

**Organic Volunteering: Exploring Understandings and Meanings of Experience**

by

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **Abstract**

Volunteer tourism, a sub-sector of the tourism industry, is growing at an accelerated pace subsequently creating socio-cultural, political, cultural, and environmental impacts. Current tourism literature suggests volunteer tourism provides opportunities for participants to facilitate building relationships with like-minded volunteers and encourages consciousness-raising experiences (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Furthermore, volunteer tourism has been shown to foster cross-cultural understanding between participants and hosts (Raymond & Hall, 2008; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008). However, researchers question the laudable aims of volunteer tourism; indicating the presence of this type of tourism creates social and power struggles within local destination communities (Guttentag, 2009, Sin, 2010). Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) claims the transformative capacities of tourism are overshadowed by industry attributes of tourism. To use tourism as a positive engine for social, cultural, environmental, and political change, it would be necessary to promote touristic experiences that encompass a transformative ethos.

My exploration of organic volunteering within this thesis illuminates the transformative capacities of these touristic experiences and contributes to the expanding horizons of volunteer tourism literature. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explores experiences of organic volunteering and what these experiences mean to the volunteers. Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic phenomenology provided me the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the meaning of organic volunteering experiences studied in Argentina. Using interviews and participation observation, I explored meanings of organic volunteering, while I also considered volunteers' historicity, or pre-

understandings, of these experiences. Data analysis revealed the emergent essential structure of “Opening to living in interconnectedness.” Interconnectedness within organic volunteering is embodied in six essences of reconnecting, exchanging knowledge, being in nature, bonding with others, consciousness-raising, and transforming. My research reinforces what many organizations’ claim; volunteer experiences improve global citizenship and participants desire to become more involved in future activism upon their return home.

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## Chapter One: My Pre-understandings (Introduction)

*What is the lived experience of WWOOFing?* My first encounter with the WWOOF acronym was in May 2009 in Central America as I neared the end of a backpacking trip. Drained after a day's travel, I dropped my pack onto the floor of the communal room in the local Hostel and proceeded to the check-in. I'm not quite sure if it was the state of my tattered clothes or the exhausted look on my face, but a few young travellers approached me unexpectedly: "Are you a WWOOFer? You en route to your next farm?" they asked. "WWOOF?" I responded, perplexed. "World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms," the longhaired, bearded man exclaimed. *Organic farms* I thought and immediately became interested. Being a vegetarian and an avid consumer of organic products, I quickly wanted to learn more. The young hippie-esque woman explained the concept further, "We are both WWOOFers, we've been travelling for months, volunteering on local organic farms. In turn for our hard work, we have a place to crash and food to eat," she looked up, smiled, and continued, "No cost at all."

Upon my return home, I began to think more about World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) and this idea of being a WWOOF volunteer (WWOOFer). I started to think about who I was and why, out of a room of a dozen or so people, I was the one they assumed was a WWOOFer. I recalled what I was wearing: a cotton ankle-length skirt and a neutral-coloured wrinkled shirt, both of which possessed holes; no shoes, as I had lost them the day before; a patchwork purse slung off my shoulder; and an overstuffed backpack one-third my height. Similarly, the young WWOOFers I encountered appeared to have this relaxed and easy going aura about them. I saw them as my type of people: cultured, adventurous, and young, inspired activists. Their passion for

WWOOF was obvious and contagious and this instilled in me a strong curiosity to know what this experience entailed and what it actually meant to be WWOOFing.

In the spring of 2010 I felt the itch for change again – that need to experience a new culture or something different. At this point, I occupied a 9 to 5 office job. I was not unhappy, but I sought something more; something or someone I could better relate to. I began to research WWOOF online. Additionally, I started talking with friends who introduced me to others involved with WWOOF. My exchanges with previous WWOOFers generated fascination and a keen interest to participate in such an experience. During this period I thought of WWOOFing in two ways: 1) a new adventure, an opportunity to experience something different; and 2) my chance to create change and engage in activism.

The ability to go WWOOFing, and to quit my job, seemed ideal. As an open-minded, privileged, and relatively well-travelled independent-female, exploration and adventure has always been something I've been passionate about. Born the youngest of five children in a small, socially conservative town in Pennsylvania, I have continuously searched for something to set me apart from my siblings and friends. Fearless of change and spontaneity, my defining label quickly became “the adventurous one.” Upon return from my travels, I would ask myself questions such as “when’s the next trip?” and “where to now?” I love immersing myself into new cultures and felt that WWOOFing would allow for just that.

Additionally, I thought volunteering on a WWOOF farm could be my chance to create change and make a difference in the world. I am personable, helpful, and hard working; an individual who approaches life with a “we can do it” optimistic attitude. I am

a vegetarian and believe in the communal living environment that I imagined WWOOF farms created. Coming from a large family, I understand the importance of working together and sharing responsibilities. Values that guide me through my everyday are love, patience, and an open-mind. I believed that what WWOOF farms were doing was important and wanted to better understand these experiences.

Due to a current full-time job at the time, I never did go WWOOFing in the spring of 2010. However, my interest about the movement never ceased. I enrolled into the University of Waterloo, and began to pursue a Master's degree in Tourism Policy and Planning. My reason for conducting research in the tourism field reflects my desire to view tourism as part of the solution for world peace and equitable development. When travelling alone, I always assumed other people looked at the world in the same way I did. I thought others saw travel as a way to connect and learn about new cultures, to try new foods and talk to the local people. However, and contrary to my naïveté, this is not always the case and I soon began to watch my "tourism for peace dream" slowly dissolve.

Regardless of this realisation, I did not give up. I still believed there was good to come from tourism and chose to conduct research in the tourism field. I began to think more broadly about the WWOOF movement. I initially explored WWOOFing through a narrative inquiry project for a qualitative methods graduate course. I interviewed four participants in an effort to explore (WWOOF) through stories. As I completed the narrative project and started to compose my literature review for this Master's thesis, I began to see parallels between WWOOFing and the volunteer tourism sector. By its own admission, WWOOF, as an international organisation and volunteering movement,

provides people with the ability to travel, volunteer and share more sustainable ways of living (WWOOF, 2011). Volunteer tourism is said to generate opportunities to facilitate relationships with like-minded volunteers and encourages consciousness-raising experiences (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Furthermore, students of volunteer tourism suggest it fosters cross-cultural understanding among themselves and hosts (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008).

As I reviewed the literature, I believed WWOOF mirrored certain aspects of volunteer tourism yet differed in others, and noted a sense of reciprocity or mutual exchange between hosts and guests, which I felt might be unique to the WWOOF experience. This sense of reciprocity was underscored by the two WWOOFers I had met at the hostel a few years earlier. Nonetheless, I realised during my literature search, there were few published studies on the WWOOF movement itself and even fewer studies linking this concept directly to volunteer tourism. I wanted to understand the broader picture of the experience of WWOOFing and what these experiences meant to the volunteers who participate in this movement. Guided by the philosophical foundations set forth by Gadamer (2004), I chose to conduct a hermeneutic phenomenological study to explore the meanings volunteers gave to the lived experience of volunteering on organic farms in Argentina.

Gadamer (2004) believes we cannot look at either the past or present experience objectively. Thus, and prior to data collection, I reflected on my proposed research topic and identified how I understood this phenomenon. As I wrote in my thesis proposal:

*The research I am proposing to undertake may cast light on this fairly controversial topic: experiences of volunteer tourism, more specifically the experiences of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). As of now, I understand WWOOFing, as an opportunity for*

*like-minded people to come together to participate in organics and sustainable living; an experience that may be sought out in order to escape life back home and learn something new; potentially I can see it as being a form of emancipation from the commercialised farming industry; and finally, from a traveller's perspective, I see WWOOF as a cheap way to travel, a way to "give back," and to experience another culture more in-depth.*

Gadamer would likely describe this reflection, along with personal attributes and the circumstances of my life, as my *historicity* or pre-understanding, which is always with me when I make meaning of an experience. Gadamer (2004) suggests we must recognise that our understanding of experience is determined by the fusion of our present horizon (e.g., what is taking place or the experience to take place) within our historical horizon (e.g., pre-understandings). Furthermore, this fused horizon is always expanding as we are constantly revising our understanding about the whole as more parts come into view.

As this thesis aims to make clear, I recognised my expanding understanding as I began data collection in Argentina; gaining new perspectives from both volunteers and my own experiences. As more parts came into view, I began to revisit my pre-understandings and continually altering and expanding my new understanding. I present this expanding horizon throughout the thesis, and reflect on new understandings gained about the phenomenon as I navigated through the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes of the research.

It should be noted that early on in my data collection, I realised it was more accurate to refer to the experience as an "organic volunteering" experience, and to move away from the WWOOF title. While I initially framed my research around WWOOF, my immersion in the volunteering experience made it clear that this was no longer an accurate phrase. For example, some of the volunteers were not participants of the

WWOOF organisation but belonged to organisations, such as Help Exchange, which also promoted these volunteering experiences. Furthermore, the volunteers I met did not always volunteer and work exclusively on a “farm,” as the letter “F” in “WWOOF” suggests, but rather instead some volunteers engaged in organic and sustainable building projects. Because of my immediate expanding understanding of the experience, the phrase “organic volunteer” was adopted within the first several days of my research. However, upon my return, and again more recently, I reflected more on why the phrase “organic volunteering” encapsulates the volunteer experiences explored through this research. Through reflection of what the word *organic* means to me and how it relates to my research, I understood this phrase to mean more than just a form of volunteering promoting organic production. Rather, the phrase illuminates the natural development and interconnectedness of these experiences, while also encompassing the notion that volunteers and hosts within this context assume the educational role of organic intellectuals. This new understanding of the phrase *organic volunteering* will be further discussed in the concluding chapter as it has potential future research implications.

### **Purpose statement and research questions**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the meanings volunteers gave to lived experiences of volunteering on organic farms in Argentina. Guided by philosophical foundations set forth by Gadamer (2004), I situated this study within an interpretivist paradigm, which helped me gain insights into the phenomenon of organic volunteering. Research questions guiding this study focused on lived experiences and interpretations of volunteers involved with the organic volunteering movement. The research questions are as follows:

- ❖ How do the volunteers experience organic volunteering?
- ❖ What does it mean to be organic volunteering?
- ❖ How do volunteers understand the experience of organic volunteering?
- ❖ How do the participants' pre-understandings of organic volunteering shape their experiences, encounters and relationships on the farm?

### **Significance of the study**

Although the use of this methodology is not common in tourism literature, Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic phenomenology provided the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the meaning of organic volunteering experiences. Additionally this methodology allowed me to engage with and explore the aspects that shape my understanding about knowledge production and interpretation of the lived experience. The insights I have gained through this research not only contribute to hermeneutic phenomenological research in tourism, volunteerism, and leisure studies, but also represents the expanding horizon of tourism impacts, as discussed below.

Mowforth and Munt (2009) argue there is now an abundance of tourism offerings attempting to minimize negative impacts of mass tourism, claiming to be "alternative" (p. 96). Niches such as eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and pro-poor tourism, bid their reaction to mass tourism, as each attempts to re-define the most ethical and sustainable way to take holiday (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Volunteer tourism, a growing sector, is another form of alternative tourism "re-defining" holiday, as it claims to proffer potential for cross-cultural understanding, a sense of global citizenry among participants, and shift towards a more responsible form of travel (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Although it seems volunteer tourism moves us closer to the ideals of tourism, researchers such as



Guttentag (2009) and Sin (2010) question its laudable aims; indicating the presence of tourism creates social and power struggles within the local communities of these destinations. Moreover, the sustainability of volunteer tourism is contested, when organisations accommodate these participants' interests over those of the host communities (Guttentag, 2009, Sin 2010).

Within Higgins-Desbiolles' (2006) conceptual paper, *More than an "industry"*: *The forgotten power of tourism as a social force*, tourism's potential as a social force is recognised. However, as it was highlighted in the critical volunteer tourism literature above, Higgins-Desbiolles claims transformative capacities of tourism are overshadowed by the industry attributes of tourism. It seems to me, in order to use tourism as a positive engine for social, cultural, environmental, and political change, it would be necessary to promote touristic experiences that encompass this transformative ethos. One way to achieve this is through the experience of organic volunteering. As explored and illuminated in my thesis, organic volunteering is an experience of living in interconnectedness, which ultimately facilitates opportunities for learning, consciousness-raising, and inspiring future activism; thereby fostering new hope for positive social and political agendas within tourism.

## Chapter Two: Related Literature

In preparing for this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, it was important for me to explore other authors' interpretations and perspectives of the research topic. I believe it was important for me to ponder my own perceptions of the organic volunteering experience *and* to assess scholarly literature to engage, participate, and understand this movement. As Gadamer (2004) suggests:

We find that meanings cannot be understood in an arbitrary way. Just as we cannot continually misunderstand the use of a word without its affecting the meaning of the whole, so we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another. (p. 271)

Thus, through the review of this related research, I have come to better understand the current field of knowledge relating to my work, as well as a clearer understanding of the dominant discourses surrounding my topic. Reflecting upon research enabled me to move beyond my own pre-understandings, expanding my horizon of the phenomenon under exploration.

In this review of literature, I explore literature in the following topic areas: tourism in the Global South, alternative tourism, volunteer tourism, socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism, and the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement. The discussion of volunteer tourism is organised into the following sub-categories: definitions of volunteer tourism, volunteer tourists and their motivations, notions of the *Other*, impacts on the volunteers, impacts on host-guest relationships, and social-exchange theory. I end the literature review by providing context for my study; highlighting the agricultural tourism literature as well as the WWOOF phenomenon.

It should be noted, in the literature review I refer to the North-South divide when speaking of nations affected by tourism. The North-South divide is a socio-economic and political division that is constructed between the wealthier developed countries, known collectively as the North and the developing nations known collectively as the South. Therefore, throughout my document I will refer to developed countries as the Global North and developing countries as the Global South.

### **Tourism in the Global South**

Following the Second World War era, the demand for international tourism rapidly increased. This increase was influenced by plummeting fuel prices and growing levels of disposable income enjoyed by people living in the Global North. As a result, nations worldwide began to capitalise on this booming industry (Hampton, 1998; Tosun & Timothy, 2001). The situation today has changed little, as increasing economic gains resulting from tourism are still being felt worldwide. In 2009, the international tourism market generated over \$8.5 billion USD in export earnings (UNWTO, 2010). As an engine for economic growth, tourism has drawn the attention of developing nations and their governments. Many of these governments actively pursue international tourism development with the hope of finding solutions to resolve economic challenges; as tourism is viewed as providing employment opportunities, small business development, and foreign exchange earnings (Harrison, 1992; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Scheyvens, 2002).

While it may be a laudable approach, the usefulness of tourism as an economic development strategy has been questioned, as it can lead to socio-cultural and environmental issues such as: foreign domination and dependency, socioeconomic and

spatial polarization, environmental destruction, cultural alienation, and the loss of control and identity among host communities (Brohman, 1996; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Scheyvens, 2002; Spenceley, 2005; Wearing, 2001; Weaver & Opperman, 2000). These issues are discussed at length by Brohman (1996). He argues foreign domination occurs when foreign capital controls and owns the majority of accommodation and tour agencies in a specific location; thereby contributing to economic leakage and taking income away from the local community. Drawing upon examples from the Caribbean, Brohman also highlighted the spatial dichotomy between the “privileged” tourists or elites, who often control choice spots on the coast, and the “underprivileged”, whose space remains in the interior of many countries (p. 57). Indeed, issues such as: environmental destruction, cultural alienation, the loss of control, and changes to cultural identity, are felt by many communities due to increasing visitation, rising crime, host-guest conflicts, overuse of natural assets (e.g., sandy beaches, coral reefs) and unsound environmental practices, many of which often accompany tourism development (Brohman, 1996). Furthermore, debates about tourism development in the Global South consider whether existing forms of tourism are sustainable, as they may perpetuate negative impacts on the environment, corrupt local cultures and result in any potential economic benefits leaking back into the economies of the Global North (Mowforth & Munt, 2009, p. 11).

The realisation that unregulated, mass tourism has damaging effects on the environment, economy and members of local communities led to the emergence of alternative tourism, which is often viewed as forms of tourism that are assumed to alleviate some of the abovementioned issues (Brohman, 1996; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Spenceley, 2005; Wearing, 2001; Weaver & Opperman, 2000). The emergence of new

forms of tourism (frequently prefixed with *sustainable* and *eco-*) suggests “old” tourism (e.g., mass tourism) has created problems, which need to be overcome (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). The goal of achieving these forms of tourism is a significant part of the discourse within tourism studies; however, prior to embarking on an in-depth discussion of alternative tourism, which may seem to be more sustainable, it is appropriate to first define what it means to achieve *sustainability* in the context of tourism. According to Butler (1993) sustainable tourism development is

...tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being of other activities and processes. (p. 29)

Mowforth and Munt (2009) argue, to attain a more sustainable tourism development in the Global South, it is necessary to move beyond dependency; to disrupt subordination and domination patterns created by mass tourism and to develop alternative forms, which will promote local ownership of tourism resources, create local employment, and help reduce economic leakage. For example, Choo and Jamal’s (2009) concept of “eco-organic farm tourism” employs a strategy for using tourism to help facilitate sustainable agriculture, local development, socio-cultural and environmental conservation, and well-being. The development of alternative tourism forms, such as Choo and Jamal’s concept, provides the opportunity to challenge and potentially change the inequalities of mass tourism as suggested by Mowforth and Munt. However, this can be a complicated undertaking. The discourse of alternative tourism offers one possible approach and is analysed in the next section.

## **Alternative Tourism**

Definitions of alternative tourism are ambiguous and often dependent on the definition of mass tourism. As Wearing (2001) states:

The term 'alternative' logically implies an antithesis. It arises as the contrary to that which is seen as negative or detrimental about conventional tourism...the terms alternative and mass tourism are mutually interdependent, each relying on a series of value-laden judgments that themselves structure the definitional content of the terms. (p. 28)

Therefore, alternative tourism would ideally be different from what is characteristically viewed as mass tourism or dominant forms of tourism (Wearing, 2001). According to Brohman (1996) alternative tourism is a phrase often associated with smaller-scale and locally-owned enterprises, host community participation in the development and planning processes, and development emphasising local economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability. In accordance with Brohman, the provision of alternative tourism attempts to minimise perceived negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts.

Wearing (2001) indicates that by exploring the specificity of a particular tourist experience, such as an alternative tourist experience, it may be possible to achieve a better understanding of significant divergences and convergences that exist between both mass tourism and alternative tourism and the subtle nuances that add to these tourist experiences. To further investigate the concept of alternative tourism, the following sections present an examination of alternative tourism offerings and what this sector entails. I then briefly present some critiques of alternative tourism literature.

### ***The want for an alternative***

The search for new travel experiences, the want for something different, is said to reflect tourists' increasing understandings of the homogenising nature of conventional

mass tourism (McIntosh, 2004; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Richards & Wilson, 2006). Alternative tourism caters to tourists' desire for *alternatives*, proposing experiences that engender *authentic*, *interactive* and more *meaningful* and *individualised* opportunities for tourists (Richards & Wilson, 2006; Taylor, 2001; Wearing, 2001). According to Richards and Wilson (2006) the desire for these alternative experiences evolved from tourists' increasing desire for altruism, self-change, and a confirmation of their identities. Krippendorf (1987) proposes the drive for participating in alternative tourism originates from tourists' demands to satisfy social needs such as: contact with other people, self-realisation through creative activity, and knowledge and exploration opportunities.

In search of different experiences, tourists are increasingly seeing the Global South as an exciting travel opportunity, offering off the beaten path holidays, which are perceived to incorporate environmental beauty, ecological diversity, and culturally enhanced-encounters (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Scheyvens (2002) suggests individuals who partake in alternative tourism activities seek out low-budget opportunities to explore their surroundings, experience adventure and authentic culture, and meet new people (Scheyvens, 2002).

