

## **Social Inclusion and Local Development through European Voluntourism: A Case Study of the Project Realized in a Neighborhood of Morocco**

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**Abstract: Problem statement:** Tourism is an important activity in the global economy that drives thousands of people each year through all continents of the world and generates employment and income. Its economic impacts affect on agents that are directly involved in the sector, transferring to other sectors and destinations on an indirect way, characterizing it as a transverse activity that affects and is affected by many different sectors and areas of the economy. Tourists, in turn, travel for different reasons and motivations. Those might be for leisure, business, health reasons, religious or any other reason. Considering the usual travel for leisure, there is an increase in the number of tourists seeking to escape traditional tourism, enjoy new experiences and have a change in their routine. Just as tourism, voluntary work also moves thousands of people around the world with the purpose of changing the reality of disadvantaged societies. Volunteers are submitted to the most diverse forms of unpaid work in various areas of action. **Approach:** The purpose of this study was to present European tourism as an instrument for local development and social inclusion through the practice of Voluntourism. For this are presented the results of the analysis of the project carried out by European tourists in Abi Bakar Sidik School, Youssofia in the district of Rabat, capital of Morocco during the month of July 2009. Departing from these results, the profile and motivations of the participants were established, their experiences along this month, as well as contributions from such activity for local development and social inclusion. The data were obtained as a direct survey. **Results:** Are shown in two ways: from the perception of voluntourists and from the point of view of local population, both of them evaluate as a very positive contribution this kind of tourism for local population social inclusion and for the country development. **Conclusion:** The voluntourism is evaluated as a sustainable way of international cooperation to development and a important way to promote social inclusion of less favored social classes at less developed countries, in this sense it would be interesting for governments of developed countries to encourage young people to involve in this kind of activities.

**Key words:** Social inclusion, voluntourism, local development, European cooperation

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Voluntourism, as a volunteer work intends, individually or collectively, is a kind of tourism based on international, inter social and intercultural cooperation to maximize the common good trying to get a sustainable development. In order to make that possible, volunteers offer their time, knowledge, skills or financial resources to benefit other people or causes that need it.

This need of helping and contributing to the creation of an inclusive society with fewer problems and inequalities combined with the search for new destinations and tourist motivations have been moving

volunteers to other cities, countries and even continents. This flow of volunteers around the world has established an industry inside the tourism sector, the industry of voluntourism, that is, tourism generated by people travelling to destinations outside their normal residence to perform volunteer work to contribute to the development of disadvantaged communities.

The voluntourism industry includes a wide range of organizations that are structured in different ways. It is possible to perceive an important split between organizations with commercial or humanitarian focus. This division generates two types of environments within the same stage of the activity. Volunteer tourism and other tourist types have important impacts on the

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destination where it occurs, these are of environmental, socio-cultural and inclusive society and economy nature. These impacts are pointed by some authors as Guttentag (2009), as a result of the volunteer tourist motivation that is not all altruistic, but that is made by personal reasons.

Other authors include direct contact with local people and cultural exchange provided by the volunteer tourism as more meaningful and beneficial than those interactions that traditional tourism provides (Broad, 2003; Brown, 2005; Zahra and McIntosh, 2007a; Wearing, 2001). In such cases these relationships often occur so intensely, producing what is known by relational good. The relational goods are non-materials, not results but the services that are created individually, but are related to interpersonal relations Bruni and Zarri (2007).

McGehee and Santos (2005) argue also that this kind of tourism provides opportunities to encourage or enhance participation in social movements and activism support, either through the establishment of new networks of relationships or experiences of awareness.

Self-discovery and personal growth are also mentioned by Simpson (2004), which states that volunteers respond to many tourists poverty recognizing that they observe their fate in having been born in more favorable living conditions. This recognition is a valuable lesson for tourists. Regarding poverty, Galley and Clifton (2004) and Guttentag (2009), state that in very poor places, another benefit of voluntourism is the direct income generated by this activity to these regions, which would normally not be generated by traditional tourism.

Volunteer tourism represents a significant support for economic, social and environmental recuperation of destinations in catastrophic situations. As happened in 2002 with the sinking of the *Prestige* in the Galician coast, in 2004 in Asia with the tsunami, or also, in 2005 in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina.

