Bachelor Thesis

Impacts through ‘WWOOFing’ on the volunteer’s personal development –

*Increasing awareness of sustainable societal values*

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Abstract

This study focuses on volunteers within the non-profit organization ‘WWOOF’ World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farming, which provides individuals the opportunity to experience a sustainable organic farming through volunteering. As sustainability needs to be more valued within society and as individuals are seen to develop similar values from their social surrounding, the study examines how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development.

The material findings of 20 semi-structured interviews from previous WWOOF volunteers were collected and indicated four main outcomes: increased environmental awareness, community awareness, a sustainable lifestyle and personal growth among the volunteers. The outcomes are discussed in relation to the following main theories and concepts: sustainable worldview theory, symbolic interactionism, social identity theory, the Third Space and narrative identity theory.

The sustainable societal values achieved among the volunteers indicated that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, can contribute to improve the global community.

Keywords

WWOOF, volunteer tourism, socio-cultural exchange, environmental sustainability, personal development, community awareness, sustainable societal values, organic lifestyle
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1. Introduction

This chapter opens up with an introduction of how volunteer tourism is used in relation to identity construction and how this form of tourism can help to spread sustainable values among volunteers. Moreover a historical review of the non-profit organization WWOOF is presented, followed by a literature review of previous research about volunteer tourism and identity work, as well as related to WWOOF. After the literature review, the study’s research question and overall aim is presented, as well as limitations of this study are discussed.

A change of values among individuals is strongly needed for a more socio-cultural and environmental sustainable present and future (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Sustainable values are needed, as the current era is characterized by non-sustainable values like hyper-consumption, high speed, a culture of individualism and where economic profit is more valued than environmental concerns (Elliott 2014). Tourism is one way to spread sustainable values, as it brings people from different countries and cultures together (Bramwell et al. 2013). Common in Western society is the practice of volunteer tourism among young individuals, with the motivation to achieve a form of personal development (Grabowski et al. 2014). There are various possibilities through which to practice volunteer tourism, a different way is through the non-profit organization, WWOOF, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farming (Mostafanezhad et al. 2014).

WWOOF represents an alternative way to travel, as it links people together who want to volunteer on organic farms with people who are looking for volunteer help (WWOOF 2013). The idea is based on a pure exchange where the WWOOF hosts offer food, accommodation and the opportunity to learn more about an organic lifestyle in return to the help of volunteers. Everyone works together in the spirit of an international federation with a democratic foundation.

WWOOF stood originally for Working Weekends on Organic Farms and started in England, in autumn 1971. It started by offering a weekend trip to a rural English farm for urban citizens, who had an interest in an organic or rural lifestyle. More urban inhabitants started looking for an escape to the countryside, and small scale commercial farmers were pleased to get help on their farm. Working weekends on organic farms became popular, as it opened up the possibility for an exchange between host and volunteers. The first International WWOOF conference was held in 2000,
where 15 countries were represented. In 2000, WWOOF changed its name to what it is today, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Today WWOOF is established in over 100 countries, where volunteers from all over the world can experience life on an organic farm. WWOOF has become recognized as an important factor that brings more and more people into direct contact with organic farming and owners (WWOOF 2013).

One of the primary aims with WWOOFing is to contribute to a cultural exchange and to a learning experience (WWOOF 2013). Usually wwoofers stay at least one week on the farms, but it can vary from a few days to several months, depending on the interest and the relationship between the host and volunteers (WWOOF 2013). At the same time as WWOOF could be considered as a form of volunteer tourism, based on the length of stay and the place of origin among the volunteers (Mostafanezhad et al. 2014), WWOOF does not want to be associated with tourism (WWOOF 2013). The distinction is made as it differs from commercial tourism where tourists pay money for the place they visit (Lipman et al. 2012). Instead WWOOF is based on the principal of a pure exchange, between the volunteers and the WWOOF hosts (WWOOF 2013).

In order to achieve an understanding about how this form of travelling can have an impact on the volunteer’s personal development in developing sustainable societal values, it was deemed essential to pursue literature review with previous research in the context of conventional volunteer tourism and WWOOF related to identity work.

1.1 Literature review

This heading contains previous research concerning volunteer tourism and identity construction, as well as the impacts from conventional volunteer tourism. This in spite to achieve an overall overview about how conventional volunteer tourism, is used for identity construction in society. Further previous research about WWOOF is reviewed. A selection of previous research was considered to be essential, as it provided an insight and understanding about what knowledge in the context of volunteer tourism with the focus on WWOOF concerning identity development is missing. The literature review was essential for the formulation of the study’s research question and how this study can contribute with knowledge. Similar such as different point of views were taking in consideration. The main instrument to achieve an insight in previous research was made through the database of the Linnaeus University, ‘One Search’, and ‘Google Scholar’.
1.2 Volunteer tourism and identity construction

Hibbert et al. (2013) notice that tourism increasingly is used for identity construction, as birthplace and nationality are seem to become less important for identity construction. Tourism is argued to influence an individual’s identity, as identities are formed within the interaction and the present of others (Côté et al. 2014). Moreover Grabowski et al. (2014) point out that alternative forms of tourism, like volunteer tourism have an impact on volunteer’s identity, since this form of tourism involves a high form of interaction.

Volunteer tourism in the context of identity construction has broadly been discussed in research literature (Grabowski et al. 2014). Smith et al. (2014) consider volunteer tourism participants as those who want to help a certain specific environment and participate, alongside touristic activities. Furthermore the main motivation among the volunteers with the trip is often the desire to experiencing something new, to interact and to achieve personal development, this because this form of tourism enhances international cross-cultural understanding and an exchange of values (Smith et al. 2014). In line with this, Ooi et al. (2010) notice that the motivation to participate in volunteer tourism is to learn more about oneself as well as the desire of a re-evaluation of how one perceives ‘life’ and ‘the world’. However Sin (2009) argues that “many volunteer tourists are typically more interested in fulfilling objectives relating to the ‘self’” (Sin 2009:497). In this note Sin (2009) states that volunteer tourists are more motivated by the desire to satisfy objectives concerning their own needs. Wearing et al. (2013) on the other hand agree with Smith et al. (2014) when they notice the opportunity with volunteer tourism for cross-cultural interaction and exchange to occur. Nonetheless Grabowski et al. (2014) in their research about volunteer tourism and identity development, refer to the importance of taking into consideration in what period of life the volunteers are in. The period of life is regarded as important in order to achieve an insight about the complexity of the motivation related to identity development (Grabowski et al. 2014). Participants of volunteer tourism are typically in a transitional period of life, therefore it is argued that the main motivation to undertake volunteer tourism is to achieve a form of personal development (Lyons et al. 2012).
1.3 Exchange from volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism has become in the context of personal development increasingly criticized in the research literature (Griffin 2013, Hammersley 2014, Lyons et al. 2012, Smith et al. 2014). Smith et al. (2014) criticize this form of tourism, for being mainly profit-driven and having overpromising benefits. Hammersley (2014) argues within this context that a key problem in some volunteer tourism areas, is that it can reinforce cultural stereotypes and increase the division of ‘us’, the volunteers and ‘them’, the local population. Hammersley (2014) notices therefore the importance of a re-structure in volunteer projects, so that volunteers can learn anything of personal or social value. This because volunteers are in general young, engaged and from Western society as they show a willing to learn, but are mostly completely unskilled. Further this type of tourism contributes to the illusion that only the Western society can represent solutions to development issues (Hammersley 2014).

In accordance with Hammersley (2014) and Smith et al. (2014), Griffin (2013) is mentioning that conventional volunteer projects, run by Western organizations are often resulting in that the volunteers are actors of imperialistic hegemonic control, instead of actually empowering local communities. Volunteers who have been volunteering in third world countries are reflecting the context of poverty but do more realize their favorable life situation in comparison to the others, instead of contributing to a change: “The fixed perception of the other as poor and us as rich does little to inspire solutions to the poverty we witness, but placates us, content with our present” (Griffin 2013:870). This note tells that volunteer tourism does more provide a valuable insight for the volunteer’s favorable situation but that there is a lack of contribution to make a positive change for the local population (Griffin 2013).

McGehee (2012) argues that volunteer tourism potentially can benefit the volunteers’ personal development and the host community, as a meaning is given to the experience through social interaction where social values can be created. While Griffin (2013) on the other hand, notices that the desire to experience different cultures in conventional volunteer tourism, mainly is satisfied by the interaction with other volunteers and not with the host community. Lyons et al. (2012) are further critical into what degree volunteer tourism changes the participant’s world view and actually contribute to a less stereotypical perception of other cultures.
However to mitigate negative impacts resulting from volunteer tourism, new definitions have emerged in this context, solitary exchanges and social tourism have come up, with the desire to promote more robust forms of this form of tourism (Hartman et al. 2014). The aim is to develop a more balanced relationship that benefits the three major stakeholders in volunteer tourism, the volunteers, the host community and the volunteer organization (Hartman et al. 2014).

1.4 Research on WWOOF

WWOOF has not gained much attention in the literature. An ethnographic examination has been done by Mostafanezahd et al. (2014) of the economic and non-economic costs and benefits of hosting perceived value of hosting farm volunteer tourists. Mostafanezah et al. (2014) describe WWOOFing as an international movement that promotes a sharing of sustainable organic lifestyle and that opens up the opportunity for travelers to help local farmers and communities around the world. The outcome of the study based on the non-economic benefits indicated to be, spiritual development, shared lifestyles and interpersonal exchange relationships, while non-economic costs indicated to be a loss of privacy and the need to engage in the emotional labour associated with hosting volunteers (Mostafanezahd et al. 2014).

Lipman et al. (2012) have discussed WWOOF in the context of the so-called ‘slow tourism’ movement, in which WWOOF is regarded as a way to achieve a more balanced lifestyle and a personal growth. Further Yamamoto et al. (2014) are in their research, examining the motivations of the WWOOF hosts in the United States, to join WWOOF. The motivations were found to be a need for help on the farm, for social and cultural encounters and the desire to share knowledge. Especially the emphasis on sharing knowledge of an organic lifestyle was found in their research (Yamamoto et al. 2014).

A tourist student, Börjars (2012), from Linköping’s university in Sweden, has done an undergraduate thesis about how WWOOFing in Oregon, the United States, influences the volunteer’s identity through cultural and social interactions. The outcome of the study indicates that the volunteers achieved personal development through WWOOFing. The personal development was influenced by increased environmental awareness and by socio-cultural exchanges (Börjars 2012).
1.5 Findings from the literature review

The literature review has led to the insight that there has been much research about identity construction in conventional volunteer tourism, concerning the achievement of personal development among the volunteers (Griffin 2013, Hammersley 2014, Lyons et al. 2012, Smith et al. 2014). Research indicates that volunteer tourism has become increasingly criticized in the literature for having overpromising benefits and an unbalanced exchange (Smith et al. 2014).

WWOOFing is in the literature described, as part of the 'slow travel' movement, where volunteers through WWOOFing can experience an organic lifestyle, based on a pure exchange (Lipman et al. 2012). However is research in the context of identity construction related to WWOOFing missing. One undergraduate study has been conducted in the context of how WWOOF has an impact on the volunteer’s personal development, however this study exclusively focuses on a single WWOOF farm in Oregon (Börjars 2012). The literature review arises therefore questions like, how does being a volunteer on WWOOF farm all over the world influence the volunteer’s personal development? Can WWOOF contribute to a more balanced give take - experience than conventional volunteer tourism? In what ways are volunteers developing sustainable values through experiencing an organic lifestyle at a WWOOF farm? How do these sustainable values, in its turn contribute to create a more sustainable present and future in the contemporary Western society, which is regarded as needing individuals that promotes sustainable values?

1.6 Research question and aim

This heading presents the research question and overall aim of this study, as well as the limitations of the study.

