

DIPLOMA SPRING 2022

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**Service
design**

Can we
save our
saviours?

AHO

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A heartfelt thank you to my friends and family. You know who you are, going out of your way to help me through. Although filled with crippling depression and anxiety I come out of it stronger. I would truly never made it this far without you.

Forever grateful.



FIGURE 1: Knight in shining armour

ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a closer look at volunteer trips, particularly those where a European travels to an African country. What mentality do they travel with? Many travel on the premiss that they are going to save someone. This mentality is dangerous because it takes the power away from communities to resolve the situation in a way they deem appropriate. Can we save these saviours from making more situations that need saving?

I have gathered information about this topic through in-depth interviews in Norway, as well as more in-depth interviews, contextual interviews and observational studies, conducted while I travelled to Tanzania.

These methods taught me that critical self reflection could be one key to unlocking an understanding in a way that leaves room for more integrity and better directed help. To spark this thought process I have created a card game to be used when preparing volunteers for their trip. By asking them to reflect on possible situations that they might face in the field. These cards are a direct result of the interviews and observational studies I conducted and are meant to be used by volunteers for volunteers.

This is not meant as a direct solution for how to conduct better volunteer trips, but more as an aid to prepare and maybe educate young adults travelling to a foreign country with a culture often very different to their own and sometimes in a very rural setting. To come better prepared will aid not only the volunteers but the workplaces they are travelling to. As an interactive tool, I feel the card game could foster more reflection than being asked questions on the spot. Their visual manner encourages a more playful experience which might lessen the fear of having to give a "correct" answer and open up for deeper reflection.

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Motivation

Over the last decade there has been an increasingly high demand for volunteer trips. A travel organiser in Arusha, Tanzania said about forty per cent of all tourists that stay for a couple of months request volunteer work. After some time the tourists get bored and would like to feel useful. Especially the last two years. Now most of the local tourist companies have a connection to a volunteering project.

In 2012, in Uganda, there was a man named Joseph Kony, who committed terrible crimes against humanity and especially children. An American actor went to Uganda and was quickly horrified, so he started a campaign to get the US government to send troops to Uganda in the hope of catching Kony. This campaign is known as Kony 2012.

Africa here served as the perfect backdrop, a place where the rules do not apply. A “nobody” from the west could become a godlike saviour. The genuine hurt in Africa is not fiction. Joseph Kony was one man, a terrible one yes, but the problem was systematic and could not be reduced down to just one man. The people of Uganda knew this and created local initiatives to stop the crimes and support victims. But we, the audience did not see this. And when I say we, I really do mean we.

Let us take a minute to reflect on this post I posted on Facebook, March 7th 2012 captioned: “I think we all should watch this...”

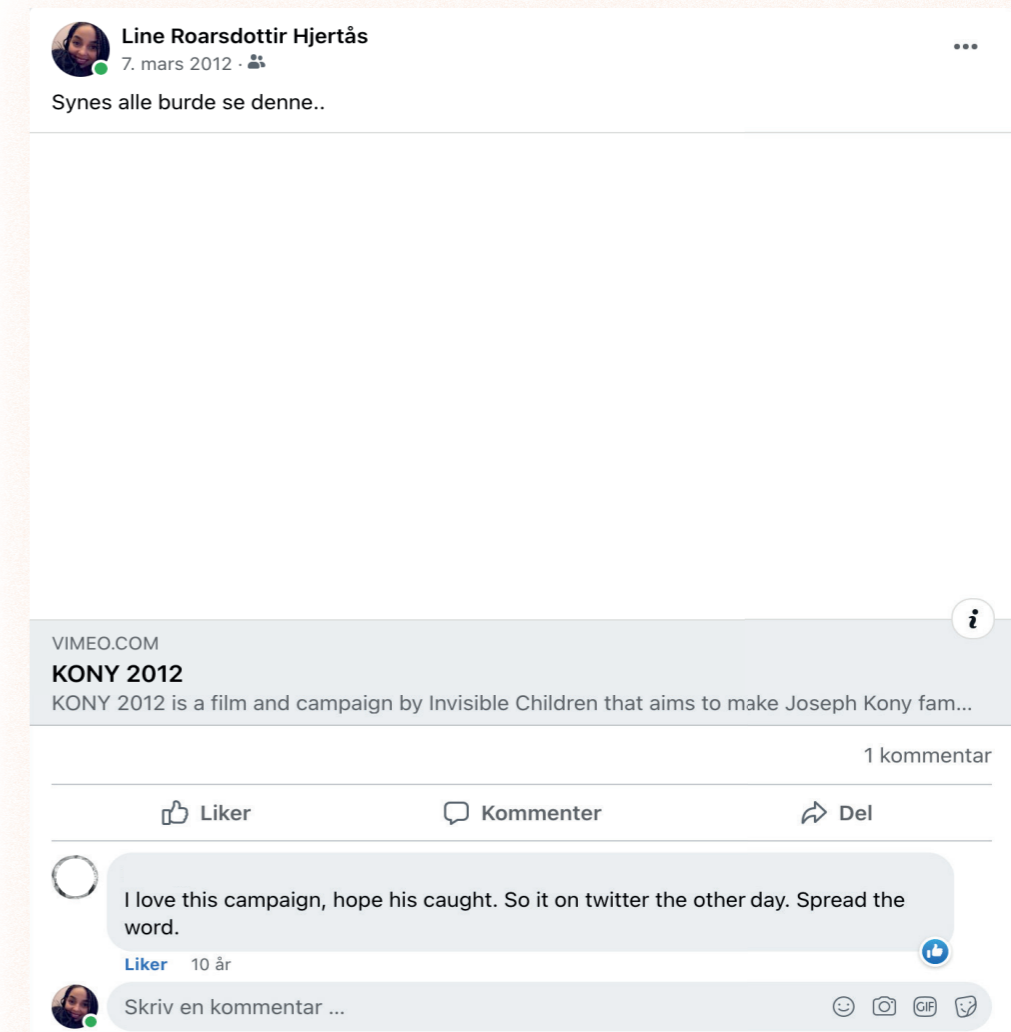


FIGURE 2: Facebook post sharing the Kony 2012.
Accessed May 18, 2022, facebook.com/line.r.hjertas/posts/231932900236806

“I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.”

@TEJUCOLE

twitter.com/tejucole/status/177810822268067841

I was a nineteen-year-old student living in the southern part of Norway, 10 000 kilometres from Uganda. I saw the video, cried and shared it with everyone I knew thinking that maybe it could help. Because it could not make it worse, right?

This mentality is a product of our hegemonic society. We are told that we have so much abundance that we should feel guilty and perhaps even selfish for not sharing it. You should go out of your way to help the others in need. I do not diminish the fact that we should help each other and especially those in need. However, the way the African continent is portrayed in the media is not nuanced, not described as a rich and vibrant place, with difficulties that need to be addressed, rather as a place of hunger, disease and poverty. The dark history of black people in the West is still present in our modern day society. How to address racism is still an ongoing debate. The narrative of the situation in Africa is that of a helpless continent that needs saving from the West. This sentimentality and guilt is then carried across the border with us when we volunteer.

Teju Cole had a seven-part Twitter rant in response to the Kony 2012 campaign. This placed the White Saviour Industrial Complex into the dictionary for good. I find the seventh and last post to be a good summary of why this project is so important. “I deeply respect American sentimentality, the way one respects a wounded hippo. You must keep an eye on it, for you know it is deadly.”

What if we could use all this sentimentality, emotion and willingness to help in a way that will aid long term goals and encourage independence? Designed by locals that know what is needed while exchanging experience and ancestral knowledge to the West.

By utilizing service design methods (keeping in mind the hegemonic context they are created in) we could find ways to re-imagine, reshape or rebuild volunteer trips. Not only to better the next generation's understanding of other cultures but to break the bond of the inner saviour that has been passed down through generations.

The white saviour complex

Definition by Savala Nolan, author of Don't Let It Get You Down: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Body and the director of the Thelton E. Henderson Center for Social Justice at UC Berkeley School of Law.

The white saviour complex is: "An ideology that is acted upon when a white person, from a position of superiority, attempts to help or rescue a Black, Indigenous, people of colour or community (BIPOC for short). Whether this is done consciously or unconsciously, people with this complex have the underlying belief that they know best or that they have skills that BIPOC don't have."

This is an emotive subject and is hard for everyone involved to talk about. No one wants to be considered a white saviour. Many people associate this term closely with racism which makes it so much more potent. Perhaps in most circumstances, you would not recognize that you are transcending into a saviour when your actions are coming from a genuine desire to help. This is exactly why it is so important that we talk about the ripple effects of living in a hegemonic society.

Africa is the perfect backdrop for this saviour complex. A place where the rules do not apply, where a "nobody" from the west could become a godlike saviour overnight. The peak of the white saviour complex is when the wish to help others turns into actions, like booking a volunteer trip. You take a big portion of your hard-earned money, set aside time from your daily life, you travel to a place otherwise unknown, to help people that you have been told are in dire need of your help. We all wish to be that person, needed, important, irreplaceable, the knight in shining armour, someone's saviour.

It is a wonderful lie that a whole continent are seemingly unable to solve the problems they face. We believe it so completely that we do not even dig deeper or try to understand how these problems occur.

After high school, many Norwegian students plan to take a gap year. They could work, take up classes or travel the world. These travels are usually quite expensive so they spend a long time organizing everything usually together with an agency. One travel agency that specializes in this kind of travel is Kilroy. In the last couple of years, they have seen a high demand for volunteer work as a part of these gap years. They have experienced a surge in clients wanting to go on such trips - most for the Instagram pictures. They now have a thorough screening process to assess the intentions and qualifications of their clients before arranging a volunteer trip that could best suit them.

Volunteer trips have become a big industry. Lion "rescue" centres would breed lion cubs and offer people the opportunity to come and take care of them for a period of time. By mimicking a rescue centre, they simultaneously destroy animals lives and earn a lot of money in the process. With the growing number of volunteer trips available it is hard to differentiate the good from the bad and cases like the lion rescue centre become more common.

On the next page there is an collection of the first few hits on Google when searching for: volunteer trips to Africa. Advertising with phrases like: "once in a lifetime" and "change the world", pictures of sad- or happy kids with a white person in the middle and often exotic wildlife. Reviews are mostly about how the trip changed the volunteers life not so much about the impact it made locally.

In conversation with Kilroy they emphasized that this is not a selling point, it is an service they have by request. Not only because it would be ethically wrong, but also because the volunteer work is physically and mentally challenging.





FIGURE 3: Child looking into camera [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, agape-volunteers.com

Volunteer in Tanzania!

Your chance to make an impact by helping the less fortunate through love and care while on a lifechanging adventure.