Significantly, as well as other tourist types, this also entails costs. Despite the fact that tourists travel to work as volunteers, this means, without receiving, they have, just as the others, to pay for this trip. In theory, the value that tourists pay to go and work for a community is intended to cover the costs of maintaining this tourist during his/her stay. Such costs cover accommodation, meals, as well as maintenance of the project. However, it is not necessary to contrast some volunteer travel deals to find the huge gap existing between prices charged by organizations. Regarding this, one can distinguish two basic trends in the industry of voluntourism, accounting that each one plays the role to satisfy tourists and demands with different

motivations. These are: voluntourism based on the commercial nature of the activity and voluntourism based on the altruistic nature of the activity.

The voluntourism industry has often received hard criticism in this regard. However, it is necessary to take into account the key feature of volunteer work, that is, its altruism and solidarity, in addition to the results achieved by the global volunteerism in recent years to realize that voluntary activity itself is valid.

On the other hand, the aim of the projects offered by organizations involved in this kind of tourism, in general, is to really help and meet a local need. This market consists mainly by non-profit organizations, however there are also organizations that obtain some benefit from this tourism.

Tourists who encourage this market have motivations characterized by solidarity and are usually willing to be integrated into the local community, despite the efforts involved. Many are also motivated by the opportunity to meet other people and different culture, different from his/hers.

These two models of action within the voluntourism industry are realized through the motivations of tourists, that is, the demand. Thereafter different offers are designed seeking to combine the need of tourists to the necessity of destination. The effectiveness and usefulness of voluntary work done by tourist is basically due to the good planning of the activity under an ethical actuation. A well-designed package, aiming mutual satisfaction tends to be positive for the tourist, to the community, as well as for the organization, in case this is not a non-profit organization. Anyway, tourism market is a commercial market and most of the participating organizations are for profit. It is natural that tourism offerings designed by them have the goal of generating money. While there is demand for these products, these organizations will act. However, it must be assumed that the objective of generating profits do not overlap that one of promoting a responsible tourism.

Therefore, it is important that programs take into account basic points as if tourist needs to have some specific knowledge or expertise to a project on time, or the minimum time required for the program to provide continuity and sustainability. It is also important to dispense full attention to the local population and their interests not to escape or even encourage the rejection of these to tourists.

In case of a well-designed program, independent of the type of travel or tourist motivation, it will be able to add value to the community visited, apart from supplying the wishes of its participants.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Theoretical underpinnings:** Voluntourism is a relatively recent terminology which has no universal definition. According to Alexander and Bakir (2009), it is usually described as a combination of two elements: tourism and volunteer work in the destination visited.

Wearing (2001) describes it as one area of tourism in which people participate in voluntary work to carry out projects to support local communities while they are on vacation.

For the Corporation for National and Community Service, a branch of United States Government, this is a type of tourism that combines non-profit sector and the tourism sector Corporation for National and Community Service (2009). It is a question of serving while learning about the host community and its people. The Corporation adds that it is not just a simple alternative to a regular trip, but an opportunity for volunteers to use their skills and interests in an unconventional setting to the benefit of others.

Wearing (2001); Brown (2005); Callanan and Thomas (2005); Zahra and McIntosh (2007b); Matthews (2008) and Guttentag (2009) still recognize it as a form of alternative tourism. For Wearing (2001), alternative tourism is on the opposite end of mass tourism. Also, within this alternative tourism is voluntourism.

As other sub-categories that derive from alternative tourism, the author treats volunteer tourism as a small-scale tourism of non-urban areas which attends groups of people with education levels above average and high financial returns. In short, voluntourism as a tourist typology has the characteristics of volunteer work and at the same time the peculiarities of tourism. Therefore, it is considered voluntourism trips those took for a period lower than 12 consecutive months, to a destination outside the normal environment of the tourist and where tourists carry out some volunteer work.

According to Volunteer Travel Insights (2009), a study conducted by GeckoGo (2009) together with Bradt Travel Guides and Lasso Communications international volunteer exists since many years ago; however, it was after the September 11 attacks and the tsunami that travelers started considering more strongly the possibility of acting as volunteers in their holidays.

