found that found that commemorating events can bring communities together especially in the aftermath as these can be used to celebrate life (Ntontis, *et al* 2020). Spontaneous memorials which appear immediately after an event and often includes flowers at the site itself often evoke a positive reaction on those who have been affected (Collins, *et al* 2020). Community resilience in a post disaster setting is effective in combatting psychological matters arising from the event such as PTSD and depression (Makwana. 2019). It has been found that this “coming together” of communities allows for a sharing of responsibility they then become a collective this further gives hope in the case of future events (Reid, *et al* 2020). Social media sites have been instrumental in the success of building resilience as the safety notification such as the one found on Facebook allows members to check in to allow loved ones to know of their situation which brings attention to the matter and therefore support (Möller, *et al* 2018). Resilience will be key to

overcoming disaster in the future due to climate change and the disasters which it is bound to bring (García. 2019).

In the case of L'Aquila, Italy they viewed disaster as an opportunity to not only increase economic growth but allow for tourists visiting the site to fund the rebuilding of the bridge, as a city with limited resources and a heavy reliance on local resources this is the main instigator in attempting to attract foreign investment through tours relating to the site (Wright, & Sharpley. 2018). Revival of the tourism industry in Sichuan following the earthquake was instrumental in improving the GDP and infrastructure. Since the earthquake tourism has flourished allowing for increased economic growth (Huang, et al. 2020). New Zealand also successfully benefited from disaster when they built "Quake City" following the Christchurch Earthquake were supported immensely with-it educating visitors on the future recovery process and the focus being on the economic recovery and resilience in the face of disaster (Tucker, et al. 2017). Remembering past disasters though is important as it allows for better preparations in the future (Rice & Jahn. 2020).

2.2.2 Disaster zones and preparedness

Disasters themselves are always different so it is important for disaster management framework to be put in place specific to each location (Hystad & Keller. 2008). Tourists are often unaware of when a disaster is about to occur due to them being in different surroundings, they may be unaware of the natural dangers which locals may be prepared for (Park & Reisinger 2010). In some instances, museums have attempted to inform tourists of risks and preparedness through video games with the player shown what to do in the case of emergency (Gampell, *et al* 2020). Though informing tourists of potential risks can be costly, and, in some circumstances, smaller companies may not be able to afford to train and maintain skilled workforce who are adapt at risk preparation (Cioccio & Michael. 2007). It has been researched that tourism businesses feel that they are not being engaged in relation to disaster preparedness and management (Granville, *et al* 2016) with this study finding that tourism companies often not welcoming information portraying locations as dangerous (Rittichainuwat, 2013). Tourism operators in high risk areas should be implemented in the direct response recovery as this would keep costs low and save the need for developing their own strategies (Becken & Hughey. 2013).

Disasters are difficult to predict whilst they are rare, they will likely occur in the future, the likelihood of predicting disasters is enhanced by reviewing history of events within the country

it allows for certain assessments to be made (Faulkner, 2001). Disaster prone countries must have an evacuation framework in place if and when one occurs, this can often lead to anxiety and worry but it is an important safety precaution (Emori, *et al* 2015). The feeling of fear, emotions and fascination with natural events can be a huge driving force for tourists wishing to visit the sights of natural disasters (Rosselló, *et al* 2020). Tourists themselves though specifically younger ones see themselves as risk takers and adventurers and are considered resilient in that fear does not affect constrain them (Hajibaba, *et al* 2015). This makes volunteer tourism an attractive prospect with these events they can increase the number of visitors with this increase it will help change the tourist perspective of the destination (Pompurová, *et al* 2018). To alleviate any fears these tourists may have they should be informed of the current situation the destination is in such as those of the environment (Pahrudin, *et al* 2020). Disasters which otherwise would have hampered tourists visiting have shown how resilient they are and also how willing they are to visit a sight where a disaster occurred in the immediate aftermath once they are informed of greater procedures and have a relationship built with the local population (Fountain, & Cradock-Henry, 2020). Empathy plays an important part in recovery as residents with higher levels of empathy are more likely to allow tourists who have been displaced access to their homes (Hajibaba, *et al* 2017). This is shown where destinations with a sense of community recover faster than other destinations where there may be sense of distrust amongst locals of those outside the community (Valdivieso & Andersson, 2017). This is supported this study which found that volunteers create a larger community spirit in the aftermath of a disaster and allow the community to live through the post recovery stage in a celebratory manner (Nelán, *et al* 2020). Post disaster tourists should be implemented into the recovery framework through volunteering especially those with trades which will allow rebuilding to happen at a faster rate (Wearing, *et al* 2020). These studies show that preparing tourists for disaster should be a focal point before during and after and instructions should be clear and concise in regard to personal safety and for that of the locals.

2.3 Voluntourism

Volunteer tourism can provide a positive experience for both locals and the tourist as they seek an enlightening experience (Wearing, 2001). Travel itself can have a detrimental effect on the person's life with it having the ability to transform their reality (Lean, 2012). It has been found that those who seek meaningful experiences are more willing and able to help out and are able to meet the demands of what type of volunteer work is needed (Müller & Scheffer, 2019), it

was found that volunteer tourists are often likely to engage with donations in the future (Thompson & Taheri, 2020). Though these tours provide good intentions they often fail to examine the potential dangers of promoting these where tourists could engage with them blindly without talking about the issues at hand and how they came to be which affects the need for critical change and transformation as a whole (Toomey, 2017). The assimilation with the liberal agenda specifically amongst gap year students applying was put forth (Lyons, *et al* 2012). Voluntourism can often be deemed as classist and epitomises modern liberalism where privileged people are targeted with idea of helping those in need but doing so as a self-serving adventure (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). While it has been considered a form of “neo colonialism” with this paper concluding that voluntourism must be aware of the developmental needs of the society they are in with a broader focus toward the blatant inequalities (Conran, 2011). This supports this as it found that it serves as a means to build emotional character within young people with emotions such as compassion allowing them to understand the inequalities within the world and allow for political change (Germann Molz, 2017)

2.3.1 Voluntourism and privilege

These visitations offer incur issues as they epitomise “Western privilege” which has been often researched in relation to this with gap year voluntourism used to encourage students to experience the Third world as a means to create change (Simpson, 2004). Gap year students contain a majority female demographic with those who blog about their experiences being mostly female students (Snee, 2014). This supports the findings put forth in this study that women are more likely than men to volunteer and those that do are in majority in the age demographic of 35 – 44 (Brown, 2005). This has found that the majority of students who take a year out and choose to engage in international volunteering tend to do so through a Christian organisation, which suggests that the majority of voluntourists are Christian (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011). This theory is supported by this study which found voluntourism is especially attractive to those from the West with it showing the majority demographic of those taking part in volunteer tourism being identified as white Christian women (Bandyopadhyay & Patil 2017). There are assumptions voluntourism may be covertly racist (Henry, 2019), statistics found in this study show that while race may well play a part so does employment status with 14 % of the study being self-employed which is further evidence that volunteering is only accessible by those who can afford it (Lee & Won, 2017). These studies give evidence that only those who are privileged can visit places which are underprivileged but, in many cases,, they may be

unaware of this fact especially regarding the fact that Christians appear to be the majority of those who take part.

