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Stories of volunteer tourism – constructions and power relations in a local context in Vietnam

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Abstract

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Volunteer tourism, which is a combination of travelling and volunteer work in the global “South”, is increasing and there is a need for more knowledge of the local context. There is a need to examine the constructions of volunteer tourism in the interpretations of people involved on a local level and the implications of these constructions. It is also important to study power dimensions in the relation between local staff and volunteers. The purpose of the study is to examine what image of volunteers and volunteer tourism is constructed by volunteers and local staff. It aims to study what view of the volunteer’s role and what image of the function of volunteer tourism is constructed by local staff and volunteers. Another aim is to examine power relations in the relation between volunteers and local staff. The theoretical framework is social constructivism using discourse analysis. My analysis shows that the volunteer takes the role of an educator. The image of volunteer tourism that is constructed revolves around the volunteer and the *volunteer experience* and the function of volunteer tourism as an international internship. Volunteer organisation involves an imbalance in power between volunteers and local staff since volunteers are customers and being western means to have a symbolic capital in this environment.

Introduction

Volunteer tourism is a form of tourism that has increased during the last decade. It is defined as a combination of travelling and volunteer work which often takes places in social, environmental or economic development work (Luh Sin et al., 2015). My interest in the topic started during volunteer trips to Ghana and Peru where I became interested in how volunteers and volunteer tourism is perceived by people involved in the local context. Volunteer tourism is a controversial subject where research points out that there is an unequal power relation between volunteers and locals and that volunteer tourism has negative impacts on local communities (Guttentag, 2009; Sin, 2010). Previous studies stress that there still is a need for more knowledge of the local context of volunteer tourism (Bargeman et al., 2016; Chen, 2016). Since volunteer tourism is one of the fastest growing tourist markets in the world (Luh Sin et al:120) it is important to get more knowledge about constructions of volunteer tourism in the interpretations of people involved on a local level and their implications, and to study power dimensions in the relation between local staff and volunteers. This study can contribute to an understanding of volunteer tourism from the perspective of how it is constructed in participants' way of reasoning around the phenomena. The choice of context means that the study can provide knowledge about how volunteer tourism is manifested in a specific environment; what is specific for this context and what can that say about the phenomena.

The study was conducted in Vietnam. This choice is based on the hypothesis that Vietnam makes an interesting context for studying volunteer tourism and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), since it is a country that is currently opening to western market economy, at the same time as it has an extended state control over the work of organisations in Vietnam (Hayton, 2010:80). Vietnam has a socialist government but started to create a socialist-oriented market economy in 1986 by the so-called "Doi moi" reform (Templer, 1999:3-4). The country is now characterized by strong economic growth (World Bank, 2017) and increasing tourism (Turner, 2015). It is a one-party state where the entire state apparatus is controlled by the party. The state has an extensive control over the media and the press and freedom of expression is severely limited. It is illegal to question the socialist system and the party's monopoly of power (Daleke, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2017). Hayton (2010) means that the staff of local and international organisations have considerable autonomy on a day-to-day level. Although, when it concerns things that the party finds important, there is a large control system where surveillance works both formally and informally. Formally the activities of or-

organisations are monitored through a system of ‘chops’; a stamp which proves that a document is officially sanctioned. The registration of ‘chops’ is tightly controlled and there are also other controls. Foreign NGO workers are regularly followed and monitored and local NGO workers are regularly questioned to make sure that their international partners are not breaking the legislation (ibid: 80). Vietnam was the top 8 most popular country for volunteer tourism in 2014 (Salvesen, 2014). The study is conducted in the capital of Vietnam, Hanoi, where many volunteer organisations have placements for volunteers. The purpose of the study is to examine what image of volunteers and volunteer tourism is constructed by volunteers and local staff. It also aims to study what view of the volunteer’s role and what image of the function of volunteer tourism is constructed by volunteers and local staff and to examine power relations in the relation between volunteers and local staff. The governmental context of the study can help to understand how volunteer tourism manifests itself depending on the context and how the image of volunteer tourism is constructed in a context with specific governmental characteristics.

Research questions are:

1. What image of volunteers and volunteer tourism is constructed by volunteers and local staff who are employed by the volunteer organisations?; What view of the volunteer’s role is constructed by volunteers and local staff? What image of the function of volunteer tourism is constructed by volunteers and local staff?
2. What power dimensions are possible to discern in the relation between volunteers and local staff in the volunteer organisations?

Theoretical framework

A social constructivist approach is a basis in the theoretical understanding since the aim of the study is to examine what images are constructed in the perceptions and interpretations of volunteers and local staff.

A social constructivist perspective assumes that an individual's perception of the outside world is socially constructed (Wenneberg, 2010:12-13). Berger and Luckmann's (1966:67) social constructivist theory has three pillars; that society is a human product, that society is an objective reality, and that man is a social product. Their theory contains two different kinds of constructions of reality. One is the construction of social reality, which addresses the way that

habits, externalization, roles, institutions and objectification together create social reality. The other form of construction of reality is the construction of the subjective experience of social reality which refers to how the social world and its norms are internalized through socialization (Wenneberg, 2010:71-74).

Social constructivism is a term for several theories about culture and society where discourse analysis is one of many approaches (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000:11). I will use Potter and Wetherell's (1987;1988) discourse analysis to examine how categories are constructed in the interview data, and what evaluations and norms can be distinguished. Their discourse analysis is useful as a theoretical starting point and method in my study since I am to examine the perceptions and interpretations of respondents from the point of view of how they make sense of it.

Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis has a social constructivist approach and is based on both the poststructuralist idea that the self is a discursive subject and the interactional idea that people use discourses actively and in creative ways, as a tool and therefore is not only a carrier of discourses (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000:105). Central in Potter and Wetherell's (1987) discourse analysis is to examine how participants' language is constructed and the consequences of different kinds of construction. There is a focus on examining how evaluative expressions and norms are produced in social texts and it is also regarded as important to examine context in discourse analysis. They stress that it is important to pay attention to the variability in interview accounts and that interview talk is interpretation work concerning the topic in question. There is, nevertheless, a close interdependence between descriptive and evaluative language.

Potter and Wetherell view discourses as *interpretative repertoires*. A "repertoire" can be defined as a register of terms and metaphors that are drawn upon to evaluate and characterize actions and events. An important part of their discourse analysis is to examine what are the uses and functions of different repertoires, and what problems can be recognized by their existence (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:138-149). Interpretative repertoires are bounded units of language, formed out of a limited range of terms which are used in a specific stylistic and grammatical style. These terms derive from one or more key metaphors, and the presence of a repertoire can be told by the usage of certain figures of speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1988:172).