The literature review indicated that there has been made much research about volunteer tourism with the focus on identity development as well as about the impacts from conventional volunteer tourism. However conventional volunteer tourism has increasingly become criticized in the literature (Smith et al. 2014), it is therefore favorable to achieve an insight about WWOOF in the context of identity construction. As the research literature indicated is research about how WWOOFing influences the volunteers, though missing.
Various questions arose from the literature review, however only one question is focused on in depth in this study. As society is in need of individuals that stands for more sustainable values (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014) and due to the fact that travelling is regarded as a way to have an impact on individuals identity, through the interaction of an unknown socio-cultural environment (Jun et al. 2012), the main research question of this study is therefore: How does ‘WWOOFing’ influence the personal development among volunteers and how does this lead to sustainable societal values?

WWOOF stands for sustainable values and includes a simple organic lifestyle which contains values which are in opposition to many of the current western society values (Lipman et al. 2012), therefore is it significant to examine how this form of travelling has an impact on the volunteers. This is spite to achieve an understanding of how volunteering on a WWOOF farm potentially could result into developing and spreading more sustainable values. The aim of this study is therefore to contribute to the missing knowledge within the context of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development.

1.7 Limits of the study

The research question focuses only on the volunteer’s personal development, it does not include the WWOOFing hosts. Due to several limitations, 20 written interviews served as a ground for the study.

2. Research methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology which was used to achieve an understanding about how ‘WWOOFing’ influences the personal development among volunteers. It also discusses alternative methods which could have been used as well as it contains ethical considerations related to the informants participating in this study.

2.1 Method approach

There is no research literature surrounding the specific case of how ‘WWOOFing’ influences the personal development among volunteers and how does this lead to sustainable societal values. Because there was no existing theory around this
phenomenon to serve as a framework for this study, an inductive study was made
(Smith 2010). To achieve trustworthiness and reliable material towards the study’s
research question an inductive study was considered to be the most beneficial method
approach in order to create knowledge and understanding around this specific case
(Bryman 2012). The empirical ground for the study was the material findings from 20
semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data was collected through 20 semi-structured
interviews, around the specific case of how ‘WWOOFing’ influences the personal
development among volunteers. As the study’s research question involves a complex
social phenomenon and could not be answered by a simple yes or no, collecting
qualitative data was the preferred method to achieve an indication related to the research
question (Åsberg 2011).

After collecting and analyzing the empirical material through a thematic
analysis (Buetow 2010), the results were compared and contrasted with selected theories
that could be used to understand the material findings (Bryman 2012). The comparison
of the empirical material with theories and concepts gave an indication towards, how
being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development
and how this leads to sustainable societal values.

2.2 Sample

To get representative and trustworthiness data towards the research question, a total of
20 previous wwoofers were interviewed. The number of informants was considered to
be a representative sample, as a sample reflects a microcosm of the population and an
empirical saturation (Bryman 2012) was considered to be achieved after 20 interviews.
The empirical saturation was achieved as the thematic method analysis of the 20
interviews had formed the basis for the creation of main categories. Another semi-
structured interview would not have contributed with a new dimension towards the
principal categories (Bryman 2012) related to, how being a volunteer on a WWOOF
farm influences the volunteers personal development.

To collect representative material related to the research question (Smith 2010)
only volunteers were included and selected who had volunteered at least two weeks in
succession on a WWOOF farm. The length of two weeks was considered as appropriate
since one week was assumed to be too short to examine the impact on the volunteer’s
personal development. Furthermore, exclusively volunteers were requested to
participate as representatives in this study, who spoke English. Age, nationality and gender were not included criteria’s for the participation in the study, as they were not meaningful for the outcome of the study’s research question (Bryman 2012) as WWOOFing is for everyone regardless age, nationality or gender. Taking this in acknowledge, age, nationality and gender were not part of the criteria to get represented material related to the research question. Although the outcome was that a majority of the previous wwoofers were females in their twenties. More specific, the interviewees were between 19 and 30 years old of which 13 were females and 7 males. Of the interviewed volunteers eight came from France, four from Germany, three from Spain, two from the United States, one from Sweden, one from Switzerland and one from Italy.

Once informant selection was conducted, the study's sampling framework was furthermore defined. Defining the sampling framework involved the process of how to contact the selected informants (Smith 2010). A purposive sampling worked as a ground for the study’s sampling frame. Purposive sampling was considered to be the most appropriate way to ensure variety in resulting sample (Bryman 2012). The variety among the participants of the study was important, so that the sample members differed from each other, which was important to collect representative data (Bryman 2012) related to how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development.

To achieve access to previous wwoofers the author applied for a membership in WWOOF Independents, as this membership provided the author with the possibility to publish an invitation through the WWOOF Independent newsletter. However since no more than one previous wwoofer respondent and agreed to be part of this study, other previous wwoofers were contacted through social media, Facebook. Through this social media, 70 previous wwoofers were contacted on WWOOF's official Facebook group. Having access to this group, opened up the possibility to achieve representative and trustworthiness material concerning the study's research question (Bryman 2012), as this group included individuals from all over the world who had done WWOOFing. However only 15 previous wwoofers were willing to be part of the study. One reason could have been that the Facebook group turned out to even include members who were planning to do WWOOFing in the future. Another negative outcome with this way to achieve access to previous wwoofers, was that it was not only difficult to get in touch with some of the unknown previous wwoofers, but it also included sometimes poor answers. A complement to achieve access to previous wwoofers was therefore made
through the use of informant’s convenience sampling (Smith 2010). As Smith (2010) mentions, convenience sampling includes people, the author of a study happened to have access to. In total four previous wwoofers, which the author had been in contact with through previous WWOOF experiences, agreed to be part of this study. There is a risk to use convenience sampling, because of the unaware of what population this sample is representative, it is impossible to generalize the findings and to get representative material (Bryman 2012).

Further the use of acquaintances is seen as problematic since there is evidence that interviewers can have an impact on respondents replies (Bryman 2012). However as the four previous wwoofers were individuals, the author had met randomly during WWOOFing, as it was exclusively by coincidence that those individuals used to be at the same farm at the same time, it was not considered to have a large influence on the outcome of the material findings. Moreover together with the purposive sampling, it was considered that representative material could get achieved for the study as well as it could serve as a ground for further studies.

2.3 Semi-structured interviews

To achieve qualitative material to the study’s research question a semi-structured interview method was used (Bryman 2012). To achieve information concerning qualitative material the use of semi-structured interviews is favorable (Galetta 2013). Semi-structured interviews allowed the possibility to achieve an understanding of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteers personal development, in a much more depth than it would have been possible through, for example structured questionnaires (Brotherton 2008). Further by collecting information through semi-structured interviews, it was possible to draw connections related to this specific case (Galletta 2013).

In the beginning of the interviews, the informants were asked to introduce themselves by name, birth country, country and length of WWOOF farm. The semi-structured interview was composed of open-ended questions (Bryman 2012). The open-ended questions allowed new ideas related to the volunteers WWOOFing experiences to be brought up during the interviews. At the same time as the interview questions were prepared in advance, by deciding the ground to be covered and the main questions to be asked (Bryman 2012). This was important since the aim was to achieve knowledge
around the specific phenomenon of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development and how does this lead to sustainable societal values. To achieve as valuable and deep material as possible related to the research question, the interviewed wwoofers in the semi-structured interviews, had freedom in what they would like to express (Galletta 2013). As well as the semi-structure of the interviews allowed an insight into the interviewee's values, worldview and way of thinking (Bryman 2012), which were all essential characteristics for the understanding of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteers personal development.

All 20 interviewees were done through written interviews online. It was taken into account that it would have been more appropriate to perform personal face-to-face interviews, because personal interviews would have opened up the possibility for more interpretation, including observations from body language (Bryman 2012). As the research question considers a complex social phenomenon, little details like body language would have been important to achieve an insight about what the interviewees considered as especially important (Bryman 2012) when talking about their WWOOF experience. Personal interviews, would moreover have gained an improved personal inside (Smith 2010) related to how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development. At the same time as written interviews gave the informants the possibility to reflect upon their answers and the informants easier could express themselves, since they replied to the questions at an available time they considered as suitable (Smith 2010). To get as reliable and trustworthiness material as possible towards the study’s research question, it is regarded as essential that the interviewed persons feel comfortable while responding (Smith 2010).

Written interviews allowed further the respondent to answer in a well-known environment, by taking in consideration that many of the interviewees came from different countries, as English was their second language. That English for a majority of the informants was not their native language, required time for some of the respondents to answer. Therefore written interviews were a favorable way for the informants to reflect upon their answers. Another positive outcome with written interviews was that only, the interviewed persons voice and thoughts were heard, in contrast to personal interviews where some of the focus can be on the person interviewing (Smith 2010). At the same time as the author takes in consideration, that there where potential effects of personal and social characteristics when collecting data. Collecting the data could
therefore not be considered as being conducted on a simple objective base (Freeman 2014). As the author has a tourism education as a background, this specific knowledge was used to gain an understanding about ‘WWOOFing’ influences the personal development among volunteers. The inter-subjectivity related to the authors background, was helpful to for example ask relevant supplementary question when conducting the semi-structured interviews (Freeman 2014).

2.4 Alternative method

To achieve reliable and trustworthiness material related to the study’s research question, alternative methods to collect the empirical material, apart from the semi-structured interviews were taken in reflection. Two alternative methods were taken in consideration, the use of participant observations as well-known as an ethnography method, such as the use of a focus group (Bryman 2012).

Participant observation is regarded as a suitable method to examine a community through the attention of symbols, to achieve deeper and broader understandings of some aspects of the group and the culture (Smith 2010). Using a participant observation method would therefore have included field research (Bryman 2012), in which different WWOOF farms would have been visited. Observations includes watching, listening, taking notes and to be an interactive part of the community (Brotherton 2008). Therefore would this method have contributed with inter-personal insides (Smith 2010) about how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development. Furthermore this form of method would have been appropriated to gain knowledge through an interaction towards the study’s research question, since the research question involves complex social factors (Bryman 2012). Taking in consideration that human beings have a tendency to actually do things differently than they say they do (Galletta 2013). Participant observations would therefore have been a favorable method to achieve first-hand knowledge related to the study’s research question (Bryman 2012). However due to the need to overcome geographical barriers to visit nearby WWOOF farms, because of winter time as well as time limit and financial constraints, it was regarded as problematic to use participant observation for the material collection related to the study’s research question.

The second alternative method, a focus group, would have involved several participants comprised of previous wwoofers. This group of previous wwoofers would
have discussed a number of topics in a relatively unstructured way (Bryman 2012) related to their WWOOF experience. It would have been a favorable method to achieve knowledge related to how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteers personal development, as focus groups provides the opportunity for participants to probe each other’s reason and to claim a certain view (Bryman 2012). This in its turn would have opened up an understanding about why previous wwoofers felt about something in a certain way. Moreover a focus group would have allowed understanding the core topics (Bryman 2012), previous wwoofers considered as important and significant related to their WWOOF experiences, as participants collectively would have made sense of their WWOOF experience and construct meaning around it (Bryman 2012). This in its turn could have been helpful for the development of categories based on how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development and how this leads to sustainable societal values. However would a focus group have demand a lot of the moderator, as it is essential to have a balanced form of control over the group, at the same time as participants should be able to discuss free and in a relatively unstructured based way (Bryman 2012). Therefore as it was difficult to get a group of previous wwoofers together and an online focus group was considered to be problematic for each involved participants voice to be heard (Bryman 2012), semi-structured interviews were instead used to collect empirical material.

2.5 Thematic analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the empirical material from the 20 semi-structured interviews (Bryman 2012). The thematic analysis involved to find themes related to the material findings (Buetow 2010). Defining the themes was made from the outcome of the material findings from the 20 semi-structured interviews. The question from the semi-structured interviews did not work as the ground for defining the main themes, but might have influenced the development of the themes. The interview questions can be found as an appendix.