4.3.2 Helping themselves while helping others

The idea that voluntourism is self-serving is supported by this study which found evidence that some volunteers were seeking memorable experiences and chose this as a means to achieve it (Han, *et al.* 2020). Though there is no question that volunteers do help in some instances in regards to disaster sites they can be seen to become a nuisance and even slow down the process due to excessive managing and monitoring of the volunteer's safety due to the training involved in the risk preparedness (McMorran. 2017). This found that volunteers are often only around for a short period as a lifestyle choice so volunteer organisations may not receive a good return on investment (Holmes. 2014). Nepal experienced a huge number of volunteers following the earthquake which occurred there this allowed the government to use the disaster with organised tours and volunteering exhibitions which was used to generate revenue with targeted advertising online relating to the needs for volunteers (Easton, & Wise. 2015). The country began to integrate a system where tourists come to teach English to its citizens as a second language for a period of time which will entice more tourists to come if they know there isn't a language barrier (Bernstein, & Woosnam. 2019). There are numerous occasions where voluntourism was exploited by volunteering groups as a means to make a profit, this has raised the question as to whether money raised goes toward the communities or toward a profit orientated organisation (Anderson, *et al* 2013). It was found in certain circumstances that those seeking to help are often unprepared specifically in the case of Haiti where these voluntourists are becoming increasingly relied on to "fill gaps" in the Medicare system (McLennan. 2014). This has become the reasoning for gap year students to apply as it allows them to work in an industry without the need for qualifications as which will benefit them in the future (Simpson. 2005). These papers contain evidence that voluntourism may be beneficial only for those who are visiting and the organisations themselves.

Voluntourism as a career builder

Those who wish to volunteer abroad for reasons relating to "CV building" are often left disappointed too due to the potential intensity of the volunteer work but it is deemed that even minimal effort volunteering is better than none (Rothwell & Charleston. 2013). This agrees

with the idea that some tourists are more vacation minded so in turn may afford less effort (Brown. 2005), whilst according to Tomazos, (2010) “volunteer tourism, as neither solely volunteering, nor tourism, stands as a fusion of the two”. The self-serving nature is further supported by the findings in this study where it has been found that tourists often overlook the potential damage they could further do especially in regard to the environment (Demir& Saribas. 2015). They may have different reasons behind choosing to take part in this with some stating a transformative experience of witnessing the plight of others as a means of change (Magrizos, *et al.* 2020). It was found that volunteering is a transformative experience which has the ability to create change (Dass-Brailsford, *et al* 2011). This is further supported by this study which found that these sites are evolving into “transformative experiences” where the tourist is encouraged to learn in their own way so that they can educate others and their own society as a means toward societal change (Magee & Gilmore. 2015). Although in some instances volunteering did not change the tourists view on the cultures and the people themselves (Raymond & Hall. 2008), this study disagreed with that assumption as it found that the majority participants thought volunteering abroad had improved their spiritual wellbeing (Tukamushaba, *et al* 2017). These studies show conflicting experiences of volunteers in regard to transformative experiences in general.

Cultural differences

Volunteers often attempt to empathise what residents of a disaster-stricken area went through it is impossible to do so as the residents not only lived through the disaster the life they knew before will be forever changed (Pezzullo. 2009). In some instance’s tourists may “appropriate” what the locals have gone through as a means to receive an empathetic response (Tucker. 2016). Tourists who volunteer often do so to understand other cultures with them using this as a means to present themselves as all-knowing in regard to the world (Sin. 2009). This could be attributed to narcissistic behaviour as often times tourists themselves will travel to satisfy this need for attention through various means which could potentially threaten the industry (Canavan. 2017). Selfie taking and online presentation is an indicator toward narcissistic behaviour, though this can be a cultural phenomenon and depend on the persons internet usage (Sorokowski, *et al* 2015), travel selfies are often encouraged as it drives desire to visit these destinations (Lyu. 2016). This can become problematic especially at disaster sites due to the potential outrage they cause with some even taking them in the direct aftermath of the Grenfell tower (Price, 2017, p.97). The cause for selfie taking at these sites has been claimed that it allows those

taking the selfie taking to “celebrate life” or even as a means to deal with anxiety they feel when in such a place (Hodalska. 2017). This has led to the “barbie saviour” association with voluntourists where they are often criticised for posting photographs of the third world with some now becoming less inclined to post (Sin & He. 2019). It has been determined that the majority of voluntourists are aware of what is worth posting to as not to offend the online community but the potential fear of being parodied is often the driving force behind this decision (Schwarz & Richey. 2019). Social media has its usefulness in regard to voluntourism in that it allows those who participated abroad to keep in contact with people they have met there improving relationships and may encourage them to revisit in the future (McAllum & Zahra. 2017). Social media through its faults may become the most important factor toward building relationships between participants and communities as it allows them to remain in contact.

Tourists and local communities

Tourism itself can be difficult to manage with “over tourism” in some instances becoming an issue for locals (Papathanassis. 2017). Voluntourist numbers especially should be minimised due to lack of resources available to locals which is further stretched when there are a large number of tourists at a given time (Lo & Lee 2011). Nepal for instance which frequently suffers natural disasters resulting in 30% of tourists choosing to do so for volunteering reasons (Wearing *et al* 2020). This study has found that the benefits to the host communities is minimal with the cost of the trip itself exceeding the value to the host community (Banki & Schonell. 2018). While most communities who embrace volunteers recover faster (Valdivieso & Andersson. 2017), there are other communities who may have little to no interest in embracing volunteers which presents a problem, but the suggestion is that better awareness of cultures and their habits may prevent this (Guttentag. 2009). These studies provide conflicting views on relationship building between tourists and the communities they visit.

Conclusion

Within this research, this article had two main aims: First, it reviews literature that specifically addresses the definition of dark tourism and how disaster tourism became part of it, then successful implications of tourism surround certain sites and discuss the post disaster resilience which the community must exhibit if they are ever to recover (Fountain & Cradock-Henry, 2020). Disaster zones and the preparation of how tourism operators should implement them in regard to the tourist's welfare which leads on to how they should prepare tourists in general about disaster preparedness (Gampell, *et al* 2020). Second, the article discusses literature on the transformative experiences will then be discussed and the positives and negatives of voluntourism will be analysed whilst looking into the demographic of those who participate and voluntourism in general and focusing on the empirical evidence which suggests that women are more likely than men to volunteer abroad (Han, 2020).