A general premise in social constructivism is that knowledge is not only a reflection of rea-

lity. Truth is constructed and different knowledge regimes indicate what is true and what is false (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:19). The view of our interpretation of the world as constructed also means that norms are constructed. There are power dimensions in this construction since the question is who creates the norms and how it is spread (Potter & Wetherell, 1987:6). Power is therefore an important part of social constructivism and Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis and thereby a natural part of the framework. An additional power perspective will be included since I aim to examine power in the relation between local staff and volunteers in the context. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of various capital will be used since they are useful in understanding power relations in a certain social environment. Economic capital is an individual's economic resources. Cultural capital is defined as a person's education, knowledge and intellectual skills which serves as an asset to reach a higher social status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital means resources an individual holds, based on honour, prestige or recognition and works as value that a person has within a culture (Bourdieu, 1984).

Volunteer tourism is interpreted as a moral economy of alternative consumption where volunteer tourism is a unique 'product' (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Another interpretation is as a new type of work in a global context (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011; McGloin and Georgeou, 2016). Furthermore, volunteer tourism is interpreted as a combination of tourism, aid and emotion (Mostafanezhad, 2013; Mostafanezhad, 2014).

Previous research

Volunteer tourism can be defined as a type of tourism where tourists participate in voluntary work in an organized manner. The purpose of volunteer tourism is the possibility of travelling to support the poor in developing countries and fight poverty, or helping with various forms of environmental work or participate in social or environmental research (Wearing, 2001). The focus of research has mainly been on the motivation that the western volunteer has to participate in volunteer tourism, what volunteer tourism contributes to the host country and how volunteer tourism affects the volunteer tourist (Luh Sin et al., 2015:120-121). Mostafanezhad (2014) indicates that volunteer tourism involves intercultural exchange. In this exchange, there are differing interests between local people and volunteers in volunteer tourism but there are also interests that are common to both parties. Volunteer tourism is seen as an authentic travel experience and is also a way for volunteers to create an identity (ibid:130-131). Guttentag (2009:537) highlights the negative impacts of volunteer tourism on local communi-

ties. His study shows how volunteer tourism destroys the local economy, reduces employment opportunities for the locals, does not consider local people's wishes and helps to reinforce the notions of the "Other" and provide a simplified picture of poverty (ibid). Furthermore, studies indicate power inequalities in volunteer tourism. A study by Palacios (2010) show that the roles of three studied volunteer projects were characterized by local people's perception of the volunteer as a person with more knowledge than themselves. Raymond and Hall (2008) points out that it is problematic when volunteer tourists take on roles of teachers and experts without regard to their actual qualifications. This can be regarded as a representation of a neo-colonial construction of the westerner as superior (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Research also examines what assumptions of the world volunteer tourism relies on. McGloin and Georgeou (2016:403) argue that volunteer tourism adds to the dominant paradigm that the poor of developing countries need the help of wealthy westerners to bring about development. Jakubiak (2012) means that English-language volunteer tourism depends upon and recreates a discourse of hyperglobalism, to construct short-term, volunteer English language teaching as a kind and appropriate development intervention (ibid:435). This study puts forward that English-language volunteer tourism is constructed as an altruistic practice because English is viewed as a 'magical cure' for development (ibid:448). Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011) means that the volunteer marketing industry promotes a distinction between "ordinary" tourists as problem-causers and volunteers as solution-bringers which is problematic since it takes volunteers' beneficial role for granted. They also stress that the volunteer identity construction draws boundaries by opposing volunteers as help-givers and locals as help-receivers. Mostafanezhad (2014) uses the term *Cosmopolitan empathy* to describe an emotional response to poverty in the "South" which today often manifests itself in the choice of consumption. The driving force to help others manifests itself in a phenomenon of consumption of alternative products such as for example *Fairtrade* products, and volunteer tourism is also a product that can be consumed (ibid:70). Furthermore, research examines whether volunteer tourism can function to increase cross-cultural understanding. Wearing (2001) means that volunteer tourism promotes mutually beneficial relationships between tourists and host communities and therefore facilitates cross-cultural understanding. Raymond & Hall (2008) argue that cross-cultural understanding is rather a goal than a natural consequence of volunteer tourism. Kirillova et al. (2015) mean that volunteer tourism can simultaneously promote and inhibit cross-cultural understanding.

The research I have looked at shows power inequalities in volunteer tourism and what the phenomena means in contemporary society. However, it raises questions about the local context and what image of volunteer tourism is constructed here; how employees and volunteers on a local level reason around volunteer tourism and what are the implications of their constructions. Earlier research also raises questions about power dimensions between local staff and volunteers in volunteer organisations. My study can give a fuller understanding of power relations in volunteer tourism and what volunteer tourism means for people involved in a specific context. Therefore, it can contribute to a wider understanding of what volunteer tourism means in a global world for different people involved. Since the study is conducted in a country with specific governmental characteristics and regulations for NGO-work it gives an understanding of how the image of volunteer tourism is constructed depending on the context.

Method and context of study

9 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 volunteers and 4 local staff. Interviews were based on an interview guide with a list of themes and general questions (Trost, 2005:19-21). Interviews were chosen since they can give an insight into the perceptions and interpretations of the respondents. Contextual observations of 6 hours were conducted to get a complement to the interviews for a fuller understanding of the context and power relations between different actors in the local context. Through observations I also gained knowledge about the context which was valuable as an interviewer. The observations were passive observations (Fangen, 2005) conducted at two occasions in two different classes; the duration of each observation was three hours. The method is abductive - I started from an empirical basis but also my theoretical preconceptions. Consequently, I alternated between theory and empirical facts during the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009:4). All interviews were conducted in Hanoi in volunteer tourism organisations. The volunteers and three local staff worked in the same organisation. One local staff worked in another organisation which sends out volunteers to the same projects as the organisation where volunteers and staff mentioned above work. Volunteers have been selected with regards to the volunteers present at the location at the time of the data collection and to achieve a variety of nationalities in the sample of respondents. The local staff has been selected by the volunteer organisations.

Volunteers was labelled V1, V2, V3, V4 and V5. V1: Danish man, 20 years, high school; V2: British man, 18 years, high school; V3: Danish woman, 20 years, high school; V4: Burmese man, 24 years, bachelor degree; V5: US woman, 24 years, bachelor degree.

Local staff was labelled S1, S2, S3 and S4. S1: Vietnamese woman, 24 years, bachelor degree; S2: Vietnamese woman, 23 years, bachelor degree; S3: British man, 26 years, master degree; S4: Vietnamese woman, 41 years, master degree.