The study states that this class of traveler wants to experience a new travel experience with a different meaning. Unlike travelers who wish to sit on a beach and be served by the local population, these ones prefer to engage in the community and help as possible, contributing to social and labor inclusion.

The combination of altruism with the search for a journey that provides an experience with a peculiar meaning and the increase in the interest in Voluntourism by the media has recently increased this kind of travel (Volunteer Travel Insights, 2009).

A recent study finds that, as well as with tourism as a whole, the most significant growth of volunteering in the tourism sector has been occurring since 1990 (Guttentag, 2009). It is estimated that about 1,6 million people attend each year to volunteer tourism. According to the study Volunteer Travel Insights (2009), this will be another year of growth in this market.

It is possible to emphasize that the main destinations for carrying out voluntourism are countries belonging to the group of Southern countries, countries with low human development and high poverty rates. This way, the tourists who flock to these destinations are often people from developed countries with high purchasing power. This scenario reaffirms the role of tourism as a redistributor of wealth and transmitter of social inclusive values, within society itself, as well as in international context.

There are several studies about motivations of volunteer tourists. Reasons such as the desire to “make the difference”, the search for “improving the curriculum vitae” or the “personal development” are often identified by Halpenny and Caissier (2003); Galley and Clifton (2004); Campbell and Smith (2006) and Wickens (2009).

For Brown (2005), motivations for this type of tourist are due to 4 main factors: Cultural immersion, the desire to reach the disadvantaged, the search for companionship and willingness to provide education to children, trying to avoid on many occasions that children from marginalized communities be excluded from society and in their future, their exclusion from the labor market.

The researcher agrees with McClelland (De Castro, 2002) emphasizing that, ultimately, all motivations have a relational background. According to Brown (2005), all motivations relate, in different levels, to social interaction as part of a volunteer travel’s experience.

Wearing (2001), in turn, adds other factors to the discussion. First, the altruism, which was completely discarded by the previous author, that corroborating with Adam Smith’s theory says that in the end everything comes from the search for personal satisfaction, in this case the search for interpersonal relationship. For this author, altruism as a motivational factor for voluntourists is shown through different ideals, such as the desire to save the world and make good. In general, all aspects are related to the fact of helping others and passing on the inclusive values they

have learned from children in their home societies. According to the author, this is an important motivational factor that contributes to these tourists to join this type of tourism.

The search for personal growth is also targeted by Wearing (2001) as a strong motivator. This factor expresses the need of tourists to learning and growing at personally level. Tourists perceive the stay in a disadvantaged community as an opportunity to mature and learn from local people.

Cultural exchange is an accepted factor in many authors. Just as Brown (2005) Wearing (2001) argues that cultural immersion, as well as the chance to know another culture from a different perspective from that one of traditional tourist is a highly valued motivation by tourists when choosing this tourism typology. Many also value their professional development. The author, just like Galley and Clifton (2004) and Wickens (2009), states that while travelling to serve in volunteer work, many tourists seek to heal the desire to gain experience or show it when increasing its curriculum, seeking a differential in the professional area.

Despite the different reasons cited by tourists as motivational factors for a volunteer tourism trip, every author agrees that these motivations, according to the classification of Maslow (Dubrin, 2000), present higher-order character. Tourists try to satisfy the lower needs of communities through the pursuit of meeting their own higher order needs.

In general it is possible to say that volunteer tourists are divided into two groups: those ones whose motivations are based on meeting the needs of others through the unselfish nature of volunteer activity and those ones who have as motivational factor the touristic aspect of travel above the voluntary action that will develop and its beneficial effect on society.

The role played by Europe in voluntourism is undoubtedly relevant and meaningful. Such mainland, for example, acts as a major re-distributor of wealth by sending its tourists to disadvantaged countries, like Africa. Redistribution of wealth is one of the characteristics of tourism activity and occurs due to the costs incurred by tourists in the host community during their displacement. Such redistribution is given by a more important way when such movements result of the travel of tourists from developed countries to the southern countries, although its highest incidence is among rich countries, especially among European countries. Countries that most emit international tourists are the developed ones. This statement is readily acceptable because these are the countries with greater resources to spend on luxuries often considered "superfluous", such as tourism. In 2007, the countries

that most emitted international tourists were, by far, those belonging to Europe. European continent is responsible for more than 50% of international tourist's emissions in this year (World Tourism Organization, 2008).

