



VOLUNTOURISM IN KATHMANDU, NEPAL

An anthropological study on the positive and negative effects of voluntourism, as seen from the point of view of the local community in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis aims to elucidate both the negative and positive consequences of voluntourism from the point of view of the host community in Kathmandu, Nepal. The host community is operationalized as the ones on the receiving end of voluntourism, therefore being directly influenced by the work of volunteers or the businesses behind this process. Despite this, the experiences and views of the host community are often overlooked. However their viewpoint is essential since it can provide us with an unparalleled assessment of the true effects of voluntourism, being deeply connected to both the volunteers and the local communities. Therefore I will discuss the different effects and controversies of voluntourism, mainly focussing on the views of the host community. I will also discuss how different groups of participants experience these consequences and how the consequences influence their lives.

First and foremost, it is essential to define and understand voluntourism. Several authors name voluntourism as one of the fastest growing sectors in the travel industry (Wearing, 2001; Guttentag, 2009; Rattan, 2015). For example, it was estimated by Atlas (2008) that in 2008 1.6 million people travelled to foreign countries for the purpose of volunteering work (Atlas, 2008). An increasing amount of people have the ability to travel, stimulating the movement of people around big parts of the world (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008). As Palacios (2010) found, in the last couple of years a growing number of young people are involving themselves in volunteering work abroad. The motivation to experience something new and to be involved in more unusual travel experiences sparked a 'new' trend of tourism: voluntourism. Voluntourism is a form of tourism with the incorporation of volunteering projects as part of the tourist experience (Wearing, 2001). Brown (2005) defines voluntourism from the point of view of a tour operator, as "a type of tourism where 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" (2005: 480). Andereck, McGehee, Lee and Clemmons (2009, 130) handle another definition, including both the experiences of the volunteer and the travel experience: "the conscious, seamlessly integrated combination of voluntary service to a destination and the best, traditional elements of travel-arts, culture, geography, history and recreation – in that destination" (Andereck, McGehee, Lee and Clemmons, 2012). Andereck (2012) states that in this particular form of tourism it is

not just authenticity that is desired by tourists, but a situation where they can perform acts of helping and believe they can make a difference. Also Tomazos and Butler (2009, 196) argue that volunteers in voluntourism go on a working holiday to volunteer their labour for what they see to be 'worthy causes'. This variety in definitions already shows the point of Taplin, Dredge and Scherrer (2014, 874-897) that voluntourism knows several stakeholders with each their own interests, values, objectives and motivations. Therefore it makes sense that not one but a wide variety of definitions can be found in the literature.

In the literature several authors discuss the main purpose of voluntourism. Wearing and McGehee (2013, 120-130) state in a literature review of voluntourism, that the base of international voluntourism is in line with ideas of development aid. Ticktin (2011, 5) argues in accordance with Wearing and McGehee that both industries have the general motivation to help, support the development of a society and make a change in the lives of people. Young (2008) takes on another point of view and mentions disasters and growing social and environmental issues in developing countries as a reason for the growth in popularity of international voluntourism. Young (2008) argues that the combination of these social and environmental issues and major social changes including increases in leisure time and higher disposable income contribute to the current popularity of international voluntourism. Nestora, Yeung and Calderon (2009) add to this reason the effect of big disasters which influenced a lot of people and sparked the awareness for the opportunity to experience a holiday that involved volunteering. Wearing and McGehee (2013) argue that voluntourism often focusses on humanitarian and environmental projects with the intention of serving communities in need.

The earlier stance in the literature was predominantly positive about the impact and consequences of voluntourism. Several researchers portrayed the performing of volunteering acts as part of tourism as an ideal activity with few negative consequences. The voluntourists would experience a satisfying travel experience and the 'volunteered' would experience benefits such as community building or development of the area (McGehee, Gard and Santos, 2005; Brown and Morrison, 2003; Broad and Jenkins 2008, 72-85). Broad and Jenkins (2008, 72-85) explain that the general idea was that the voluntourist wanted to differ itself from the motivations of the mass tourist by searching for altruistic experiences. Motivations for these altruistic experiences were self-development, giving back to the host community, participating in community development and cultural understanding. Broad and Jenkins

(2008) describe a mutual beneficiary relation, as the volunteers are seeking a meaningful, intense experience and the host community can benefit from the long-term commitment and financial contribution of the volunteers.

In addition to these positive impacts of voluntourism, after more research had been done and long term experiences became apparent, a more cautious stance started to characterize the literature (Brown, 2003; Conran, 2011; Guttentag, 2009, 531-537; Palacios, 2010; Sin, 2009). The potential negative effects and possible pitfalls of voluntourism were addressed. Salazar (2010) mentions that one of these pitfalls can be the possible mismatch between the motivations of volunteers and the needs of the host community. He argues, in contrast with Broad and Jenkins (2008) and McGehee (2002) that, volunteers often lack altruistic intentions. Palacios (2010) also emphasised the potential for exploitation of the host community, as he states that foreign interests are prioritized over local ones. Furthermore Palacios (2010) mentioned that volunteering organizations and voluntourists tend to receive more benefits than the local communities. In the literature review of Wearing and McGehee (2013), they state that helping others, developing a feeling of contribution and making a difference are often the reason to perform volunteering work in a foreign country. In the process of fulfilling this need, the focus can be on ways to reach satisfaction for the volunteer, and not the actual needs of the host community. A mismatch can appear when the needs of the host community fail to accommodate the expectations or motivations of volunteers. This can happen when most problems that need attention are caused by large scale processes, such as community building or the raising of education levels, which are quite hard to solve for a volunteer with limited time. This is in line with the findings of Callanan and Thomas (2005, 183-200), who found that volunteering projects are largely short term, with the majority lasting less than 4 weeks. This can contribute to the failure of voluntourism to establish real changes and benefits for the host community.

A gap in this body of knowledge about NGO's in voluntourism and the goals they want to achieve for the host community is the incorporation of the view, experiences and impact on the host community. They are the ones at the receiving end of voluntourism. As Singh (2002) emphasized in his research about the effect of tourism on small villages in the Himalayas, such a societal situation can never be fully understood when only one side of a story is told. As Palacios (2010) states voluntourism organizations can be considered to have the potential

to act either as catalysts for positive socio-cultural change or as facilitators of neo-colonialism and dependency. To deepen this debate it is undesirable to exclude the view of the local people who are the core of the discussion. This research attempts to anticipate on exactly that and will explore voluntourism from the point of view of the host community. More specifically, it will explore the experiences of the host community of voluntourism in Kathmandu, Nepal. The positive and negative consequences of voluntourism on their lives and their view upon these practices will be discussed. This thesis will answer the following research question:

How does the host community of voluntourism in Kathmandu, Nepal perceive the negative and positive (un)intended consequences of voluntourism on their lives?

Fieldwork experiences showed that volunteers themselves added important value to the discourse about voluntourism in Kathmandu. Therefore I chose to include views of volunteers as well in discussing the experiences of the host community. Furthermore I will make an explicit distinction between positive and negative consequences of voluntourism, but as will become clear in chapter 3 and 4, these concepts are heavily intertwined. Therefore I will relate them to each other and discuss what the different views are on these consequences. I will also aim to show certain aspects of the host community that illustrate the agency and the creativity of the ones on the receiving end of voluntourism. This is mainly because I find these aspects to be underestimated in the contemporary literature. To illustrate this I will discuss how from many consequences that have been portrayed as mostly negative, the host community has been able to extract some positive ones.

1.1 Doing research: The Field and Methodology

1.1.1 Field Setting

This research was conducted during a three-month period of fieldwork in and around Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The choice to conduct the main part of my fieldwork at this location was the outcome of two main reasons. First, several websites of volunteering organisations made clear that most of the volunteering projects, and therefore the main part of the host community that is influenced by these projects, are located in Kathmandu. The volunteers prefer to perform their activities in or around Kathmandu, so they can enjoy the nightlife in the evening with their friends (Hindman, 2014, in Mostafanezhad and Hannam,

2014). Kathmandu is the hub where most organisations and volunteering locations are centralized. The infrastructure is substantially better in and around the city, making most volunteering experiences easy accessible in this area. Having cultural highlights nearby is an appealing element for voluntourists to focus their volunteering work around Kathmandu (Hindman, 2014). Not only volunteers focus their visit around Kathmandu, also most organisations and official governmental institutes can be found here. This would provide me with vastly easier access to interviews and appointments with officials. The second reason to choose Kathmandu as location for my fieldwork is because I had already established contact with one of my key participants before I left for fieldwork. This contact had lived in Kathmandu for over 4 years and has her own volunteering organisation. This provided me with early access to a (her) network of people in the voluntourism sector in Kathmandu. She also recommended Kathmandu as prime location, as it was *'the place where you should be if you want to be in the middle where everything [concerning volunteering] is happening'*¹.

This research can be seen as a 'multi-sited research', as I have conducted my fieldwork in several different places and settings (Marcus, 1995, 95). Not only does my research include different research location, different scale are also included in the observations and discussions. Perspectives from both the 'local' and the 'global' scale have contributed to the interdisciplinary views and experiences of the host community, and are therefore valuable to include. By means of the network of my key participants I had the opportunity to conduct research on the local scale and live in a host family. As anthropological research is often characterized as *being there* and *hanging around* (Ingold, 2011), for my research it was important to place myself as close as possible to my research participants. For most of the three months I lived in a Nepalese family that has been hosting 37 volunteers over 6 years. Most of these volunteers stayed for an average time of 7 to 20 days and did volunteering work as part of their holiday or travelling experience². Therefore this location was a suitable place to research voluntourism from a local point of view. In these three months I attempted to gain an *insider's view* (Ingold, 2011). As O'Reilly discusses in her book on ethnographic methods (O'Reilly, 2011, 92-94) time is an important aspect to gain an insider's view. As I had significantly more time to spent in this host family than most other visitors, I was able to differ myself from the volunteers. This could help me building trust and a fruitful relationship between me and my research participants. As an insider, I could be able to obtain and

¹ Informal conversation, January 2017

² Informal conversation, Devi, April 2018

interpret different kinds of data. Not only the things that stand out as an outsider, but also the things one experiences as an insider could be recorded in this research. By means of building *rappport* participants can be more open and share their honest experiences (Chrzan and Brett, 2017, 60).

