PROGRESS IN VOLUNTEER TOURISM RESEARCH: FROM NICHE TOURISM CURIOSITY TO EXPERIENCE--BASED IMPROVEMENTS

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Abstract

This paper reviews the latest research directions and conceptual developments on the phenomenon of volunteer tourism. The last review was published in 2017, so it is time to summarize and re-evaluate how voluntourism has evolved. The paper projects future developments within voluntourism by showcasing some critical changes in the participants' attitudes. This is likely to influence how, where and by whom volunteering initiatives will be implemented. The contributions of this paper are assembling an overview of efforts to formulate a definition of voluntourism and providing clues as to what socio-cultural and market forces will drive its evolution in the future.

Key words

Introduction

Definition of volunteer tourism and contribution to the research progress

Volunteer tourism or "voluntourism" is an independent part of the recreation market that, in the simplest terms, is defined by the necessary presence of two elements: volunteer work and tourism activity (Wearing, 2001; Callanan & Thomas, 2005). The ambiguity of the phenomenon is often enhanced by researchers, as they highlight the diversity of both the "vacationing" and "volunteering" spheres that are involved. It is usually agreed, however, that for voluntourism to occur, it needs to be organised for that purpose (Wearing, 2001) and propelled by the idea of providing some kind of help. Apart from these agreed-upon aspects, there are few other common denominators that help to unify the phenomenon of voluntourism. Our article aims to explain what has been done to address the increasing need for a conceptual framework of volunteer tourism.

In connection to this, most researchers argue that volunteer tourism is moving away from its "niche tourism" identity. The latest available reviews of the literature discuss and evaluate the effects of volunteer tourism's growing popularity (Wearing & McGehee 2013; McGehee, 2014; Wearing et al., 2017) in terms of both market demand and research interest. These aspects have been discussed in relation to the critical and cautionary views presented in the literature, including proposals for solutions aimed at the improvement of volunteer tourism. There are more and more organisations and stakeholders involved in facilitating volunteer tourism, and, over time, this has led to the development of different models of this activity. Since more than decade ago, it has been observed that there is no one conventional image of volunteer tourism, but rather it involves different forms and cases, such as service learning, fund-raising adventure tourism and cultural exchange projects (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Finally, what requires

attention is the discussion on the updated positioning of "touring and volunteering" activity within global tourism and the structural differences between supply/demand markets. At first glance, it is evident that this activity is associated with its occurrence in the countries of the so-called "Global South" (Grimm et al., 2021), where tourists are encouraged to share their skills with the "less fortunate ones". The latest research, however, highlights the multi-faceted nature of volunteer tourism and its growing role within the sharing economy philosophy, in which help is a valued currency that applies also between the developed countries of the West. We also observe that many tourists no longer want to just gaze at something "authentic" (Urry, 1990), but instead, they search for various hands-on activities that can make them feel "like a local".

To this end, we deepen the popular research trends but also make available less developed, yet promising narratives.

The scope and order of the article

The article updates the available "state-of-the-art" information on the topic and aims to complement the latest available reviews of volunteer tourism research. It delivers a readable collection of the best source literature in the current area of volunteer tourism research.

First, we discuss the development of the volunteer tourism definition and its various concepts. Previous literature studies have provided meaningful insights into the roots of volunteer tourism, both in relation to volunteering (Tomazos & Butler, 2009; Lyons & Wearing, 2008) and tourism (McGehee & Santos, 2005). In contrast to this approach, we take a long view on its contradictory and complicated nature, seeking to avoid applying yet another classification scheme. We noticed that the multifaceted interpretation of volunteer tourism has prompted the literature to categorise this phenomenon within different fields and more detailed subcategories (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Tomazos & Butler, 2009; Kainthola et al., 2021). We limited our study

to the identification of the most important characteristics of volunteering and tourism that must appear simultaneously in order to be classified as volunteer tourism.

Apart from the definitional aspects, we introduce and analyse another three leading trends within volunteerism research today that we consider worthy of further study:

1. Changing attitudes of three types of volunteer tourism actors,
2. Geographical considerations of volunteer tourism,
3. Non-commercial forms of volunteer tourism.

We use these approaches in discussing the contributions that seem promising for taking volunteer tourism studies in new and interesting directions. These are mostly connected to the proposals of policy improvement, based on case studies, illustrative examples and/or theoretical considerations.

The less developed, yet promising narratives are introduced later in the section "Emerging tracks and recommendations for future research".

Research methodology

In this narrative literature review, substantial efforts were made to comprehensively identify and explore broad literature on the volunteer tourism topic. We carefully studied the input of the previous review articles (Wearing & McGehee 2013; McGehee, 2014; Wearing et. al., 2017), however little review literature available does not create enough potential to summarise and compile previous articles on the topic in the umbrella review. With every article we analysed, we conducted snowball research to extend the research with the literature mentioned in the literature chosen in the first step review. There is a growing amount of research on this topic, and new articles appear almost every week.