- ✓ Fulfill your passion for improving the lives of others and make a difference for entire communities
- ✓ Provide lasting benefits to and change the lives of disadvantaged people and animals
- ✓ Enjoy your adventure in total safety with secure facilities that have been extensively vetted
- ✓ Join an incredibly affordable program trusted by over 22,000 since 2006
- ✓ Right this moment, there are many people in Tanzania n desperate need of your help. will you answer the call?

[Get more info now](#)

Take a minute to complete the form and we will be in touch.

FIGURE 4: IFRE volunteer in Tanzania ad [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, ifrevolunteers.org/tanzania/volunteer-abroad-africa-tanzania.php



FIGURE 5: Volunteers on safari [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, goeco.org/area/volunteer-in-africa



FIGURE 6: Naturally Africa Volunteers Malawi project [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, volunteerafrica.com/volunteer-projects/lake-malawi-child-care-development-volunteer-project



FIGURE 7: Teaching in Uganda [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, volunteeringolutions.com/blog/top-volunteer-destinations-in-africa



FIGURE 8: Portrait by Håkon Dueland

This is I, Line

I have a bachelor degree in visual communications and two years work experience as a graphic designer. During my time at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, I have completed courses in both interaction and service design.

I consider myself a designer with a broad vision. Unable to commit fully to one discipline, they coexist and support each other in everything I design. However, for my diploma, I want to dive deeper into my inner service designer. I believe this mindset will give me the relevant perspective to see possibilities within our societal norms. A service design mindset will also help me evaluate the methods we as designers use to research and understand our circumstances.

From a young age, I was interested in art, design and creating. This interest grew stronger over the years. Meanwhile, going into my teens I became very politically active. Voted youngest member of the city council ever in the municipality of then Mandal, now Lindesnes.

I am biracial and grew up in Tanzania, Zambia and Norway so I can communicate in Norwegian and Swahili. I understand the small gestures, the humour and the unwritten rules of both my cultures. I think this will be a great advantage when doing research and trying to get honest feedback from interviewees across different cultures.



The fact that I am biracial is an advantage, my parents have two perspectives on the world and tried to guide me with their knowledge. I am in many ways constantly finding solutions based on these two perspectives. My parents also gave me a mixed racial look that I think the key actors could either see as a similarity to themselves or create an equal amount of distance from me.

If my Facebook post is proof of anything it is that a white saviour lives on in me too. A saviour I hope we can confront together on this journey of critical self reflection that is my thesis. Whilst staying wary of in the risk of becoming a design saviour trying to save the white saviour.

As designers we are armed with visual tools and skills of storytelling that have the power to create an understanding and spark conversations on topics that are hard to talk about. Like all weapons, these tools should be used cautionary. I believe this to be the greatest responsibility we have as creators.



Interview phase in Norway

AMOUNT OF PEOPLE IN TOTAL: 6

METHOD: Classic in-depth interview

TIME/CONTEXT: January 2022

During the first weeks of my project I talked to former European volunteers. I talked to volunteers that travelled as experts, who worked at small organisation and volunteers that paid a large organisation to organise the trip for them.

It was important to me to have these conversations while I still was in Norway. Most of the interviews were digital, but some were physical.

These interviews are conducted in a very classical way. We would schedule a meeting via email, I sent the consent form and conducted the interviews over an 1,5-2 hour span. I used an interview guide throughout the interviews and made sure that it felt as much like a conversation between friends as possible.

The following pages are pieces from my notes to give insight on how the interview was conducted and what I learned from the process.

FIGURE 9: World map by wooptoo, public property [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3430889



FIGURE 10: Photo by Ranurte
Published September 12, 2020, unsplash.com/photos/SIPvBJRhVlc

Interviewee in Oslo

It is a sunny day in Oslo and I am running late as usual. It takes me 20 minutes to get to Deichman. I sent her an email apologising and reassuring her that I will only be five minutes late. She responds quickly; "I am in the cafe, just bought a coffee. Don't stress". She sounds nice. When I get there she is waiting at a seat by the entrance, looking out into the cafe. I am always happy to see people that can simply exist in a busy public space without hiding behind a phone or other distractions.



We get the formalities of the interview over and done with and I start the audio recording. It is quite loud in the cafe so I'm not sure if I will be able to hear what she is saying when I play it back. I take up my notebook where I also have something that resembles an interview guide. My first question is if she can tell me more about herself? She looks and sounds like an accomplished, trustworthy and reflected young woman. I believe her words. She talks about her current life and we gradually move backwards in time until she reaches the year she spent in Ghana as a volunteer. She lived and worked at a home for disabled children and travelled out with ICYE.

The International Cultural Youth Exchange is an international, non-profit, youth exchange organisation that provides youth mobility, intercultural learning and international voluntary service opportunities to help people break down prejudices and develop intercultural understanding and competence for a more just and peaceful world. ICYE organises long and short-term exchanges combining home stays with voluntary service in more than 40 countries around the world.

She knew early on that she wanted to go on a humanitarian trip and had all along imagined going to Africa. So when ICYE had a stand at her school she was already sold. Nothing could stand in her way, not even the Ebola outbreak - she had to go, it was important. The organisation took care of her and she felt well informed from the start. They arranged a two-week seminar for all three hundred travellers with practical information and how to ethically be a volunteer. Things like don't portray a "very rich privileged person" and "don't take a picture in the middle of sixty African children looking like you are Jesus reborn".

She speaks about difficult subjects with ease, it is entertaining to listen to her. Despite the seminar pointing out that a trip like this could encourage white saviours she openly admits that it took her a relevant bachelor's degree to understand the scale. She travelled with a white saviour mentality that got let down when she realised that it was not helping anyone and the job she was doing would probably be done better by a local. Despite all the efforts, she feels like the organisation was feeding into the white saviour mentality.

When reflecting on Ghana as a country I am not sure if her feelings were positive or negative. She speaks about openness in people and amazing adventures during the weekends, but also a feeling of being on the outside of the community. There was no denying she was a European and the feeling that everyone saw her as an extremely wealthy person or a gateway to a European country created a certain distance, she feels.

Throughout the whole conversation, she brings up personal development and growth. This is what the year gave her and she will forever be grateful for all the lessons that she learned. She would recommend a humanitarian trip but be open-minded to the way things are done, realise that you are doing it just for yourself and that the people in the country you are travelling to are as different as they are in the country you are from.

Our conversation had a flow to it, long after I have finished the questions in my interview guide we keep talking. When we come to a natural end, she has finished her coffee and I thank her for taking time out to help me. She tilts her head, smiles and says "happy to help" before she turns around and disappears out of sight in the busy street.

Online in Oslo

I get an email address from a close friend. It is for a former volunteer and she is willing to talk to me. I send her an email about the project and ask when she wants to meet. She replies: "late afternoon, after work". She lives on the outskirts of Oslo and would rather take it online, I initially find it a little strange the way she cuts to the decisions. But I want her to feel comfortable so instead of offering to travel close to her, I oblige.

I am sitting at home in front of the computer, reading while waiting for the clock to strike and for her to come online. She seems almost strict in her facial expression, like a somewhat strict teacher. She has a way of taking over the conversation, it sets me a little off kilter and takes me a few seconds to remember my role as interviewer. She seems efficient and almost impatient. I try to mirror her and change the setting from a friendly conversation to more of an official interview. I realize that maybe taking it online was a good idea as the barrier between us makes it easier for me to take control.

I ask her to tell me a little bit about her for context and her resume and past experiences are breathtakingly impressive. I am way out of my league. She is more suitable as an expert than a volunteer. In some way that explains her demeanour. She has been all over; as a volunteer for a big organisation at a young age, in a refugee camp and working for smaller organisation in another country she has expertise. She has travelled since she was young, as if it is just a part of her being and anything else would be strange, I can relate.

My experience of her as a strict character changes when we get talking. We have some commonalities and I am after some time able to talk to her in a way that she responds well to.

However, it is hard to get to an emotional level, almost like she is uncomfortable with anything other than facts. So I ask about the facts and the more she talks and reflects about the facts the more we can talk about how she came to such conclusions. She repeats often that volunteer trips through large organisations is not something one should do. That it is not helping, but rather is more damaging. Travelling on a backpacking trip or any kind of trip for that matter will give the community more long-lasting help than setting up more volunteer trips. She would have really good insights like this then retract them, with statements like "I don't know if this is the case for everyone". I respond reassuringly "of course, this is just based on your personal experiences and encounters".

The interview feels like a whirlwind, it goes by too fast for me to reflect during the interview and before I know it we have reached the awkward silence that seemingly has no end. We finish the conversation, say our goodbyes and I am left with an audio recording and my thoughts to reflect upon.

She gave me some great insight into the different kinds of volunteer trips one can go on and how they are useful. She also talked about a tough competition for jobs and opportunities in order to be useful when trying to save the world. She wants to do good for a living and has for the last few years been working towards for a role in a large international organisations like the United Nations or the World Food Program. Her approach when talking about doing good was so strict that it feels like a miscommunication when it reaches me, I dismiss it, thinking it is our personalities that don't match. I sit for a while and ponder about the conversation and how influenced I might be by my own experiences, only interrupted by my stomach rumbling for dinner.

Lessons learned

LESSON 1

The experiences the volunteers gained had great impact on their lives after. Changing their future - created growth. Particularly when as young adults this is for many the first meeting with a life independent from their families and the city they grew up in. They could be studying or starting on their career path, changing up routines or generally having a better understanding of the world. Mainly the understanding that a difficult situation in someone's life is often very complex and hard to comprehend from the outside.

LESSON 2

Many volunteers would realize that some of the things they did were harmful after the trip. They would reflect on the situation and their stay. Most will have good reflections of their actions, some even realise that they were acting as white saviours. Unfortunately these reflections usually do not come as a result of seminars and talks that the organisation set up before they travel. One interviewee said: "My trip was heavily white saviouresc, despite having gone through a total of three weeks in seminars on how to ethically be a volunteer". This realisation is often a result of experience, reflection and conversations between the traveller, the staff and people in difficult situations. Experiencing the context of which these problems occur encourage reflection of ones ability to inflict change. This reflection might be the most important thing for everyone involved. Both for the traveller but equally for the receiver of volunteers in order for the aid to be executed from a place of understanding.

LESSON 3

Self reflection earlier on would have made an impact on their expectations beforehand and also their ability to state what they could contribute with.

LESSON 4

Upon returning from a trip volunteers are highly invested in the organisation they travelled with and understand their current situation and urgent needs. So though they might not necessarily want to travel back again they would still want to contribute and help the organisation from afar.

LESSON 5

I would categorise volunteer trips into three different categories:

Organised trips: Paying a large organisation and having them plan everything based on your recommendations or by exchanging expertise.