The guest mother of my host family was also the principal of a women's school that was fully dependent of the support of volunteers and NGO's. This school had 9 active students at the moment I was there. These students were all women between the age of 32 and 53 and all had never received education before. The aim of the school is to provide education for those who have never been in the position to attend school. For these women, the main reason they never attended school was mostly a financial one. Another often mentioned reason was that other responsibilities prohibited them to go to school. During my conversations with them they told me that most reasons include household tasks or family related issues. It has been challenging for them to combine these tasks with any form of education. The school was founded with the help of Oxfam Novib, but their support ended a couple of years ago. Ever since this moment volunteers of two different organisations support the school with financial aid and teach English at the school. Both organisations offered the volunteering experience to tourists, for some of them as a part of their holiday. This made this location suitable to research the consequences of voluntourism and the consequences for the local community. Together with these volunteers I attended school every day. At this location I could observe and experience the contribution of volunteers in supporting education and teaching English, and what the consequences were on the lives of the women that worked with volunteers.

1.1.2 Research participants

The group of research participants mostly existed of locals who worked with or for volunteering organisations. This included owners or employees of organisations, guest families who host volunteers or other involved individuals such as women who attend a school where volunteers are active. I also involved volunteers themselves, family members of host families and two employees of the Tourism Department of the government. The age of the participants ranged between 14 and 47, most of them were of Nepalese nationality. The age of some participants was difficult to establish, as some of them were not in the possession of a birth certificate. I decided to note the age they handled in their daily lives. In total I have performed interviews with twenty-four participants, thirteen women and eleven men. Four of

these participants were volunteers and seventeen were Nepali. I performed multiple interviews with many participants, spread out over a period of three months.

1.1.3 Participatory observation, interviewing and positionality

Several research methods were used to obtain as much data as possible and to be able to triangulate the data. Triangulation of data entails that I combined several research methods and information from participants to research one topic (Flick, 2002, 226). For example, when researching the consequences of volunteers at the women's school, I used information from observations, participatory observation and interviews to come to my conclusions. Also to realise the best interaction between research participant and researcher in several contexts, the used research methods varied from informal to formal (O'Reilly, 2012, 116-140).

The main research methods used in this research were interviewing and participatory observations. Furthermore data from formal sources such as websites, media and regulation policies were used to formalize and understand the formal framework in which the research participants live. To realize the interviews I approached several organisations who worked with volunteers. This was essential to get access to the locations where the volunteering work took place. Having access to these locations is crucial for conducting research on the experiences of locals with these practises, as these locals are also situated at these locations. By means of my personal network I got in contact with people who lived in Kathmandu and were involved in voluntourism. Through these contacts I attempted to ensure access and started to build up a small network before I arrived in Kathmandu. Utilizing them and their network I realized several interviews during my fieldwork. Some of these had a formal character and some could be recorded, most were informal conversations. The decision to use mostly informal interviews was based on the experience that the formality of recording or the structure of formal interviews had a negative effect on the comfort and openness of the participants. Several encounters taught me that my participants felt uncomfortable and were not familiar with the concept of recording conversations, as they seemed to feel unsure about what to say. The conversations lost their connection with the participants and the answers became more neutral and simplistic. As O'Reilly (2012, 116-140) describes in her book on ethnographic methods, being flexible and sensitive to the reaction of the research participants is important to ensure the best match between research method and participant. This ultimately contributes to more substantial and valid data. Therefore I chose to mostly use

informal interviews over formal ones. To preserve as much information as possible after every conversation I wrote down some small notes or quotes, on which I elaborated whenever I had a moment alone. As O'Reilly (2012, 154-155) describes, this is a method often used when recording is not desired but as much data as possible is to be preserved.

In addition to the interviews participant observation was a much used research method. As Berreman (2012) argues, participatory observation is about impressions and managing your position within the field (Berreman 2012, 153). Conducting participatory observation helped me to get more familiar and comfortable with my research participants and presented me with the opportunity to make them comfortable with my presence so that I could observe information about their lives. As O'Reilly (2012, 96) notes, participatory observations are about understanding and learning from the point of view of the research participants. I observed mostly at the school in Kirtipur, but also in several children's homes and other schools and monasteries where volunteers were active.

In my host family and school I had a double role; as a researcher and as a volunteer. This demanded a quite dynamic position. For example, in my host family and at the school I took on the role as researcher and less as volunteer. During my fieldwork several volunteers lived at my host family as well, which provided me with the opportunity to observe the activities and behaviour of the family and school with and without the presence of (other) volunteers. This contributed to a deeper understanding of their experiences with voluntourism, as I could notice changes in behaviour when volunteers were or were not present. For example, at the school I noticed that the teachers involved themselves with the volunteers when they were present, but they started to perform their work as teachers only when the volunteers were absent. They prepared classes or corrected tests only when the volunteers had gone home. This showed me their different behaviour in absence or presence of other volunteers. This also proved to me that they did not see me (only) as a volunteer, because then they probably would not have shown this difference in behaviour.

I could distinguish myself from the other volunteers by staying a significant longer time than the other volunteers did, during which I could build *rapport* with the family. Setting myself apart from the other volunteers was important, because otherwise I would be expected to volunteer instead of conducting research. It would have also been harder to observe the (somewhat objective) consequences of voluntourism on their lives, as I only would have experienced a one-sided view on their lives. In the role of researcher I could aim to experience both sides of the interactions with volunteers. When hanging out with the volunteers I

switched to my volunteer role, because of our similar positions and experiences. Nevertheless, even in this dynamic positionality I always presented myself as researcher to maintain a sense of transparency and honesty towards my research participants. This proved not only a research difficulty, but also on a personal level this put me in a challenging position. As I personally do not support volunteering in the arrangement that was offered to me, I had to make a decision about my personal preferences and my research. During my tasks I would mostly be supporting the staff. Therefore I would not be taking over their job. Hence I made the decision to prioritize this opportunity for my research over my personal preferences.

1.2 Structure of thesis

This thesis describes the ongoing debate about voluntourism in further detail and focusses on the experiences and point of view of the host community. In Chapter 2 the current situation in Nepal will be described to generate understanding about the formal structure in which this research was conducted. To understand the way people have organised their lives and to understand why they act in a certain way it is important to be familiar with the (formal) structure they are situated in. The short history of foreign developmental aid in Nepal and the quick rise of tourism have influenced the contemporary political and civil structures are therefore relevant to acknowledge. Furthermore a short overview of the research that already exists concerning the consequences of voluntourism will be discussed in relation to the data of this study. In Chapter 3 the focus is on the negative consequences of voluntourism for the host society. The data will be discussed in accordance with and complemented by relevant theory. After describing the negative consequences of voluntourism for the host community, the focus will shift to the positive consequences in Chapter 4. The current academic debate will be discussed again shortly before focussing on the collected data and relevant theory. Finally the concluding chapter will summarize the given arguments and conclude the views given in this thesis. The limitations of this research and recommendations for further research will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Understanding the context: The situation in Nepal

Present day tourism in Nepal is characterized by certain rules and regulations that have been established in the last 30 to 40 years (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). These rules and regulations determine the climate of voluntourism and directly influence the involved locals. The relations between rules and regulations, the (control of) the government, NGO's and volunteers were a significant topic in the conversations with my research participants. To understand the context in which the data is embedded, I aim to explain these relations in this chapter. First I will shortly address the role NGO's play in Nepal, then I will discuss the consequences the earthquake of 2015 has had on this sector and how that influences voluntourism today. Furthermore I will discuss what elements of the situation the locals find themselves are explicitly triggering the mechanisms of voluntourism by using the concept of regimes of care from Ticktin (2011). Finally, I will explain why this influences voluntourism and therefore the experiences of the host community before I will dive into the negative and positive consequences of voluntourism in chapter 3 and 4.

2.1 Formal context of voluntourism in Nepal

Since the 1990s there has been an increase of non-governmental organisations (NGO's) in Nepal. They have been filling the gaps where the government has been running short (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). Edwards and Hulme (1996) state that several tasks that would fall under the responsibility of the government, such as crisis aid, education or medical care have been (partly) taken over by the NGO's. This explosive growth shaped the structure in which the locals are living now. The increase of NGO's is heavily influenced by the history and political environment of Nepal. Karkee (2016) argues in her article about NGO's and foreign aid and development in Nepal that several factors contributed to this growth.

The political environment of Nepal has, before 1990, always been characterized by antipathy of any form of formal organisation. During Rana's rule (before 1950) any form of organisation or freedom of people was banned (this included freedom of expression, right to perceive education etc.). Any organisation was seen as a threat to the regime (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). Some local organisations persisted in their work underground, as the

nationalized legal organisations lacked cooperation with the locals. Later some local organisations with social capital from the locals were allowed to exist, but still under a level of control of the government (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018, 68). This shows the complex relation between the government and local (oriented) organisations. Because this cooperation has always been difficult, it can explain why NGO's were enthusiastically welcomed. In 1990 a big shift characterized the political climate, as the multiparty system was re-established and guaranteed freedom to organise once more. In these circumstances the number of NGO's boomed. It is difficult to find reliable number due to lack of structural registration, but it is estimated that more than 30,000 NGO's have been registered in the country in 2005 (Global Policy Forum). Next to the favourable environment from 1990 onwards, Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka (2018) mention the failure of two other big sectors, the state and market, as contribution to the success and inviting circumstances of NGO's. In the beginning of the millennium, the NGO's have been so successful that they have often overtaken the state services in providing development services. Second, the neoliberal market policy that favours privatization and is supported by western countries has attracted increasing amount of aid through private organisations. In a system of free markets and privatizations, services that are offered by private sectors are thriving in a competitive environment. These structures in a competitive environment show the favourable circumstances for the commodification of the request for aid and even of volunteers themselves. This will be further discussed in subchapters 3.2.1 and 4.2.1.

