

Volunteer tourism in Cambodian residential care facilities—a child rights based approach

Abstract: Cambodia has experienced a rapid and uncontrolled increase in the institutionalization of children in the last decade. In this article, we analyze the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care facilities in Cambodia by employing a child rights-based approach. Four articles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child are chosen as framework to analyze two bodies of documents. We engage in critical reflections on the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care institutions in Cambodia as it is regulated, described, and reported. We provide a critical stance on current debates about the reasons behind institutionalization; the various linkages between institutionalization and volunteer tourism to care facilities; the (lack of) competence, training, and stability of volunteer tourists in care facilities; the interface between volunteer tourism and corruption; and the ways in which institutionalization and volunteer tourism reinforce and are reinforced by predominant Western ideas and ideals about childhood.

Key words: Volunteer tourism, children's rights, institutionalization, orphans, Cambodia

1. Introduction

Cambodia has experienced a rapid and uncontrolled increase in the number of institutionalized children during the last decade. Despite strong traditions of community-based care for the youngest generation, residential care institutions are mushrooming throughout the country. The number of residential care institutions formally registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) expanded from 154 to 254 between 2005 and 2015 (MoSVY 2016). A recent mapping exercise identified 406 institutions, accommodating nearly 17,000 children (MoSVY, 2017). This means that nearly 1 in every 350 children lives in a residential care institution in Cambodia today. The steep increase in residential care facilities has been linked to support from overseas donors (*ibid.*). In addition, many institutions turn to volunteer tourism projects to attract more funding (*ibid.*). In fact, UNICEF (2011), among others, has found direct links between the increase in children living in institutional care in Cambodia, and the increase in tourism to the country, where tourists often volunteer time or money to these institutions. As Carmichael (2016) states, the steep increase of orphanages mirrored the jump in tourist numbers over the same period.

Even though many of the initiatives within the volunteer tourism industry that involve children are well intended, seeking to enhance children's rights and wellbeing, it is highly problematic that the market is ill researched and completely unregulated (Fee and Mdee, 2011). However, the question of impact on the host communities is increasingly being raised in the media as well as academia (Kushner, 2016). The overall aim of this article is to analyze the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care facilities in Cambodia. We employ a child rights-based approach—focusing on four articles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) that are of particular importance for institutionalized children—as we analyze two bodies of documents. The chosen articles are Article 9 (separation from parents), Article 20 (children deprived of a family environment),

and Articles 28 and 29 (education). They are chosen due to the relevance to institutionalized children and reasons for institutionalization, and to the volunteer tourism industry. The two bodies of documents we analyze are current national laws and policies and recent reports conducted by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), intergovernmental organizations, and governmental institutions.

Our contribution to the field is twofold: 1) We suggest the application of a child rights-based lens as an analytical approach to analyzing the impact of volunteer tourism addressed at children. 2) We engage in critical reflections on the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care institutions in Cambodia as it is regulated, described, and reported in available documents. This article is structured as follows. First, we describe volunteer tourism as a phenomenon and present an overview of previous research findings in relation to it. Then we move on to a brief contextualization of Cambodia, focusing on the country's history, children, and rights. In the method section, we clarify our use of document analysis and a rights-based lens to analyze orphanage volunteer tourism in Cambodia. Then we analyze available documents according to Articles 9, 20, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC, and show how volunteer tourism in residential care institutions as well as the current situation in Cambodia may challenge their implementation. In the concluding comments, volunteer tourism industry is situated in a global context while we discuss the major points of criticism raised in the documents.

2. Situating volunteer tourism within academic debates

2.1. Volunteer tourism – altruism, egoism, or imperialism?

'Orphanage tourism' is an important part of the volunteer tourism industry, which has boomed globally since the 1990s. It is estimated that as many as 10 million volunteer tourists travel abroad each year, spending up to \$2 billion US dollars (Popham, 2015). While many organizations offering volunteer tourism opportunities are charitable, commercial companies

are increasingly entering the market (Benson, 2011). According to Wearing (2001), a tourist volunteer is someone who volunteers 'in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding or the alleviating of the material poverty of some groups of society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment' (p. 1). Most tourist volunteers are youth between the ages of 18-30 from the global North, travelling to countries in the global South (Wearing and Grabowski, 2011). However, distinguishing between a tourist, a volunteer tourist, and a volunteer can be difficult. Tourists can volunteer for a few hours or a few days, and volunteers can combine months-long projects with holidays (Farley, 2015). Simpson (2004) draws a distinction between 'professional volunteers' and 'gap year volunteers.' The former are skilled volunteers for organizations such as the United Nations who spend relatively long periods of time (1-2 years) and who often receive compensation, and the latter are inexperienced and unskilled volunteers who pay fees and who spend short periods of time (1-6 months). In relation to this, one might question whether one can be defined as a volunteer if paying a participation fee, or whether this defines one as a consumer purchasing a product.

Traditionally, research on volunteer tourism has focused largely on the volunteering experience, more specifically on motivational factors. Volunteer tourism is often promoted as 'travel with a purpose' and 'making a difference' (Ingram, 2011), as altruistically motivated tourism in contrast to commercial tourism (McIntosh and Zahra, 2007). However, studies have found that the strongest motivators among volunteers are self-centered (e.g., Schott, 2011; Sin, 2009; Wickens, 2011; Carpenter, 2015a). Enhancement of curriculum vitae and gaining new skills to improve chances of employment was the most important reason among volunteers in a rural development scheme in Nicaragua, followed by the desire to travel the world (Daldeniz and Hampton, 2011). Ranked as fourth, behind not knowing 'what else to do with their lives' came wanting to do something useful for others. However, as Sin (2009) emphasizes, leisure

seeking or self-development motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive with altruistic motivations.