Relief program: Aid work in the event of a crisis ,like a refugee camp, gaining valuable insight.

Local organisation: Working for an organisation that is simply unable to pay you.



FIGURE 11: Volunteer trip categories



Interview phase in Tanzania

AMOUNT OF PEOPLE IN TOTAL: 10

METHOD: Modified in-depth contextual interview

TIME/CONTEXT: February 2022

As a part of my research I travelled to Tanzania where I talked to organisers of volunteers, orphanages and park reserves, founders of volunteer centres in Kenya and Tanzania, former travel agent and an expert exchange centre.

My trip to Tanzania was about talking to people on the ground, the people that accommodate and cooperate with the volunteers. To hear their perspective and to see the environment the volunteers are placed at.

A great challenge for me is that it also question the design methods I have learnt and grown comfortable with using, as these methods will not be as applicable in an East African setting. For example, an interview like the ones we do here in Norway will force an East African to answer “correctly”. It will remove the honesty in their opinions and just mirror the biases they think you have. My method was more or less an extension of the one I used in Norway, but I saw the need for modification through one of my early interviews and adapted accordingly. Instead of openly documenting the interview by recording or taking notes I treated it as a conversation and immediately after wrote down as much as I could remember from the conversation.

The following pages are pieces from my notes to give insight on how the interview was conducted and what I learned from them.

FIGURE 12: World map by wooptoo, public property [online image].
Accessed May 18, 2022, commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3430889



FIGURE 13: View from outside work station at Kijiji Beach Resort

Resort call in Kijiji

I am in a bungalow at Kijiji beach resort, the fan only has one speed -race car. It makes a loud background noise, but the humidity outside leaves me with no choice. The promise of a good wifi connection brought me here, I can conclude that good wifi is different for different people. →

A forum for news and debates about African relations. Members can contribute with post and share articles from Norwegian and international media. The forum is administrated by Bistandsaktuelt, an independent website on aid, global conditions and international development.

In Tanzania the beginning is slow, in sheer desperation I post on a closed Facebook group that got recommended to me at a seminar with Arena, the group is called Afrika-interesserte:

This is possibly the wrong place to ask, if so, just remove this post.

I am a master's student at The Oslo School of Architecture and Design.

Currently, I am working on a master's in design and possibilities connected to humanitarian trips with a special focus on African countries. I would love to get in touch with more people that have been on such trips or that have special knowledge on this subject. All help will be greatly received.

Thank you in advance.

I post it and go out for dinner with my mother. I don't have any wifi outside anyway so the need to constantly check for a response will be met.

By the time I get back to the resort, I have a message from an older lady on Facebook. She is offering to talk about her project. She is in Norway but her project is based in East Africa. We agree to a WhatsApp call. I stalk her a little on Facebook and she seems like the typical elder woman that has fallen in love with Africa. Strongly passionate in her words and an avid Facebook user but not to be found on any other social media. I am excited about this conversation, I am convinced she has a lot of interesting insights.

Her voice is just like I imagined, warm and loving. She tells me about the project and I gobble up all what she is saying without question. She talks so passionately and is very well reflected. It takes me a good twenty minutes to realise that I, on a personal level, strongly disagree with her way of doing things.

She talks about how she does fundraising in closed groups by telling stories and sharing pictures without the subject having a part in how the story is told or even knowledge about the story being told. She continues to talk about companies travelling to see the project that they donate money to, where they stay in a nice hotel in the city and do tours to see where kids come from with armed guards. She has done this tour in other African countries too, and quickly learned that if the transition from Europe to Africa is too great the participants will be left with a negative experience. The way she lays out

the ethical dilemma makes it seem like she has to do it in this way to get the financial support needed. "Our main goal is to help these children out of a situation they can't help themselves out of, they need this". I am left to wonder, is this the only way we can help these children? Is it a battle of the lesser evil?

We get into the subject of me maybe travelling to the area where her project is. She gets so excited and invites me to visit, to stay, to go on guided tours, everything. I feel so welcomed and warm. Her passion for this project is truly genuine you can not help getting pulled in. We end the conversation with a promise that I will contact her when I know more about my travel plans.

Organiser in Arusha

We came to Arusha last night, it was a six-hour spontaneous trip that I convinced the driver to take. We are here because I managed to get some time with a friend that is also a tour guide. Arusha is one of the hubs for tourism in Tanzania and after talking to him on the phone he offered to help me get in touch with relevant people in Arusha. He often helps tourists find a place to volunteer, there is high demand. So here we are, me, the driver and my tour guide. Headed to an office to meet someone that matches European volunteers with local organisations.

We sit in the car for a while, waiting for him to announce that he is in the office. None of us is expecting him to be on time so we just sit there and make light conversation for around twenty minutes. The guide gets a text: "Are you far away?". Perplexed we decide to go inside. We go to the building across the street, past the guard inside the entrance and upto the second floor. At the end of the hall, there is a door into an office. A friendly man greets us, it seems like the guide knows him well. He has been waiting for nearly twenty minutes. We apologise for the misunderstanding, he tells the guide that he changed his routine to be on time when he said that I was a student from Europe. The guide leaves us and I take a seat.

I start by telling him a little bit about me and my project then go on to ask him about himself. When he starts talking I take some quick notes. It makes him uncomfortable, I can tell. Every time I write something he stops and locks his eyes on the pen. The flow of his sentences are different when I write. So I stop. I can imagine an audio recording would make him even more

uncomfortable. I close the notebook and his phrasing changes, he talks more about his experiences and is more assertive in his descriptions. I ask about the collaboration with Europeans, he sighs heavily and says: "I will be honest with you, it is challenging". He goes on to explain that his daily routine needs to change when working with Europeans. He needs to be punctual in a way that is not common here. It makes me think about how all the volunteers I talked to also said African time is a challenge. He also mentions how on a normal day he would have a plan for the day in his head, but when working with Europeans he would have to write it down. He feels like it is almost as if they don't believe he has a plan if it is not written down for them to see. However he summarises it to be an overall good experience: "I just change my routine to accommodate them when they are here and revert back when they leave, it is the only way it works". This is such a strong juxtaposition from what the European founders say, they would usually say with enthusiasm that the collaboration is so nice and everyone is on the same page. Makes you wonder if they really are or if the locals have a better understanding of the western culture and therefore are quicker to adjust.

An hour has passed and the guide knocks on the door. He slowly opens the door and sticks his head in asking if we need some more time. The organiser was in the middle of a story, we invite the guide in and he continues to tell a story about a volunteer that attended an event they organised. She had sat the whole weekend looking at how things were organised and the last night when asked about what she thought explained it as "an organised chaos". He liked that approach: "she observed and then concluded", he has dealt with volunteers that believe they have a better way of doing things from the first five minutes. And not once has it happened that they have been able to solve or optimise anything. It just creates more work. The tour guide laughs in agreement. We sit and talk amongst ourselves for some time until someone knocks on the door asking if they can use the office. I do not have any more questions so we let them in, he walks us out to the street where the car is parked, I thank him for his time and we go our separate ways.



FIGURE 13: Orphanage building, windows to the classroom/playroom

Orphanage surprise

We are still in Arusha slowly cooking in the back of my mom's Land Rover. I have only a short time left in Arusha so need to find the right connections fast. My guide is hard at work, he finds an orphanage we can visit so we start driving. The windows are down and the breeze is cooling, the mood in the car lightens up immediately. We drive to pick up another guy that the guide knows, I am not sure I understand exactly why my guide needs a guide, but we are here now. He gets in the back of the car next to me and we do the traditional greeting where you ask about how everyone in his family is doing. It takes forever. He says he knows about two orphanages he can take us to. One knows we are coming the other one we would need to ask very politely when we get there. We start with the uncertain one, in the hope that we at least could schedule a meeting for another time.

We drive up to a medium-sized, very green house. There is a fence around the building and a wide gate that is left open. It looks like something between a home and an office building. We drive in and park the car in the shade. My companion in the back seat gets out and asks if I can let him go in first to explain the situation. I recap to him what I need. He might be the first person that understands, which is refreshing. He goes in advance and I anxiously wait in the car. The feeling is almost similar to the one you get before a blind date. What if they don't like me? What if they find my questions annoying? What if I don't like them? My thoughts are interrupted by someone shouting my name. I get out of the car and walk up to the entrance. I debate whether or not I should bring my notebook, I can't decide then remember the conversation with the organiser and leave it.



Lessons learned

LESSON 1

There is a strong juxtaposition between how the Europeans describe the collaboration and the general feedback from organisers in Tanzania. Tanzanians seem to have a better understanding of how the European culture works and therefore are better prepared and able to adjust quicker giving more room for the other culture to live along side theirs. Whilst Europeans know that there is a difference but do not fully understand the mechanics at work.

LESSON 2

Coming to an African country unprepared is a great transition for many Europeans especially young adults that have yet to discover the world. This is a challenge that most organisers try to navigate by giving out a lot of information before travelling or giving a feeling of safety by sending them to nicer hotels or bringing security around. One can argue that this enhances the feeling of a situation– or in this case their surroundings being dangerous.

LESSON 3

The understanding that East Africans have of the western culture through years of colonialism helps when facing challenges like the perception of time. A Kenyan-born philosopher John Mbiti, argues that Africans do not have time divided up in three parts like the west with past, present and future. It is only past and present what has not happened yet one does not need to think about. This is only one of many theories on the African sense of time. But the premiss is that time moves a little bit differently in Africa. Meaning an appointment that you have at eight will probably not happen exactly at eight.

LESSON 4

When you come with an outside view some of the things that happen might seem like they are more complicated than necessary. The urge to lend a helping hand and optimise the routine is very normal. However it is seen as rude by the locals. You should instead sit down and observe. Observe until you understand the mechanics of what you are seeing, if you still do not understand- then ask. Of course if you want to voice your outside perspective, say it. However make sure that you come from a place of understanding before you do so, then things might actually start to make sense.

LESSON 5

Some organisers are actually just here for the money and they are often really hard to spot. As a volunteer it is important to stay mindful when choosing an organisation and remember that not all have their best intentions in mind. Some give very little back to the centres or families you are sent to volunteer for. Some even send you out to do work that is not really needed. This might create friction that a volunteer in ideal circumstances should not be in the middle of.

LESSON 6

There should be more understanding of how different things actually are in order to be better prepared. The expectations have such a grave impact on how the whole situation is experienced. Both for the volunteer as well as for the centres asking for help. Critical self reflection on how you actually can help before hand with more facts about what you are going to do is key for the centres to get the help they need. It will also not place a volunteer in a situation they are uncomfortable with or where they feel like their expectations where not met.



Actors map

This map shows how the different actors are in relation to each other. It served as an effective way to synthesise each interview and notes and to assemble a general overview. Figure 16 (on the next page) is the overall map, but on the following pages I have two further maps that look at how the funds and knowledge flows between the actors involved.

