



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Burrai, E and Sterchele, D (2024) Towards posthuman geographies of volunteer tourism in a time of polycrisis. *Tourism Geographies*. pp. 1-11. ISSN 1461-6688 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2373868>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/11039/>

Document Version:

Article (Published Version)

Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

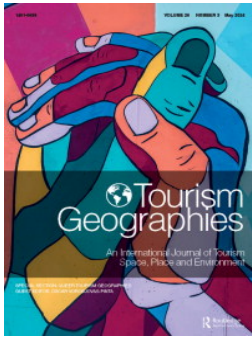
© 2024 The author(s)

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.



Tourism Geographies

An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rtxg20

Towards posthuman geographies of volunteer tourism in a time of polycrisis

Elisa Burrai & Davide Sterchele

To cite this article: Elisa Burrai & Davide Sterchele (01 Jul 2024): Towards posthuman geographies of volunteer tourism in a time of polycrisis, *Tourism Geographies*, DOI: 10.1080/14616688.2024.2373868

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2373868>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 01 Jul 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 67



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Towards posthuman geographies of volunteer tourism in a time of polycrisis

Elisa Burrai  and Davide Sterchele 

Tourism and Hospitality Management, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

ABSTRACT

Volunteer tourism has long represented a fruitful realm for the application of geographic perspectives and has greatly benefitted from them. Yet, despite the progress made through multi-, inter-, and intra-disciplinary approaches to the field, its development has notably slowed down and reached a stagnation phase. This is because much scholarship on volunteer tourism has focused on rather dichotomic conceptualisations of the field, and because of a lack of engagement with the intertwined challenges of our times, whose combined effects characterise the current polycrisis. Hence, in this paper we provide an overview of how recent geographic approaches to volunteer tourism have shown ways towards less rigid conceptualisations that better capture its fluid processes and dynamics. Subsequently, we discuss how geographic perspectives can help us make sense of the challenges faced by volunteer tourism in the current polycrisis, including those related to socio-ecological justice, capitalist ideologies, technological advancements, and intersectional inequalities. After looking at the possibilities offered by the application of digital geographies and geohumanities to our understanding of current and future volunteer tourism scenarios, we advocate for a post-human theoretical shift. In particular, we suggest how this can help us rethink roles, practices, meanings and justifications of volunteer tourism in a rapidly changing world. In raising questions about the future development of volunteer tourism, the paper aims at sparking debates and stimulating collaborative efforts to drive meaningful advancements of the field.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 July 2023
Accepted 24 June 2024

KEYWORDS: Volunteer tourism; post-humanism; polycrisis; digital geographies; geohumanities; decolonisation

Introduction

The literature on volunteer tourism has extensively evolved over the past twenty years, providing a fruitful context for the application and development of geographic theories and approaches. At the same time, geographical perspectives have contributed important insights into the interconnection between volunteer tourism and the physical and human environments, both in the form of space and place. These

CONTACT Elisa Burrai  e.burrai@leedsbeckett.ac.uk  Tourism and Hospitality Management, Leeds Beckett University, Macaulay Hall, Headingley Campus, Leeds, UK.

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

perspectives have enabled critical reflections on the spatial (power) dynamics which characterise volunteer tourism and how these have been reconfigured overtime.

Geographers have long studied how volunteers' perceptions of the human and physical characteristics of the destination shape the volunteers' motivations, their choices of a volunteering project, and the types of relationships that emerge within those spaces. In order to be attractive, volunteer tourism places require a mixture of leisure and safety features. These seamlessly merge with local needs and poverty, which also become part of the appeal of the volunteer tourism experience. Additionally, extensive geographical scholarship has focused on the types of encounters and relationships that emerge within volunteer tourism spaces. These are often discussed in relation to the Global North-Global South divide whereby spatial geometries of power, inequality, dependency and exploitation become more evident. Yet, less frequent accounts of South-South volunteering highlight different and heterogenous possibilities of development contesting its established imaginaries (Baillie Smith et al, 2018). Furthermore, geographers have begun to unpack the links between volunteer tourism and the natural environment through the study of volunteering for conservation and how volunteer tourism influences, and is influenced by, climate change and broader sustainability issues. Western epistemological emphasis on the Anthropocene as the solution to environmental problems are being critiqued as one of the main issues in conservation-oriented volunteer tourism. Notably, environmental causes are deemed to reproduce the dominant set of Western (colonial) knowledges, as they advocate 'for a geopolitics of fortress conservation' that 'seek to reassert absolute sovereignty over space in the name of nature conservation' (Henry & Mostafanezhad, 2019, p. 299).