Certain topics of volunteer tourism research are developed in the literature to an extent that allowed us to cross-reference the various findings. Based on that, we defined an ordered structure of relevant issues and questions to be answered. Main focus

was given on reviewing to the emerging areas of research, which was possible due to the fact that conventional literature on volunteer tourism has been already carefully analysed in the previous literature reviews.

Identification of topics was then followed by the determination of the relevant search terms, associated keywords (Annex 1), and then different word variants, spelling, tenses and synonyms. The relevance of each term was assessed based on the literature study and discussions with the research team.

We used Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, DOAJ and JSTOR databases, as well as Google Scholar search engine. We examined 73 academic papers, books and book chapters on volunteer tourism, focusing mainly on those published in the last eight years, up to April 2022. The papers were limited to peer-reviewed ones.

Volunteer tourism defining process

After decades of volunteer tourism research, scholars still consider this term ambiguous and have come out with various definitions. Volunteer tourism thus has multiple meanings attached to it, and various phenomena have been described as volunteer tourism. This variation is mostly due to reflection on this activity according to the types and terms of help offered by volunteers, what institution is responsible for arranging particular experiences, whether or not they are subject to a fee, and, if the latter, on what basis the fee is charged.

Stephen Wearing, who coined the most popular definition of volunteer tourism, refers to the "overlaps and ambiguities of volunteer tourism" (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). This involves examining various "manifestations of intersections between volunteering and tourism", such as cultural exchange programmes, service learning and fund-raising adventure tourism (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). In his interpretation, the "narrow treatment" of volunteer tourism in its original definition is dropped in favour of recognising those

who "are exposed to a multitude of opportunities and challenges that may at once render them classifiable as volunteer tourists, students, package tourists, exchange participants, employees, fund-raisers, or a number of other designations".

Guttentag (2009) proposed a much broader approach, which is that "any tourist who participates in volunteer work while travelling will be considered a 'volunteer tourist', regardless of whether the volunteer work is the sole purpose of his/her vacation". He excludes, however, those volunteers who perform work that lasts longer than 12 months, such as Peace Corps workers. Guttentag covers only volunteer trips that are organised and managed by for profit or non-profit organisations, in which volunteer tourists usually pay to participate, and which are undertaken in destinations that are deemed "quite poor". McGehee and Santos (2005) define volunteer tourism as ''utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need", applying theories of social movements to explore changes that occur in networks and consciousness-raising among those who participate in volunteer tourism. Furthermore, as is noticed in McGehee's later work, "while good progress has been made toward defining the concept, debate persists as to the more subtle components of volunteer tourism, including (…) the system of volunteer tourism, how various stakeholders view themselves, and the role of volunteer tourism organisations" (McGehee, 2012). Thus, from one side, it seems that the author considers the volunteer tourism organisation as an immanent component of the phenomenon. On the other hand, she admits that "the lines between volunteer tourism, eco-tourism, backpacker tourism, and sustainable tourism" are not easy to draw, which might suggest that forms of tourism that lack an organisational element, such as backpacker tourism, can be joined with volunteering. Other authors, such as Brown (2005), Callanan and Thomas (2005), Coghlan and Fennell (2009) and Kennedy and Dornan (2009) consider tour operators, specialised

organisations and group engagement as central in order for volunteer tourism to occur. Brown states that the term "voluntourism" applies to the type of situation in which "a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as a cultural exchange with local people". Kennedy and Dornan (2009) see voluntourism as a combination of unpaid voluntary activity and tourism, which is served in most cases by specialised organisations.

In the recent work of Della Lucia et al. (2020), the volunteer tourism definition considers two elements: time of leisure and volunteering for the benefit of others. The authors point out that volunteer activity is always "orientated towards the others and their needs, therefore being deeply rational". This is similar to the work of Mostafanezhad (2016), in which volunteer tourism means travelling for the purpose of dedicating voluntary time, energy and finances to support projects focused on environmental conservation and development. Han et al. (2020) observed that this term simply combines "tourism" and "volunteering", adding that a similar definition is used by volunteering organisations, who state that it is a "combination of volunteering at the destination with typical travel elements" (Han et al., 2020). It can be observed, therefore, that in the latest literature, the authors do not state organisational structure in the volunteer definition. Even if the organized form is not considered a necessary element of volunteer tourism, this approach is not pointed out as an intentional one.

