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Volunteer tourism and the eco-village: Finding the host in the pedagogic experience

ABSTRACT

The pedagogical dimension of volunteer tourism (VT) is often used to position volunteering as an alternative form of tourism. Many researchers seeking to understand the expansion and benefits of VT have approached the practice through the frameworks of transformative learning and global citizenship education. These forms of education have been criticized by pedagogy and tourism scholars alike as they reproduce an elitist neo-liberal system that positions the needs and desires of volunteers before those of host-community members. The case of Sólheimar eco-village, Iceland, is used to explore the role of the host-community during volunteer tourist experiences aimed at fostering global citizenship. While it is observed that the needs of volunteers are often prioritized, the community members of the eco-village are nonetheless significant actors in the transformative education process of these volunteers. The ability of community-members to provoke reflection amongst volunteers over their complex position as members (albeit transient) of an eco-village represents a form of learning based in critical thinking. By acknowledging the role of the host during VT encounters, researchers can avoid fixing the meaning of transformative learning and global citizenship in ways that reproduce volunteer-centric discourses.

KEYWORDS

host-community
critical pedagogy
transformative learning
global citizenship
focused ethnography
alternative spaces

1. INTRODUCTION

After facing much criticism in recent years, within and outside of academia, many acknowledge that volunteer tourism (VT) contributes little to international development. Over a decade ago, VT was defined by Wearing (2001) as a holiday that combines volunteering on local projects related to community development, poverty reduction and environmental restoration with travelling abroad. As VT grew in popularity as an activity and topic of research, many definitions and conceptualizations have emerged (Wearing et al. 2017). It has been considered a form of niche tourism (Novelli 2005), related to pro-poor-tourism and issues of justice (Rogerson 2011) and even identified as a moral form of holidaymaking (Butcher 2005). VT has also been interpreted as an alternative form of tourism meant to generate a chance for informal, yet valuable, profound cultural exchange between host and guest (MacIntosh and Zahra 2007; Zahra and McGehee 2013). As such, there is a sense it differs from other more mainstream tourism activities by offering the guest an experience in social justice, community emancipation and environmentalism (MacIntosh and Zahra 2007; Zahra and McGehee 2013).

In this regard, Wearing and McGehee (2013) identified the emergence of an adaptancy platform within VT research, starting in the mid-to-late 2010's with ongoing support today. The adaptancy platform implies that, currently, researchers are mostly concerned with identifying prescriptions to maximize the benefits of VT and minimize its negative effects (Wearing and McGehee 2013). These prescriptions often focus on the pedagogical dimension of VT, and its potential to transform the volunteer into a more critical and reflexive individual, hopefully contributing to a more tolerant global community and into the latter's participation in social movements (McGehee 2012). The concepts of transformative learning and global citizenship education are increasingly associated with volunteer experiences abroad, whether for service learning, a part of educational programmes or simply for holiday purposes (Butcher 2017, 2015).

However, the structural flaws and market orientation of many volunteering abroad programmes have prompted scholars to question whether VT can effect real change amongst communities (Guttentag 2009). Notably, pedagogy scholars have challenged the expectation that experiences abroad can transform individuals into global citizens (Aktas et al. 2017; Giroux 2011; Pais and Costa 2017). Criticism is also echoed in tourism research with scholars such as Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant (2017) arguing that the de-politicized nature of activism makes it acceptable that many VT programmes are not judged on their ability to effect real change.

Tourism researchers acknowledge the need to further probe the diversity of VT organizations as they all operate on a continuum of commodification (Wearing et al. 2017). This scientific diversity is necessary to open up to the many possible social outcomes in VT as this form of tourism comes into being through different types of contexts, programmes and initiatives (Everingham 2016). This article outlines the circumstances under which volunteer and education programmes, with seemingly good intentions, can turn a community into a tool to foster global citizenship amongst international volunteers, interns and students. The results of the study highlight the tensions found between the commodification of both the eco-village as an idealist space for learning in VT, and the role of the community in reproducing and challenging these tensions.

In the first instance, I argue that it is problematic that the physical and emotional well-being of the community members are dismissed in favour of procuring guests with a learning experience that should turn them into global citizens. This article demonstrates that this dismissal reproduces and reinforces the elitist nature of global education outlined by critical pedagogy scholars such as Giroux (2011) and Pais and Costa (2017), where the host has foremost to answer to the needs of volunteers, interns and students. Second, I nonetheless attempt to position the community members of Sólheimar eco-village as significant actors in the transformative education process of guests as they can provoke shifts in their consciousness.

The needs of host-communities are complex as members operate within the neo-liberal system, which enables and hinders them in various ways. Communities, hosts and other groups with idealist goals often compromise social and environmental ambitions as they resort to commodification and commercialization for economic sustainability (Coghlan and Noakes 2012; Weaver 2014). As these groups embark on projects of VT and education, they have to cater to the comfort needs of guests and their desire to have meaningful experiences (Deville et al. 2016; Mostafanezhad 2016). I ultimately argue that community issues related to hosting volunteers should be approached and resolved beyond the management-based solutions of an adaptancy platform in order to avoid fixing the meaning of transformative learning and global citizenship in ways that reproduce volunteer-centric discourses. Rather, these issues should be the basis of the learning experiences of the guests. The article concludes with recommendations for further research that considers the spaces that facilitate encounters based in critical reflection between host and guests.

2. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING THROUGH VT

The pedagogical dimension of VT is generally framed from the perspective of providing international volunteers with a transformative learning experience while abroad. Transformative learning has become a major component of educational programmes abroad, offered within the curricula of internships, classes or volunteer experiences, often accredited by a university (Bamber et al. 2018). Similarly, as with educational programmes abroad, many scholars have proposed the transformative learning experience of the volunteer as the key outcome of a successful VT programme (see Conran 2011; Coghlan and Gooch 2011; Hammersley 2014; McGehee 2012; Mostafanezhad 2014). Transformative learning has thus arguably become a popular benchmark on which to assess the success of VT.

Transformative learning theory stems from adult education studies and implies a pedagogic experience where the student goes through a disillusionment and search for new frames of reference (Mezirow 1991; O'Sullivan 2002; Taylor 2006). Transformative learning is about the provocation of a shift of consciousness that alters one's way of thinking about the world, meaning: 'experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world' (O'Sullivan 2002: 11). The application of such a pedagogical approach is thus concerned with 'how' we know, rather than 'what' we know, where focus is put on the tacit, aesthetic and relational ways of knowing (Bamber et al. 2018).

The application of transformative learning to discussions about VT can be seen as an attempt to address the long-standing criticism of how volunteers

may make sense of their international experience in problematic terms, jeopardizing their relationship with community members and reinforcing negative stereotypes. Volunteers often take on the role of experts and saviours in communities they see as 'powerless', fostering associations of inequalities to luck and diversity (Simpson 2004). This attitude reinforces the gap between 'us' and 'them' as volunteers do not always distinguish between what is developed and underdeveloped in their romanticized views of community and culture (Guttentag 2009; Mostafanezhad 2014; Palacio 2010; Sin 2010). Hammersley (2014: 858) contends that it is crucial that volunteers understand their role as 'facilitators, rather than implementers, and knowledge conveners rather than knowledge providers who work in the privileged position of listener, learner and guest'. This vision shifts VT from an imperialistic and paternalistic activity towards one that is based on dismantling dominant ideologies.

Tourism scholars in favour of VT generally believe sending organizations and people in leadership positions play an important role when it comes to fostering learning, reflection and cross-cultural understanding during the volunteer experience (Coghlan and Gooch 2011). For instance, Mostafanezhad (2014) advocates a structured educational approach with on-going opportunity for critical reflection which would serve to deconstruct predominant ideologies between uneven cultural groups. Hammersley (2014) argues that the sending organization should manage the pedagogic experience of the volunteers before, during and after the stay. Such sustained involvement would facilitate conversations around the privileged nature of being a guest and the dynamics that constrain host-communities (Hammersley 2014).

3. TRANSFORMING VOLUNTEERS INTO GLOBAL CITIZENS

Transformative learning arguably implies that individuals on international volunteer or study aboard programmes are transformed into global citizens; individuals that hold civic responsibilities that transcend political borders (Bamber et al. 2018). Accordingly, Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant (2017) recognize that global citizenship is a value often attributed to those who volunteer, as seen in the language used in promotional material. Global citizenship as an educational goal reflects a wider shift in society over what quality education implies. In this regard, education is no longer a resource to access to gain practical skills and knowledge, quality education now revolves around an ability to lead a wholesome lifestyle, and make informed choices when responding to local and global challenges (Bamber et al. 2018).

Global citizenship education is thus about teaching pupils to handle complex issues of interconnectedness associated with life in a highly globalized world (Horlick-Jones and Sime 2004; Klein 2004). Such an approach to education is meant to instill values and skills that Bamber et al. (2018: 5) describe as 'abilities to think critically, transcend local loyalties and sympathetically imagine the situation of others'. Ideally, the term global citizenship outlines an identity that transcends geographical borders, imposing duties and responsibilities on the individual to care for humanity (Andreotti 2006; Dower 2003; Shultz 2007).

Shultz (2007) and Andreotti (2006) note the difference between a neo-liberal and a critical view on global citizenship. The neo-liberal view focuses more on providing a form of education that develops skills and knowledge for effective participation in the global economy, through for instance internships and language courses abroad (see also Simpson 2004). More akin to the

goals of transformational learning is what Shultz (2007) calls transformationalist/critical global citizenship, which considers the structures of inequality that characterize the global economy. This approach usually includes international service learning and local volunteer work in its curricula, seeking to address issues of injustice and disempowerment that affect vulnerable groups through reflexivity, engagement, dialogue and critical thinking (see also Boni and Calabuig 2015; Larsen 2014). Social movement participation, personal transformation and international cooperation are key elements of global citizenship education.