The difference between coming as a volunteer with a larger organisation or with a local organisation is very visible through this map. This is why I have chosen to divide them in order to take a closer look at how the funds and knowledge flow in these two scenarios. This shows that a volunteers contribution will be more in line with what the beneficiary needs financially and open up for more knowledge to the volunteer when choosing to work more directly with a local organisation. However there is a bigger risk as a volunteer trying to find a suitable destination when you do not have a larger, more experienced support system around you.



FIGURE 15: Photo by Ryoji Iwata
Published December 13, 2017, unsplash.com/photos/n31JPLu8_Pw

Money distribution

Here is a map showing how the money is distributed between the actors. Corruption is often a factor that could consume a lot of money that should be going to the intended beneficiary. This is not a factor that is easy to map out, but it needs to be taken into consideration.

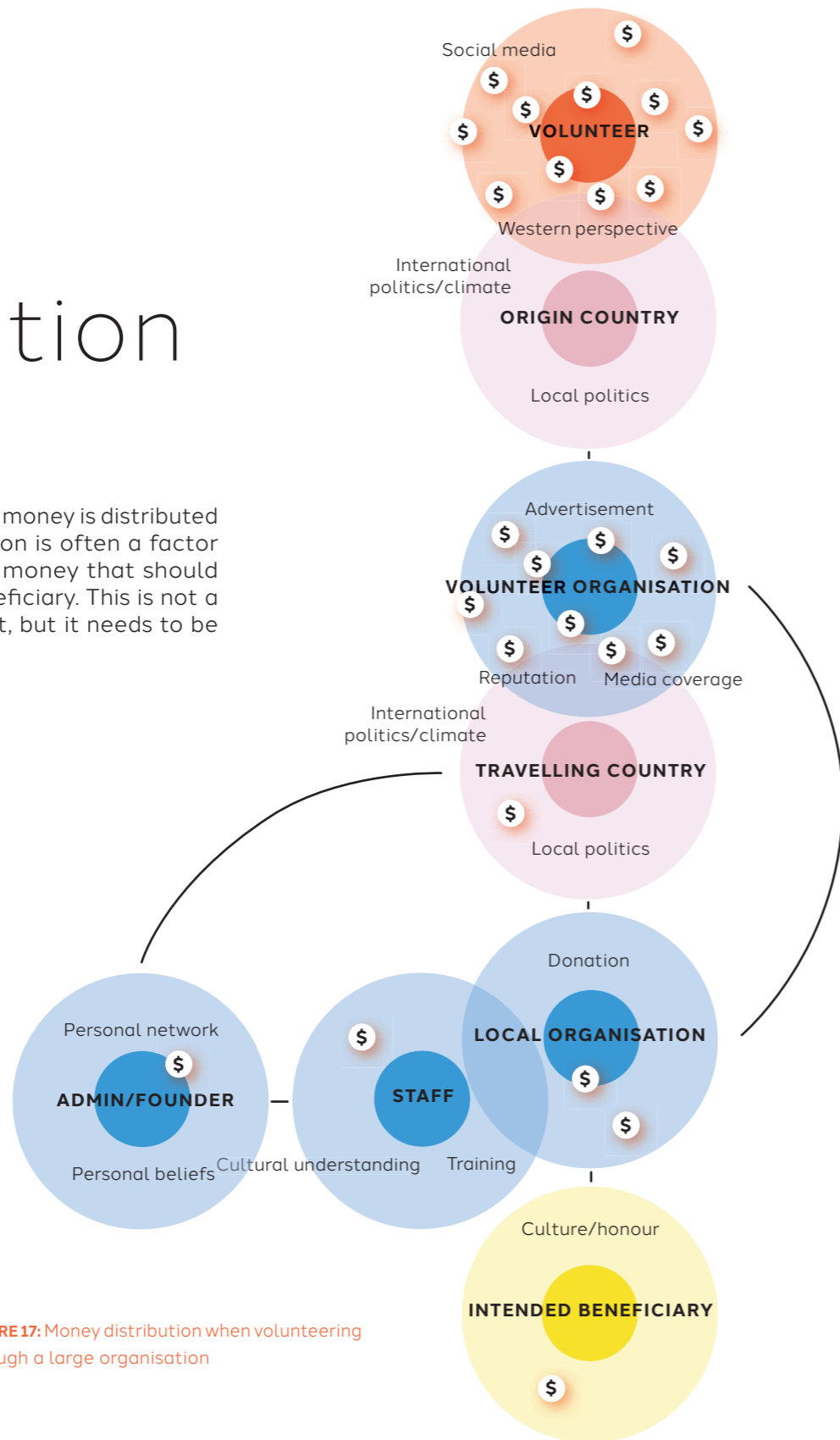


FIGURE 17: Money distribution when volunteering through a large organisation

The direct contact with the organisation leaves less people evolved and naturally less people that would need to get something out of the exchange. There is a clear difference as to how much money is left for the intended beneficiary.

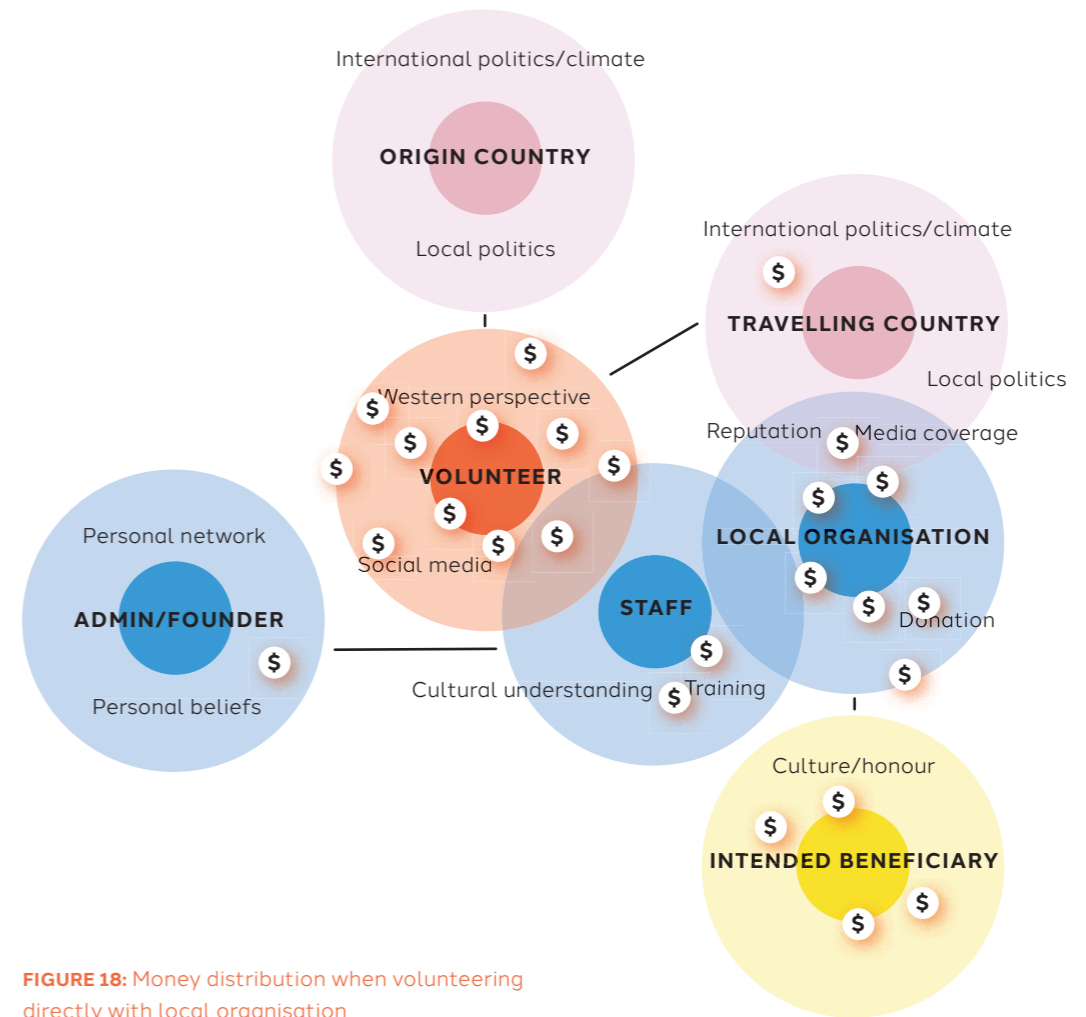


FIGURE 18: Money distribution when volunteering directly with local organisation

Knowledge and information flow

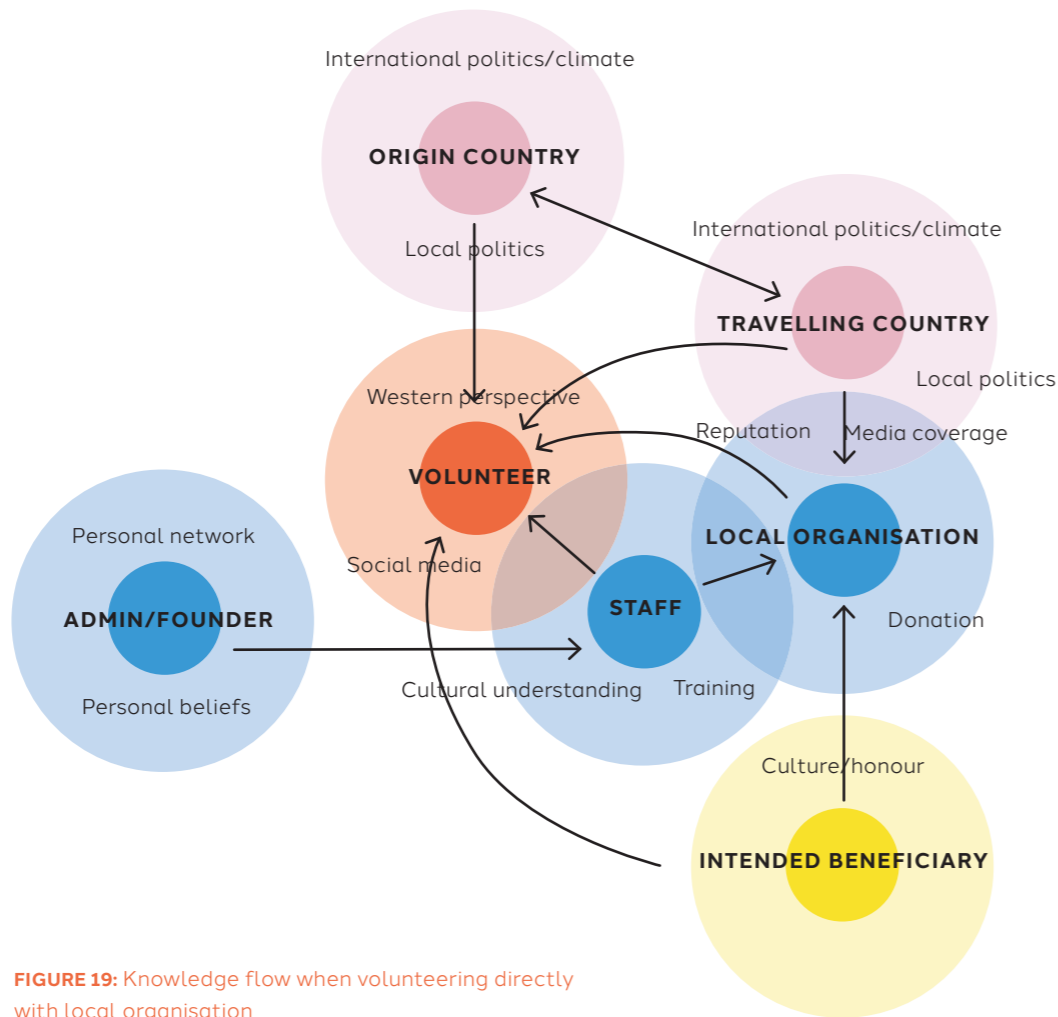


FIGURE 19: Knowledge flow when volunteering directly with local organisation

Knowledge is an inevitable part of any exchange, but especially one across cultural divides. This is the same map showcasing how the knowledge flows amongst the actors.