Furthermore the failure of the government at certain sectors contributed to the attraction and popularity of NGO's (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). At first corrupt, inefficient and unrewarding governmental processes and bureaucracy characterize the government (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). These structures motivate alternative work mechanisms, such as NGO's, to work independently. The government of Nepal is embedded with widespread corruption and slow response in the civil system (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). Therefore the civil society is easier triggered to take matters in their own hands and independently find solutions for their problems. Second, the failure of the government of activities that are implemented at community level, such as empowerment, guarding of human rights, and civil participation in community building. Cantwell, Nigel and Gillioz (2018) support this argument, as they zoom in on institutional care in countries in Asia. They argue that institutional care persists because of the lack of governmental policy, or at best the lack of resources to ensure its effective implementation. They add that formal care provision has been

left in the hands of non-state actors such as NGO's and private initiatives. This can result in residential facilities operating with little or no governmental oversight. Many participants of this research view the government as inefficient and unable to deliver the services needed³. Instead, these services can be efficiently delivered as projects of empowerment and rights supported by NGO's (Karkee, 2016). In this way, NGO's do match with the needs of the communities on services that the government fails to deliver which contributes to their rapid rise and booming success. Concluding, the popularity of the NGO's can be attributed to the needs of the host society and the shortcoming of the government in certain areas. Because of the earlier ban on any form of organisation, the benefits of the NGO's are directly visible and generate vast changes in the lives of many people.

2.2 The Earthquake of 2015

The failure and inefficiency of the government became quite apparent after the earthquake of 2015. During most interviews this earthquake and its consequences was mentioned by the participants, as it has had a huge impact on all of their lives. This earthquake ravaged a significant part of Nepal (Basnyat, 2015), destroyed a large number of buildings and infrastructure in urban and rural areas and claimed 9,000 deaths (Nayak, 2015). The infrastructure was heavily damaged and the earthquake instigated several landslides in the mountain areas which blocked roads and hampered rescue activities. The Centre for Disaster Management and Risk Reduction Technology (CEDIM) (2015), reported the total economic loss of about 10 billion U.S. dollars. This is about half of Nepal's gross domestic product. Therefore it will have long-term socioeconomic consequences for people and communities in Nepal (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), (2015) (Goda, 2015). These grave statements were supported by several research participants. Participants of all ages, different socio-economic status and several castes mentioned their experiences of the earthquake in their lives. For example, during a visit of a children's home in Sundarijal, a neighbourhood of Kathmandu, the owner of a guest house where I stayed explained that his house, and that of his family and many other families, was damaged badly by the earthquake and was not safe to live in anymore. The disaster relieve aid of the government was taking weeks to reach this area, and when they arrived it took a long time before they realised any improvement. As the town was in need of medical aid, reconstruction

³ Informal conversations and group discussions, February-April 2018

and resources, the whole town turned to the NGO's that were active in that area. These NGO's were able to effectuate help in a short period of time. As the guest house owner told: *'It was very cold during this time, but we were too scared to enter the house. We had seen other houses collapse. We all lived in an emergency accommodation for over two months. But this was more like a shed, where we lived with four different families. It took a very long time before we could go back to our house.'*⁴ This shows the slow response of the government to re-establish the safety of the houses. This inefficiency of the government results for the local people in minimal possibilities, as often the personal resources are not sufficient to establish enough improvement⁵. This makes the position and popularity of NGO's more understandable. The emergency accommodation he mentioned was built by two different volunteering organisations. Quick results were realised with their help, which resulted in emergency accommodations and rebuilding of houses and infrastructure.

2.2.1 Regimes of Care

International voluntourism has grown in popularity as a result of growing social and environmental issues, such as natural disasters, in developing countries (Brown, 2005). These changes can create a situation in which direct aid is needed and this aid can generate tangible changes in the lives of involved people. These are characteristics that create an inviting environment for volunteering and humanitarian aid. Ticktin (2011) describes regimes of care in her book, based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in France: *Casualties of Care: Immigration and the Politics of Humanitarianism in France* (2011). With regimes of care she means the structural, static plans or even protocols that are active in a system where the main focus is on the moral need to relieve human suffering. Ticktin describes how within the system of regimes of care there is one general idea of suffering, and as a consequence it can always be recognized and identified. This is often the framework in which volunteering organisations are set up, as can be seen in the visions and views of several volunteer organisations, such as Gapxperience⁶ ("memorable and fulfilling experience"), GVI⁷ "our projects focus to provide disaster relief to those in need"). Within these regimes of care, people feel a moral obligation to help whenever they are faced with human suffering. The motivation to act in a regime of care is in consonance with the philosophy of

⁴ Informal conversation, March 2018

⁵ Fieldnotes, 2018

⁶ www.gapxperience.org/nl/nepal, retrieved on May 9th 2018

⁷ <https://www.gvi.co.uk/volunteer-in-nepal/>

humanitarianism. Fassin (2011) defines humanitarianism as ‘a mode of governing that concerns the victims of poverty, homelessness, unemployment and exile, as well as of disasters, famines, epidemics and wars – in short every situation characterized by precariousness’ (2011, 5). Ticktin (2014) also states that the goal of humanitarianism is to relieve direct human suffering in any area, in which the performed actions are not aimed at the relieve of suffering in a large scale, but in direct emergency situations. These situations have the ingredients to be specifically appealing to voluntourists as they can feel engaged and experience an opportunity to help and make a difference (Wearing and McGehee, 2013).

CHAPTER 3: NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF VOLUNTOURISM

A negative stance on voluntourism is currently dominating academic literature. Several researchers discuss numerous aspects of voluntourism that can effectuate negative consequences for the host community. Arguments often mentioned in the literature are obstruction of the long term development of the host community as consequence of a mismatch between the motivation of volunteers and the actual needs of the host community (Palacios, 2010; Wearing, 2001), the commodification of the host community (Callanan and Thomas, 2005; Simpson, 2004), creating a new layer of dependency on external aid (Caton and Santos, 2009; Guttentag, 2009) or psychological problems for (the development of) children (Saxe-Smith 2015, 8). Many more arguments can be found, but for the sake of this argument only the ones most relevant to the gathered empiric data of this study will be discussed.

3.1 Who is the human in humanitarian aid? The mismatch between the motivation of volunteers and the needs of host community

3.1.1 Motivation of volunteers

Palacios (2010) discusses the potential failure of efficiency of voluntourism. In his ethnographic research about participation of young Westerners in projects of volunteer tourism in developing countries, he mentions a mismatch between motivations of volunteers and the needs of the host community. In earlier research Wearing (2001) has stated, in accordance with Palacios, that the main motivation for volunteers to perform volunteering work is to help others, develop a feeling of contribution and to make a difference. Palacios (2010) argues, as opposed to Wearing, that often an altruistic attitude is missing in the motivation and work of volunteers. The stance of Palacios in particular was very recognizable in empiric data of this study. Data from several locals who have been working with volunteers for several years shows this similarity when they discussed their experiences. They agreed that they recognized the stance that volunteers have a certain view of their experience which

is mostly based on information provided by volunteering organisations⁸⁹. They mentioned that fulfilling these motivations is often the focus of the visit of the volunteers. The actual needs of the host community are experienced as less important¹⁰. This became apparent in a group meeting between the owner and two employees of a children's home. We discussed the activities and tasks volunteers perform during their visit at the home. The owner argued that the volunteers visit because they want to work with children. The children spent most of their time at school during the week, so he has arranged that the volunteers can help with the cooking and play with the children after they come back from school. The two employees who were also involved in this conversation were the cook and the social worker of the home. They explained that volunteers often can be helpful, but they can run the home without any difficulty without the volunteers. Nonetheless, letting them help does fulfil the needs of the volunteers and ensures their visit. This provides the home of financial support, which is quite important as their other financial resources were limited. Employees at two other children's homes and one monastery told me a similar story, that they can run without the help of the volunteers, but not without the financial support of the volunteers. This data shows that, in accordance with Wearing (2001), a mismatch exists between the motivation of volunteers and the actual needs of the host community. The volunteers want to help and make a difference, but their activities in these homes are regarded as irrelevant by the owner of this children's home¹¹. However, this data also shows an alternative side of the consequence of this mismatch. Although it is certainly not an ideal situation, by letting volunteers do 'useless' tasks so they feel satisfied does ensure the location of financial support, which is according to their needs. This alternative view on the real consequences of the presence of volunteers will be further explored in chapter 4: Positive consequences of voluntourism.

3.1.2 Needs of the host community

Not only a mismatch between the motivations of the volunteers and the needs of the host community can exist, but also the expectations and possibilities of the volunteers can fail to accommodate the actual needs of the host community. For example when most problems that need solving are caused by processes on a large scale which are quite hard to solve for a volunteer in a period of four weeks. Community building, raising literacy or raising the level

⁸ Interview with owner of children's home, interview with founder volunteering organisation, February 2018

⁹ Fieldnotes 2018

¹⁰ Group discussion, April 12th 2018

¹¹ Interview April 12th 2018

of quality of education are not goals that can be achieved in a couple of weeks. Simpson (2004, 681-692) took a critical stance upon the phenomenon ‘gap’ year, where young people travel to a foreign country to engage in new experiences. She argues that this gap year industry promotes a particular public face of development, which in turn informs the experiences of travelling participants. This ‘public face of development’ consists of simplistic, do-able notions of development. This same trend of young people travelling to foreign countries can be seen in voluntourism. Development is portrayed as something that can be ‘done’ in a short period of time. For several participants, both locals and non-locals, this has resulted in disappointment at both ends of voluntourism because both the volunteers and the host community often fail to satisfy their needs¹².

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This is the third week I have been going to school now. Since last week another volunteer has joined, Sacha. She has been teaching English as well. We enter the classroom for the English class. The classroom is a small room, decorated with the English alphabet and some educational posters other volunteers have made. Today 5 students are present. Depending on their responsibilities at home the number of women in class can differ, as family tasks and the household are priorities for them. When we enter, Hasita, the teacher, takes her place in the back of the room. She hands us the marker and tells us to write down some names of jobs on the board. Then we proceed with trying to explain the jobs, but as we don’t speak Nepali and the students speak no English, the conversation has to be mediated by the teacher, who speaks both languages fluently. As the class has shifted to the end of the room, we stand awkwardly in front of the board, not sure what to do. Sometimes one of the students turns to us and gives us a supportive smile, but we are both happy when the class is over.