There remains ambiguity surrounding the actual possibility of transforming someone into a global citizen through a pedagogical experience abroad. For instance, Bamber et al. (2018) warn it is unclear how a transformation into a global citizen manifests in practice. Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant (2017) claim that promotional texts regarding VT might use the term 'global citizenship', but rarely explain what it constitutes. For some scholars, changes are subtle, meaning the pool of skills and openness gained abroad will eventually build a western elite more sensitive to global issues (Dower 2003; Pearce and Coghlan 2008; Heath 2007). For Hermann et al. (2016), however, there is no guarantee that mere participation in a global citizenship education programme abroad turns one into a global citizen. Moreover, the concrete localized social and economic outcomes of the volunteer's transformation into a global citizen are hardly ever evaluated as significant elements behind the quality of a volunteer programme. Rather, Steele et al. (2017) show that intermediaries mostly focus on the satisfaction of volunteers to evaluate the outcome of their educational components.

4. CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

Many pedagogy scholars find it problematic to think that an education based on global citizenship has the ability to transform one into a more critical and reflexive individual (Aktas et al. 2017; Giroux 2011; Jefferess 2008; Khoo 2011; Pais and Costa 2017; Zemach-Bersin 2012). Khoo (2011) contends that current global conditions, favouring marketization and competition amongst educational institutions, have eroded any possibility to deliver truly ethical and cooperative pedagogic programmes. There is doubt the idealism behind a world of global citizens matches the individualistic dynamics that reproduce capitalism, where individuals seek to maximize opportunities, and heighten their self-reliance and individuality to succeed on the market (Binkley 2007). Under neo-liberalism, education is used not to tear apart the capitalist system, but to make it more efficient through teaching people to become more competitive, opportunistic and individualistic (Giroux 2011). In terms of higher education programmes, Aktas et al. (2017) and Zemach-Bersin (2012) argue that global citizenship has become something to earn, in the form of a diploma or certificate, or achievement in one's resume. Such credentialing overshadows prospects of a real transformation, and the overall potential to make volunteering abroad beneficial for all parties involved.

In this regard, Pais and Costa (2017) draw on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1995) to suggest that global citizenship education is merely an attempt to fix meaning. This implies an uncritical reproduction of hegemonic systems, apparent in the appeal of a consensus that excludes opposing voices (Laclau and Mouffe 1995). What we consider to be the true meaning of the state of society and its institutional systems is formed through social relations

(Howarth 2000). Power is a productive process that normalizes behaviours and opinions so that individuals accept the state of affairs. It does not belong to particular individuals, but rather is diffused through society by regimes such as schools, research institutes, clinics and media (Foucault 1979). The effects of power are as such subtle, and do not necessarily amount to resistance by those affected, which can be both positive and negative.

Transformative learning and global citizenship continue to exist as goals within service learning and volunteer abroad programmes since they embrace emancipation and democracy in ways that appeal to a (mainly) western audience (Pais and Costa 2017). There is no significant attempt to break down or challenge the hegemonic system that makes opportunities abroad a selfish matter (Jefferess 2008). This criticism resonates with the work of Giroux (2011) who deplores that reductionist views of critical pedagogy recast serious questions of power, agency, history and identity into romanticized celebrations of individualistic experiences. In tourism studies, Butcher (2017, 2015) is critical of global citizenship as he holds that it encourages the enactment of private virtues of care, responsibility and awareness that de-politicize global issues such as poverty and inequalities. Social critics have blamed this de-politicization on the lack of alternatives to the capitalist system which turns consumption choices into political action (see Chouliaraki 2013; Jacoby 1999; Žižek 1999). In this regard, volunteering aboard is more likely to be a reflection of one's strategic choices of consumption, rather than activism, as the practice is primarily directed at shaping the self as an ethical consumer (Butcher 2017, 2015; Butcher and Smith 2010; Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant 2017).

Few question the structures, values or risks at the heart of this obsession with travel and consumer products centred on care and responsibility (McGloin and Georgeou 2016). Conran (2011) argues notions of care and bonding are seldom critiqued in VT, overshadowing the unequal power relations between volunteer and host. Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant (2017: 216) concede the emergence of life politics is why 'bringing smiles' within contexts of poverty is considered an adequate outcome of VT. In my case study, I highlight the role of the community in reproducing and challenging the dynamics of transformative learning and global citizenship in order to avoid fixing the meaning of these concepts in ways that reproduce volunteer-centric discourses.

5. THE CASE STUDY: SÓLHEIMAR ECO-VILLAGE, ICELAND

The case study concentrates on Sólheimar, an eco-village, located in a rural area about 60 km east of Reykjavik in the south-west of Iceland. It was founded in 1930 by Sesselja Sigmundsdóttir as a summer holiday place for orphaned children with intellectual disabilities. Sesselja's project took root and the summer operation eventually became a permanent living space to accommodate adults with intellectual conditions (e.g. autism, Down syndrome) of varying levels. Residents with an intellectual disability now compose about 45 per cent of the population of around 100 residents. Residents with disabilities work in various businesses and workshops at Sólheimar or at other locations in the surrounding area at tasks that correspond to their abilities and which are meant to stimulate self-worth and inclusion.

