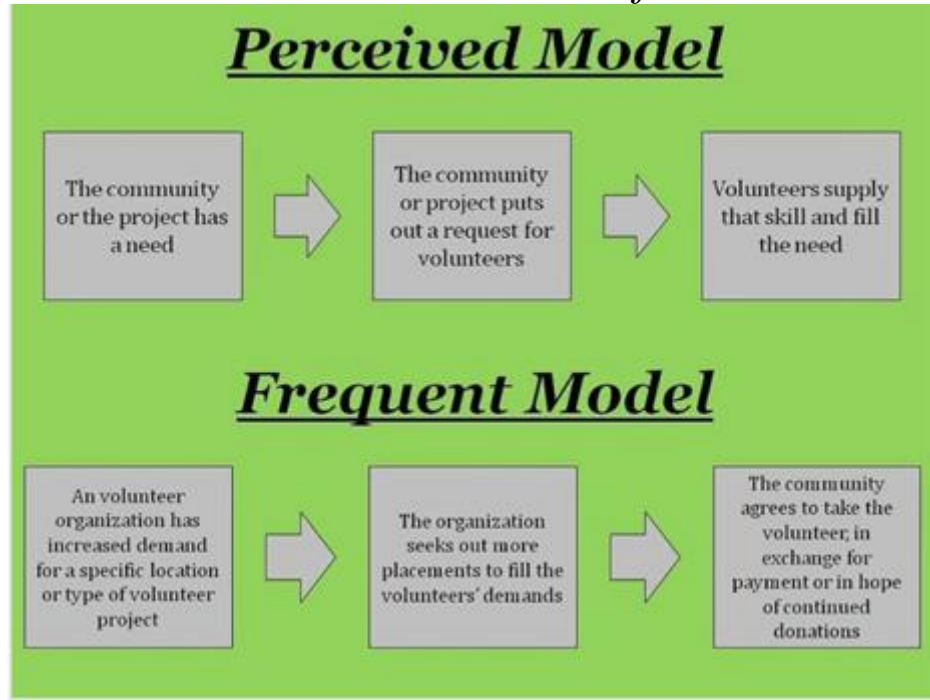Title: Saving or Serving - Voluntourism: An investigation into the problematic nature of the voluntourism industry and the associated repercussions for the communities deemed in need

Chapter Four

Positive Potential: The Future of Voluntourism

Learning.service.[2019]. Instagram.com.

Chapter 4

The dramatic and continuing growth in the prevalence of globalised International volunteering is reflective of the "prevailing desire amongst a growing cohort of consumers to avoid conventional mass tourism"[2]. Due to shifting consumer values and demand for experiences with an altruistic narrative, the voluntourism industry will continue to strengthen. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the future of voluntourism and ways in which the core values presented by the industry can shift to play a more sustainable role in the future of Global Development.

The Covid-19 global pandemic has had a dramatic and likely transformative impact on the voluntourism industry, which will bring about long term change. With travel bans placed by subsequent governments at the macro level halting all forms of international volunteering. As

highlighted in my interview with Projects Abroad Project manager Duncan Curnow stating "Covid-19 has halted our projects completely."[3] However while international volunteering has been stopped the pandemic has sparked a surge in volunteering at the local level with "millions of people sharing their time, skills and knowledge to support their fellow self-isolators"[4]. This means that communities in both the Global South and Global West are working on community-based solutions themselves.

The wide-ranging effect of the pandemic on the travel industry has resulted in a job loss across the world on a macro scale. This means that the business model of voluntourism is no longer practical, as described in my interview with Dr. Simone Faulkner, "I work with an organization in Cambodia and we are devasted by this."[5] The business model of voluntourism is now defunct as described in my interview with Claire Bennett, "The unethical organisations could go out of business because there only interested in profit and there is no profit right now."[6] This, however means that in order for the travel industry to restart after the economic and social readjustment caused by Covid-19, unethical practice might be prominent as expressed in my interview with Dr. Simone Faulkner "I am worried that there will be lots of loop holes that are jumped through and unethical practice."[7] with financial incentives at risk of outweighing the ethical concerns of society and the environment. Despite concern over future unethical practice in response to Covid-19, Claire Bennett also highlights the pandemic as a chance for "people to reflect and take a critical view of this whole sector, and what we might find is people are going back and reconsidering travel in general."[8] Thereby the Covid-19 pandemic may have a transformative impact on the way volunteer travel is conducted, implemented and conceived.

 In order for voluntourism to have the positive and wide-ranging effect it was formed to achieve a major shift must occur in the de-commodification of volunteering. This major reforming of voluntourism would mean "tourist operators step away from a solely profit-orientated business plan to include a more holistic approach."[9] This approach means that accountability must be ensured between volunteer sending organisations and host communities, as to allow communities to identify their priorities and areas of need rather than uniform projects based off

volunteer demand. The current commodified nature of voluntourism means that power dynamics are asserted and upheld as discussed in my interview with Pippa Biddle, "At home, when volunteers and recipients live among each other and their lives overlap, it's possible for these power dynamics to be eroded or even swapped. This isn't possible in voluntourism, where voluntourists come and go because they have bought into a commercial tourism product that is by its very definition, short term."[10] Greater ethical considerations combined with the decommodification of the industry will break down existing power dynamics and Western superiority.

[1] Bennett, C. Collins, J. Heckscher, Z. Papi-Thornton, D. [2018] Learning service, the essential guide to volunteering abroad. Red Press. Cornwall England. P177

[2] Ong, F. Lockstone-Binney, L. King, B. Smith, K. [2014] The Future of Voluntourism in the in the Asia Pacific Region. Alternative Prospects. Research Gate. The Scale and Scope of Voluntourism. P3.

[3] Interview, Duncan Curnow, See Appendix C

[4] O'brien, J. [2020] Opinion: The future of volunteering in the corona virus era. Devex.

[5] Interview, Dr. Simone Faulkner, see appendix E

[6] Interview, Claire Bennett, see appendix F

[7] Interview, Dr. Simone Faulkner, see appendix E

[8] Interview, Claire Bennett, see appendix F

[9] Wearing, S. McGeeHee, N. [2014]. International volunteer tourism: integrating travellers and communities. Chapter 8, P128.

[10] Interview, Pippa Biddle, see appendix D

[11] D, Papi-Thornton. [2012]. What's wrong with Volunteer Travel? TEDxOxbrigde. Ted Talks.

[12] Interview, Claire Bennett, see appendix F

[13] Ibid, see appendix F

[14] Bennett, C. Collins, J. Heckscher, Z. Papi-Thornton, D. [2018] Learning service, the essential guide to volunteering abroad. Red Press. Cornwall England. P60

[15] Interview, Dr. Simone Faulkner, see appendix E

[16] Bennett, C. Collins, J. Heckscher, Z. Papi-Thornton, D. [2018] Learning service, the essential guide to volunteering abroad. Red Press. Cornwall England. P107