The first step in finding the main themes from the material findings, included to achieve an overview of the interview transcripts, which was made by reading each interview transcript from beginning to the end, as one would read a novel (Buetow 2010). The next step included to read each interview transcript again, but more carefully
to capture key thoughts and concepts (Buetow 2010). The author highlighted text and wrote in the margin of the text a keyword that appeared to describe an emotional reaction related to the impacts of volunteers WWOOFing experience related to their personal development. The emotional reaction was significant, as the research question considered a complex social phenomenon (Buetow 2010). After the open coding of five transcripts, the keywords were used as themes where new themes were added, when the author discovered data that did not fit into the existing themes (Braun et al. 2006). When defining the themes the author was looking for keywords that recurred frequently in the material from the 20 semi-structured interviews, resulting in an indication of pattern within the data that could be considered as a theme (Buetow 2010). This step included the first impression and thoughts about how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development.

Once all the 20 transcripts had been coded, the themes were: environmental concerns, sustainability, mindfulness, socio-cultural exchange within the WWOOF community, open-minded, balanced exchange, collective needs, organic lifestyle, change of consumption, connection with nature, individual responsibility and personal development. These themes were further sorted into main categories based on how different themes were related and linked. Further by looking for similarities and differences the author examined how the interviewees discussed a theme, like for example the exchange within the WWOOF community, in different ways, resulting in that the main categories indicated to be; increased environmental awareness, community awareness, change of lifestyle and personal growth. The results from the thematic analysis were compared and contrasted with relevant theories and concepts. Relevant theories were used to achieve an understanding about the material findings and in order to contribute with knowledge around this specific issue (Buetow 2010). Through the online databases ‘One Search’ and ‘Google Scholar’, theories and concepts to understand the material findings were found through the search of articles and books. The databases gave the author the possibility to find theories and concepts to achieve an understanding related to the material findings in an interdisciplinary way.

A disadvantage with using the thematic analysis method was that it was almost impossible to find themes that did not involve some interpretation on the part of the researcher (Buetow 2010). At the same time as some interpretation almost always is involved in social science research (Bryman 2012). Therefore is the author aware of that there were potential effects of the author’s personal and social characteristics when
collecting and analyzing the data. On the other hand the inter-subjectivity was based on the authors tourism educational background, used in a way to gain a broader understanding related to the specific case of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteers personal development. This because the inter-subjectivity was for example helpful, to asking relevant supplementary question related to the semi-structured interviews (Smith 2010).

2.6 Ethical considerations

All 20 informants were courteous about their information being used for the study, as well as in what way their information was going to be used. I thanked both the participants who wanted to be part of the study, as well as those who denied to the fact that they did not have a WWOOF experience yet.

Due to ethnical reasons, new names were given to the informants in the report. Anonymity allowed for participants privacy and confidentiality (Bryman 2012). Furthermore the use of real or changed names was not in any way significant for the study’s outcome.

Moreover the participants in this study did not have to answer a question which they did not feel comfortable with, as well as the freedom to stop the interview without giving any reason at any time.

The informants were further provided with the information that the participation of this study was voluntary and that being part of the study had not any direct benefit for them. At the same time as the informants were courteous about that through their help, the outcome of the study would become more reliable and representative.

3. Increased environmental awareness

After discussing the methodology which was used for this study, further the impacts of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influenced the volunteer’s personal development is discussed. The impacts are described in four main categories, which indicated to be the outcomes from the thematic analysis related to the material findings: increased environmental awareness, community awareness, a change of lifestyle and personal growth. This chapter discusses one of the main impacts, increased
environmental awareness. The increased environmental awareness is understood by the sustainable worldview theory. The chapter finishes up with a part conclusion about how volunteers developed increased environmental awareness through being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm.

3.1 Environmental values

The material findings from this study indicated that a connection with nature was achieved among volunteers on a WWOOF farm. The connection with nature contributed to increased environmental awareness and a change for valuing sustainability to a higher degree.

A majority of the informants came from urban cities and it was one of their first agricultural experiences. One of the informants Leila, 26, from Italy, mentions in the interview, that it was not until working on a WWOOF farm, that she realized the work it takes to grow food and why organic food therefore is more expensive. On the farm in south France, where she volunteered for three weeks, the WWOOF farm had a market every weekend, Leila mentions that one of the highlights of her time as a wwoofer included these experiences: “To see the result of hard work when there are markets in nearby villages and you proudly think: ‘I picked that tomato’ (Leila 2014).” Further she tells that the time as a volunteer made her more aware of the miracle of nature and to understand that nothing is for granted (Leila 2014).

Another informant Euan, 25, from The United States, notices that working on a farm makes one more appreciative of what one is eating and consuming. The two and a half months on an organic farm on Vancouver Island, Canada, made him aware of the importance to only consume what he actually needs and is going to use. The fact to be directly involved in an organic lifestyle resulted in his case in an awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability and into change of consumption (Euan2014). In line with Euan, Anna, 21, from Germany, notices that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm helped her to become more environmental aware and to buy less, but quality products, both for her own and for the local farmer’s sake:

I started buying more organic foods and more food from local farmer’s markets. Even if organic food is more expensive in the super market, I know
that it is because it entails so much more work, and I feel like it is worth the extra cost. (Anna 2014)

In this note, Anna talks about her increased environmental awareness, as it was a consequence from being a volunteer on an organic farm, as it made her more aware of nature processes and resulted into the insight of the importance to buy organic food and to consume less (Anna 2014).

Other wwoofers also stated that being outside all day helped increase their environmental awareness. Elise, 24, from France mentions that she felt an increased awareness about where food originally actually is coming from and that everyone can and should contribute to environmental sustainability. Elise tells:

I feel a greater awareness of the importance of taking care of our planet, our environment and our bodies. While WWOOFing I learned a lot about how harmful non-organic farming is to our planet and our health and I gained a lot of respect for organic farmers and environmental activists. (Elise 2014)

In this note, Elise tells about her increased environmental awareness and the insight how harmful non-organic farming is, after being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm (Elise 2014). In line with Elise’s note, other material findings indicated that especially, the direct interaction with an organic lifestyle, made the volunteers aware of the importance of organic food. Informants noticed the assumption to mainly buy seasonal and organic food after their experience of being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm. A previous wwoofer, Amélie, 22 from France, mentions that a result from WWOOFing was a strengthened food and healthy lifestyle relationship. Further in the interview she notices that she paid more attention to what she put into her body, after realizing the different taste and feeling after eating fresh harvest from the farm compared to eating food from grocery stores. Amélie remarks, that WWOOFing is an excellent opportunity to appreciate food more (Amélie 2014). Diego, 24, from Spain is another of the informants who notices “I try to eat organic and local vegetables. I try not to buy too much things. Only the goods I really need” (Diego 2014). Here Diego tells that he tries to exclusively eat organic and local vegetables as well as he mentions the assumption to consume less (Diego 2014).
Being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm resulted therefore to take a step back from the hyper-consumption society, as the material findings indicated. The experience to be a volunteer on a WWOOF farm resulted for the volunteers into a change of consumption. Timoté, 28, from France expresses that due to his previous studies and lifestyle back home he had always been concerned about a green, environmental friendly lifestyle, but WWOOFing has even increased those concerns. In the interview he mentions that there is a high possibility that he got influenced from the particular standpoints from the members in the WWOOF community, as he notices “You cannot resist in becoming environmental aware, surrounded by people who are talking about sustainability and individual’s responsibility all day long” (Timoté 2014). In this statement Timoté, notices that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm made him becoming even more environmental aware, due to the social surrounding, which was made up by individuals with sustainable values (Timoté 2014).

Consequently, as the material findings indicated, direct involvement with nature, resulted in a connection with nature which in its turn influenced the volunteer’s values, among others in increased environmental awareness.

### 3.2 Sustainable worldview

The increased environmental awareness among previous wwoofers can be understood through the concept of the sustainable worldview. The sustainable worldview concept refers to the need of changed individual behaviors and lifestyles for a more sustainable present and future (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Sustainability contains to live a way of life of consumption and production, which are minimally harmful to the environment and to other human beings, both here and at other places in the world, including the present and the future (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). However, research shows that lifestyles in general are not becoming more sustainable (Brand et al. 2013). A change of values or as Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) are referring, a more sustainable worldview, is therefore considered to be significant for a more sustainable present and future. An individual's worldview is regarded as playing an essential role in shaping lifestyles and behaviors (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Worldviews are playing essential roles, because worldviews in this context are understood to contain values like for example environmental attitudes (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). In order to increase the understanding of sustainable lifestyles and environmental attributes, an insight into a
worldview somebody is related to, as well as the worldview they are contrasted with, is therefore of high relevance (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). It allows obtaining an understanding of individual’s values in a larger cultural and historical context:

One sees the dignity of man in him assuming control of an objectified universe through instrumental reason. If there are problems with pollution or ecological limits, they will themselves be solved by technical means, by better and more far-reaching uses of instrumental reason. The other sees in this very stance to nature a purblind denial of our place in things. We ought to recognize that we are part of a larger order of living beings, in the sense that our life springs from there and is sustained from there. The notion is that sharing a mutually sustaining life system with other creatures creates bonds: a kind of solidarity which is there in the process of life. To be in tune with life is to acknowledge this solidarity. (Taylor 1989:384 in Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014:41)

Taylor refers in this note that different worldviews between societies co-exist as well as this note indicates individual’s assumption that there will be a technological solution for upcoming problems (Taylor 1989 in Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) argue instead to take a step back from high-tech innovations and refers to Taylors (1989) idea of the reunification with nature: “Bringing us back in contact with nature, healing the divisions between people, and creating community” (Taylor 1989:384 in Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014:42). In this note humanity is regarded as being part of nature, resulting in that a leading part of a favorable life therefore is to be in accordance with nature and not cut off from it. Lifestyles characterized by sustainable behaviors makes one therefore feel more in harmony with others and the larger order. Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) are further arguing that nature is seen as a great current of life, running through all things, whereby human beings are seen as the creatures, which in becoming aware of this can bring themselves into expression.

Volunteer tourism is described as a way to enhance social, environmental and cross-cultural understanding, resulting in a change of worldview (Lyons et al. 2012). However are Lyons et al. (2012) critical if a volunteers worldview changes through conventional volunteer tourism as the interaction with the local community and the environment are regarded to be limited.
Moreover do Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) refer to the correlation between feeling connected to nature and having an environmental sustainable behavior worldview. Since one cannot feel a profound connection with nature if one does not recognize an essential dimension to it. Humans that express a high connectedness with nature are therefore in general more willingness to change into more sustainable behaviors like lower meat consumption and higher consumption of organic and local/seasonal food (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014).

3.3 Part conclusion increased environmental awareness

Under this heading the increased environmental awareness among the volunteers on a WWOOF farm is understood through the above described sustainable worldview theory. As the material findings indicated did the direct involvement with nature on the WWOOF farms result in an increased appreciation of the miracle of nature and the insight that everyone needs to take individual responsibility for the improvement of the global community. In present days it is a common vision that environmental problems can be solved by technical means in the future, as this might not be the case, changed consumer behaviors and lifestyles are significant in order to achieve a more sustainable present and future (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). The sustainable worldview theory emphasizes therefore the idea that a leading path of a favorable life is to be in accordance with nature and not cut off from it. Lifestyles united with nature which are characterized by sustainable behaviors, makes one therefore to be more in harmony with others and the larger order (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). As the material findings from this study indicated is WWOOFing considered to be a favorable way, for volunteers to experience an organic lifestyle in accordance with nature, away from everyday modern technology.

Moreover as the material findings indicated, was a connection with nature achieved among the volunteers, by being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm. The connection with nature contributes further to an increased environmental awareness and resulted into a change into more sustainable values. This can be confirmed by the sustainable worldview concept, which states that somebody cannot feel a profound connection with nature, if one does not recognize a significant dimension to it. Furthermore indicates the sustainable worldview theory that there is a correlation
between feeling connected to nature and having an environmental sustainable behavior worldview (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014).