Insightful conceptualisations of volunteer tourism have also been produced by the wider geographical literature on volunteering, beyond those geographical studies that have explicitly and more specifically focused on volunteer tourism. This literature includes examinations of geopolitical, structural and institutional frames which bound volunteering practices and affect the roles of different actors, the types of relationships they form, and the effects of volunteering practices on different scales (i.e. local, national, international). Notably, scholarship in the geography of volunteering has shed light on the processes which categorise uneven North-South and South-South mobilities (Sin, 2009) and on the often-unbalanced relationships among actors. Moreover, geographers have discussed how the third sector (e.g. NGOs and charities) involved in international development reinforces uneven geographies of poverty and livelihoods shaped by capitalist processes of production and consumption (Laurie and Baillie Smith, 2018).

Whilst these studies were not specifically focused on volunteer tourism, the overlapping themes and issues have enabled a cross-fertilisation and knowledge exchange between the areas of volunteer tourism and the geography of volunteering.

Yet, despite the progress made through multi-, inter- and intra-disciplinary approaches to volunteer tourism, its development has notably slowed down. We argue that this has manifested in two ways. Firstly, early scholarship on volunteer tourism has often discussed rather dichotomic conceptualisations of the field such as the neat separation between work and leisure or between volunteer tourism and other forms of leisure/tourism activities and work. Secondly, we note how the crises generated

by major intertwined geopolitical, social, and technological evolutions, such as those related to migration, climate change, wars, pandemics, artificial intelligence, have not fundamentally 'shaken' and innovated the *status quo* of the literature on volunteer tourism. This is rather striking, since the concept of polycrisis (Tooze, 2022) has recently gained popularity to highlight 'the causal entanglement of crises in multiple global systems in ways that significantly degrade humanity's prospects' (Lawrence, 2024, p. 2). Although the simultaneous emergence of multiple crises is not a new phenomenon (Morin & Kern, 1993), the implications of the intersecting crises we confront in the twenty first century have unique features in a time of global interconnectedness, given 'the extent to which human activities are exceeding the planetary boundaries of key Earth systems' (Lawrence, 2024, p. 6). As such, the effects of polycrisis on societies and their nexus to tourism deserve closer scrutiny. To this end, Bianchi and Milano (2024) argue that the dysfunctional, unbalanced and unjust distribution of resources generated by tourism's growth 'are symptomatic of multiple, intersecting crises or "polycrisis," played out at different scales' (Bianchi & Milano, 2024, p. 9), which influence the way tourism functions and develops.

Addressing the aforementioned issues, we articulate our paper as follows. We open our discussion by examining how geographical perspectives have contributed to developing less rigid conceptualisations of the volunteer tourism field. Subsequently, we consider how advancements in the field can be achieved by rooting our understanding of volunteer tourism into broader analyses of the current polycrisis. After examining the potential contribution of emerging geographical perspectives such as digital geographies and geohumanities, we conclude by suggesting that a posthuman theoretical shift can assist in developing novel, critical insights on how current social, environmental, economic, technological and political issues shape (new) practices and knowledges of the volunteer tourism landscape.

Complexifying volunteer tourism: geographical insights

Early literature on volunteer tourism mostly highlighted its benefits, such as promoting altruism (Singh and Singh, 2004), fostering cross-cultural understanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008), helping reconcile divided societies (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003) and overcoming prejudice (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007). A subsequent wave of scholarship begun to critically highlight the negative practices of volunteer tourism by discussing the dependency of hosting destinations on outsiders' help (Guttentag, 2011), the lack of skills of volunteer tourists, the uneven distribution of benefits for tourists and for the local population, and the depoliticised nature of the field (Mostafanezhad, 2013). Furthermore, critical insights unpacked the nexus between volunteer tourism and development, ethics, care and responsibility contributing to identify volunteer tourism as a form of 'neoliberal governmentality' or of 'mainstream development practice' (Sin et al., 2015, p. 122). It was also noted how volunteer tourism can reinforce stereotypes of the beneficiaries as inferior and dependent (Park, 2018), but also as 'poor but happy' (Crossley, 2012), thus reaffirming the authoritative position of power of the volunteers (Sin, 2010).