Sólheimar's income derives from subsidies from the Icelandic state, profit made at its businesses, and financial support from affiliated organizations and private donors. The six artisanal workshops of the village produce crafts made

from a variety of organic and natural materials. The businesses of the village are: an organic greenhouse, a tree nursery and a centre for sustainability and environmental education built in 2002. Non-disabled residents fulfil administrative and coordinative duties, and have adapted to the form of organization the residents with disabilities need to live and work in the village.

Interns and volunteers join the community independently, through local and external programmes. Moreover, Sólheimar hosts a number of educational opportunities through different partnerships at its education centre. These include the European Volunteer Service (EVS) and the American study programme by the Centre for Ecological Living and Learning (referred to as CELL). All guests integrate within the community for periods ranging from a few weeks up to a year. They live in the village in special accommodation and participate in all aspects of daily life, including attending communal lunches, morning meetings and social events, and showing initiative to contribute to the community beyond assigned tasks. They live and work alongside the residents with disabilities during the day and socialize with them at events. These interns, students and volunteers are not Icelandic, and usually come from countries in Europe and North America.

The Global Eco-village-Network (GEN) declared Sólheimar the first Icelandic eco-village in April 1997. GEN is a global association of people and communities dedicated to the practice and promotion of sustainable living (ecovillage.org 2018). Member communities of GEN have goals related to sustainability, such as social inclusion and environmentalism like at Sólheimar. They can generally be said to use the network to share ideas, transfer technologies and develop cultural and educational exchanges (Jackson 2004). While eco-communities have strong ideals in the face of social struggles, it cannot be disregarded that they face complex dilemmas due to their position within the neo-liberal system. For idealist businesses, communities and non-profit organizations, when agreeing or resorting to tourism as a development strategy, trade-offs are often made between profit and mission, this in light of keeping social and environmental projects afloat within a system that rewards growth, profit and a 'winner takes all' mentality (Coghlan and Noakes 2012; Weaver 2014). As these groups embark on projects of VT and education, they are required to cater to their guests' comfort needs and their desire for meaningful experiences (Deville et al. 2016; Mostafanezhad 2016). A focus on reconciling the learning experience of the volunteer with community goals of sustainability is thus an interesting context to explore the role of the host in transformative learning and global citizenship education in VT.

6. METHODOLOGY

I conducted focused ethnographic research during a six-week period in early 2015 at Sólheimar to explore the interactions of the volunteers, interns and students with the host-community members as they seek to benefit from and educate these guests. I had been an intern in the community in 2010 for three months, and therefore had access to gatekeepers to join the community as a researcher. I chose an ethnographic approach to research patterns of daily interactions between host and guests at Sólheimar. Ethnography is the study of social interactions in their actual occurrence (Wolcott 2008). My interest in a specific aspect of the social interactions of these two groups led me to perform focused observations, instead of trying to interpret the whole register of community interactions (Wall 2015). It was important to sustain maximum

contact with the actors of interest at the village as the validity of ethnographic data rests on meaningful social interaction (Frohlick and Harrison 2008).

I collected most of my data through on-site observations and informal semi-structured interviews during daily activities at the eco-village where I approached volunteers, interns, visitors, students and community members alike in their context of experience (i.e., their workplace, and social spaces such as the lunch hall, at morning meetings, and community events of all sorts). I was able to sustain a high level of contact with these individuals as I participated in the same activities as the volunteers, students and interns, which included volunteering, and shared their accommodation for convenience. I focused my attention on the guests that were significantly involved in volunteering activities during their stay at Sólheimar, either by working on community projects or regularly providing free labour around the village. I included in my observations and informal semi-structured interviews the 15 volunteers/interns and ten students from the American study programme CELL present at the community during my fieldwork. My integration in the community enabled me to also approach for interviewing, and observe, members of the host-community involved with volunteers, interns and students during the day: the two coordinators of the educational centre, the managers of the greenhouse, tree nursery and bakery, and the residents with disabilities.

I wrote down my observations and informal interviews as field notes during the day as often as possible, or otherwise during the evening, in order to ensure the reliability of my study findings. Creswell (2013) explains that reliability in qualitative research is highly dependent on techniques that enable the researcher to retain the relevant information. Since the informal nature of my interviews prevented their recording, it was important that I wrote down field notes as often as possible. I also gathered field notes related to any social interaction with other community members, extra-local stakeholders and short-term visitors, from the area and international alike, that could give me clues regarding the dynamics of learning and helping at the eco-village. All participants were aware of my researcher status for ethical purposes. As Kvale (1996) argues, interview participants should be made aware of the overall purpose of an investigation in order to make an informed decision about participating.

I obtained access to eight reports and was given information about blogs written by previous volunteers who had reflected on their experience. The reports came from volunteers who attended Sólheimar through the EVS, which requires participants to write reports of their experience to discuss different learning objectives. The coordinators of the volunteers at Sólheimar had copies of the reports written by their EVS volunteers, and they shared them with me for my data collection.