On the other side are Lyons et al. (2012) critical into what degree volunteer tourism influences volunteers worldview, as conventional volunteer tourism has a limited interaction with the local environment. However as the material findings indicated, due to the fact that previous wwoofers were directly involved in an organic lifestyle on a WWOOF farm, it resulted in a more sustainable worldview among the volunteers. Increased awareness of environmental sustainability and a change of consumption were some significant outcomes from this changed worldview, according to the material findings. Further as the sustainable worldview states, are humans who express a high connectedness with nature in general more willing to change to more sustainable behaviors, like lower meat consumption and higher consumption of organic and local/seasonal food (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). As the material findings indicated, volunteers expressed the desire to buy seasonal and organic food and to only buy things one really needs, after their WWOOFing experience, this in order to have as little environmental impact as possible. A strengthened food and healthy lifestyle relationship were other outcomes from the material findings, which could be related to the connectedness made with nature on the organic WWOOF farms.

4. Community awareness

Another significant outcome with the material findings was an increased community awareness among the volunteers, which was achieved through socio-cultural exchanges in the WWOOFing community. The increased community awareness is understood through the help of two different identity concepts in this chapter. Social comparison and social identity theory, as well as the concept about the ‘Third Space’ were considered to be the most relevant theories to achieve an understanding of how volunteers influenced by their social surrounding on the WWOOF farms. This chapter concludes with a sum up related to the increased community awareness among the volunteers.
4.1 Socio-cultural exchange

As much as environmental awareness, community awareness among the volunteers was another outcome from the material findings. Previous wwoofers noticed a rich give and take experience by being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm. One of the informants, Jacques, 30, from France mentions what many of the informants noticed regarding the socio-cultural exchange involved with this form of travelling: “It’s amazing! It’s a deep taken-given experience which develops a very good energy” (Jacques 2014). Further in the interview Jacques notices that working towards something as a group, while everyone contributed with different knowledge, resulted in an excellent exchange (Jacques 2014). Another previous wwoofer, Louise, 20, from Sweden summarizes her WWOOFing experience with: “It is a unique opportunity to try another way of living, to meet people from other cultures- and to discover things about yourself” (Louise 2014). In this note Louise mentions the unique opportunity with being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm to interact with different cultures. Further in the interview Louise (2014) tells that she highly appreciates the concept of the pure exchange, WWOOF is based on.

A majority of the informants noticed that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, was an enriching experience through the excellent possibility to get to know a new way of living. To live in a community with wwoofers and hosts from all over the world, felt like being part of a multicultural family, mentions Noémie (2014), 27, from France. In line with Noémie, another wwoofer, Raúl, 23, from Spain states:

I really felt lucky to be part of this network. People are all difference but seem to share the same values and the same energy. Maybe the fact to be close of the ground was positive to relationships. It seems to be connected. Actually I’ve kept relation with wwoofers. (Raúl 2014)

In this note, Raúl (2014) mentions that everyone in the WWOOF community came from different countries with different backgrounds, cultures and knowledge, but that one thing united the wwoofers and the host; the interest in living a sustainable life in unite with nature. The shared sustainable values created a strong form of connection (Raúl 2014). Another informant, Camille, 23, from France mentions that she kept in touch with the volunteers she met during WWOOFing:
I made great friends while WWOOFing. You are united by a common interest and a common cause. The people I met were people who, like me, wanted to learn about different ways of life, wanted to travel, wanted to be challenged and experience new things. Again, everyone came from different backgrounds or different countries, but we were all somehow connected by a love for food, a love for environmental initiatives and social causes. Because of this similarity, we all got along very well. Also, being confronted with challenging tasks usually brings people together. We all kept each other company talking and joking while working long hours in the fields, weeding and harvesting. (Camille 2014)

In this note Camille talks about the strong connection of the WWOOF community, as people with different backgrounds but with the same spirit and interest in sustainable values are being united (Camille 2014).

Further the material findings indicated that there could be some language barriers between the host and the wwoofers. Ambre, 27, from France spent some time on a WWOOF farm in India and experienced some language barriers with the host. At the same time as she mentions that it only made her experience more valuable and that it was a learning experience, as she learned to be more patient with people with different backgrounds:

It wasn’t easy because of the language (Hindi- English), the farmers didn’t speak English sometimes. But it was a real exchange. I learn more and the farmers were happy to meet strangers from every part of the world. It wasn’t a material exchange but more human. (Ambre 2014)

Noticing in this statement, that there were some language barriers, Ambre (2014) mentions that she still felt as an integral part of the WWOOF community and that being a volunteer on an organic WWOOF farm, opened up the opportunity for an exchange to occur and to get involved in the ‘real’ culture in the host country: “I like to stay with the family and learn about the culture. So it’s a really good experience. You are not just a tourist who spends his money in a poor country; you do something and you share (Ambre 2014)”. 


Many of the informants remarked what Ambre mentions in this note, that they felt different than conventional tourists and perceived themselves separated from mainstream tourists. One of the informants, Simon, 20, originally from Germany, mentions that he did not feel as a normal tourist but more part of the WWOOF community. It was a completely different travel experience, since you stay in an unknown country but while working with local people, you feel part of a community (Simon 2014). Further in the interview he mentions that the WWOOFing experience allowed him to stay at places he normally never would have suggested to visit as an ordinary tourist (Simon 2014). The material findings indicated that right from the beginning a majority of the informant’s made a distinction from conventional tourist, by choosing to travel through WWOOF.

Another outcome with the material findings was an achieved insight among the volunteers, of the importance of sharing. This in order to fulfill collective needs, as it in the end even will benefit the individual’s needs. Being part of the WWOOFing community included living with random people, one may not even have considered a conversation with under different circumstances. One of the informants, Laura, 24, from Spain mentions that living in a community with random people, takes away a lot of prejudices, resulting in becoming more open-minded. Everyone being friendly around you makes you to think in less individualistic patterns. Instead Laura (2014) mentions that she picked up from being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, that small little things, like a simple smile to an unknown person, can contribute to make the everyday life a little better. Another informant, Euan (2014) mentions that one of the enriched experiences with being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was to be surrounded by completely diverse people, which in their own way contributed with something. Further Timoté observes the feeling to share with both the host and the wwoofers from various different countries: “Yes I've contributed, because I've shared my culture and my knowledge with them and they did the same with me!” (Timoté 2014).

Moreover previous wwoofers reported a rich culture exchange occurring through interesting discussions between volunteers. Sina, 19, from Germany, mentions that while working as a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, one has endless time and since everyone is from different parts of the world many enriched discussion arises (Sina 2014). In accordance with Sina, Louise mentions that WWOOFing created the opportunity for a great exchange to occur:
You learn to have a certain distance on your life back home. Being an academic studying political theory, I spend most of my time reading books, not working with my hands. Instead of being the origin of conflicts this can be the starting point of a lot of interesting discussions. (Louise 2014)

Due to the lack of technology and modern-day facilities on some WWOOF farms, it resulted into that the volunteers spent real face-to-face conversation, instead of through social networks. The material findings indicated therefore that instead of sitting in front of the Television or internet the volunteers spent their free time holding conversations or reading books together, while drinking home-made tea with the ingredients from the garden.

On the other hand the findings indicated that not all volunteers exclusively reported positive experiences related to the exchange on the WWOOF farms. While the normal exchange is based on five hours volunteering work, some volunteers expressed that they had to work far more. One of the informants, Ben, 19, from Switzerland mentions that he volunteered in average 8 hours a day on a WWOOF farm in Corsica. Ben (2014) notices that he had the feeling that the hosts really needed the volunteers help and would not make it without them, the reason why he decided to stay on the farm. On the other side the experience on this WWOOF farm was not a balanced exchange, he mentions retroactively. Further Ben (2014) tells that most of the exchange and intercultural learning came through other wwoofers and not primary within the interaction with the host. The farmers did not express a high interest and indicated a lack of time for an exchange to occur. Ben mentions that a reason could be, that wwoofers come and go and that it is difficult for the hosts to make a connections with all of the volunteers (Ben 2014). Being a volunteer on different WWOOF farms on Corsica, Ben notices however that WWOOFing most of the time was a positive exchange: “I think it’s a perfect exchange. Well, depends of the farms. In some of them I felt use as a free worker, but still include in the family, some other time I felt as a guest giving a hand!” (Ben 2014). In this line Ben (2014) mentions that the ‘taken-given’ philosophy with this form of travelling depended on the different WWOOF farms.

Further the material findings indicated that there could be a discrepancy between the descriptions on the website of a farm and the actually farm. It was therefore not unusual that previous wwoofers had changed WWOOF farms. However those
negative experiences did not indicate dissatisfaction about WWOOFing in general. One of the informants, Clémence, 21, from France, notices:

I had several experiences in several place. I have to say that the deepest and the most instructive, as a woofing experience, was the first. The other experiences were very interesting and always spontaneous but I have to say that the rules were not totally respected which changed the relation between woofers and farmers. (Clémence 2014)

In line with the note related to how the WWOOF experiences depend on the farms, another informant, Sarah, 24, from the United States, mentions:

My first time WWOOFing in New York I was expecting something very different from what I actually experienced. Firstly, WWOOFing is a bit of a gamble since every farm is different, every person is different and you can’t know exactly what you’re going to end up with solely based on the website’s description of the farm. In fact, my first time WWOOFing was a big surprise because the farmers had lied on the website about the farm and what kind of work volunteering would entail. When I arrived at the farm everything was very different from what they had described on the website. With WWOOFing there aren’t really any regulations- no one follows up on the farms to make sure that what they say on the website is accurate. My second time WWOOFing was much better. The description on the website matched what I found when I arrived and I did not feel deceived or tricked in any way. (Sarah 2014)

Sarah (2014) tells in this note that at the first WWOOF farm she visited, there was a discrepancy between the description of the farm on the website and the reality. The discrepancy could be a consequence of non-existing regulations, such as no one who follows up on the farms, to make sure that the descriptions of the farms are accurate, does Sarah (2014) mention in the note. However, she told further in the interview, those negative experiences be turned into positive learning experiences. Explaining that negative experiences are part of life and provides a good learning opportunity, for example that people are all different and that it is important to analyze why somebody
act in a specific way. As well as those experiences provide one with the knowledge about what you appreciate in life, as much as you do not want, she summarizes (Sarah 2014). Further Clémence observes that it is part of WWOOFing to not exactly know in advance how the farm you end up actually will be, as this form of travelling includes an adventure component (Clémence 2014).

4.2 Social comparison and social identity theory

To achieve an understanding about how volunteers on a WWOOF farm got influenced from their social surroundings and developed increased community awareness, the Social identity theory is used (Sets et al. 2000). Social identity theory, classifies individuals into various social categories, also called stereotyping, in which identities emerge in relation and comparison with other individuals (Sets et al. 2000). Introduced by Henri Tajfel, social identity theory views identities therefore in terms of categories, where the ‘self’ is seen as something reflexive and can categorize itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories (Sets et al. 2000). This process is named self-categorization and it is through the process of self-categorization that an identity is formed (Sets et al. 2000). Reynolds et al. (2010) are referring that the human system is composed both by individuals and groups, resulting in that a person is both an individual and a group member. Individuals with a similar social identification and who view themselves as members of the same social category are part of the same social group (Raynolds et al. 2010). Individuals can join those social groups if they share the same values, goals, interests and experiences (Sets et al. 2000).

A person’s sense of who they are is further based on their group membership (Raynold et al. 2010). Social identity does not necessarily refer to sociological, demographical or role groups, but instead to psychological groups where the individual in the group perceives him or herself as being relevant (Reynolds et al. 2010). To be part of a group is viewed as being essential for a sense of belonging and a sense of identity (Sets et al. 2000). Once belonging to a group, the identity is formed by the status of the group an individual belongs to, whereby the group-image can be increased by making comparison with other groups (Sets et al. 2000). Social identity argues that individuals are placed into social groups, based through a process of categorization, in which groups get divided into ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Sets et al. 2000). For the existence of ‘us’ it is necessary that there is another group to distance the group from. It is within the
comparison and distinction of the other group, that a common identity is created (Sets et al. 2000). The characteristics of a group achieve therefore most of its significance in relation to the perceived differences of the values from the other groups, whereby the ‘others’ are part of the ‘out group’ while the ‘us’ is part of the ‘in group’ (Sets et al. 2000).