Research Questions

The methodological section will be used to analyse the questions put forth in the introduction. The current research is intended to (1) Uncover the role of religious effects on voluntourists, (i) The preference towards specific organisations, (ii) Relationships built between the participants and those within the disaster stricken community, (iii) The effects social media had on their experience (2) Explore the effects volunteering had on character building (i) Whether it improved their feelings of resilience (ii) effect it had on their spirituality (iii) The effects it had on their knowledge of politics and society (3) Explore the idea of privilege and whether the participants felt this was a privileged experience, (i) Where the tourists self-aware of their privilege, (ii) did they feel race or ethnicity was an issue (iii) The allocating of resources and (4) explore the effect of self-serving attitudes within voluntourism such as taking part as a means to CV building and the effects it has on their career (i) how it benefitted them, (ii) how they helped themselves whilst helping others, (iii) How they feel that tourism could affect disaster zones in the future. This will be conducted through the qualitative analysis.

3. Methodology

Qualitative methodological with an interpretivist approach was undertaken as this can be seen as the best way to understand the participants emotions (Saunders, *et al*, 2016, p. 140). The phenomenologist approach was undertaken which will allow the experiences which the participants had to be better understood with their differing views and experiences (Biggam. 2011, p. 137). The personal beliefs and backgrounds of the participants was important in understanding the experiences and observations which occurred when the participants volunteered abroad.

Bracketing is an important aspect to phenomenological research; in this instance the researcher will set aside his own beliefs and feelings so that the answers will not be swayed by opinion and remain uninfluenced (Quinlan. 2011). The research investigator may be influenced though by the personal and to the participants but allowing them to reminisce and to self-reflect allows the study to become trustworthy (Tracy, 2010. P.840).

The research onion was used to guide the researcher through the methods needed to conduct the analysis.

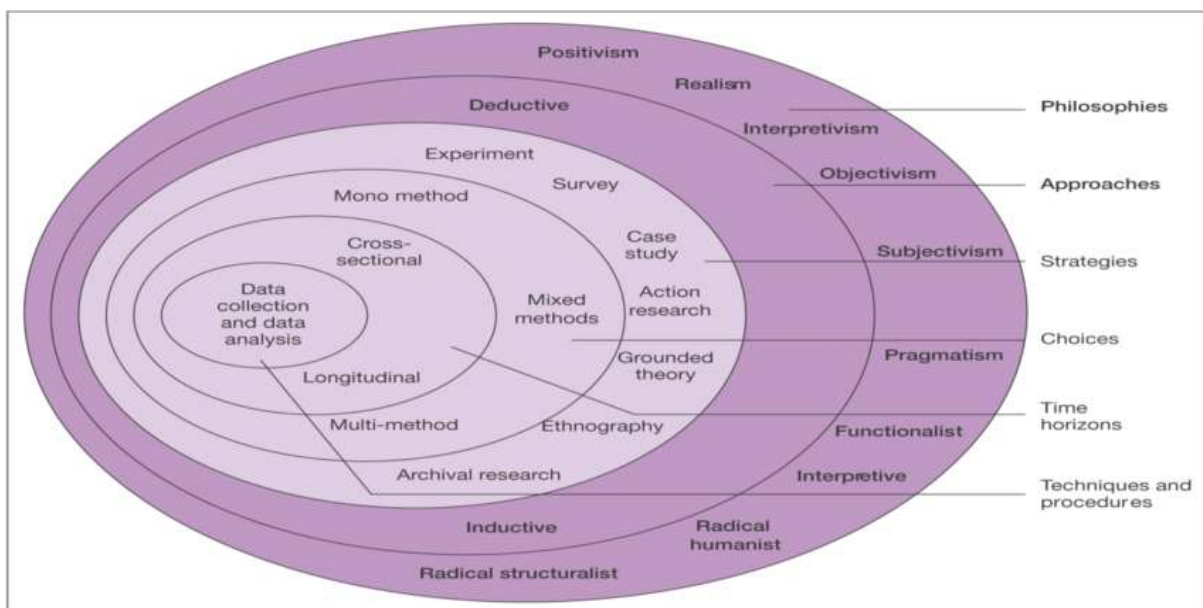


Fig Research Onion (Saunders, M., Lewis, & Thornhill. 2008).

3.1 Sample/Participants

This part of the thesis the researcher intends to conduct a qualitative study based on those who have visited areas which suffered disasters and have volunteered as part of aid programmes there and the experiences they have shared. The participants came from different backgrounds and different occupations. The researcher intends to conduct interviews with these tourists online due to the travel restrictions imposed by COVID19 face to face interviews were not possible.

The researcher has found these participants through both travelling and blogs and has carefully selected them once a trend emerges that the participants have visited numerous sites relating to dark tourism specifically all have taken part in tourism related to areas struck by disaster and the researcher has found eight participants who are willing to be interviewed individually. The age group ranging from 21-28. The average age of the participants is 28. The sociodemographic factors are varying with an emphasis on genders with a male majority so as to differentiate from other studies, differing nationalities and their religious as well as occupational backgrounds. Purposive sampling was chosen as though they may not be experts in the field some had a wide variety of knowledge and experience related to the subject.

Table 1 shows the information relating to each participant with them each being given a corresponding number so as to not use their real names, this confidentially would allow for them to be more open and honest about their experiences. The ethnicity demographic was not collected as but the demographics of religion, gender, occupation age and nationality were.

Table 1. Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Occupation	Religion
P1	Male	27	English	Media Analyst	Christian
P2	Female	28	English	Politics Student	Christian
P3	Male	28	Irish	Media Analyst	Catholic
P4	Male	25	American	Electrician	Christian
P5	Male	21	Chile	Visual Merchandiser	Catholic
P6	Male	28	English	Electrician	Christian
P7	Male	25	Irish	Content Creator	Catholic
P8	Female	28	Canadian	Photographer	Atheist

3.2 Data collection tool

To gain an insight into the experience of voluntourism at disaster zones the researcher chose to have a free-flowing online interview which was also semi structured so as not to phase out the main point of the thesis this was done by constructing numerous questions relating to the topic but also allowing for the participants to engage in a non-formal manner. Semi structured approach to the interviews was chosen by the researcher as it can be an interesting way to allow participants to relay their own experiences, but the structured part of the interviews will allow for themes relating to certain theories behind it to be proven. The unstructured part of the interview will allow for the participants to express themselves and though this may not yield significant value it will provide a basis for which they themselves have chosen to do this. It is worthwhile to work on the problems arising from this as they occur as our brains sub consciously work on issues even as we move to other things. The interviews intended to last roughly twenty minutes, but they can go on for as long as it takes to gather interesting data. They were then recorded through the voice recording app Otter as opposed to visually recording as some do wish to remain anonymous. The individual interviews will be conducted with two a day which will allow for the breakdown and coding of each interview per day. By

also analysing existing data this allowed the researcher to gain a further insight into other participants motivations.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data was analysed through reading through the transcripts together so as to identify common themes within these by writing down the notes so as to put the data into categories and sub themes. These sub themes though were then aligned with the overall themes found and then reflected on to align with the research questions (Lindseth, & Norberg. 2004). Content analysis was then applied to identify key themes within the transcript with identifying recurring phrases and opinions (Saunders, *et al* 2008). The researcher will then compare the findings to that of another research conducted in this field (Corbin, & Strauss. 2012).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

When conducting these interviews the researcher does acknowledge that there will be certain ethical issues which may arise as certain interviewees may be known to which may prevent a difficult issue as these may then become conflicted due to the interviewees potential to be less open or in certain circumstances they may also wish to remain private. This may be the first time that the participants have expressed how they feel it can present difficulties for both the participant and the researcher (Dickson-Swift, *et al* 2007). In this instance it can become difficult for some to express themselves regarding the lives of those who live in post disaster areas.