### ***Alternative offerings***

Recognition of increasing tourist demand for new and alternative tourism experiences resulted in the creation of a multitude of niche tourism sectors within alternative tourism. These new niches are essentially small-scale, low-density, dispersed in non-urban areas, and generally cater to special interest groups of people with mainly above-average education and income (Wearing, 2001). Some countries in the Global

South developed alternative tourism niches, such as ecotourism, backpacker tourism, adventure tourism, and more recently volunteer tourism, to suit the needs of the tourist. Provisions of these alternative tourism experiences, including ecotourism and volunteer tourism, should ideally align with the principles and fundamentals of sustainable development as previously outlined by Butler (1993). Furthermore, highlighting some characteristics of alternative tourism, specifically backpacker tourism, Visser (2003) notes that alternative tourism facilitates local economic, socio-cultural, and environmental objectives.

Alternative tourism experiences have the potential to change the focus of tourism for both visitor (Brown & Morrison, 2003; McGehee & Santos; 2005; Wearing, 2001) and host community (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Scheyvens, 2002; Wearing, 2001). For example, experiences described in McGehee's (2002) study reflect how tourism impacts the participation of the tourists in social movements. McGehee recognises alternative tourism's potential power to change tourists' perspectives, providing ways to create and establish relationships, extending beyond the brief tourist experience itself. More specifically she argues alternative tourism motivates and mobilises on-going participation in social movements. Additionally, some research has shown these tourists are more engaged and involved with the community, while participating in these types of alternative experiences. For instance, McIntosh and Zahra (2008) explored cultural encounters in New Zealand and argued alternative tourism affords opportunities for active involvement and reflexive interaction, whereby volunteers working in the Awatapu Holiday Programme, experienced appreciation of Maori culture (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008). The Maori communities in McIntosh and Zahra's (2008) study use the cultural



experiences within this tourism context, to preserve the Maori culture in New Zealand. This is also reflected in Taylor's (2001) research. Taylor implies these experiences are centred on increased engagement, encouraging meaningful interaction between the visitors and Maori people. Furthermore, Scheyvens (2002) proposes alternative tourists, such as backpack travellers, drive monetary gains into the hands of the local community, empowering the local populations of these communities.

It is apparent that the aforementioned descriptions of the alternative tourism offerings are congruent with some of the goals of sustainable tourism as Butler (1993) defined them. Indeed, alternative tourism has the potential to provide tourism opportunities, which attempt to better the well being of the surrounding local communities. However, other researchers have highlighted the rapid growth of alternative tourism forms, such as backpacker tourism, which some would argue is blurring the boundaries between alternative tourism and mass tourism (Ooi & Laing, 2010; Welk, 2004; Zurick, 1995). These blurred boundaries necessitate a critique of alternative tourism and this is offered next.

### ***Critical review of alternative tourism***

The critiques of alternative tourism often begin with the following argument: just because this form of tourism is not considered mass tourism, it does not necessarily guarantee that the same set of social, environmental, and economic impacts will not occur under the *alternative* form. For example, Zurick (1995) argues backpackers, as they search for greater authenticity, push further into the periphery and access remote places. Thus, off the beaten path becomes the path most trodden.

It is often claimed the development of alternative tourism has been a result of the need to address problems created by unregulated mass tourism (Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Wheeler, 1991). However, Wheeler (1991) asserts alternative tourism is only a “micro solution” at best, to what is essentially a “macro problem” (p. 91). Mowforth and Munt (2009) claim the blame for the growth of new and alternative forms of tourism cannot be exclusively associated with problems due to mass tourism. Rather, the growth of alternative tourism is associated with the continuation of historical inequalities between the Global North and Global South. Fernandes (1994) declares this growth has arisen because “the mainstream tourism industry has in fact merely tried to invent a new legitimisation for itself – the ‘sustainable’ and ‘rational’ use of the environment, including the preservation of nature as an amenity for the already advantaged” (p. 4, as cited in Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

Regardless of the reason for the growth of alternative tourism, Mowforth and Munt (2009) argue there is now an abundance of tourism offerings attempting to minimise negative impacts of mass tourism and claiming to be “alternative” (p. 96). Alternative tourism niches such as eco-tourism, community-based tourism, and pro-poor tourism are reactions to mass tourism, attempting to re-define the ethical holiday (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). For instance, eco-tourism is marketed as tourism, with provisions involving “responsible travel that conserves natural environments and sustains the well-being of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society, 2011), while researchers indicate pro-poor tourism’s potential for poverty solutions through the development of tourism (Ashley *et al.*, 2001). Volunteer tourism, a growing phenomenon, is another form of alternative tourism that “re-defines” holiday. Volunteer

tourism is claimed to proffer potential for cross-cultural understanding, a sense of global citizenry among participants, and shift towards a more responsible form of travel (Raymond & Hall, 2008). The next section provides an in-depth exploration of volunteer tourism.

### **Volunteer Tourism**

The association between volunteering and travel was established nearly a century ago, well before the emergence of terms such as alternative tourism and eco-tourism (Benson, 2011; Wearing, 2004, p. 210). Volunteer tourism, sometimes referred to as “voluntourism” (Clemmons, 2009), is seen as a sub-sector of alternative tourism and has been hailed widely as a mode of tourism that affords benefits for both tourists and host communities (Alexander & Bakir, 2011; Brown, 2005; Guttentag, 2009; McGehee & Santos, 2005; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Wearing, 2001). The most commonly cited definition of volunteer tourism is set forth by Wearing (2001):

The generic term ‘volunteer tourism’ applies to those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment. (p. 1)

Volunteer tourism is a more reciprocal form of alternative tourism generating benefits such as cross-cultural understanding among the participants and hosts (Raymond & Hall, 2008, p. 530). It has become a global phenomenon with future market predictions indicating growth both in size and value (Benson, 2011; Tourism Research and Marketing [TRAM], 2008). Tourism Research and Marketing (TRAM), an independent consultancy, established in London in 1980, operates in many sectors of the tourism industry with an emphasis on research and feasibility studies. TRAM (2008) published

statistics from a 2007 survey, indicating a significant growth within the volunteer tourism sector, estimating total expenditure generated by volunteer tourism is likely to be between 1.66 billion USD and \$2.6 billion USD. Additionally, it is estimated nearly 1.6 million people participate in volunteer tourism per year. The growing popularity of volunteer tourism is evident, with recent research providing confirmation of this dramatic expansion of this sector (Benson, 2011; Guttentag, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Young, 2008).

Much of the published research over the past decade focused on the volunteer (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2006; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Wearing 2002, 2004), whilst more recent volunteer tourism studies are focused on impacts of volunteer tourism on host communities (Guttentag, 2009; McGehee & Andereck, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Further, Benson (2011) points out, recent research is challenging the ethics of volunteer tourism, rather than the previous passive acceptance of volunteer tourism as “saving the world” (p. 2). This tension will be further explored next.

Predominately cast in a positive light, volunteer tourism provides a variety of possible benefits including the work volunteers undertake, personal growth, environmental conservation, and fostering cultural exchange (Brown, 2005; Lepp, 2008; McGehee & Santos, 2005; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Wearing 2001, 2002). Receiving less attention is the possibility of negative impacts. Consequences must also be recognised, as they may perpetuate community dependency, acculturation, and negative conceptualisations of the *Other*. These issues eventually impede on the host-guest relationship in a destination (Benson, 2011; Guttentag, 2009). The next section examines

the socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism and host-guest relationships. However prior to this examination, it is imperative to identify the volunteers by highlighting research on volunteer tourists characteristics, and their motivations. Additionally, discourse surrounding the concept of the *Other* is also considered. This discussion seems necessary, as volunteers may desire to become a part of the host community's space, and move away from traditional tourism experiences (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011).

### ***The Volunteers***

Volunteer tourists are sometimes not considered specifically as tourists, either by local residents or by themselves. Although volunteer tourists expect to carry out meaningful volunteer work, current literature suggests many volunteers expect to experience tourist activities while on their volunteer vacation (Alexander & Bakir, 2011). Brown's (2005) research made a distinction based on two possible participant mindsets: the volunteer-minded, where most or the entire trip is devoted to volunteering at the destination, and the vacation-minded, where volunteering is only a small portion of a predominantly leisure experience.

Regardless of the individual's mindset, if we refer back to the volunteer tourism definition previously provided by Wearing (2001), volunteer tourists include any individuals who volunteer in an organised way, participating in trips that may involve alleviating poverty, restoring the environment, or research into aspects of society or environment (Wearing, 2001). Some volunteer tourists expect to pay the provider, to be in the hands of a responsible provider, and to experience something unique; as made clear by McGehee and Andereck (2009) suggesting that "depending on the volunteer tourism organisation with which they are involved, volunteer tourists may expect resources such

as accommodations, food and transportation in a different, more sustainable form from mass tourists” (p. 47). Many respondents from McIntosh and Bonnemann’s (2006) study were reported to be at a juncture in their lives and looking for future direction. These volunteers hoped their participation in a voluntary working-holiday would allow for self-reflection and an opportunity to assess what is personally meaningful.

Values and motivations of volunteers are evaluated so researchers can better understand reasons behind the desire and willingness to participate in volunteer tourism programmes and experiences. The next sub-section briefly outlines relevant literature on volunteer tourist motivations. Understanding motivations may allow for a more thorough evaluation of volunteer tourist behaviours and socio-cultural impacts that may be endured by the local communities. The following section outlines relevant research undertaken, briefly exploring these co-existing tourist motivations and typologies within volunteer tourism. Smith’s (1981) concept of altruism is then highlighted at the end of this discussion, to further illuminate the co-existence of these multiple motivations.

#### *Volunteer motivations*

Wearing (2001) argues, “the volunteer tourist seeks to discover the type of life experiences that best suits their needs” (p. 9). Correspondingly, Wearing’s research identified seven categories of volunteer tourist motivation including: (1) altruism, (2) travel/adventure, (3) personal growth, (4) cultural exchange/learning, (5) professional development, (6) structure of the programme, and (7) right time/right place. Furthermore, numerous volunteer tourism studies also indicate volunteers are not simply motivated by altruism, but also largely by personal intentions and values (Brown 2005; Guttentag, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Sin, 2009).

Sin's (2009) research focuses on participants who travelled abroad to volunteer in South Africa with a university programme, *Action Africa*. The researcher extrapolated themes from semi-structured interviews to understand volunteer motivations for volunteer tourism. Themes of "Self" and concepts such as, "I want to travel," were identified as major motives for becoming involved with the programme, while only 18% of the volunteers interviewed had identified with "I want to contribute" (Sin, 2009). Similarly, using a mixed-methods approach, Rehberg (2005) investigated motivations of young Swiss adults who had an interest in international volunteering. Findings indicate the majority of volunteers identified with "Quest for new" and "Quest for oneself", inductively constructed typologies; whereas, only 11% of the volunteers identified with the "Achieving something positive for others" group, implying genuine altruistic motivations are limited.

Though altruism is one motivation of the volunteer tourist, it does not seem to be the central component to volunteer tourism experiences. Drawing on volunteerism literature, Smith's (1981) concept of *altruism*, identifies a co-existence of motivations when volunteering, and although altruism is a principle of volunteering, individuals pursue an experience that provides a combination of altruistic and personal benefits for themselves (Smith, 1981). Furthermore, altruism has been described as unobtainable in an "absolute" form and at a very basic level, those who practice it "feel good," receiving psychic rewards that contribute to a positive self-image (Smith, 1981, p. 23). Smith believes altruism is best defined as:

An aspect of human motivation that is present to the degree that the individual derives intrinsic satisfaction or psychic rewards from attempting to optimize the intrinsic satisfaction of one or more other persons without the conscious expectation of participating in an exchange whereby those "others" would be

obligated to make similar/ related satisfaction optimization efforts in return. (p. 23)

Smith's definition further illuminates there is no absolute altruism; "no absolute lack of concern for self in the net motivation for any act" (p. 24). Indeed, this idea and the investigation of volunteers' motives seem instrumental to our understanding of volunteer behaviours, specifically behaviours of volunteer tourism participants, and further reveals potential socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism as the sector grows. For example, as Sin (2009) theorises, the tensions and paradoxes revolving around volunteer-host relationships, namely power structures and *Othering*, could be a result of egotistic-centred motives. To further this conversation, I now briefly discuss the concepts of *Othering* and the *Other* as are engaged in the volunteer tourism literature to help unpack power relations underlying all tourism relationships.

### ***The Other***

The term *Other*, as it relates to volunteer tourism, is explained by Wearing (2001), who argues volunteer tourism facilitates an alternative form of leisure not available to those in the Global North. Wearing (2001) suggests volunteer tourism enables one "to explore new cultural paradigms and to create new identities that incorporate the 'other' – this other being the community and natural environments of the area visited" (p. 87). As volunteer tourists attempt to explore these new cultural paradigms, their interest in becoming part of the host community's space shifts away from traditional tourism experiences (Wearing & Garbowski, 2011). However, Wearing and Grabowski (2011) emphasise the importance of recognizing the way host communities can be *Othered*, when tourists visit these destinations in these new ways. For instance, Jack and Phipps (2005) note, Western tourists, "seek solace in the *Other*, where the *Other* is viewed as an



equally homogenous, but diametrically opposed set of people that are untainted by the violent orderings of modernity” (p. 24). Furthermore, the *Other* are pushed to the periphery of society, a practice referred to as *Othering* (Foucault, 1977). *Othering* can lead to segregation and exclusion of local communities from participating or sharing in tourism development processes, functions and economic benefits of the industry (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011).

Thus, when exploring and interacting with communities in tourism destinations, these potential consequences should be recognized and relationships between hosts and guests should be evaluated. For example, Barnett and Land (2007) analyse and critique the debates about around the concept of “caring at a distance” to conceptualize the problem of tourists relating to locals from a destination community (p. 1066). Caring at a distance suggests the compassionate relationship individuals have with people is more difficult to sustain as distances increase; this includes what they call “recognised differences” such as ethnicity and race. Relating to the *Other* or “distant strangers” is rendered equivalent to caring at a distance by these authors (Barnett & Land, 2007, p. 1066); perpetuating inequalities between hosts and guests. To counteract these inequalities, the authors introduce the concept of generosity as a modality of power, whereby caring relationships, which are attentive and responsive to the needs of individuals are encouraged; “caring-about”, a more genuine set of relationships than just “caring-for” individuals (Barnett & Land, 2007, p. 1067).

An additional example in the literature is presented by Alexander and Bakir (2011), whose research touches upon the notion of the *Other* and the relationships created between hosts and guests. In an effort to better understand volunteer tourism, Alexander

and Bakir conducted grounded theory research to look at the experiences of the volunteer tourists visiting South Africa. The idea of engagement was identified as an essential component to the voluntourism experience. Contrary to other forms of tourism (e.g., mass tourism), Alexander and Bakir's (2011) concept of engagement not only involves interaction with the *Other*, but encourages connecting with the *Other* in meaningful ways through participation, integration, involvement, and immersion. Literature surrounding notions of the *Other* and the influence on host-guest relationships, highlights the importance of investigating socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism. In the next section, I outline several main areas of research undertaken on socio-cultural impacts.

### **Socio-cultural Impacts of Volunteer Tourism**

According to some researchers, volunteer tourism provides a more reciprocal form of tourism, arguably generating cross-cultural understanding among participants and hosts (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). It generates opportunities for facilitating relationships with like-minded volunteers, and encouraging consciousness-raising experiences (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Additionally, researchers assess volunteer tourism's ability to produce an environment for fostering positive socio-cultural impacts (McIntosh and Zahra, 2008; Ooi & Laing, 2010; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Sin, 2010). However, Sin (2010) challenges the notion of *reciprocity* within volunteer tourism he argued this sector sometimes perpetuates power struggles and dependency issues. To determine in what ways volunteer tourism affects volunteers and destination host communities, research examining positive and negative impacts is necessary. The next section presents research regarding the socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism, including an overview of the impacts on volunteers and on host-guest relationships. As

social exchange theory is an influential explanatory framework used in this area, it will also be discussed.

### *Impacts on volunteers*

McGehee (2002) argues alternative tourism experiences, such as volunteering with Earthwatch, can influence a tourist's activism upon their return from the experience. Earthwatch, similar to other volunteer sending organisations, generates opportunities for paying volunteers to participate in different types of alternative travel expeditions (McGehee, 2002). Earthwatch participants choose different types of research-oriented projects that teach basic research skills, data collection techniques, and interviewing methods (Earthwatch, 2011; McGehee, 2002). McGehee's research shows how expeditions with organisations such as Earthwatch facilitate resource mobilisation and networking, which then often leads to an increased desire to participate in social movement activities.

McGehee and Santos (2005) determined volunteer tourism affords the opportunity to build relationships with like-minded volunteers and encourages consciousness-raising experiences. These experiences include the realisation of an "us and them" dichotomy; a heightened awareness of social inequalities in the host community, and the global and complex nature of social issues; and the realisation that time and effort are necessary before effective and permanent change will occur (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Lepp (2008) concluded, volunteer tourists, working on projects abroad, develop deeper perspectives of their lives at home, and discover an intrinsic desire to become involved in society in more meaningful and purposeful ways once they return home. Ideas put forth by McGehee and Santos (2005) and Lepp (2008) parallels some findings in my own

research, as volunteers described developing a new awareness and understanding about the world when on the farm, which they suggest will shape how they relate and become involved in the world once they return home.

### ***Impacts on host-guest relationships***

Research on volunteer tourism suggests it can create an environment for fostering a more “reciprocal” host-guest connection; one in which volunteers give back, rather than just take, from the community (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Wearing 2001). Additionally, local community members and volunteers participate in cultural exchanges, rather than the more traditional tourists’ experience where the tourist observes the local culture (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Ooi & Laing, 2010; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Alexander and Bakir’s (2011) concept of engagement has been conceptualised from the fundamentals of Kearsley and Shneiderman’s (1998) engagement theory: “Relate-Create-Donate” (p. 16). However, Alexander and Bakir recognised that engagement within volunteer tourism does not necessarily “create” projects to address problems; rather volunteers dedicate themselves through participation in purposeful work and projects, as needed or determined by the community (Alexander & Bakir, 2011).

Recent research has shown how volunteer tourism can foster cross-cultural understanding and mutual beneficial relationships between hosts and guests (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). For example, as previously mentioned in McIntosh and Zahra’s (2008) study, which explored volunteer tourism in a Maori community in New Zealand, the researchers introduced volunteer tourism as a form of creative tourism, providing opportunity for cultural encounters, which were dependent on active

involvement and reflexive interaction on the part of tourists. Tourists worked interactively with communities on local projects, and as a result developed stronger, more meaningful relationships with locals (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008).

Increased cultural understandings and the existence of social exchange relationships, between hosts and volunteers, can facilitate an environment where residents express positive attitudes towards volunteer tourism. For example, McGehee and Andereck (2009) focused their study on residents' attitudes about volunteer tourism in Tijuana, Mexico. In their study, social exchange theory was applied to examine the inter-relationship between personal benefit, planning, and additional product development for volunteer tourism. The authors determined that those who benefit the most from volunteer tourism also perceive positive consequences and will be more supportive of future volunteer tourism activities in their communities (McGehee & Andereck, 2009). Similarly, Heuman (2005) investigated small-scale, community-based volunteer tourism and its impact on host-guest relationships. Heuman (2005) explored these host and guest exchange relationships as a trainee staff member on a Visions Holiday (working holiday) in Dominica. His research findings indicate that in *working holiday tourism* locals (hosts) seek to protect tourists, a reciprocal exchange of gifts is present, there is an element of obedience among tourists to expectations of locals, and a performance of deference that accompanies interaction between volunteers and hosts (Heuman, 2005). Exploring this charitable social-exchange literature is helpful in understanding the extent of a relationship formed between host and guest.