~

This fragment shows the position of the volunteers and the teacher, in which the teacher is better suited to teach the class the volunteers are teaching, as she speaks both languages and therefore can explain difficulties. This is one example of the experience of working with volunteers. For both the volunteers and the involved locals the situation is not ideal, and in a different setting more benefits could be realised. The experience of Sacha at a local school illustrates this. In Kirtipur at the women’s school where a substantial part of this research is

¹² Informal talk March and April 2018

conducted, volunteers visited to teach the women English¹³. Sacha¹⁴ is a volunteer who took a gap year after high school and wanted to help people learn English and have an authentic experience in Nepal. Therefore she applied for this location, where she stayed for 10 days. When discussing her experiences she told: *'This was not really what I expected actually. I don't have the feeling I am really doing something, the teacher only tells me to do something and then I do it. I don't think the students understand me or that what I am doing is matching their level. I feel kind of useless here'*¹⁵. This quote was in line with the other conversations we had, in which she also expressed her doubts about her added value of teaching English and her dissatisfaction of her volunteering experience. The mismatch between motivations of volunteers and needs of host society Palacios (2010) mentions are recognisable at this school.

The school employed three teachers, all educated to teach the subjects of their expertise. English was one of these topics. Therefore an educated teacher, who is fluent in both Nepali and English is capable of teaching the class now taught by volunteers. In the time spent at the school it became apparent that the teacher could teach the English lessons in a more effective and qualitative better manner¹⁶. This was visible during the last few weeks of my fieldwork when we prepared for the exams that the class would take. During the seven weeks before several volunteers had practised several exercises with the classroom. During these last few weeks, the teacher taught several different exercises, during which the volunteers were given another task. The efficiency and pace of these lessons was substantially higher, as the teacher was able to communicate with the class in Nepali and answer questions of the students. After two weeks I had the opportunity to read the exams, which existed only of the exercises practised with the teacher. This shows that the students learned all they had to learn in two weeks and the work of volunteers the seven weeks before did not contribute at all to their preparation of the exams.

This data shows that the work of volunteers does not always match with the needs of the host society. The school was not in need of volunteers who wanted to teach English, they were in need of financial support for the wages of the teachers and sponsorships of fees of the

¹³ Fieldnotes 19th February 2018

¹⁴ Sacha was a Swedish girl who volunteered at the school for two weeks. She also lived at the guest family and taught English at the school.

¹⁵ Informal conversation 22th March 2018

¹⁶ Observations and informal conversations March-April 2018

students¹⁷. As I earlier mentioned, one of the reasons for this research was to look into the agency and resilience of the host community. This will be further explored in chapter 4.

3.1.3 Lacking expertise volunteers

Also Palacios (2010) points out that several reasons have been given in the literature why volunteer tourism is failing to contribute to the development of the communities. A lack of knowledge from young volunteers, a lack of reflection capacity, appropriate skills or qualifications, volunteering and international experience, time to get involved with the locals or a lack of altruistic intentions are all being listed as suggested reasons for the low impact of the project on the local communities (Palacios, 2010). As Palacios concludes, a core question is if volunteers possess the necessary capacities and motivations to produce *effective* help, not whether the help of Westerners has any *relevance in the development* of poor nations (Palacios, 2010). Other authors mention different arguments when they suggest volunteering projects have low impact in the local communities because the volunteers have not enough knowledge (Brown and Hall, 2008), reflection capacity (Simpson, 2004), appropriate skills or qualifications (McGehee and Andereck, 2008), volunteering or international experience (McLeod, 2008), time to get involved with the locals (Roberts, 2004) or altruistic intentions (Salazar, 2010).

Even if the volunteers do not seem to fit the ideal capacities to work with these children, according to the humanitarian concepts of motivation and the regimes of care from Ticktin (2014), their moral need to help those in need can motivate them to do so. The participants in this research who were also volunteers were a mixed group of volunteers or interns with relevant background and those without any relevant background. Participants who were volunteers who are performing their internship abroad were there as part of their relevant study, have passed a selection procedure and receive supervision from an expert. These participants worked with a specific target group that needs special attention, such as children with autism. The participants who were interns all had a better screening and a better fit between their skills and placement. As for the participants that were volunteering at this same location, there seemed to be less supervision, selection or suitable motivation¹⁸. Therefore, they can perform actions that are not in their area of expertise, such as teaching, or interacting

¹⁷ Fieldnotes Kirtipur Women's school, 15th March 2018

¹⁸ Observations and informal talks, April 2018

with children in a 'pedagogical' way. One owner of a children's home in Kathmandu told me that most of the volunteers are allowed to interact, educate and play with children without any screening of valuable skills on these subjects¹⁹. The focus on the benefit for the child seems to be completely missing. A broad body of literature has focussed upon the psychological and developmental effects on the children from this way of interaction (Saxe-Smith, 2015).

In addition to the mismatch of expertise of the volunteers and the work they do, their work can, for the larger part, be characterized as indispensable. One participant is an employee of the Child Welfare Board, a committee that is part of the government and has responsibility over children's homes in Nepal. He explained that every children's home is required to have permanent staff who take care of the children²⁰. The staff is working every day, and therefore form a stable environment for the children. The employees often are educated for their job and often have several years of experience in the same home. We also discussed that all the homes should be registered and receive a check every year from the board²¹. During these checks the condition and facilities are scheduled to be checked according to the standard of the Child Welfare Board. Because of the staff, whose job it is to take care of the children and are often experienced to do this, the additional value of the contact with unexperienced volunteers seems to be minimal for the children. The volunteers do not seem to bring in any expertise that the regular staff does not have. Next to this potential lack of suitable expertise, the continuous flow of volunteers becomes an unstable factor in the lives of the children. In one of the homes I visited, the children were expected to interact and spent time with me. The owner of the home asked some children in particular to interact with me. For me, and as it seemed for the children as well, this felt very uncomfortable as they did not seem to want to interact with me themselves. This kind of situation in which children are expected to interact or spent time with volunteers is something that also was recognizable for other volunteers in this research. They explained that because they did not want to be rude, they accepted it and interacted with the children, even though it did not really feel good.

¹⁹ Interview 18th March 2018

²⁰ Interview 26th April 2018

²¹ Interview 26th April 2018

3.2 Commodification of vulnerable traits

3.2.1 Financial aspect: Selling of experience

The most vulnerable people have the most clear request for aid and thus match with the need of people (or volunteers) feel to help others and make their lives better (Ticktin, 2011).

Ticktin also argues that humanitarianism begun with a focus on the ‘suffering body’ (Ticktin 2014, 274-275). As discussed earlier, several media have made the suffering body ‘hyper visible’, and as Ticktin argues, this emphasized the universality of the experience of suffering all over the world (Ticktin 2014, 274-275). For example, children in an orphanage are often portrayed as in need of love and affection. They will be susceptible to fit in a regime of care because they have a clear request for aid. Many (commercial) volunteering organisations are looking for exactly that; a situation that can respond to a ‘packaged’ experience of volunteering work. With the growth of voluntourism more and more commercial providers are offering ‘products’ and services that do little to serve the needs of either the volunteer tourists of the host communities they seek to serve (Callanan and Thomas, 2005; Simpson, 2004). These ‘products’ serve the need to make a profit, and thus are a commodified experience (Lyons, Hanley and Wearing, 2012).

This was quite visible when walking around in Kathmandu. As any tourist would experience in Kathmandu, in the touristic area of Thamel many businesses can be found that offer ‘volunteering experiences’ next to, and sometimes blended in with, the shops offering trekking guides, rafting trips and other tourist trips. Offered as any other trip one can go on in a couple of days, many tourists pay for these ‘experiences’.



Figure 1: Found in a hostel in Thamel;
“Volunteers wanted: No professional skills
needed²²”

As mentioned earlier, the financial character of voluntourism is substantial (Atlas and Tram, 2008). Consequently it is possible for the host community to shape itself to answer to the desires of volunteers to be able to accommodate them to receive the financial benefits. When the host community starts to shape itself to accommodate the motivation to help of the volunteers, a possible effect could be that the image that is created of a community that needs help only serves the goal of accommodating volunteers. The regimes of care mentioned earlier will then be created for the purpose of serving the motivation of volunteers, instead of acting on the real problems. In addition to this argument, in a conversation with the owner of the children's home in Sundarijal he explained to me why he made an explicit decision about letting volunteers pay for their visit or not. He made the decision to not make it mandatory to make a donation. He explained: *‘When you charge no fee, people actually help with a more open heart. Otherwise they would have paid the fee, and felt like they did their part and are done²³’*. This data shows that he had little trust in the motivations of the volunteers, because they could feel as if they had helped enough when they donated some money. His experience was that after they had donated money, their motivation and attitude changed as they lost their feeling of responsibility of achieving actual change.

²² Original picture taken in Thamel, 2th April 2018

²³ Informal conversation 20th March

Guttentag (2009) adds the neglect of locals' desires caused by a lack of local involvement, as was described in chapter 2. The local community was not involved enough in the decision making about the placement of volunteers. The argument of Guttentag (2009) was very recognizable during my fieldwork in Nepal. Especially when looking into the placements of big volunteering companies, the volunteers were placed at a location without much consultation of the host community. During my fieldwork at a school for children with autism (Special School for Disabled and Rehabilitation Center (SSDRC)) a situation occurred that illustrated this argument. At this school several volunteers were active with working with the children. Several organisations were connected with this school and placed volunteers there. During my stay, a conflict occurred because one organisation had placed another volunteer at this school to work with the children. The problem was that already sufficient volunteers were working there, and the school was not prepared or even informed about the placement of this volunteer. As both organisations wanted to place their volunteers at this location, the school had to deal with too much volunteers and the volunteers had even less work to do.

Another example became apparent in an interview with the president of a fairly big foreign volunteering company. She explained to me that with any new applicant the starting point is based on the wishes and interests of the volunteer. This organisation is still starting up in Nepal, which resulted in their approach being led by the wishes of the volunteers, as they are the ones who pay for the projects. A location is found that matches the wishes of the volunteer, placing the volunteers benefits ahead of the benefit of the community. For the president this was the most workable manner to place volunteers, as she was bound to a certain target amount of placings she had to reach by the end of the year. This principle is very characterizing for some organisations in this industry. Demanding to reach a target of volunteers by the end of the year in itself brings in commercial principles and is not leaving much space for a thorough, individual placement that takes the needs of the host community into consideration.