So, to summarize the ethical considerations the researcher may consider are privacy concerns involving confidentiality with a focus on the interviewees consent to their information at all times and potential arguments arising from the online interviews with a transcript of the interviews being sent to the participants to allow for them to alter it in ways they may feel can become less offensive.

4. Findings

4.1 Voluntourism relating to religion, tourism packages and the effects of social media

The effects of religion on the decision to volunteer was discussed and it was found that for profit voluntourism is becoming more attractive, with tourists moving away from religious organisations if given the choice. Social media plays a part in building awareness and relationships.

4.1.1 Religious partially effects on voluntourism

The effects of religion on volunteering abroad is vast with four participants in the interviews stating that they went abroad as part of an outreach programme run by religious groupings

“I was always motivated to help out but my conversion to Christianity drove it even more as part of the prayer programme they told us it was instrumental to become altruistic”. (P3)

The effects of religion on voluntourism tended to expedite the motivation and drive to volunteer at these disaster sites as a means to give back but in some of the participants it had no effect:

“I’ve never been religious but though there were religious ideals behind the company which I chose I still never felt that religion was driving me towards it, they just happened to be somewhat involved and active in Africa”. (P8)

Though religion plays a part in volunteering abroad its effects on the tourists themselves can be difficult to justify as they are often involved within volunteering. The overwhelming majority do tend to be Christians so to target other religious groupings it may become better specifically for non-profit organisations to move away from the religious aspect and focus entirely on the altruistic aspect:

“it is always assumed that I chose to do this through religious reasons, but it never really had any effect on me I believe social media had more influence on my choice”. (P4)

This could be further motivation for organisations to move toward a neutral religious standpoint with the focus being entirely on helping in need communities without the focus of missionary work. It allowed the participants to learn about culture and the religious ideologies as well as

the day to day activities. The findings though do somewhat support previous studies suggesting that voluntourism is dominated by Christianity.

4.1.2 For profit is becoming an attractive tourist package

Though half the participants went volunteering abroad as part of non-profit religious organisations there seems to be a growing number who have chosen to go as part of a for profit travel package:

“I had the options of choosing between volunteering for and non-profit but I chose the package through USIT as it seemed more attractive to me, personally I felt they had the best of both worlds vacation minded as well as helping others” (P7).

Tourists packages relating to voluntourism is not a new trend with some countries relying on this form of tourism but the travel packages relating to the more vacation minded tourist is becoming increasingly attractive to tourists. This will likely lead to an increase in opportunities for both tourism operators and tourists themselves as there will be more places to visit with vacation minded tourists open to these opportunities to visit new places.

The participants felt that they would use tourist operators in the future with the majority mostly agreeing that they would be enticed to go but others felt it was religion which was their driving motivator.

“The religious aspect and the fact that it was entirely non-profit is what drove me to do it in the first place I doubt I would feel comfortable with doing it for tourism reasons”. (P3)

“I think the main aim is to help people, so it doesn’t really matter which organisation you choose”. (P7)

This shows evidence that there is growing number of people willing to become volunteers as an experience for themselves and for a different type of vacation. The strong association with religion though may be hard to entirely move away from. The idea of helping others remains prevalent throughout but some participants feel the need for religion within voluntourism is no longer needed so diversity amongst organisations will likely increase competitions or religious organisations they could work alongside tourism operators.

4.1.3 Voluntourism is moving away from religion

The participants who took part in religious backed volunteering at disaster sites have expressed their concern as to whether it is entirely non-profit and have insisted that in the future they may opt to choose to go with companies which are separate entities altogether. The reasoning behind this for some of the participants is that they feel that they don't wish to become part of a potential missionary agenda with some expressing concerns that some religious organisations may be attempting to convert locals or entice them to join. These concerns were expressed by a number of participants:

“the dominance of religion within volunteering at these sites is frightening at times there are crosses ingrained on all the supplies and when rebuilding commences there are often Christian churches being built it concerns me because some of these countries may have vulnerable locals who may feel like they need to convert” (P8).

“The urge to prayer at specific times was a constant reminder that this was religiously orientated, it was after a while irritating because I felt this should be done privately”. (P7)

These findings may support the empirical data from previous studies which states that the overall majority of volunteers are Christian and also why it has become part of culture. The feelings of the participants are that religion should have little to do with volunteering is noticeable but also it could potentially harm the opinions of voluntourism with some feeling that it can become overwhelming. The idea that religion even plays a part in the rebuilding of the stricken locations is also a cause for concern amongst some participants.

4.1.4 Culture and keeping up was a driving force

The participants all felt that the culture within their countries to help those less fortunate was the main driving force behind volunteering abroad, with those specifically from England being enticed to take time from work as they never experienced a gap year themselves they felt envious of those who did and felt that their main motivation was to make up for lost experiences. Some of the participants felt that culturally they felt it was their duty to help out but also along with this keeping up so as not to be left out was also a factor:

“Though I went to university I never had a chance to do a gap year as a lot of my colleagues in work did volunteer work it kind of egged me on, I felt a need to visit a site of disaster as a volunteer would be a great talking point”. (P1)

This desire to take part so as not to be left out is not uncommon with travellers in general as all the participants felt a need to take part as it made them appear more “worldly” and knowledgeable. There appears to be some form of peer pressure for people to take part in voluntourism which may make them feel like they are worth knowing and interesting. This allows them to engage others in conversations and build up networks through their vacation stories and the more unique the vacation the better.

4.1.5 Social media helps build relationships

Social media allowed the participants to remain in contact with the locals. The participants enjoyed staying in touch with the locals they met and wanted to be informed of how well the restoration of the site is going:

“When I was in Nepal I became close to three locals and remain in contact with them, they’ve shown me how well the restoration programme is and I planned to visit this year but I had to put it off unfortunately”. (P3)

Though social media did result in long term associations some were wary of becoming too close:

“I didn’t personally want to hand out my online details because I felt that in some instances it may cause a disliking from them if they see how I could just leave a disaster zone and return to everyday life while they needed to rebuild”. (P2)

The participants were all eager to post on social media as a means to gain attention too with them using the platform to inform their followers and friends of the volunteering they were doing:

“I’m aware that there are some issues with posting photos of those less fortunate in the aftermath of a disaster but I also believe that to put faces on those affected helps people to understand and empathise with them”. (P6)

Social media also the driving force behind the reasons some of the participants choosing to volunteer:

“I actually had a friend who visited Nepal and his post looked like an amazing experience to not only help out but to experience life”. (P3)

This conflates the idea that social media is both positive and negative where it does help build longstanding friendships it also stands to build an ideal with which some people may never potentially be able to reach. Social media is also used as a platform to raise awareness to disasters and ongoing situations with which it may reach those and inform them of the situations, they may never have been able to hear of before. The marketing of disaster sites as tourism destinations seems to be encouraged when there is a cause for both helping others and experiencing life and is shown through real life experiences of volunteers.