Closely linked with the social identity theory, Festingar emphasizes the concept of social comparison (Festinger 1954 in Turner 1975). Festingar notices the process of social comparison that individuals create their opinions and abilities by comparing the opinions and abilities of others: “No opinion in and of itself has any greater value than any other opinion” (Festinger 1954 in Turner 1975:8). In this note Festinger states that it is part of the Western culture, that individuals create their opinions based on the comparing of the opinions of others as the opinions of others play an essential role (Festinger 1954 in Turner 1975).

Comparison is moreover a common phenomenon in tourism (German et al. 2013), which can occur through for example the intra-tourist gaze (Holloway et al. 2011). Observing other tourists, influences a tourists understanding of what is considered, acceptable and unacceptable, in forms of tourist behaviors (Holloway et al. 2011). The intra-tourist gaze helps therefore to construct a sense of identity (Holloway et al. 2011), as it is not before defining the 'us' and 'the others' that an identity formation takes place (Sets et al. 2000). For example as mass tourism has a certain reputation, some tourists distance themselves from the masses by using another form of tourism like volunteer tourism (Nelson 2014). By identifying themselves in comparison with conventional tourists they define themselves as being part of alternative travelers and as a belonging to this specific group of travelers (Nelson 2014); this because a desire to belong is crucial for the identification with a group (McLeod 2008).

4.3 Third space

The Third space theory is further used to understand the outcome of the increased sense of community awareness among volunteers on a WWOOF farm. The Third space theory is a postcolonial theory of subjectivity, cultural diversity and community introduced by Homi K. Bhabha in the 1990th. In this theory the Third space represents the space in which cultures meet and hybrid subjectivities are created. Bhabha underlines that “cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to
Other” (Bhabha, 1994:52). In relation to the other, each individual is seen as a hybrid with a set of unique affinities that can contribute to new knowledge:

[…W]e should remember that it is the ‘inter’— the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the inbetween space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the ‘people’. And by exploring this Third space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves (Bhabha, 1994:56).

The Third space is the in-between of the first and second space of human interaction where new forms of meaning can get achieved. Therefore the third space opens up the opportunity for new possibilities to occur (Bhabha 1994).

Wearing et al. (2009) mention that the Third space when related to tourism, can be referred to a space in which the tourist and the local population meet and interact by creating new knowledge. As it opens up the possibility for an interaction to occur, tourists and hosts can learn from each other with an open mind and in a balanced way (Wearing et al. 2009). In the Third space hosts are reflecting, interpreting and educating, as visitors meanwhile are part of the re-presentation but not intrude on the local culture. This can result in that identities and social values can develop in a balanced way (Wearing et al. 2009).

4.4 Part conclusion of community awareness

As the material findings from this study indicated did previous wwoofers achieve increased community awareness through socio-cultural interactions within the WWOOF community. A majority of the volunteers experienced a rich 'taken-given' philosophy and highly appreciated the concept of the pure exchange, WWOOF is based on.

On the other hand did the material findings indicate that the taken-given philosophy with this form of travelling depended on the different farms. As some volunteers had to work more than upon agreed and noticed a discrepancy between the virtual description of the farms and the reality. Further did the intercultural exchange on some farms mainly occur through the interaction with other wwoofers and did not include the hosts.
However most wwoofers referred to the unique opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds, united by the same spirit and interest in sustainable values. WWOOFing was regarded as a way that contributed to create new knowledge through socio-cultural exchanges. Further being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, opened up the possibility for social identities to develop, which can be understood through the Third space theory. WWOOFing could work as what Wearing *et al.* (2009) are referring to a Third space, based on Homi K. Bhabha’s theory, where new subjectivities can develop. WWOOFing could be associated with a Third space, as it opens up the possibility for exchanges and new knowledge to occur, where new identities and social values can develop through an interaction between the tourist and the host with an open mind. As Wearing *et al.* (2009) are mentioning is culture seen as something that changes over time and is influenced from everyone taking part of it. Previous wwoofers were consequently seen as being part of the re-presentation of cultures in the WWOOF community instead of intruding on the local culture.

Further does social identity theory argue that a person’s sense of who they are, is based on their belonging group membership (Reynolds *et al.* 2010). Previous wwoofers expressed a high sense of contributing with knowledge and felt therefore being part of the WWOOFing community. Furthermore as the self is something reflexive (Sets *et al.* 2000), individuals create their opinions and abilities by comparing the opinions and abilities of others. According to the material findings, a comparison was made with conventional tourists, as the volunteers defined themselves apart from conventional tourists and instead part of the WWOOFing community. This resulted in increased community awareness, as a sense of community emerges in relation and comparison with others social groups (Sets *et al.* 2000). The material findings indicated that the distinction with conventional tourists was made right in the beginning with the WWOOF trip. This can be understood that conventional tourists have a certain reputation (Nelson 2014), and the values this reputation involves, could previous wwoofers not identify themselves with. That previous wwoofers instead felt a stronger connectedness to the WWOOFing community and apart from conventional tourist can be understood through the social identity theory. Groups are seen as essential for a sense of belonging, the social identity theory assumes that individuals are placed into social groups through a process of categorization where groups are getting divided (Sets *et al.* 2000). By dividing ‘us’ or ‘the other’ group, it creates a form of belonging and an increased form of sharing the same values (McLeod 2008). Similar to the social identity
theory, the intra-tourist gaze concept states that it is not before defining the 'us' and 'the others' that a form of belonging takes place (Holloway et al. 2011), as it is crucial for individuals to belong to a group (McLeod 2008).

The material findings indicated that by identifying conventional tourist, the volunteers distinguished themselves from this type of group, as they identified themselves instead as alternative travelers and part of the WWOOFing community. As the social identity theory states are individuals both an individual and a group member (Reynold et al. 2010). Individuals with a similar social identification and who view themselves as members of the same social category is called a social group, individuals can join those social groups if they share the same values and interests (Reynolds et al. 2010). Previous wwoofers all shared the same sustainable values, which created a strong connection in this social group. Further the comparison and distinction with the particular group of conventional tourists, contributed that a common identity was created among the volunteers.

Another essential outcome from being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was to develop into becoming more open-minded and to think in less individual patterns. Through their WWOOFing experience, volunteers achieved moreover an increased community awareness and the insight of the importance to share, in order to fulfill collective needs, as it in the end even will benefit even individual’s needs.

5. Sustainable lifestyle

Beside increased environmental and community awareness, the material findings announced moreover that the being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm made the volunteers reflecting upon their lifestyle back home, which resulted into more sustainable lifestyles. This chapter presents how a more sustainable lifestyle through WWOOFing among the volunteers was achieved, which is understood with the help of the contemporary society concept as well as through the concept of slow tourism. A sum up about a sustainable lifestyle through being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm is further presented in the end of this chapter.
5.1 Change of lifestyle

The material findings indicated that being a volunteer on an organic farm resulted in a change of lifestyle. A majority of the informants, who had done WWOOFing, came from urban cities. The WWOOFing experience included therefore a completely lifestyle change, as being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm required a basic lifestyle in relation with nature, as most farms were lacking of modern-day luxuries like technology. This resulted in a reflection among the volunteers upon their lifestyle back home.

Sarah mentions, that living on an organic farm, brings one closer to nature and away from modern-day luxuries:

> It was really another way of living: I was awake earlier, and asleep earlier: a way of living in a farm! There was no stress at all. I ate just local foods, organic food from the farm. I didn't use internet, there was no television. No hot water for the shower, but it was hot outside so that was fine! (Sarah 2014)

Here Sarah (2014) tells about the different lifestyle on the organic farm as it includes not constantly being connected, due to the lack of technology on the WWOOF farm, which results in living a much simpler life in harmony with nature. In line with this statement, Louise mentions: “The way you live in a farm is much simpler than at home; a lot of facilities that you take for granted are lacking. However, there is something truly magical to live in harmony with nature (Louise 2014)”.

In this note Louise (2014) tells that living a lifestyle in harmony with nature was a different but very positive experience, as there is something delightful about living in harmony with nature. Living without modern-day luxury’s resulted in that the days felt longer, since one pay attention to much more. Further Louise notices that it was a relief to live a simple life, where the sun indicated when it was time for lunch break (Louise 2014). Another informant, Simon (2014) mentions that a result from he's WWOOFing experience was to follow a more mindful lifestyle and to increasingly focus on essential things in life.

Further the material findings presented that many previous wwoofers noticed a different relationship to money and consumption, as the insight was made that one does not actually need to own much for a satisfied life. One of the informants, Jacques
(2014), mentioned that it was a relief to live in a community not driven by the main goal to make profit, which resulted in a change of values in Jacques lifestyle. As well did the WWOOFing experience, allowe Diego (2014) the insight that it is by living a simple life in contact with nature apart from consumption that one can achieve satisfaction. Amélie from France, observes that being a volunteer on WWOOF farms contains a simple life because you do not need to care about money at all, she explains, you can travel month and month without spending anything (Amélie 2014).

Especially outstanding with the material findings was that a majority of the volunteers were not quite satisfied with their lifestyle back home. Many of the informants were in a transition period of life when they did WWOOFing, resulting in that this form of travelling helped the volunteers to achieve an insight into what kind of lifestyle they want to follow in life. One of the informants, Clémence decided after her WWOOF experience, to find a job in agriculture and to live a simple life on the countryside (Clémence 2014). Another informant that found his direction in life through being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm is Jacques. The first time he heard about WWOOFing, he thought it was an excellent concept (Jacques 2014). Growing up in a Paris, Jacques had recently finished he's marketing degree, but was not quite satisfied with the city life and its values. As he always had been interested in an organic lifestyle, he found that WWOOFing would be a fruitful opportunity to experience this form of living:

My aim was both. First, to learn new way of living but also to learn a new job and how to work with my hands (new thing for me). I’m from the city but I’ve always been attracted by the country and its values. Woofing was a very good opportunity to have new experiences and to open myself to a new world and a new way of thinking. (Jacques 2014)

In this note Jacques mentions that he's aim with WWOOFing was the desire to experience a different form of life, away from the urban city and technology innovations. According to him, WWOOFing was therefore an excellent opportunity to combine traveling with the possibility to experience a different lifestyle from back home. After being a volunteer he decided that he wanted to work with green construction, since it is something he really believes in and it might be able to contribute to a change in society. In the interview Jacques mentions therefore that
WWOOFing was an accelerator to actually make a change in his lifestyle (Jacques 2014).

Similar to Jacques, Sarah (2014) notices a form of dissatisfaction with her current life. Living in New York, she explains in the interview, that she was searching for a change of lifestyle, where not economic profit and consumption play the major parts but instead a sustainable lifestyle. In the interview Sarah notices, growing up in New York, she always had an interest in an organic lifestyle; WWOOFing gave her the opportunity to combine travelling in Europe with the possibility to explore an organic lifestyle:

I started WWOOFing in New York State, close to where I live, to get a feel for the lifestyle and learn a bit about organic farming. Once I had already had my first experience WWOOFing I decided to try it in a foreign country, France, in order to continue learning while also being able to travel around Nice and the surrounding area. (Sarah 2014)

In the note Sarah talks about the combined possibility through WWOOF, to experience an organic lifestyle and the opportunity to do sightseeing in the surrounded areas during free-time. Further she mentions that it is a way of traveling that suits her excellent, as conventional touristic sightseeing, like lying down on the beach in Nice all day long, would not have made her satisfied (Sarah 2014).