We therefore lack a functional term emphasising the many formats in which tourists undertake volunteer work and the fact that it does not need to occur through the organisational framework of an entity. In the same way that tourists are not only the ones who participate in mainstream tourism by means of organised and guided tours, volunteer tourism also can be undertaken spontaneously and arranged directly between tourists and communities or individuals in need. We observe that an important phenomenon

is missing, which is that of volunteering for private individuals or organisations, undertaken autonomously and not through an organisational body of an NGO or a tourist agency, but still with the intention to help people while on holiday.

At the same time, we have seen change in the place volunteer tourism holds within the tourism typology. Considered initially as a niche type of tourism (Stainton, 2016), its popularity has since grown (Kainthola et al., 2021), and it is now classified as a phenomenon under "mass niche" (Thompson & Taheri, 2020). For example, volunteer tourism is considered one of the main subtypes of "research related tourism" (Shah et al., 2022) or scientific tourism (Godfrey et al., 2015) whenever it "involves elements of research" or "knowledge acquisition through learning and practicing new tasks". It means that scientists may engage in a volunteer organisation's project as its leaders (Shah et al. 2022). From another angle, travelling volunteers have become the source of the labour force or funding for scientific research projects that lack either or both of these (Grimm et al., 2021). Finally, volunteer tourism appears in the notion of "public tourism" and "socialising tourism". This refers to how bad luck, such as a natural disaster or global pandemic, positively influences the social awareness of tourists (Yamashita, 2021). We therefore can observe that volunteer tourism is often used as a good demonstration of many new names and forms of tourism that scholars strive to identify.

Volunteer tourism actors

"Who" and "why" in volunteer tourism

Research on volunteer tourism started with propositions of the classification of the main actors of this phenomenon, that is, volunteer tourists, organisations and hosting communities. Notwithstanding the variety of models proposed, in the typology of the first two groups, inner motivation is considered a key factor. Researchers have distinguished key values that lie behind individual decisions to participate or promote volunteer tourism and then associated them within specific classifications. In the literature about the volunteer tourism, the area of motivations is the most developed one (Wearing, 2001; Brown & Sally, 2005; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Therefore, our narration serves mostly to briefly remind a spectrum of values that back volunteers stories.

An obvious motivation to participate in voluntourism is an altruistic need to help other, the so-called less fortunate people. However, as has been shown in various research, this is usually quite a superficial explanation for Westeners seeking experiences in Global South countries (Coghlan, & Fennell, 2009). Volunteer tourists are strongly motivated by the urge of living a genuine, authentic experience, seeking to express themselves (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Kahana, 2021) and have a purpose (Brown, 2005). This is what inspired the very roots of volunteer tourism and still echoes in various involvement initiatives taken up by tourists while abroad (Lis et al., 2022). Motivations to volunteer while on vacations might also have strong self-development focus, and these are on the opposite side of the egoistic-altruistic spectrum. For instance, having an experience of voluntary work abroad might serve as an asset in the university application or in volunteers' curriculum vitae (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016).

As regards the classification in the reviewed literature, Callanan and Thomas (2005) applied the notion of "deep-shallow ecology" taken from Naess (1973) and Sylvan (1985) in their work on volunteer tourism. The typology they proposed contained shallow and deep volunteer tourism on both ends of the spectrum and intermediate in the middle. In the case of vacationers, the classification is based on the importance of the altruistic motives in relation to the self-interest motives of the participants; if the second one prevails, a tourist is considered a shallow type. The division between altruistic

and self-interested motivations is still observed as a factor that shows the variety of observed attitudes among volunteer tourists (Proyrungroj, 2023). This brief introduction summarises the well-grounded perspective applied in the previous decades of research that have examined volunteer tourists' various motivations and created these typologies. Indeed, it opened up the space for the latest studies focused on discovering the relations and influence of motives and experiences on the attitudes of volunteers and organisations, as we discuss further on in the text. When it comes to host communities, the question revolves around their participation and representation level.

Volunteer tourists: Seeking an explanation of well-known motivations

Demographics

Scholars have started to dig dipper and to examine the politics of race as well as class in volunteer tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023; Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). Syed and Ali (2011) examined post-colonial feminist views of white women in developing countries (Proyrungroj, 2023). Bandyopadhyay and Patil (2017) analysed the feminist framing of volunteer tourism as a basis to examine the "white saviour complex" phenomenon, which until now has usually been associated with volunteer tourism. Early on, studies on volunteer tourists' behaviours and motivations revealed that these are usually determined by their age and gender (Mostafanezhad, 2013). The picture of the volunteer tourist in the literature consists of images of a white person, most frequently a female (Palk, 2003), from one of the broadly understood "Western countries" (Daley, 2013), based on the average participant in volunteering activities. This model of volunteer tourism, criticised with the intention of signalling its neo-colonial way of thinking, was later reviewed. It is alleged that this image is being "invoked in universalising ways",

whilst in fact expressing privilege. In the latest discussion about this binary division, the gendered nature of volunteer tourism, and what unpaid work has in common with the social transformation, Wearing et. al. proffered a nuanced critique of the well-known model, proving it to be excessively simplified (Wearing et al., 2018).