3.2.2 Vulnerability as consequence of financial dependency

Especially in the child home sector voluntourists have a major presence in Nepal, as stated by Durham (2014), hundreds of homes are fully reliant on donor funding. Durham adds that with this funding the homes care for thousands of Nepali children and provide them with education. With such an emphasis on the financial flows the price for the voluntourism project or the selling of a 'commodified product', this industry also suggests that if an evaluation of

the projects reveals not to be economically viable anymore for the company (or organisation offering the voluntourism project), the project would cease to exist, which can have serious implications for the host community (Lyons, Hanley and Wearing, 2012). In Bhaktapur, a neighbourhood in the area of Kathmandu, the owner of a children's home experienced this dependence first handed when the German organisation who supported the children's home stopped their support due to personal reasons. Next to the children's home this organisation also constructed a big guest house. This accommodation consisted of eight permanent staff members and served the volunteers when they worked at the children's home. When the organisation stopped their activities, not only the children's home suddenly lost their (financial) support, but also the guest house lost its income, as no volunteers were visiting anymore. This resulted in school fees of the children which couldn't be payed anymore, supplies that couldn't be afforded and salaries of employees that failed to be paid. For them, this meant crisis. Caton and Santos (2009) warned for the potential of voluntourism as a new form of colonialism, creating yet another layer of dependency between the developed and developing world. Palacios (2010) also addressed the potential of exploitation of the host community, as their cultural resources can be commodified and exploited. For volunteering companies vulnerable people thus possess certain traits that identify them as being in need of help and responsive to regimes of care. Therefore they have become a desired target group for the 'packaged' volunteering projects of commercial volunteering organisations. Traits that make people belong to a vulnerable group have become desirable traits for the industry of voluntourism.

In a conversation with one of my Nepali key participants, who has been working in the voluntourism industry for many years, he emphasized that dependency on the income of volunteers can make the host community vulnerable. According to his experiences, voluntourism in Nepal is a season bound industry, because volunteers visit Nepal (mostly) only in a couple of months a year due to the rain season. Therefore the income of this industry can fluctuate significantly and cannot promise stability²⁴. Next to this possible instability of income, McLennan (2014) adds to this that '*A host community may become dependent on volunteers when these are promoted at the expense of longer term or community driven initiatives*' (165). This shows the unintended negative consequence of voluntourism that the projects run by volunteering organisations can oppose longer term of community driven initiatives. Because the financial character of the commodified volunteering projects can be

²⁴ Multiple conversations February-April 2018

more appealing than other initiatives, even though these initiatives can possibly better play into the needs of the host community as the motivations of the volunteers are not prioritized.

3.3 Position of children in voluntourism

The position of children in the processes of voluntourism is a much debated issue. As many children at school, monasteries or children's homes are the targets of voluntourism, a substantial body of research is devoted to the consequences on the lives and development of the involved children in voluntourism.

Earlier I discussed certain traits that become desirable for volunteering. An example of vulnerable traits becoming desirable traits for the purpose of volunteering projects can be found on the website of the Better Care Network, a Dutch organisation that concerns itself with the care for children without parents in developing countries. As they state, volunteering in orphanages has become very popular. Cantwell, Nigel and Gillioz (2018) acknowledge this in their research about the orphanage industry. They argue that in many countries in these areas institutionalized care has been increasing substantially. An ironic situation has presented itself, where the majority of the financial support of these institutions comes from private sources from countries where similar institutions have been deliberately phased out.

Worldwide, around 8 million children live in orphanages. It is estimated by Cantwell, Nigel and Gilloz (2018) that 80% of these children has at least one parent, and therefore most of these children are not orphans and could live with family. UNICEF and Terre des Hommes has made a similar estimation in a rapport about orphanages in Nepal in 2008 (UNICEF and Terre Des Hommes 2008, 19) . Therefore the term 'orphanages' is a complex category.

'Orphans' are generally seen as children with no living parents by Mark et al (2008), which makes this term hardly applicable in the case of Nepal. Therefore one might say to dispose of the term as a whole, but several reasons can explain why 'orphanages' still are mentioned by this name. One of these reasons is that this term is a recognizable signifier for suffering, which fits in the marketing strategy of the volunteering organisations to trigger the motivation of volunteers to help (Ticktin, 2014). In Nepal these 'orphanages' are by locals often referred to as children's homes, therefore I have chosen to use this term in this thesis.

Several reasons have been identified by different research participants that can be the cause for the children to live in a children's home such as poverty, a non-healthy situation at home or neglect, often as consequence of lacking governmental policies (Cantwell, Nigel and

Gillioz (2018). During one of my visits of a children's home I met Aisha²⁵. Aisha is a 13 year old girl who has lived in this home with her sister since she was 7. Aisha was asked by the owner of the children's home to talk to me during my visit. During the weekend when I visited, we spent quite some time together and had several talks. She told me about her and her sister's story and of those of some of the other children. She and her sister still have their family in the village they were born. Aisha told that her parents did not have enough money to take care of her and her sister and that this was the reason they lived here. She does still have contact with her mother. Sometimes she can call her and in a long holiday from school she can go and visit with her sister. But this is not often, as she told that her village is rather remoted and the roads are in bad condition. It takes them a couple of days of travelling to reach their family. Usually they see them once or twice a year²⁶. Another participant is Redah²⁷, with whom I visited several children's homes. He has grown up in one himself as well. He confirmed the idea that the majority of the children in his children's home still have a family and are therefore not an orphan. He stated that the most common reason for children to live in a children's home is because their family is not in the position to provide the children with food, shelter or education. The family can make the choice to send the children's to the city and into a home. Mostly with the motivation that they hope in this way their children will have a better chance in life.

3.3.1 Development of children in a children's home

In the children's homes I visited during my fieldwork, the children have access to school, shelter and food. Most of these children have left their families, some at very young age, where many have lived under difficult circumstances. This implied for me that this group of children can have certain traits that could disrupt their development. Reas (2013) expresses her concern that 'orphans' can be seen as a vulnerable group of children. As the children are not living with their families she is afraid they do not get crucial attention, love and care in the children's home (Reas, 2013; Csáky, 2009). Also the Better Care Network and the Child Safe Movement have expressed their concerns about the lacking expertise and knowledge of

²⁵ Fieldnotes Aisha: Aisha (13) was asked by the owner of the children's home to talk to me during my visit. During the weekend I was here she told about her situation and those of others. We spend

²⁶ Informal conversations, March 2018

²⁷ Fieldnotes Redah; Redah (24) was one participant who had grown up in a children's home himself. He lived there from his 5th until his 19th. After he finished school, he wanted to keep involved with the children's home and therefore is now ambassador of Nepal at a big international NGO.

volunteers needed to work with ‘vulnerable children’ (Child Safe Movement, 2014; Better Care Network Netherlands, 2015). Living in a in a stable environment is also an important circumstance for them and any other child to develop in a healthy way. As the Better Care Network (2018) states clearly in a later report, every child in a children’s home is traumatized because he or she is separated from his or her family. Attachment comes natural to every child, from which the child develops and explores the world. A long and reciprocal relationship is therefore mentioned as indispensable for a healthy development of the child (Better Care Network, 2018). They state that in a children’s home many fluctuating relationships with a diverse group of people are established. Stable figures that can realize attachment are said to be missing because of the circulation of volunteers. Therefore are volunteers in children’s homes harmful to the development of the children (Better Care Network, 2018). The argument of high circulation of volunteers is in accordance with the findings of Callanan and Thomas (2005) who conclude that generally international volunteering projects are short term, with the majority lasting less than 4 weeks. As I certainly ascribe and acknowledge that growing up in a children’s home is far from ideal, I do want to discuss the notion of ‘ideal childhood’ a bit further. Most of the research about this topic has been conducted by Western researchers. In this discussion it is of importance to emphasize the context and cultural heritage of the research and the children in Nepal. In addition, in line with my argument of the value of agency of the host community, I also consider the agency of children to influence their lives and the society around them (White, 2012, 81). The difficulty in describing the ‘ideal childhood’ is described by Panter-Brick (2002), who shows that anthropologists have been struggling with this concept because it differs across cultures (Panter-Brick 2002, 150). The dominating Western image of an ideal childhood is filled with play, friends, school and family as Korbin (2003) argues. The reality of children who live in famine, war-torn societies is in stark contrast of this concept (Korbin 2003, 431). Baxter (2008) mentions in addition that in the ‘western’ definition of childhood the children should be cared for and controlled during their period of dependence and innocence in which they are learning in preparation for adulthood (Baxter, 2008, 161).

In this context the image the media creates of the ‘orphanages’ is strongly in conflict with the ‘western’ concept of a ‘normal’ or ‘ideal’ childhood. Advocating against orphanages is logical because it is not in accordance with the western ideal of having a child living with their family. As White emphasizes, anthropology of children has a history of the habit of comparing children over the world with (modern) western middle class children (White 2012:

82). The difference of 'ideals' is of value in this discussion, as this is influencing the debate in the literature and my research findings in the field in Nepal. Therefore substantial similarities can be found between the statement this thesis makes about the agency of the host community and the dominant negative stance in the literature about voluntourism. Balagopalan (2002) also argues that children in different places in the world, in this case in a developing country such as Nepal and 'middle class western children', cannot be compared (Balagopalan, 2002, 21). Comparable in the way she argues for this differentiation, I argue for this differentiation to be applied in the discussion about the negative and positive consequences of voluntourism for the host community. Therefore I will discuss the power of agency and creativity of the host community on the aforementioned processes further in chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Positive consequences of voluntourism

Especially in earlier academic literature also positive consequences of voluntourism are mentioned. A considerable amount of authors identify voluntourism as something that can ‘make a difference’ in favour of the host community (Wearing, 2001; Raymond and Hall, 2008). For example, Devereux (2008, 358) states that a non-market mechanism like volunteering, in particular long-term international volunteering ‘[m]ight offer a realistic but creative and empowering way of mobilizing people globally for development that is based on trust and understanding’. Lewis (2005) adds to this that international volunteering allows a ‘humanising response’ to the pace and impersonal push of globalisation. He suggests international volunteering can help bridge the gap between the professional world of organisations and experts that work with the practices of development, and include the ‘non-specialized publics’ who engage with the ideas and practises of development. It can promote international understanding and solidarity (2005, 13-14). Understanding and solidarity were also the topic of McIntosh and Zahra’s (2008) study in an indigenous community in New Zealand. This study on voluntourism found that the intense social interactions during the volunteering work could contribute to a new narrative between host and guest that is engaging, genuine, creative and mutually beneficial. Also increasing social awareness and international responsibility are mentioned as positive consequences of voluntourism. For example, McGehee and Santos (2005) conducted research on the impact of short term volunteering on future action or involvement in developmental aid. They found that the experience of volunteering had a positive effect on future involvement in social movements. They present voluntourism as an unique opportunity for exposure to social inequities and foreign political issues, which can lead to increasing social awareness or support.