4.2 Voluntourism and character building

The effects n the spirituality and general character building such as resilience will be discussed.

4.2.1 Disaster sites had a profound effect on their feelings of resilience

The idea of resilience is compounded within disaster zones and the participants all agreed that they had witnessed first-hand how humans can adapt to their surroundings:

“The people of Nepal inspired with how headstrong they were and how they improved their lives even in the direct aftermath of disaster and frequency with which they happen there” (P2)

This has led to the majority of the participants agreeing that it improved their personal growth both emotionally and physically with some participants feeling that they can overcome anything after what they witnessed. The idea of resilience and perseverance is ingrained in human survival and the patients felt that looking at how these communities move forward allows them to view obstacles in their lives as insignificant compared those of others. This allowed the participants to not only build their resilience but become more empathetic in the process as they resonated with others better afterwards.

4.2.2 Spiritual awakenings were sought but occurred infrequently

All of the participants agreed that in a way they wanted to find spiritual peace and they found that helping at these sites helped them with this:

“Helping others was the sole cause of my trip but in doing so I believe I became closer to God and this opened my eyes to the plight of others. In some ways disasters could be the work of God to bring people together” (P3).

Though this participant in particular used volunteering abroad to further his own religious views there were others who found that experiencing other religions and cultures benefitted them more. This allowed them to experience the cultures of others and open their mind to how others live. The participants often felt how peaceful minds can move on through perseverance and strength from within:

“I have been fascinated with Buddhism my whole life and to experience the culture first-hand and how at peace they were opened my mind”. (P2)

Though spiritual awakenings did occur some found that it did not affect them in that way rather it just changed their outlook on the injustices in the world. The participants had their eyes opened to what was occurring around them and how injustices were often happening:

“I was never religious and never expected this to make me more religious I did expect to experience something spiritual, but I think it rather made me aware of how unjust and unfair the world is”. (P7)

The experiences themselves though did evoke a feeling of spiritual meaning for some of the participants. The participants felt that this was a great character-building experience and allowed them to feel that strength comes from within:

“I know the idea of spirituality is alien to me, but it made me appreciate how those I’ve witnessed have used spirituality as a means to build resilience”. (P7)

The idea behind spiritual awakenings could depend on the individual involved for instance a spiritual awakening for one person may be a political awaking or a societal one rather than a religious one but for another individual they may feel like witnessing the aftermath of disaster may be “Gods work”. The focus of some of the participants on how spirituality can lead to resilience is interesting and may be focused upon those who wish to build character. The idea of spirituality is often linked with religion but the participants in this instance did not feel like they wanted a religious spiritual awakening but rather experience one related to their character.

4.2.3 Fascination with disaster and learning about recovery

The participants all wanted to witness the aftermath of disaster so as to see how well people can cope in the case that they themselves will be within a disaster zone. This was directly related to character building within the participants. All the participants were eager to learn

how to deal with on an ongoing disaster and the methods which were used to ensure safety, these measures they felt didn't instil fear as they believed that they were key to surviving any such occurrence. The recovery process intrigued most of the participants and this was in fact a main driving factor in their view of disaster tourism. They all stated that disaster aftermaths should be witnessed as it allows people to become educated on how the earth works and how nature in itself can be both destructive and beneficial to people. Some of the participants found that recovery in the aftermath of disaster is the complete definition of resilience where building back up afterwards without hesitation shows how people can overcome things even tragedies which could spiritually demotivate and psychologically harm those affected.

4.2.4 Climate Change awareness was enhanced

The participants all stated that they were becoming more knowledgeable about climate change. Some of the participants were particularly worried about rising flood waters which were the reasons behind the disasters in some of the locations they had visited. P7 and P3 were particularly worried about the state of climate change action within Ireland and were worried that disaster response implementation should be instructed in counties close to the coast:

“Rising oceans present a problem for the future in Ireland and I believe that by viewing these sites and witnessing the destruction they cause is important as currently the measures which Ireland use are outdated as the speed in which climate change is occurring at present is more than what the government will be able to deal with unless they act now”. (P3)

It appeared that the participants wanted to take ideas from the disaster zones in how to prepare the citizens and the structures in the case of the disaster occurring in their country. The lack of awareness amongst governments relating to disasters attributed to climate change exasperated the participants with some feeling that the cost of maintaining and educating citizens on what to do in the event of a disaster should be no issue but they felt the government didn't wish to invest money in “what ifs”. Some of the participants decided after visiting these sites that they would become active volunteers in clean ups in the future with one even going to Mauritius following an oil spillage. So, in turn there became an affect in driving them towards becoming environmentalists.

4.2.5 The desire for political and societal change was enhanced

All the participants agreed that there needs to be political change to help combat these events. Some of them feel that natural disasters should be considered man made at this point with them stating that rising oceans and other would be natural disasters are enhanced by failure to recognise the damage we do to the environment:

“The Trump administration fails to recognise climate change and since he has been in office, he has been more focused on deporting those affected by Western ignorance than by recognising the problem.” (P4)

The participants all felt that as a society there should be a focus on helping others who have been displaced by these events. They felt that due to the nature of Western actions specifically relating to increased fuel consumption and air travel which has a direct effect on the current state of disasters that they should be more welcoming to refugees from afflicted countries. Some of the participants were aware of the ignorance of their governments but also realised that in some instances the locals in stricken communities did not want to leave their home countries. They felt that to prevent this governments should be more aware of the dangers of not only global warming but the idea of relocating people with some participants feeling that those within affected communities having access to better and sturdier homes.

4.2.6 Fear of disasters often increased

The fear of disaster is related directly to how unprepared most governments are in light of them. The participants from the United States were particularly aware of how disasters can strike and how dangerous they can become with one stating that “the sirens for tornadoes and hurricanes is one of the most frightening sounds you can hear”

“Living through disasters becomes almost an accepted part of reality at times, in Chile for example we have our houses reinforced so the fear of earthquakes diminishes but if those precautions weren’t there it would be a different matter”. (P5)

The fact that climate change is increasing the number of disasters occurring is evidenced to the participants that they feel their countries should be implementing them as safety precautions instead of assuming they will never occur there. Climate change action should be implemented by all governments the participants believed and there should be matters taken to ensure the safety of all citizens so as to prevent unnecessary damage.

4.3 Western privilege and diversity

The idea of Western privilege will be discussed along with tourism privilege on site, issues relating to time and money and the diversification of voluntourism.