The volunteers live together in a “volunteer house” in a local area a bit out of Hanoi city centre, where mostly local Vietnamese people live. On the ground floor of the volunteer house is the office where the Vietnamese staff of the NGO works and a kitchen where the volunteers eat meals that the “nanny” prepares for them. On the second floor are the dormitories. Volunteers teach English in the local school and the centre nearby the office. The English teaching in the centre is led by three volunteers and a Vietnamese staff who help with the PowerPoint-presentation and translation. Vietnamese university-students attend the lesson before their classes at university. The material used is from www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglishteens and the theme of the lesson I attended is “Describing people”. The other lesson I attended is in a local school where one of the volunteers assist the local English teacher. He gets a leading role in the class of 50 students, and the Vietnamese teacher passes the role of teacher to him while she sits down and watches him leading the lesson.

In a brochure about the volunteer organisation, the organisation describes themselves as a NGO based in Hanoi “with a strong focus on developing the capacity of young people to effect change in society. Since our establishment and legal registration in 2009 we have successfully implemented a wide range of community projects to improve the livelihood, education and wellbeing of the Vietnamese people through sustainable development”.

The organisation and the participants in the study were informed about the purpose, that their participation is voluntary and that they may cancel their participation whenever they want. They were promised confidentiality that the data will be taken care of in such a way that unauthorized persons cannot access them. They were also informed that the data collected will only be used for research. Anonymity was assured to volunteer organisations, local staff and volunteers (Vetenskapsrådet).

The interview-technique was based on Potter and Wetherell (1987), Talja (1999) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) since they have a social constructivist approach to interviewing. Potter

and Wetherell (1987) strive to perform interviews that both cover a range of topics and allows more naturalistic conversational exchanges (ibid:165). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:34) argue that interviewing is an active process where the interviewer and the respondent create knowledge through their interaction. Talja (1999:464) means that interview talk is *interpretation work* regarding the topic in question. She stresses that respondents produce a *version* of the object of talk and this version contains an evaluation. Therefore, interview talk is *reflexive, theoretical, contextual, and textual*.

In the interviews consideration was given to the language barriers since all interviews were conducted in English, which is not all respondents' native language. It was important to be sensitive to how respondents appeared to interpret my questions to make sure that they understood my accent and what I referred to. During the research process, I was in the position of an outsider who came to visit and interview participants in the project at certain occasions. This meant that I had no relation to the participants which was beneficial for the quality of the research. However, this position could also be a disadvantage for the research since I was not a natural part of the environment. As a westerner, I was in a certain position both in relation to volunteers and local staff. Since this could affect my analysis it was something I held myself critical to during the research process. I also reflected on the fact that my previous experience of volunteer trips could influence my preconceptions of volunteer tourism. This meant that I tried to keep myself as open as possible to new perspectives on volunteer tourism.

The transcription followed what Potter and Wetherell (1987:166) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:200-202) suggest for a discourse analytic study. Interviews are transcribed in a way which makes it possible to analyse interviews as social interaction. Both questions and answers are transcribed. In the transcript, the symbol ... stands for a short break. Emphasized words are in italics. Added in parentheses are my own comments. If I have left out a section of talk I have used the symbol (...)

I used Kvale and Brinkmann (2009:211-212) view of the process of analysis as a process where analysis and interpretations starts during the interview. I drew on Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Talja (1999) in my search for patterns of interpretative repertoires. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest two phases for the analysis where the researcher first searches for pattern in the data in the form of both variability and consistency. In the second phase the researcher forms hypotheses about the functions and effects of patterns of repertoires and searches the data for linguistic evidence for these hypotheses (ibid:167-169). Talja (1999:466)

draws on Potter and Wetherell and claims that the analysis of interpretative repertoires is a process where the accounts are analysed to find significant patterns of consistency and variation. Then, the researcher examines what the starting point behind an account is, what kinds of limitations of perspective a description is based on and what other statements are based on the same perspective. Finally, the accounts are linked to the viewpoint that they were based on and the different repertoires are named; usually by concepts used when the topic is discussed from a certain angle.

Contextual observations followed a schedule for observation which was based on the research questions. The observations focused on the interaction in the classroom, the themes of the education and the roles of the participants. The schedule consisted of the focus of the observation, the nature of the written record and what you might discuss afterwards (Wragg, 2011). Field notes were written in a “stream of consciousness-style” at the same time as I held myself to a few key points. The privacy of the participants was protected and I had consent to enter the field by the participants. The observations were analysed through a process where I divided the observation-notes into different categories. These categories were based on the research questions (Fangen, 2005).

Findings and discussion

The different purposes of volunteer tourism

The image of volunteer tourism revolves around terms such as *getting to know the culture*, *develop as a person*, *get experience* and *give to the community*. This is illustrated in the following example by one of the volunteers:

I: To sum up, how would you describe your experience volunteering?

V1: Amazing. I won't ever live without this experience... Like giving on information to other people, learning a new culture and learning more about yourself and your culture by other cultures. It's essential for your understanding of yourself and other people, I think.

Volunteer tourism is expressed as serving both a career purpose and a purpose of personal development. There is an emphasis on wanting to help others but at the same time the view of volunteer tourism revolves around the interests of volunteers which the following example from a local employee can illustrate:

I: In general, what do you think is the purpose of working as a volunteer?

S3: So, we have people who come here to gain experience themselves and we have other people who come to provide training and support. We have people who come here for gap years, because they just wanted to explore a different country and do something at the same time linked to their interests. We had some people who come here for example for teaching and sometimes where they want to go into that career but aren't sure about it. (...) So gaining experiences, cultural interaction, providing for the locals with their knowledge.

This quote shows what is common in the interviews, that volunteers have a clear purpose with their “volunteer trip” since it is supposed to give them something in return. This reflects what Mostafanezhad's (2014:124-125) highlights in her research: that volunteer tourism can be a way for volunteers to self-develop for a future career-purpose. In my data volunteer tourism is regarded as being *good for the community* and a way of *giving back* but it is clear in the interviews that volunteers have another purpose with their trip besides that, such as travelling, self-development or career development. The starting point of volunteer tourism in my data does not appear to be only *giving back* or *authentic cultural encounter*, which Mostafanezhad highlights. Therefore, my findings show a more multifaceted image than Mostafanezhad's findings.

There is a variation in what is emphasised as the main purpose of volunteer tourism. Two of the volunteers emphasise learning for a career and getting to try internships while three volunteers emphasise personal development, giving to the community and alternative travelling.

It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire which depicts volunteer tourism as something different from regular tourism which gives a deeper experience of the culture:

I: What do you think is the function of volunteer tourism?