According to Wickens (2011), there is a tendency among researchers to adopt one of two opposing stands when analyzing volunteer tourism. At one end, there are those who view it as a way of engaging in sustainable and developing tourism, contributing to improvement of the life conditions or environments of local communities. Among these, Wearing and Grabowski (2011) argue that volunteer tourism enables a more equal and inclusive relationship between the tourist and the 'Other.' Studies reveal that the interactions between volunteers and their hosts do indeed lead to improved cross-cultural understanding with the former gaining a sophisticated understanding of the local community and the issues they are facing (e.g., Jones, 2005; Sin, 2010; Wearing, 2001). As McIntosh and Zahra (2007) state:

With volunteer tourism, intense rather than superficial social interactions can occur; a new narrative between host and guest is created, a narrative that is engaging, genuine, creative and mutually beneficial (p. 554).

However, such studies emphasize that for fertile and reciprocal cross-cultural understanding to ensue, volunteer programs have to be carefully designed and managed (Raymond and Hall, 2008).

At the other end are those who perceive the phenomenon as a modern form of imperialism, fueled by consumer capitalism rather than an urge to help. Studies of traditional tourism have claimed that in processes of commodification and marketing a destination for tourism, international tourism operators play a central role in defining and determining the characteristics of the place and its people (Wearing and Grabowski, 2011). In relation to volunteer tourists' search for 'authenticity' (Brown, 2005; Sin, 2009), Ingram (2011) argues that this resembles conventional forms for tourism and could be interpreted as 'othering' and

exoticising people and places. Wearing and Grabowski (2011) underscore the risk of volunteer tourism to perpetuate, or even exacerbate, ethnic stereotypes. When volunteer tourists take on roles of ‘expert’ or ‘teacher’ regardless of their experience or qualifications (Sin, 2010), they risk representing the neo-colonial construction of the Westerner as racially and culturally superior (Raymond and Hall, 2008). Moreover, when presenting volunteers as central to development, locals are reduced to being passive recipients (Ingram, 2011). Volunteer tourism may indeed reproduce hierarchical distance and difference between volunteer tourists and host community (Sin, 2010).

2.2. Situating ‘orphanage tourism’ within a development paradigm

Volunteer tourism covers a broad range of activities. In addition to environmental and construction projects, working with children is predominant. This includes English and IT teaching, general teaching support in nurseries and primary schools, social work and health work assistance, as well as work in residential care institutions. Volunteer tourism is advocated as a development strategy (Guiney and Mostafanezhad, 2015; Wearing, 2001, p. 12). As other development projects, they are primarily initiated by countries in the global North, driven by the idea that social and economic progress as experienced in Western Europe and North America is the desired advance and destination for all societies (Ansell, 2017; Burman, 2007). Child institutionalization as a ‘solution’ was originally exported from the global North through international aid agencies operating in the global South (Boyden, 1997). Despite being largely discredited in the global North today, residential care facilities continue to expand in countries such as Cambodia.

Children hold a crucial position within the development paradigm, as *indicators* of development progress, *illustrations* of the need for change, and *objects* of policy interventions (Ansell, 2016). As children’s status as future citizens and workers is emphasized, they become prime targets of social investment (Qvortrup, 2009). Economics

have played a vital role in linking child development and wider economic and societal development, supported by studies on investments in education, health, and nutrition as assessed by the growth of national economies (Boyden and Dercon, 2012).

The global discourse of the child as subject of social investment co-exists and intertwines with the child rights discourse—particularly the right to education and participation—and is connected to processes of individualization, self-determination, and self-realization (Kjørholt, 2013). Volunteer tourism with children is at the core of this discourse where children are perceived both as subjects of rights, for instance to education and health services, and as effective targets of investment in broader development schemes. As Valentin and Meinert (2009) assert, rights-based development rhetoric sets the agenda in the work of most organizations in the global South, taking on the role as ‘second guardians’ who civilize and cultivate children. This not only infantilizes the children, but also entire people and nations (Burman, 2007). Orphans hold a symbolic position, as they have become the ‘quintessential vulnerable,’ conveying images of victimization, innocence, and lack of (responsible) adult care and supervision (Meintjes and Giese, 2006). ‘Orphanage tourism’ thus fits easily into the wider discourse of children, rights, and development.

Guiney and Mostafanezhad (2015) describe the current discourses around ‘orphanage tourism’ in Cambodia as represented by a ‘double movement’ between commodified humanitarian interventions driven by the volunteer tourism industry and involved NGOs, and a countermovement that is led by international NGOs, and intergovernmental and governmental institutions who challenge these practices. Although both discourses draw on humanitarian principles and human rights ideology (Mostafanezhad, 2013), capital forces are more vividly at play in the former, resulting in a neoliberalization of orphanages (Guiney and Mostafanezhad, 2015). The polarization in the academic debate around the impact of volunteer tourism in general mentioned above reflects the divisions of this ‘double

movement.’ Whereas studies supporting ‘orphanage tourism’ in Cambodia have found that institutionalized children and their communities benefit from volunteer tourism (Carpenter, 2015a, b; Emond, 2009), other researchers argue that the industry turns children into marketable objects (Reas, 2013) and that the institutionalization of non-orphaned children meets the legal definition of human trafficking (Van Doore, 2016).

3. Growing up in Cambodia—moving from human rights abused to children’s rights

Since independence from France in 1953, the Cambodians experienced decades of war and conflict, including the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979 in which between one and two million people died (Beazley and Miller, 2016). As Miles and Thomas (2007) report, the Khmer Rouge period led to an immense destabilization of a society built on close family and community networks. Many children were separated from their families, sometimes physically in nurseries, but more often emotionally, by being told that they had been ‘adopted’ by the regime and encouraged to denounce their family members. This period of conflict may have caused developmental insults to children, many of whom are now parents, reproducing a cycle of violence and victimizing a new generation of children (ibid.).