The above mentioned arguments all formulate positive consequences, but all seem to be argued from the point of view of the volunteer, or seem to focus upon large scale indirect consequences. These consequences can therefore not be equated with direct positive consequences that actually directly influence the lives of the host community. This stresses the need of insights from the perspective of the host community, therefore I will connect these and more arguments with the experiences and stories gathered from the host community

during my fieldwork. The focus will be on the direct change volunteers can establish for the lives of the host community, the (unintended) value of cultural exchange and language practise and the potential of voluntourism to be made into a social safety net for the host community in Kathmandu.

4.1 Cultural exchange and language practise

4.1.1 Transformative learning

The presence of foreign volunteers in a Nepalese host community inevitably means that several cultures are in contact with each other. This contact in cultures can establish several positive consequences for the local community. For example, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) introduce the concept of transformative learning as a benefit of voluntourism. It was believed that this concept of transformative learning could be one of the processes to establish long-term benefits for the host community. In transformative learning knowledge and expertise is transferred to locals, who can benefit from the development of their skills (Coghlan and Gooch, 2011; Benson and Blackman, 2011). Some aspects of transformative learning were recognizable in my fieldwork, but I would take a more cautious stance than Coghlan and Gooch did. Certain findings do support the stance that the host community can develop their skills and expertise due to foreign volunteers. One example became evident during a trek in a nature area in which several conservation projects were running. One of these projects was the drinking water project in the Annapurna region, set up with the expertise of Dutch engineers and water experts. Due to their knowledge and expertise, access to clean drinking water has been realised in several villages which contributes to higher and safer life standards of the inhabitants of this area (www.sifvn.nl, Stichting Installatietechniek Friesland voor Nepal, Nepal Pariwar www.nepalpariwar.nl). Next to acknowledging the possible added value of transformative learning, a more critical stance became apparent in my fieldwork. Many projects of voluntourism focus on the development of children, and as discussed in subchapter 3.1.3 and 3.3.1. Misinterpretation or disconnection between the view of the volunteers and the needs of the children are often described in literature, and was also recognizable during my fieldwork. This mismatch can interfere with the process of transformative learning as the actions of the volunteers are grounded in their, non Nepali, mostly western, concepts of what children should or shouldn't learn. These concepts can differ from those of the children,

which can result in them learning irrelevant things. This is supported by experiences during a visit of a children's home, where I had a conversation with Kardim²⁸. He showed me proudly the classrooms where the volunteers had classes with the children. He told me that every volunteer gives language lessons in his or her native language, so that the children learn many different languages. This showed that there are good intentions for the broad development of the children, but the practises result in minimal progress, as the children are expected the impossible task of mastering a new language in a weeks' time (field notes, April 2018). Next to the classrooms, Kardim showed me the computer room. A German NGO had donated ten computers to the children's home to stimulate their technical and computer skills. When I asked if the children use them often, Kardim answered that the voltage of the computers is too high for the electricity in the building, which causes a power failure every time they turn them on. Therefore the computers have been barely used. This data shows the good intentions of volunteering projects, but their failure to actually connect with the needs and situation of the host community which results in minimal progress.

Next to this experience, I also had an encounter that showed that this problem can be solved. During one of my visits of a children's home, I had a conversation with the founder and owner of that home. The home hosted sixteen children, six boys and ten girls. All the children also attended school. This school was also part of the same organisation. After graduating school, he also supervised the adolescents in finding accommodation outside of the home and finding a job that could support themselves. In this organisation, fifteen regular employees were active in supporting the home and the children and in supervising the children during and after school. This owner in particular had a long term vision for the development of the children in this home. He argued that the presence of volunteers should contribute to this, not oppose it. About receiving volunteers he said: *'Volunteers are welcome to visit, but they are always a contribution to our regular staff. The organisation can run perfectly fine without volunteers'*²⁹. Volunteers therefore are seen at this children's home as additional value to the regular staff, for example for cultural exchange and teaching children about other cultures. The volunteers were always instructed about the culture and rules in the children's home, as they were expected to respect this as well. The authenticity of the culture of the children was hereby guarded strictly, in accordance with an argument McLennan (2014) makes in her

²⁸ Kardim, 38, is one of the owners of this children's home, and has been running it for five years now. He has contact with several volunteering agencies and told about his experiences with the placing of volunteers. We met three times, and had several (informal) conversations.

²⁹ Informal conversation 17th April 2018

article about medical voluntourism. She warns: *'In addition Western volunteers can be seen as 'modelling' a lifestyle of cultural and material values that may be inappropriate, and which promote modernization, or development as Westernization'* (2014; 165). Awareness of this process can help to counteract the effects on the children. As a result the children could preserve their own culture while learning about others. In this organisation, the volunteers were also matched with their knowledge and skills with a specific task. As we discussed this, the owner said: *'You won't employ some who is not a doctor to work in a hospital, things would go very wrong'*³⁰. In the same logic he would not place someone to work with children or teach at a school if essential knowledge or skills were missing. This shows that the mismatch between the motivation of the volunteers and the needs of the children can also be turned into something beneficial for the children. The awareness of the owner provided the children with the opportunity to learn about other cultures without harm.

4.1.2 Conservation of culture

Another argument that can be found in the literature is that because of expectations of volunteers to experience 'authentic culture', the host community can be expected to fit itself according to the stereotypy of the tourist (Salazar, 2013; Bunten, 2008). In some literature this is portrayed as solely a negative argument that undermines the agency and authenticity of the host community, I aim to emphasize that for the host community the experiences can be different. The argument Salazar emphasises in his article *'Imagineering otherness, the commodification of field sites and tribes'* (2013) is the deep connection between anthropology and tourism, as anthropological research and ethnographies are used by tourist agencies to stimulate the imagination of tourists and create an image of exotic cultures and portray them as static entities. "Anthropological models are used to in the lucrative multibillion-dollar tourism business to provide simplified and historically fixed versions of local natural and cultural heritage" (Salazar, 2013, 673). Bunten (2008) adds to this idea that "culture is not only to be showed, but also to be experienced with interaction with 'locals', who are expected to conform to the stereotypy the Other of the tourist and are thus expected to exoticize themselves" (2008, 386). He concludes that culture must be shaped according to the desires of the consumers (tourists), given form by their imaginaries which are rather shaped by the tourist's origin culture than the culture of the host community. This is portrayed as a negative

³⁰ Informal conversation 17th April 2018

consequence, for the reason that it can obstruct development and changes of the host community that differ from the imaginaries of the tourist. Experiences during my fieldwork showed that the motivation of volunteers to experience the ‘authentic’ culture can also contribute to the conservation of authenticity.

My host mother, who has been hosting more than forty volunteers over five years, explained that she experiences a big benefit from the cultural hunger of the volunteers. She lives in Kirtipur, a town nearby Kathmandu. As an inhabitant of Kirtipur, she experiences difficulty for the last couple of years on how to persevere the cultural heritage that characterizes the town. As it is a typical Newari (an ethnic group in Nepal) town, it is known for its Newari buildings and temples. Tourism has never played a big part in Kirtipur, and modernization is leaving a trace in the town, in her opinion degrading the cultural heritage. The earthquake has also influenced the played a big part in the setting of modernization and after the earthquake when new buildings are being constructed, it has been difficult to maintain the authenticity of the town. Because of the financial value of hosting volunteers (see subchapter 4.1.1), the town board is searching for ways to attract more volunteers to Kirtipur. By preserving the authenticity of the town they hope to achieve this, which supports the wish of Ganga to preserve the authenticity of the town. As she told me: *‘the neighbours and me too are happy when there are more volunteers here. They bring more income for the shops and restaurants here and now the government has submitted benefit for the building of more traditional houses. Also I like to show them our traditions and culture. I am proud to be a Nepali women and I like it when they want to learn about me. Then I can also learn about them³¹’*. This data shows another side of the argument from Bunten (2008) and Salazar (2013) and highlights the positive experiences of being proud of your culture and the support of the preservation of authenticity. Also on organizational level in Kirtipur there is attention for this issue, as there is already subsidy for those who rebuilt their house in authentic Newari style.

4.1.3 Cultural exchange

Another positive consequence of voluntourism that participants have discussed with me is the value of cultural exchange. With cultural exchange they meant getting in touch with and interacting with foreigners. The value of these experiences lies in the degrading gap between ‘the outside world’ and Nepal. One Nepali participant who has been working with volunteers

³¹ Informal conversation 11th March 2018

for several years explained that a lot of Nepali people experience stress and insecurity in the interaction with foreigners. He told he encountered this a lot in his work, during which he has contact with both volunteers and the host families or locations. As Nepal has been closed to any foreign influences, he explained there still exists an elitist image of people from the West. This can cause stress for Nepali people as they can feel embarrassed about the level of their English or afraid to do things that are culturally unacceptable, because they are not familiar with the culture³². He explained that learning to work with foreigners in the growing tourism sector is important, because working in or with this sector can result in financial benefits or a job. This argument was supported by an experience in a children's home. Here I spoke to the founder and owner, who discussed his approach with me. When I arrived, he asked two girls of 15 and 16 to give me a tour and spent some time with me. Later he explained he did this because he wanted them to practise their English and hosting skills, as they were going to enrol in a hospitality class of the ROKPA Foundation³³. He perceived the interaction with westerners as a good practise for them.