The volunteer is the actor that gains the most knowledge from others. Especially when volunteering directly through a local organisation.

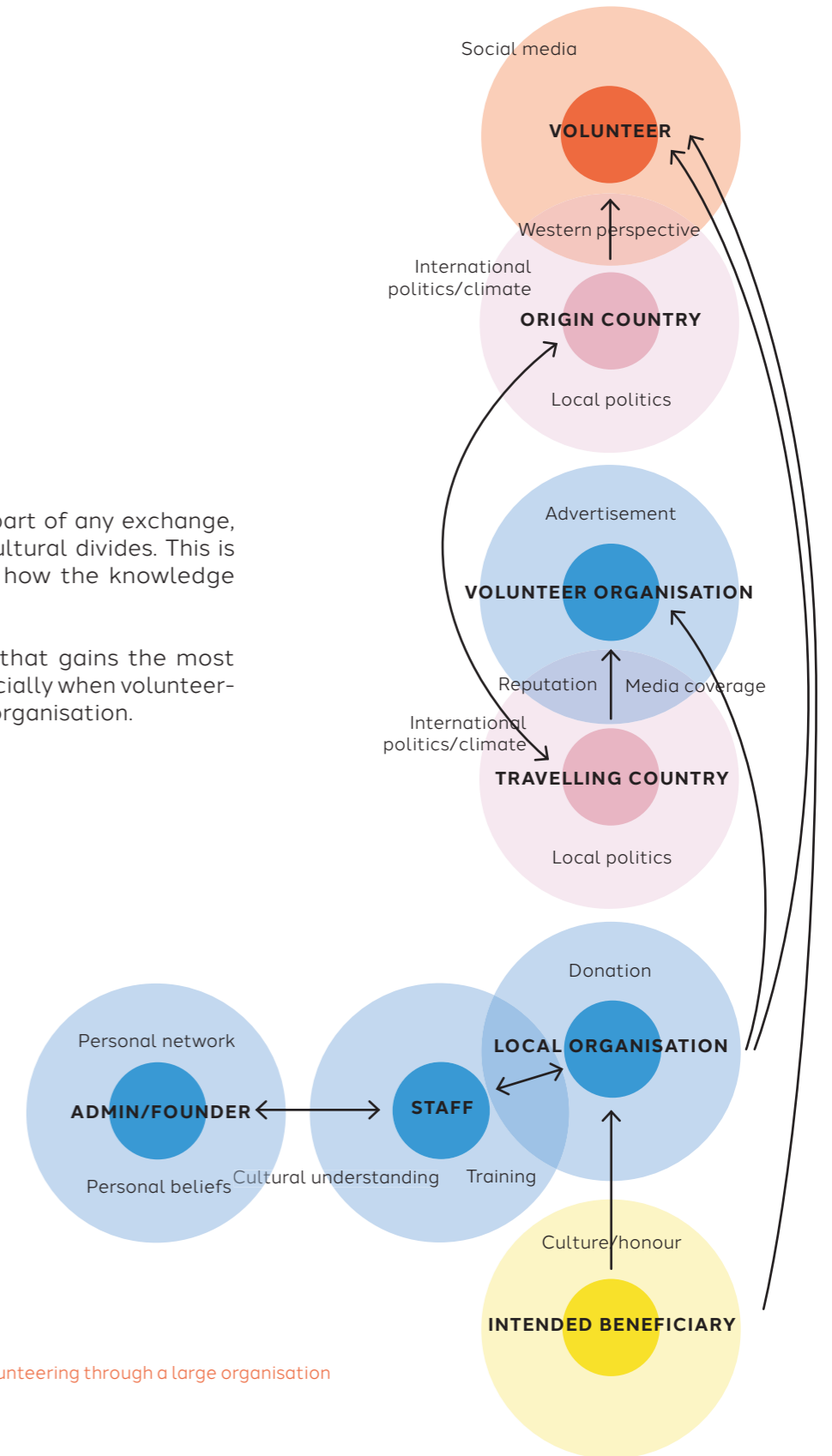


FIGURE 20: Knowledge flow when volunteering through a large organisation

Key findings

What is the essences of all my research and synthesis, what did I actually learn? I can boil it down to four key findings.

1 SAVIOURS MOTIVATION

The white saviour complex comes in different shapes and sizes and is an important feeling in order for someone to go so far out of their way to help. Although the premiss of the white saviour is that you, from a position of power believe you can rescue someone else is in most instances faulty. We can not deny this as a great motivation to help.

2 EVERYONE ADJUSTS

There will be a need for an uncomfortable adjustment from both the volunteers and the workplace. Regardless of how much willingness and motivation is present.

3 FINANCIAL GAIN

Most large volunteer organisations are highly driven by financial gain. This can manifest itself as a good product to ensure more customers and good reviews. But unfortunately more often leads to the intended beneficiary getting a smaller piece of the pie.

4 CRITICAL SELF REFLECTION

Critical self reflection is key to understand your impact but also one of the hardest things to achieve when you have no prior knowledge about the place and culture you are travelling to.

Based on these four key findings self reflection has the potential to impact the other three the most. Self reflection could help you understand your motivation. It will help to ask questions to the different organisations in order to choose the right one for your trip all the while giving you a chance to prepare yourself for the adjustment that you have to go through in order to make it a mutually beneficial trip.

Volunteer trips have great potential to improve. After my research I believe the most impact throughout the different organisations is to help shift the mindset or perspective of the volunteers. One of the former organizers I talked to said that they had highly emphasized self reflection throughout the trip. So much that many of the volunteers ended up feeling bad about the situation, so they shut down the whole program.

My goal is not to stop anyone from volunteering but rather create a tool that will initiate this process so that the volunteers themselves can understand if this is the "right" way to help.

What if...?

Throughout the process of this project I have written down what-if questions in my notebook. These are questions that have come up during interviews, observation and correspondence. It was a good exercise to reflect, allowing myself to ask questions that could shift my perspective.

For example: What if the narrative was changed? If I was in need and had to make a TV commercial in order to get help, what would that look like? Is there another way of telling these stories and still receive money or do we always need to tap into the feeling of guilt in order to receive help.

What if the narrative was told by the person in a difficult situation?

What if the benefiter was talking initiative to the whole situation?

What if you were not allowed to do tourism while volunteering?

What if we could help politically?

What if instead of going for exchange we would travel and leave our money in the community?

What if we can't help at all?

Self reflection has been an important tool for me to understand my relationship to the situation. Open questions like this opened up for a better understanding but also enable me to see things from other peoples perspectives and see connections that I had previously missed.

Could this shift in perspective add value for a volunteer too? What if I created a tool for critical self reflection? Designed for young adults wanting to volunteer in an African country.



FIGURE 21: Conversation cards can be downloaded from listening.nyc or picked up from listening booths. Accessed May 19, 2022, creativereview.co.uk/listening-nyc-police-campaign/

Ideation

My previous experience with reflective tools is not one that brings back joyous memories. Often times it is an online quiz where you give the “most” correct answer or seminars where we sit in groups and discuss a given topic. Going in it was important to create something that felt light hearted and interactive.

I looked into methods that try to evoke questions to help start the reflection process and was quickly drawn to cards that prompt a topic that you can reflect on. However it did seem a little too similar to being placed in a group to discuss a topic. So I tested out other things like creating a poster to identify the white saviour so people could confront their own biases. All of it felt somewhat shallow and did not necessarily initiate a conversation in the way I wanted it to, nor was it interactive. I therefore found myself back on cards it seem to have all the elements that I was looking for. An interactive factor in its sheer physicality, reflection in the questions and, depending on the feel the possibility to be lighthearted.

In a conversation with a fellow student I was recommended to check out a NYC police campaign. Somewhat similar to issue cards they developed cards with statements and questions that would promote empathy or provoke conversations. This was very inspirational and a similar approach to what I wanted to achieve; “...physical cards to support the conversation around complex matters by breaking down the subject”.

I went on to test what such topics could be and how to address the complexity of this situation with cards. Are people open to reflect about these issues or does it feel to far removed? This resulted in conversations between me and possible volunteers and observation in conversations using the tool I made.

Issue cards are used to promote discussion, to suggest new avenues of exploration, to structure thinking, and to spark ideas. They can be especially useful when the group feels stuck, or is unable to move away from familiar thinking. Definition by Service Design Tools,

First round of test

I wrote a list based on my findings of situations that are positive, negative or both. I wrote these down on different pieces of paper a little bigger than playing cards and asked participants to join me for a conversation. The participants picked out a topic and I would initiate a conversation around the topic that they chose.

PRO

The topic itself was a good guide, and gave some direction to the conversation. Picking out a topic at random left participants curious.

CON

The conversation died out before we got to the deep reflection, so there might be a need for further guidance than just a topic, something closer to an interview guide. Whilst avoiding an interrogation situation where you are across from someone that may feel intimidating. This could be a result of the positioning or if you feel like a knowledgeable person is asking you difficult self reflection questions they already have the "right" answer to.

CONCLUSION

A need for more guidance to keep the conversation flowing and opening up so that even people with no knowledge can ask the questions.