V2: It's to try and balance experiencing different cultures as well as helping other people and try to help, like, the community. And it's also a way to experience different cultures. Cause now I have a much broader knowledge of the education system in Vietnam that I wouldn't have had if I would just have been a tourist and stayed in a hostel and not taught children in the school.

In this interpretative repertoire volunteer tourism is evaluated as an alternative way of travelling that has several benefits over regular tourism. Volunteer tourism gives volunteers a different identity where they are different from regular tourists which reflects previous research by Mostafanezhad (2014:128-131) who argues that volunteer tourism is viewed as an authentic travel experience and also becomes way for volunteers to create an identity.

The following quote is an example of the interpretative repertoire mentioned above:

I: What do you think is the function of volunteer tourism?

V3: (...) I think... a lot of people go out and they are tourists and that's great. (...) But I think if you do it with volunteer work... it gives you're journey more of a purpose (...) I think regular tourism is, it's fun but it's also very like, shallow. I have a lot of friends that go on backpacker trips where they do Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam (...) And they just go from city to city and get drunk and see Angkor Wat and you know, do some like superficial things. And I think that this, it's just... it gives you so much more.

Volunteer tourism is constructed as a different travelling experience that has a purpose. Vietnam and Hanoi is depicted as good destinations for volunteer tourism since Vietnam is not considered as touristic as other countries in South East Asia such as Thailand and Cambodia. Hanoi is also considered to be a city that is more traditionally Vietnamese compared to Ho Chi Minh City. One volunteer, V1, tells me that he went to Ho Chi Minh City but he didn't like it since it was "like any other western city" whereas he considers Hanoi as more genuine and traditionally Vietnamese. S3, a British employee, also says that Hanoi "is really big right now for volunteer tourism" since Ho Chi Minh City is much more western. "There are two McDonalds now in Ho Chi Minh City", he says as an example of how it is becoming more western.

V2, a British volunteer gives the typical expression of this in the following quote:

V2: I think coming to places such as this (...) where there isn't many westerners and things like that, is a lot better than travelling to places that are set up for tourism. It's sort of untouched by the western world. So, it's not full of... sort of, like the nights out, are predominantly still Vietnamese people out like in bars if you go for a beer. Whereas I think if I went to Bangkok, bars would be full of westerners.

Vietnam is compared to other more touristic countries in South East Asia such as Thailand. Furthermore, V2 argues that Vietnam is a much more genuine touristic destination. The way Hanoi is described here can be interpreted as a typical volunteer tourism destination which has the characteristics which aligns with what a volunteer experience should include such as *authenticity* and *cultural encounter*.

Three volunteers, V1, V2, V3 also express a feeling of being privileged and wanting to help less privileged people:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

V1: Somebody wants to help other people, somebody wants to feel better about themselves. Somebody wants to do a combination of these two. I think you have to do it a little bit for yourself, but it can be a combination. Because I think that we are pretty privileged. I can feel a little bit obliged to helping other people, so why shouldn't I? I have a gap year now and I have lots of time so why not go here where I can help?

It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire about the function of volunteer tourism to feel better about yourself through offering your help as a volunteer:

I: What do you think is the function of volunteer tourism?

V1: I think it is both a good thing and a bad thing. I think it is a good way of doing it also to come out and travel (...) But maybe, I haven't experienced some bad occasions with it, but maybe it could be with volunteer tourism, that people just go out like, they have two weeks as a volunteer and then they go out travelling just to have like good self-confidence about themselves. And also, just like to get it on their CV. Just get two weeks of work and then travel for three months and say that you have been out as an international volunteer...

Here, volunteer tourism is assumed to make volunteers feel better about themselves. This account and other volunteers' expression of how they want to "give back" to less privileged people in the world reflects Mostafanezhad's (2014:70) theory of Cosmopolitan Empathy where a bad conscience about poverty in the global "South" can be solved through consumer choice. The accounts show how privileged volunteers are consumers of a volunteer trip that eases their conscience and gives them a sense of "giving back" which aligns with the view of volunteer tourism as a moral economy (Mostafanezhad, 2013) where volunteer tourism is a product of alternative consumption which eases the conscience.

The ideal volunteer and the volunteer as an educator

In the way that the respondents interpret the definition of a volunteer, they express norms of how a volunteer should be. The view of the volunteer revolves around the view of the ideal volunteer who is viewed as someone who is open-minded, flexible and willing to try new experiences:

I: What is your definition of a volunteer?

S3: (...) But generally it would be someone who wants to learn... and teach. That want to gain experience, and give experience. A volunteer should always have in mind that it's a give and take-system. It's not *all-give* or *all-take*. If they don't understand that then they can't get fully involved with volunteer-work. Because it's a two-way system generally. But a volunteer has to, yeah they have to be willing to... It has to be someone who is open-minded, if you're in a country like this. Someone who's willing to travel and see new things. But someone who is eager to get involved with something out of the comfort-zone.

It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire in the data which expresses the characteristics of an ideal volunteer. This repertoire implies that everyone who volunteers should live up to this ideal and it also assumes that all volunteers have the intentions of the typical volunteer.

The view of the volunteer's role revolves around interpretations of the volunteer's role as a provider of knowledge and skills to the local projects and a support. In this view the importance for Vietnamese people to learn English is stressed, and volunteers are regarded as an important asset to teach English. V5, a volunteer from US, expresses how volunteers can help locals to learn English:

I: What do you think volunteers can contribute that local participants cannot on their own?

V5: Again, just anyway that... you know I hope that I can help them better their English because I think it's a priority for them (...) And just how they, the local community anyway can specifically put their English. It's a priority for them. They are very eager to strengthen their English and it can help them feel more connected to the international community.

All volunteers and local staff share this view of the volunteer's role as helping students to learn English and be an eye-opener to the rest of the world. This pattern can be regarded as an interpretative repertoire of the volunteer's role and is further illustrated by the following quote:

I: Talk about 3 main successes of the project so far, if any.

V1: I would say happiness, smiles in the faces of people. That's some of the things I've tried here. Happiness... And, seeing some form of development. Now I teach English so getting to know them and see that they develop in understanding English. And, waking a curiousness between those students in what another culture is... I think that's also very important, that they have been conscious about some other people, on the other side of the world and they are also very interested. They want to learn more about them.

The importance of learning English expressed in the interpretative repertoire aligns with (Jakubiak, 2012) and Mostafanezhad (2014:59-62) who argues that English is perceived as a way to development by volunteer tourism participants. This can be compared to McGloin and Georgeou (2016:413) who argue that the discourse of volunteer tourism advocates what is viewed as a 'given'; that English speaking is valuable, that all cultures want to speak English and that people in developing countries need to learn English to improve their socio-economic situation. Included in the described interpretative repertoire is the view that volunteers can bring "new", more updated and more enjoyable ways of teaching English:

I: How does that differ from the role and responsibilities of the local participants involved in the project?