Perception of the experience and looking for authenticity

In their hopes for a rewarding experience, volunteers are confronted with their growing knowledge of the potential and actual pitfalls within the volunteer tourism sector. Together with the main actors' growing awareness of the critique of this sector (Kadomskaia et al. 2021), researchers are interested in studying volunteer tourists' perceptions, their need to experience authenticity and the value they give to it. Volunteering tourists seek intrapersonal and interpersonal authenticity (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017) and "substantial interaction" with locals (Kainthola et al., 2021). However, limited time dedicated to a project often prevents volunteers from obtaining the desirable work result, which causes them frustration (Pompurová et al., 2020).

When it comes to growing awareness and self-critique, there are two issues to ponder: the first is the evaluation of the tourist's own experience (Taylor et al., 2020), and the second is the assessment of others, the so-called "intra-tourist gaze". Schwarz (2018) used the "intra-tourist" framework to analyse how volunteer tourists compete among each other when it comes to the "moral high ground" of their experience, that is, which one is the proper "international volunteering". According to Schwarz, volunteers "gaze" and judge the other's experience and disregard it as "voluntourism" if the project is shorter in duration, involves unskilled participants, or involves an equal amount of "work" and holiday.

Another study on volunteer tourists' self-evaluation revealed, however, that volunteering is considered part of the quest to the moral principle to "be true to yourself".

This, allegedly, can be obtained through the tourism experience (Kahana, 2021).

From this, we can see that volunteer tourists have an awareness of the sector's darkest aspects and neo-colonial features, and thus they choose their experiences carefully. However, above all, they keep on reviewing and comparing their experience as it unfolds.

Organisations: Mediating the relations

Researchers divide the range of organisations and entities that are involved in engaging volunteer tourism according to the organisational basics (i.e., NGOs, commercial tour operators, religious organisations and academic groups) (Smith, 2016), the question of generating profit or not (Gray & Campbell, 2007), acting as a sending or receiving organisation and if the latter is operated by the locals or not. Altogether, it is considered that "volunteer tourism organisations" have the main influence on the shape and development of the sector because of their marketing, management and administrative tasks (Steele et al., 2017; Kainthola et al., 2021), as well as the objectives they set.

Specifically, studies have revealed also how the actions of organisations influence the individual volunteer's experience. The first reason for this is that only these organisations can prepare volunteers before the experience and debrief them afterwards (McGehee & Santos, 2005; McGehee, 2014). The second reason is that the volunteer tourism organisation very often acts as a facilitator and interpreter of the local culture.

The online imaginaries of volunteer tourism created by organisations are crucial for the influence they wield. Inversini et al. (2019) applied the social representation theory to analyse the content of websites managed by volunteer tourism organisations in South Africa. The study revealed that tourism and volunteering are cast as key elements of what is broadcasted as a cultural experience. When it comes to the socially constructed meaning of voluntourism created online, authors argue

that in some cases, it still reproduces neo-colonial stereotypes (Everingham & Motta, 2020) and strengthens "the romantic view of poverty", as described earlier by (Butcher, 2011). These false imaginaries, although attractive for potential participants, create expectations that cannot be met. This, in turn, leads to volunteer tourists' disappointment in the actual experience (Smith & Font, 2014). From this, we can see that even indirect models of communication towards potential volunteers influence them significantly, mostly in terms of their expectations regarding the upcoming experience.

Local communities: The role of the host's participation and representation level

The critique of volunteer tourism creating dependency on the part of local communities evolved from the scholars' search for solutions and conditions for these communities' empowerment. The examples and effects of reckless volunteer tourism practices, such as the exploitation of local communities, low-quality work performed by unskilled volunteers, the reawakening of neo-colonial attitudes, bad management of resources and other issues (Guttentag, 2009) naturally led to proposals within the literature to make the practices within the sector more balanced.

We can observe a trend of thought that this should be done first through the change of relationship dynamics between the actors (Tomazos & Butler, 2009; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Frilund, 2018; Lee & Zhang, 2020). Scholars advise a more regulative and structured approach represented by the volunteer tourists themselves, as well as media engagement that takes into account the structure and dynamics of a given community (Banki & Schonell, 2018; Thompson & Taheri, 2020). The research on residents exposed to volunteer tourism pays strong attention to these communities' experience of transformation, reviews the attitudes towards volunteers (McGehee & Andereck, 2009), enhances the importance of having control and the

ability to set their own goals (Frilund, 2018), and the self-categorisation they undertake. Consequently, there are recommendations for making "being volunteered" a better experience. There is also the question of the distribution and balance of power among the actors involved. (Grimm et al., 2021) write about the need to "flatten out the relation" between volunteers and locals.