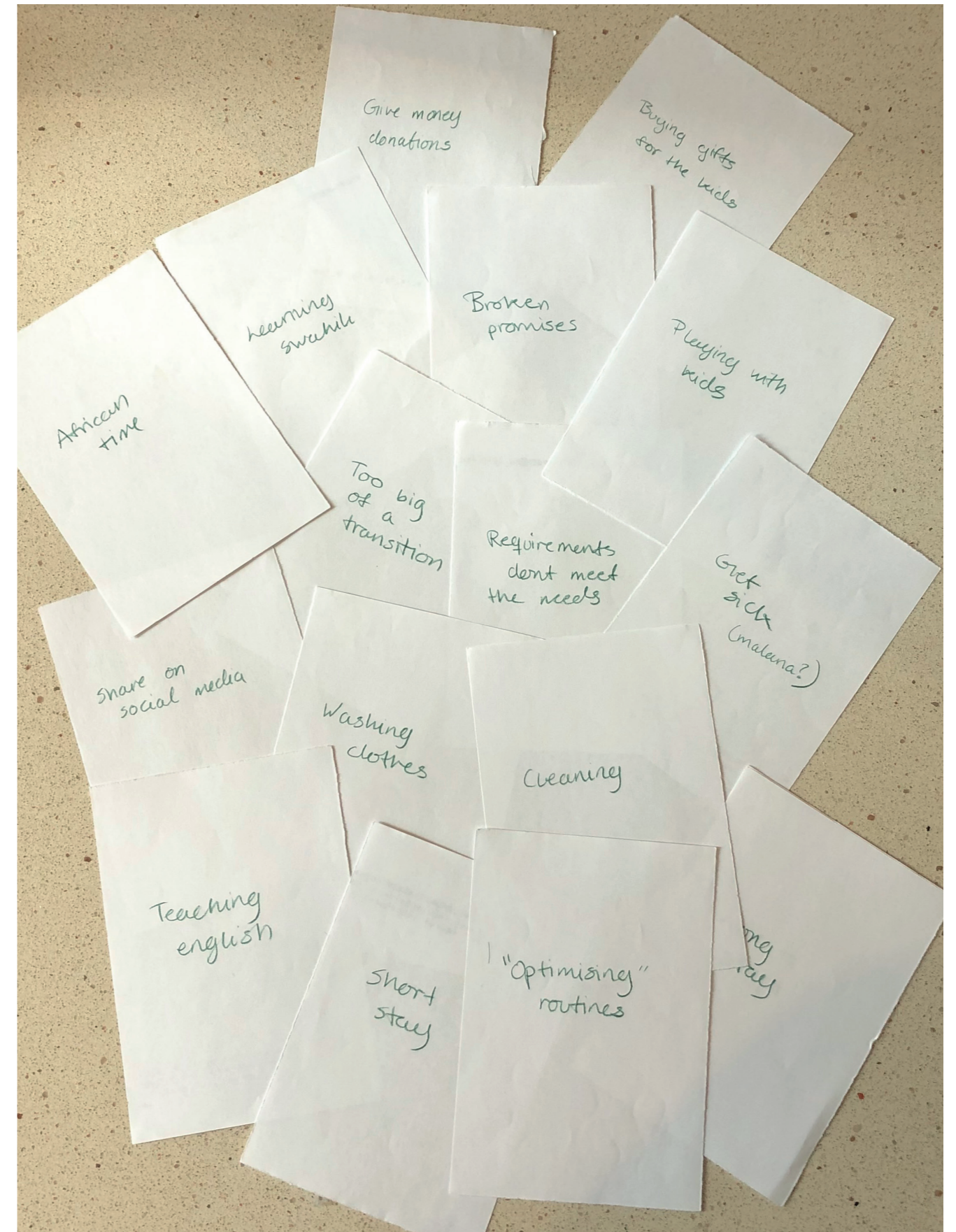


FIGURE 22: Topics on paper for testing

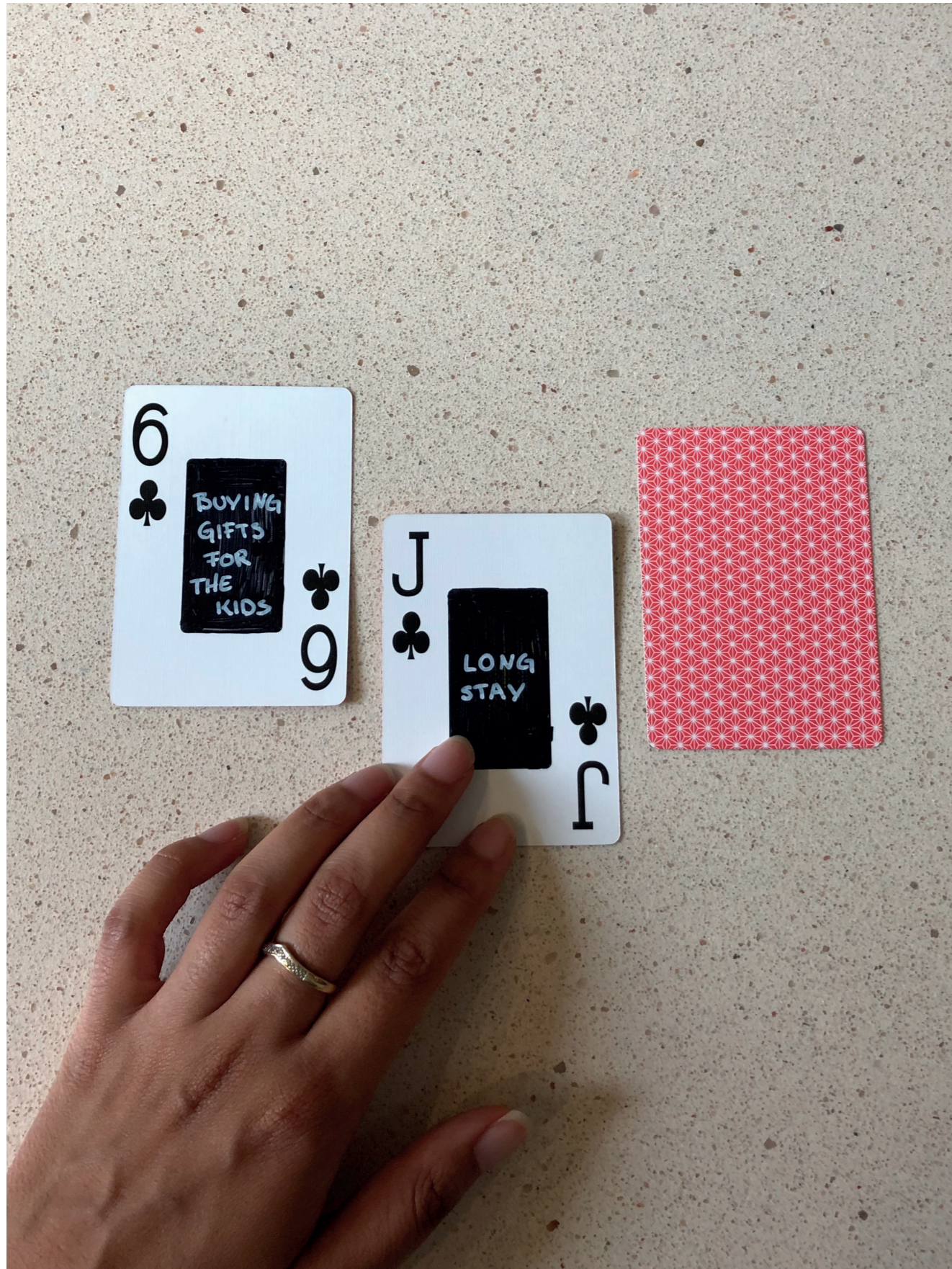


FIGURE 23: Modified playing cards for testing

Second round of test

To add more interaction to the cards I took inspiration from a tarot. Tarot cards have a long complicated history, they date back as far as the middle of the 14th century. However their origins remain unclear. They most likely started out as a regular deck of playing cards, but their origins are as mysterious as the cards. As late as the 18th century the cards were connected to fortune telling and the personal psyche of people and to self reflection, and have remained like it ever since. This was a time when people were more open to the occult and started searching for more meaning and future predictions. We now see the same tendencies with generation Z. The surge of astrology, numerology and angelic numbers serve as a sign that the new generation is looking outside of themselves for meaning to their lives. Wanting to reflect and be guided. More gen Z look away from religion but are open to using spiritual guides. Still claiming that they don't really believe in them, using it more like a placebo effect where hoping it will happen will make it happen. What's the word? Manifesting!

The guide book is set up to help guide a conversation. Similar to the guidebook you get together with a tarot deck in order to read the meaning of the cards or an interview guide. Like in an interview guide maybe you don't ask all the questions or maybe the other person does not have the answer to everything, which is all perfectly fine. It is not a quiz. The point is to start a conversation, and maybe dropping a little bit of facts or opening up for self reflection. →

I set the guide book up with a few questions to each card. This would make it easier for someone without prior knowledge to steer the conversation. I wrote the topics in text over a regular deck of playing cards to make them easier to handle. And inspired by the traditional way of dealing a tarot deck you would pick out three cards, then use the guidebook to “read” the cards.

PRO

The guidebook made it easier to keep the conversation flowing despite not having any prior knowledge of the topic at hand. Handling the playing cards was easier than pieces of paper.

CON

The text alone on the cards was too specific and had participants fixated, this could be from the lack of visuals. It is an abrupt start, some participants felt like they were thrown right into the middle of a story.

CONCLUSION

There arose a need for more visuals and setting the stage before diving into the cards.



FIGURE 24: Topics illustrated on cardboard

Final round of test

To set the story of the game I again drew inspiration from a popular card game, this time dungeons and dragons. Both tarot and dungeons and dragons are methods that use cards to tell a story and invite the participants in to create an imagined scenario.

Dungeons and dragons is a game where all you need is playing cards, a dice, friends and your imagination. It is set up around a fictional story. The dungeons master or narrator starts by telling everyone their immediate surroundings and the participants then make decisions on what the next move should be. A dice is rolled to determine if the action was successful or not and the narrator continues on a story in that direction. There are no illustrations or guides to what the surroundings look like so it is all up to the participants to create a visual image. This idea of leaving it up to the individual to make the picture is interesting to bring into the tool for reflection. As you paint the picture yourself you have an understanding of why all the elements are there and what their purpose is. Thus making it easier to reflect around your own position in relation to this.



In the guidebook I added a backstory. This comes after the step by step on how to play and is meant to set the mood before flipping over the cards and diving into the questions. I added an intro to each card and follow up questions to help the players dig a little deeper while having a conversation and adding answers to questions that have a clear answer.