On the other hand the material findings indicated that the lifestyle from the volunteers not only changed through WWOOFing but by travelling in general. As Camille mentions: “Again, not only this specific experience but all my travel experience together definitely changed my view and influenced my life back home” (Camille 2014).

5.2 Contemporary society and slow tourism

The changed lifestyle among volunteers through WWOOFing can be understood by the contemporary society concept as well as through the concept of ‘slow tourism’. The current era is characterized of enormous changes or as Elliott (2014) notices social transformations. The Western contemporary society is defined by new information technologies, an unstoppable growth of consumerism, dominated by speed. The
emphasis is on living the short-term contract lifestyle, starting from what one wears to where one lives and to how one works (Elliott 2014). Fast production, fast consumption, fast travel, fast food, fast relationships, short-term contracts are just some of the key areas of the western high speed society (Elliott 2014).

Further Elliott (2014) mentions that the contemporary society, influenced by globalization, neo-liberalism and the deregulation of the market, has had significant impacts in ordinary people’s life. To watch TV or to do shopping is in present day the most popular leisure pursuit: “The pursuit of shopping in the West has established itself as fundamental to experiences of personal liberty and human freedom” (Elliott 2014:41). In this note Elliott (2014) describes that in the current society increasingly people define themselves in terms of what they buy and what they own. Further Elliott notices that the twenty-first century is characterized by a new consumer society: “The contemporary consumer society is all about instant self-gratification and pleasure” (Elliott 2014:41). Those instant self-gratification and pleasures stays though ungratified, since the consumer society is an ever-expanding terrain of new needs, wants and desires (Elliott 2014).

A change of more sustainable values is needed that distance from the assumption that owning things is the embodiment of satisfaction (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). Lipman et al. (2012) on the other hand explain that the Western speed society has resulted in the prefix ‘slow’, were ‘slowing down’ has become an antidote to the current era. ‘Slow tourism’ is one outcome, which emphasizes the idea of simplicity, mindfulness and embodied experiences:

The path of modernity is one characterized by acceleration, interconnection and mobility. Amidst the increasingly fast tempo of life in late modernity, contemporary pilgrims and other ‘slow travelers’ express needs and desires for alternative experiences of temporality, while subverting the dominant ‘cult of speed’. (Lipman et al. 2012:11)

In this note Lipman et al. (2012) mention that ‘slow travelers’ express a desire for an experience outside what the current era is characterized by. ‘Slow travel’ is associated with the value of time, activities at the destination, travel experience as well as environmental consciousness, whereby ‘slow travelers’ are associated with the desire to
experience something different beyond the ‘bucket list’ of tourist places (Lipman et al. 2012).

Another significant change according to Elliott (2014) in contemporary society is the significant transformation of how people imagine themselves and in the way they engage in everyday life with others in forms of global interconnectedness. The current society has turned into a culture of individualism; a more individualist society has had a profound impact and emotional consequences for the individual’s life (Elliott 2014). As society is full of changes it results in a reinvention between the self and society, as the individual coherently needs to reflect on changing circumstances (Elliott 2014). A result into a society of individualism culture is furthermore that the relationship between community and society has changed, as more people live in urban cities, where individuals can experience everyday contact, as well as a lack of contact, loneliness and isolation (Elliott 2014). However as Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) notice is everything on earth connected and not the individual but the collective needs, should be of primary priority in order to create a sustainable present and future.

Further Lipman et al. (2012) are pointing out that ‘slow travel’ is typically associated with a form of self-transformation. Further they refer to ‘temporal reflexivity’ in which slow travelers only temporary step out and liberate themselves from their ‘fast’ life associated with cell phones, emails and overflowing daily planners, as their points of departure inevitable will be their point of return. This contemporary step out however opens up the possibility for alternative experiences of time, place and the self (Lipman et al. 2012).

At the same time as ‘slow tourism’ has become a high status among experienced traveler, as it distinguishes itself from conventional mass tourism, it has also become criticized in the research literature (Lipman et al. 2012). A paradox between ‘slow travelers’ in contrast to the ‘fast world’ is argued to be that ‘slow travelers’ strongly rely on modern technology and the global travel system to experience this ‘slow travel’: “They use the tools of the information age and the modern luxuries of travel to temporarily escape the voracious pace of late modernity” (Lipman et al. 2012:12). Lipman et al. (2012) notice here the paradox of needing the information age and modern luxury’s, like the global travel system, to experiencing ‘slow travel’.
5.3 Part conclusion of sustainable lifestyle

How the concept of ‘slow tourism’ and the contemporary society can help to understand the material findings, related to the indicated that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm had an impact on the lifestyle among the volunteers, is discussed under this heading.

A majority of previous wwoofers were in a transitional period when they did WWOOFing and were not quite satisfied with their lives back home. The dissatisfaction with their lifestyles can be understood through the contemporary society and the sustainable worldview theory. Contemporary society is seen to be characterized by high-speed, technological innovations, fast consumption and a distance from nature (Elliott 2014). According to the sustainable worldview theory, to break away from technology and a reunification with nature leads instead towards a more sustainable and satisfied life (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014).

The current speed society has resulted in the prefix 'slow', whereby 'slow travel' is used to take a temporary step out from the ‘fast’ life associated with cell phones, emails and overflowing daily planners (Lipman et al. 2012). Traveling by doing WWOOFing could be associated with ‘slow travel’ as a majority of the volunteers expressed a desire to take a step back from their contemporary lifestyle (Lipman et al. 2012). The lifestyle on the WWOOF farms requires a basic lifestyle in relation with nature, as a majority of the farms were not equipped with modern-day luxuries, like electricity or technology. Further the ‘slow travel’ movement is associated with the value of time as well as environmental consciousness, with the goal to reach a form of self-transformation and a more satisfied life (Lipman et al. 2012). Volunteers who had done WWOOFing expressed an increased satisfaction in live by living an organic lifestyle, which can be illustrated by that volunteers were not constantly connected. Instead a change of focus got achieved towards more essential things, like environmental consciousness. In contrast to their lifestyle in current society, which is made up by a fast and increasing speed which results in that it is increasingly difficult to focus on small little things in life, as one is all the time connected and surrounded by high-tech innovations (Elliott 2014).

The ‘slow travel’ concept has however been criticized, as it is argued that ‘slow travelers’ only contemporary take a step out from their ‘fast’ life, as their points of departure inevitable will be their point of return (Lipman et al. 2012). The material
findings from this study indicated however that a majority of the volunteers who had done WWOOFing, actually changed their lifestyle when they returned back home.

This is a significant outcome as the contemporary society concept strongly emphasizes a change into more sustainable values, as society is defined by a consumer society, where people increasingly define themselves in terms of what they buy and what they own (Elliott 2014). The material findings indicated that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was helpful to take a step back from the hyper-consumption society. Previous wwoofers observed to a different relationship to money and consumption, as their WWOOFing experience included the insight that one does not actually need to own much to live a satisfied life. To live on an organic farm resulted therefore into the development of a more sustainable lifestyle and values among the volunteers.

Another outcome from the material findings related to the changed lifestyle among the volunteers was to think and act more in collective patterns. Through WWOOFing, volunteers experienced a community lifestyle, where not the individual but the collective needs are of main priority. This was a valuable insight since the contemporary western society is defined by a culture of individualism (Elliott 2014), however as Hedlund-de Witt et al. (2014) notice is everything on earth connected and not the individual but the collective needs, should be of primary priority in order to create a sustainable present and future for a better global community. To work on an organic farm by being a volunteer, was therefore helpful to achieve this insight, as the material findings indicated.

6. Personal growth

This chapter discusses the last main outcome from the material findings; the personal growth volunteers experienced through their WWOOF experience. The material findings are understood by the narrative identity as well as by the symbolic interactionism theory. A part conclusion follows in this chapter where the personal growth achieved among previous wwoofers is summed up.

6.1 Personal development

The material findings indicated that the volunteer's achieved a personal growth through being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm. Being surrounded by nature and living a simple
life away from modern-day technology, contributed to that a majority of the volunteers become more mindful and found peace within themselves. Further the organic lifestyle on the WWOOF farms consequent in that volunteers learned to be more open-minded. One of the informants, Ambre (2014) mentions that the WWOOF experience made her become more open-minded related to new things and to people with different cultures. Living in a multicultural community, makes you aware of why people act in specific ways, she mentions (Ambre 2014). However even negative experiences could be turned into a positive outcome for the volunteer’s personal development. As one informant from Germany, Alexandra, 21, tells about the insight that it was not before being on one farm in Corsica, where the rules were not really respected, that she learned how to say no: “Looking back, I think so. I learned to say No” (Alexandra 2014).

The material findings indicated that part of being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was the desire to achieve a form of personal growth. The findings indicated furthermore that many of the informants were in a period of transition in their life. This period of transition in life, resulted in that a majority of the informant’s regarded WWOOFing as a beneficial opportunity to learn more about themselves and to find their direction in life. Some of the informants had recently graduated from high school, while the majority had graduated from university. Amélie mentions in the interview, that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm in India, involved the desire to know more about herself and to find a direction in life: “I went abroad to know a bit more about myself and what I wanted to do for living, how I wanted to live. I was searching for answers. And the wwoofing gave me some” (Amélie 2014).

Another informant, Raúl on the other hand did not notice that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm in New Zealand influenced his personality: “The wwoofing experience didn’t change me. Maybe my one year trip did, but no specifically the wwoofing” (Raúl 2014). In this note Raúl (2014) states that his whole trip to New Zealand probably had an impact on his personality but not necessarily the WWOOFing. The material findings indicated that spending time on a WWOOF farm was common to be a part of a large trip, therefore is there a possibility that the entire travel trip had an impact on the volunteer’s personality. Clémence’s statement regarding her personal change through WWOOFing indicates this: “Yes, but I think that comes inevitably with any sort of challenging or different experience. I wanted to learn, travel and explore and by doing that I learned more about myself and achieved a form of personal growth (Clémence 2014)”. In this note Clémence tells that challenging situation she got though
while travelling resulted in a form of personal growth. Moreover she mentions in the interview that WWOOFing involves an uncertainty, a form of adventure since one does not know much about the farm and the people in advance. It is a challenge to adapt to a completely new environment, which resulted in that she became more independent. It was during being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm that she gained self-confident by expressing herself to other members of the community. A significant factor was that WWOOFing involved living in a WWOOF community with multiplicity volunteers from different backgrounds, which included an increased challenge of interaction (Clémence 2014).

Timoté mentioned that living in a community where everyone came from different places, speaking different languages resulted for him in a personal development: “I think it wasn't the woofing who changed me but the people I've meet there! Most of the time the peoples where amazing and they changed me! I’ve had the feeling that I was changed after” (Timoté 2014).

Moreover an outcome with the material findings was that volunteers did not during their time as a volunteer felt that they had changed as a person, but afterwards by telling the lived experiences to relatives and friends.

6.2. Symbolic interactionism

How being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influences the volunteer’s personal development due to their social surrounding, can be understood by the symbolic interactionism theory. Symbolic interactionism, introduced by Blumer and Kuhn in 1969, views society as a product of social action and interaction (Sets et al. 2013). Interactionism stands for the assumption that individuals are implicated in society from birth and cannot exist outside organized social relationships (Sets et al. 2013). According to Wearing et al. (2000):

Interactionism suggests that the individual is an active, thinking unit who is able to construct a meaningful existence and a sense of self from the social milieu in which she/he lives: The individual expresses himself [sic] as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole. (Wearing et al. 2000:408)
This note describes that individuals are affected by social structures and construct a meaningful existence from their social surrounding. As social structures are affected by the individuals who act within them, society is created in relation to the individuals (Wearing et al. 2000). Society and the individuals are viewed as being created in relation to each other, therefore it is assumed that identities can be recreated depending on their social surrounding (Oliver 2012).