My guest mother was a very active women in the society. Hosting volunteers contributed to that, and gave her a certain status. She was always seen with the foreigners, she was working on development. As this sector is rather important for the community, it provided her with certain status within the society. Furthermore, the cultural exchange that occurs when Nepalese people interact with Westerners is experienced by some as a positive contribution to the development of the community.

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After breakfast I walked down the stairs to meet Didi down the stairs. She came out of her room, one floor down, dressed in her guniu (Nepalese dress) and scarf. As always, she was wearing bright colours, today she choose pink, matching the pants, dress and scarf together. Then we walked down the small alley surrounding the house and crossed the backyard of the next door neighbour. We started walking towards the school, passing by the Tiger Temple, where the elderly men of Kirtipur were having their morning tea. Sitting on the steps of the temple, they observed everyone who came by. Didi was greeted by all of them, as she always was by everyone we were passing by. Greeting her always seemed to be a small sign of

³² Informal conversations February 2018

³³ The ROKPA foundation is active in Nepal and strengthens those who are affected by poverty and enables them to live a better live. The children I met were enrolled in a practical hospitality class at ROKPA which prepared them for a job at a hotel or restaurant. Especially the children who did not perform well at school were offered this opportunity.

respect, as people were jumping up surprised and asked her about how she and her family was doing. The men greeted her with a small nod of the head, as they didn't seem to see the use of words would be necessary. We continued our way, passing small shops with sweets, baked goods and utilities for in the kitchen. A little while further we reached the school, where we both took place in the directors room, and waited for the students of the day to show up.

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This fragment shows the personal experience of the positive reaction of this community on the presence of volunteers and those who are involved with them. A feeling of respect and development towards these practises became apparent during this walk in the morning.

4.2 Filling the gaps of the government; disaster relief and financial support

Disaster relief has played a big part in the development and experiences of voluntourism in Nepal. As discussed in chapter 2, in Nepal a big natural disaster occurred in 2015, when an earthquake posed a big challenge for a lot of people in Nepal, as major damage was done to many houses and infrastructure (Goda, 2015). A participant, who was an officer of the Child Welfare Board (CWB), told that the earthquake of 2015 was a big turning point for voluntourism in Nepal. The regimes of care of Ticktin (2014) describe how this kind of situation where the mechanism to help those who are suffering and in need can be activated. These mechanisms seemed to be activated in Nepal after the earthquake. As one Nepali participant who was director of a NGO in Kathmandu told me, the earthquake was actually the trigger for the start of his volunteering organisation³⁴. There was much damage and help needed, and the *government was useless in this period of time. They could not reach the areas who needed help the most, their input and efficiency was not sufficient. That is why I felt I needed to do something, because I know they were not going to do enough. So I started to gather people who could help and donate money to make a change³⁵*. According to this participant and several others who worked in children's homes or school, the earthquake instigated a substantial wave of volunteers in Nepal, but a big decline in the visits of tourists. This participant explained that the volunteers came to perform crisis aid and damage control

³⁴ Informal conversation 25 February 2018

³⁵ Informal conversation 27 February 2018

in the urban areas of Nepal. This posed a situation where volunteers can fulfil their feeling of wanting to help and make a difference. As the participant from the CWB pointed out, that because of the destruction of the infrastructure, the government was not equipped enough to offer the aid that was needed³⁶. Therefore the big wave of foreign aid led to enormous disaster relief. As one Nepali research participant who lives in Kathmandu told me about one of his first projects with foreign volunteers: *'It was an amazing experience, we had a great group of volunteers from all over the world and we just helped where ever we were needed. We broke down damaged houses and built them up again, we built shelters and cleared roads.'*³⁷ Also the director of one of the children's homes experienced a lot of help with rebuilding the home: *Tthe big amount of volunteers that got here after the earthquake did realize a lot in a short time. They built this building, and rebuilt others that were damaged. Without them this would still be a mess*³⁸. These examples show the direct contribution of volunteers in a time when they were very much needed. This was also visible in the locations I visited during my fieldwork. Most schools, children's homes and a significant proportion of other (public) buildings or services were built or renovated by volunteers. Their help in these projects effectuated direct relieve for the local community of Kathmandu.

4.2.1 The financial picture

In addition to the more applied support volunteers can establish, their financial contribution can also enable progress or support at large and small scale. At a small scale local enterprises or families can benefit from the financial support volunteers bring along. When talking to several host families, it became clear they all shared the experience that most volunteers bring along enough money for them to invest in their personal situation. As one of the mother from a host family told *'I never had the money to send my son to a private school, and now I can pay the fee with the help of the volunteers who come to visit. With the help of Aiden [the volunteer that was staying in the host family at the time of the interview] we can pay the first six months of the school year'*³⁹. Volunteers often pay a sponsorship next to their fee for their stay, which often goes to a school fee or school supplies for the children.

As mentioned under 3.3.1 there is a lot of critique about children living in children's homes. As I certainly acknowledge these arguments, I also experienced another side of the situation

³⁶ Interview 15th March 2018

³⁷ Informal conversation 11th April 2018

³⁸ Interview March 2018

³⁹ Informal conversation 8th April 2018

around children living in children's homes. It is very important to understand the formal structures and possibilities of the current situation in Nepal. As described in chapter 2, Nepal is a developing country in many areas (Jörn, Adhikari and Dorka, 2018). Because this development is still in progress, sometimes the local community does not get the support it needs from the government. One of these topics that lacks support from the government is education. One participant who has her own organisation that supports Nepali children going to school explained to me that there are problems with the quality of education in Nepal. She claimed that due to one of the Millennium Development Goals a bilateral situation has occurred. Due to the goal to spread the reach of education, building public schools has been a priority⁴⁰. As positive as this sounds, merely the setting up of the schools was incentivized whereas the quality at these schools often gets neglected. Therefore the problem with this Millennium Goal occurs, as many parents seek for opportunities at private schools because they feel the quality at public schools is rather low. This experience is reflected in the percentages estimated about the School Leaving Certificate, the diploma children get when they successfully graduate from school. This participant estimated that few students of public schools graduate with their school leaving certificate (SLC) compared to almost all students in private schools. She recalled the numbers of her organisation that in 2015, 38% of students from public schools passed the SLC, while 93% passed the same exam from private schools. This indication of numbers is supported by the comparative research of Thapa (2015), that also states that the level of education in public schools is significantly lower than that in private schools. Therefore he also suggests that the government invests more in the quality of education in private schools (Thapa, 2015, 60). This distinction between the level of education in private schools and public schools is incorporating a division between parents with more financial capabilities and parents who have less options. As parents with a lower socio-economic status cannot afford to send their children to private schools as these fees are substantially higher than those of public school. Therefore their children often end up in a public school with lower succession rates. To provide their children with the best opportunities, parents want to send them to private schools⁴¹. A problem next to the high fee is that these schools are often located in or around Kathmandu, which is often difficult to reach from remote villages. They perceive children's homes as a solution for this problem⁴². At many children's homes, children regularly get the opportunity to receive good education.

⁴⁰ Informal conversation 17th March 2018

⁴¹ Informal conversation with parents at school in Kirtipur, April 2018

⁴² Informal conversation students at children's homes

One of the participants whom I met while visiting one of these homes told me that in his village many parents send their children to children's homes for them to benefit from better education opportunities, next to limited options in their own situation due to poverty⁴³.

Next to better school opportunities, the parents also explained that they saw a materialistic advantage of children's homes, as children are provided with clothes and good food. One mother to whom I spoke who had send her daughter to a children's home three years ago told about the role of volunteers. She perceived children's homes where volunteers were present as 'better ones', as she perceived the facilities to be better there in comparison with children's homes without volunteers⁴⁴. The presence of foreign volunteers for them creates the image of wealth and available money, which fits in the image of the commodified volunteers as I will describe further on. Observations during my fieldwork did confirm parts of this image of children's homes. Several homes which I visited did offer education at private schools, supported by donations of volunteers. Also did all the homes had a cook employed who cooked food for the children. Also did some homes had a tv set, which at first did not attract my attention. Only when I discussed my experiences later with a Nepali friend, he pointed out to me that this was very unusual as in Nepal there is a quite strict caste system. Usually one the higher casts have these kind of facilities. This showed me that some children's homes have quite luxury facilities, which is in line with the image several parents have. As I was not able to visit children's homes where no volunteers were placed, I am unable to compare these and see the differences.

When I asked why parents in his village think about education as this important to send their children away from home for many years, he answered that because of modernization and the influences of foreigners, parents have the idea that there are more opportunities for their children in the 'big city'. They want better chances for their children than they would have if they would stay in the village. Therefore he explained that in his village children's homes are seen as a solution for the problem that good education is too expensive, as children get good education in the homes.

This data also shows that, even though it is certainly not a perfect solution, for the host community children's homes can be seen as a solution. This also shows how voluntourism can help fill some gaps that have been left open by the government. The problem some

⁴³ Informal conversation March 2018

⁴⁴ Interview 20th April 2018

parents encounter to send their children to (what they perceive as good quality) school can be solved by the opportunities children's homes offer. As I argue for the importance of the acknowledgement of the positive view that exists in the host community about the children's homes, an ethical debate is of equal importance. Sending children away from their family can cause many problems for their development (Reas, 2013). Many researchers have confirmed this, but as stated before this is argued from a western perspective. In Nepal these conclusions could be experienced different. The children's homes offer a different kind of 'ideal childhood'. Emotional rewards are put to the background, receiving (perceived) good education and material wealth is accentuated. Also the contact with (especially foreign) volunteers is perceived as beneficial, as this is expected to contribute to the level of English and something Bourdieu calls acquisition of 'social capital' (Bourdieu 1986). Important to note that these ideals do not exclude each other per se and are sometimes getting closing to each other or are even combined.