Positive relational impacts of volunteer tourism paint an optimistic vision of this form of alternative travel and although the intent is commendable, outcomes should be

analysed critically. To this end, it is necessary to identify critical tourism literature, which can help to highlight negative socio-cultural impacts and aid in our understanding of the entire situation (Guttentag, 2009). For example, Mowforth and Munt (2009) indicate tourism and the unequal nature of its development creates a power structure in which the dominance and control of tourism in the Global South is centred in the Global North. Although alternative tourism activities, such as volunteer tourism, are positioned as a seemingly more effective approach for minimising negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism, Mowforth and Munt argue relationships among hosts and guests should be critically examined. Indeed, volunteer tourism may have negative implications. For example, Sin (2010) states:

...despite intentions to aid or be “pro-poor” in volunteer tourism, the very premises of care posits the volunteer tourist as privileged when compared to his or her hosts, meaning that the relationships formed are unequal to begin with. While caring relationships may very likely be welcome and accepted by both volunteer tourists and hosts, it is still important to highlight the possibility that volunteer tourism may simply be another form of “aid” that continues to perpetuate and re-produce existing power and social hierarchies between the rich and privileged, and the poor and less privileged. (p. 991)

Sin’s (2010) article, *Who are we responsible to? Locals’ tales of volunteer tourism*, presents a critical analysis of these relationships. Examining host-guest relationships from the perspective of hosts in volunteer-receiving communities of Cambodia, the author investigated both positive and negative opinions of Cambodian hosts towards volunteer tourist groups. Research findings indicate volunteer tourism in this particular case has yet to achieve equality within host-guest relationships. Sin (2010) argues it sometimes causes power struggles and dependency issues. Moreover, Guttentag (2009) insinuates negligence of local’s desires caused by a lack of local involvement and

an increase in dependency caused by the presence of volunteer labour. Wearing (2001) acknowledged early on that, “one fundamental danger is that volunteers can reiterate the ethos of the *expert*, thus promoting deference in the local community to outside knowledge, therefore contributing to the curtailment of self-sufficiency” (p. 51). As Wearing’s observation suggests, volunteering disrupts local economies and promotes a cycle of dependency.

Furthermore, researchers argue intercultural benefits are possibly “over-stated” and in actuality intercultural experiences may have the reverse effect, reinforcing stereotyping and *Othering* (as described above) (Guttentag, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008). This is made apparent in Simpson’s (2004) interviews with gap-year volunteers. Some interviewees emphasised the difference between host and guest and instead of finding commonality among developed and developing nations, they reinforced the dichotomy of “them and us” (p. 668). The *Othering* seen in this example parallels the concept of “caring at a distance” previously presented by Barnett and Land (2007).

The central focus of the volunteers’ motivation is contested. Some research claims the focus is not the livelihoods of the host community; rather it is the volunteers’ motivations, which often include personal factors such as “self” and personal growth (Coghlan, 2008; Guttentag, 2009). Also, motivations of giving, performing charitable work, and volunteering have potential to be misinterpreted and may perpetuate tensions with host communities. Raymond and Hall (2008) indicate the problem with volunteer work is local community members can usually complete the projects volunteer tourists perform. Volunteer tourists, however, generally work for free (sometimes they even pay to work). Therefore there is a likelihood that these tourists undercut competing local

labourers. Guttentag (2009) notes a decrease in employment opportunities caused by the presence of volunteer labour. Moreover, for organisations, satisfying volunteers' personal motivational factors becomes necessary to attract future project participants, even if this may result in negative impacts for the host community (Guttentag, 2009). Comparably, Rehberg (2005) argues organisations use motivational studies as a planning mechanism to create programmes that fit the needs of volunteers, sometimes contrary to the needs of the host community. Some researchers contest the sustainability of these practices, as accommodating these participants will become problematic, particularly if volunteers' interests are given preference over those of the host communities (Guttentag, 2009; Wearing, 2001). Volunteer labour and intentions of giving should not be viewed as inevitably beneficial, and as the literature reviewed above has shown, the relationship created may not always be positive. Critically examining exchanges between hosts and guests within volunteer tourism is necessary to further understand host-guest relationships.

In addition to the review of host-guest relationships, this literature review thus far has assessed research related to key concepts relevant to my project, including tourism in the Global South, alternative tourism, volunteer tourism, and socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism. For example, Mowforth and Munt (1998) discussed the emergence of alternative tourism experiences led to exciting travel opportunities in the Global South, offering off the beaten path holidays; organic volunteering being one of these opportunities. The philosophies and personal values of organic volunteers of my study reflect some volunteer tourism motivations suggested by Wearing (2001). Furthermore, my research echoes studies in the volunteer tourism literature, as McGehee's (2002)



research about Earthwatch suggests expeditions facilitate resource mobilization and networking, which often lead to an increase desire and participation in social movement activities. McGehee claims time on these organic farms afforded volunteers opportunity to bond with other volunteers, learn about themselves and organic agriculture, and inspire the desire to implement some of these practices once they return home.

Now, to provide the context for understanding the phenomenon under exploration, I next review the research on organic volunteering and related literature, including farm tourism and the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement.

### **Volunteering on Organic Farms**

Organic farm volunteering experiences, like those offered through organisations like the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement is an understudied area of tourism. WWOOF experiences have generally been situated within the broader sectors of farm stay tourism and agro-tourism (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006), although it seems to mirror components of volunteer tourism. Within the WWOOFing experience there seems to be this notion of reciprocal exchange or mutual exchange (WWOOF, 2011), which will be discussed in more detail below. The following section will be broken into two sub-sections. The first sub-section will review farm tourism and related literature, whilst the second sub-section will outline literature and research surrounding the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) phenomenon.

### **Farm Tourism**

Ecotourism, as an alternative to mass tourism, correlates with many forms of tourism including farm or agricultural tourism (Bjork, 2007). Since the early 1960s, farm tourism has been recognised as a product in its own right (Busby & Rendle, 2000). This

sector of tourism incorporates a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component (McGehee, Kim, & Jennings, 2007; Weaver & Fennell, 1997); attracting visitors seeking traditional rural hospitality, nature, and cultural experiences, while assisting farmers with sustaining agricultural viability. To explore ways this “product” has been categorised, Busby and Rendle (2000) analysed international examples in attempt to articulate the transition from “tourism on farms” to “farm tourism” (p. 640). The authors suggest this transition occurs once a farmer adopts a tourism business plan or when consumers begin regarding the enterprise as farm tourism (Busby & Rendle, 2000).

The demand for new and alternative tourism products, such as agricultural tourism or farm tourism, provides opportunities for locals and small enterprises within a community. Farm tourism creates income-generating opportunities for farming enterprises, sometimes making the difference in terms of viability (Busby & Rendle, 2000; Weaver & Fennell, 1997). Additionally, Weaver and Fennell (1997) discuss how farm tourism affords diversification of farm production in order to maintain family farms. In addition to the economic benefits, farm tourism can be employed as a strategy for facilitating sustainable agriculture, local development, social-cultural and environmental conservation, volunteer and host well-being, and learning (Choo & Jamal, 2009). These benefits have been outlined in Choo and Jamal’s study of a new eco- agro- form of tourism: “eco-organic farm tourism” in South Korea.

Organic farming emerged between the 1920s and 1950s as a response to perceived environmental and nutritional impacts of using chemical fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Rodale, 1948). Choo and Jamal propose organic farming is a movement, rather than an exact set of rules and methods, which can vary

from farm to farm. As Choo and Jamal's work outlines, as a result of organic product subsidies offered to farmers as an incentive to grow organic produce and practice environmental conservation, the *green* agri-tourism sector expanded in South Korea. Farms were also encouraged to diversify into tourism activities (Choo & Jamal, 2009). Thus, Choo and Jamal's primary research examined Korean organic farms engaged in tourism activities. Situating their concept of eco-organic farm tourism at the intersection of conventional agro-tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism, Choo and Jamal employed ecotourism principles as a guide to evaluate activities and practices of these farms.

To understand if these farms were a distinct form of environmentally sustainable tourism, Choo and Jamal (2009) implemented extensive phone interviews and conducted website content analysis. Findings concluded tourism within this organic context use traditional practices, where the farmers work closely with local ecosystems to sustain the natural habitat. Also, socio-cultural and human-environmental relationships are created and are an essential part of the everyday life of the farmers. Choo and Jamal's (2009) concept of eco-organic farm tourism can be characterized as small-scale, which applies sustainable practices to promote eco-cultural and eco-agricultural relationships. The emergence of the organic volunteering experiences, such as the WWOOF phenomenon, seems to align with the conceptualisation and values of eco-organic farm tourism as described by Choo and Jamal (2009). The following section further explores WWOOF and ultimately sets the context for my organic volunteering experience.

## **The WWOOF Phenomenon**

World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) was established in the United Kingdom in 1971. It was initially a weekend opportunity for urban dwellers to escape the city, to experience the countryside, and learn how to farm. Over the last several decades, WWOOF has grown as an international movement, providing people with the ability to travel, volunteer, and share more sustainable ways of living (WWOOF, 2011). Although there is no international governing body for the WWOOF network, each country has its own unique organisation. These organisations bring people who want to volunteer, known as WWOOFers, to farms owned by people looking for volunteer help, known as WWOOF hosts. Created as a low-budget network, WWOOFers pay a small fee to the WWOOF organisation and in turn receive a catalogue of WWOOF farms from which to choose. It is then up to the WWOOFers to contact hosts and to organise their travels. WWOOFers do not pay hosts and hosts do not pay WWOOFers. Rather, WWOOF can be defined as a work-food/accommodation exchange. WWOOFers volunteer to work and farm for the host farms and in return, receive food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles (WWOOF, 2011).

There have been a limited number of published, academic studies on the WWOOF phenomenon and even fewer studies linking this concept to volunteer tourism. The WWOOF movement has generally been situated within the broader sectors of farm stay tourism and agro-tourism (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). However, researchers suggest it differs from traditional agricultural experiences, and is a neglected aspect of farm stay tourism (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; McIntosh & Campbell, 2001).

McIntosh and Campbell (2001) investigated WWOOFing as a form of farm tourism. Using data collected from postal surveys from WWOOF hosts, the researchers sought to understand the management of WWOOF farms in relation to their role in providing tourism opportunities, host motivations, and host values and attitudes towards the environment. Findings presented evidence indicating WWOOF hosts differ from that of other farm tourism hosts, in particular the WWOOF hosts possess sustainable environmental ethics and shared knowledge of organic practices (McIntosh & Campbell, 2001). Similarly, McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) used their study to understand the WWOOF farm experience as an alternative farm stay endeavour. They compare WWOOFing with “commercial” farm stay experiences in the rural region of Canterbury, New Zealand and argue that notably different from commercial farm stays and farm tourism, the experience on hosted organic farms provides a rural experience, an opportunity to learn about organic agriculture, and what might be personally meaningful and sincere experiences (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). WWOOF aligns with ecotourism principles related to conservation, learning, and social-cultural wellbeing, as suggested in Choo and Jamal’s (2009) work, as well as community participation in offering tourism services. Furthermore, care and stewardship of the biophysical world are an integral part of the eco-organic farm tourism ethos (Choo & Jamal, 2009) and seem to be reflected in WWOOF.

Despite the volunteer underpinnings, to date there has been no academic article published linking the concept of volunteer tourism to WWOOF. Although, even a brief look at the volunteer tourism literature and WWOOFing websites ([www.wwoof.org](http://www.wwoof.org)) highlight parallels between organic volunteering experiences and components of

volunteer tourism. The nexus of volunteer tourism and WWOOF is considered in Ord's (2010) unpublished master's thesis, *Contribution of volunteer tourism to organic farms: An analysis of the WWOOF exchange in Canada*. Ord (2010) analysed data from volunteer and host applications of the WWOOF Canada organisation and implemented a survey with the hosts to understand the value of volunteer labour, the WWOOF farms' relationships with commercial tourism, and the supply of volunteers. Ord's findings imply WWOOF is situated within the broader sector of tourism, namely as a form of volunteer farm tourism. In addition, WWOOF hosts in Canada do rely on some aspects of commercial tourism and host farms perceive volunteers' labour to be valuable (Ord, 2010).

Throughout the literature review, I highlighted others researchers' perspectives of concepts such as tourism in the Global South, alternative tourism, volunteer tourism, socio-cultural impacts of volunteer tourism, farm tourism, and the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement. Congruent with some of this literature, organic volunteer experiences explored in my research highlight organic volunteering as a reciprocal learning exchange, a different way to travel and farm, and an opportunity to build host-guest relationships. For example, McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) explain that experiences volunteering on organic farms proffer opportunity to learn about organic agriculture, which may be personally meaningful and sincere experiences to them. Additionally, similar to McGehee's (2002) research in volunteer tourism expeditions, organic volunteers are inspired to implement some of the practices they learned on the farm once they return home.

Finally, tourism as a development strategy for the Global South and the emergence of alternative tourism and sub-sectors such as volunteer tourism has been investigated. After reviewing critical discourses within the tourism literature, I still have concerns and trepidations about volunteer tourism and experiences such as organic volunteering. I highlighted research critiquing the potential of these tourism niches as a solution to the problems of mass tourism. After this extensive review it is evident the debate continues as to whether volunteer tourism perpetuates and reproduces existing power and social hierarchies among the host communities of a tourist destination. Although some of these social and political tensions were not exclusively present in my research findings, further research of the organic volunteering with these critical lenses would be beneficial to the volunteer tourism literature.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the meanings volunteers gave to lived experiences of volunteering on organic farms in Argentina. Guided by philosophical foundations set forth by Gadamer (2004), I situated this study within an interpretivist paradigm, which helped me gain insights into the phenomenon of organic volunteering. Research questions guiding this study focused on lived experiences and interpretations of volunteers involved with the organic volunteering movement. The research questions are as follows:

- ❖ How do the volunteers experience organic volunteering?
- ❖ What does it mean to be organic volunteering?
- ❖ How do volunteers understand the experience of organic volunteering?
- ❖ How do the participants' pre-understandings of organic volunteering shape their experiences, encounters and relationships on the farm?

The following sub-sections outline phenomenology and hermeneutics, while also considering how these methodologies have been used within the tourism field. I also highlight key aspects of Gadamerian hermeneutics, to situate my methodological approach to phenomenology, prior to discussing the research methods in Chapter Four.

#### **Hermeneutic phenomenological research in tourism studies**

Phenomenology is seen as both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches (Daly, 2007). It seeks to explore the nature and meanings of particular *phenomena*, as they may be experienced and perceived (Santos & Yan, 2010).

Phenomenological researchers explore and investigate small groups of individuals or



social situations through face-to-face data collection techniques such as interviewing and participant observation (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Some researchers conduct studies using phenomenological perspectives and procedures because they assume the world is socially constructed; accepting a subjective perspective as the starting point for analysis and accepting interpretation as an intrinsic part of the research process (Santos & Yan, 2010).

Phenomenology has a long history in many fields including education, nursing, existential psychology, and family therapy (Daly, 2007). With respect to the tourism field, Pernecky and Jamal (2010) argue, few would repudiate *experience* is central to the tourism offering and what we understand as the tourism phenomenon. Thus, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology fits well with the exploration of situated and embodied accounts of tourism and may offer potential opportunities to delve more deeply into understanding and meanings of tourism experiences (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

Researchers have also suggested phenomenology may be a promising tool for understanding tourists' experience, even though phenomenology is still a relatively new research approach within the tourism field (see for example, Canton & Santos, 2007; Ingram, 2002).

Nonetheless, phenomenological research may be gaining momentum in the tourism field particularly since Cohen (1979) wrote *Phenomenology of Tourists' Experiences*. Canton and Santos (2007) implemented a phenomenological study to evaluate the explanatory power of nostalgia in the context of tourists' experiences of travelling along the Route 66 National Historic Corridor in the United States. Their study emphasises the importance of tourists' interpretations of their experiences. In another

tourism example, Santos and Yan (2010) employed a phenomenological approach to understand lived experiences of genealogical tourists to the Fort Wayne Genealogy Library in the United States. These authors argue tourists are increasingly motivated by their desire for a full range of varying intimacies, intensities, and complexities in their search for lived experiences (Santos & Yan, 2010). Likewise, and using the work of Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990) to guide her phenomenological perspectives, methods, and analysis, Curtin (2006) sought to gain understanding of human-dolphin attractions; asking, “What is it like to swim with dolphins?”

Although phenomenological research in tourism studies seems to be growing in popularity, Pernecky and Jamal (2010) are critical of many of these phenomenological studies; arguing they are inadequate, ambiguous, and lack the theoretical and methodological rigour required for such inquiry. More specifically, Pernecky and Jamal (2010) insist, “to appreciate the richly diverse range of phenomenological approaches and methodological directions they inform, it is crucial to first recognise the philosophical assumptions that undergird them” (p. 1060). They believe phenomenological research requires active researcher involvement, necessitating attentiveness to the knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of each particular approach. This awareness may help the researcher to delineate ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions underlying phenomenology, and hermeneutic phenomenology in particular, as they are used in tourism research (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). The onus of the hermeneutically-inclined researcher is to engage with and explore the aspects that shape one’s understandings, raising pertinent questions regarding knowledge production and existential being (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

This philosophical discussion creates an entry for the introduction of my approach to phenomenological research. Pernecky and Jamal's (2010) critique of phenomenology implemented in the tourism field raised pertinent concerns for my own study. In my phenomenological undertaking I sought to understand organic volunteering experiences as interpreted by the participating volunteers. However, prior to exploring these experiences, I questioned myself; how do I understand experiences? How do I understand meaning assigned to these experiences? I took a Gadamerian philosophical approach, building my research framework on his foundational understandings of hermeneutic phenomenology, as I situate myself in an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivist approaches allow the researcher to co-construct meaning through collaboration with research participants, and enables the researcher's own perspectives and experiences to play a role in the research process (Groenewald, 2004). Also, Gadamer's foundational hermeneutic philosophies such as historicity and pre-understanding align with my worldviews, as I believe the way I understand and interpret is reflective of my past and previous experiences. Furthermore, I believe the way I understand something is always changing, as I am always growing and learning. The following section will outline some of these philosophical understandings as Gadamer presents them.

### **Gadamer's Hermeneutics**

Building on Heidegger's notion of *Da-sien* ("being" or "being-there"), many of Gadamer's (2004) foundational teachings revolve around historicity and pre-understanding. Heidegger (1996) believed human existence or *Da-sien* is based on interpretation and understanding. That is, experience is formed through interpretation of the world and these interpretations are ultimately governed by the concrete situation of

the interpreter. Gadamer (2004) saw consciousness as grounded in our history (our prejudices and pre-understandings) and argued we cannot step out of this history (e.g., bracket our prejudices) as philosophers and authors such as Husserl (1970) have suggested is possible. Rather, Gadamer believes we cannot look at either the past or experience objectively and in turn, must recognise our understanding of experience is determined by the fusion of the individual's present horizon (e.g., what is taking place or the experience to take place) within the prejudices of our historical horizon (Gadamer, 2004). Similarly, within the tourism literature, Pernecky and Jamal (2010) explore how tourists' meaningful experiences come about:

What in a touristic situation may be for X an encounter with "strangeness," can be meaningfully interpreted by Y due to her socio-cultural-historical background. Here "strangeness" cannot be the essence of that experience, but rather something that "travels" with the interpreting individual. (p. 1063)

Gadamer (2004) notes to find meaning we must acknowledge and interpret understandings and interpretations of others, as they may affect our understanding of the whole experience.

Acknowledging the foundation of historicity in Gadamer's philosophy is pertinent to my hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Working with participants to identify prejudices and explore the background or particular nature of each participant's past has allowed me to better understand their historicity. Prejudices in this context should not be thought of as false judgements, rather conditions of truth, expectations or projections about the whole that are continually revised as more parts of the whole come into view (Gadamer, 2004).

During this process of interpretation and understanding we, as hermeneutically inclined researchers, begin with an assumption of familiarity and proceed to listen to our participants with openness to the unexpected and a readiness to revise this understanding, as our understanding is ever changing (Gadamer, 2004). This openness to these unfamiliar meanings is expressed as Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is keeping oneself open to other universal points of view, as one "leaves the all-too-familiar and learns to allow for what is different from oneself, and that means not only to tolerate it but to live in it" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 70).

Remaining open throughout my research I was able to explore horizons of my participants. However, within the notion of understanding, it is also important not to forget our own pre-understandings. We should remain open to meanings of our participants' experiences and then situate these interpretations in relation to our own meanings and pre-understandings (Gadamer, 2004). Considering my own pre-understandings allowed for me to fuse my own understanding with the multiple horizons of organic volunteering, as expressed by my participants. This conscious act of fusing horizons creates a historical consciousness, but is something that moves with me and continues to expand. Gadamer (2004) sums this idea up nicely:

The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. (p. 304)

### ***Methodological considerations***

Daly (2007) believes there is no set way to undertake qualitative research, but we, as researchers, must consider the broader context of values and practices that may shape

the way we conduct our research. Beliefs such as what knowledge is (ontology), how we know it (epistemology), and the process for studying it (methodology) are all considered when undertaking research. Philosophical underpinnings of Hans Georg Gadamer align with my interpretivist worldview and served as an appropriate framework for my Master's thesis as I explored experiences of volunteers on organic farms. However, upon completion of my data collection and analysis procedures, I more thoughtfully considered the methodology, which influenced my research procedures.