Recent geographical perspectives on volunteer tourism and its links to space, place and the environment have brought to light similar issues in relation to the actors

involved, their experiences, and the relationships they generate. As such, it has been noted how spaces of volunteer tourism practices are characterised by the types of activities (Amsden et al., 2011), the leisure attractiveness of the setting (Di Matteo, 2023), its safety features (Keese, 2011), and its impacts on the types of relationships that emerge during and post-experience. Volunteer tourism enables in-depth encounters between residents and volunteers, whose intensity is facilitated by the prolonged length of volunteer tourists' stays in destinations and by the type of works they do. In considering post volunteer tourism experiences, the geographical and technological distance between destinations influence the developments of human relations, either by facilitating or impairing the formation of deep and intimate relationships (e.g. friendship or romance), or the willingness to return to the same destination to volunteer.

Yet, as Everingham argues (2016), encounters and relationships in the context of volunteer tourism are complicated, diverse and dependent on the socio-spatial characters of the places where they unfold. As such, they should not be limited to analyses that take into consideration only the commercial and neoliberal environments which bounds these relations. Instead, deeper analyses should emphasise the emotional and affective possibilities that underpin such encounters. In fact, past studies on volunteer tourism have not paid enough attention to the evolving, fluid processes which characterise volunteer tourism encounters, thus neglecting the possibility to consider them as 'unexpected spaces of coming together for different actors, which both confound and complicate spatial binaries' (Laurie and Baillie Smith, 2018, p. 96). Indeed, further work on volunteer tourism has contributed to significant developments, particularly drawing upon early geographical perspectives on emotions and affect (see Crossley, 2012; Mostafanezhad, 2013). This current wave of scholarship has enabled reconsiderations of volunteer tourism theory and practice in less normative and dichotomous terms, capturing the nuanced and complex dynamics of the field through more fluid conceptualisations. These perspectives help to interpret volunteer tourism encounters as ever-shifting assemblages of emotional, affective, and embodied entanglements which open multiple possibilities for the actors and destinations involved (Everingham, 2016). Hence, they enable us to look at volunteer tourism dynamics not only as the result of spatial encounters between Global North and Global South, but also as sites in which meaningful relationships and specific sense of place can emerge.

In line with this, Everingham and Motta (2022) convincingly argue that theories on emotions and affect help us revisit fixed understandings of volunteer tourism usually based on dichotomic conceptualisations (e.g. good/bad; donor/beneficiary; help/need; leisure/work). Emotions in volunteer tourism encounters prove to be useful to decolonise connections and to emphasise the social, embodied, and affective nature of relationships. Indeed, volunteer tourism encounters and mobilities are commonly associated to the colonial practices of White saviourism (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017) and uneven geometries of power between, for example, North-South, poor-rich and oppressor-oppressed. Decolonisation processes are scrutinised through a disentanglement from dichotomous thinking, offering the possibility to examine how volunteers unlearn 'colonial ways of being in the world' (Everingham & Motta, 2022, p. 225) *via* the formation of moments of critical intimacy, care and vulnerability. The

decolonisation of volunteer tourism practices helps to move beyond their usual (rigid) conceptualisation as encounters between the oppressed and the oppressor, highlighting the potential to shift from paternalistic saviourism to mutual solidarity.

Turning to theories of emotions and affect can assist in the identification and understanding of tensions, possibilities, hierarchies and relations that take shape in volunteer tourism spaces. Judge (2017) uses such approach to examine short term volunteer tourism trips of non-elite youths from London council estates that take place in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Her study analyses how the entanglements between emotions, affect and politics in transnational encounters of volunteer tourism contribute to rethink issues of class, race, and uneven North-South mobilities. Indeed, the study enables us to reflect on the intersectional and relational nature of power and subjectivity (Judge, 2017), thus proving an opportunity to distance ourselves from the well-established categories of the (privileged) 'saviour' and the (passive) 'needy'.