V2: Well, I think it's like to try and use my culture, western culture, which the teachers and the local participants don't have. And to try to bring new ideas (...) when we teach our lessons are supposed to be more enjoyable for the pupils than the local teachers. And we're supposed to... some of the children are more disciplinary to their teacher whereas we are supposed to try and make it more fun. And try and teach them that way, rather than using discipline and just reading out of the textbook.

This quote is illustrative of the interpretative repertoire of volunteers as English teachers who can give a different, “more updated” and western input in the education and make the education “more fun”. Research mentioned above does not put attention to this: that volunteers contribute to the quality of the education through more general qualities such as teaching English in a “more updated” and “fun” way. Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), western volunteers appear to have a symbolic capital which is regarded as valuable in the education. This has not been highlighted in previous research. The interpretative repertoire of volunteers’ role creates norms about what volunteers are supposed to do since it assumes that all volunteers can make the education more fun than the local teachers, and that the western culture that volunteers can bring and use in the education is valuable and important for the pupils. In this repertoire, volunteers are assumed to serve as representatives for the rest of the world and the western world, who can open the locals to the international world/western world:

I: What do you think volunteers can contribute that local participants cannot on their own?

V1: I think it’s like (...) a bit of a motivation to meet new people and talk to people that are different from yourself. I think also, a different way of approaching things. Getting the students to know different cultures, think differently... (...) So, it can also make you become more conscious of the world around you. Because a lot of the students, they are very local, they have only been in Vietnam. They are very curious about hearing about our cultures, perspectives and how we live in other countries and how they do there. (...) And that’s not something that the local participants can contribute as much as we can.

Another part of the repertoire mentioned above is the role that volunteers are assumed to have as westerners who can teach Vietnamese people how to do certain things and make them learn from western culture. A developing country such as Vietnam is assumed to be able to learn from developed countries through volunteers:

I: Should volunteers come to Vietnam? Why or why not?

S2: The first thing is that, volunteering in Vietnam (...) we are a developing country so we still have a lot of developing matters. They can have a lot of fields, a lot of matters for them to volunteer and it is not limited like in other developed countries. So, we still have some poverty, we still have some... maybe corruption, for example. We still have something that we need to improve, and we need the knowledge and the experience from a westerner friend.

This way of talking about learning from westerners implies that volunteers are representatives of developed countries who can act as role models and teach locals of a developing country such as Vietnam to improve development in accordance with a western way of thinking. This reflects what previous research by McGloin and Georgeou (2016) argue that volunteer tourism adds to the dominant paradigm that the poor of developing countries need the help of

wealthy westerners to bring about development. In the repertoire mentioned above, the westerner is the norm and ideal and it is implied that Vietnamese should learn from westerners and develop in accordance with a western model to bring about positive change. The relationship between volunteers and locals is unequal since volunteers act as teachers who can teach valuable things to Vietnamese locals.

Another regular pattern in the interview data, interpreted as an interpretative repertoire, is the volunteer's role to bring enthusiasm and extra energy and care which the following quote from a Vietnamese employee illustrates:

I: What do you think volunteers can contribute that local participants cannot on their own?

S4: About the projects were volunteers work with children with disabilities (...) the way that they care for the children is unique, it's very special. It's like unconditional love. It doesn't mean that the local teachers cannot bring that to the children but it's understandable that they cannot do it every day, to every single child (...) And to compensate for it, the international volunteers come, and they just do their volunteer work and they know for sure that they do it for only a short amount of time, when they are here. So they care and they laugh (...) they can do everything good and the kids enjoy every moment with the international volunteers. So that's (...) one of the biggest contributions of the volunteers.

This describes volunteers as people who can give extra energy and care since they stay for a shorter amount of time than local teachers and staff in the care centres. Furthermore, it is also possible to discern a variation in what is emphasised in the interviews as the main role of volunteers. V4 and V5 emphasise that the role of the volunteer is to bring skills, while V1, V2 and V3 points out that the role of volunteers is to bring enthusiasm:

I: In general, what do you think is the role of a volunteer?

V3: I think the role of the volunteer is to like bring... enthusiasm. To give that extra, that maybe the local teachers or the local people don't have the capacity to do (...) Like to play a supportive role. As a volunteer, you have some extra energy and motivation.

The variation in the data, described above, shows that the role of volunteers appears to be influenced by the way that volunteers interpret their role.

The volunteer as an expert

There is an interpretative repertoire where professional volunteers who are trained in a certain area are depicted as "experts" in their areas who can give expertise to the locals:

S4: In addition, there are some international volunteers who are like experts in some areas. And they organise workshops and seminars for the local teachers. And for the parents of the children, to learn about some things. How to manage children with hyperactivity and those things like that.

This repertoire implies that volunteers who are professional and have training from the western world can teach Vietnamese professionals how to do their work. The following quote from a British employee is another example of this repertoire:

I: What do you think volunteers can contribute that local participants cannot on their own?

S3: (...) They have a different experience, that they can bring. A different mind-set perhaps with certain tasks, different training as well. (...) Local volunteers would obviously be able to communicate easier with the local people, but the foreign volunteer might have additional knowledge regarding certain things that they might not be taught here. When it comes to teaching again, there are different teaching methods... It can be refreshing to have a new teaching-style (...) something a bit new, something more exciting (...) it varies from placement to placement, but I think having that outside-knowledge can be beneficial for the country.

This interpretative repertoire implies that volunteers who are trained in the western world know more, compared to locals who are trained in Vietnam. At the same time as the interpretative repertoires are somewhat different concerning the role of the volunteer they are connected and interwoven with each other since they concern the idea of the western skills and the superiority of western knowledge, norms and values. This can be compared to what Raymond and Hall (2008) argue about volunteer tourists taking roles of experts, which could be seen as representing a neo-colonial construction of the westerner as superior. Since volunteers with training from the west seem suitable to teach Vietnamese professionals, this interpretative repertoire about western experts includes a meaning of western professionals as superior to Vietnamese professionals which could reflect a neo-colonial construction of the westerner as superior.

There is a consistent pattern discernible in the interview data of the local staff. Although, S4, a Vietnamese employee, deviate from the other employees since she talks about the problem that sometimes occurs when volunteers cannot contribute in the local projects. She states that that local employees who work in local projects often expect volunteers to be experts and they are disappointed when they are not prepared to do the work:

I: Talk about 3 main difficulties in the project so far, if any.