4.3.1 Tourists were self-aware that their lives are privileged

The theme of privilege came up with all the participants and they were all aware that they themselves came from privileged backgrounds. Being self-aware of privilege was prevalent amongst the participants:

“I come from a country which is regularly hit by earthquakes but coming from Santiago allowed us some form of affluence which I decided to use to help others, I often donate to causes related to disasters within Chile but I’ve also been to sites of other natural disasters in different countries and witnessed the economic disparities between people”. (P5)

This allowed for a learning process for some participants about how the world is even beyond disaster zones and allowed them to gain a better understanding of economies are affected in times of disaster and why there is a need for funding beyond governments:

“I’ve always believed that helping out was just that but then I realised that some countries GDP and economic growth is hampered by regularly occurring disasters which has led for the need to increase volunteering and disaster relief funds”. (P5)

The awareness of the affect’s disasters has on the economy of countries was a major concern amongst the participants with some becoming focused on donating to causes specifically ones with which all the proceeds go to the site and the people:

“The fact I went as a tourist encouraged me to donate to charitable causes, I feel if someone can then someone should” (P7).

Though the feelings of privilege in a sense are felt by the participants some would prefer to donate rather than volunteer again due to the cost constraints involved with the idea that financial stability for themselves would be foremost before they can help others. This could tend to support the idea that those who take part in volunteering at disaster sites are privileged amongst the privileged and why it is known as a “gap year” vacation. The participants feel that

volunteering should be carried on after the vacation has ended and those who are able to afford to donate to worthwhile causes should.

4.3.2 Tourists and resource entitlement

The participants were aware that though the idea is to aid those in need they were allocated more resources such as food and better living facilities than the locals affected with them having access and funding to purchase items from both locals along with what they were allocated by the organisation:

“We had a better variety and more mealtimes than the locals as we often gave them bulk care packages on the other hand volunteers could have access any time they wanted” (P2)

It appears that a number of the participants were aware of this and often brought over gifts for the locals as a means to make up for any feelings of entitlement. This selflessness went beyond gifts and showed how self-aware the participants were of their lives and allowed them to recognise that simple actions can have a huge effect on others:

“Working as a visual merchandiser for Disney I decided to bring over toys for the children, I feel like this will allow them to take their minds away from the disaster which occurred”. (P5)

There was a common occurrence amongst the participants that this led to changes in their lifestyles when they got home. This allowed them to realise how frivolous and pointless some things were in their lives:

“I was less inclined to waste money on extravagant things and focused on giving back”. (P1)

“volunteering definitely changed my aspect on the important things in life, I realised my privilege not only came from the life I was born into but also the place I’m lucky enough that my country isn’t hit by disasters regularly so I feel this is my duty to give back to those who are”. (P4)

The entitlement also led to giving back with all the participants stating that they were using their money to shop locally and to give back which allowed them to bolster the local economy. This was as simple as purchasing homemade products with this income going a long way for them:

“there was a girl selling home-made bracelets and it opened my eyes to how a small amount of money could potentially feed her for a week”. (P3)

This awareness of privilege is good for both the affected communities and those who are volunteering abroad as it allows them to become more altruistic but also it leads to societal change and a move away from commercialism. The participants contributed to the host companies away from simply helping by spending their money locally which helped support the local economy. This encouraged the locals and tourists' spirits and allowed them to build up better relationships.

4.3.3 Time and money were issues

The time spent there for the participants became an issue as some felt that they spent too little time there to become any benefit to the community. The cost of the trips was considered exorbitant and they became aware when they were there that the cost didn't meet expectations with some of participants deciding that in the future they may decide to do it individually rather than get an organisation involved.

“The expenses involved were a lot more than those of regular holidays it can be difficult to do this regularly unless you're sponsored by a job”. (P6)

The issue of time away from work also presented an issue amongst the participants, they felt that though it was worth it to help out the time spent there didn't meet the standards they had expected as for the cost of the visit they could have been there longer. Some of the participants even went as far as to take a sabbatical but due to the cost they struggled to stay in the location as their funds began to dwindle. The idea that some companies were not as truthful also presented issues regarding the money spent by participants:

“It's difficult to justify funding organisations that profit from others and then lie about it especially seems I myself had to spend my hard earned money to support helping others, I can see why NGO's have had a hard time of late” (P1)

Some of them found that when they arrived costs of products bought from the organisation themselves were exorbitant and this further discouraged them from volunteering with a non-profit organisation again as they viewed this as suspicious. Some of the participants voiced their concern specifically relating to ongoing debates and whistle-blowers who have disregarded the actions of NPO's as self-serving, and profit orientated.

4.3.4 Lack of diversity was noticeable

The participants when pressed about whether they felt that volunteering abroad was an activity dominated by a majority of white westerners, they all felt that the majority of volunteers they met themselves were predominantly from North America, Britain, and Australia. They felt that though voluntourism did contain a lot of stereotypical persons such as gap year students they did not believe that there were any racist undertones in applying in that anyone can apply which they agreed was down to money, in other words anyone regardless of race or ethnicity once they could afford to could take part in voluntourism:

“I believe that maybe voluntourism itself is ingrained in culture but depends on the wealth of the person and their livelihood, when I volunteered after the earthquake here I found that a lot of Mapuche people volunteered but likely they wouldn’t do so in a foreign land personally I feel because of language barriers or even the inability to travel due to cultural boundaries”. (P5)

The cultural aspect and how Westerners seemed to be the dominant demographic within voluntourism may present future issues regarding inequality in the future. This inequality the participants felt was the exclusion of those who cannot afford to participate and should therefore become more accessible. The participants further felt that those who are unable to afford this long term should be allowed more affordable.

4.3.5 Language barriers were an issue

Though race was not an issue all the participants agreed that language could be an issue as some of these affected places the locals had either an understanding or were fluent in English, but they struggled with accents. The participants from North America felt that they were understood by the locals, but accents did present an issue for the others with P1 and P7 in particular finding it frustrating that their accent was difficult for others to understand:

“I volunteered in Reunion and my ability to speak both French and English was the reason I enjoyed it so much as I could communicate with the locals with ease”. (P8)

This focus on language could make things either better or worse as the only participant whose first language was not English felt that at times it was almost impossible to get their points across. It has been suggested by participants that companies could target those who would be willing to volunteer in countries similar to their own to prevent linguistic or cultural issues

which became major issues especially as both locals and those beyond the West often had poor English.

4.4 Volountouring and career building

The participants will discuss how beneficial they found volunteering at disaster sites in relation to their career.

4.4.1 Volountourists benefitted and furthered their career through voluntourism

The majority of participants felt that due to volunteering abroad they increased their chances of future employment as they had gained “work experience” whilst doing this which also allowed them to create a more attractive CV:

“Photographing the aftermath of disaster and the effects it had on structures helped boost my standing for sure. I have taken photos of building for structural architecture magazines in the past, but this allowed me to see the effects other natural disasters had”. (P8)

Other participants specifically those within the trade industry gained valuable work-related opportunities in the rebuilding process whilst one participant documented a blog which allowed them to raise awareness through content creation. The idea of career building did not present an issue with the tourists as they believed this was one of the benefits for them which would encourage them to take part in future. It also allowed them to learn about subject matters they found interesting such as the damage which occurs when a disaster happens and this they felt could lead to changes and inventions in the future.