Geographical perspectives of emotions and affect have also been fruitfully applied to the interconnections of heritage volunteer tourism, collective memories and place making. Driessen's (2022) work, focused on Europeans who travel to volunteer in European former war sites, reveals different ways of emotionally experiencing tangible and intangible embodied encounters with a specific historic past. Notably, the study shows how volunteers connect to places of war and remembrance through the (emotional) creation of spaces of both personal and collective memory highlighting different forms of motivations, mobilities, and trajectories. Alongside these studies based on theories of affects and emotions, other geographical works have recently illustrated possible avenues for capturing volunteer tourism's nuanced dynamics through more fluid conceptualisations. Di Matteo's study (2023) of volunteer tourism in refugee camps in Lampedusa (Italy) and Lesbos (Greece) analyses the encounters and interrelations between two different types of mobilities, complexifying the usual juxtaposition between the volunteer as (mobile/travelling) visitor and the beneficiary as (immobile/local) host. Di Matteo's analysis highlights how mobility (in)justice is experienced and performed, particularly when considering the privileged free movement of volunteer tourism versus the forced and/or constrained mobility of migrants. These uneven spaces of mobility reinforce the dominant political discourses of separation through border regimes rather than being in opposition to them (Di Matteo, 2023). Volunteer tourism, in this context, is conducive of 'mobilities that can produce geographies of exclusion, disconnection, inequality, and immobility' (Di Matteo, 2023, p. 11). Whilst the liminality of the spaces where these encounters unfold do not erase the power imbalances between volunteers and beneficiaries, it can reshape the sense of place by turning leisure tourism destination into volunteer tourism ones.

Whilst the innovative works discussed above have shown insightful directions and opportunities for new developments of the field, we believe that the intersection between geographical themes/perspectives and volunteer tourism can be further investigated and more fruitfully articulated, as suggested in the next section.

Moving forward: new geographies of volunteer tourism in the polycrisis

Considering the current state of volunteer tourism scholarship, the geographical contributions discussed so far, and its existing gaps, we suggest that knowledge

advancements in the field could be achieved by developing a deeper understanding of the implications of the major geopolitical, social, and technological changes that are characterising our societies, whose interplay with volunteer tourism has not been thoroughly considered and unpacked yet. These include, for example, the fast-expanding use of artificial intelligence; the nexus between late-capitalism, welfare state erosion, and democracy crisis; environmental transformations driven by climate change; pandemics and epidemics; geopolitical reconfigurations related to migration (and vice-versa); long lasting and more recent political instability (e.g. conflicts in the Middle East, Central Africa, South Asia, Ukraine/Russia).

Geographical approaches to these and other interconnected features of the current polycrisis could contribute to forge knowledge developments of volunteer tourism in relation to space, place, and the environment. Notably, we highlight the need to better understand how new and old volunteer tourism spaces are generated or re-shaped as a result of processes and relations that emerge from growing economic inequalities and cross-national class divides; from uneven types of privileged vs forced mobilities, and from the increased institutional withdrawal of the state from both internal social provision and international development.

A range of emerging geographical paradigms could contribute to a radical rethinking of the nexus between volunteer tourism and socio-ecological justice, capitalist ideologies, technological advancements, and intersectional inequalities. Here we focus particularly on how digital geographies, geohumanities, and posthuman geographies could be adopted within the field of volunteer tourism.

Digital geographies can be used to understand some of the re-conceptualisations of volunteer tourism space and mobility that have been prompted by the recent COVID-19 pandemic. These resulted in creative forms of (online-mediated) e-volunteering, which temporarily replaced volunteer tourism during the pandemic. Since these new virtual relational patterns stimulate critical insights into sustainability, dependency, power, and mobility, digital geographies could help us scrutinise the link between (virtual) volunteering, climate change and sustainability. Considering these aspects of the current polycrisis, we wonder for example whether the moral dimension of volunteering justifies the carbon footprint of volunteer tourists and the CO₂ emissions they generate when flying to their chosen destinations (a contradiction that becomes even more striking in the case of volunteer tourism for environmental conservation projects). Furthermore, future studies should investigate how global warming is changing the volunteer tourism landscape and its 'geographies of compassion' (Mostafanezhad, 2013), for example by reducing the appeal of some destination whose climate becomes too extreme, or by turning certain sending destinations into receiving ones as a result of climate-induced natural disasters, such as wildfires, flooding and droughts.