S4: The first difficulty can be the difference in the expectation of the volunteers, and the local projects. So (...) in some projects they want the volunteers to have good expertise, who can like immediately do the work. But it is not always the case, because we have many young volunteers. And many of them come for short time, like two weeks or three weeks. And it already takes some time for them to get to know about the country and also get to understand about the work. So, little time for them to help out in the projects.

This quote also shows how norms are created which expects volunteers to bring expertise and be trained in the area where they are set to work. This has been shown by previous research

by Palacios (2010) who stresses that volunteers in his study perceived it difficult that locals expected them to bring expertise to their projects. The quote above also shows the difference in expectations between local staff and volunteers.

In a follow-up interview after observations at the English class a volunteer V1, tells me that the volunteers were instructed when they came to the NGO to not talk about politics and not involve themselves in politics. They were told a story about two of the previous volunteers that had posted a photo on Facebook holding a placard with the text “Save the planet”. After this, the security police had shown up ringing the bell at the door of the NGO’s office/volunteer house in the middle of the night. This account from V1, could serve as an example of the role of the volunteer in Vietnam – to work for the NGO in their projects and be a support and an asset, but abstain from any kind of involvement in societal and political matters of the country.

The “volunteer experience”

Another clear pattern in the interview data is the view of the function of volunteer tourism as revolving around expressions such as *giving back* or *helping others*. At the same time the function is expressed as an *experience* which involves tourism and personal development. In these formulations, it is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire where volunteer tourism is viewed as an experience that makes it possible for volunteers to get out of the life they lead in their home countries to try a new environment and travel at the same time as they can help, share their skills and develop on a personal level. This repertoire can be compared to the view of volunteer tourism as tourism, aid and emotion (Mostafanezhad, 2014). But emotion does not appear as central in my material, instead it is the feeling of giving aid which is highlighted. A typical example of this is the description below which is a quote from the website of the NGO under the heading *Volunteer in Vietnam*:

You can change the world...while you change your life! Do you want to travel and at the same time use our valuable skills and abilities to enhance the lives of others? Would you like to escape the daily grind and pressure associated...?

Another typical example of this repertoire is a quote from a local employee:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

S4: I still think that in our organisation we have some volunteers who are very young, like 17, 18, 19. And for most of them, they want to combine it with like travelling. So travelling and also volunteering at the same time. So their time is still meaningful in some way. And, they want to see how

they can survive or work in a very different context, different setting... And for many of them it opened up very new horizon for them.

I: In general, what do you think is the purpose of working as a volunteer?

S4: It can be many things... (...) Like be able to give back and support the others. It's one thing. And it can also be an opportunity for them to really learn and immerse in the culture of another country, and get to know the local people better. It can also be to get work-experience for their career. It can also be for making their CV better for jobs in the future. It can also be to explore the possibilities to do the similar thing, in their country.

Here, volunteer tourism is expressed as an experience which not only includes work but also travelling, experiencing a different culture, challenging yourself and learning about locals in Vietnam. The way that the repertoire mentioned above depicts the function of volunteer tourism as a tourism experience can be illustrated in this quote by a Vietnamese employee:

I: What, if anything, has changed about your thinking about volunteerism since you first started to work with volunteers?

S4: Hmm... When I just started working with this, my expectations were also very high, I think higher than now, towards the volunteers. So at the beginning I also thought that, or expect that, the volunteers come to work mainly. To help mainly. Then I realised that it is not everything. Working is just one part of their volunteering-experience. They should have the chance to explore the country in different ways, in different settings... to have a better point of view about Vietnam and about the people. (...) So, we try to integrate as many activities like extra activities as possible, to their experience.

Here, volunteers are assumed to combine the stay in Hanoi with travelling on weekends. The *volunteer experience* is expressed as constituted by diverse experiences for volunteers; travelling, experiencing the life of locals and giving back to the community. The quote above also shows how one local employee has changed her perception of what volunteer tourism means since she started working for a volunteer organisation. In this interpretative repertoire volunteer tourism is constructed as a “package-experience”. Another example of the same repertoire is illustrated by the following quote from another Vietnamese employee:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

S2: I think everyone, they have the dream to go abroad, right? Everyone wants to see other view (...) not similar views, or the same views we see every day. So, going abroad is really attracting. When you go abroad you can still help the other people, it's really, an attracting idea. And sometimes, they can *experience* the cultural shock or the cultural difference, as well. So, that can be a good idea if you come, just like travel and work, you can experience the difference. And they say like, step out of the comfort-zone. Trying to be in another environment. I think it's a quite common trend now because a lot of people want to experience...

Here, volunteer tourism is viewed as an experience where volunteers get out of their ordinary life at home to challenge themselves in a different environment. This quote is also an example

of how local Vietnamese staff use the same language and reasoning around volunteer tourism as volunteers, and use expressions such as *getting out of your comfort-zone*.

Volunteer tourism as a “two-way stream of benefits”

It is possible to distinguish another interpretative repertoire which is connected to the repertoire mentioned before. I identify it as a different repertoire since it has another function. This interpretative repertoire describes volunteer tourism as consisting of two different parts, where volunteers learn and self-develop at the same time as they help the local community. This quote from a volunteer is a typical example of this repertoire:

V3: I think that for most people, like the people I volunteer with, it has been the same with the two dimensions. There's the big personal motivation to meet a different culture and get out where it's unfamiliar and stuff. And there's the part about helping people that have lower expectations to life than yourself and have fewer advantages, like, opportunities, to get to meet them and... talk to them. I don't know. I think it has really been an eye-opener for me, to meet these Vietnamese people in my class that are the same age as me and they have so many different views on things that I don't have and it's a really fun culture-meeting, I think, for both of us.

Here, volunteer tourism is described as beneficial for both volunteers and locals. A British employee says that volunteer tourism always benefit both volunteers and the local community: S3: “So I think it's a two-way stream of benefits, generally. In any of the placement it might be more towards one person or more towards the other but there's always a two-way-flow.” This repertoire in the interview data includes an evaluation of volunteer tourism as a phenomenon which is beneficial for both volunteers and the local community. It also involves a view of volunteers as givers and the locals as receivers. This aligns with previous research by Vodopivec and Jaffe (2011) who mean that the volunteer marketing industry takes volunteers' beneficial role for granted and that the volunteer identity construction draws boundaries by opposing help-givers and help-receivers (ibid). There is a contradiction in this repertoire, since at the same time as it emphasises that volunteers are supposed to give to the community, it appears to revolve around the individual - the volunteer and his/her interests. Therefore, this repertoire of the function of volunteer tourism revolves around what volunteers can get out of the volunteer experience but not around the interests of the local community. This sheds light on what Guttentag (2009) highlights that volunteer tourism does not consider the wishes of locals. My findings elaborate what Guttentag (2009) highlights, since they point out that the starting point in volunteer tourism is not the locals, the starting point is the volunteer.