Phenomenology as my research methodology was chosen because of the research questions I wanted to ask. Furthermore, Gadamer's (2004) philosophies such as *Bildung* and the fusion of horizons are beliefs I too share about the nature of understanding. Nevertheless, I re-asked myself how does this methodology reflect my epistemological beliefs? Furthermore, how can phenomenology be limiting as a research methodology? Phenomenology as a way for collecting information about the world does not reflect my ontological and epistemological beliefs in absolute form. Phenomenology from its inception has been a question of lived experience or "how objects, actions, and events appear in the consciousness of the actor" (Daly, 2007, p. 94). Researchers such as van Manen explain the significance of phenomenology as a methodology to "transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence." (1997, p.36). The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to condense experience into an essence, or in other words one universal truth of the experience being explored. The concept of an essence of experience, was something I felt uncomfortable at times when analysing data, and can be seen as a limitation when using this methodology. Because the idea of universal truth does not mirror exactly my beliefs, I attempted to mitigate the uneasy feeling of

“universal truth” by using Gadamer’s hermeneutics; philosophy which stands by the idea of expanding horizons and the fusion of multiple subjective realities. Nevertheless, though my horizon of organic volunteering is ever transforming, my research still indicates one essential structure and six underlying essences assigned to the data. Thus, if the researcher desires to represent multiple realities or truths, phenomenology as a methodology may be a limitation.

Additionally, phenomenology, in particular Gadamer’s hermeneutic phenomenology may be seen as a limiting due to its focus on lived experiences in one historical moment. As mentioned in the above section of this chapter, Gadamer states, “The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon.” (2004, p. 304). Any slight change or added variable when making meanings of experiences will alter an experience and participants and researcher’s understandings. Furthermore, if a different group of participants partake in the “exact” same experience, the understanding of these experiences may be completely different. Therefore Gadamer’s hermeneutics could be seen as limiting in regards to generating generalizable experiential research.

Lastly, phenomenology is criticised for romanticising experiences. Wylie (2007) explains this idea as it relates to archaeological and anthropological studies. He states phenomenology supposedly seeks to uncover the “more authentic, engaged and ‘natural’ perception of the world” one which we already have but was lost as a result of “installation of an objective, modern, detached perspective” (Wylie, 2007, p. 182). However, Wylie highlights that when on the quest for these lost essences, phenomenology has a tendency to romanticise the pre-modern or non-Western, ultimately

subscribing Euro-centric narratives. Therefore, phenomenology may be seen as limiting as it inadvertently perpetuates historical pre-eminence and priority of Western cultures (Wylie, 2007). Although, phenomenological hermeneutics lends space to interpretations and subjectivity, being cognizant of this limitation seems necessary when negotiating representation of data. With these aforementioned methodological considerations in mind, the following chapter presents the data collection and analysis approaches I implemented while in Argentina.



## **Chapter Four: My Approach (Research Procedures)**

The methodology discussion in chapter three provided a starting point, helping me reflect on my worldview and philosophical foundations. In this next chapter, I outline my research framework and identify the approach I used to explore and analyse experiences of organic volunteering. Topics discussed include selection of the research site, recruitment of participants, data collection processes, and procedures used for analysing data.

The selection of farm sites is a process that each volunteer, himself or herself, must go through when preparing to organic volunteer. As previously described in the WWOOF literature, volunteers pay a small fee to the WWOOF organisation and in turn receive a catalogue or “WWOOF book.” These books outline each farm; providing a description, location, and contact information for WWOOF farms in the country of the volunteer’s choice. Volunteers choose hosts who most interest them and make direct contact to arrange a stay (WWOOF, 2011), and coordinate and organise logistics of their trip. Although there are other ways to connect with these farms and experiences, I was unaware of these modes prior to my data collection. Thus, I purchased the WWOOF Argentina catalogue, which can be found on the WWOOF Argentina organisation website: [www.woofargentina.com](http://www.woofargentina.com). I selected Argentina as my research site for three main reasons: (1) A past volunteer recommended I visit and WWOOF in this region, (2) The University of Waterloo’s research policy requires students conducting research abroad to have an in-country emergency contact in the country they choose (which I had), and (3) Argentina is located in the Southern hemisphere, therefore by the time I was

ready to enter the field for research it was planting time for these farms, and volunteer spots would be available.

Once I received ethics approval I used the WWOOF catalogue to solicit information about farms located in different regions of Argentina. After reviewing descriptions of these farms, I contacted hosts via email with an Information Letter (Appendix A) explaining my research goals and objectives and requesting they contact me if they were interested in my research and would like additional information. Criteria for farm sites I selected to email included: available space for me, accepting volunteers between October and December, owners who spoke English and/or Spanish, and recognised my ability to volunteer as appropriate exchange for room and board. Also, I thought it best if the farm had at least three to five volunteers (including myself), subsequently providing a larger range of research participants. Furthermore, the hosts had to agree I could participate as a volunteer and researcher for my study. In June 2011, I received emails from hosts who met the specified criteria and were willing to be involved. Therefore, I scheduled my field research to begin in mid-October, at a farm I felt best suited my study.

My research explored organic volunteering experiences on three interrelated farms within one community/region in Argentina. It should be noted here that throughout the remaining chapters, I refer to these interrelated farms, as a farm community. Although conducting interviews in more than one community/region would have afforded me the opportunity to speak with a broader range of hosts and volunteers about their experiences, focusing on one community of farms within this region allowed me to immerse myself in to this culture. This provided opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of

experiences of a group of people working in one farm community and more time for interviews to provide rich data.

I interviewed hosts and volunteers originally. I did this thinking I was going to be able to include host experiences in my research as well. However, I ended up focusing my analysis and interpretation towards volunteers who were currently participating in organic farming during the time of my research. Yet, I will still briefly discuss the process of collecting both, volunteer and host interviews in the data collection section.

Although I did not set a specific number of participants for my research, the farm/region chosen for data collection had many volunteer participants willing to be involved with my research. However, given Gadamer's notion of expanding horizons, I understood my understanding of these experiences was/is ever-expanding. Thus I stopped interviewing when I ran out of time in the field. This was in late November, whereby I spent a total of five weeks in the farm community.

Specific interview times were determined by participants' time constraints. Due to the nature of the selected farm community, I had no contact with volunteers before arriving in Argentina. Upon my arrival at the farm community, I identified my purpose and my role as both a researcher and volunteer participant to individuals on the farms. I did this to assure individuals would not be distracted nor upset about my proposed research or my participant observations. Additionally, I provided each volunteer with an Information Letter (Appendix B) to better describe my research intentions and to ask them to participate. Once volunteers indicated willingness to participate in my study, I set up different times for interviews. Finally, after I received approval and consent from willing participants, I asked each to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C).

## **Data Collection**

Data was gathered over five weeks through mid-October to late November. Although I did not know what to expect in terms of the farms and their politics, I wanted to remain open and flexible over time, allowing for the collection of rich data. The data collection process for this phenomenological inquiry included creating *field texts* using methods including observation, participation, and active interviews. Initially, I also intended to conduct focus groups; however due to time limitations and logistics, this did not transpire. Each of the abovementioned methods is described in detail below and a discussion of methodological and ethical considerations follows.

### ***Participant observation and reflexive participation***

While in Argentina, I assumed the role as an observer and volunteer participant. This dual roles helped me to understand experiences of organic volunteering, generating first-hand insights into the phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Participant observation helped me document details and characteristics of the farm, and encounters and relationships between the hosts and volunteers. My participant role allowed me to gain first-hand involvement experiencing daily life of an organic volunteer. By maintaining a reflexive journal, I was able to begin formulating my own understandings of meaning and interpretations I assign to the experience of organic volunteering. Before entering the field, I outlined a set of guidelines and questions (Appendix D), to help narrow my scope and guide my use of both of these methods (e.g., participant observation and reflexive participation). Due to the potential for collecting immense amounts of data, I proposed guidelines and questions (Appendix D) prior to my fieldwork, shaping my reflexive journal and participant observation activities.

### *Active interviews*

When conducting face-to-face interviews, Holstein and Gubrium, (1995) argue qualitative enquirers should strive to give attention to the intellectual purpose of the inquiry, the sensitivity of the situations, and the timing: Ultimately this creates better rapport with interviewees. I conducted in-depth, face-to-face *active* interviews with organic volunteers and hosts to understand meanings of experiences of organic volunteering. Active interviewing, as described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), seeks to balance the *hows* of social processes and the *whats* of lived experience by maintaining focus on what is being asked in interviews and what is being conveyed by the participants. Further, they argue, active interviews are conversational in nature and primarily focus on cultivating participants' stories. Therefore, those who practice these methods must recognise the roles of researchers and participants as co-creators of meaning. Active interviewing is a form of interpretive practice, which relies on interaction between participants and interviewer for articulating experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Reality can be seen as continually “under construction” and meaning is not always formulated anew. Thus, as researchers, we must keep in mind the research topic set forth and local ways to orient topics, so meaning created will be neither predetermined nor absolutely unique (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 16). I was able to negotiate this process and orient the focus of my study by conducting my interviews in the farm community. I implemented in-depth active interviews, incorporating conversational approaches to actively create new meanings and understandings with participants about their experiences.

Prompts and cues also helped me address issues relevant to my research concerns. Dupuis (1999) notes, when researchers choose to employ active interviews, they must acknowledge the interviews are driven by the interviewer and research objectives, as well as being a process of shared meaning making. When implementing these interviews, I did not lead my participants towards preferred responses. However, I did guide my participants to consider potential linkages between diverse aspects of experiences. I inquired about aspects of organic volunteering experiences that may have not been discussed, ultimately encouraging participants to develop topics relevant to their own experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). For instance, if daily responsibilities of farm were not discussed or divulged, I then inquired about the volunteer's experiences throughout the day and how they negotiated their work.

My initial interview questions provided minimal prompts to avoid giving participants direction of how to respond. Essentially, I sat down with participants and asked them to share experiences about their lives prior to being involved with the organic volunteer movement, as well as experiences. Daly (2007) recommends the interviewer begin by framing the area of interest and encouraging participants to tell their story, only prompting occasionally, to encourage detail in a particular area: "And then what happened?" or, "Can you say more about what that was like?" (p.114). My questions and topics served as guide posts, but as I attempted to remain flexible, to allow for emerging subject or topic changes as the interview progressed. How interview processes unfolded, is further discussed in the sub-section below.

Lastly, it should be noted, due to the location of this research I understood the potential language differences prior to my arrival in Argentina. As expected, some farms

had Spanish-speaking volunteers. Constrained by my intermediate levels of Spanish I thought it best to avoid Spanish-English translated interviews, yet, the extent of my interactions with certain volunteers, necessitated inclusion of these participants. Thus, I was dependent on a Spanish-English translator for three interviews.

### *Volunteer interviews*

I interviewed nine volunteers during my stay within the community of farms. There was no specific amount of time allotted for these interviews, but of the nine interviews, the shortest interview was 30 minutes long and six of the interviews averaged 70 minutes in length. An interview guide was implemented as an entry point to explore the historicity of each participant and to uncover participants' understandings and interpretations of organic volunteering. To view the volunteer interview guide, please refer to the Volunteer Interview – Questions Guide (Appendix E). All interviews were conducted informally, asking open-ended questions with few interruptions. Due to the nature and complexity of the topic, I provided a copy of the interview guide to all participants a few days before their interview. This was allowed volunteers to begin reflecting on the questions prior to the interview.

Interviews were designed to first question and then explore the *historicity* and *prejudices* of participants; following Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology (Gadamer, 2004). Gadamer (2004) states:

the coordination of all knowing activity with what is known is not based on the fact that they have the same mode of being but draws its significance from the *particular nature* of the mode of being that is common to them. (p. 252)

Thus, I incorporated questions about each participant's background into the interview. I believed it would illustrate the way each participant interprets and understands the world.

Additionally, my interests included hearing about the volunteer experiences of participants. While holding each participant's historicity and pre-understandings in my mind, I attempted to piece together participants' understandings of organic volunteering, while interpreting and co-constructing the diverse relationships, meanings, and prejudices they may have (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Accordingly, individual participant interviews allowed us (the research participants and I) to co-construct meaning and interpretations of their pre-understandings of organic volunteering and what it means to be a volunteer. Through the interview, I was able to better engage, understand, and interpret the phenomenological question of "How is organic volunteering experienced?" The following questions/topics guided and prompted my volunteer interviews:

- 1) Who were you/who are you? How does that contribute to what brought you to being here today?
- 2) What is it like to be a volunteer so far? Can you describe a typical day as an organic volunteer?
- 3) How do you experience organic volunteering? Tell me about your time on the farm, the daily encounters on the farm as a volunteer.
- 4) How has the meaning of organic volunteering changed for you?

Depending on how participants responded to these questions, I then engaged in conversation to help tease out meanings assigned to experiences of organic volunteering. When necessary I probed for deeper meanings and insights into their pre-understandings of this experience. Furthermore, I attempted to engage in a meaningful way with my participants, offering my own insights and understandings of organic volunteering in the hopes to begin the co-creation and meaning-making of this experience.



Sharing some of my own experiences and the conversational approach I took with the volunteers created a relaxed space for participants to share with me. There were few times I needed to repeat a question or further explain my follow-up questions. The majority of the interviews went smoothly. It did not seem difficult to gather information. Volunteers willingly shared their experiences of organic volunteering with me and the interviews felt honest and sincere, which lead me to believe the rapport I created with volunteers helped to create this space.

### *Host interviews*

In addition to interviewing volunteers, I conducted interviews with two farm hosts. These interviews allowed me to explore experiences from another perspective, developing a better understanding of organic volunteering experiences in its entirety. I asked them what the hosting experience entails and about their perceptions of relations and encounters. Interviews conducted with hosts were also informal, active interviews and were therefore conversational in nature.

My purpose with these interviews was two-fold. First, I wanted to understand host participants' interpretation of their own historicity and of the organic volunteer phenomenon. Secondly, I wanted to understand what hosts believed about the meaning of the organic volunteering experience. As with volunteer interviews, a guide was developed to direct general topics of discussion. The guide included basic questions designed to initiate conversation with host participants. The following questions/topics were used:

- 1) Who were you/who are you? How does that contribute to what brought you to being here today?

- 2) What is it like to be a host? Describe a typical day as a host.
- 3) What is the experience of on the farm? Tell me about your time on the farm, the daily encounters on the farm as a host.
- 4) How has the meaning of organic farming/volunteering changed for you?

Similarly to interviews conducted with volunteer participants, I thought it may be helpful and beneficial for hosts to reflect on the questions prior to the interview. To view the host interview guide, please refer to the Host Interview – Questions Guide (Appendix F).

I intended to analyse hosts' experiences upon my return from data collection. However, after analysing my volunteer interview transcripts, and reassessing my research questions, I realised including host perspectives in the analysis and interpretation process was beyond the scope of my research purpose, which was to understand experiences of organic volunteering. Therefore, I decided not to include a discussion of hosts' perspectives in my findings. However, it is important to note that interviewing these hosts contributed to my own understanding of organic volunteering. My decision to eliminate data collected from hosts in this thesis was discussed and approved by the two farm hosts I interviewed. As we agreed prior to data collection, I still provided each host with a PDF copy of my thesis via e-mail. Thus, if they desired, there was opportunity to offer feedback on contextual aspects of the study.

### ***Method considerations***

Participant observation and reflexive participation afford data collection opportunities; however, these methods also have potential limitations. Creswell (2009) suggests the *observer as participant* may observe private information, which cannot be reported, while the *participant as observer* may not have the ability to attend and observe

simultaneously. Due to these limitations, it was critical to manage my data efficiently. This is discussed further in the “Data Management” section of this document. Also, while observing, it was important for me to remain cognisant of feelings of volunteers because of the potential for uncomfortable or sensitive situations. These issues are discussed in more detail in the “Ethical Considerations” section below.

In addition, I wanted to examine the limitations of using interviews as a research method. As discussed above, interviews are useful for collecting rich data. Interviews provide participants opportunity to identify personal insights that cannot be directly observed (Creswell, 2009) and allow researchers to use cues and prompts to further explore a specific interest. However, there is no way to prepare for the interview process and how it will unfold. Therefore, to manage this challenge, I attempted to think about important methodological considerations, prior to and throughout the interview. This helped me to acknowledge how I wanted to ask questions and carry on conversations, and allowed opportunity to minimise the potential to reinforce my own pre-understandings and assumptions about organic volunteering by leading my participants. In addition to these methodological considerations, it was imperative for me to recognise ethical concerns arising in my research. I outline these concerns below.

### ***Ethical considerations***

The University of Waterloo’s Office of Research Ethics approved my study prior to entering the field in Argentina to begin data collection and reviewed issues of confidentiality, privacy, and security. My duties as the researcher, in terms of privacy and confidentiality include the obligation of safeguarding information entrusted to me by my participants (Government of Canada, 2010).

To address the aforementioned issues I followed three procedures. Firstly, to ensure confidentiality of my participants, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant and used them throughout the presentation of findings. Secondly, specific names of farms within the community are not identified, ensuring the confidentiality of the host farms. Lastly, translator confidentiality was acquired by implementing a translator-researcher contract (Appendix G). This contract included a confidentiality form, which outlined expected privacy and security considerations.

When transcribing from the audio device to my computer, I used pseudonyms to identify participants and to label the document. To ensure the security of these documents, I created a master list of participant names and farm names within the farm community. The related pseudonyms and transcripts were kept on my computer, secured by a password. All digital files and paper copies, which included information that may identify participants, will be destroyed two years after the defence of my thesis. Fulfilling ethical responsibilities of confidentiality, privacy, and security was essential to building trust with my research participants and myself, as well as to the integrity of research conducted through the University of Waterloo.

While keeping these methodological and ethical considerations in mind, I immersed myself into the organic farm culture in Argentina; actively observing, engaging, and participating with volunteers. Successfully managing data collected was another crucial aspect of my research. The next section describes processes and techniques I used.

## **Data Management**

Using reflexive participation and participant observation methods, I recorded my thoughts out of the sight of participants, attempting to decrease *subject gaze* that may be created if I were intently writing down every detail of the daily happenings. Once alone in a quiet location, shortly after any unique encounters or after the farm day was complete, I audio-recorded my thoughts about events, encounters, or details from my participation observation.

I chose to record my thoughts, rather than writing them, because I can articulate my thoughts verbally more quickly. Additionally, it allowed me to discuss farm activities and experiences as I remembered them, permitting a stream of consciousness. I discussed what happened, what I observed, how it made me feel, and offered interpretations of what I encountered or viewed. After recording my thoughts, I downloaded these digital recordings and transcribed them into word documents on my sole use personal computer. I then was able to read over my notes, adding in details I forgot.

Individual interviews were digitally-recorded and downloaded onto my computer. Digital files were transcribed verbatim into word documents, each identified and titled by pseudonyms. As previously noted, in some interviews, language barriers necessitated the use of a translator. In these instances, I hired a local Argentinean from the surrounding community to assist me during these interviews. The translator accompanied me to each Spanish-English interview. Prior to the start of these interviews, I ensured the participant was comfortable with the presence of the translator. I posed my questions to the translator in English and she then translated them into Spanish for the participant. After translation of the answer, I responded and asked another question. These translated conversations

were also digitally-recorded. After the participant left, I asked the translator to sit with me briefly, to further discuss the participants' responses in detail. Re-listening to the recordings, I had the translator cross-check her translations, to be sure she captured as much as she could during the first translation. I then downloaded the digital recordings on to my computer. Upon my return from the field, I transcribed the recordings.

To supplement my voice-recorded thoughts and interview transcripts, I kept a reflexive journal. By keeping this journal, I had opportunity to further reflect on what was said and felt throughout interviews and volunteering experiences. Additionally, I reflected on how my thoughts, my pre-understandings, were changing throughout the research. I did not designate specific times for reflexive writing, but used the journal as an outlet for any stream of consciousness thinking, a place to troubleshoot, and a medium for personal reflection. This journal always used assigned pseudonyms and was kept secure in my possession.