I made the cards more visually appealing and colourful. The bright colours makes it feel less like a serious game that you need to get correct. The simple illustrations give the players a quick understanding of what it is about, supported by a title.

I hand drew these out on thicker pieces of cardboard, a little bigger than regular playing cards but smaller than the first round of test to give more of an impact in use. While still keeping it a rough so it would be easier for participants to give honest feedback while testing.

After each test I did adjustments to the guidebook to make it as clear as possible in use.

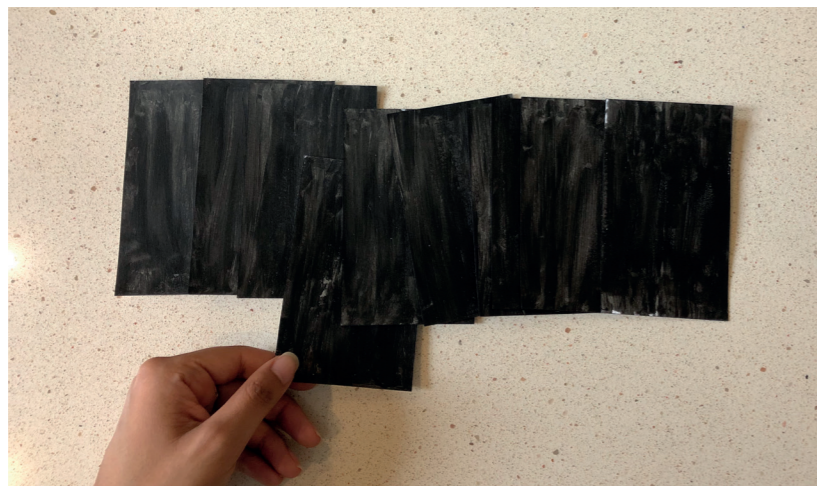


FIGURE 25: Spread out the cards and pick three



FIGURE 26: Place the three cards facing down, and turn one over at a time.



FIGURE 27: Find the matching card in the guidebook and start a conversation.



FIGURE 28: Mockup of the 3 scenarios.

:scenarios

Concept

Inspired by card games and service design tools I would like to present you with 3 scenarios. A self reflective card game designed to help better prepare volunteers travelling abroad. Shuffle the deck of cards, pick out three possible scenarios for your up coming trip and use the guidebook for questions related to your cards.

Bright colours reflect the lighthearted manner of this approach. Although lighthearted it has the potential to greatly impact the volunteers journey. Having the right expectations will make the trip feel safer and increase the ability to contribute to the workspace.

The goal is not to point a finger or demand the correct answer. The cards are there to help the volunteer gain a better understanding of a possible scenario.

Location, location, location

Location and timing are two important factors. If we start the reflection process too early it might be forgotten and not brought to good use, and too late there will be no time to process the reflection before travelling. If the reflection takes place in a busy or stressful environment it might become hard to take the time you need to properly reflect.

Most organisations unrelated to the size of volunteers already have in place some method to prepare the volunteers before they travel. This is where the volunteers would start doing all the necessary things like visa applications and receive more practical information. It is not uncommon to have a segment in their program on how to ethically conduct volunteering. This is mostly talks by former volunteers or experts or links to articles and books. Although it gives you the information on what to do, it does not give the volunteers the incentive to further reflect on how they would react in such situations. This is a method that I see repeated in several organisations with a lot of experience of preparing volunteers.

The 3 scenarios game is designed to easily be implemented as part of the existing practice allowing it to come as a natural part of the organisational procedure. It can be dealt out to a group of two volunteers in a seminar or gathering or sent home as a starter kit to prepare for a volunteer experience.

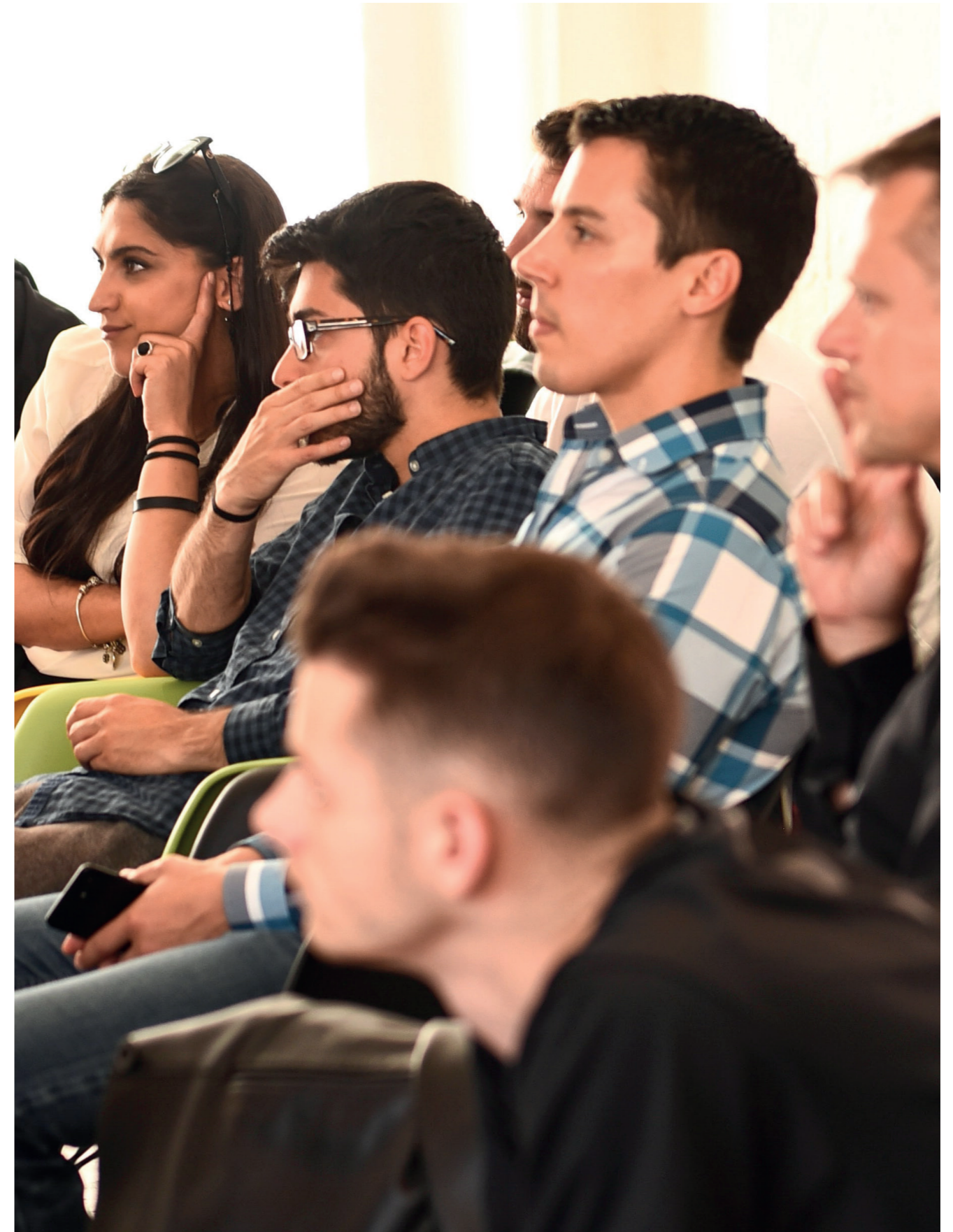


FIGURE 28: Photo by M Accelerator
Published September 8, 2020, unsplash.com/photos/zJYMJIrQYTE

The deck

The deck currently consists of 14 cards with one topic per card. The topics are pulled directly from my research on what local organisations and volunteers wish they were better prepared for. For example the orphanage saying that very few of the volunteers are willing to help wash clothes, because they do it by hand and the volunteers would rather play. But when you have thirty kids to take care of this is an important chore that they should be willing to do. When choosing topics I also considered how relatable they are to western culture making it easier to reflect upon without prior knowledge.

Each front (figure 30) has a strong individual colour. This gives a strong juxtaposition to the backside in order to give a playful feel each time you flip the cards over and see a new vibrant colour combination. The clear colours make it easier to differentiate the cards from each other when searching for it in the guidebook. The simplicity of the illustrations lets the colours do most of the work while indicating the theme, supported by a title. The back (figure 32) has the continent and emphasis on which area this deck is created for.

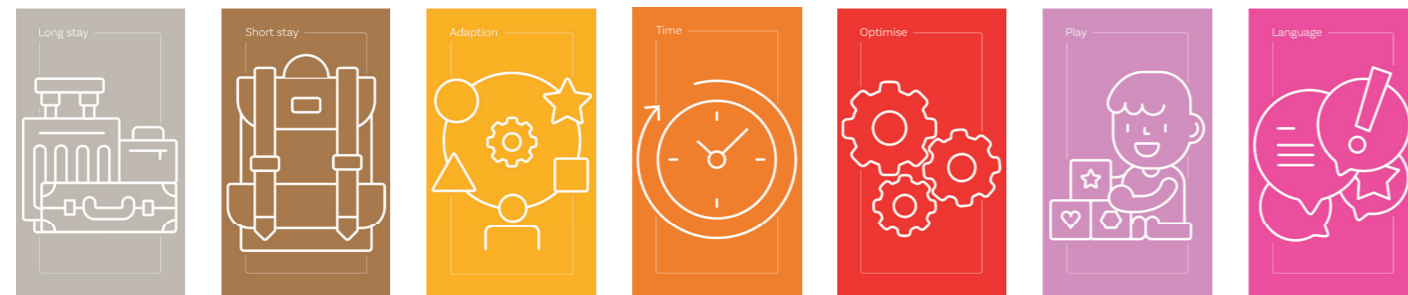


FIGURE 30: Front side of all the cards in the deck.