However, there can be mutual benefits of volunteer tourism for both locals and volunteers. There seems to be an interpretative repertoire in the data, where volunteer tourism is assumed to increase cross-cultural understanding. Local staff and volunteers assume in the interview data that volunteer tourism is a way for the local community and volunteers to increase their understanding of different cultures. A typical example of this is a quote from a Vietnamese employee:

I: What do you think volunteers can contribute that local participants cannot on their own?

S2: Hmm... The first one is, like definitely they bring another different culture, that we cannot bring. (...) Because when we work in a multicultural environment like this, we can experience the difference among the cultures. Or we can understand more about other people. Like if, in a local context, if someone does something weird, you will think – why are they doing something weird? But if you work in a multicultural environment you may have some thinking (...) that they come from different countries, we can understand them, it's their culture, we do not judge too much. (...) So, for the first time they bring something different, for the first time it can be a shock, but after that we can get used to it and we can understand more.

The local staff in my study express that volunteer tourism is an opportunity for local people to understand more about other cultures, and become more tolerant, and for volunteers to learn about other cultures. Their accounts align with previous research by Wearing (2001) who regards volunteer tourism as facilitating cross-cultural understanding. Other research by Raymond and Hall (2008), Kirillova et al. (2015) shows that volunteer tourism can have contradictory effects on cross-cultural understanding and that it is not a natural consequence of volunteer tourism. The repertoire of cross-cultural understanding in my data implies that increased cross-cultural understanding is a natural consequence of volunteer tourism. However, an effect of this repertoire is that it does not examine if volunteer tourism leads to increased intercultural understanding since it assumes that it is a natural part of volunteer tourism.

An international internship for career development

There is a variation in what volunteers emphasise as the function of volunteer tourism. V1 and V3 from Denmark put most emphasis on personal development, giving back, cultural interaction and alternative travelling while V4 from Burma and V5 from US emphasise bringing skills and learning for a career and V2 from Britain, emphasise both a career purpose and personal development and alternative travelling:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

V2: A lot of it is for the experience. I think it's a way to get out of England or wherever you come from. And try new experiences... different cultures. And also meet new people (...) It also looks

very good on the CV and that's what I came for. It sets you apart, so if you got the same academic grades as someone but you are the one that have went abroad to volunteer and experience a different culture, then they can set you apart.

Here volunteer tourism is expressed as an advantage in a future career, for example for applying for scholarships for university. It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire in the data where volunteer tourism is depicted as an international internship which looks good on the CV since it shows that you are active and have experience abroad. A typical example of this is the following quote from a US volunteer:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

V5: Just to get better awareness to the international community and to work on projects or with companies that maybe they wouldn't have the opportunity to work in in their home-country.

Here volunteer tourism is described as a good opportunity to try internships that you are not able to try in your own country. This is an example of the repertoire mentioned above, which gives volunteer tourism the meaning of an international internship where volunteers without qualifications can try internships that they would not be allowed to try in their home countries and at the same time experience a different cultural context. Another illustration of this repertoire is the following quote from a British employee:

I: Why do you think people want to volunteer in foreign countries?

S3: I guess... (...) People want to travel, that's usually the first thing that comes to everyone's mind. They want to see a new culture. If they are doing an internship for example, they want to fulfil the needs of their course, but do it in an interesting environment. So yes, kill two birds with one stone, if you know what I mean. It makes sense in a way, for people to have... it makes it more enjoyable for the work they're doing.

Here volunteer tourism is regarded as an international internship in an interesting cultural environment. This reflects what McGloin and Georgeou (2016:415) argue that "voluntourism promises adventure, authenticity and the chance to set oneself apart from the herd in the job market." Another typical example of the repertoire mentioned above is a quote from a Vietnamese employee:

I: What do you think is the function of volunteer tourism?

S2: The first thing you can say is that you can travel. I think a lot of people now want to travel and want to get more stamps on their passport and they want to show the other that they are experienced people, that they are quite knowledgeable.

Here volunteer tourism is expressed as a way for volunteers to define themselves. This appears to be a part of the same interpretative repertoire which depicts volunteer tourism as an internship where volunteers get to develop an image of who they are which serves a future career. This reflects previous research by Luh Sin et al. (2015) who argue that volunteer tourism works as a form of neoliberal governmentality where volunteer tourism becomes a way for the subject to develop itself as a competitive, entrepreneurial, market-based and individualized player which is at once a caring, responsible and active global citizen. The repertoire also aligns with the view of the function of volunteer tourism as a new type of work in a global context (McGloin and Georgeou, 2016; Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011).

Power relations between local staff and volunteers and the symbolic capital of being a western volunteer

In the interview data local staff express a view of volunteers as guests that they are supposed to take care of. It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire which views local staff as taking care of volunteers. This relation can be illustrated by the following example:

I: Talk about 3 main successes of the project so far, if any.

S4: The first thing that comes to my mind is about the level of support of the staff. It is quite consistent and... to some extent, it is good enough. Because for us it is very important for the volunteers to receive sufficient support, when they are in a different country (...) The second thing is about the partners (...) When the sending organisations send volunteers or interns to our organisation, they know that the volunteers will be in good hands. And they don't have to worry too much. And they know that we are always here to... sort out any problems or any challenges that the volunteers may have.

Here, the respondent expresses that the sending organisations expect a certain service from the NGO. Volunteers have paid a sending organisation who, in turn, sends them to the NGO – therefore, volunteers are somewhat, customers. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory (1986), volunteers have an economic capital since they have the means to buy a “volunteer trip” from a sending organisation. This economic capital puts volunteers in a role of customers and therefore in a privileged position. Volunteers are also new in the Vietnamese environment compared to local staff who are familiar with the culture and codes in this environment. In this way volunteers have a less powerful position compared to local staff. The potential consequences of volunteers' roles as customer who buy a “volunteer trip” has not been highlighted in previous research.

The local Vietnamese staff and the Burmese volunteer express a view of western volunteers as having a symbolic capital. An example of this is the following quote from a Vietnamese employee:

I: Do you think that the meeting with western volunteers has influenced the way you look at your own life?

S2: Of course. (...) I think it can have some influence or effect on your life. The meeting with them have a big influence with me I think, even with the other people, because not everyone can have the chance to work with international volunteers, right. So, we are really lucky to meet them and inherit some working-spirit from them and some experience from them. So sometime it affect me a lot and it changed my thinking and even changed my mind-set, about life and about the way that we conduct the work or the way we handle or deal the work. So it's really the best thing.