As my research was conducted abroad, there was potential for unfortunate or unexpected events (e.g., theft or luggage loss) to occur. Thus, digital files, MP3 files, and word documents were saved on an encrypted memory stick, which was carried on my person during any commutes to and from the farm. Additionally, when Wi-Fi was available, I emailed encrypted files to myself. After files were downloaded on my computer, I deleted them from the digital voice recorder. I then transcribed interviews verbatim. Initially, I attempted to transcribe during my downtime on the farm, however, this only occurred for the first two interviews. By transcribing while still in the field, I could have facilitated re-connection processes with participants, aiding co-construction of meaning of organic volunteering. This would also allow me to confirm transcriptions

were accurate and representative of the meanings and interpretations participants wished to suggest. However, as I continued to interview more volunteers, I found little down time and was not able to continue transcribing while in Argentina.

Furthermore, due to my own time constraints, in particular daily farm responsibilities assigned to me as a participating volunteer, I was unable to reconnect with participants about their interviews while in the field. Consequently, I requested each participant's contact information to further discuss my interpretations upon return to Canada. This information was filed with other documents and transcriptions. I kept a document on file, which listed the actual identities of each participant with his or her pseudonym. This file was destroyed after my data analysis process. The following section describes the approach I followed for data analysis and interpretation.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Having chosen Gadamerian philosophy as the foundation for my research, I found it quite difficult to decide on an approach for analysis and representation of the data (e.g., interview transcripts, my reflexive journal, and notes about my participation and observations). Although Gadamer (2004) offered insights, he did not provide a systematic way for developing a deep understanding of texts (Flemming *et al.*, 2002, Turner, 2003). Additionally, the current tourism literature, specifically the phenomenology of tourism, offers little or no insights regarding how one can analyse and interpret data collected following Gadamerian philosophy. Thus, navigation of the data analysis process was often challenging, as I tried to understand and make meaning of volunteers' and my own experiences with organic volunteering. This section explains the data analysis approach I developed and followed.

Throughout this section I use a multi-vocal strategy to convey the process I used to analyse data, as well as how I navigated the experience. I use three separate voices. For clarity, I denote each voice with a specific font or format. The first voice is presented in plain text. This voice explains what was done in my analysis process; the necessary and more “pragmatic” steps I took to analyse the data I collected. The second voice appears as indented text boxes; this voice is my reflexive journaling voice. Due to challenges I faced throughout my analysis process, I include some excerpts from my reflexive journals to supplement the description of pragmatic steps. Including this voice, allows me to showcase the way I navigated and came to understand the analysis experience. The third voice puts forward retrospective insights, which exemplify understandings I was gaining about Gadamerian philosophies and my experience of data analysis. The third voice is presented in *italicized text*.

### ***In the beginning***

Prior to data collection in Argentina, I initially planned to use an analysis approach adapted from Flemming *et al.* (2003), who outline a five-step approach to conducting research in the Gadamerian hermeneutic tradition. They suggest using the following stages: (1) deciding upon a question, (2) identification of pre-understandings, (3) gaining understanding through dialogue with participants, (4) gaining understanding through dialogue with text, and (5) establishing trustworthiness. Although Flemming *et al.* originally proposed their Gadamerian-based approach for nursing research; I believed their methodological procedures were applicable for understanding the organic volunteering experience. Their approach encouraged co-created interview texts and interpretations, which I thought would enable me to develop my own understanding of



the organic volunteering phenomenon as well as an understanding of my participants' interpretations (Flemming *et al.*, 2002).

Flemming *et al.*'s (2002) approach draws on Gadamer's (2004) work, which valued identification of pre-understandings and did not believe in the ability to bracket prejudices. Gadamer believed understanding is not possible without pre-understandings. Aware of this, I frequently revisited my pre-understandings during the process of analysis and interpretation and believed the stages provided by Flemming *et al.* were suitable for identifying and revisiting one's pre-understandings, as it includes reflexive steps encouraging journaling and dialogue to explicate and periodically review one's own pre-understandings.

As time elapsed on the farm, however, my mind became saturated with data and the application of a methodical step-by-step process was no longer my reality. I initially implemented several of the beginning stages of Flemming *et al.*'s (2002) approach including "Stage One: Deciding upon a research question" and "Stage Two: Identification of pre-understandings" through establishing a research question appropriate to the methodology and reflecting on my pre-understandings prior to data collection. However, execution of the remaining stages was not as easy. As I detoured from Flemming *et al.*'s five-stage approach, I noticed I was becoming frustrated and weary with data collection and beginning stages of analysis. While I did not intentionally digress from this approach, I decided to follow my researcher intuition, which steered me in a different direction for the remaining data analysis and interpretation processes.

When I returned to Canada to continue my analysis, I felt confused and was overwhelmed by the amount of data I had collected. I also struggled with the lack of

analysis guidelines as I steered away from my “planned approach.” Feeling uncomfortable, I began losing confidence in my abilities as I searched the phenomenological literature for a new analysis and interpretation approach. However, it seemed the more I searched for a new approach or plan, the more frustrated I became with both my data and the entirety of the analysis process. Finally, I began to reflect on the analysis process experience, which helped the weariness and defeated feeling subside. In the beginning of data analysis I wrote the following reflexive journal entry, encapsulating emotions and confusion I experienced at the start of my analysis process.

*Reflexive Journal Entry 1 – Frustrated with analysis*

After attending an inspiring methodology class conducted by Sue and speaking with my supervisor Heather, I felt I received the necessary kick in the ass to get this analysis process under way. Originally I was frightened to start. Where do I enter the data? How do I begin? My concerns of beginning were suffocating.

It's now two weeks later and I've only viewed one transcript! Yes, two weeks – one transcript. I am attempting to summarise the transcripts in a method similar to Wertz (2011), reflecting on the large expansive meaning units. I didn't quite agree with Wertz's methods, but I thought I liked the concept of meaning units and the way I conceptualised this form of data analysis. I thought it would let me view the transcript from a "whole" perspective. Unknown to me at the time of my data entry, I jumped off into the deep end and I am now in a panic – head barely above water. I'm drowning in my data! WITH NO PROCESS GUIDING ME.

Okay, take a breath. I am stepping back. Maybe I'm going about this analysis in the wrong way. I have 21 meaning units, which were derived from Nico's (interviewee 1) transcript. I chunked the units into meta-narratives as Wertz did, and then took these meaning units forward to the next interview transcript. At the beginning, this sounded like a great idea, but in actuality – I feel like I'm losing the whole and I am focused on trying to encapsulate more than necessary into these meaning units, while also pigeon-holing other transcripts into the newly defined meaning unit. Is that not being "closed" to the data and the possibility of emergent meaning? I feel defeated and frustrated in a way – 2 weeks worth of analysis time – LOST?

I think I need to start over, scrap the old process and begin again. ARG. I'm mostly frustrated with myself, for not listening to my intuition a week ago. I think I need to forget about following an approach identified by Wertz or van Mannen or Flemming. Rather than seeking what I should do, I think I just need to read, to feel, and to let my data speak. Let each transcript speak for itself as an individual. Maybe I need to look at each transcript as a whole, and then see the parts of that whole, and then look at the WHOLE in its entirety – comparing and synthesising all of the transcripts. Talking to other friends who've implemented phenomenological inquires is quite helpful. They too, believe I should just listen to the transcripts. Get "one" with them. I have to stop panicking and just do it. Here goes nothing. A new beginning...

*Throughout the navigation of my “data analysis experience” I can identify my inherent tendency towards Gadamerian philosophies. For example, while contemplating how to begin and proceed analysing my transcripts, my prejudices regarding the actual experience of the data analysis process were formed and reformed. In this context, Gadamer (2004) refers to prejudices not as false judgments, rather as conditions of my understanding. Accordingly, my prejudices of data analysis processes were initially grounded in a more rigid perspective; the notion I must have this methodical, step-by-step procedure. Maybe this is why I originally chose to try to implement Flemming et al.’s (2003) approach, as I thought I must stick to one approach. I initially believed I needed to analyse my data in a systematic manner, as Wertz (2011) did with meaning units, or it would be most effective to implement some type of coding scheme. Through the use of reflexivity, however, I revisited those initial prejudices, bringing my pre-understandings to consciousness. By doing so, I reformed my thoughts on the entire experience of analysis, broadening my horizon, and was able to come to a new understanding of the analysis process. With this new understanding, I accepted the analysis process does not need a strict approach. Instead, analysis can be messy.*

*Furthermore, my new understanding was reinforced by discussions with friends and colleagues, as well as the discovery of more literature. Critiques by authors such as Pernecky and Jamal (2010) claim phenomenological analysis oriented in Gadamer philosophy does not require an exact method. Furthermore by looking at this literature, I realised selecting a method congruent with these philosophical underpinnings may be challenging, but is essential to qualitative research such as phenomenology (Flemming et al., 2002; Turner, 2003). My newly formed horizon embraces Gadamerian hermeneutic*

*phenomenology as a methodology that does not have a strict approach to analysis. Furthermore, I understand the importance of making methodological decisions, which are consistent with my epistemology.*

### **My Analysis Approach**

Embracing a Gadamerian perspective, I began to implement my own approach to data analysis. Inspired by de Sales Turner's (2003) paper *Horizons revealed: From methodology to method* and through the "messy analysis" lens, I began reading through my data for the second time. The following sections of this chapter will guide you through the analysis and interpretation process I used. Though my process was often intuitive, phases within my analysis approach mirror some components from other phenomenological data analysis processes set out in the literature. I will briefly note these parallels where warranted.

#### ***Identifying my pre-understandings***

Gadamer (2004) argued we cannot look at the past or an experience objectively; rather we must recognize our understanding of the experience is determined by the fusion of the individual's present horizon (e.g., what is taking place or the experience to take place) with the prejudices of our historical horizon. Thus, prior to interacting with my participants, I reflected on my own pre-understandings and fore-projections of the experience of organic volunteering. I presented some of my pre-understandings in first chapter. Through reflection of my pre-understandings of organic volunteering (which I initially referred to as experiencing WWOOFing), I was able to develop a clearer understanding of my assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about this experience.

According to Flemming et al. (2002), researchers exploring phenomenon with the

guidance of Gadamer's hermeneutics are required to identify their pre-understandings or prejudices. Gadamer (2004) emphasised the notion of historicity and saw it as a crucial part for knowledge and understanding. The importance of these of pre-understandings has been discussed in detail throughout the previous chapters of my thesis. I was able to begin identifying my pre-understandings when reviewing literature relevant to my research topic. Through this initial process I was able to interpret meanings of these topics and further develop my understanding. In addition, Flemming *et al.* (2003) suggest a helpful approach for provoking one's pre-understandings is to have conversations with colleagues and also to engage in reflexive journaling. Through conversations with my advisor and committee members, as well as writing my initial interpretation of WWOOFing, I began mapping what I understood as my pre-understandings of organic volunteering. The development of my pre-understandings has been an on-going process. Furthermore, understanding the influence of my prejudices and organic volunteering have been continually changing as I gained new understandings through dialogue with participants and texts. My decision to identify my own pre-understandings was a step in the analysis process I consciously chose to take part in, rooting myself in the Gadamerian research tradition. This step in particular reflects "Stage Two: Identification of pre-understandings" in Flemming *et al.*'s (2002) analysis approach.

Prior to collecting my data, I recognised my pre-understandings would be called upon and most likely change throughout the research process. Through this process I realised the alternation between pre-understanding and understanding reflects the dynamic nature of the hermeneutic circle. The understanding of a text or new idea seemed to demand a pre-understanding, yet for a pre-understanding to be further

developed it seemed to demand an understanding of the new idea or text. Shifting between these two interpretive states, a new awareness was brought to my consciousness regarding the experience of organic volunteering.

### ***Remaining open – Bildung***

*Bildung*, according to Gadamer (2004), is keeping one's self open to what is other, detaching from one's immediate desires or purposes, and embracing more universal points of view. I was unfamiliar with Gadamer's concept of *Bildung* or *openness to meaning* during the data collection phase of my research and the beginning stages of my analysis. However, I was able to recall being introduced to the concept of openness in a qualitative methodology course. The dialogue in class around this concept reiterated the importance of remaining open to emergent data throughout both data collection and analysis stages. Similarly, Gadamer (2004) stated:

...this does not mean that when we listen to someone or read a book we must forget all our fore-meanings concerning the content and all our own ideas. All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text. But this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of our own meanings or ourselves in relation to it. (p. 271)

Building on these ideas, my pre-understandings of the experience of organic volunteering was knowledge that I carried with me into the interviews, and I also understood the importance of being open to emergent understandings of participants along with my own shifting and evolving horizon of understanding.

I believe I am instinctively open. Consequently, *Bildung* manifested quite naturally during data collection for me. When on the farms and throughout interviews I conducted, I did not hold my thoughts of organic volunteering, and my place as researcher, on a pedestal. Rather, I was prepared for and anticipated learning something new about these

experiences from each interaction. Furthermore, *Bildung* was manifested in the design and tradition in which I carried out my interviews. Open-ended and conversational style interviews were conducted in a quiet space on the farm property, which produced an intimate space for openness between research participants and myself.

Though *Bildung* was inherent to data collection, I nonetheless faced challenges with regard to openness during my analysis process. For example, there were times I wanted to assign my own meaning, what I experienced as a volunteer, to my participants' experiences. However, I knew it may not be appropriate to ascribe specific meaning units, as it may not be reflective of the whole experience of organic volunteering, rather these meanings only represented my experience. The following excerpt from my reflexive journal depicts my challenge to remain open to my participants' understanding.



### *Reflexive Journal Entry 2 – Openness*

After reading Nico's transcript as a whole, I began to allow the data to speak to me. I found this method much more productive. I feel the potential essences emerged on their own and I found many of the ideas were reproduced multiple times throughout Nico's transcript. A few other ideas spoke to me. These include "Self Reflection", "Feeling Welcomed," and "Being in touch with nature." These ideas were briefly touched upon in Nico's transcript, but were not strong enough for me to consider them as essential essences of organic volunteering at this point. Maybe they arose because I too was a volunteer on the farm. When reading through other volunteers' understandings of the experiences, I often find myself reflecting back to how I felt with what resonated with me. Staying close to the Gadamerian idea of *Bildung or openness to meaning*, I am trying to remain open. I am trying to keep open to what is *Other* and I am trying to embrace more universal points of view. I am trying to detach myself from my immediate desire, however I believe it's important to recognize these desires; my want to assign certain meanings exists. Thus I reflect ...

Maybe the idea or essence of "self-reflection" jumped out at me, because as a volunteer, my experience offered me so much time for self-reflection. In fact, much of my volunteering experience on the farms in Argentina was spent in deep thought. It might have been where I was coming from. Seemingly, but at the time unknowingly. I was at a juncture in my life, heart vs. mind, my love life, finally letting go of significant loss, trying to synthesize my future steps in my academic career, the continuous need for adventure and change. My experience of volunteering and being immersed into nature allowed for me to connect with myself, to camp in my tent for one month. Noise pollution, light pollution, stimuli that would generally preoccupy my thoughts was non-existent on the farm. Just me and my thoughts. Even during the daily tasks, there were times where we all seemed tired and just mellowed out into the work, deep in thought. I'm curious to see if this comes up for any of the other participants or if maybe it really just relates to my own historicity and the prejudices, or conditions of my truth: silence, space, no time frames, no preoccupations, just many unsettled thoughts.

*The above journal entry is another example of how I was experiencing the data analysis process. Again through use of reflexivity and the new understandings I gained from Gadamer's Bildung, my prejudices and pre-understandings of the analysis process changed. At this point, I now understood the analysis process as a "messy" experience, which requires this concept of openness. However, understanding openness and experiencing openness were two different ideas for me. I comprehended the importance of openness during my initial analysis stages, as I highlighted in my journal, but at the historical point in my experience of the analysis process I was not experiencing openness. The second paragraph in the reflexive journal highlights reflections on why I may not have been open. Retrospectively, navigating Bildung in the experience of analysis was often difficult, but eventually was essential and evident in my analysis experience. The idea of Bildung surfaces in other phases of my analysis approach.*

### ***Immersion***

As I began to explore my data further for emerging meanings, pre-understandings and *Bildung* were established as foundation blocks for my analysis process. This step in my analysis process could be defined as an immersion phase, as I was engrossed in the data. Reading and re-reading each transcript, I attempted to understand the whole of each participant's organic volunteering experience. During this phase, I began to reflect on these transcripts through note-taking in the margins of the transcripts and writing reflexive memos for each transcript. As I continued to read and re-read the transcripts, I tried to begin to understand the text. This led to the next step in my approach; preliminary understanding.

### ***Preliminary understanding***

Immersed in the data, I tried to begin making meaning of this text. I now label this part of the process as my “Preliminary understanding” phase, where I highlighted and teased out key statements and text that correlated with specific meaning units. As I previously reflected in *Reflexive journal entry 1: Frustrated with analysis*, the early steps in this preliminary understanding stage was most aligned with Wertz (2011). However, as expressed in the abovementioned reflexive journal entry, I felt uneasy with systematic steps. I found myself forcefully prescribing meaning units from one transcript to the next; thus, failing to honour the foundational underpinnings of my hermeneutic study.

This inconsistency was duly noted and after reflection and receiving encouragement from my advisor, I re-immersed myself into the transcripts with a new lens, less focused on a systematic approach and categorizing across the transcripts; allowing each transcript to speak for itself. This new openness led me to the next phase of my analysis, “Understanding.”

### ***Understanding***

Reading all nine of my volunteer transcripts on their own, I allowed for each to individually speak for itself. During this phase I read and re-read the text of each transcript, writing notes in the margins, so I could later return to these parts. I then read the whole of the transcript and returned to these notes, shifting from the whole to the parts and then back to the whole again. The circling of whole to parts and back reflects Gadamer’s hermeneutic circle, in which the task of hermeneutic undertakings become of themselves a questioning of things, whereby the projections and early understandings of an experience are replaced with present, evolving understandings (Gadamer, 2004).

As I attempted to understand the whole and parts of each transcript, I began to see meaning take shape in my participants' experiences. With these emerging meanings, I began to consciously tease out and selectively highlight sections of the text that represented patterns of recursive thoughts and ideas. I began to classify ideas with appropriate categories, reflected by titles such as "Experiencing harmony: Being in touch with nature" or "Building bonds: Experiencing human connection." These categories were transferred onto a separate computer document, as the essences of the organic volunteering experience began to take shape. In between each transcript, I reflected on these emerging thoughts and patterns extensively. I questioned my beliefs about what each meant, evaluating my interpretation and returning to my own pre-understandings of organic volunteering. Focusing on meanings and ways my understandings evolved over time allowed me to contemplate the horizons of each participant. This mode of understanding, circling between part and whole and teasing out meaning, was completed for all nine volunteer transcripts. By the end of this process I had identified between 11 and 19 potential essences for each transcript.

The steps I took in the understanding phase of my analysis approach paralleled many of the "traditional" thematic analysis methods implemented by van Manen (1997) and Giorgi (2009). However, in contrast to these authors, I allowed essences to manifest in each individual transcript. I focused on the participants' own horizons of understanding, rather than attributing meaning to life-world existentials (spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality) as suggested by van Manen (1997). Furthermore, it was my intention to avoid prescribing essences and then moving the essences into higher levels of abstractions, which is an approach often recommended for

phenomenological data analysis (for example see Giorgi, 2009). Instead, I hoped to see horizons or the multiple realities of my participants, allowing each transcript to initially stand on its own. Once I began engaging with this stage of analysis, the realities and meanings of the participants' texts were finally beginning to emerge. I experienced a calming feeling as I made progress with my analysis. My thoughts about experiencing this feeling are shared in the journal entry below.

*Reflexive Journal Entry 3 – Progress brings calm*

The analysis process is becoming a bit easier; the ball is rolling and gaining momentum. Being relatively new to the qualitative research analysis processes, in particular the phenomenological inquiry process, I originally started out with a more traditional way of understanding and interpreting my data. Using traditional coding after a read through the whole, I was able to understand pieces of the experience, identifying what I thought emerged as important essences of the experience. Reading and re-reading my interview transcripts, field notes, and reflexive journals opens me back up to the experience of organic volunteering as a whole. Through opening to the experience of volunteering and not trying to be so rigid with a structured approach, I can sense my attitudes shifting about data analysis. Sifting through the same massive amount of data, I feel calmer. I am starting to see ideas come forth, ideas of what it all means, how it's experienced, and why the volunteers are interpreting it this way. I feel a sense of progress, finally... I am calm. The ball is rolling, still rolling.