The civil conflict continued after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, and a peace agreement was signed in 1991. An election was held in 1993, but according to Vachon (2012), power was never transferred to the winning party in practice. The Cambodia People’s Party is still in power, with Hun Sen being Prime Minister for over 30 years. The country has regained some stability and has experienced immense economic growth, including a reduction of poverty from 50% in 1992 to a level of 13,5% today (UNDP, n.d.). The tourism industry is growing rapidly, with tourist numbers nearing 5 million in 2015, spending over USD\$3 billion a year (Ministry of Tourism, 2016). After 1993, the UN, foreign aid agencies, and international NGOs became highly active in Cambodia (Miles and Thomas, 2007). More recently, international volunteers have become a common sight along the tourist routes (Farley, 2015; MoSVY, 2017). Although

the government has provided a certain form of stability, Beazley and Miller (2016) state that Cambodia is blighted with poverty, corruption, and trauma. In addition, Hun Sen is accused of severe human rights abuses (The Guardian, 2015).

Contemporary Cambodia has a relatively young population, where 65.3% of the total population of 15.6 million is under the age of 30 (UNDP, 2017). Cambodia ratified the UNCRC in 1992 and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography in 2002. Cambodia has integrated the UNCRC into the school curriculum and the social work training curriculum. On a national level, Cambodia has adopted several laws and policies concerning institutionalized children and their rights, including Proclamation on the Conditions and Procedure for the Admission of Abandoned Infants or Children to the Centers (2001) and Alternative Care for Children (2006). In line with the UNCRC, the Cambodian government considers the family unit to be the best possible option for a child's development and wellbeing, and reintegration with families is a priority for children in residential care facilities (MoSVY, 2017). Yet the number of children in residential care increased from 6,254 to 11,945 between 2005 and 2010, with only 23% of children in residential care being orphans in 2009 (UNICEF, n.d.). Self-reporting by institutions in 2015 revealed that a total of 16,579 children lived in 406 residential care institutions (MoSVY, 2017). The great majority was of school age, and 53% were boys. In addition, nearly 10,000 children resided in other institutional settings such as boarding schools, religious centers, and temporary emergency accommodation.

4. Document analysis through a child rights-based lens

Despite increased negative attention, there continues to be a lack of ways to measure outcomes of volunteer tourism (Fee and Mdee, 2011). In this article, we propose document analysis of a specific volunteer tourism activity—volunteer tourism to residential care facilities in Cambodia—through a child rights-based lens. The United Nations Convention on the Rights

of the Child (UNCRC) is used as an analytical framework, analyzing the chosen documents according to four articles. Before doing this, we will comment on three methodological issues; the usage of the UNCRC as analytical framework; the choice of articles; and the selection of documents.

4.1. Reflections on using the UNCRC as an analytical framework

We are aware that the UNCRC has been heavily criticized for drawing on and supporting Western ideas and ideals, which are rooted in a specific understanding of children, childhood, and human rights (e.g., Boyden, 1997; Kjørholt, 2013; Liebel and Saadi, 2012). By using UNCRC articles as analytical framework, we also re-insert the hegemonic perception of this international treaty as of vital importance when examining and discussing children's wellbeing. We support a cultural-universalist standpoint (Kaime, 2009)—believing that despite acknowledging social and cultural differences and the Western roots of human rights, processes of globalization have rendered the concept of human rights universal. This implies that we recognize the infinite variations of understandings of rights around the globe.

However, we propose that the UNCRC serves as a valuable yardstick in analyzing the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing because it has become a main point of reference at all levels inspected in the coming analysis; locally, nationally, and internationally. The fact that the UNCRC is ratified by all nations (except the United States of America) is vital considering the phenomenon of volunteer tourism, involving volunteer tourists crossing borders and continents: These rights are valid in both countries of origin and destination, despite potential cultural differences. Furthermore, the UNCRC is not only ratified by Cambodia but is also adopted into national laws. Cambodian children in residential care have the right to be aware of and understand the UNCRC, as stated in the Prakas on Minimum Standards of Residential Care for Children (2006, p. 4). Moreover, the UNCRC works as a

vital point of reference when analyzing the chosen documents as both the volunteer tourism industry and its countermovement draws, directly or indirectly, on similar rhetoric of humanitarianism, child rights, and children's wellbeing.

4.2. Reflections on choice of articles

Most of the UNCRC articles have relevance for children's wellbeing in residential care institutions accepting volunteer tourists. The articles of the UNCRC are deeply interrelated and interdependent and should preferably be analyzed in a holistic manner. Yet due to the scope and format of this article, we have chosen to look at four interrelated articles. These are: Article 9, which aims to prevent children from being separated from their parents against their will, but also states that they should be protected if there are circumstances in the family that would see a separation as being in the best interest of the child. Article 20, which aims to ensure protection of children who have been deprived of their family environment, and to protect their ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic background while they are in alternative care. Article 28, which aims to ensure the right to education for every child. This should be provided in a manner consistent with the convention, including the dignity of children. Furthermore, Article 28(3) aims to encourage international cooperation within education, and to make available modern technology and teaching methods to all children. Lastly, Article 29(1c) refers to the content of education, ensuring an education that develops a child's cultural identity. We find that Articles 9 and 20 are of particular and obvious importance for institutionalized children, involving their rights to family, protection, and proper out-of-family care. Articles 28 and 29 are chosen because education is commonly reported as primary reason for the institutionalization of children in Cambodia (e.g., Carpenter 2015b; MoSVY and UNICEF, 2011; MoSVY, 2017). In this lies a tension between the right to family life and the right to proper education, which we seek to explore.

The four general principles of the UNCRC help to interpret and implement the other articles. Hence, we would like to comment briefly upon their relevance for the coming analysis. This study is rooted in Article 2 (non-discrimination), which the UNCRC applies to all children, including the most marginalized ones. Implicitly, the line of argument throughout the analysis also resonates with and draws on Article 3 (best interests of the child) and Article 6 (right to life and development). In the discussion, we briefly re-connect with reflections around ‘the best interest of the child.’ We perceive it as uttermost important to listen to the views of children in care facilities receiving volunteers, aligned with Article 12 (the right to be heard). However, in the current study we opted for document analysis for several reasons. Doing research with children, and particularly the most vulnerable ones, involves a range of ethical issues. We do not speak the Khmer language, and have not had the time and resources to develop sufficient rapport and trust among institutionalized children. Bearing in mind that these children are frequently exposed to temporary visits of volunteering foreigners, we concluded that the ethical risks exceeded the advantages. We recommend researchers of Cambodian origin to pursue child rights-based research with these children.