Moreover, digital geography has the potential to assist in the identification of the location of power and how this is relationally experienced. Indeed, the adoption of GPSs and other digital technologies (Gautreau and Noucher, 2022) underpins common surveillance strategies related to migration and border controls. The use of drones, geolocation systems, and biometric passports reinforce the position of power of those who have access to (and control of) digital technologies—such as government agencies, military staff, volunteers, tourists—and denies opportunities to others, who are

digitally controlled and excluded. Yet, being aware of the possibilities and limitations of a digitally connected and controlled world offers a fresh perspective on ways volunteer tourism practices can be rethought. For instance, reversing how power is currently reinforced and mediated by technology within a scenario of polycrisis, new forms of volunteer tourism could use technologies to even spatial discrepancies and to dismantle ethnocentric narratives of 'the other', through the development of a shared, postcolonial sense of care and compassion.

Insightful possibilities for novel examinations of the concept of volunteer tourism mobilities can also be found in the theoretical association of geography and humanities. Geohumanities, through the subfield of critical cartography, provide new tools to look at the traditional, often fixed, spatial configurations of volunteer tourism (for example between the Global North and the Global South). Hence, mobilities of volunteer tourism often defined by dichotomic characteristics (e.g. donor/beneficiary; work/leisure; need/aid) can be reshaped by cartographies that help us to reflect along and across the multiple and fluid complexities and processes of the present polycrisis (Braidotti, 2017). In particular, cartographies are used to link knowledge with power, and to understand where power is (unevenly) situated and how it circulates. In this light, cartographies could provide a 'navigational tool' (Braidotti, 2017, p. 84) to understand how power flows in the volunteer tourism landscape and the interface between the (im)mobile human and nonhuman entities which are part of this landscape. The theorisation of maps through critical cartography can also facilitate the reconfiguration of local imaginaries of the places of origins of volunteer tourists in a way that contributes to dismantle stereotypes by considering South to South and South to North trajectories.

New frontiers of geography can therefore provide us with more inclusive perspectives on the interplay between volunteer tourism and the current polycrisis. Notably, we suggest that refined applications of posthuman geography (Falcon, 2023) could lead to more holistic and topical understanding of the current state of the volunteer tourism field, one that moves away from anthropocentric, polarised and colonial frames of reference. By highlighting the agency of non-human entities (i.e. plants, animals, technological objects), posthuman geographies help to situate and interconnect human and nonhuman subjectivities alongside multiple others. As part of such continuum, human and nonhuman relations can be rethought through the entanglements of their intersectionality and alterity.

This offers new lenses to analyse the current polycrisis, which could be fruitfully applied to enhance our understanding of volunteer tourism.

Current posthuman approaches in geography help to address socio-environmental challenges linked to the effects of global (capitalist) economies centred on growth and on the exploitation of nature for the material gains of humans. In questioning the human-nonhuman interplay and the effects of our global economies, recent post-humanist insights are adopted to critique the risks of reproducing colonial sets of practices and knowledges whilst silencing other ways of being and knowing. Hence, recent debates highlight the powerful potential of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that provide alternative views on the nature-society binary and human-nonhuman relations (Sundberg, 2014). As such, these post-humanist geographical perspectives would enable us to reconsider volunteer tourism encounters as based

on human and non-human assemblages, helping to interrogate and critique (hierarchical) social-cultural constructions and Western knowledges in favour of other ontological and epistemological orientations. Furthermore, attention to ancestral, sacred, and spiritual ways of knowing can rebalance the relation between volunteers and their (natural, social, economic, political) environments, detaching it from Western-centric discourses of conservation and development which have traditionally framed the praxis of volunteer tourism (Henry & Mostafanezhad, 2019). This might help to reconfigure geometries of power forging more just and ethical interactions between humans and nature that address the pressing ecological injustices of our current time.

Hence, a posthuman theoretical shift requires us to rethink how we make sense of the role, practices, meanings, and justifications of volunteer tourism in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, it enables us to consider how the current polycrisis may shape future reconfigurations of the volunteer tourism industry and its contexts, conditions, and possibilities. This relates to a range of issues and questions that have been discussed in this paper. How will mobility flows and trajectories be affected by the combined effect of climate change, growing inequalities, democracy crisis, digital surveillance, and increasingly predatory economies? Who will be able to travel in this changing scenario, and why? Who will be allowed to travel, and why? Who will afford to volunteer? Will the combination between democracy crisis, welfare state dismantlement, and growing economic inequalities, erode the middle-class basis of the Global North's volunteer tourism industry? Could the shifting flows of global capitals nourish new South-to-North patterns of volunteer tourism? We argue that a posthuman perspective allows for a deeper engagement with the complexity of these and other possible scenarios for volunteer tourism in the polycrisis. For example, the combined effect of climate change and economic crisis might impoverish certain volunteer-sending destinations to the point of turning them into volunteer-recipient ones. Likewise, former leisure-tourism destinations might turn into volunteer tourism ones. New pandemics, combined with the increasing possibilities offered by technological advancements in digitally mediated communications, might require e-volunteering to replace physical travel to some extent, thus reshaping our geographies of compassion. This could redefine power relationships among humans and between them and their environments, reducing the carbon footprint of the volunteer tourism industry, but also fostering new inequalities based on digital divides.