*This journal entry captures my horizon expanding once again. Horizon in this context refers to the things (e.g., ideas, experiences, beliefs, etc.) within our immediate world, which are part of our own understanding (Gadamer, 2004). After the “understanding phase” of my analysis process, I began considering the new horizon experience of my analysis process experience, which was opening for me. By remaining open to my emerging understanding, and maintaining an*

*openness to the direction my analysis process was going to take me, I began to experience my data analysis process with a new found calmness. This sense of calm may be attributed to what I understood as “progress” in my analysis process experience, thereby allowing me to identify the concepts of progress and ease/calmness as prejudices or conditions of my truth. As Gadamer (2004) explained, prejudices are not false judgments, but are rather the historical reality of the experience itself and the condition of understanding it. That being said, I experienced the analysis process as calming, because for me, making progress, in this case the task of data analysis, brings relief or calmness.*

### ***Fusion of horizons***

Having multiple experiences emerging within volunteers’ texts, combined with my own shifting pre-understandings of organic volunteering experiences, I found myself even more inspired to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Gadamer (2004) believed understanding occurs during the conscious act of fusing two horizons, whilst our own horizon is understood. Thus, I had to look both within each volunteer’s transcript and across each transcript, while being aware of my own pre-understandings. To synthesise multiple horizons of the organic volunteering experience expressed by my participants, I attempted to create a historical consciousness (Gadamer, 2004). This was done in the “Fusion of horizons” phase of my analysis process.

Steps during this phase of analysis included additional interaction with the texts, by exploring them both as part and whole, as well as individually and together. First, I took the essences, which surfaced in the “Understanding” phase of my analysis process and listed them under the respective participant’s name (Appendix H). This list allowed me

to see the horizons of each individual and also gain a sense of the meaning of the whole. By creating this list, I was able to visually identify underlying essences. I explored each of the essences by reading and re-reading the texts, while holding these essences in my mind. I then grouped and re-grouped supporting texts and quotes from volunteers' horizons into specific essences of the experience. Six underlying essences were identified:

- Reconnecting: Experiencing what was
- Exchanging knowledge: Experiencing learning, teaching, and sharing
- Experiencing harmony: Being in touch with nature
- Building bonds: Experiencing human connection
- Consciousness-raising experiences: Creating awareness for future activism
- Transforming: Experiencing growth

I followed my intuition and decided to focus on dominant horizons in this phase because it echoes the synthesis and essence development processes outlined in other phenomenological data analysis approaches, such as van Manen's (1997) theme analysis. After I grouped texts by categories, I reflected and synthesised what I was beginning to understand as participants' meanings. I used this phase to compare and contrast the emerging ideas and I explored each horizon more deeply, searching for an underlying horizon or essential structure. My goal was to make sense of the totality of what my participants were sharing with me; to create a cogent whole to articulate the experience of organic volunteering. Although early in the "Fusion of horizons" phase, I thought I had found the essential structure of the experience, I was still not fully convinced. I began to question my impetuosity in another reflexive journal entry; which further highlights the way I navigated the analysis process. I share this journal entry next.

*Reflexive Journal Entry 4 – not clean and simple. Messy layers.*

Now that these ideas have emerged...I'm trying to really understand the phenomenon at the core. Initially, I thought the central essence was "Experiential Learning" or something relating to the learning and educational experience of organic volunteering. However, after my meeting with Sue, I think my hasty assignment of meaning was too surface level. I feel foolish I tried assigning a central essence already. I re-entered the data. I am seeing layers in my data... so many layers...like layers of clothes on the floor and you're trying to find the perfect shirt to wear on your night out on the town. I know all of my clothes are there, but I cannot see the shirt I'm looking for... because I don't know what it looks like yet, and I haven't yet finished sorting through the other clothes and items sprawled across my floor.

As intuitive as I wish this process was, I understand I cannot simply assume an idea is the central essence of the experience and here is why: A, B, and C. It's much more complex. I must sort through the mess of the data, the mess of the clothes to find a "shirt" which suits the occasion, the essence which underlies the totality of the experience. However, I also realise the difficulty of finding the perfect shirt does not end with simply finding it. Rather, here's where Gadamer's philosophy echoes in my thoughts. Okay, hypothetically, I found the shirt – but what makes this shirt perfect for the occasion? How do I understand perfect? I need to start asking myself questions: What is the occasion? How do I make meaning of what's appropriate for the occasion? I then begin to start to think about my friends that are going out with me. What shirt will they pick to wear for the occasion? What makes them think their shirt is perfect for the occasion..? I suppose I am simply trying to express that once the mess is sorted through and you think you've found the right shirt...there's another set of questions, another set of conditions, prejudices, pre-understandings, that might shift your perception, change your mind and cause you to dive right back into the mess, the pile of clothes, the data packed transcripts... searching for a shirt, essences that might be better. Maybe the mess will be sorted, by working through it again and again, picking up each item asking questions such as: What do all these prejudices mean? How can my participants' expressions be understood in light of one another? How are these expressions fused together in a meaningful manner?



*When attempting to fuse horizons together, I began to think I was nearing the end of my analysis process, settling on a central essential structure. This is reflected in the aforementioned journal entry. Yet, through reflexive journaling, I again began to understand the analysis process in a new light. Through the use of my shirt analogy, I was reminded of the importance of the hermeneutic task of this data analysis. Incessant dialogue and engagement with emerging ideas are necessary when attempting to understand. This is also important then when using understanding gained to further explore the meaning of experience. I now realise by assigning meaning such as “learning and educational” as the essential structure to the organic volunteering, is comparable to assigning “messiness” as the essential structure to my experience of data analysis. Yes, the idea of messiness does re-emerge in my journal entries (as does the concept of learning in my transcripts); however, I need to consider all of the emerging prejudices of my horizon. Although it is an essence that re-emerges frequently, this does not necessarily mean it symbolises the central meaning of the entire experience. Thus, I gained an awareness through the analysis process of the importance of returning to the whole, to prevent the experience from being mis-represented.*

I returned to the transcripts with more questions. I looked at the dominant horizons as a whole, as I began to tease out underlying meanings of the organic volunteer experience. For example, I began to see awareness as connected to learning; learning as connected to awareness, growth, and consciousness-raising, which are connected to the desire for change and activism, and which are connected back with learning and education. This cycle continued and the more I understood one essence the more I identified its connection to the whole. It is as if each piece was interconnected and

interdependent. I explored other volunteers' horizons, which included bonding, connection with community, interaction with hosts, and harmony with nature. Again, the more I wrote about these ideas and expressed them aloud to friends and colleagues, it became more clear these horizons were somehow all linked. I realised these essences affected the entirety of the experience; they created this alternative experience or lifestyle and each part affected the flow and the dynamics of the experience. I had all of these essences identified, but was still challenged to find a way to articulate the essential structure of volunteers' experiences and my own.

Feeling stuck, I explained my essences and my experiences on the farm to one of my committee members. I was guided to reflect on my experiences, as it was assumed there is something deeper, an idea holding the entire experience together. Thus, I expressed some of my initial farm encounters in a journal entry (This entry is included in Chapter 5). Following this reflection, it became more apparent the experience on the farms, the experience of organic volunteering, was one of *interconnectedness*. When the horizons are fused, the idea of interconnectedness emerges. I began to think: *is this the essential structure of the experience?* Each part or essence seems to interrelate or rely on one another, all contributing to the entire experience. However, when each part is considered alone, the experience is not fully understood and meaning seems to be lost.

### ***Illumination***

Finally, with the underlying essences and essential structure of the experience in mind, I began to explore and interpret my findings. However, when I began to think about writing my findings, I felt overwhelmed and stuck once again. Not only did I have a desire to articulate the volunteers' experience as honestly as possible, but I also wanted

to create an embodied experience for the reader. I could not justify the use of a linear and formal presentation of my findings. After some thorough consideration, I decided to represent these findings through the use of creative analytic practice (CAP). CAP as a presentation method promotes the sharing of meanings by moving beyond the structure of formal scientific writing through use of creative representation, rich descriptions, and different view points (Parry & Johnson, 2007). Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest this interpretive qualitative research requires a presentation style which complements its methodological purpose, reflects emotion and meaning, values the individuals' experiences, and conveys these experiences to the reader. Given its Gadamerian underpinnings, the use of CAP in my study seemed essential to bring out the lived experience of organic volunteering. CAP allows me to provide perspective for the reader about the experience, coupled with my own understanding of the same experience, and invite the reader to contemplate experiences in relation to their own lives. Using CAP, I have been able to move away from formal structures of scientific writing and recreate experiences of organic volunteering for my audience, or more accurately my interpretation of it, rather than simply describing underlying essences from my analysis of participants' transcripts. Additionally, CAP facilitates an opportunity for audience engagement, offering the chance to experience, even if only vicariously, the issue or topic being explored in the research (Ellis, 2000).

According to Gadamer (2004), "the dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself" (p. 350). To illuminate experiences my audience could embody, even if only vicariously, I created multiple fictional scenarios. Within these scenarios, I ask

readers to open their minds and *imagine* themselves in the particular situation. Some scenarios are based around actual occurrences, which I as a researcher witnessed or participated in, while others are my interpretation of the experiences volunteers discussed in their interviews. However, I believe these *imagination* pieces are realistic representations and plausible scenarios on the farm.

Researchers who choose to use a CAP representation believe this method provides diversity and flexibility in the way they present, but still generates challenges regarding authorship, authority, truth, validity, and reliability (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Indeed, it then seems important to consider how to evaluate such pieces. Richardson (2000) discusses important criteria for authors and readers to consider when evaluating ethnography pieces, which Parry and Johnson (2007) then apply to evaluating the use of CAP. Richardson's (2000) criteria include:

1. Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social-life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) human-world understanding and perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?
2. Aesthetic merit: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?
3. Reflexivity: How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Do authors hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied?
4. Impact: Does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?
5. Expresses a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience? Does it seem "true"—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the "real"?

Regarding the criteria, I am asking the reader to place themselves in the scenarios. It is my aim to have one grounded in a plausible farm occurrence, which allows a greater understanding of what it is like to experience organic volunteering. The *imagine* scenarios allow readers to feel and begin to understand the volunteering experience; allowing them to vision, interpret, and make meaning of the details.

Cognizant of the abovementioned criteria, creating texts capable of holistic embodiment while holding on to the meaning of each volunteer's prejudices and horizons was a difficult, yet invigorating task. I believe this was the culminating, but also the most important, phase of my analysis process. I felt excited, but also weary when it was all over. I attest to these emotions in the following reflexive journal entry.

*Reflexive Journal Entry 5 – Finished?*

I finally finished analysing... but am I actually finished? I see interconnectedness, as the essential structure, the core of the organic volunteering experience... does this make sense? Will this represent my data? It seems to me interconnectedness is the central essence of the organic volunteering experience. While on the farm I unknowingly was experiencing interconnection. I felt it, but couldn't articulate it at the time. The analysis process allowed for the essence of interconnectedness to emerge. I began to understand the embodied experiences of the volunteers as interconnected existence. For example, a visceral reaction to a negative situation may appear to be a disconnection, but I now understand it to actually be a result of an interconnection. Additionally, the way in which the concepts of awareness, consciousness, and learning are interrelated, also further supported my understanding of interconnectedness. It's as if to learn, you have to be "aware" of the idea or thing you want to learn about. This awareness is brought to consciousness, which triggers the desire to learn. You then experience learning, which creates a new conscious awareness. This cyclical process then repeats itself, each of the concepts, interdependent on one another, creating the whole. Without one of the pieces, the cycle would no longer exist or be experienced as it is.

I think I feel satisfied with my understanding of interconnectedness, however, because I decided on taking a few creative liberties, I'm feeling apprehensive. I would like my CAP representation to produce something that is representative of the experience of organic volunteering in the eyes of the volunteers. I'm a bit weary of writing up the findings. I believe the choice of using the "imagination" piece will represent my interpretation of organic volunteering most accurately. I do believe it is the right decision for me... right? Why is it right for me? Is it right for the audience? It just clicked one day... I was sitting with a bottomless pot of coffee, distraught with no words... I was having so much trouble articulating the experience. How did I understand organic volunteering? How did I explain the experience to my friends? My family? My colleagues? What did it mean as a volunteer to organic volunteer? I repeatedly asked myself these questions.

That's it, it finally clicked. I've always used the word... IMAGINE. "Imagine you were there..." When relaying my own experiences. I always tried to re-create the experience for my listener, whom ever it was. So, it only seems appropriate when trying to convey meaning to an experience, my interpretation of that experience would involve engaging the listeners' imaginations, as such they can create meaning and understanding from their own perspective. After all, it is my interpretation. Right? But also, the readers'. Right?

*When navigating the final stages of my data analysis approach and when deciding on the representation structure of my essences, I lacked confidence. I grappled with my essences and tried to articulate my understanding of the core essence in the above journal. I desired to "get it right." Also, I wanted to present my findings in a meaningful way, which would represent my participants' experience of organic volunteering. After reflecting on why I decided to use 'imagine' scenarios for my readers, I regained my confidence. I also realised Gadamer's philosophy supports the notion of multiple realities, multiple horizons. In turn, my interpretation is just one reality within many possible realities for exploring the data of this study. Creating a hypothetical experience for my reader echoes who I am and my perspective of the experience. Also, these imagine scenarios reflect how I create meaning for someone else (i.e., through inserting the*

*audience into the experience), and my awareness of the present task at hand (i.e., representing my data). Furthermore, as I am following in Gadamerian tradition, it will be necessary for me to accept interpretations of the organic volunteering experience, both the readers and my own, will be constantly reforming, as understandings change over time. For example, my understanding of this data would change if I were to re-engage with it in the future. Additionally, my audience may see the data differently, as each person brings their own horizon.*

*I had to surrender to the notion that experiences and meanings of organic volunteering are never entirely finished or complete. As I continue to grow and change as a researcher, my thoughts and ideas of the analytic process will also change and be refined, extending my horizon. Currently, I see experience of the analysis process as frustrating at times, messy, and never ending, but also an experience reliant on openness and reflexivity. This understanding has expanded since the start of my data analysis, which was witnessed throughout my reflexive journaling and research process, and will continue to change over time.*

Throughout this section I have used a multi-vocal strategy to articulate how I navigated the analysis and interpretation approach implemented in my research. I offered explanations of the pragmatic steps I took when analysing data I collected, while also providing reflections on challenges I faced throughout these steps. Inclusion of these voices within this section of my thesis illustrates the development of my deeper understanding of Gadamerian philosophy, not only as it applies to my research, but also as it underpins my worldviews. Furthermore, use of reflexive journals allowed me to regain confidence with my writing, as I showcase my interpretation of the organic

volunteering experiences. The following chapter illuminates this interpretation, using Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) imagination pieces, supplemented by voices of volunteers.



## **Chapter Five: Findings and Discussion – Exploring the horizons of organic volunteering**

The idea of “Opening to living in interconnectedness” emerged as the essential structure of the organic volunteering phenomenon. This essential structure helped me to develop a framework for assembling meaning of experiences and the interplay between six underlying essences. These essences are not only embodied in the essential structure, but reinforce its very core; the essences are interconnected.

### **Underlying essences**

I Creative Analytic Practice (CAP) imagine pieces to explore and share underlying essences that emerged. It is important to note this is my representation, my attempt to illuminate experiences of organic volunteering. Each essence has one to three imagination piece(s). These are denoted with italics, following the phrase “Imagine...close your eyes and imagine...” After each CAP piece, I present quotations from interview transcripts with volunteers. Each volunteer is identified by a pseudonym to guard confidentiality. I included volunteer quotations to provide insight about why certain imagination scenarios were created. Furthermore, this allows for prejudices and pre-understandings of experiences to be illuminated, further forming understanding and meaning. That being said, I think it is imperative to first introduce the volunteers and include a brief description of their historicity, to provide context.

### ***Volunteers’ historicity***

**Nico**, a volunteer in his mid-20s and a regular traveller from the Northwest of the United States, grew up on an organic dairy farm. He was born into a life with constant connection with plants and animals. Though the life and beliefs of his past are different from what he has come to know now, he realizes that his time on the dairy farm may have been a beginning for him, a jumping off point, and has shaped the direction he is

going. Traveling with dreams of owning his own organic farm one day, Nico has volunteered on over 15 farms in the past 10 years. When not volunteering, Nico can be found in various kitchens of the world. To name a few, Nico has worked as a chef in a research camp in Antarctica, as well as in a lodge restaurant in the renowned Denali National Park, Alaska. Nico referred to himself as a simple man. Happiness for him is a piece of dirt and being able to wake up in the morning and harvest his vegetables to share with his community.

**Xavier**, a French volunteer, grew up living in a tiny village of 300 in the West of France. Though his father had a large garden at their family home, Xavier had no interest in gardening or farming as a child. He described himself as a typical kid playing sports and spending time on the computer, until his adolescent and early adult years in which he started reading more books and entered into a university biology program. After completing three years of university, Xavier was diagnosed with a terminal illness. In remission, Xavier began to travel more frequently starting with his first international trip to New Zealand about five years ago, where he volunteered on four different farms. When volunteering Xavier exerts energy into the projects, as he wishes to be part of the change he wishes to see. Feeling a pull to the culture, Xavier is now in South America with a goal to volunteer and learn a bit more Spanish.

**Hope** is an Argentinean volunteer from Buenos Aires. Childhood memories for Hope include her frequent trips to the woods with her family. Her grandmother constantly reminded her to appreciate the birds and the little bugs of these natural environments. She recalls taking holidays near the sea as a child, observing the tiny creatures living within the small spaces between the rocks. As she grew older and went to school, she'd retreat to green spaces as often as possible. Eventually, Hope no longer felt comfortable in the city, feeling bothered by society. Though she was unsure of the cause of this lack of comfort, she knew she wanted to live differently and closer to nature. After being introduced to the idea of organic farms and sustainable living by a friend of her Uncle's, a guard from a local national park, she looked into organic volunteering.

**Dylan** is a volunteer native to the rural surroundings of Brisbane, Australia, growing up on a hectare of land alongside a river. Dedicated to sustaining a family of five on minimal finances, Dylan's parents' cultivated food from the garden and raised chickens and cows. As a child, Dylan was not enthusiastic about the farming lifestyle he was born into and the laborious farm work of his youth eventually led him to the city. Dylan pursued a university degree and career in business and finance, providing him with economic means he always desired to have. Several years later, Dylan changed professions realising the corporate environment and materialistic approaches to living were not intrinsically satisfying. As

a Masseur, Dylan began to feel reconnected with humanity and saw it as a stepping-stone towards doing something more natural with his life. His search for a more natural lifestyle led him to research sustainable living, and he began to travel to organic farms. Dylan was drawn to experiences on farms, as he felt a greater connection with the land. This feeling of connection is a large contributor to his current land hunt. Dylan envisions living on his own self-sustaining farm one day. Dylan believed he has come full circle as he is re-creating a lifestyle he was born into, but worked so hard to escape.

**Jade** did not have to travel very far to come volunteer on the organic farm in Argentina. Residing only a kilometre away from the farm community, Jade decided to move out of her family home and into a tent on the neighbouring farm property. Though she was an agriculture student, she had never been to a farm before this experience. However, Jade believes she has always been in contact with nature, which ultimately contributed to her pursuit of a degree in organic agriculture. Recently finishing her studies Jade saw the farm experience as an opportunity to apply what she has learned as a technician. Open to exchanging ideas, Jade believes the path of organic farming is one which her and the host have to walk together. Jade believes attitude is the secret to a happy working environment and successful life experiences. Jade's aspirations include owning her own farm and implementing her own organic farming projects to help teach children and families how to grow their own food, with the ultimate goal of extinguishing hunger.