4.3. Reflections of choice of documents

We have chosen to analyze documents that are electronically available and that relate to children in residential care facilities in Cambodia and/or so-called ‘orphanage tourism.’ In some instances, we also draw on literature that is more generally concerned with vulnerable children and families in Cambodia. This approach implies that the following analysis cannot be read as discerning practices but rather the ways in which practices are regulated, described, and reported. The analysis involves two categories of documents (an overview is provided in Table 1, see end of this document). The first category (1) involves current national laws and policies provided by the Cambodian government, available online in English. The second

category (2) entails reports of various bodies, including reports by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY), which is the responsible governmental body for institutionalized children in Cambodia. Also included here are reports by two Intergovernmental Organizations: International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF. The latter has produced reports partly in cooperation with MoSYV and the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD). Additionally, reports by two International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are included: Friends International and ECPAT International. Where relevant, we also refer to the concerns from the Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee). The reports are chosen because of their relevance and reference to vulnerable children, institutionalization, and volunteer tourism, and the chosen set of UNCRC articles. All were published within the last decade.

As mentioned, by analyzing laws, policies, and reports rather than engaging in a field study, we examined how the impact of the ‘orphanage tourism’ on children’s wellbeing is regulated, described, and reported. This requires a critical glance on the sources employed. The Committee lies under the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and consists of independent experts who monitor the implementation of the UNCRC by its State parties. Part of the United Nations, UNICEF closely cooperates with governments, NGOs, and civil society. It has an annual expenditure of nearly \$4 billion a year, where over half of the humanitarian funding comes from government donors (UNICEF, 2013). Both the Committee and UNICEF hold powerful global positions in defining ideals of childhood and regulating it. Through technocratic analysis, intergovernmental bodies such as these are vehicles for surveillance, influencing ideas and in turn shaping the policy and practice of governments and organizations towards children and youth (Ansell, 2016). Another intergovernmental organization, IOM (2017) provides expert advice, research, and operational assistance to states and has an extensive working relationship with the UN at several levels.

Friends International (2016) originated in Cambodia, initially providing services to street children. The present organization develops social business and child protection elements in the region. It receives funding from its own enterprises as well as national and international donors. By far its biggest donor is UNICEF. ECPAT International (2016a) is an INGO with headquarters in Bangkok that works to combat sexual exploitation of children worldwide with support from a wide range of donors.

5. The practice of volunteer tourism through a rights based lens

In the following three sections, we will discuss how the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care facilities in Cambodia is regulated, described, and reported. The analysis is structured in numerical order according to the four chosen articles, drawing interchangeably on the national legal and policy framework (Category 1), and the national and international reports by governmental, intergovernmental, and international non-governmental institutions (Category 2).

5.1. Separation from parents

Article 9

1. States Parties shall ensure that *a child shall not be separated from his or her parents* against their will, except when *competent authorities subject to judicial review* determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child. Such determination may be necessary in a particular case such as one *involving abuse or neglect of the child* by the parents, or one where the parents are living separately and a decision must be made as to the child's place of residence (UNCRC, 1989, emphasis added).

The preamble of the UNCRC (1989) identifies the family environment as the best place for a child to grow and develop, and Article 9, as stated above, shows that separation from parents should only occur when competent authorities consider this to be in the 'best interest of the child.' In line with this, the Policy on Alternative Care for Children (2006) in Cambodia recognizes that:

- Institutional care should be a last resort and a temporary solution
- Specific strategies and measures shall be established to support parents to raise their own children and send them to school
- These strategies and measures shall also be directed to families, relatives and communities caring for children where parental care is not possible, in order to avoid institutionalization (p. 13)

The governmental stance is clear: Family and community-based care is preferable. Despite these policies, Cambodia has, as mentioned, experienced a steep increase in institutionalization of children the last decade. Nearly 270 institutions were counted on a national level in 2010, a 75% increase from 2005 (MoSVY and UNICEF, 2011, p. 12). Five years later, over 400 residential care institutions were identified, accommodating 16,579 children (MoSVY 2017). As most institutionalized children have been under the radar of the government until recent national mappings (MoSVY 2017), it is evident that there has been no ‘competent authorities subject to judicial review’ as stated in the article to determine whether it is in the child’s best interest to move away from family. Reports by the Committee (2011), UNICEF (2009), UNICEF and MoSVY (2011), and MoSVY (2016, 2017) refer to stats that indicate that 77% of the nearly 12,000 children in residential care in 2009 have *at least* one living parent. In the words of MoSVY (2016): “As it is known that most of the children living in residential care in Cambodia are actually not orphans, it is essential to promote family and community-based care for them to ensure their safety, protection and wellbeing” (p. 15). According to UNICEF (2011), donors and residential care directors tend to be suspicious of families of poor backgrounds, believing that they will force children into labor or abuse them. UNICEF further argues that this entails that all poor children in Cambodia might be placed in residential care for their own good.

There is no indication of abuse or neglect being main reasons for institutionalization in the reports executed by UNICEF (2009), MoSVY and UNICEF (2011), and MoSVY (2016, 2017). In fact, institutionalization is rather perceived as an increased risk of abuse and neglect:

Global research has found that residential care has a negative impact on the development of children. It has been shown to result in delays in physical and mental development and to affect the long-term ability of children to find a place in society. Children in residential care are also more at risk of health problems and abuse (MoSVY and UNICEF 2011, 65).