It is true that the most part of tourist flow occurs between rich countries. However, an important segment of tourists moves to underdeveloped or developing countries when choosing their destination. Over 50% of African countries have as their major emitter countries within the European continent. In case of northern Africa such arrivals can be attributed to the proximity between these continents. However, not only the nearest countries, but the whole continent receives many arrivals from Europe, besides United States, China and Japan.

It is necessary to take into account that these countries are the first in the range of countries with higher spending by international tourism. Of the top five ranking countries, three of them belong to Europe, they are: Germany (1st), UK (3rd), France (4th), all with spendings higher than 24, 3 billion dollars, reaching 73,9 billion in case of Germany (World Tourism Organization, 2008).

From these data it perceives the importance of mobility of tourists from these countries to southern countries, as a way of increasing the latter's economy through the redistribution of wealth belonging to the former. This redistribution is seen as a way to minimize poverty, inequality and needs of these countries, because inequality and poverty are two of the most serious social problems and are observed globally (Almanza, 2006). These inequalities occur within countries as well as globally, as observing in the most diverse social and economic fields, including: income inequality, life expectancy, civil rights, health, participation, gender and opportunity. In order to eliminate or at least minimize these inequalities, there are the most diverse actions, including voluntary actions, which are also closely related to the European continent.

John Hopkins Institute conducted a survey in 1998, this time covering a number of 22 countries and reported that voluntary participation is equivalent to almost 10 million and a half full-time workers Salamon and Anheier (1998). And in 1994, in 8 European countries was indicated an average participation rate in volunteering of 23% in this entire continent (Gaskin and Smith, 1995). These figures confirm the importance of this activity which, by itself, increases the total economic output of a country and reduces the burden of government spending as it takes over tasks that, otherwise, it would be the government's responsibility.

United Nation Volunteers (1999) stresses the importance of volunteering when stating that in countries where there are studies about the impacts of this activity, it is estimated that the contribution of voluntary action is from 8-14% of GDP (Gross domestic product). However, not all are numbers, another important contribution of volunteerism occurs at the societal level. The other manifestation of volunteering is intimately related to the social impacts that it causes, more difficult to quantify. Volunteering as a driver of social capital development works in building trust and reciprocity by encouraging the formation of a more united, stable and increasingly prosperous economically society.

Besides the benefits that volunteering brings to the recipients of this action economically or socially, it also produces important impacts on the individual volunteer. In words of the United Nations Volunteers (1999): "Volunteering helps to integrate into society people who are excluded or marginalized. For example, for people with disabilities participating in volunteering challenges, negative stereotypes of disabled people as passive recipients of care. Likewise volunteering for young people offers opportunities for self-development and provides a valuable grounding in the practice of citizenship. For older people volunteering contributes positively to the process of "active aging" by helping the newly retired adjust to life without the structure of the workplace and by improving physical and mental well being." Therefore, this activity is benefit to both those who favor by their results and those who carry it out. In turn, is fomented by the European contribution, both economically and socially. As it can be confirmed in the project presented in this study carried out in Morocco by European tourists.

**Data used:** We used data obtained by our own findings through a survey based on the project carried out in Abi Bakar Sidik School, Rabat-Morocco in summer 2009.

The Kingdom of Morocco has a great tourist offer owing to its so diverse nature and climate. Despite this destiny occupying a modest target in the ranking of world tourism, with a visitation of 7.878.639 tourists (in 2008), the sector is the second largest source of foreign currency of this country (Ministry of Tourism of Morocco, 2009).

The income from the activity showed an increase of 28.3% in the period 2000- 2003, passing from 22.000-29.000 million Dirhams. Those revenues in 2002 represented 7% of the components of GDP, which in 2004 represented a total of 640.000 direct jobs (Aguer, 2004). The predominant tourists who visit the country are mainly from the countries of the European

Union, more specifically French, Spanish, English, German and Italian Data from the Ministry of Tourism of Morocco (2009). The country, like many other countries in Africa, is an important destination for the practice of volunteer tourism, presenting in all its geographic area several projects in the most different areas of action.