Further contributing to this point Sets et al. (2013) agree that social structures have an impact on the possibility that an individual is influenced by the social surrounding and develop similar kinds of selves. Further mentioning, that the self develops in social interaction within society, resulting in that individuals seem to have many ‘selves’, as the ‘selves’ have others with whom they interact in a complex and organized society (Sets et al. 2012). Symbolic interactionism mentions that individuals try to develop a self-structure that reflects the different identities hold in their surrounding social environment, as individuals are seem to have multiple identities or 'selves', those identities can be activated in different situations (Sets et al. 2013).

According to Sets et al. (2013) an identity is categorized into three different parts. The first part is role identity, where a set of meanings are attached to an individual’s role in the social structure, the second part is group identity and the third part, person identities which is described as a unique way in which individuals see themselves (Sets et al. 2013).

Further a significant concept in this identity theory is identity verification (Sets et al. 2013). Identity verification involves the process in which it is an individual’s desire that others see them in the same way as they perceive themselves (Stets et al. 2013). In line with this Jun et al. (2012) argue that humans are engaged in a constant process of self-verification: “People constantly seek to verify self-views and identities by behaving in ways where their beliefs about themselves are aligned with their perceptions of how others see them in any situation” (Burke 1991 in Jun et al. 2012:2). This note argues that the self-verification is a process, where individuals seek others to see them in the same way as they perceive themselves or want to be perceived (Jun et al. 2012). In the case of non-verification, individuals may need to convince others that they are the way they claim to be (Stets et al. 2013). Tourism provides the opportunity to express the self to others, as the happening mainly occurs outside an individual’s socio-cultural milieu (Jun et al. 2012). A consequence from being involved in an
unknown environment is that the tourist wants to present him or herself in an interesting way to convince new acquaintances, that they are the way they claim to be (McCabe et al. 2006). In the case of a consistently feedback that verifies one's identity, trust and positive self-feelings such as commitment to the relationship and situations that provides the verified feedback, is established (Jun et al. 2012).

Immergut et al. (2014) on the other hand, criticize part of the symbolic interactionism theory, by arguing that traditionally and contemporary research of the conception of the self has been entirely based on Western thinking and more Eastern perspectives should be included. The assumption that the self is socially constructed and fully dependent on other individuals is entirely influenced by Western thinking, a rethinking of the self is needed, which is not wholly based on Western conceptions (Immergut et al. 2014). Immergut et al. (2014) refers to the rich tradition of Buddhist theories of the self, to contribute to intercultural theory building. The key difference in the Buddhist theory of the self is the conception of a no threatened, a no-self (Immergut et al. 2014). However there is a concordance between the Western conceptions that the self is entirely dependent on other individuals and between the Eastern concepts of a no-self. The concordance between those two concepts is that the self is considered as a construction and that individuals are ambitious to protect and defend this sense of self (Stets et al. 2013). A significant distinction is however that the self is regarded as an ongoing change rather than an essentially stable thing (Schachter 2005). In line with this, Immergut et al. (2014) argue that it this the reason why the self is understood as an illusion and need to be understand as a no-self:

Thoughts, feelings, moods, attitudes, physical parts, or movements of the body are all simply changing, impersonal interactions that arise and pass away. To identify with them, to hold on to them, or cling to them as ‘myself” only invites suffering according to Buddhism because we are trying to stabilize what is inherently not stable. (Immergut et al. 2014:272)

In this note Immergut et al. (2014) are pointing out that the self is an illusion, since it is in a constant change, concluding their argument that if interdependence is the reality, the self-other dualism concept of the symbolic interactionism theory is a misperception and a construct of human imagination (Immergut et al. 2014).
Together with Immergut et al. (2014) are Wearing et al. (2000) further critical to the symbolic interactionism theory. In the context of for example volunteers identity development, Wearing et al. (2000) argue that using the interactionism theory arise problems, since interactionism deals with the idea of multiple ‘selves’. As the current era is full of changes, it results in constantly shifting identities, which is regarded as a challenge to symbolic interactionism (Wearing et al. 2000); this because the theory makes a clear distinction between the ‘self’ and the ‘others’, as it represent the idea of the ‘self’ as the subject and the ‘others’ as the object. Instead they refer to emphasizes the idea of the ‘self’ and the ‘others’ as being deconstructed, where the ‘others’ is a part of the ‘self’ and not separated from the self (Wearing et al. 2000). In contrast to what Wearing et al. (2000) are mentioning, that identity is an ongoing change, it is argued that identity change is ongoing but very gradual (Sets et al. 2013). That it is only during a longer time period, from month to years that individuals find their identity different (Stets et al. 2013).

Schachter (2005) is in accordance with Wearing et al. (2000) when mentioning that the symbolic interactionism theory is problematic in the postmodern contemporary society. As the contemporary society involves fast growing social changes and is made up by a society in constant fluidity, this has an impact on an individual’s identity construction. Resulting in that the coherence of identity and its stability becomes complicated to maintain, surrounded by constant changes (Schachter 2005). Berger discusses this context already in modernity:

Modern man finds himself confronted not only by multiple options of possible courses of action but also by multiple options of possible ways of thinking about the world. It further follows that the institutional pluralization of modernity had to carry in its wake a fragmentation and ipso facto a weakening of every conceivable belief and value dependent on social support. Modern societies are characterized by unstable, in cohesive, unreliable plausibility structures. (Berger 1979 in Schachter 2005:8)

Here Berger argues that in modern society, identities are no longer taken for granted, but instead require a choice and in its turn self-consciousness and reflexivity (Berger in Schachter 2005). The fact that identities require choice and reflexivity indicates why especially young people in the contemporary world use traveling such as volunteer
tourism as a way for identity construction and to find their direction in life (Grabowski et al. 2014).

6.3 Narrative identity theory

Under this heading the narrative identity theory is presented, as it later, together with the interactionism theory, is used to understand how volunteers achieved a personal growth through WWOOFing.

The theory of narrative identity considers that individuals create their identity by constructing and telling self-defined stories about their life (McAdams et al. 2013). In line with this, Nelson (2014) mentions that one's identity is defined and gets a meaning by constructing and internalizing self-defined stories. A narrative is defined as a story that considers an important aspect of one’s life, a specific event or even one's entire life story (Griffin 2013). Narratives are a significant part of social identity construction, as individuals identity can be communicated through narratives (Nelson 2014). Identities are created through actions, attitudes and values, therefore once an experience is communicated, the narrative helps to define the kind of person ‘we like to think we are’ (McCabe et al. 2006).

McAdams et al. (2013) notice that an identity through narratives is constructed slowly and over time, in the interaction with many different individuals, where stories get internalized:

Through repeated interactions with others, stories about personal experiences are processed, edited, reinterpreted, retold, and subjected to a range of social and discursive influences, as the storyteller gradually develops a broader and more integrative narrative identity. (McAdams et al. 2013:235)

This note states that internalized stories are developing a wider and more integrative narrative identity (McAdams et al. 2013).

Nelson (2014) mentions that especially tourism experiences are becoming important factors for an individual’s identity construction in contemporary society, as tourism provides the opportunity for an individual to try new role identities (Nelson 2014). Further tourism is considered to play an important role in identity construction as a tourist experience mainly occurs outside one's socio-cultural milieu (Rickly-Boyd
2007). Being placed in an unknown environment results in tourists getting involved in conversation with new acquaintances, where story-telling is used to construct sense and meaning from lived experiences, to present them in an interesting way (McCabe et al. 2006). By transforming travel experiences into stories, those narratives create meanings, whereby narratives give the individuals the possibility to create an identity by expressing their subjectivity (McCabe et al. 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to understand narratives as edited versions of reality. This is significant as narratives involve experiences which are recreated from the memory, resulting in that things may be forgotten and may not reflect the actual happening (Nelson 2014). In agreement with Nelson (2014), Rickly-Boyed (2007) mentions that narratives are a second reading of experience: “Telling ‘about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what’s happened, and why we’re doing what we’re doing” (Rickly-Boyed 2007:260). The note indicates that stories that are told about one’s experiences, are a form to communicate one’s identity to others (Rickly-Boyed 2007), narratives are therefore essential for identity construction (Nelson 2014).

McAdams et al. (2013) on the other hand point out that stories which are exclusively told for the entertainment of others normally contain few meanings. Explaining that by trying to entertain somebody, meanings do not arise in the same relevance as when an individual is trying to explain oneself to somebody. McAdams et al. (2013) are further noticing in this context the importance of relationships in narrative identity, as attentive and responsive listeners help to promote a better development of narrative identity.

Furthermore contributes Noy (2004) with another aspect of using narratives in identity construction. Noy states that personal narratives are seen as more than just a reflection on identity, but makes instead the core experience of a person’s identity. A significant experience in an individual’s life can result in a self-change, but it is usually only recognizable in retrospect and reflection. At the same time as somebody due to a trip, not changes a hundred and eighty degrees, but telling about the lived experiences, becomes instead an integral part of an individual’s interpersonal growth (Noy 2004).

Past experience influences the way a story is told: “The kinds of things that we seem to agree make stories tellable reflect and disclose our cultural presupposition” (McCabe et al. 2006:200). This note argues that audiences are playing an active part in the construction of stories and dependent of how stories are valued in one culture, the kind of stories that get told may differ to another (McCabe et al. 2006). According to
McAdams et al. (2013) are human’s natural storytellers as storytelling exist in every human culture. In line with McCabe et al. (2006), McAdams et al. (2013) agree that narratives are highly contextual in culture, wherefore it is important to analyze the development of life stories in different societies and among cultural groups.

6.4 Part conclusion of personal growth

As the material findings indicated, volunteers on an organic WWOOF farm achieved a form of personal growth. Living in accordance with nature contributed to the finding of peace among the volunteers, and by being an active part in the WWOOF community resulted in a stronger personality. How other members of the WWOOFing community influenced the volunteers personality, can be related to the symbolic interactionism theory. The symbolic interactionism theory takes up the assumption that individuals develop a self-structure that reflects the different identities hold in their surrounded environment (Sets et al. 2013). Many of the previous wwoofers mentioned to have got through a form of personal growth, as they developed personal self-structures that reflected the different identities hold in the WWOOFing community. The development of environmental and socio-cultural values among the volunteers during their WWOOFing experience can therefore be regarded as a reflection from the values hold in the WWOOF community.

Volunteers developed a self-structure that reflected the different identities hold in the WWOOFing community, can be understood by that individuals are regarded as having many ‘selves’, as the ‘selves’ have others with whom they interact in a complex and organized society (Sets et al. 2013). On the other hand Immergut et al. (2014) argue that the self only can be understood as an illusion, as a no-self. As feelings, thoughts, attitudes and movements are all the time changing, by trying to identify one’s identity, one is trying to stabilize something that is naturally not stable. Instead the self needs to be regarded as an illusion, since it is in constant change (Immergut et al. 2014). Therefore can it be difficult to understand the volunteer’s personal growth through the interactionism theory, as the present world is full of changes, where identities are all the time shifting (Wearing et al. 2000).

However a majority of the informant’s mention that part of being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was the desire to achieve a form of personal growth. This can be understood by the contemporary society concept, which views the current era as being
characterized by constant changes (Elliott2014). A constantly changing society results according to Berger (Berger 1976 in Schachter 2005), in that identities are no longer taken for granted but instead requires choice, self-consciousness and reflexivity. As places are becoming less important for identity construction, travelling is therefore increasingly used as a way for identity construction and to achieve a personal growth (Grabowski et al. 2014). The constantly changing contemporary society can therefore be an indication into why part of the being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, was the desire to go through a form of personal development.