Issues raised as especially problematic in this report included the fact that adults who work in residential care do not undergo background checks, and children sleep in the same room as the adults. Friends International also argues that the volunteer tourism industry normalizes strangers' access to vulnerable children (Farley, 2015). Likewise, the Committee (2015) is deeply concerned about child sex tourism to Cambodia as well as the growing phenomenon of 'orphanage tourism,' which subjects children "to sexual exploitation by foreigners, such as tourists and volunteer workers" (p. 6). This concern is shared by ECPAT International (2016b), which argues that tourists—seeking sexual gratification as well as child pornography—gain access to vulnerable children through several channels, including through "pseudo-care professions" where they have "child-contact roles," for example teaching and working, professionally or voluntary, with child-focused NGOs (p. 42-43).

Yet other reports not focusing on volunteer tourism per se reveal potentially detrimental circumstances for children in Cambodia. For instance, UNICEF's 2014 report from the Cambodia Violence Against Children Survey 2013 reveals that sexual abuse in childhood is significant among Cambodian children, as more than 6% of girls and 5% of boys aged 13 to 17 reported at least one experience of sexual abuse. Another NGO-initiated and funded survey

among nearly 1,400 Cambodian school children found that 43% had experienced physical punishment by parents (Miles and Thomas, 2007). A report by the IOM found that 10% of children in Cambodian childcare facilities (not necessarily targeted for volunteer tourism) cited sexual abuse or domestic violence as reasons for institutionalization (Boyle, 2009). As ECPAT (2016b) emphasizes, the main problem regarding sexual abuse of children in Southeast Asia is not tourists or volunteers, but residents. As such, a sole focus on orphan status, as in the cases of UNICEF and MoSVY's reports on institutional care, might obscure other reasons for institutionalization.

The most common reasons for institutionalization mentioned in the reports by UNICEF (2009), MoSVY and UNICEF (2011), and MoSVY (2016, 2017) are poverty and lack of educational opportunities. This is supported by a study conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and Columbia University (cited in MoSVY, 2017) in 2015, which found that 75% of 13 to 17-year-olds named either escape from poverty or educational opportunities as the primary reason for entering residential care. MoSVY (2017) underscores that the fact that the great majority of institutionalized children are of school age supports this. By institutionalizing children for education, Article 9 conflicts with Article 28, and children's right to education (further discussed below). According to Carpenter (2015b), the institutionalization of children for education is a cultural norm in Cambodia, bearing similarities with the idea of boarding schools. However, MoSVY (2017) argues that there are strong community-based mechanisms to care for children in Cambodia. On a more general basis, UNICEF (2009, p. 162) emphasizes cultural expectations of the extended family to partake in childrearing practices and teach children values. UNICEF (2009, p. 165) highlights that intergenerational duties of care is legally anchored through Cambodia's Constitution and Law on Marriage and Family (1989), which stipulate the duties of parents to raise and take care of their children as well as children's reciprocal duty to take care of their elderly parents, resonant with Khmer

tradition. Following the line of reasoning of MoSVY and UNICEF, institutionalization of children might jeopardize the quality of intergenerational relations and provoke rupture of vital, traditional care relations.

The study conducted by IOM (Boyle, 2009), interviewing over 80 institutionalized children in Cambodia, revealed that while nearly all children expressed a predilection towards living at the residential care facilities rather than at home. Their three most cited reasons were ranked as following: (1) better living conditions, (2) more food, and (3) opportunity to attend school. This suggests that the higher standard of living conditions may act as a hindrance in the reintegration of children into their families and communities of origin. The report also suggests that some residential care facilities enroll children vaguely categorized as ‘at risk’ to fill up the residency if they do not have ‘acquired’ the planned number of clients of the intended target group.

Friends International links the recent increase in institutionalization of children directly to an increase in international volunteer tourist arrivals, as “international volunteering has been identified as a key driver in the expansion of orphanages and children’s residential centers in Cambodia” (Farley 2015, p. 1). Although the volunteers might have good intentions, they increase the demand for children they can ‘help,’ intensifying the institutionalization of children. This is supported by MoSVY’s (2017) recent geographical mapping of residential care institutions in the country, where popular tourist destinations are heavily over-represented in number of registered facilities, where Phnom Penh and Siem Reap alone account for 49% of the overall number. The same regions are also over-represented in terms of contracting volunteers in residential care institutions.

The Proclamation on the Conditions and Procedure for the Admission of Abandoned Infants or Children to the Centers (2001) by the Cambodian government, states in Article 15 that

Anyone who makes use of an opportunity to adopt infant/child in the villages or communes in consideration of money or materials as donation to the parents and alters documents by changing the story into the facts that the infant/child is abandoned shall be totally prohibited. If there is, it shall be considered as Child Trafficking (p. 3).

Thus, the institutionalization of children under false pretences and with altered documents is prohibited. Yet this type of institutionalization of children is commonly used to provide enough children for volunteers to ‘help’. This is in line with Van Doore (2016), who argues that children who are not orphans, but sent to an orphanage on deceptive grounds or with fraudulent papers to accommodate an orphan status, are victims of human trafficking for economic reasons. A range of institutions and organizations are concerned with the implementation of the law. As MoSVY (2017) reports, the fact that 38% of orphanages operate outside national regulatory frameworks hampers the implementation. UNICEF (2009) criticizes the lack of sanctions available if NGOs fail to meet the minimum national standards while the Committee (2011, §16) links the lack of control and monitoring to corruption, explicitly expressing concern about the corruption diverting resources from child protection and about social services being outsourced to development partners.

5.2.Children deprived of a family environment

Article 20

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be *entitled to special protection and assistance from the state*.
3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of *continuity in a child's upbringing* and to *the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background* (UNCRC, 1989, emphasis added).

Children are entitled to special protection and assistance from the state if they for some reason have been temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment. These rights are echoed in Cambodian law and policy (further discussed below). According to the critique of ‘orphanage tourism’ in the country, institutions contracting volunteer tourists from abroad are jeopardizing their chances to uphold this article in three ways. First, the entitlement of special protection and assistance. To uphold this paragraph, educated and experienced staff are required (see Sandberg, 2015). The recruitment and teaching processes of new employees in residential care institutions are currently regulated in the Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children (2008). The document states that professional caregivers shall receive training on, amongst other things, ‘orientation related to childcare skills and regular capacity-building on child development and caring, in particular specialized care for vulnerable children such as training on disabilities, abuse, HIV/AIDS’ and ‘counselling and the importance of listening and how to listen to children’ (p. 8). Yet, MoSVY (2017) points out that experience in the field of childcare is not a requirement. In addition, the persistent lack of governmental control and monitoring mentioned earlier enables the recruitment of unskilled, short-term volunteers, who work as ‘social workers’ with vulnerable children (see also Sin, 2010).