The project presented in this study was conducted in the city of Rabat, the capital of the country, in the neighborhood of Youssofia, one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city. The project is conducted by a local NGO, called CSM-Chantiers Sociaux Marocains, which operates at nationwide, carrying out several programs across the country.

The project is about a summer language course for children from disadvantaged neighborhoods of the capital. This time the kids have the opportunity to participate in English or French classes taught by foreign teachers who offer themselves to work voluntarily in the country during the month of July.

The schools used for the project are all public. The NGO needs to negotiate with the Public Administration the permission to use these places for this month and undertake courses, compromising itself to make the maintenance of them in the month following the class, in August. Therefore, another work camp offered by the NGO is receiving volunteer tourists who stay the entire month of August in the school cleaning, gardening and painting it.

As a project organized by an NGO for local development through cultural exchange, there are no Moroccan teachers in schools, only foreign volunteers.

This organization is part of an international network, which facilitates the marketing of their projects, since volunteers can go to the so called "work camps" through any NGO of the network.

The project can be classified as a volunteer tourism offer based on altruism, therefore the main focus of the NGO that organizes it is not on the commercial nature of tourism, but on the social nature of voluntary work.

That is apparent both for the costs it represents to tourists participating in the project, as for the conditions of stay to which they are subjected in this month of volunteer work. The work camp costs 50 Euros for each volunteer participant. This value, besides being derisory if compared to other offers of volunteer tourism industry, ensures the participation of tourists in the project, as well as accommodation and food for the entire month. Moreover, the course has a cost of 80 Dirhams (about 7.30 Euros) for students. This value is intended to meet the costs of the project and ensure its self-sustainability, besides creating a greater sense of responsibility.

Voluntourists stay in houses of Moroccan families, all residents of the disadvantaged neighborhood where they are supposed to work, where besides enjoying the local food and accommodation, they can be actually inserted into the culture of the country through close contact with residents. Promoting this way a bilateral exchange of experience, so that recipients also imbibe of the voluntourists culture, assuming, or at least getting close the values of other societies distant to them. Families receive a value of 70 Euros for each volunteer hosted. This value should cover the costs that the family has with the volunteer's food and others; however, this is not enough. Yet families continue receiving tourists in their homes for many different reasons. The tourist reception guarantees families as participating members of the NGO, as well as in seminars organized by this institution and by the international network of which this is part, that is, many families are hosting volunteers in their homes as a possibility that their sons can travel abroad.

Other families also considered beneficial for their children living together with foreigners since this time they have contact with other cultures, as well as the possibility of learning new languages. And there are those who do it just to collaborate with the project.

The working day in schools is from Monday to Friday with 4 h of daily classes. Each teacher has two groups of students, the first group from 8:00-9:50 am and the second from 10:10-12:00 in the morning.

At the end of each working day teachers are submitted to a short meeting with the coordinators of the project (Moroccan youth participants of the NGO), in charge of taking questions, clarify specific points related to the course by instructing volunteers about their work.

After the class schedule teachers have the day off, as well as weekends. In these periods volunteers also have the support of the NGO in charge of tours to the touristic attractions of the city during the week or trips to neighboring cities.

Besides these tours, trips are also organized to other tourist cities in the country (as Marrakesh, Fez and Chefchaouen) on weekends. On these occasions each volunteer is responsible for the cost of his/her trip. The project under this study was conducted in the period from 5 of July to 5 of August 2009, at Abi Bakar Sidik School, in Youssofia, one of the neighborhoods of Rabat.

This project had in 2009 a total of 253 students enrolled. Of these, 171 had completed the course, representing a rate of desistance of 32.41%. That index was due mainly to the fact that the students were on their vacation period and many of them travelled with

their parents before the end of the course. The students were children and teenagers from 7-25 years old and residents of Youssofia and nearby neighborhoods, mainly Dawar Doum, Jbelraissi and Dawar Haja, the latter known as "Colombia" because of its high rate of drug sales (mostly hashish). This explains, among other things, the concern of parents for their children to continue studying even in the holiday period.

This year 13 volunteers attended the school. English teachers working in pairs, while French teachers taught alone, due to the large number of students who demanded this course. French, despite being officially recognized as the second national language, is not spoken by the population, hence the great interest towards this language.