**Sadie** is a volunteer in her mid 20s and claims a love for the countryside and gardening, although she was unaware of this love in her childhood. She grew up just outside of Brisbane, Australia with a stay at home mom and remembers her folks being quite busy with owning their own business. Much of Sadie's childhood meals consisted of ready-made microwavable dinners and although her grandmother gardened a bit, Sadie had very little exposure to the taste of vegetables and fresh produce. Sadie's realisation of her love for gardening manifested when she met her partner, Avery. She recalls one of the first dates they had. She found it quite strange when he asked to make her dinner instead of taking her out, creating pizza based from scratch and using produce from his backyard veggie-patch. Experiencing the amazing taste of fresh food sparked something within Sadie, as she realised how easy this way of living can be. Eventually, Sadie set up her own veggie-patch and changed career paths, moving from her high-stress city job to working in a local garden centre. Traveling with her partner throughout South America, organic volunteering was an unplanned component of the trip, but her experiences on the farm reinforced her understanding of how simple life can be and how food gets to the table.

**Clayton's** origins are rooted in the state of Michigan in the United States. A volunteer in his early 20s and a talented musician, Clayton recently graduated with a degree in sitar from a small private Buddhist run university in Boulder, Colorado. Clayton, an avid hockey player and athlete in his teen years, claimed that he was not always aware of conscious living and believes he was very much into himself. Prior to choosing a university, Clayton was confronted with an experience, which shifted his perspective of the world. He claimed this was an awakening, which led him to these types of sustainable communities. While back packing through the Appalachian Mountains, Clayton encountered his first organic farm and decided to stay and volunteer for two weeks. Though he was much younger then, Clayton looks back on his first farm experience and appreciates what he learned and gained from that experience and feels like a different person because of it. Recognising the power of these experiences, Clayton felt pulled to organic volunteer again, with hopes of becoming more grounded.

**Layna**, a volunteer from Minnesota, United States believed the experiences on these farms are a continuance of who she was. Growing up in a fairly active family, the outdoors and principles of living in harmony with nature were instilled in Layna at a young age. Her tattoo of the Teton Range of the Rocky Mountains is a tribute to her childhood as she remembers camping and climbing there, summer after summer. She feels very fortunate to have had a supportive family and resources to encourage her outdoor pursuits. Layna spent the first several years out of undergrad between travelling and working. Eventually, Layna desired to continue her education and rather than entering a formal institutionalized education setting, as encouraged by her parents, Layna sought out alternative ways of learning. Layna first experienced volunteering on an organic farm in Minnesota for several months, but it ended quite traumatically causing her to give up on organic farming for a bit. Several months later, Layna enrolled into organic agricultural classes and began volunteering with the organisation "Dream of Wild Health," a native owned and operated farm. These experiences contributed to reviving her hopes and dreams of owning an organic farm. In the search of more knowledge, Layna now uses her organic volunteer experiences to connect with people and learn more about organic and indigenous practices.

**Avery** grew up in a rural area west of Brisbane, Australia. He is a chef at a vegetarian restaurant, when he is not focusing his energy towards his musical career. Music and the arts were not always the number one priority in Avery's life, as he grew up playing sports and being a "typical" Aussie boy. His family owned a garden, so he came to appreciate fresh produce at a young age. He spent summers and most holidays at farms of his parents' friends and recalls helping out on his uncle's horse farm.

Avery enjoyed spending time with his uncle, assuming the role of a jackaroo, breaking in horses and rounding up cattle. Eventually Avery used his farm skills as a source of extra income, while finishing up high school. After high school, Avery pursued his musical career as a drummer much more seriously, touring through Australia and New Zealand. Traveling to South America with his girlfriend Sadie, their trip was initially intended to explore the percussionists of the Latin culture. In the need for a break from travel and missing the countryside, Avery and Sadie decided to volunteer on organic farms in Argentina. On the farm, Avery reflects on his life back home, comparing it to the one he is living now. He is reminded of a book he once read, called Ishmael, as it expresses the importance of “leaving,” rather than “taking,” a philosophy he believes is underlining these experiences.

The next section presents the underlying essences of the organic volunteering experience. These essences are:

- Reconnecting: Experiencing what was
- Exchanging knowledge: Experiencing learning, teaching, and sharing
- Experiencing harmony: Being in touch with nature
- Building bonds: Experiencing human connection
- Consciousness-raising experiences: Creating awareness for future activism
- Transforming: Experiencing growth.

Finally, I offer the following suggestion to the reader prior to reading each imagination piece: Open your mind. With unrestricted imagination, envision yourself experiencing organic volunteering. Feel, believe, and embody the words that are written. If you find yourself having a difficult time doing so, I recommend going one step further; with your mind still open, close your eyes and have a friend, family member, or colleague read each farm experience aloud. By keeping an open mind, congruent with Gadamer’s (2004) concept of *Bildung*, one then can be open to what is *Other*; embracing a more universal point of view.

### ***Reconnecting: Experiencing what was***

“Trying to be self-sufficient, trying to give back a little more to nature and escape a little bit the craziness of the cities.” – Xavier

Leave the chaos of your busy, preoccupied life behind for a few moments, as I illuminate a way of living different from what you may know. Understand the lived experience you are about to encounter is not as foreign as you may presume. Though different from what you may know now or are currently living, open yourself to experiencing what was and what can be. Close your eyes, open your heart, and open your mind, as I try to help you imagine the experience and the meaning of organic volunteering as an experience of reconnecting.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*Suspended in the hammock slung between two giant pines, you nap peacefully in the warm energy of the sun. The farm is quiet. So quiet, you can hear whispers of the wind, as breezes dance across the field of sprouting corn stalks. The occasional cool gusts save you from the stifling heat of mid-day, as you continue to slowly rock asleep. The subtle sounds of children's laughter begin to permeate your dreams. Unconsciously, you process these sweet sounds, gradually awakening from your siesta. You scan the sprawling fields, finally focusing in on the small laughing children behind the willow tree in the distance. There they are, hair-matted, in tattered clothing, and mud coated faces playing in the dirt with bits of bark and scrap metal, giggling, and carrying on. The joyous shrieks of the children send you back to your own childhood: What did I do as a child? Did I play outside with bits of bark? Your thoughts then return to the life you knew before this farm and the children of your society. Why don't I see kids outside as much? You reflect, as you realise much time has elapsed since you've witnessed the carefree playfulness of children digging earth. However, you smile, remembering the time you made volcanoes out of sand. No newly purchased materials and technological devices facilitating your fun, just imagination and creativity. You sigh and think, uhh... the good 'ol days. You smile towards the direction of the children, thankful to know this type of life and leisure still exists.*

The experience of organic volunteering is not just a perspective on how life can be lived; rather it is a reflection on how life once was lived. For some volunteers, organic

volunteering mirrors previous experiences and times in their lives, times in which they connected with nature, times not reliant on electronic devices and materials we have all come to know so well. For instance, Sadie's experience allowed her to reconnect with memories of a life she once recognized as hers. Sadie claimed:

Even just watching the kids, I remember when we first arrived here... there's four kids here...they were covered in dirt and shit and they were running around and their hair was all matted up and I just went "holy shit these kids are wild." But the more I watched them, they were probably exactly the same as I was when I was a kid, but you just don't see kids like that anymore, because people don't play outside and you know kids don't want to be kids... and it's so important it's so simple like they're just playing in dirt you know with bits of bark that are cars.

Watching children interact with the surroundings in such a care free and natural way forced Sadie to reflect on both her own childhood and the youth population she knows from back home. She identified with the children of the farm, however, witnessing these children created a new awareness of a potential disconnect between youth and the earth. Life on the farm is different from what she had more recently come to know as the "norm", therefore initially Sadie viewed the children as "crazy." However, eventually, Sadie came to the understanding, she too was like this as a child, interconnected with nature, outside playing with bits of bark and dirt.

Similar to Sadie, Dylan's experience echoes returning to a life with which he had once identified as his. Dylan, a volunteer who initially grew up farming with his family in Eastern Australia, expressed how hard he worked to escape his agricultural and nature-based lifestyle. However, as time passed his desire and need for a lifestyle change re-emerged and he wished to reconnect with a past he once knew. Dylan exclaimed:

I mean after working in a corporate environment for a period of time and recognizing that this kind of really materialistic approach to living is not,

it's not really intrinsically satisfying... fundamentally there's no food for your soul.

Realization of dissatisfaction and his childhood experiences contributed to Dylan's decision to return to the earth. Dylan admitted:

I think in some ways that has kind of led me back to here...and that initial experience helped me appreciate this lifestyle. Not in a conscious way but in terms of later as I moved from there [parents' farm] and moved to the city and started university and did my business and finance degree and started working in those fields and then realised it's a bucket of shit really.

Frustrated with society, volunteers seek to escape city life, in search of something different and more satisfying. Volunteers realised life can be lived differently. Hope, an Argentinian volunteer, who once resided in a large city, explained the differences between her experience with life on the farms and that with her old city life. Experiencing organic volunteering, she now understands, she does not have to surrender to the city and its system; rather spaces such as these farms provide a way of living, different from the city, one that feels more freeing and lively. Hope stated that in this life people "live more happily. And are happy all day. It's really weird and it's not happening in the city and that's what the city is lacking." Do you wish to experience a life that is more satisfying and happy?

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*It is your turn to prepare the community dinner tonight. This means you need to gather the necessary food and items needed for the meal. There is no need to plan a trip to the grocery store. You have no car. What you do need to do, though, is venture out back behind the house to the pile of birch-wood logs, the ones you chopped earlier this week. Gathering logs and sticks, you collect the kindling needed to start an open fire in the outdoor, wood-burning stove. Recalling techniques you learned from childhood camping trips, you first pile twigs then leaves ambitiously building your fire from scratch. Before you know it, the fire is blazing, so hot, the hairs on your arms begin to curl. While, the roaring flames slowly reduce to a bed of sizzling embers, perfect for cooking upon, you decide*



*it's time for you to head back into the mud-structured house, to prepare the food. You enter the cool damp, dark room off the side of the kitchen. Like an explosion of colours, the pantry is stashed with veggies and herbs you helped cultivate from the garden yesterday. Seeing the products of the harvest, you proudly select the fresh produce to go into your meal. Walking back outside, you head towards the edge of the farm property to the hens' coop. Careful to not disturb them, you sneak into the wired door to collect the eggs. As you gather each of the bright brown eggs, a vision of egg Furtada, arises in your mind. Back in the kitchen now, you are ready to craft your furtada. First, you wash the veggies with boiling water, as you remember accumulating it in buckets this morning from the dirt-trenched irrigation system. You then begin to chop. You stop to dab your eyes. The onions are so fresh, the scent is overpowering such that the burning sensation invaded your eyes instantaneously. With each down stroke of the knife, the vegetable membranes crunch as fresh misty sprays are released with every passing slice. The aromas of cooking onions enter your nose, awakening your grumbling belly. You quickly become hungry as each of your five senses become stimulated. Salivating, you begin to plate the food. You're excited to reap the rewards of your work. Delivering a plateful of furtada to each person around the table, you smile at the hard, but satisfying effort required to create this meal.*

What a different, yet livening, dinner experience. Did you imagine smelling, even feeling the freshness of the onions in your palms, as you cut them? Did you feel proud, happy, or satisfied when preparation of this meal was over? How did this compare to how you create a meal in your own kitchen? Did it taste different or make you think of your food differently?

The farm is set in the countryside, removed from the city, and with no access to a car. Volunteers and hosts relied on what is around them in nature and what they constructed from this natural environment. Wood-burning stoves and water from the trench were a deliberate and conscious way to save energy resources, while fresh products, the majority grown at the farm or locally, were a constant reminder of the organic philosophies of the farm. Xavier suggested living on organic farms was an experience in which “people have really different lifestyles... its always kind of the same

frame of mind for people. Trying to be self-sufficient, trying to give back a little more to nature and escape a little bit the craziness of the cities.” Xavier argued organic volunteering was a life considered more organic, conscious and “low impact,” creating a place different than where volunteers had come from. Similarly, after arriving at the organic farm Layna realised people she encountered on these farms were those who desired to escape, searching for something different than city lifestyles. Layna gave an example of meeting a young Argentinian mother who moved from the “craziness of the city” with her daughter to this organic lifestyle. Layna asked the mother why she decided to move from Buenos Aires; the mother claimed that having a connection to a farm or an organic life is “a more healthy and alternative way of living.”

Furthermore, Clayton’s experience of organic volunteering reinforced that he felt disconnected from the land. Before coming to the farm Clayton believed he was living “organically.” Sure, he was eating from organically-fed animals and purchasing eco-friendly labelled foods, however, actual experiences of planting, cultivating, and harvesting broadened Clayton’s own horizon, as he began to reconsider his lifestyle back home. Clayton stated:

I could go to the store and I could buy whatever I want for food, you know I could buy salmon, beef or whatever I wanted. Oh I’ll take the organic grass fed beef. You know... Oh I’ll take 3lbs of spinach and parsnips and carrots and broccoli... It sounds great and it’s like all I had to do for that is hand them a piece of paper. Here [on the farm], it’s like I have to plant a seed I have to water it so it grows, I have to wait until it’s time to harvest, it’s a lot of work.

This experience evoked memories and visions of what life was like or could have been like before grocery stores and packaged processed food. Moreover, Hope sees this way of life as an alternative to discontent people in the city, suggesting “maybe that’s the

change... people...they must find a way to come up with this new and different lifestyle where they can realise they are not slaves to the system and they can free their souls and live more happily.”

*Discussion* – Reconnecting: Experiencing what was

Organic volunteering involves an experience of reconnecting with life as it was. For some volunteers this means remembering childhood leisure pursuits, reconnecting with forms of play and leisure prior to certain technological influences. Others reconnect with farming lifestyles, remembering how they grew up on a farm, and how rewarding and satisfying it was to plant and harvest their own food. In addition, volunteers begin to see organic volunteer as an alternative way to live. Life experienced on these farms is different than volunteer’s previous lifestyles; different from what they have come to know in the city, different from their reality at home. Also, it seems the recognition of these differences further illuminates the notion of reconnecting with what was. For instance, as Clayton pointed out, his experience reminds him of the difficult steps necessary for successful agricultural production. He realised alternative ways of living outside of the consumerism he came to know so well. With this in mind, I pose the following questions: Does organic volunteering actually reflect a life from which colonization, industrialism, and technological advancements strived so hard to move beyond? Are organic volunteering experiences echoing the very life of our own ancestors, and people who lived on the land before us? Organic volunteering is an experience in which volunteers can learn and become consciously aware of the way life can be lived. It is an experience that provides volunteers with a space to reconnect with life.

Volunteers, therefore, may seek out organic volunteering to reconnect to a life that once was and different than city life to which they are accustomed. Some volunteers expressed their motivation to come to a farm as wanting to escape unhappiness or discontented feelings about the life they have come to know (e.g., materialistic, technological, consumptive city life). For example, Hope confessed she came to these farms because she felt bad in the city; she felt “disconnected.” However, after arriving on the farm Hope instantly started feeling better; feeling more alive. She understood that whatever was happening on these farms was not happening in the city. The volunteers’ motivation to escape the status quo and their desire for an alternative, more satisfying lifestyle or experiences mirrors some of the alternative tourism literature. Some authors suggest tourists desire *alternatives*, experiences that engender authentic, interactive, meaningful, individualized opportunities (see for example, Richards & Wilson, 2006; Taylor, 2001; Wearing, 2001), and these opportunities offer off-the-beaten path holidays, perceived to incorporate environmental beauty, ecological diversity, and culturally enhanced-encounters (Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Despite these parallels, the alternative and volunteer tourism literature does not capture volunteer tourism experiences adequately and completely, and this may be especially true for organic volunteering experiences. Participants in my study suggest organic volunteering is something beyond an experience simply seen as “alternative” tourism or a mere mode of travelling; rather it is an experience of reconnecting with life as it was, and as it still can be.

Considering my own pre-understandings of organic volunteering, I re-assess my understandings. Prior to my research, based upon my prejudices and literature review, I understood organic volunteering or “WWOOFing” as niche experiences within the

volunteer tourism sector. I understood it to be a “different way to travel and farm.” However, aligning with Gadamerian tradition, I am reminded of my ever-changing understanding and interpretations. Gadamer suggests possible expansion of horizon and the opening of new horizons. After my experiences of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, my horizon of organic volunteering expanded, as I now understand organic volunteering as an experience of reconnecting with a life that once was; an experience meaning much more than an alternative way to travel. Furthermore, as I continue to present and discuss the remaining underlying essences, the ever-transforming horizon of the organic volunteering phenomenon becomes apparent.

***Exchanging knowledge: Experiencing teaching, learning, and sharing***

“Every human being no matter how similar or how different has something to teach and learn.” – Nico

Farms proffer a space for continual learning. Organic volunteering is experienced as an educational exchange between volunteers and hosts. These farms embody educational opportunities different from what is offered in the four walls of an institution. The farm is the classroom, a place to learn and share. Close your eyes, open your heart, and open your mind as I try to help you imagine the experience and the meaning of organic volunteering as an educational experience.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*The bell rings as you rush down the bland halls of the academy. Almost late, you scurry to open the heavy wooden door to your next class. As you step through the doorway you realise you are no longer inside the four white walls of a classroom, rather, you've arrived at a small organic farm in the beautiful countryside of Argentina. Mary, the smiling and welcoming farm host and several volunteers warmly greet you, as you step through and close the door. Your shoes are no longer on your feet, and you feel the warm soil between your toes, as you are led out to the garden*

*at the back of Mary's property. "Wow" you admire as you hear bees bumbling around the expansive field, collecting nectar from a variety of fruits and vegetables that are budding from the rows of earth. You're given a pair of strong canvas enforced gloves, a small hand-shovel, and packet of squash seeds. Charismatically, Mary points over to the untouched soil in the backside of the garden and says, "That's where today's lesson will be." Row by row, she guides you and the other volunteers on how to plant the variety of squash, assuring you understand the differences between Cucurbita moschata and Cucurbita Maxima. Cameron, the volunteer squatting beside you, speaks up. Without sounding arrogant, Cameron kindly offers a different suggestion. "Mary I think there could be a more effective planting pattern for these squash, I learned this while on another farm," he explains as he demonstrates the technique with his hands. "Thank you," Mary smiles with genuine gratitude, accepting the advice as a terrific idea. She then instructs you and Cameron to implement this new strategy, starting with the rows in the far back left corner. You bury the seed into a dome of dirt, mixed with humidor collected from Mary's compost, a fine white calcium powder, and the gritty grey wood ashes from the fire pit. You are a bit surprised of this mixture, specifically the use of humidor, but Mary reminds you of the noted benefits of the use of human manure; its power to reduce and reuse waste, while providing essential nutrients to the earth. You intriguingly nod your head up and down, with a newfound awareness. You never even knew these practices existed.*

Volunteers can experience the farm as their classroom, just as you imagined it.

Layna reflected this notion while discussing her motivation for being on the farm, "So, my parents want me to go back to school and I'm like 'this is my school'." Pressure from society and her parents to continue her education has led her to seek out ways to do so, bringing her to these organic farms. Her desire to learn and her hunger for new knowledge emboldened her to become a part of the organic volunteering experience.

Likewise Dylan also recognized his experience as one of learning. He claimed:

There's always a bit of work going on, but I think intertwined with that, unless you're just hoeing a field, there's also a bit of learning that occurs during this time of work in terms of which plants go where, and what plants go together, or if you're working on for example building the mud wall in here, the different compositions of the materials and so it's kind of a learning exchange process happening while the work is happening. So there is kind of that distinction of learning on the job.

Volunteers identified hosts or farmers as teachers and themselves as willing students, wanting to learn and experience the farm as a classroom. Engaging with farm hosts provided new insights for volunteers. Sadie believed these learning opportunities were limited where she resided. If these alternative and organic practices do exist back home, she was unaware of them. Reflecting on her farm experience Sadie said, “It’s so easy, there’s so many ways and there are so little places to learn things like this....” Referring to certain weeds as food, she exclaimed, “I mean we have some of this stuff at home, I don’t know why I’ve never known we’re able to eat it.” Sadie experienced this learning in the garden, when farmers initiated new insights about plants and different agricultural techniques. Similarly, Nico reflected on these educational experiences:

...spending time with Jose at the garden was like, ya know a constant flow of knowledge into my head and the crazy thing was that he didn’t speak English that well, so it was all in Spanish. So not only did I learn about growing food, I also learned a ton of Spanish, which is very important.