Further the narrative identity theory can be used to understand how volunteers achieved a personal growth as the WWOOFing experience occurred outside their socio-cultural milieu. The unknown environment included to live in a WWOOF community, with multiplicity volunteers and hosts from different backgrounds, which was a challenge as it involved to integrate and to interact with a socio-cultural milieu outside one’s comfort zone (McCabe et al. 2006). Being in an unknown environment provided however the opportunity for volunteers to try new role identities. Travelling in general includes conversations with new acquaintances and involves story-telling, which is used to construct sense and meaning from lived experiences (Nelson 2014). To adapt and get integrated in an unknown environment gives therefore the individuals the possibility to express their subjectivity through narratives, where the narrative helps to define the kind of person ‘we like to think we are’ (McCabe et al. 2006). As volunteers experienced a direct interaction with other members of the WWOOF community, it included to express their subjectivity through for example narratives.

Furthermore the material findings indicated that volunteers felt part of the WWOOF community and that they achieved a consistently feedback that verified their identity, which resulted in positive self-feelings and in a more stable personality. The self-verification was regarded to play an essential role in the WWOOF experience, as it occurred outside volunteer’s socio-cultural milieu whereby the volunteers wanted to present themselves in an interesting way, to convince new acquaintances that they are in a way they claim to be (McCabe et al. 2006, Jun et al. 2012).

A few isolated volunteers expressed that they did not feel that, being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, influenced their personality, which can be understood through the symbolic interactionism theory, as it argues that identity change is ongoing but very gradual (McAdams et al. 2013). Furthermore is it not before a longer time period that individuals find that their identity is different (Sets et al. 2013). The
narrative identity theory points furthermore out that an identity is slowly constructed through repeated interactions with others, where stories get internalized (McAdams et al. 2013). Some volunteers noticed that exclusively in retrospect by telling about the lived experiences on the WWOOF farm, a personal growth was achieved. This can be understood in relation to that a travel experience can result in a self-change, but it is only recognizable in retrospect and in reflection (Noy 2004). It is by telling about the changes a person has got through during their trip, that those narratives become an integral part of an individual’s interpersonal growth (Noy 2004). Once an experience is communicated, the narrative helps to define the kind of person ‘we like to think we are’ (McCabe et al. 2006). Therefore did some volunteers only retrospectively notice a personal growth related to being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter how ‘WWOOFing’ influences the personal development among volunteers and how this leads to sustainable societal values is summed up.

As research in the context of identity construction and WWOOFing was missing, an inductive study was made related to this specific issue, in order to contribute with knowledge in this area. The outcome of the study gave an indication towards how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influenced the volunteers personal development. The empirical material from 20 semi-structured interviews with previous wwoofers indicated four main impacts on the volunteer’s personal development. Increased environmental and community awareness were found such as a change into a more sustainable lifestyle, as well as forms of personal growth were found.

An increased environmental awareness was achieved by living in accordance with nature, surrounded by people who emphasize high environmental values. Being directly involved in an organic lifestyle, resulted in creating a connection with nature. As the sustainable worldview concept indicates, somebody may not feel a profound connection with nature, if one does not recognize a significant dimension to it (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014). The direct interaction and connection with nature by being a volunteer on WWOOF farms resulted therefore into developing more environmental sustainable behaviors. A strengthened food and healthy lifestyle relationship were some of the outcomes, as well as previous wwoofers reported a desire to only buy seasonal and organic food. As the volunteers experienced the hard work it
takes to grow organic food, it resulted into a willingness to pay more for seasonal and organic food. Furthermore WWOOFing was an eye-opener to see where the food is actually coming from and to experience the taste difference. Previous wwoofers reported moreover the assumption after their WWOOF experience, to consume less in order to have an as little environmental impact as possible.

Further community awareness was achieved by socio-cultural exchanges in the WWOOFing community. Differently from conventional volunteer tourism, where an intruding on the local community often occurs (Nelson 2014), WWOOFing was defined as a balanced exchange as everybody in the community contributed with unique individual knowledge. WWOOFing could work as a Third space (Bhabha 1994) that opens up the possibility for new identities and social values to develop through the interaction between the volunteers and the host. As Wearing et al. (2009) are mentioning is culture seen as something that changes over time and is influenced from everyone taking part of it. Previous wwoofers were consequently seen as being part of the re-presentation of cultures in the WWOOFing community, instead of intruding on the local culture. Living in a community with volunteers from all over the world, resulted therefore in a cultural exchange and spread of knowledge, due to for example rich discussions between the volunteers and between the volunteers and the hosts. Especially the lack of modern-day facilities, like technology, resulted in valuable face-to-face conversations. An increased form of being open-minded towards people with different backgrounds was furthermore acknowledged.

A strong community sense and a differentiation from conventional tourists were found, which could be understood through the social comparison and social identity theory. As groups are regarded as being essential for a sense of belonging, by defining different groups and by dividing ‘us’ and ‘them’, it creates a form of belonging and shared values (McLeod 2008, Holloway et al. 2011). Previous wwoofers defined themselves as separated from conventional tourists and instead being part of the WWOOF community, as they shared similar values. Volunteers experienced a strong community feeling as everyone in the WWOOFing community had the same spirit and interest to work together towards a more sustainable present and future. However not every volunteer expressed a balanced taken-given experience with the WWOOFing hosts. Some isolated volunteers reported that they had to work more than upon agreed and that there was a discrepancy between the description of the WWOOF farm and the reality. A reason was seen to be that nobody is controlling the WWOOF farms, as it
represents a non-profit organization (WWOOF 2013). Nonetheless could even negative experiences be turned into learning experiences or be resolved by a change of a WWOOF farm. In general community values were highly appreciated after being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm and a changed thinking in less individual pattern was acknowledged. As the current society is characterized by a culture of individualism (Elliott 2014), the WWOOFing experience helped to achieve another insight of the importance to share and to fulfill collective needs.

Increased community awareness among the volunteers and the development into more sustainable values was understood by the symbolic interactionism theory. The theory assumes that social structures have a high impact on the possibility that an individual gets influenced by its social surrounding, resulting in developing similar values (Sets et al. 2013). Individuals are regarded to be influenced by the particularly standpoint of other members in the same social group (Wearing et al. 2000). Being surrounded by people in the WWOOFing community with high sustainable values, could therefore have resulted into the fact that volunteers developed similar values as the WWOOFing group members.

Furthermore the organic lifestyle on the WWOOF farms influenced the lifestyle from the volunteers back home into developing a more sustainable lifestyle. As the material findings indicated, the living on the farms required a basic lifestyle in relation with nature, as majorities of the farm were not equipped with modern-day luxuries like technology. This changed lifestyle, resulted in a reflection among the volunteers upon the current society, characterized by high-speed, hyper consumption and constant changes (Elliott 2014). Part of the current society is hyper-consumption, which represent the idea to achieve satisfaction in life by owning certain and especially brand new things (Elliott 2014). As this study indicated did previous wwoofers through their experience on organic farms achieve the insight that it is by living a simple life in relation with nature, apart from hyper consumption that one can achieve a lasting satisfaction in life. This outcome could be understood by the sustainable worldview theory, which argues that a satisfied lifestyle only can be achieved by living in accordance with nature, instead of being cut off from it (Hedlund-de Witt et al. 2014).

A majority of previous wwoofers were in a transition period. As the current era is associated with uncertainty and a multiplicity form of choices (Elliott 2014), being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm was therefore used as a form of traveling to find a direction a life. Through the experience of a completely different lifestyle, some of the
volunteers found their direction in life, as they found out more of what wanting and what not wanting in life. The desire to live a more sustainable, organic lifestyle and to contribute with something essential in life, were some of the outcomes of this study.

Moreover the study indicated that volunteers achieved a form of personal growth due to their WWOOFing experience. To live a life in accordance with nature resulted to find peace within them. Furthermore to be involved in a WWOOFing community outside volunteer’s socio-cultural environment resulted into becoming a stronger personality. Narratives were used among the volunteers to express their subjectivity to new acquaintances in the WWOOFing community. However some of the informants mentioned that it was not before telling about the lived WWOOFing experience to friends and relatives that a personal growth was acknowledged. This was understood by that a self-change is only considered to be recognizable in retrospect and in reflection and that it is by telling about the changes a person have got through during their trip, that a personal growth can get achieved. Further the study indicated that it might not only have been the WWOOFing experience that resulted in a personal growth, but the volunteer’s whole travel trip, which included some weeks volunteering on a WWOOF farm. A majority of the volunteers reported however that living in accordance with nature contributed to find peace within themselves and that expressing their subjectivity to other members in the WWOOFing community, resulted in a stronger personality.

Moreover the four outcomes of the study were considered to be significant, as the contemporary society in present time is characterized by mainly unsustainable values like high speed, hyper-consumption, and individualism, where economic profit is more important than environmental concerns (Elliott 2014). However instead sustainable values in society are needed where the focus is less on individualism and competition but instead on cooperation, including a society that emphasizes less on consumption and where social and environmental values count equally or even more, than economy factors (Hedlund-de Witt 2014). As the study indicated, the volunteer’s personal development through being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm resulted into these insights and into developing more sustainable lifestyles. Unlike conventional volunteer tourism, which has been criticized for an unequal power and mainly profit relationship, WWOOF was moreover overall regarded as a balanced taken-given experience. Being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm, where people from different parts all over this planet reunites and interacts, was an excellent opportunity for the spread of sustainable
thinking. The study’s outcome indicated therefore that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm can contribute to improve the global community.

However this study does only provide an indication of how being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm influenced the volunteer’s personal development. The study would have needed to include the visit of different WWOOF farms all over the world to achieve reliable and trustworthy material. The use of semi-structured interview methods was exclusively used because of the need to overcome geographical barriers and time limit. However this study can serve as a framework for further research.

Moreover, this study focused on the impacts on the volunteer’s, while further research might want to focus on the hosts. Further research could make as well a follow up of this study to examine how this form of travelling might have an impact on the volunteer’s personal development in a larger time perspective. Is there a discrepancy between the volunteers’ ambition right after their WWOOFing experience and years later? This in order to examine the deep impact this way of travelling could have and if it in a larger time perspective can contribute to improve the global community.
8. References

8.1 Written references

Galletta, A. (2013). Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication. NYU Press.


### 8.2 Personal Communications

Alexandra, 2014
Amélie, 2014
Ambre, 2014
Anna, 2014
Ben, 2014
Camille, 2014
Clémence, 2014
Diego, 2014
Elise, 2014
Euan, 2014
Jacques, 2014
Laura, 2014
Leila, 2014
Louise, 2014
Noémie, 2014
Sarah, 2014
Simon, 2014
Sina, 2014
Raúl, 2014
Timoté, 2014
Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

In what country/which countries have you done WWOOFing?

How long time did you spend on the WWOOFing farm(s)?

What was the primary aim for you to do WWOOFing?

What was your expectation with WWOOFing, is there a difference how you expected and experienced your time as a volunteer?

Can you tell a little bit about your experience as being a WWOOFer?

Did you feel that being a volunteer on a WWOOF farm has influenced your personality? Did you went home as a changed person?

Do you feel more environmental aware, more nature connected after the WWOOFing experience?

Has your experience as a volunteer changed your view of society, in form of that you perceived a change of values? Did it made to change your life back home?

How was the life on the WWOOFing farm different from your life back home?

Can you tell a little bit about your experience with other WWOOFers as being a part of a community? Did you feel as an integrative part among the other WWOOFers and the host community?

How did you perceived the cultural exchange, was it a balanced form of taken-given did you contribute with something?
Have you ever done other forms of volunteer tourism? If yes, how was your WWOOFing experience different from conventional volunteer tourism?

Would you recommend WWOOFing?

What was the highlight of your time as a volunteer?
Appendix B

Study Participants

France: Amélie (Female 22), Jacques (Male 30), Ambre (Female 27), Clémence (Female 21), Timoté (Male 28), Camille (Female 23), Elise (Female 24), Noémie (Female 27)

Germany: Sina (Female 19), Alexandra (Female 21), Simon (Male 20), Anna (Female 21)

Spain: Raúl (Male 23), Diego (24), Laura (24)

United States: Sarah (Female 24), Euan (Male 25)

Sweden: Louise (Female 20)

Italy: Leila (Female 26)

Switzerland: Ben (Male 19)