As I shared accommodation with volunteers and interns, worked as a volunteer around the village, was of a similar age and non-Icelandic like them, it became relatively easy to sustain a sense of mutual understanding and shared confidence with this group of people. Hammersley (2014) argues that community membership and researcher status are complementary, rather than contradictory, during ethnographic data collection. Hammersley (2014: 861) describes her participatory research in VT as being 'based on a sense of mutual understanding and shared confidence between the researcher and research participant'. The ethnographer thus finds methodological depth by being a sympathetic ear to her study participants (Frohlick and Harrison 2008).

I had to be more creative in my approach to managerial and coordinating staff, and other community members, since I had less social proximity with them. I thus included five semi-structured formal interviews with key staff members in my fieldwork. I conducted the interviews in English as participants were highly proficient in the language. I interviewed the two coordinators of the educational centre, who, during the time of research, worked with volunteer tourists at the village by managing their selection process, welcoming them and seeing to their integration. It is also part of the coordinators' responsibility to manage the centre, local guesthouses and to offer guided tours of the village, which involves them further in the management of visitors. It was important to interview the managers of the organic greenhouse and tree nursery as these businesses receive the largest share of volunteers, students and guests. I also interviewed the wood workshop manager to get a more in-depth understanding of the perspective of community members involved with creative workshops (though most creative workshops accept very few or no volunteers at all).

I did not record the formal interviews with managerial and coordinating staff as they often took place in common areas (e.g., the coffee house and lunch hall) or workplaces (e.g., the greenhouse and the educational centre) where there was noise and disturbance from the surroundings. Meeting these interview participants in their realm of involvement was done to prevent the development of uneven relations between researcher and respondents which is often associated with the interview setting (Kvale 1996), and it allowed me to observe these people in their context of involvement (Anderson and Jones 2009). I therefore opted to write down concise field notes during the interviews, and more extensive ones directly after each interview.

My interest for the volunteers centred on why they came to Sólheimar, their background, what they appreciated and disliked about their experience, their overall impressions and the lessons they were learning at the community. Such information was expected to give clues about the character of the learning experience at the eco-village: in what way it would reproduce individualization and opportunism (i.e., Giroux 2011; Pais and Costa 2017), and in what context did alternatives to these discourses occur? With the staff of the village, my focus centred on how it was to host and work with volunteers, what kind of people they preferred, and also the challenges of hosting and working with volunteers. With the residents with disabilities, I was interested in their interactions with volunteers; what characterized these interactions? Were they benefiting from each other? These perspectives were important to study in order to identify the role of the host-community members in the reproduction and contestation of neo-liberal discourses of pedagogy that can challenge their local developmental goals. The close contact with the social group eased the validation process as continual member-checking could be done casually throughout fieldwork with different actors as I made sense of my interpretation (Creswell 2013).

During the analysis, the notes and documents with the different data were read and re-read, and also compared, to generate corroborating evidence to validate the relevance of the themes that were emerging (Creswell 2013). I gave participants pseudonyms during the data collection and analysis in order to preserve their anonymity. After obtaining consent from the managers, I decided to identify the eco-village by its own name in my project. The subjects at stake were not deemed overly personal and sensitive, and thus, while it may affect the anonymity of some participants, I chose to name the

eco-village and its components in order to be able to give a rich analysis of its dynamics.

7. FINDINGS

In this section, I present a description of the two themes generated through my data analysis, and that characterize the social interactions of the host members and their guests at Sólheimar in relation to what could be considered as challenging instances of disappointment and confusion, and positive moments of learning, sharing and helping. I define these themes as projects of global citizenship, and social learning through encounters.

7.1 Projects of global citizenship

Volunteers, interns and students coming through programmes such as EVS and CELL have the objectives of their sending organizations to reconcile with their participation at the eco-village. While the coordinators of the educational centre promote local goals and sometimes ask for reflection, programmes also make their participants reflect on their own goals. The volunteers who come through EVS meet with the organization in Iceland before and during their experience and write a report at the end of their stay specifying their learning outcomes. The themes these volunteers are asked to reflect upon relate to what Shultz (2007) refers to as neo-liberal global citizenship, such as communicating in a foreign language and building civic competences. These EVS reports show little purpose for debating social integration, alternative living and community sustainability, matters important to the eco-village, and focus mostly on the volunteer becoming a competent European citizen. One volunteer wrote in her EVS report:

> I had the opportunity to share my daily life with people with disabilities. It gave me the opportunity to get to know different [kinds of] pathologies and different [kinds of] people. I lived with 14 other workers and volunteers from Iceland and around Europe. It has been a great opportunity to get to know other cultures and become more tolerant and compassionate.

Simpson (2004) and Hermann et al. (2017) write that programmes facilitating gap years abroad, including volunteer and work-placement programmes, are mostly aimed at preparing a better pool of civil servants by giving opportunities of self-development and skills learning. The underlying goals of the EVS align with the professionalization of idealist work, as they are about pan-European cooperation and the development of competent social individuals. While there might be some overlaps in terms of the diffusion of best-practices and social contribution, the goals of Sólheimar are not directly included in the reflection process the EVS has its participants undergo. This mismatch reflects the doubt that Khoo (2011) expresses over the possibility that ideals of global citizenship can be reconciled with the individualistic dynamics of capitalism. Arguably, the situation resembles the typical negative issue with VT where the experience of the volunteer matters more than local goals (Guttentag 2009; Palacio 2010).