Here western volunteers are regarded as having valuable characteristics. When I ask the question mentioned in the quote above, I get an immediate concurring answer. It is possible to distinguish an interpretative repertoire in the interview data where volunteers have a symbolic capital through being representatives of the western/international world who speak English with a pronunciation that Vietnamese strive to get. Drawing on Bourdieu (1984), this repertoire revolves around the symbolic capital that westerners have in this context. This can be illustrated by the volunteer from Burma's view of western volunteers:

I: How would you describe your experience working with western people?

V4: They are good, and they take responsibility of their things. They are not afraid to fulfil their tasks. And then they are friendly. They are not afraid of talking in front of other people. Because mostly they are teenagers but when they teach in the school they are just a little bit nervous but they are not afraid. As for me, in my country, teenagers are a little shy. Mostly the people from Asia they are shy and they are nervous, they don't want to stand in front of people. But it's different from the western people.

I: Do you feel that you change your way of being when you work with Western people?

V4: Yeah, mostly. But maybe I tried to change a lot before. Being with western people is a big experience. I have learned a lot, because they are not afraid. They fulfil their task; they don't miss anything. They just take their responsibility. And then they are really very knowledgeable. They know most of the things. So, I learned a lot.

In the repertoire mentioned above, western volunteers are depicted as having certain valuable knowledge and codes which locals in Vietnam look up to:

V2: They (the pupils in the local school) are genuinely interested in finding out about England. Like a lot of them are very interested to find out about London and things like that. And the Vietnamese teachers can't offer them knowledge about the Western world and things like that.

This quote by a volunteer could be regarded as showing that volunteers have a cultural capital since they have knowledge of the western world which is as an advantage in the international world that Vietnamese strive to enter. In this international world, the westerner is the ideal

who teaches the locals in Vietnam how to learn certain codes and characteristics. In the same repertoire, which is expressed by both volunteers and local staff, there is a view of volunteers as representatives of the international world, who have assets that the Vietnamese strive to learn from:

I: What is your experience of working as a westerner with locals in Vietnam?

V5: (...) Again, I think they really value English and they are really curious to know about places I've travelled to in the United States... So no, the experience hasn't been anything to note. Maybe they think that they can sort of use me as an asset, to learn from and to help them and to support them in what they're doing.

A consequence of this interpretative repertoire is that the knowledge that volunteers are considered to have through being western and “native English speakers” makes volunteers entitled to teach locals. Furthermore, western volunteers appear to be the norm in the interpretative repertoire of volunteer tourism, even if volunteers can be from countries outside the western world,

Conclusion

This paper has looked at how a certain image of volunteers and volunteer tourism is constructed by actors in a specific context, the implications of these constructions and what power dimensions are visible in the relation between volunteers and local staff. The image of volunteer tourism is constructed as a tourism experience, where volunteer work is a part of the experience. The starting point in this construction is the experience of the volunteer and what the volunteer wishes. A consequence of this is that the priority is not the wishes of the local community but the wishes of the volunteer. This reflects and elaborates the results of previous research by Guttentag (2009) who claims that volunteer tourism does not consider the wishes of locals. However, it could be beneficial for the country to get free labour and help with English teaching through volunteer tourism which means that volunteer tourism could also serve the local community. Volunteer tourism appears to go in a one-way direction where the community is a “receiver” and the volunteer a “giver”. There is an unequal power relation in this distinction since volunteers are in privileged positions as givers.

The view that is constructed of the volunteer's role as an educator and an eye-opener to the rest of the world has several implications. First, it leads to a transmission of western values and a positive evaluation of internationalisation and globalisation. Another effect is that volunteer tourism transmits the idea of English as the way to social development, which has a

starting point in a positive evaluation of a globalised free market-perspective. The view of English as a solution for social development reflects what has been found in previous research (Mostafanezhad, 2014; Jakubiak, 2012; McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Volunteer tourism also stands for an idea that the Vietnamese people are supposed to learn western codes to become successful. A result of this constructed view is a risk that the Vietnamese people are perceived as passive receivers of help provided by volunteers who give them knowledge. This relies on an image where westerners are regarded as more knowledgeable compared to locals in Vietnam. The effect of this construction is that it might work as a hindrance for an equal interaction between volunteers and Vietnamese locals, since an equal interaction would require a double-sided interaction; an interaction where locals in Vietnam also give of their knowledge to volunteers. An equal interaction would also require that the projects are adapted to the circumstances and perspectives of locals in Vietnam. Furthermore, the data shows that western values are highly valued by local staff. My research also shows the importance of investigating the symbolic capital of western volunteers in volunteer tourism.

The constructed image of the function of volunteer tourism as an *international internship* in a different cultural environment shows that volunteer tourism is not only about *giving back*. Instead, an important part of volunteer tourism appears to revolve around the interests of volunteers. This construction also reflects results in previous research by McGloin and Georgeou (2016) who argue that volunteer tourism serves as career development for volunteers. The implications of this construction are that volunteer tourism in a country such as Vietnam functions as an enabler for career development for western youth or young people from other countries outside the western world who have economic resources to participate in volunteer tourism. There is an obvious need for more research about how volunteer tourism works as an internship in different parts of the world that can serve as an advantage for higher education or the labour market.

The relation between local staff and volunteers is characterized by the fact that volunteers are customers which puts them in a privileged position. On the other hand, volunteers are in a less powerful position since they are in an unfamiliar environment compared to local staff. The relation between local staff and volunteers is also characterized by the fact that the NGO aim to provide service and place volunteers in projects that they wish to participate in. The effect of this is that no account is taken to whether volunteers are qualified for the work or if they can contribute in the projects. The only requirement to volunteer is to speak English.

This consequence of the industry of volunteer tourism is a result of my research which has not been highlighted in previous research. Furthermore, there is a need for more knowledge about the imbalance in power in the volunteer tourism industry since volunteers and local staff have different terms in this industry.

Another important finding in my study is that local staff appears to have taken up a way of reasoning and expressing themselves around volunteer tourism which correlates with the discourse of volunteer tourism. This can be analysed as an adaptation to and internalisation of ideas and norms from volunteers and the volunteer tourism discourse. This means that local staff have internalised a volunteer discourse which belongs in a western context which could be examined further.

In Vietnam volunteer tourism appears to take a form which suits the political system and the wishes of the government, since volunteers are free to give knowledge, albeit in a restricted manner, without involving in the political matters of the country. This indicates the need for further research on different local contexts of volunteer tourism to examine how it adapts to different countries and political systems as well as different cultures and societies.

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