The second difficulty raised in reports relates to the desirability of *continuity* in the upbringing of a child. Friends International expresses concern over the rapid turnover of unskilled volunteers who often work for short periods, strongly inhibiting stability and continuity in care relations (Farley, 2015). While the volunteer may consider two, three, or even six months to be a long time to develop rapport with the children, the child is getting new caregivers several times a year. Likewise, MoSVY and UNICEF (2011) refer to research that shows that children living in residential care often experience mental and physical challenges due to lack of attachment to a caregiver:

Research has consistently shown that children who grow up in residential care, no matter how good the conditions or how caring the staff, are at significant risk of harm ... and that this ‘neglect and damage caused by early privation of parenting is equivalent to violence to a young child’ (WHO, 2005, in MoSVY and UNICEF 2011, 24).

Furthermore, they assert that problems with lack of attachment to a caregiver can cause Reactive Attachment Disorder, which causes children to either become emotionally withdrawn or indiscriminately social, meaning they can be “unusually friendly towards others, including strangers” (p. 20). Carpenter (2015a, b) disclaims this when it comes to residential care institutions in Cambodia, stating that most children do not move into residential care until they are of school age. She argues that attachment disorder cannot happen to a child aged five and above, and that the sadness a child may feel when a volunteer leaves should not be perceived as mental harm (ibid). Emond’s (2009) research, on the other hand, reveals that institutionalized children in Cambodia speak of the lack of loving relationships with adults as a negative aspect of life in an institution. Feeling sad is not necessarily harmful to a child, but being unable to have close, loving relationship with adults over long periods is a risk factor for mental harm (ibid.). The volunteers seldom make up for this, as they are not a constant in the children’s lives. Worth noticing in regard to this matter is the report by the IOM, which reveals that nearly half of the interviewed children expressed severe obstacles in communicating with staff (of local origin), due to staff being too busy, fear of approaching them or fear of being scolded, or not having permission to talk to them (Boyle 2009). This suggests that living in a care facility—whether surrounded by volunteer tourists or locals—entails serious challenges for children in terms of trust, confidentiality, and participation.

The third way in which volunteer tourism might impede the implementation of this article concerns a child’s right to an upbringing ‘according to ethnic, religious, cultural and

linguistic background' as stated in the article. The importance of this is highlighted in the Policy on Alternative Care for Children (2006): "Due regard needs to be given to the continuity of a child's upbringing and her/his ethnic, cultural, and linguistic background" (p. 19). The Prakas on Minimum Standards of Residential Care for Children (2006) also encourages children to learn about and exercise their own cultural identity (p. 5). However, taking into consideration the nature of most volunteer tourism projects—short with no educational requirements—this seems unlikely to be fulfilled according to Friends International (Farley 2015). They raise this issue by stating that few volunteers in Cambodia have much knowledge of the history, politics, and economic and social challenges of the host people. Buddhist beliefs govern most of the culture, behavior, and attitudes of the Cambodian people. The official language is Khmer, and many have limited English skills. According to Friends International, both the language barrier and the religious differences make it difficult for volunteers to adequately fulfill the requirements of the children's cultural, ethnic, and religious background being adapted into the alternative care environment.

5.3.Education

Article 28

1. States Parties recognize *the right of the child to education*, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; [...]
3. States Parties shall *promote and encourage international cooperation* in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the *needs of developing countries*.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, *his or her own cultural identity, language and values*, for the *national values of the country in which the child is living*, the country from which he or she may originate, and for *civilizations different from his or her own* (UNCRC, 1989, emphasis added).

Children’s right to education has been recognized in Article 68 of Cambodia’s 1993 Constitution, which guarantees that the “State shall provide primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools” and in the Law on Education, Article 31, which stipulates: “The Ministry in charge of Education shall gradually prepare policies and strategic plans to ensure that all citizens obtain quality education” (cited in UNICEF, 2009). According to recent numbers by the World Bank (2017), the net enrollment in primary education increased from 82% in 1997 to 97% in 2016—the right to free education for all seems to be moving in the right direction.

Despite political aims and national laws on free primary school for all, families have been reported to ingress their children in residential care due to the prospect of a better, Western-styled education (MoSVY and UNICEF, 2011; MoSVY, 2017). Both UNICEF (2009) and the Committee (2011, §65) are concerned about the quality of the public educational system, and report that it struggles with lack of equipment and qualified teachers, especially in remote areas. According to MoSVY (2017), public schools are often compared to NGO-led institutions who receive international funding and equipment. This provides support to Carpenter’s (2015b) argument on institutionalization for better education. This practice not only discloses flaws in the current public educational system, but also reveals the perceived importance of (a particular kind of) education among families in Cambodia, outpacing the necessity of growing up in a family context.

As stated in Article 28(3), the UNCRC holds the developed countries particularly responsible for supporting developing countries in achieving the educational goals. Key international stakeholders, such as the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, perceive education to be key for national development, believing it will ensure economic growth and sustainable economies (Ansell, 2016, see also Boyden, 1997; Kjørholt, 2013). The volunteer tourism industry and volunteers teaching in residential care facilities can

be interpreted as responding to this task, providing free teaching aid in developing countries. On the other hand, Sandberg (2015) insists that trained teachers are necessary if children's rights are to be upheld. Relating to this matter, Friends International are deeply critical to the lack of educational requirements for participating in volunteer tourism projects (Farley, 2015).