The encouragement of a reflection process linked to global citizenship challenges the idea that an intermediary can effectively enable a process of critical thinking for the host-community's sake that goes beyond the volunteer's

personal development. The prospect is better with the CELL programme than with the EVS as its focus is directly linked to transformative learning and community service, rather than promoting neo-liberal global citizenship: 'You will experience a transformation in how you view yourself, your relationship to community, and your role as a change agent' (CELL Official Website 2018). These participants spend a lot of time reflecting on their contribution to the community and personal development as part of their programme compared to other volunteers and interns, also getting in-depth debriefing about the eco-village from their coordinators upon arrival.

The meaning of participants' localized practices, and eventual transformation, is complicated by CELL being a client of the educational centre. Participants of the CELL programme gain credits in community service and project development, which they do by volunteering in the community and working on local projects. The obtainment of credits is, as Aktas et al. (2017) and Zemach-Bersin (2012) hold, a major element overshadowing the prospects of genuine transformation, and places the focus on personal achievement. A focus on course credits can be disadvantageous to host communities, as is apparent in the case of Sólheimar. The coordinators of the educational centre must provide these project contribution opportunities to the students, regardless of local needs. This could put pressure on the managers of the businesses who must accommodate individual demands from students (and even interns and volunteers) within their busy schedule. An encounter with Valdemar, a member of a nearby hamlet who came to Sólheimar to discuss potential student projects with the coordinators, revealed these student projects often implied superficial research on Internet to write a report and did not directly contribute to local sustainability. Ultimately, the promotion of solidarity overshadows contradictions between individually oriented goals, in this instance acquiring credits, and effective communal activism (Pais and Costa 2017).

The presence of volunteers at the eco-village often pushes the Sólheimar administration to negotiate its goals against, rather than aligning with, the volunteers' expectation of participating in community development and gaining a learning experience. As Sin (2010) explains, volunteers tend to frame their experience according to their own needs, and thus intensify uneven dynamics where the guest assumes an authoritative position over the host. As such, the coordinators of the educational centre expressed general discontent with volunteers who focused on projects they designed for themselves and who requested to change workplaces. These demands were often linked to a desire to heighten their experience of Sólheimar as a space for personal development and social encounters, which outlines how VT is primarily used to shape the self as an ethical consumer (Butcher 2017, 2015). This was the case with Lena, an intern stationed at the environmental centre. Her main task was to write a grant proposal to fund the installation of a patented waste disposal system. She was displeased that she did not spend time with the residents with disabilities during the day like other volunteers and interns did. In her opinion, her isolation at the educational centre prevented her from having a fulfilling eco-village experience. The coordinators of the educational centre were very eager to secure the funding and improve the environmental sustainability of the eco-village, but nonetheless agreed she could spend more time at other businesses during the week.

Coordinators of the educational centre are often left ensuring that volunteers receive a learning experience, instead of working towards the goals of

the community. Similarly to Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant's (2017) view of volunteering and global citizenship, it becomes acceptable to assess the effects of volunteering according to the happiness and feelings of intimacy it provides to volunteers, rather than according to the fulfilment of community needs. This dynamic was apparent during meetings between volunteers and coordinators, which were mostly related to the quality of the volunteer experience, reflecting conclusions by Steele et al. (2017) that intermediaries mostly focus on volunteer satisfaction to evaluate the outcome of their educational components. With the increased number of volunteers and other guests at the village, their stays not all being synchronized and the workload of the coordinators increasing, their conversations with them easily ended up centring on how to improve their management (i.e., resolving interpersonal conflicts amongst volunteers, convincing them to clean their accommodation, ensuring they were happy, etc.). Little time was dedicated to encourage volunteers to reflect on wider meaning, transformative potential and practical aspects of their local contribution.

4.2 Social learning through encounters

One of the most positive aspects of the presence of volunteers, interns and students at Sólheimar was the happiness it brought to residents with intellectual disabilities. These community members expressed a lot of affection for the volunteers. They often sought hugs from them, especially at the morning meeting, and approached them for small talk and laughter during the day, which the volunteers appreciated. The interactions of volunteers with community members with disabilities seem to be conducive to global citizen transformations, as Bamber et al. (2018) define, where shifts of consciousness can prepare individuals to respond to social challenges. For example, the statement of this volunteer on her final EVS report demonstrates the positive social outcome of these relations:

> I learned how to work and live with disabled people at Sólheimar. Living there taught me to see the disabled people as equal members of our society and took away my fears of contact with them. It also taught me to be more patient and let them make their own experiences.