In the last week of classes a survey was applied with all students and volunteers involved in the project, aiming to identify the profile of both groups as well as their perception of the activity performance and the importance of their impacts. The detailed results of the surveys are presented below.

## RESULTS

**The profile and perception of voluntourists:** As mentioned above, the project in 2009 included a number of 13 volunteers, from the most diverse nations: Italy, Malaysia, France, England, Serbia, Greece, China and Brazil. However, as for their countries of residence, all were from European countries. Eleven volunteers took part in the survey with 37% of them from England, 18% from Italy and the others from Germany, Spain, France, Greece and Serbia. With the exception of Serbia, all other volunteers live in developed countries belonging to the European Union, which reaffirms the role of the activity as redistributing wealth.

This characteristic is due to the fact that these tourists are people of middle or high purchasing power, moving from developed countries to economically and socially disadvantaged countries. In case of the work camp done at school Abi Bakar Sidik, most participants are from families with monthly income above €2.000.

The volunteers were mostly young people between 20 and 30 years old. Of these participants, 73% were women, which according to coordination is a fact repeated every year, where most of volunteers are females. However, this discrepancy is something that usually happens in volunteer projects in general, where the participation of women is much more intense than that of men. Badget and Folbre (1999) underlined that the familiar altruism is one concept socially constructed about gender norms governing interpretation of appropriate behavior for women and men, in this way,

would be possible to fit an adequate explanation for the imbalance in gender distribution of volunteers.

All participants have a great education level, where more than 70% have a degree or diploma and the rest are holders of a master's degree or others, such as a doctorate. Just 36% of volunteer tourists were working and being paid in their country of residence, therefore, on this occasion combining their working holiday with the stay in Morocco.

Despite the work camp managing organization does not ask for previous experiences for the volunteers in the educational area, more than half of them, 55%, are working or intend to work in this area in their country of residence. Whereupon, a 60% believe that the experience will enhance their curriculum. A number of 20% believe to have a greater chance of finding employment after taking part in this volunteer work and 10% say that the experience will help them move up in the employment they have today.

As occurs with volunteer tourists in general, the participants of the Moroccan work camp were people who had already some relationship with the world of volunteerism. About 55% of tourists had already been involved in volunteer projects in their country of origin. Of the 36% who had never been part in a volunteer project in their country of origin 18% claims not to do it, this statement reinforces the importance of tourism activity in these cases.

The choice of the country by tourists reveals that this occurs for personal reasons and not altruistic. Only 15% of the respondents chose Morocco because this is a developing country and therefore it needs more than other places the help of volunteer labor, all the remaining 85% chose it because of personal motivations. About 35% of the respondents chose the destination for the cultural difference it has by being an Arabic and Muslim country, 20% took into account its tourist attractions, while 20% rated various reasons as the desire to visit friends or the need to improve their French knowledge.

These findings reinforce the tourist nature of the activity noting the great importance of cultural difference and the tourist attractions of the country, the drivers of local tourism, when tourists choose their destination. Their motivations for the project itself are not different, in this case the option of helping other people has a response rate of only 25% of the volunteers and all the remaining 75% reflects personal motivations. Voluntourists showed as main motivation the opportunity to experience another culture, 35% pointed out this motive as their primary motivation.

Such findings serve to strengthen the theory of Adam Smith, based on the idealism of *quid pro quo*,

since despite the positive results generated by this kind of work; this is carried out not by the desire that these tourists have to help the neediest ones, but for personal reasons. With the beginning of classes and accommodation in families' house, volunteers started having a daily routine with defined schedules and lifestyle according to the local culture. This situation generated some culture clashes between residents and volunteers, common to the activity. Such conflicts are related mainly to issues concerning food, hours, dress and some behavior that are common in Europe but considered inappropriate under the eyes of a Muslim. Such events sometimes created some discontent. However, in a general way, both tourists and residents tried to cope with cultural differences as best as possible, preventing further problems.

Moreover, the coexistence of local and foreign population also had its benefits. The cultural exchange contributed to the personal development of both and created a greater tolerance towards the other, besides the empathy and affection cultivated in this month of cohabitation.