By rethinking the role, place and position of humans in the world (and beyond), posthuman epistemologies help us understand the root causes of the current polycrisis, possibly questioning the fundamentals of private property, capital accumulation, and national boundaries/sovereignty, which underpin and enable the volunteer tourism system itself.

Conclusions

In this paper we point out that the volunteer tourism field has reached a stagnation point whereby recent theoretical, methodological, and practical progress seem to be limited. We argue that through the use of a posthuman lens, new geographical approaches contextualised to a time of polycrisis could help volunteer tourism scholarship to overcome its limited engagement with radical and innovative theoretical and methodological advancement. At the same time, the dilemmas, problems, and

opportunities raised in our discussion show that volunteer tourism offers a fruitful and stimulating realm whereby geographic approaches and concepts can be tested, challenged and advanced.

We acknowledge that our attempt to provide contextual and theoretical avenues for reflections about volunteer tourism raises more questions than answers. This is because pushing the boundaries of the field requires venturing into uncharted territories, such as those of posthumanism and polycrisis, which we are still ill-equipped to navigate within the context of volunteer tourism. Hence, our suggestions of actual and possible contributions from geographical perspectives only offer some initial examples to stimulate further debate, without claiming to be exhaustive.

Contemporary geographical analyses have demonstrated increasing interest in understanding the multiple possibilities offered by social worlds made by the continuum of human and nonhuman entities. Extending these analyses to volunteer tourism provides opportunities to capture the complex nuances that characterise the ongoing evolutions of the field. In a time of global socio-political and economic fragility, the adoption of a posthuman lens allows to re-conceptualise the roles of, and relations between human and nonhuman actors nourishing equality, inclusivity, ethics, and responsibility in tourism and within the wider field of (international) development.

Therefore, we invite further reflections on how complex, overlapping, and intermingling crises impact on lifestyles, motivations and experiences related to volunteering leisure dimensions. Multiple and overlapping crises interact in such a way that bring uncertainty to individuals and societies (O'Regan, 2023). Hence, in our considerations on the future of (both the knowledge and practice of) volunteer tourism, we have wondered whether and how the field will be characterised by new geometries of power, different relational spaces, unusual ecological demands, and unexpected configurations of mobilities. The exploration of these uncharted territories will need concerted multi- and inter-disciplinary efforts. This paper was aimed at sparking debate among geographers, volunteer tourism scholars, and beyond; we hope it will also stimulate their collective endeavour to unpack the complexities and changes brought to the fore by the intersection between polycrisis and volunteer tourism.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Dr. Elisa Burrai is a Senior lecturer in the School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management at Leeds Beckett University. Elisa's research focuses on the intersection between tourism, responsibility and ethics. Her research interests include interdisciplinary approaches to global development, responsible tourism and tourism ethnographies.

Dr. Davide Sterchele is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management at Leeds Beckett University. His research explores interaction rituals within events and tourism experiences. Past publications have focused on the inclusive/exclusive dynamics in the fields of alternative sport events, anti-racism/ multiculturalism, and sport for development and peace.

ORCID

Elisa Burrai  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1068-6304>

Davide Sterchele  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3864-1631>