4.4.2 Participants found that voluntourism was attractive to employers

Participants found that not only did it further their career if they needed to apply for a new job this stood as a major talking point and increased their chances of employment. Two of the participants entered into new employment shortly after volunteering at a disaster site:

“though my volunteering didn’t have any effect on my career through skill enhancement it became a major talking point through the interview process and my employer said he admired selflessness which in turn got me the job”. (P5)

Adding to this it allowed the participants to build confidence when looking for potential employment in the future. This was an encouraging aspect to volunteering abroad and the participants felt this was what made it more attractive for both them and employers with some believing that there could be encouragement for employers to allow employees to take part as a means to build both skills and character.

4.4.3 Voluntourists saw it as beneficial for both themselves and the locals

The participants in this study did not feel like they were being self-serving in viewing it as a career builder with the idea that if they are helping others but in turn receiving rewards then it becomes an ideal situation for both them and the locals. They did believe however that for the most part tourists should be somewhat qualified to undertake jobs:

“being an electrician I’m aware of how dangerous unqualified work can become and in situations like this sometimes they are looking for a fast and easy fix”. (P4)

Volunteering they felt should require assessments if tourists are trying to go into fields which require them. This could minimize the potential dangers in which they could put the local community in, with the participants specifically those with trades well aware of how unqualified work could cause further damage and result in increasingly dangerous situations. Specifically this relates to participants who are encouraged to volunteer abroad as a work experience exercise with some countries being laid back in terms of regulations this is often exploited with the participants in this study feeling that in future it should be closely monitored and become better regulated.

4.4.4 They believed that overpopulating a disaster zone will be harmful

The participants in this study did voice their concern regarding the expanding number of tourism operators who are introducing volunteer abroad packages. The idea of increasing number of different operators bringing in more tourists has the potential to overwhelm the local community and create issues in the future:

“not all disaster zones are entirely safe and overpopulating a place with tourists could lead to them wandering off into potentially unsafe situations”. (P1)

The idea of tourism safety may well feed into the idea that this is not an entirely safe touristic activity and certain precautions should be made to ensure the safety of those who participate. Some of the participants also felt that the number of tourists visiting in the aftermath of a disaster may also create issues and duress for locals with some feeling that it can become an almost “zoo like atmosphere”. This becomes increasingly noticeable within vacation minded tourists with the participants feeling that some may be interested in only observing the locals rather than helping them.

5. Discussion

By using online interviews, the researcher managed to conduct a study which focused on the experiences of voluntourists at disaster zones. Demographics such as age, religion, nationality, occupation, and gender were considered. The majority of the participants were those who were currently in employment. These tourists were mostly volunteer minded, but some were willing to choose vacation-based packages in future which supports the theory put forth by Brown (2005) that they are either one or the other. These participants were not generally focused on touristic activities but would rather engage with locals and learn about their cultures and focus on purchasing from them to help build up their economy. The findings of Han, *et al* (2020) that there is sociocultural pressure to take part in voluntourism is supported as they often felt that it was up to those who were better off to give back to society. Concluding with Bandyopadhyay & Patil (2017) that travelling is somewhat a ritual amongst certain demographics and travelling to locations allowed them to help out and allowed them somewhat to feel like they were “saving” the world.

It was found that though the participants themselves did not feel that voluntourism was racist, but rather they found it to be classist in that it is only accessible to those who are able to afford it which supports the suggestions put forth by McGloin & Georgeou (2016). It was observed that tourists would find it difficult to fund their trips along with finding the time away from their work which supports Lee & Won (2017) who found that those who are taking part in voluntourism outside of gap year students are self-employed. This negative aspect may be often ignored but it does add to the conclusion that it could cause those in local communities to become envious of the lifestyles the tourists lead. The tourists themselves though are in support of political change and aware of the inequalities which supports the findings of Germann Molz (2017) that engaging with volunteering allows tourists to build compassion which leads to societal change. The findings suggested by Guttentag (2009) that prior knowledge about the culture of the local community may allow them to recover faster have been supported by the tourists as they wish to engage and fully immerse themselves into it, it is believed that this allows tourists to engage with it in the future.

The idea of a language barrier discouraging tourists in the findings by Bernstein, & Woosnam (2019) was supported as those who didn't have English as a first language found it difficult to integrate with the locals and also accents from those who weren't from North America were

often misunderstood. They found that Americanised English was often popularised with those who spoke it and when they heard a different accent it created accentual issues.

While they agreed with the findings by other researchers (Papathanassis 2017; Lo & Lee 2011) regarding over tourism and they believed that it should be closely monitored to protect both the locals and the tourists themselves from potential harmful situations. It was observed that the volunteers believed that they were beneficial to the host community. They chose to purchase items from locals, they remained in contact with some of them they met through social media and they were interested in learning about the culture of the host community. This disagrees with the study by Bank & Schonell (2018) in that though the cost of the trip itself may be exorbitant for the tourists it didn't exceed the efforts they made in helping the locals with some of the participants stating that they used the skills they learned in the workplace to help out where they can.

The findings suggested by McMorran (2017) were disagreed with somewhat as the value of tourism in rebuilding the affected countries economy such as purchasing from locals was an important part of the experience but it also supported the theory that over tourism become risky and lead to them becoming nuisances. The tourists themselves where are of the dangers posed by underqualified workers being allocated jobs and doing them poorly with those who are vacation minded possibly not worried too much by the work at hand but focus on enjoying themselves which were suggested in the findings by (McLennan. 2014; Simpson. 2005; Brown, 2005). The tourists who were all qualified in different areas felt that in the future to avoid further potential damage being done that all participants should undergo prior evaluation. The perceived value of tourists within the recovery framework suggested by Wearing, *et al* (2020) was supported with some feeling that their skills were valuable and some feeling that they could bring about change. The value of volunteering abroad was a great thing for the tourists to add on to their C.V and increased their chances of gaining employment in the future which disagreed with the findings by Rothwell & Charleston (2013). They felt their time there was worthwhile and they welcomed the work that they needed to do with the ability to use volunteering as a talking point encouraging them further to volunteer in the future.

The negativity surrounding social media was often overlooked and the tourists themselves were eager to upload onto their pages to keep their followers updated on the volunteering they were doing. They often took photographs and one even wrote a blog which could support the theory that it supports narcissistic behaviour by other researchers (e.g. Canavan, 2017; Sorokowski,

et al 2015) and could lead to over tourism as these vacation photos often drive the desire to take part as found by Lyu (2016). This aspect could feed into the narcissistic behaviour and lead on to tourists who are visiting purely to post online and gain attention, this goes against the whole idea of volunteering abroad which is about giving back. Further negative aspect surrounding voluntourism such as the findings of Anderson, *et al* (2013) which suggested that voluntourism by Non-profit organisations is in actuality profit oriented has resulted in more tourists eager to take part in tourism package holidays related to voluntourism.