However, classes went on normally during the month and at the end of the program all were satisfied with their participation. The volunteers considered the project and its impacts as positive or very positive for themselves and for other groups involved: students, students' family and local population. About 82% of respondents believe they were capable for the work carried out in school, against just 18% who did not consider possessing the skills and knowledge required for this activity.

That helps explaining the small percentage of volunteer tourists who claim that the experience did not meet their expectations. On the other hand, 91% believe the experience was good or very good and fulfilled their expectations.

These results imply that 55% of the volunteers claim that they would surely repeat the experience, compared to 45% that do not deny it but doubt and say that maybe they would do it again. Following the characterization of the project from the perspective of voluntourists, the profile and perception of students who were part of the courses in this program were also defined.

**The profile and perception of students:** As discussed above, in 2009 the project received a total of 253 students enrolled, with a rate of desistance of 32.41%. Considering that the survey was conducted in the last week of classes, the number of respondents among the students was 171.

The students were children and youth from 7-25 years old with the vast majority between 11 and

15 years old. At this age children already attend classes of English and French in school, therefore they had already some basic notion of languages, facilitating communication between students and teachers. As volunteers, the vast majority of students were female, 68 Vs 32% male participants. These students are part of large families, generally composed by a 4-7 people and mostly living among all with a monthly income of up to 4.000 Dirhams (about 360,00 Euros).

Thus it is possible to see that the courses are really intended for economically disadvantaged children and youth, that probably would not have access to a language course if it were not through voluntary work done by these tourists.

Unlike volunteers, that were most willing to give English classes, most of students, 41%, were enrolled to participate in both courses. That is, attend English class in the first period from 8:00-9:50 pm and French in the following period, from 10:10-12:00 h and vice versa, thus staying the whole morning at school. The remaining 59% was divided between French courses (35%) and English (24%), demonstrating that despite assess English, most students feel a greater need to learn the second official language of their country, because classes taught in public schools are not sufficient to meet this need. 53% attend the course because their parents enrolled them, demonstrating the concern of creating an occupation for these young people also in their holiday period. Moreover, 22% of students enrolled in the course were motivated by the opportunity to meet people from another cultures, something provided by the program and appreciated by students. Besides moving these students away from the streets and drugs, which are a local reality, the course also enables them to participate in this period of an educative activity, since if it were not by this project, most of these students would be involved in other non-educational activities. In the opinion of 81% of the respondents, the classes met their expectations being considered by them as a good or very good experience. Just 16% considered the experience regular and 3% considered it poor or very poor.

Regarding the perception of the impacts generated by the course, students in a general way also perceived it positively. 4, 79% of them considered the experience good or very good for themselves. 80% also think it was positive for teachers, as well as for other groups involved. Such a similarity to the results presented by volunteer tourists on the same question confirms the validity of the experience for all the participants in the project.

About the impact of the program over time, in the perception of students, this is a course of great

importance and relevance, as 93% believe it will help them improve their living standards in the future, 87% believe that completion of the course will help them improve their social relationships and 42% demonstrate that it will provide them better opportunities for finding a job.

Due to the great importance of the service sector and tourism industry in the country's economy, many students recognize the importance of knowing a foreign language when starting their working lives. Regarding the capabilities of volunteer to develop his/her work, it was possible to verify that in the students' opinions, unlike the perception that teachers had of their own abilities, 96% of them believe that volunteers were eligible for the proposed work.

Only 4% of students felt their teachers unable to teach the language proposed, compared to 18% of teachers that believed themselves not sufficiently trained to carry out his/her task. The vast majority, 89% of the students appreciated the reception of foreigners to work in their community and the cultural exchange generated by this experience, provided by such projects.

In the end, though voluntourists are motivated primarily by personal issues, it is their work generates positive results to the participants of the project. While 55% of volunteer tourists reported that they would certainly repeat the experience, in the group of students this percentage raises to 75%, a fact that has come to strengthen the importance of implementing programs like this in disadvantaged communities.

## **DISCUSSION**

Voluntourism is a relatively recent terminology used to define the touristic typology which combines tourism with the completion of a volunteer work in the destination visited by the tourist.

Given that, tourism comprises "the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes" (World Tourism Organization, 1991) and volunteering is commonly defined as an unpaid activity where people where people give their time to help an organization or person who they are not related to.