While often the money volunteers donate can be considered well spent, I have also encountered several situations in which the extraction of money from volunteers seemed to get overdone. In some situations it seemed like the volunteers were getting exploited by the host family. For example one volunteers told that she had experienced six different festivals during her three week stay. At each of these festivals she was expected to buy the family a gift, such as a bag, some kitchen utensils or food. As it is common in Nepal that guests bring fruit as a gift at festivals, the other gifts and six festivals seemed a bit excessive to me. Curious about these festivals, I asked one of my key (Nepali) participant about this. He answered it is indeed common for guests to bring a small gift like fruit, but bigger gifts like bags or kitchen utensils are never asked of guests. This example and data from other similar experiences from several volunteers, such as having to pay an excessive amount to do laundry, other unexpected costs or raises in fees show the use locals make out of the financial support volunteers bring. These experiences added to the sometimes extravagant amount volunteering organisations ask, volunteers also seem to be commodified, as they have been ascribed economical value by the volunteering organisations and the host community.

Also at the school in Kirtipur the locals have developed a solution in which the volunteer and the school can gain benefits. In inviting volunteers and organising an experience for them in which they can accomplish their goals of their visit, for example in by letting them teaching English, the school provides itself with the security of their financial support. This shows the resilience of the locals to make the most out of a situation and extract benefits in an

alternative way than the volunteers had in mind at first, but still respecting their motivation and wishes.

To sum up, the financial character of voluntourism is substantial, as volunteers pay an average of 2000 euros per trip to engage in volunteer activities, collectively spending about two million euros a year (Atlas and Tram, 2008). NGO's invest a large proportion in several sectors, mainly in disaster relief, education, community building and youth services. This financial support can be a contribution for locals to improve facilities and support development in their region (Atlas and Tram, 2008). Next to this investment of NGO's, the locals have found several ways to extract benefits of voluntourism for their own support and development.

4.3 Social safety net?

Taking the arguments mentioned into consideration, it can be argued that locals receive benefits and can realise facilities because of the presence of volunteers. Therefore volunteers and NGO's can fulfil some tasks that would be under the responsibility of the government. The women's school, for example, has realised a raise in literacy in Kirtipur under women, which the government has never been able to. Children live in a home where they have basic facilities and receive a form of education, where left under the government their chances of getting out of poverty are seen as quite minimal. For communities big improvements have been made in infrastructure and medical facilities. As the government is failing to provide these services, the NGO's are stepping up their game. During my fieldwork it seemed like a substantial amount of locals are (financially) dependent on the support of volunteers and NGO's. This can be seen at the children's home in Sundarijal. When I asked about the role of the government in sustaining this organisation, the owner answered: *'The government is no good. As long as you seen them as extra, but are not dependent on them, then all is good'*⁴⁵. This quote shows he has reversed his relationship with the government, not looking at them for help but taking care of things himself and building up his own financial safety network, existing on donations. His network exists of about 600-800 separate donors, which does not make him dependent and vulnerable when one donor stops.

⁴⁵ Interview March 2018

This could mean NGO's and foreign support is providing a (better) safety net for the locals than the government. But, as discussed earlier, the flow of volunteers and therefore the flow of income of many NGO's is season bound and unstable. Therefore these instances can also struggle to provide a stable safety net for the locals, leaving them with yet no real security.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The core of this thesis shows that in the debate about the consequences of voluntourism the view of the local community is often little exposed. This thesis shows the importance and value of the agency and creativity of the local community to extract benefits out of voluntourism, which is in certain aspects far from ideal. In a developing country that is dependent on international aid and where a lot of people live on or under the poverty line, people tend to find ways to improve their personal situation. Especially when the government is leaving gaps in their support, other agencies fill in these gaps. Different stakeholders create changes and experiences on small and large scale. This thesis has looked into both scales, zooming in on local experiences and placing these in the larger political context. In this concluding chapter I will summarize the given arguments and discussion and conclude with the main argument of the thesis. Also the limitations and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Several negative consequences are extensively discussed in academic literature. During my fieldwork I recognized several of these consequences, but also experienced a different side of these consequences for the local community. The dominance of negative consequences in the literature was not something my research participants experienced in that manner. I have seen some of these consequences affirmed, but due to the agency and creativity of the local community I have seen many alternative experiences with these ‘negative’ consequences. Noticeable is that these consequences are less directly visible or experienced. As a substantial part of voluntourism seems to be focused upon the volunteers instead of the host community, targets of the volunteering are often missed. The motivations and goals of volunteers, as they are the ones who pay, appear to be placed above the actual needs of the host community. ‘Packaged’ experiences are sold, often with little or none collaboration with the host community. Tangible changes for the host community are for this reason difficult to realize. In addition to this consequence, favouring placing of volunteers over the actual benefits for the host community can result in the commodification of vulnerable traits. These are the traits that trigger the motivations of volunteers, as then they can ‘help and make a difference’. This can result in the maintaining of vulnerable traits to place volunteers and make money. Therefore one could speak of the commodification of these vulnerable traits, as they are now given an economical value. These processes are, partially, the reason why many children are leaving their family moving to the city and live in children’s homes. As these locations are

promoted to offer them better chances in life, they move away from their families at a young age. At children's homes sometimes have a fast changing environment, as volunteers often stay only a few days or weeks. The children can experience attachment issues or other developmental problems. In addition to the quick circulation of volunteers in the homes, another negative consequence can be the mismatch between relevant skills and placement of volunteers.

In several places volunteers are expected to perform certain tasks, such as social work, teaching or building. These tasks are often matched with their motivation instead of relevant skills. This can result in inefficient or even harmful consequences when volunteers are performing work for which they are not qualified. A last point mentioned is the dependence on an instable income. Voluntourism is mostly season bound, which means that at some periods of time in the year the income of dependent locals can cease to exist. Dependency on voluntourism can also be dangerous when an organisation decides that their activities are not viable anymore and quit their activities, leaving the host community empty handed again. If other alternative projects were pushed aside for volunteering organisations, this can result in inhibition of sustainable development.

Next to this negative consequences, also positive ones influenced the lives of the local community in Kathmandu. The positive consequences for the locals were very directly visible during the time after the devastating earthquake of 2015. Locals have experienced substantial improvements in their lives that were realised by the volunteers. The work of volunteers resulted in direct disaster relief, in accordance with the *regimes of care* and the aims of development aid. The areas in which the government was experienced as not efficient enough by the host community, volunteers could fill the gap. Next to the disaster relief volunteers contribute substantially in financial aid. It has become normative for volunteers to pay a substantial amount of money for their experiences, especially when they are affiliated with a big organisation. This financial aid can effectuate big support and benefits for the locals who are working with volunteers. However, this does not seem to be exclusively the only possible scenario. As several participants have shared, the money can also disappear in the big organisations and not reach the location at all.

Another positive consequence can be the benefits of cultural exchange and language practise. The motivation and search of volunteers to experience the authentic host culture can contribute to the perseveration of this culture. Working with volunteers can also contribute to

the development and practise of English. Especially for young children this is a big benefit, as speaking sufficient English is perceived as valuable for better chances in the job market. The practise and interaction with foreign volunteers is also beneficial for the development of social skills and the confidence of locals. Humanization of the image of people from the West is also a positive experience research participants have encountered. A last positive consequence is the possibility of voluntourism to function as a social safety net. Locals who work with volunteers experience certain improvements in financial and social safety. For example having an income for a period of time and the possibility to make improvements in facilities were mentioned.

As can be seen in the former, there are many positive and negative consequences of voluntourism. This research contributes to this discussion in adding the side of the host community. One central theme is the creativity and resilience locals show in the processes of voluntourism. Resilience in showing how they can make the best out of a non-ideal situation, and extract benefits for their needs in an alternative way than how the aid might be constructed originally.

The resilience of the local community is shown in the several ways initial motivations or plans of volunteers have been redirected in a way that is actually beneficial for them. The examples that illustrated how several locations are inviting in volunteers and have found a balance in volunteers can satisfy their intention of their visit and in the same time the host community can find support to satisfy their own needs. These processes are yet little exposed in contemporary literature, which is mostly written from the view of (Western) volunteers. This research is of added value to emphasize the need to discuss voluntourism from the view of the host community as this produces new insights and possible adjustments to contemporary theoretical frameworks. More research from this point of view can shed an alternative light on voluntourism in foreign countries and place other literature in a more cultural sensitive context. To discover the real experiences and processes it is necessary to go to the location of the research topic and experience and listen to people who are the involved ones. They are the only ones who can shed a light on their experiences, which directly shape and influence those of the voluntourists.

Another consequence of voluntourism that this research has shown is not only the commodification of the request for aid of the host community, but also the commodification of the volunteer. The host community has found ways to extract benefits from voluntourism that diverge from the initial motivations which brings volunteers into their community. This

entails that the biggest benefit the host community can get, and is very much needed in the limited situation they are in, is financial support. For the purpose of extracting the most out of the available financial support volunteers can be commodified and seen as ‘products’, namely the ones that can deliver money as long as their experience of helping and making a difference is guaranteed. Acknowledgement of the commodification of the host community is definitely endorsed in this research, but an important addition has to be made from the point of view of the host community. This commodification of volunteers is not described in earlier research and is therefore in need of more attention and clarification in further research.

Limitations of this research could also be overcome by future research. This research has been conducted in a limited time frame, as only three months were available. More time could result in an even better relationship with the research participants. This could contribute to gain more and/or deeper insights of the lives of the participants and provide more examples and stories. Especially in Nepal this could generate more reliable data. One difficulty of this study was to differentiate myself from the other volunteers, so I could be able to study the interaction between the host community and the volunteers. Ideally I would have presented myself less in a position of a volunteer to increase this distinction between researcher and volunteers. This could have helped me in the challenging position of becoming my own research topic. This position of both volunteer and researcher also did give me the opportunity to study the different interactions and approaches of the host community towards volunteers and non-volunteers. One last limitation was the language barrier, which can have caused some data to get lost in vagueness. I was able to mostly solve this problem by using an interpreter and to focus on the individuals of the host community who could speak English. Still, being able to speak fluently Nepali could help with correct interpretation of data and lowering the threshold of having an (honest and open) interview.

Voluntourism, while there are certainly also negative consequences, can offer relief and benefits for the local community in the contemporary situation in Nepal. From a sustainable point of view a lot still has to change, as often a long term view of the consequences for the host community is missing. The viewpoint of the host community is essential since it can provide us with an unparalleled assessment of the true effects of voluntourism, being deeply connected to both the volunteers and the local communities. Their agency and creativity may not be overlooked anymore, as this thesis shows that every individual has the power to influence their own life.

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