The findings by Hystad & Keller (2008) were supported as there was a willingness for countries to engage in specified methods dealing with occurring disasters. They felt that their governments themselves did not acknowledge the potentiality of disasters, but they would rather know how to react rather than being misinformed which would potentially cause more damage in the long run. Concluding with Pahrudin, *et al* (2020) should be taught about the environment and potential disasters with them feeling that though knowledge about disasters may evoke a certain amount of fear there should be measures put in place. The volunteers in this study were aware of the potential damage that climate change has on these affected countries and are willing to engage in climate action as a means to prevent this. Though they were aware of the damage to the environment they were often unaware of the damage in which they themselves contributed which supports the findings of Demir & Saribas (2015). Volunteering allowed them to become more aware of what is occurring in the world which supports Nelan, *et al* (2020) finding that spiritual awakenings is often sought by the tourists. This form of spirituality does not necessarily have to relate to religion but is for the tourists themselves to become more empathetic to what is surrounding them.

6. Conclusion

No previous studies have focused on the experiences and thoughts of a majority of male travellers who volunteer at disaster sites. This has addressed this gap. Though the intention of the researcher was to also undergo focus groups alongside face to face interviews this was not possible due to the ongoing pandemic. The findings themselves may not be diverse enough to provide a proper conclusion and there may need to be broader investigations done to understand this further. For future research there could be studies done on how volunteering at disaster sites is a classist activity where this study focused on those who have begun their careers and thus have money to take part no studies have been done on those volunteers from a working class background. There could also be studies done to compare the experiences of those who have fascination with dark tourism and those who are entirely volunteer minded. This would help identify specific marketing strategies for companies involved and allow them to target a wider audience. The idea behind culture and the demand for disaster tourism and voluntourism presents an interesting case also with ideas behind this intriguing as it may suggest why certain demographics are the majority behind those who partake in the phenomenon. The final suggestion would be to identify key workers within the volunteer tourism industry and how they justify the ethical side of marketing countries which have sustained a natural disaster, this could also allow them to become aware of potential issues which have been identified such as the demographics who choose to take part.

This paper offers numerous options for non-profit organisations, tourism companies and other companies which provide packages relating to volunteer tourism within disaster sites. There is potential for governments to work with tourism companies to provide safety precautions relating to potential disasters in the future along with educational programmes about climate change and the potentiality of the disasters it might bring to the tourists country by having them visit sites of disaster and see how they function in the aftermath. This could allow tourism companies to conduct expensive programmes related to risk preparedness and recovery programmes through government grants and could in turn potentially allow them to use these grants to create longer trips which in turn may attract more tourists willing to travel to disaster zones. These packages could also differentiate between qualified and non-qualified personnel for example skilled tourist packages and non-skilled tourist packages based around their years of qualification and to allow those who are more qualified to aid those who are wishing to build upon their C.V which would in turn prevent potential dangerous unqualified work. These organisations could also engage tourists in the culture of the destinations they are visiting and

inform them of what is deemed acceptable so as to allow both groups to integrate which will allow them to build better relationships. It should also be noted though that in regard to social media it should be somewhat acceptable to post and it should be noted that certain age groups are more likely to do so. The vast majority of tourists seemingly coming from the West with this study finding this and previous empirical studies also supporting these assumptions. Voluntourism could become more culturally diverse opens a market for the targeting of potential voluntourists in other countries. This relates to the language barrier specifically as with the participant from Chile for example who participated in both Chile and Nepal and found the language barrier exhausting to diminish this it could be beneficial to target tourists in their own countries and cater packages to this at a lesser cost. This could alleviate the financial pressure but could also allow them these tourists to become even more culturally diverse. To finally conclude with these implications, it should be suggested that companies involved in volunteer tourism be open as to whether they are Non-Profit or For Profit and become less about religion. The move away from religious based organisations is in part due to tourists unassumingly becoming missionaries but also because there are allegations that they profit from them, this openness could therefore draw tourists to come back if they advertised that they were profiting from these and in turn could allow these organisations to work with tourism companies. Localized volunteer trips may not entice vacation minded tourists or those wishing to experience new cultures and those wishing to experience the “third world” but it could benefit those who speak very little English and none of the language of the community they wish to visit.

In conclusion, the findings in this study suggest that there are both positive and negative aspects to voluntourism but the overall opinion is that it is beneficial to the locals in that their economy will experience growth and they will be able to interact with those from the West. This has also become a career enhancer for those from the West which will encourage more tourists to take part thus the industry will experience growth. It was also further suggested that governments in the West should implement measures to deal with climate change and have clear instructions on what to do in the event of a disaster. Tourism operators and other governing bodies have a duty of care to provide the best experience which benefits all those involved and doesn't exploit the situations at hand and this presents the perfect opportunity for governments to work with agencies which run these tours.

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Appendix

QUESTIONS

How did religious beliefs effect your decision to volunteer? Did you feel that religion had an effect within volunteering?

What are your views on Non-profit volunteering towards For-profit volunteering tourism packages? How do you feel about the move toward this becoming more touristic? Did you have a preferred organisation to support? How did you discover these packages and organisations?

How did you feel tourists integrated within the community? Why do you believe it is important to connect with the local community? How else did you support the local community beyond the volunteer work?

What effect did social media have on your experience? Did social media allow you to integrate better with the local community? Why do you believe that social media can have negative affects specifically towards vacation photos and voluntourism?

How did you feel that volunteering changed you? Did it have an effect on your views? How did it change you? Why do you feel this was important?

What affect if any did it have on your personal feelings of resilience? Was this an important result do you feel?

How do you feel it affected your spirituality? Was a spiritual awakening a driving factor towards volunteering at disaster zones? Why do you feel spirituality is sought after?

How did volunteering affect your knowledge of politics and society as a whole? Would seeing inequalities affect your views? If you could how would you change the societal beliefs and the views of the West on 3rd world countries?

How did volunteering affect your idea of privilege? Did you recognise that you come from a privileged place? Do you feel that voluntourism and privilege can create a harmful environment? Why do you feel that the majority of tourists come from the West? Did you feel that this majority could create issues? Did you feel time constrained taking part? How would you suggest that voluntourism become more diverse? How did resource allocation take place? Was it first come first served or allocated times for different people? Did you feel that tourists had access to better resources than the locals?

How did you feel voluntouring helped you? Did you feel that it had any effect on your career? How would you describe the importance it had on your C.V? Would you

feel that it had a positive or negative affect on the opinions of future employers? Would you describe in detail the activities you done whilst volunteering? Did you feel that volunteering was beneficial to all involved? Do you feel that this type of self-serving attitudes can become problematic? In what way do you think it may become problematic? Do you feel that there will be an increase in the number of tourists taking part in this? How do you feel that overpopulating these sites should be dealt with? Do you feel like the increasing attraction to the industry will benefit locals? How do you feel tourism companies should monitor this?