Volunteer tourism has the characteristics of voluntary work and, in turn, has the peculiarities of tourism activity. Therefore, this is an area of tourism in which tourists participate in voluntary work to support local communities while they are on vacation.

Significantly, the term used to describe this type of tourism does not refer to the non-captive nature of the activity, but to the volunteer work carried out by the



tourist. As it is understood that all tourism activities as well as the different types derived from them are made voluntarily.

Volunteer tourism and other tourist type functions as an instrument of local development. In addition to promoting all the benefits that the activity entails, through job creation and all other impacts of its implementation, the local population benefits from the work done by volunteers. It should be noted that this type of tourism takes place in regions in need, that if it were not for the combination of tourism with volunteer work done on this occasion, these places would hardly be touristic destinations. Such tourist typology, like the others, causes impacts on the host community, on environmental, social, cultural and economic levels. These impacts can be positive or negative. For this reason a well designed project to be offered to tourists is so important. Only a well planned project can optimize the positive impacts and minimize negative impacts that the activity can generate.

A community can enjoy many benefits through a well developed volunteer project, among them are:

- The research carried out voluntarily by the tourists who flock to the project
- The conservation of the environment that is often promoted by this industry
- Expenses of tourists, contributing to increasing income of local people
- The multiplier effect of tourist expenditure
- The creation of jobs, directly and indirectly generated by the activity
- The opportunity to develop or enhance social participation and activism support that the activity provides, either through the establishment of new networks of relationships or experiences of awareness
- Encourage social and employment inclusion of participants in the project
- Personal growth and self discovery to which tourists are subjected
- The cultural experience and the clash of cultures, promoting a better understanding among them
- Direct contact with local people that allows tourists experiencing situations that traditional tourism does not often provide
- The strong support for economic, social and environmental recuperation of destinations in catastrophic situations
- Improve general education levels for local population
- Promote gender equality among local population

## CONCLUSION

After the study of volunteer tourism project carried out in Abi Bakar Sidik School, in the city of Rabat, Morocco in July 2009, through observation and participation in it, as well as conduction of informal interviews and surveys with its participants, was possible to verify the impacts that the activity results in the locality. In general, the project carried out for 6 years has a well-planned programme, resulting in a positive experience, from an inclusive point of view, for all participants, tourists, volunteers, students and local people. Voluntourists, not only participate in an educational project in the country, contributing to local education, but they are also recipients of an experience that provides personal growth and self discovery.

The intercultural experience, besides being one of the main motivators for these volunteer tourists to take part in the project, was conducted in a healthy way with a healthy cultural exchange between tourists and students, or between tourists and host families. A fact that, ultimately, created a great bond of friendship among all.

Direct contact with local population also allowed the tourists to know and visit non-tourist locals, as well as truly incorporate themselves into the local culture, events that in another type of tourism usually do not occur. The inclusive role of voluntourism has shown very important.

Moreover, the project contributes each year to an improvement in the student's education, which is not fully served by public education in the country, while allowing those students direct contact with people from different cultures. Promoting, in addition, a greater tolerance between both and also the opportunity to knowledge exchange, at the same time, it has contributed to diminish inequality in these societies.

These students, having an activity in their vacation period, are also off the streets of the region, which coexists with the harsh reality of the sale of drugs, an activity which is undertaken by people of all ages.

Among the group of students, besides the project represent the simple possibility to learn or improve the level of knowledge they already have about other languages, it represents an opportunity, through learning experience, of having a good job in the future, that will provide them a better life than their current one.

To the local population, in a general way, the project contributes economically, benefiting the community by tourist expenditure and its multiplier effect, besides generating jobs directly or indirectly.

From these profits, generated from the performance year after year of this program, it becomes clear the importance of this activity, as well as the European contribution to the Moroccan city.

However, voluntourism can, in places where others see only problems, perceive these problems as possible solutions and turn them into resources. Having stated that, there is not only a “need to get”, but also a “need to give”, this activity gets to work with the combination of both realities when moving through tourism, the production factors and labor to the destinations that need it.

Therefore, through ethical and responsible action this activity, besides attending a growing touristic demand, comes to the “need holders” promoting local development and social inclusion.

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