The CELL coordinators, when interviewed, spoke of a student who now works with people with disabilities in the United States because he found his experience at Sólheimar so rewarding. This is an extreme example of personal transformation leading participation in social activism as expected from scholars of global citizenship education such as Schultz (2007) and Andreotti (2006). Such an example indicates the volunteer experience at the eco-village fosters social change, as argued by McGehee (2012) and Zahra and McGehee (2013), but importantly, it must be highlighted that this occurs as host and guest meet in mutually meaningful ways.

Generally, guests coming to learn and volunteer at Sólheimar are conscious of the importance of social reform and sustainable practices. Many of them are vegetarians, educated in environmental and social studies and/or involved in activism at home. The eco-village is thus an interesting place for them to both share and gain practical skills and information (see also Miller and Mair 2014). As they integrate in the Sólheimar community though, volunteers are often faced with the application of ideas incompatible with their ideals

and standards of sustainability. Volunteers regularly voiced criticism related to food wasted at the lunch hall and store, the use of cars within the village by community members, the inefficient treatment of wastewater and, more generally, to the Icelanders' over-consumption of resources.

To some residents, the discontent of volunteers is connected to how they overlook the complexity of sustainability. Gunnar, a coordinator of the educational centre, explained that volunteers critical of their environmental practices failed to understand that, as an old community built initially for charity, the ecological aspects of sustainability at Sólheimar are still in a stage of development. Moreover, many community members have a different notion of environmental sustainability to the volunteers because of their Icelandic context. As their country runs fully on renewable energy and has plenty of water, Icelanders generally see energy and water as infinite resources. To the international volunteers, interns and students, sustainability is foremost about environmental best-practices, like saving natural resources.

It is when the community members are free and at ease to provide with their own narratives of sustainability and alternative living that valuable educational opportunities emerge. Members of the Sólheimar community with whom volunteers interact daily are significant elements of what could be considered the transformative learning experience of volunteers, where there is the provocation of a shift of consciousness that alters one's way of thinking about the world (Mezirow 1991; O'Sullivan 2002; Taylor 2006). For instance, evening discussions at the volunteer accommodation often related to criticism volunteers heard from workshop leaders and other community members about the management of the village, which led them to question aspects of eco-village governance. Many members of the Sólheimar community are comfortable discussing with volunteers their unease over the commercialization of the artwork of the residents with disabilities, provoking debates over the ethics of reproducing and selling their designs for profit.

These types of discussions lead volunteers to see the back-stage of eco-living under a more critical lens, reacting to these types of interactions with statements I noted down such as: 'It made me think about the ethics of delivering care in isolated communities' and 'Sustainability? What is sustainability? I don't know anymore!' These reactions are more in line with the ambiguity coordinators of the educational centre and different managers have to deal with daily as they reconcile the three dimensions of sustainability at the community-level, rather than about pan-European integration and personal development, which do little to address the complexity of local issues. In such instances, the volunteers show an ability to 'think critically, transcend local loyalties and sympathetically imagine the situation of others' (Bamber et al. 2018: 5). Encounters with community members based in critical reflection are thus a significant aspect behind the formation of an identity that, as scholars of global citizenship support, transcends geographical borders, imposing duties and responsibilities on the individual to care for humanity (Andreotti 2006; Dower 2003; Schultz 2007).

These reactions from volunteers highlight how critical thinking and openness between the two parties, where the host is directly involved in the construction of the meaning of the experience at stake, can be related to the unsettling aspect of the learning experience for volunteers. For Hammersley (2014), transformative learning in VT occurs through the development of bonds of support, trust and friendship, where the learner develops critical skills through the assistance of a sensitive facilitator, but also the support of

others. While the organizations sending volunteers, students and interns to Sólheimar encourage a reflection process to different degrees and with varying levels of structuration, the coordinators of volunteers at Sólheimar do not actively provide a forum for this. Reflection nonetheless occurs among the majority of the guests, which implies that it would be valuable for VT researchers to consider the sites and actors behind it during the structured learning experience that authors such as Coghlan and Gooch (2011), and Mostafanezhad (2014) wish to encourage.

5. CONCLUSION

Arguably, the focus of researchers interested in the learning experiences of VT has been directed at either identifying the benefits and possibilities of transforming volunteers into critical and self-reflexive subjects (i.e., Coghlan and Gooch 2011; Hammersley 2014), or at criticizing the practice for reproducing neo-liberal and colonial structures and discourses (i.e., Jakubiak and Iordache-Bryant 2017; McGloin and Georgeou 2016). This dichotomic focus leaves little room to imagine what social and economic community development through VT might look like. Importantly, scholarly rhetoric elevating the transformational experience of the volunteer into a global citizen as the best outcome of VT overlooks critical aspects of host and guest dynamics in neo-liberal times, rather fixing the meaning of the success of VT as revolving around the needs of the guest.

This fixed meaning impacts a researcher's ability to consider and conceptualize the relevance of the host's experience in VT. Often, when the position of the host is addressed in VT in what Wearing and McGehee (2013) called adaptancy research, it is done to propose guidelines such as 'outlining needs' and 'coordinating activities' as solutions (see Dillette et al. 2017; Thompson et al. 2017). For Žižek (1999), our de-politicized era has turned political matters into technical and managerial issues aimed at forming consensus, where attempts at change remain within the realm of the socially possible. In this case, the role of the host risks being conceptualized as fulfilling the needs of the guest, rather than as an agent capable of dismantling social structures.