Researchers suggest that this can be done by emphasising the importance of "bidirectionality of knowledge", power sharing and collaboration (Eckardt et al., 2021). This approach was introduced as one that positively influences project sustainability (Eckardt et al., 2022). Placing members of the hosting community in the role of experts about the local site is also important because newcomer volunteers might expect to be more knowledgeable since they are "helpers" (Grimm, 2013). Another recommendation to avoid misunderstandings and misrepresentations is to directly involve local communities in the process of creating the material for volunteer tourism promotion (McGehee, 2014), so also the discourse that underlies these contents (Grimm et al., 2021). Similarly, but taking it a step further, Gilfillan (2015) advises that projects should be initiated and developed by the hosting community.

On the meta-level, Smith (2016) discussed host communities as "providers of moral encounters" for tourists from the North, who pay to care for and benefit others. He suggested, therefore, that the role of host communities goes beyond the question of "care" and what is being enhanced to their role in creating specific attitudes among tourists.

Revolutionary for the literature narration itself is the fact that authors notice the need to treat local communities as partners in the volunteer tourism industry and not just as recipients of help (Grimm et al., 2021). Doerr (2017), however, advises considerable caution in this respect. According to the author, no matter if help is called a "gift" or a "partnership", all parties are aware of previously existing social relations of inequity, in which the "receiver" is a debtor who cannot reciprocate in other ways than being grateful. Doerr (2017) and also Henry (2021) recommend that those who are burdened with the history of their colonial ancestors should provide service in the idea of "paying dues" for existing inequalities instead of providing help motivated by "altruism".

These notions together constitute a major shift in volunteer tourism research that previously dedicated great attention mostly to "gazing" (Urry, 1990), volunteer tourists' experience with self (Frilund, 2018). More generally, it opens up research about the residents' attitudes towards volunteer tourism. It has been recognised that the specificity of the local community is crucial to the nature of the project implemented. "Local community" brings together the role of the aid recipients, project hosts and also its evaluators. Trivial as it may seem, without hearing their voices, project organisations will keep on misinterpreting what is "needed help", thus missing out on the chance to create the smooth travel experiences they seek to provide.

Geographical considerations of volunteer tourism

Driving factors of development

As Saarinen (2014) noted in his article, geographical research on tourism has grown noticeably in the late '90s and the first two decades of the 21st century, and also become more diverse. He reflects that research on this topic mingle well with many areas of both human geographies and social sciences. When it comes to volunteer tourism, specifically, the study of spatial differentiation and development of projects initially covered the analysis of the human development index (HDI) influence (Thomazos & Butler, 2009), the previous occurrence of catastrophic events in the given region (Thomazos & Butler, 2009; Wearing & McGehee, 2013), the question of what parts of the world volunteers think of as "needy spaces seeking compassionate service" (Mostafanezhad, 2013), the places where environmental issues are pressing

(Wearing, 2001) and, by contrast, the consideration of more conventional tourist market driving forces (Thomazos & Butler, 2009), such as safety, the attractiveness of the location and its accessibility (Keese, 2011). Only recently, the geopolitical perspective was used to analyse the positioning of today's volunteer tourism (Henry, 2019), its material and discursive implications for teaching, conservation and infrastructure tasks (Henry & Mostafanezhad, 2019).

Although these findings remain relevant, more detailed and case-based research is being undertaken on volunteer tourism's development in regions that are important for other reasons: for example, the ones experiencing a migrant crisis (Cavallo & Di Matteo, 2021) or the ones that were spared by the COVID-19 pandemic's effects. The study of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a growing body of articles finding that the global lockdown prompted a shift of the volunteer tourism industry towards a more sustainable model (Everingham & Motta, 2020; Lis et al., 2022). We consider it a field of interesting research topics, of which many were previously neglected, such as local volunteer tourism (McGehee & Anderreck, 2008). Helping locally is enthusiastically advised mostly for its accessibility and for not fostering the supremacy of volunteers (Ong, 2021). It would be of value to analyse this trend in relation to volunteer tourists' motivations, which, at this time, might involve having an additional motive to travel, the actual costs-risk effectiveness of volunteer tourism and the growth of programmes combining remote work with volunteering and touring, just to name a few.