The content of education is specified in Article 29(1) of the UNCRC, accentuating the significance of learning about 'his or her own cultural identity, language and values,' 'the national values of the country in which the child is living,' and 'civilizations different from his or her own.' Although the content is largely ignored in national and international educational policies, undermined by sheer attention on primary education enrollment and literacy rates, there has been a recent shift in perception of education where education is seen as part and parcel of a socio-economic and cultural context. Rather than emphasising highly theorised, decontextualized, and globalised curricula based on Western education, UNESCO (2012, 2015), among others, highlights the importance of promoting cultural diversity and ensuring the transmission of local knowledge and skills between generations. This is also the trend in Cambodia. As observed by UNICEF (2009), the Cambodian government has revised national school curricula, seeking to increase relevance in its formal education by including life skills programs adapted to local livelihoods. A recent report by UNICEF and NCDD (2016) reveals a change of strategy towards identifying "local, effective solutions to build and strengthen their [community] resilience" (p. 13) against the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Friends International underscores that few volunteers are familiar with Khmer language, culture, and history (Farley, 2015), and it is unlikely that they can teach institutionalized children about their cultural heritage. This suggests that the competence of foreign volunteer tourists and the education they provide is 'out of place.' While it draws on and further globalizes Western ideas and ideals of what is considered ('valuable') knowledge,

it might also interrupt local ways of knowledge transfer and ignore local forms of knowledge, which is best transmitted through intergenerational relations in local communities (Kjørholt, 2013). The very idea of residential care facilities is imported in the Cambodian context and stands in stark contrast to traditional community-based solutions of alternative care (MoSVY, 2017; UNICEF, 2009). The fact that most of these institutions are sustained by Western charities or aid agencies (MoSVY, 2017) supports this line of argument. Friends International is particularly critical to this idea of Western superiority where unqualified volunteers' presence and effort is seen as invaluable 'aid' in this context while their (lack of) competence is neither accepted nor desired 'at home' (Farley 2015, p. 34).

6. A Janus-faced phenomenon? Concluding comments

International conventions and protocols have been ratified while national laws, policies, and regulations are put in place—all aiming to keep the institutionalization of children to a minimum and to protect the welfare and wellbeing of those who are institutionalized in Cambodia. Yet, as the last decade has shown, the mere existence of legal frameworks is not enough. In this article, we have suggested and demonstrated the application of a child rights-based lens as analytical approach in analyzing the impact of volunteer tourism aimed at children. By analyzing national legal and policy framework, and available national and international reports by governmental, intergovernmental and international non-governmental institutions according to four chosen articles, we have engaged in critical reflections on the impact of volunteer tourism on children's wellbeing in residential care institutions in Cambodia as it is regulated, described, and reported.

Our analysis reveals that the legal framework and regulatory bodies in Cambodia are in sync with the UNCRC in that the institutionalization of children should be a last resort, when all other opportunities involving family and local community have been exhausted. The steep increase in institutionalization of children is found deeply problematic in the reports by the

Cambodian government, intergovernmental organizations, and international non-governmental organizations. At the core of their critical stance are the reasons behind the institutionalizations, as most children are reported to have at least one parent alive and that the prime reason given is escape from poverty or access to better education. Other sources report that the country struggles with high levels of domestic violence and child abuse. This suggests that a sole focus on orphan status might obscure other issues. Moreover, it might indicate that primary reasons for the institutionalization of a child, given by the child, relatives or professionals, might conceal—consciously or unconsciously—other reasons of relevance. This shows the importance of properly regulating all residential care institutions and the processes of institutionalization of children by having competent authorities to determine what is in the best interests of the child, aligned with the UNCRC.

Another argument of criticism evident in the reports is the linkage between the escalating number of children in residential care and ‘orphanage tourism.’ First, while volunteers may have the best intentions, they increase the demand for children they can ‘help,’ intensifying the institutionalization of children. This is in line with criticism raised by scholars on ‘paper orphaning’ to cater to the consumer-driven capitalism of the industry (e.g., Reas 2013; Van Doore 2016). Second, international aid (money, materials, and volunteers) for care facilities is problematized as it causes stark contrasts in the Cambodian society. When care facilities provide a higher standard of education and living conditions than what the households of the poor and public schools can offer, then this can lead to institutionalisation. Third, it suggests that although most of these children are, most likely, enrolled voluntarily into residential care facilities by their family members, they might be blinded by Western inspired and sponsored schools and institutions, with higher material standard and foreign volunteers. As mentioned, escape from poverty or educational opportunities are the prime reasons behind institutionalization (MoSVY and UNICEF, 2011; MoSVY, 2017). This indicates a

globalization of a Western understanding of an ideal childhood, considered and promoted as universal. Childhood is understood as a period of life marked by innocence, protection, education, and play, which is also reflected in the UNCRC. This understanding of childhood may very well be irreconcilable with the realities of growing up in poverty. Family members seeking what is in ‘the best interest’ of their child discount and underestimate what family and community life has to offer. Bearing in mind the tourist boom experienced in Cambodia during the last decade, it is likely that the presence of foreigners and English tuition is seen by parents as an investment in the children’s future in the tourism industry. Whether the tourism industry can absorb the future laborers remains unknown, but receiving education adapted to local livelihoods is considered vital by academics (e.g., Kjørholt 2013) as well as international organizations (e.g., UNESCO 2012, 2015).

Yet another criticism raised is the overall lack of competence, training, and stability within the usage of volunteer tourists in residential care facilities. The analysis of the description on how volunteer tourism influences children’s wellbeing in residential care facilities by various stakeholders elucidates a paradox: The industry’s continuous flow of well-intended volunteers increases the challenges for the state and institutions to look after children according to professional and ethical standards. As Guiney (2017) stresses, it becomes difficult to protect children from harm and abuse in an industry where children are to be saved by strangers. Using unskilled, short-term volunteers working as ‘teachers’ and ‘social workers’ is deeply problematic as it threatens the livelihoods of local professionals in some instances (Kushner, 2016) and defines the volunteer tourist as superior (Raymond and Hall, 2008; see also Sin, 2010). Its agenda draws on paternalistic and post-colonial way of thinking. Volunteer tourism does not only export ideals and uphold Western systems of care and education, but also exports people—replacing members of family and community in the crucial roles of caregivers and teachers.