In light of warnings from Coghlan and Noakes (2012) and Weaver (2014), tensions between host and guest at Sólheimar were evidently caused by coordinating members' attempts at reconciling community sustainability with efforts to commodify the eco-village as a place for personal experiences and education to entice volunteers, interns and students to visit. One example being in the tensions between local needs for intensive labour to run organic operations and the desire of guests to volunteer where they wish around the village. Another example was the invention of community projects to provide students with opportunities to acquire course credits. Projects of VT and education endow hosts with new priorities as they seek to cater to guests' comfort needs and their desire to have meaningful experiences (Deville et al. 2016; Mostafanezhad 2016). When these complex matters are not perceived as material to foster a dialogue based in the stories, aspirations and worries of the host during VT, but rather seen as inconveniences to solve with managerial practices, the guest's needs and desires remain the focal issues.

In order to avoid only resorting to managerial solutions in a VT adaptancy scholarship that concerns itself with the host, it becomes important to present the latter's members as having a meaningful role in VT, acknowledging the

relevance of these individuals' critical viewpoints and provocative effects in the learning experience of volunteers. Scholars of critical pedagogy have since long made the claim that student and teacher need to be in a constant dialogue to avoid power imbalances, where these individuals' respective positions dissolve as the student becomes the teacher and the teacher becomes the student as all parties seek to make sense of their position in society (see Freire 1970; Giroux 2011, 1988; Kincheloe 2008). This approach to critical pedagogy could be used to problematize who is doing the teaching and who is doing the learning during the integration of the volunteer in a host-community, opening up a space for community members to become interesting objects of study in VT adaptancy scholarship. Through their interactions with residents of the eco-village, guests at Sólheimar are provoked into discussing and even changing their outlook on matters such as the social integration of individuals with disabilities, the commodification of ethical goods, practical aspects of sustainability and the complexity of fostering alternative living spaces. By recognizing the complex, often subtle, pedagogical role of the host during VT encounters, researchers would avoid fixing the meaning of transformative learning and global citizenship as benchmarks for the success of VT in ways that reproduce volunteer-centric discourses.

The dynamics of neo-liberalism often overshadow what could be considered originally good intentions of fostering reflexive dialogue and cross-cultural understanding, rather turning these practices into a narcissistic experience for the student and volunteer (Aktas et al. 2017; Khoo 2011; Pais and Costa 2017). It is important for researchers to remember the original meaning of a critical pedagogy for transformation, which would imply questioning the format itself through which the education is delivered within the de-politicized realm of global citizenship and ethical consumption (Bamber et al. 2018). Of great interest is how the host-community can participate in this critical process. Researchers such as Dillette et al. (2017), McGehee and Andereck (2009) and Wearing et al. (2005) outline that there are host-community members who want to be more involved in local volunteer programmes. As for Sólheimar, some community members in coordinating positions showed disinterest and even annoyance at the presence of volunteers in the village, while others were more sympathetic or interested in having them around. The responses to VT from community members are thus complex and varied. It would nonetheless be too simplistic to discard the host as an essential player in the reformation of VT discourses of adaptancy. Even when they resist VT, members of host communities will provoke reactions. Researchers should identify the spaces that would facilitate encounters based in critical reflection between the two groups, making the creation, identification and theorization of those spaces and what happens within them as significant to research on transformative learning and global citizenship education as the reflection process conducted through the facilitation of an intermediary.

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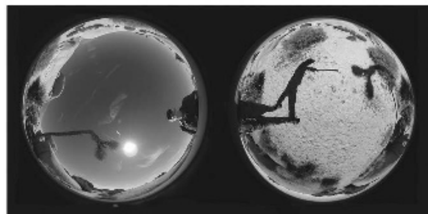
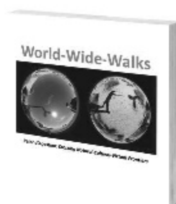


World-Wide-Walks

Crossing Natural-Cultural-Virtual-Frontiers

By Peter d'Agostino and David Tafler



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This book presents Peter d'Agostino's *World-Wide-Walks* project, providing a unique perspective on walking practices across time and place, considered through the framework of evolving technologies and changes in climate. Performed on six continents over the past four decades, d'Agostino's work lays a groundwork for considering walks as portals for crossing natural, cultural and virtual frontiers. Broad in scope, it addresses topics ranging from historical concerns, including traditional Australian Aboriginal rites of passage and the exploits of explorers such as John Ledyard, to artists' walks and related themes covered in the mass media in recent years. D'Agostino's work shows that the act of walking places the individual within a world of empirical awareness, statistical knowledge, expectation and surprise. In mediating the frontiers of human knowledge, walking and other forms of exploration remain a critical means of engaging global challenges; especially notable now as environmental boundaries are undergoing radical and potential cataclysmic change.

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