Diversification of traditionally divided market relations

The model of environmental and development projects undertaken by volunteers travelling from developed countries to developing ones has become a dominant paradigm in volunteer tourism research (Guttentag, 2009; Mostafanezhad, 2013; Ong, 2021),

including the research on the monitoring and evaluation of volunteer tourism. Considering that the main assumed purpose of volunteer tourism is to provide help while touring, it has often been seen as an activity that emphasises the neo-colonial conventional way of thinking, with a clear division between the saviours and those in need (Sin, 2009; Wearing et al., 2018). The so-called "white saviour complex" already stands out as one of the paradigms of volunteer tourism study (Wearing et al., 2018). On the other hand, the critique of the Western voluntourists' morality and legitimacy to help has become so intensive and frequent that it has been questioned for perpetuating the "ahistorical and apolitical racial, ethnic, gender and class-based binary thinking that it seeks to condemn". Finding that "popular critiques of the industry would benefit from a more historicised, multi-scalar and place-based analysis of the particularities of the volunteer tourism experience", (Wearing et al., 2018) strived for a necessary balance in the discussion about the image of the female, who constitutes the majority of Western volunteer tourists. This is particularly important once the critique of the sector participants develops[1] in the popular culture.

Laurie and Smith (2018), when examining volunteering geographies in the international development context, found that the current literature is actually dominated by "North–South imaginaries" (Grimm et al., 2021). Bandyopadhyay (2019), similarly, has argued that pictures of the "suffering" Global South as "conventional understandings" need to be challenged (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Also, Laurie and Smith (2018) recognise that volunteering and development activities and relationships are interpreted mostly through the lenses of Northern mobility, this way concealing other aspects of this phenomenon.

However, there is also a growing concern about volunteers travelling from or between

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[1] See: "Barbie Saviors" Instagram account: https://www.instagram.com/barbiesavior/.

the countries of the Global South and volunteer tourists from developed countries travelling to volunteer within their own country or between them (see for examples: Lis et al., 2022). Giving volunteering individuals from the Global South comparable benefits and opportunities is considered a potential solution to the problem of the preponderance of volunteers from the Global North (Grimm et al., 2021). On the contrary, volunteering at home has been often excluded from volunteer tourism study in favour of focusing specifically on international cases (Wearing &McGehee, 2013).

It is therefore interesting to observe the latest comments about COVID-19's influence on the tourism industry such that, according to the authors, it should now focus on following well-considered, and, most importantly, local models (Lis et al., 2022). It is already considered as an opportunity to influence the traditional dichotomy in the volunteer tourism sector and encourage travellers to apply a more sustainable model of travelling and choose to help inside their own country. Noticing that these choices are already subject to change, we argue that undertaking volunteer tourism closer to home is now motivated by imposed travel restrictions and cost-risk effectiveness rather than by the growing awareness of required sustainable objectives in the sector. Another factor is that for many people today, any type of travelling, apart from the main reason for which it is undertaken, requires ulterior motives to be accepted as well-grounded. The growing trend is to complement the main mobility purpose with the readiness of a traveller to volunteer while at the destination. On this point, we noticed that touristic destinations that support this idea are not necessarily located in countries representing the so-called Global South. Further study is needed to discover what prompted this last change, but we argue that these two new models of behaviours related to the COVID-19 pandemic will work together against the traditional Global South–Global North relation in volunteer tourism. This

involves volunteering inside the country and the promotion of volunteering during other activities in developed countries.

Decommodified forms of volunteer tourism

Is "paid" the essential characteristic of volunteer tourism?

One aspect of volunteer tourism that is still under-researched is its decommodified, non-packaged and unorganised option, in which no fee is required to participate. These experiences are usually mediated through digital platforms, existing as part of a larger movement and maintained by organisations such as Workaway and WWOOF[2]. Operating based on a "volunteer work for room and board" exchange (McIntosh & Campbell, 2001), they are inspired and organised between a private individual host and a traveller who appreciates this form of a collaborative economy. It seems that there are two reasons for scholars to classify this form of volunteer tourism as a type of working experience rather than as tourism. Firstly, some researchers consider combining volunteerism with leisure travel as the most important characteristics of volunteer tourism (Coghlan & Fennell, 2009). Secondly, the non-monetary exchange between the host and the volunteer seems to support the purpose of sustaining the volunteers rather than them pursuing their holiday objectives. Thirdly, most of the researchers mention the fact of paying for a volunteering abroad opportunity as an immanent part of being a volunteer tourist (Tomazos & Butler, 2009), although the amount of payment varies (Wearing, 2001). Mosedale, who introduces volunteer tourism as an example of unpaid work in tourism, stresses that these kind of experiences "are far from decommodified" as they are "often facilitated by fee-charging organizations" (Mosedale, 2013).

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[2] WWOOF: World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.