A last driving force behind the volunteer tourism in residential care facilities in Cambodia that is raised in the analyzed documents is corruption. Cambodia's recent history—riddled with war, dictatorship, civil conflicts, and poverty—is the perfect breeding ground for corruption. As one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International 2016), the implementation of laws and the regulation of policies is at stake. Corruption presents challenges for the implementation of the UNCRC nationally, with resources allocated to child welfare and protection disappearing in the system or being outsourced to external partners, according to the Committee (2011; 2015). Another problem is that the legal framework might result in false security, misleading donors abroad. As Freeman (1992, p. 41) points out, partially or badly implemented laws or legislation may cause children more harm than good. Bearing in mind the high level of poverty in the country and the fact that most residential care institutions receive considerable funding from abroad (MoSVY, 2017), it becomes apparent that the volunteer tourism industry as well as the 'orphanage' business might attract investors driven by economic profit rather than the wellbeing of the children. Mere economic intentions not only corrupt the system but also the quality of the institutions, as for instance by contracting unskilled foreign volunteers in short term positions. The corruption is not only enabled by the pervasive lack of governmental control and management, but perhaps also contributing to it. Corruption and ill management are intertwined, reinforcing each other. A profit-driven volunteer tourism industry—seemingly driven by the needs and wants of consumers (the volunteers) rather than by the needs of local communities (Popham, 2015)—commodifies children. As “anything that can be bought for money is at that point a commodity” (Kopytoff 1990, p. 69), the presence of and access to 'orphans' is prone to be the commodification of poor children.

In their most recent report, MoSVY (2017) launched a national action plan that aims to reduce the institutionalization of children in Cambodia. Of paramount importance is the

goal of safely returning 30% of institutionalized children to their families by 2018 and to register and inspect all facilities annually. However, as laws can be no better than its implementation, and implementation can be no better than available resources permit (Freeman, 1992), it remains to see whether this is feasible. As far as we can see, there are further dilemmas within this debate. First, since Cambodia as a nation heavily depends on the growing tourism, they must consider what impact stricter regulations of the volunteer tourism industry will have on the economy of the country, and specifically on the people who depend on tourism for their survival. ‘The best interest of the child must be a primary consideration’ (UNCRC 1989, Article 3) in doing this. When these considerations are made, the arguments around the four articles in focus in this article must be weighed against the considerations of economy, concerning individual children as well as children as a group.

Finally, it is important to raise the question of responsibility of the violations of the UNCRC in Cambodia in relation to international volunteers. The preamble of UNCRC (1989) states that international cooperation to improve living conditions of children worldwide, and particularly in developing countries, is important. Yet, the Committee and international organizations hold the State of Cambodia responsible while little attention is given to the sending States. Countries that have ratified the UNCRC send inexperienced volunteers abroad in a manner unlikely to happen ‘at home’ (Farley, 2015). As the first country in the world, Australia is currently considering banning volunteer tourism trips to orphanages (Yaxley, 2017). Indeed, ideas about ‘the best interest of the child’ are not only an initiator or reason behind volunteer tourism but are also at the core of a critical stance against it.

This article shows how the UNCRC can be used as an analytical framework in studying and discussing volunteer tourism in residential care facilities. Further research is required in this area, both in Cambodia and elsewhere. We have only touched on four articles

of the UNCRC in this analysis, whilst many other articles are also of high relevance for these children, exploring issues such as violence and sexual abuse, child participation, play, standard of living and social security, to mention but a few. In addition, more child rights-based research with institutionalized children is needed, enhancing their voices, opinions and experiences, preferably by local researchers who are familiar with the language and culture.

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Document title	Publisher	Year	Category	Themes
Proclamation on the Conditions and Procedure for the Admission of Abandoned Infants or Children to the Centers	Government	2001	(1)	Institutionalized children
Prakas on Minimum Standards of Residential Care for Children	Government	2006	(1)	Institutionalized children
Policy on Alternative Care for Children	Government	2006	(1)	Institutionalized children
Minimum Standards on Alternative Care for Children	Government	2008	(1)	Institutionalized children
My Heart is Here: Alternative Care and Reintegration of Child Trafficking Victims and Other Vulnerable Children	Boyle/IOM	2009	(2)	Institutionalized children
An analysis of the situation of children & women in Cambodia	UNICEF	2009	(2)	Vulnerable children; Vulnerable families
With the best intentions... A Study of Attitudes towards Residential Care in Cambodia	MoSVY and UNICEF	2011	(2)	Institutionalized children; Volunteer tourism
Findings from Cambodia's Violence Against Children Survey 2013	UNICEF	2014	(2)	Vulnerable children
Potential Short-term International Volunteers' Perceptions of Children's Residential Care in Cambodia	Farley/Friends-International	2015	(2)	Institutionalized children; Volunteer tourism
Local Governance for Child Rights: Looking Back Moving Forward	UNICEF and NCDD	2016	(2)	Vulnerable children; Vulnerable families
Offenders On the Move. Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism	ECPAT International	2016	(2)	Institutionalized children; Vulnerable children
Preliminary Data. Compilation and Findings: Mapping of Residential Care Institutions	MoSVY	2016	(2)	Institutionalized children; Volunteer tourism
Mapping of residential care facilities in the capital and 24 provinces of the Kingdom of Cambodia	MoSVY	2017	(2)	Institutionalized children; Volunteer tourism
Consideration of reports submitted by State parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding Observations.	Committee on the Rights of the Child	2011	(2)	Implementation of UNCRC; Vulnerable children
Concluding Observations on the report submitted by Cambodia under article 12, paragraph 1, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.	Committee on the Rights of the Child	2015	(2)	Implementation of UNCRC; Vulnerable children

Table 1: An overview over all documents included in the following analysis, where category (1) represents legal and policy framework whereas category (2) refer to reports by governmental, intergovernmental and international non-governmental institutions.