References

- Amsden, B., Stedman, R. C., & Luloff, A. E. (2011). Exploring contexts of place: The role of setting and activity in a high-amenity tourism community. *Tourism Geographies*, 13(4), 531–548. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2011.590518>
- Baillie Smith, M., Laurie, N., & Griffiths, M. (2018). South–South volunteering and development. *The Geographical Journal*, 184(2), 158–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12243>
- Bandyopadhyay, R., & Patil, V. (2017). ‘The white woman’s burden’ – the racialized, gendered politics of volunteer tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 19(4), 644–657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1298150>
- Bianchi, R. V., & Milano, C. (2024). Polycrisis and the metamorphosis of tourism capitalism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 104, 103731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2024.103731>
- Braidotti, R. (2017). Critical posthuman knowledges. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116(1), 83–96. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3749337>
- Crossley, É. (2012). Poor but happy: Volunteer tourists’ encounters with poverty. *Tourism Geographies*, 14(2), 235–253. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2011.611165>
- Di Matteo, G. (2023). Resistance or exclusion? The paradoxes of volunteer tourism, migration, and memorialization nexuses. *Tourism Geographies*, 25(7), 1746–1762. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2175235>
- Driessen, S. (2022). Summers of war. Affective volunteer tourism to former war sites in Europe. *Tourism Geographies*, 24(2–3), 326–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1812111>
- Everingham, P. (2016). Hopeful possibilities in spaces of ‘the-not-yet-become’: Relational encounters in volunteer tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 18(5), 520–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2016.1220974>
- Everingham, P., & Motta, S. C. (2022). Decolonising the autonomy of affect in volunteer tourism encounters. *Tourism Geographies*, 24(2–3), 223–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1713879>
- Falcon, J. (2023). Toward a critical posthuman geography. *Cultural Geographies*, 30(1), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14744740221110579>
- Gautreau, P., & Noucher, M. (2022). Farewell to maps. Reformulating critical cartography in the digital age. In B. Debarbieux & I. Hirt (Eds.), *The politics of mapping* (pp. 47–68). ISTE: Wiley.
- Guttentag, D. (2011). Volunteer tourism: As good as it seems? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 36(1), 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2011.11081661>
- Henry, J., & Mostafanezhad, M. (2019). The geopolitics of volunteer tourism. *Handbook of Globalisation and Tourism*, 295, 295–304.
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2003). Reconciliation tourism: Tourism healing divided societies! *Tourism Recreation Research*, 28(3), 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2003.11081415>
- Judge, R. C. (2017). Class and global citizenship: Perspectives from non-elite young people’s participation in volunteer tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 42(2), 164–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2017.1303894>
- Keese, J. R. (2011). The geography of volunteer tourism: Place matters. *Tourism Geographies*, 13(2), 257–279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2011.567293>
- Laurie, N., & Baillie Smith, M. (2018). Unsettling geographies of volunteering and development. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 43(1), 95–109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12205>

- Lawrence, M. (2024). Polycrisis in the Anthropocene: An invitation to contributions and debates. *Global Sustainability*, 7, e5–10. <https://doi.org/10.1017/sus.2024.2>
- McIntosh, A. J., & Zahra, A. (2007). A cultural encounter through volunteer tourism: Towards the ideals of sustainable tourism? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 15(5), 541–556. <https://doi.org/10.2167/jost701.0>
- Morin, E., & Kern, A. B. (1993). *Terre patrie*. Éditions du Seuil.
- Mostafanezhad, M. (2013). The geography of compassion in volunteer tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 15(2), 318–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2012.675579>
- O'Regan, M. (2023). Introduction: Off the Grid and on the Road in Europe Living in an Age of Uncertainty and Polycrisis. *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*, 32(2), 1–22.
- Park, J. H. (2018). Cultural implications of international volunteer tourism: US students' experiences in Cameroon. *Tourism Geographies*, 20(1), 144–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1387810>
- Raymond, E. M., & Hall, C. M. (2008). The development of cross-cultural (mis) understanding through volunteer tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 16(5), 530–543. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580802159610>
- Sin, H. L. (2009). Volunteer tourism – “Involve me and I will learn”? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36(3), 480–501. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.03.001>
- Sin, H. L. (2010). Who are we responsible to? Locals' tales of volunteer tourism. *Geoforum*, 41(6), 983–992. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2010.08.007>
- Sin, H. L., Oakes, T., & Mostafanezhad, M. (2015). Traveling for a cause: Critical examinations of volunteer tourism and social justice. *Tourist Studies*, 15(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797614563380>
- Singh, S., & Singh, T. V. (2004). 14 Volunteer Tourism: New Pilgrimages to the Himalayas. *New horizons in tourism: Strange Experiences and Stranger Practices*, 181.
- Sundberg, J. (2014). Decolonizing posthumanist geographies. *Cultural Geographies*, 21(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474013486067>
- Tooze, A. (2022). Welcome to the world of the polycrisis. *Financial Times*, October 28.