Some scholars recognise WWOOFing's placement in tourism (Lai et al., 2020), and some actually classify it as volunteer tourism (Terry, 2014), arguing that it is, in general, not commercially oriented (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006); Mostafanzhd, 2016). Remarkably, these are the same authors who apply a broad picture of volunteer tourism and recognise that this activity is, or at least aspires to be, seen as offering "de-commodified experiences".

Vacationers and hosts participating in WWOOF and other decommodified voluntourism experiences are studied mostly from the perspective of the economic and social benefits they gain and which motivate them. As Lai et al. (2020) observe, WWOOF and similar initiatives stand in opposition to the tourism model dominated by neoliberal economic practices. Experiences such as WWOOFing are also discussed in the context of the sharing economy, in line with "alternative economy discourse" and viewed as a niche, non-profit area (Lai et al., 2020).

A volunteer tourist does not have to wave their credit card to enjoy the act of helping since this particular vacation experience can be appreciated based on the sharing economy model. This finding should, however, be carefully distinguished from contrasting finance-related concerns. These are often raised when discussing actions on behalf of someone else's benefit that are not remunerated with money, but are called "volunteering" (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Vercammen et al., 2020). Tourists' involvement in volunteering experiences abroad has been the subject of research demonstrating the blurred boundaries of volunteering with unpaid (Kelemen et al., 2017) or precarious work (Brennan, 2018). This uncertainty is strongly linked to the question of what is actually considered "work" in modern society (Kelemen et al., 2017) and how risky the promise of authentic experience might be for the quality of the labour market, taking into consideration the free work supply (Brennan, 2018).

Volunteer-host relation

This brings us to another characteristic of decommodified volunteer experiences, which is the direct interaction between a volunteer and a host. Most of them in one way or another apply the "profit and/or loss" approach. Terry (2014) evaluated WWOOFing tourism in the United States in relation to labour shortages on farms. The causes of possible conflicts and misunderstandings in these relationships are the different personalities and motivations of both sides. Smith and Font (2014) indicated the potential pitfalls of these arrangements: touristic motivations outweighing working motivations, poor preparation to conduct hard work on farms, lack of experience and the constant rotation of volunteers. Gaps in expectations, as in other cases, could be due to the fact that cooperation is arranged through the Internet (Smith & Font, 2014). What is of value, instead, is the growing productive force of farms (De Moura et al., 2020) and the positive, permanent changes left behind, as well as boosting social change towards a more sustainable way of living (Terry, 2014). McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) compared the hosted experience mediated by WWOOFing with other stays of a commercial character found on farms. They considered the potential factors of these differences, such as the exchange and volunteer nature of the collaboration and the organic approach of the farm hosts. Four levels of difference have been identified: the possibility to learn, "the rurality of the experience", its personal meaningfulness and the element of sincerity in it.

Recalled research studies have obvious limitations in that they represent only a regionalised sample of volunteer tourism experiences, based on a limited number of onsite or telephone interviews (Steele & Scherrer, 2018). Even though studies have been performed in various localisations around the world, they present a quite harmonised, one-mind image of volunteer tourism experiences.

Emerging tracks and recommendations for future research

This article shows some areas of volunteer tourism study that are already developed and hold great potential, but are not yet crystallised. These topics are worthy of further research effort and commitment. We present a summary of these topics here, with a short comment about the current research state and the most relevant works (Tab. 1).

tourism research. A significant part of the debate invariably revolves around whether voluntourism meets the sustainability standards or not. This is observed through the prism of interaction between the visitor and the host(s), as well as through the influence volunteer tourists have on social and natural environments. Since volunteer tourism practice and theory have entered the adaptancy platform (Jafari, 1990) following a wave of criticism, we observe that the phenomenon itself has undergone a massive evolution in which participants manifest some sort of "economy

Table. 1. The summary of emerging tracks and recommendations for future research concerning volunteer tourism, own study

Topic	Summary/relevant findings	Literature
Volunteer tourism sustainability assessment	Volunteer tourism is usually placed within the notion of sustainable tourism because of the idea that it meets the needs of both vacationers and hosting communities. Today, this is considered to be a premise based on "conventional belief" that needs further examination or even to be called into question through the actual, holistic sustainability framework of the environment, culture and economy.	(Lee & Zhang, 2020)
Organic farm tourism, coinciding qualities and differences	Volunteer tourism on organic farms has gained the consideration of researchers as distinctive "organic farm tourism" or "WWOOFing" (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), the latter of which stands for the name of the movement started in Britain in 1971 and the online intermediary portal offering such opportunities (Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). Within the conceptual framework of volunteer tourism, WWOOFing is often characterised by its relatively direct and equal-power relationship between volunteers and hosts and guests as well as by the limited role of any outside entities.	(Wearing & McGehee, 2013)
Research tourism and citizen science	Projects and initiatives that engage lay individuals in the unpaid collection of scientific data, which are considered similar to acts of citizen science.	(Sandiford, 2021)
Social media's role in volunteer tourists' behaviour and choices	Identification and explanation of individuals' social media publishing behaviour during and after their volunteer experience.	
	The role of social media in discouraging potential volunteers from choosing commodified projects provided by commercial tour operators.	(Grimm & Needham, 2012; Wearing & McGehee, 2013)
Volunteer tourism and gender studies	The role of volunteer tourism experience in developing countries for white women's emancipation in the public sphere.	(Almela & Calvet, 2021)