FIGURE 31: Front side of deck



FIGURE 32: Back side of deck

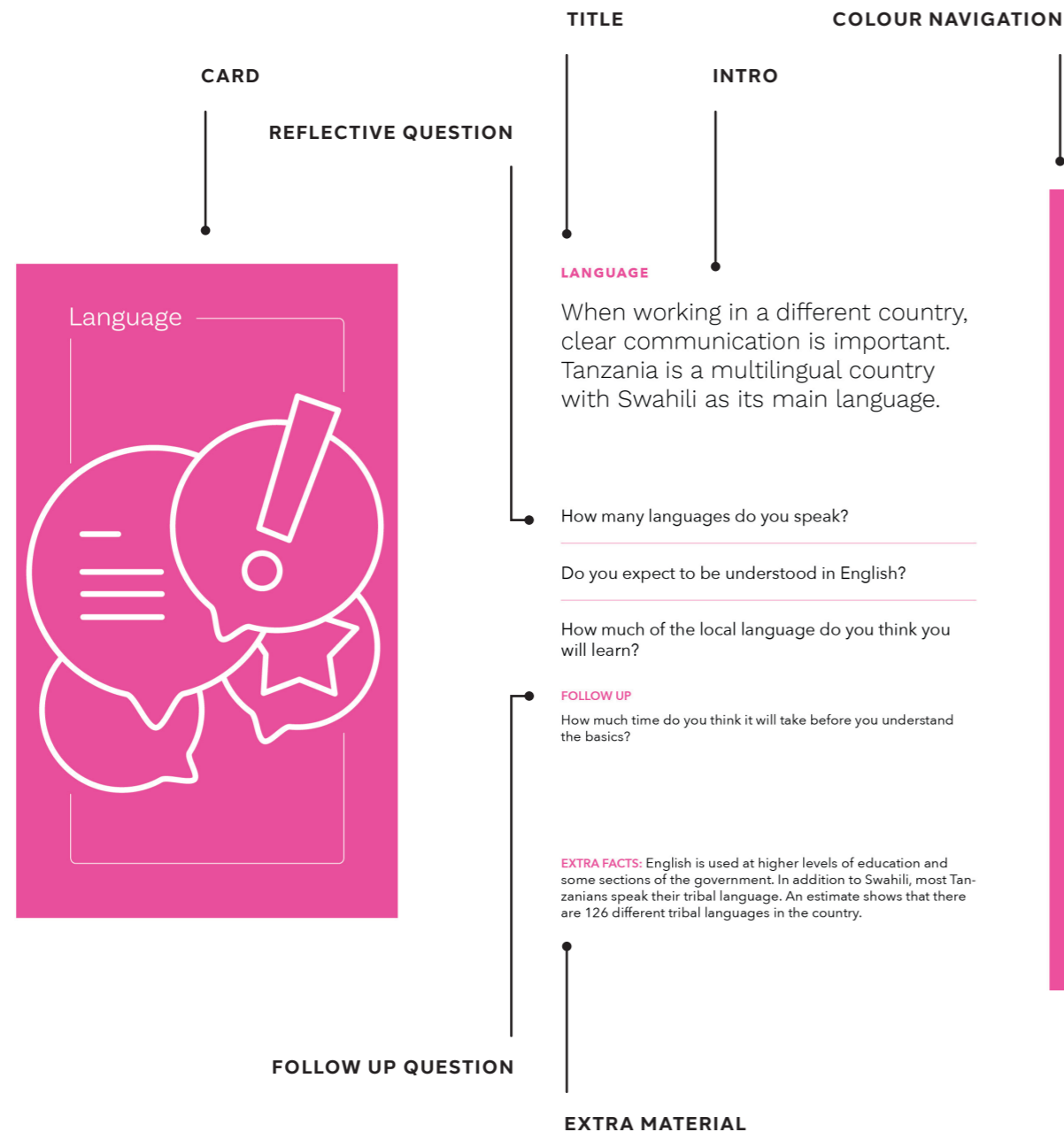


FIGURE 33: Sample from guidebook

The guidebook

The guidebook is a tool to help read and reflect on the cards. Each page follows this standard set up like shown on figure 33.

Navigation on the right side lets you easily flip through to find the colour matching the card. The cards are positioned by colour for visual ease.

The pages are designed to support more cards in a deck, the more cards, the more colours and the more difficult it will be to identify by colour alone. Therefore the card itself is on the left side so if you are in doubt or colour-blind you can search in other ways. Supported by a title that gives you more options so you can decide which method of identification is the easiest for you.

The introductory text sets the context for the topic related to that specific card. Below the introduction comes the reflective questions and follow up questions if there are any. A line visually divides each reflective question.

This is the standard set up of each page. However each card has different elements so the pages vary. Some vary in number of questions, type of follow up question like for example "if yes" or "if no" and different type of facts. Some could emphasize if you get a specific combination of cards like for example a long stay after a short stay: "In combination with short stay suggest that they can do two trips.". Extra material that is factual is at the bottom and extra material that is for the reader to know before moving on to the questions are under the introduction.

Instructions

In the context of meeting new people and cooperating it is important that the game is simple to understand and easy to start. The rules are guidance for an interactive way to use the deck but it can be used in whatever way feels most comfortable. Some of the tests I conducted showed that people got curious about further questions after going through the three cards so they continued just following the guidebook. Which is absolutely fine, the goal is to start the reflection process. The cards are a way to limit the amount of questions and make it more interactive on both sides.

On the right are the steps as they are displayed in the guidebook.

STEP 1
Position yourself opposite each other with a flat surface like a table or floor between you.



STEP 2
Player one reads out loud the backstory (on the next page) then spreads out the cards.



STEP 3
Player two pulls out three cards from the deck but keeps them facing down.



STEP 4
Player one flips the first card and goes to the guide-book to find the same card. He/She reads out loud the intro and starts a conversation by asking the following questions.



Quick tip: Look for the matching colour on the right hand side

After reading and talking about the three cards you are finished with one round. The amount of rounds is up to you, after one round you can switch roles, shuffle the deck and start over.

When playing alone place the cards towards you, read through the questions and reflect.

Remember there is no right or wrong answer. This game is a reflection tool meant to guide you when preparing for a volunteer trip.

FIGURE 34: Instrucitons

In use

How fluent the conversation is does depend on the participants and their willingness to openly talk about the topics. These are excerpts from two different tests where the language card was drawn both times. The difference in duration and reflection around the questions is clear. There is always the chance that the conversation does not spark reflection. One thing however to be mindful of is that in the first conversation the participants were less invested in volunteering and travelling in general. This may be a factor that contributed to the short answers.

LANGUAGE CARD Two boys, early twenties

How many languages do you speak?

Fluidity two, but I understand four.

Do you expect to be able to communicate in English?

Yes. Oh, like if I come to another country? Uhm, yeah. To most people.

Do you think you would be able to learn the local language?

Yes I do.

How much time do you think it will take before you understand the basics?

No idea.

CONTINUED on to the next card →

LANGUAGE CARD Two girls, mid twenties

How many languages do you speak?

I speak only Norwegian and English. And I had Spanish in high school. So I kinda understand that.

Do you feel like you have had use of it?

Meeeh, I got use for it when I was in Spain once. But it was not exactly fluent communication. And I have used it at the school football games there is one guy from Colombia, so I talk to him. But more in a jokingly way.

But it is like that to get to know each other as well, just practicing a few phrases and words here and there.

It's only **something in Spanish** that means I am fourteen which was my age at the time. And that is kinda fun.

So English, Norwegian and Spanish?

And I am practising Swahili. I can absolutely not speak, but I can read

For real? Or just in relation to this test?

No, no for real.

Wow really?

Yeah, but I can't speak it. I can read simple sentences and understand simple sentences if someone speak very slow.

So fun! That itself is a start. Do you expect to be able to communicate in English?

I know that a lot of people speak Swahili in Tanzania and they also speak English. But I don't think I would expect everyone to do it. I feel like if i travel to England, US, Australia or Canada.. or maybe not Canada either but.. hmm I actually don't know.

What do you mean?

No, just if I would be expecting everyone to know English. At least England and the US. But there are people there that don't know English there too.

But people come to Norway and expect everyone to know English here.

Not everyone expects that.

No, maybe not.

But no I don't think I would expect that everyone would know English just like that. Guess it depends if it is a very urban place or more rural. Kinda similar to Norway. Where more people live there is a higher chance of people speaking in English. I don't know.

I agree. I also really want to answer these questions so that it becomes a conversation.

But it does kinda become a test for you as well.

Yeah, but do I expect to speak English. I think my intuition is to automatically go over to English when people don't understand me. And expect that everyone is as good at English as me living in Norway. Then it will dawn on me that shit, not everyone knows English which will be frustrating. But then I would understand that I need to speak their language in order for them to be more interactive with me. Okay last question: Do you think you will be able to learn some of the local language?

CONTINUED the conversation on this topic

Feedback from organisations

I sent out an email to several organisations with a brief summary of my concept and asked if this was something that could be of use to them. Although there are few responses to this date, the ones that did were positive.



Save the Children Norway have shown interest to use this as a tool to prepare their employees going abroad. We have set up a meeting in mid June to showcase.



Africa Impact are interested in hearing more. We have an ongoing dialogue on how they could implemented the game in their preparation of volunteers going to Uganda.

For these organisations the cards will serve as a tool to bring up the important preparational conversation in a lighthearted but impactful way. Sending out volunteers that have the right expectations leaves room for more efficient work and comfortable working environment.

The cards are adaptable to different scenarios and will therefore be applicable for organisations outside of Norway and east Africa as well. The tools main purpose is evoking critical self reflection when volunteering internationally. As this is sent out by the organisations there is also a need to take care of their intentions. They do ultimately want volunteers to travel abroad and it is not in anyone's best interest to make the volunteer feel like they are in the wrong.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this process I had an image of the white saviour as a knight in shining armour, proud and confident. Through interviews and observational studies this image has changed for me into a nurse on Mars, having relevant knowledge and willingness but nothing looks or works like it is supposed to. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to travel to Tanzania, as I do not think I would have had the same understanding of the underlying mechanisms by remote conversations alone.

In my motivation I stated that I wanted to find ways to re-imagine, reshape or rebuild volunteer trips. Not only to better the next generation's understanding of other cultures but to break the bond to the inner saviour that has been passed down through generations. I believe that by giving the volunteers tools to aid self reflection of what is to come helps to give a good foundation. Timed where they can start the process of understanding that as individuals we do not have the power to rescue others from a systematic problem alone. Problems rooted in traditions and lifestyles are out of one persons control. A key factor is doing it in a way that does not feel judgemental or accusing but purely as self realisation. This realisation will in turn encourage a form of understanding and integrity back to the local community.

I believe the 3 scenarios has the potential to spark this. The game currently is a good first prototype, but there is more work to be done. To develop it further I would like to add scenarios under each card introduction to set the circumstances a little more. This would need to be tested together with how many cards one deck ideally should contain. Currently the deck is only focused

FIGURE 35: Nurse on Mars



on east Africa but I see a possibility for them to be adjusted to all areas of the world depending on the need. Overall this is a good working prototype to present to organisations as a tool, but there is more testing needed in order to avoid leading questions and to assure an engaging conversation.

Researching this topic has lead to many open and honest conversations amongst interviewees, fellow class mates and friends about the challenges we encounter when different cultures meet. The willingness to learn and understand displayed is truly hope for a better future.

So for the big question: Can we save our saviours?

Short answer, no. But we can assist them in saving themselves. Setting the right expectations creates a mindful awareness of the situation at hand. So although the 3 scenarios game will not burn down the white saviour complex it could be the spark that starts the fire.

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A closer look at volunteer trips,
particularly those where a European
travels to an African country.