Conclusions

Describing the progress in volunteer tourism research, we outline current directions and opportunities that lie ahead in volunteer

of responsibility". While this does not automatically mean fixing volunteer tourism issues, we observe greater interest in the actual effects of volunteer tourism and their evaluation. It is promising that negative images

of volunteer tourism are not being projected when this phenomenon is matched with new forms of tourism and when new stakeholders are involved in its development.

The passive attitudes of tourists and hosting communities that we observed in previous research seem to be replaced today by the stronger involvement of both groups. Volunteer tourists reflect upon their experiences and seek quality, both when it comes to self-evaluation and relations with other volunteers and communities. Local communities, in turn, are becoming partners instead of vulnerable recipients of help. In fact, the reliance on help itself is slowly giving way to supportive and cooperative ventures. Finally, in most cases, organisations are still considered the mediators of these experiences, and thus the quality of their communication greatly affects the upcoming experience.

Although these newly emerging areas of research do not address all the possible pitfalls and troubles of volunteer tourism, it seems that we may be coming back to the very essence of the industry, which is to make the most out of the vacationing experience while making the world a better place. Volunteer tourism research is based mostly on case studies that differ with regard to the locations, backgrounds, tasks, contexts and participants studied. Therefore, there is a need for a holistic approach that encompasses all dimensions of volunteer tourism: stakeholders, organisations, markets and programmes. We need to take into consideration the diversity among transnational "hosts" and "guests" that are involved in order to achieve a more nuanced evaluation of volunteer tourism.

Scholars still take the attempts to classify particular volunteer tourism activities somewhere between the volunteering and touring sectors, trying to check whether particular experience encompasses more characteristics of tourism than volunteering. At the same time, we have seen change in the place volunteer tourism as a phenomenon holds within the tourism typology. Actually, we can observe that volunteer tourism is often used as a good demonstration of many new names

and forms of tourism that scholars strive to identify.

Our general aim was to show the progress in writing and thinking about volunteer tourism during the last eight years. An overwhelming criticism of volunteer tourism has once led to an oversimplified and biased picture of the sector. Since scholars aimed at more nuanced analysis of best practices for the multifaceted domain of tourists' involvement abroad, we observe a manifestation of volunteer tourism' entering Jafari's adaptancy platform phase (Jafari, 1990).

Today, living an authentic experience is as much, if not much more important than ever. The way we travel and spent our free time remained to be a strong manifestation of our social position, lifestyle, and identity. However, there were a few new factors that made travel become a very involving aspect of lifestyle during the last 20 years. The first factor is that today it is often not enough to travel only for the sake of "normal" leisure. What people seek now is to live an everyday life abroad or/and get involved in the local environment. This can be based on various arrangements, terms, and motivations. Ideas vary from going on individual volunteering for a few days, to whole communities living together and exchanging goods for exercising simple jobs. Another factor was the process of globalization and the development of the Internet which made it fast for people to exchange ideas, and find travel opportunities across the globe. Finally, the idea of sharing economy inspired the development of ideas such as Workaway, Couchsurfing, and homesitting. All this made volunteering abroad more accessible, fun and unique, simultaneously delivering valuable research directions.

Editors' note:
Unless otherwise stated, the sources of tables and figures are the author's, on the basis of their own research.

Annex 1

The keyword search:

Volunteer tourism, Voluntourism, Working tourism, Working vacation, Workaway, Volunteering abroad, WWOOF, Wwofing, Experience abroad, Opportunities abroad, Volunteer abroad, Voluntourism Service trips, Community development, Sustainable tourism, Humanitarian travel, Social impact travel, Responsible tourism, Global citizenship, International volunteering, Service-learning, Cultural immersion, Ethical volunteering, Wildlife conservation volunteering, Environmental volunteering, Rural development, Orphanage volunteering, Medical mission trips, Citizen tourism, Niche tourism, Service learning, Fund-raising tourism, Adventure tourism, Cultural exchange projects, Global South, Missionary, Gap year, Organic farm tourism.

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