Not only were hosts teaching, but volunteers also contributed insights and their own ideas to this exchange. The openness of hosts to ideas created a receptive atmosphere for mutual learning. This openness was apparent when Dylan exchanged ideas with Melody (the farm host), regarding planting and farming based on experiences and teachings he’s gained from other farms.

I probably have those conversations more with her [Melody] because I know she’s not going to take it personally or whatever. And so we’ve had a chat about the grapes this morning when I was stringing up things. I’m like um I don’t really know much about grapes, but I think we should, you know I think these wires need to be much higher or they’re gonna... and she was like if that’s what we need to be doing then go for it.

Furthermore, Jade could look at the farm as a technician, as she received her university degree in organic agriculture. This experience allowed her to apply what she

learned from school, as a volunteer on the farm. It was a path she believed she was walking together with the farm host; not only was she learning, but she offered ideas from a technical perspective.

Clayton believes “The only way that someone can teach is by being a student...only teachers are students. If someone isn’t learning in life, they’re done...So, I think the ones that teach the most are learning the most...” It is evident this educational experience did not limit the teaching role; rather volunteers themselves also embody the persona of the teacher. Imagine you are a volunteer; imagine yourself as teacher and also as student.

*Imagine...close your eyes and imagine...*

*You are sitting around a wooden-picnic table beneath the blossoming Willow surrounded by the friendly faces of the farm. You are engaged in stimulating, yet questioningly controversial discussion that evolved spontaneously after lunch. You are not solely hearing your mother tongue of English; rather two additional languages weave in and out of the conversation, ringing with foreign words and intonations. However, you are content with not understanding every spoken word, as you feel open to being fully immersed in this cultural exchange process. The tri-lingual, French volunteer offers translation for all, while also making the conversation fun and interactive for everyone through the use of silly word games. You notice everyone is smiling and giggling; sharing insights about themselves, their culture, and their beliefs. Paul, the humble bearded volunteer, sitting directly across from you begins to explain his spiritual undertakings to the group, describing his challenging, but rewarding journey of Buddhism and meditative practices. You make note to yourself: everyone at the table may not actually be a practitioner of spirituality, specifically Buddhism ideals, but the space that you are currently feeling is one of openness and trust; free of depreciating criticism. The space facilitates an intimate and secure place for sharing; a place for teaching and learning about new ideas, and a place for cultural exchanges. Feeling rather inspired by others’ fascinating stories and remarkable insights; your heart races ever so slightly and your stomach flutters with nervous butterflies, as you begin to open up to the caring, genuine faces around the table; sharing your life, beliefs, and experiences.*



While on organic farms, volunteers learn from other volunteers. This idea emerged in conversation with Xavier. He admitted “Yeah, I’ve learned a lot going to those different places and it’s hard to know if I would have learned that much without travelling and volunteering.” Xavier, though interested in learning about spirituality, energy healing, and astrology, may not have encountered these exchanges outside of the farm, but his openness to learning new things and meeting new people on the farm afforded opportunities for spiritual discussion, which has created new awareness for him. Xavier disclosed, “There is another guy who studied it [spirituality] and he knows a lot about astrology and those kind of things so it’s pretty interesting to speak to him. I mean, I wouldn’t say I’m completely a spiritual guy, but I’m really interested in it.”

Jade also understood organic volunteering was not only learning from the host about agriculture, but also from other volunteers. It gave opportunity to share and exchange cultural knowledge. Being a resident of Argentina, she explained her thoughts about organic volunteering in this context. She believed it to be less common than it may be in other countries and cultures, stating “In many countries they may be doing this, but here it is not very common.” She continued explaining how she understood this uncommon experience:

... it’s this exchange between different people of different countries, different cultures, different customs, different habits. It’s what makes the experience more rich. The volunteer has this goal, he has this special interest in knowing other’s cultures. So they come and are really interested in learning and knowing the other person in this culture

Correspondingly, Sadie reinforced this idea when working together out in the field.

Every conversation you’re learning something new...It’s cool. There’s this crazy French chick, who speaks Spanish and English as well, who you know, she’s having fun playing word games with us, “I’ll say something

in Spanish, you say it in English, and I'll say it in French." And so we're learning out there.

Though learning, for hosts and volunteers can be experienced on a daily basis on organic farms, it depends on each person, how they are feeling, and whether they possess a willingness and openness to learn. Learning experiences are dependent on attitudes, if one desires to learn, the right attitude has to be harnessed. Consider the next scenario.

*Imagine...close your eyes and imagine...*

*Maddie, the senior volunteer takes you under her wing, as today you've been asked to help with mudding the interior of the new farmhouse structure. Wow you think increasing with excitement, mudding I've never done this before. You begin to wonder about what this construction responsibility entails. Eager to begin, you sit patiently on the log-bench next to the ditches that hold your mudding ingredients. Maddie slowly instructs, step-by-step, the exact method for successfully achieving the right consistency for the next layer of the mud wall. Three parts dirt and clay, directly excavated from the hole being dug for the new pond; one part straw, collected from the sheep pen; one part sand, sourced locally from a farm two kilometres away; finally two parts water, collected from the rain barrel. As you scoop the directed amount of each material into the small push-kart, you feel the differences of each in ingredient. The heavy shovel-full of dirt engages your tired bicep muscles, while the dry itchy straw scratches your arms as you carry handfuls to the cart. After measuring each item proportionately, Maddie pours in the water, encouraging you to start mixing with your bare hands. "Become one with the materials," she suggests. The water morphs the mixture into a muddy constituent. Squishy between your fingers, the mud-like substance feels cold and slimy, but you insist on accepting this foreign sensation. After guiding you through the entirety of the mixing process, Maddie continues to share her knowledge, assisting you with spraying down the dry mud wall of the house. Slapping fistfuls of new mud onto the wall, you and Maddie create the next interior layer, which is slightly smoother than the previous, containing a bit less straw and sand. Maddie's experience and wisdom has made you feel like a true natural. You are ready to take on the responsibility of the mudding project. You smile and laugh as you and Maddie continue to slap more and more mud on the moist walls; you never thought mudding could be so much fun. By setting your inhibitions aside and opening your mind to a new process, you've learned something different and interesting today.*

*NOW given the same scenario, the same mud-mixing task. Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*Imagine you had not excused your inhibitions. Imagine your mind was not open to the entirety of the learning process; you had hang-ups with the texture of the mud or the exhausting task of gathering all of the essential ingredients. EW, gross you think as you stick your hand into gooey looking substance clumped in the cart. Trying to mix the clay mud concoction, you are not excited about using your hands, as you peer down at your once clean fingernails. You then become increasingly annoyed with the assistance Maddie offers you, because you are not particularly in agreement with the steps she has suggested for applying the mud to the wall. Still annoyed, you begin to lose focus while she attempts to inform you of the next necessary action. Your attention is no longer with Maddie's long-winded description and your thoughts pan to visions of Florida, your usual summer vacation spot. Oh, how you wish you were spending time poolside with an umbrella-drink, clean, and comfortable. Maddie's voice raises an octave, cutting into your daydream causing you to fade back into the present. You sense her impatience with you. "Do you understand? Ready to get started?" She questions. "Yeah," you snap back quickly. "Okay, I'll leave you to it then." Maddie says. As she walks away, you're not actually sure if you're mudding correctly and you notice the cart of mud you mixed looks to be the wrong consistency. She wasn't very helpful you convince yourself.*

Hope understands the importance of attitude in a learning experience, "It's the attitude you have...people that come, have to come with respect, with values." Nico reflected on negative volunteer attitudes he witnessed and how they affected the group and everyone's ability to learn.

It's funny because ...there was people here who were here in the past ... one night we were chatting and they were like 'ya know I don't learn anything here. I wanted to ya know be out in the garden ya know planting stuff.' And I was like 'you don't learn? I'm learning lots being here' ya know?

Seemingly upset with this attitude, Nico continued by reflecting on what he thought about these volunteers' complaints.

For sure it's the attitude you take towards it for sure... I mean like we'd be out, ya know after hearing this we'd go out to the garden and I'd see that person being super lazy or maybe staring off into space when Melody [the

farm host] was trying to teach us something. And you know, that's why you're not learning anything. And it's beyond learning everything about plants, learning everything about tree, ya know? You're learning things about yourself and how to live this life, how to be; basic responsibilities people don't understand.

Drawing on some of his Buddhist beliefs, Clayton points out, the onus for learning is on the student:

If you think about it you could have the best teacher in the world and if the student is not ready to learn, it's not going to learn. It's up to the student and if you're the best student you learn so much from nothing.

It seems, with the right attitude, as suggested by Hope and Clayton, an attitude of openness and the willingness to be taught, reciprocal learning and teaching of this educational exchange are endless.

*Discussion – Exchanging knowledge: Experiencing teaching, learning, and sharing*

Farms are a space for continual learning, teaching, and sharing. Organic volunteering is an educational experience for both volunteers and hosts. Correspondingly, McIntosh and Bonnemann's (2006) research concluded experiences on hosted organic farms provide an opportunity to learn about organic agriculture. Choo and Jamal's (2009) work regarding "eco-organic farm tourism" also relates to organic volunteering experiences in which participants learn about traditional organic practices and local ecosystems. The World Wide Opportunity on Organic Farms (WWOOF) website markets these experiences as an "exchange," an opportunity to "live, learn, and share organic lifestyles." This is reflected throughout my research. In addition to learning about farming and agricultural practices, organic volunteering as an educational exchange encompasses cultural exchanges between volunteers and hosts. As Jade described what organic volunteering meant to her, she professed, "... it's this exchange between different

people of different countries, different cultures, different customs, different habits. It's what makes the experience more rich.”

Volunteers identified organic volunteering as the next step, the mode to learning about these different lifestyles, and a path towards their future. Layna decided to volunteer on farms because of societal, in particular familial, pressures. Her parents wished her to continue her education. Appreciating farms as “school” and her eagerness for new knowledge emboldened Layna’s decision to become a part of the organic volunteering experience. In this way, learning on these farms can be considered a potential part of Layna’s future. Similar to Layna, McIntosh and Bonnemann’s (2006) research participants reported to be in a juncture in their lives, looking for future direction, thus participating in voluntary working-holidays. In addition to the search for future direction as suggested by McIntosh and Bonnemann’s participants, Layna and other volunteers in my study seemed to be motivated also by the learning and educational exchange components of organic volunteering.

Due to these new understandings, I wonder about tourism motivations, and more specifically, the motivations of those who participate in experiences such as organic volunteering. What motivates these participants to come to farms such as the one in Argentina? Are they motivated by the potential for learning and cultural exchange experiences? Or, as it was suggested by Layna: Are these experiences sought out because of the societal pressures and the uncertainty of what’s next? A deeper exploration of volunteer motivations could afford insights on participants’ pre-understandings and potential for growth and transformation to broaden their horizon of understanding as they participate in the experience. I discuss this further in Chapter Six.

Additionally, within these educational experiences, volunteers identified hosts as teachers. However, there was also a realisation that teaching was shared and not solely the onus of the farm host. Reciprocity occurred in educational exchanges within the organic volunteering context. Engaging with farm hosts provided new insights for volunteers, but volunteers are also offered insights and contributed to this exchange with their work and their ideas. This was illustrated in Dylan's recommendations to the host, regarding how to care for grapevines. The concept of reciprocity through host-volunteer exchanges is echoed in the volunteer tourism literature, as volunteer tourism creates an environment for fostering a more "reciprocal" host-guest connection (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Wearing, 2001).

Reciprocity within the exchange seemed present during my participation and exploration of organic volunteering. However, I still think the notion of reciprocity must be further investigated within educational and volunteer contexts. Sharpe and Dear (2011) brought some of these concerns into their international service learning presentation at the 2011 Canadian Congress on Leisure Research (CCLR) conference. They suggested the intent of the international service learning course was to maintain a just and reciprocal planning and teaching process throughout the duration of the trip, however, occasional points of contention with partnered communities seemed to put reciprocity into question.

Through my discussion of organic volunteering as an experience of exchanging knowledge, it seems plausible learning, teaching, and sharing within these exchanges depend on both volunteers' and hosts' attitudes. Openness of the hosts to learning and sharing creates a receptive atmosphere for learning from their volunteers, as they must

also be open. Clayton understood this suggesting, "...if the student is not ready to learn, it's not going to learn." The openness required to engage and experience these educational exchanges reverberate throughout Gadamer's (2004) discussion of *Bildung* or openness to meaning. To learn, volunteers and hosts must keep open to what is being taught and shared. Gadamer suggests embracing more universal points of view through openness: detaching yourself from your immediate purpose or desires. Openness seems essential to understanding; just as it is essential to learning, teaching, and sharing. Organic volunteering, as an experience for exchanging knowledge, showcases the importance of this openness.

The above-mentioned discussion, led me to question the notion of openness and how it is fostered in other contexts such as volunteer tourism, or tourism in general. Openness and its effect on exchange processes are underdeveloped in our field. It seems to me in an educational exchange context, specifically organic volunteering, there may be a multitude of variables, which may be effecting volunteers and hosts ability to opening to exchanging of knowledge (e.g., culture, authority, power, gender). Future research on these topics would benefit multiple disciplines.

### ***Experiencing Harmony: Being in touch with nature***

"So, I was thinking a natural detergent, of course, you know, less harmful. 'Um, no I prefer to use ash because it doesn't hurt the earth.' I was like awesome." – Sadie

As a harmonious experience, organic volunteering is the embodiment of being interconnected with the natural world. Volunteers reconnect with, become in touch, in tune, or in sync with, and strive to be in harmony with nature. Close your eyes, open your heart, and open your mind, as I try to help you imagine the experience and the meaning of organic volunteering as a harmonious experience with nature.

*Imagine...close your eyes and imagine...*

*Waking up with the sun, your eyes still closed, you feel the warm rays radiating on your bare arms, as the cool breeze enters the mesh covering and gently caresses your face. You smile, unsure why, but you smile. Maybe you smile involuntarily because you feel good and the breeze and the sun makes you feel alive. As you open your eyes you roll over and cup your right ear with your right hand. The noise, where'd it go? You think. It's so quiet here, you can actually hear your thoughts. You try to listen harder and lean in towards the wind. Nothing, no traffic, no TV, no radio... only birds. You hear birds harmonizing sweet morning melodies. Fully awake now, you remember where you are; the organic farm east of the South American Andes. It's only 5:30 in the morning, but you feel energized, even after yesterday's gruelling farm work. Conscious that you are now awake, you begin stretching your tired muscles, arching your back, and raising your arms over head. You then unzip your sleeping bag and carefully step out of the tent. The babbling brook's cries in the nearby forest sound inviting. Embracing the invitation, you begin to head towards the sound of the water. "Hello" you greet the smiling sheep as you pass the animal pen. Skirting the rest of the farm property, you finally reach the tree-line. You enter the forest, and breathe in the earthy aromas of the damp moss. Following the worn foot-path you arrive at the water's edge, where the brook pools, creating an illusion of a bottomless hole, perfect for swimming. Piece-by-piece, you strip away the layers, carefully hanging each item on the low-slung branch of the Oak tree. Testing the water temperature with your right big toe, apprehension and excitement surge throughout your body. Without hesitation, and in one forceful motion, you plunge your entire naked body into the swirling cold waters below. You let out a shriek-like laugh, as you come up for air. Lungs tight, you feel alive, you feel one with the water as you re-submerge your head.*

The farm placed in countryside skirting the Andes is a perfect location for volunteers to relax, ground, and realise how much noise usually clutters and preoccupies their minds. Volunteers suggest this preoccupation can be taxing and life as an organic volunteer has shown the benefits of being in harmony with nature. For example, feeling unsatisfied and coming from a materialistic, technological, economic driven society, Dylan wanted to reconnect with nature. He desired to experience the natural equilibrium of the planet, the cycle of the seasons, and the way things grow. He believes organic farm



volunteering afforded him the chance for this reconnection. Viewing this experience as something that “feels better,” Dylan believed that he’s only had a glimmer of what this experience, this way of living, could mean for him:

I went off a feeling of what made me feel better and it was kind of what drew me towards a greater connection with land and I think that I am at the point right now where I had a little bit of a glimmer of what is possible in terms of being in sync with the natural environment.

When I asked Dylan what he meant by “glimmer” he described the positive benefits he is experiencing from life on these farms. He explained:

For example the last week that I’ve been here [Melody’s farm], I’ve been waking up early and feeling fantastic, just working hard all day, just having loads more energy than I would have sitting around in an office. And I’m sleeping less and feeling much more energized. I think more clearly, my memory is better when I’m out here doing things... For me that’s kind of like wow this is you know, I’m totally connected with the whole conventional, societal kind of thing, you know checking emails each day... For me I kind of just go wow, if such a small change just you know spending a bit more time outdoors working you know creates such a great positive benefit than what would it be like if I was just living 24/7 off the land doing this without the distractions ...

Our connection with nature is powerful and important for us to be aware of. How about the imagination piece of jumping into the watering hole; did you imagine yourself plunging in? Did the piercing cold awaken you? Did you feel connected with the water? Did you feel free or liberated?

Similarly, Hope interpreted the importance of being in harmony with nature, describing, “It gives you food and you can build yourself a place to stay and you can enjoy.” She continued, “You can feel a lot of beautiful things in places like this. Within the water, everything with the plants, you are more open to feel this.” Hope was interconnected with nature on the farm. Without shoes and surrounded by the beauty of the natural world, she discovered quickly how much she loves planting trees. The

opportunity to do this filled her with joy, as she envisioned part of the life cycle of the trees she plants. Hope explained she wanted to plant trees because she could “start life somewhere. And to see them grow.” She continued, “They grow so fast and they are so beautiful, all of the leaves that you see.” Hope’s love of connecting with trees as they developed so quickly was obvious; she described witnessing the intricate beauty of each of the leaves. She described how through her experience on the farms, and interconnecting with nature through tree planting, her appreciation of nature increased.

Hope’s love and appreciation for nature made it difficult for her to understand why some people in society and the city live in such a manner; disconnected with nature. She claimed:

We live like the blind. We live like the blind because nature is in our food, in the places that we can live, the structures and the houses and in health remedies, it’s everywhere, but you don’t have to kill yourself working to get that because if you live in a place where nature is, nature will give you all, so you live with nothing, but you live with so much.

Are you living disconnected with nature? Opportunity for understanding society’s interconnectedness to nature, more specifically for understanding how one connects with food, arises through the experience of organic volunteering.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*You slip six sticky seeds into the right back pocket of your faded denim cut-off shorts and swallow the final mouthful of your juicy watermelon slice. Mary, the environmentally-conscious farm host, has kindly asked that you save the seeds, as they will eventually be replanted. After disposing the barren rind of the melon into the compost pile behind the latrine toilet, you head over to the hand-crafted drying rack. A simple wooden table structure, with a screen as the tabletop is situated perfectly in a sunny spot between the garden and the house. The combination of the screen and the position of the rack create a warm, airy surface, ideal for drying. You reach into the tight jean pocket, retrieving the melon seeds. You spread them out neatly on the screen, as you collect the dried seeds you left there two days ago. With a fistful of dried seeds, you are ready to*

*plant, making your way to the garden. On your way over to the unplanted bed of dirt, Jonas, one of the senior volunteers identifies some of the sprouting herbs along the garden's edge. Leaning over, you stick your nose into a small, hedge-like bush. As you take a deep breath, the rich, tangy aroma of rosemary wafts into your nostrils. Mhmm... you hum. The smell lingers with you for a moment, as you cross the irrigation ditch. First arriving at the row of sprouting melons, you check that each seedling receives a large gulp of cool water from the watering can. Then, one row behind, you begin to pierce the earth with thumbprint sized holes 5 inches apart, placing the dried melon seeds into the ground. You cover them with rich topsoil and quench the parched earth. For the final step, you lay a protective layer of dry stringy straw atop of this new life. "I can't wait to see these seeds grow into delicious melons", you think, as your stomach grumbles ever so slightly, remembering the watermelon from earlier. Placing your hand on your belly, you smile at your work, exhaling your feelings of gratitude. You understand and realise that you nurture these plants, so they in turn can nurture you.*

Volunteers recommend organic volunteering to those who want to become more in touch with understanding how they connect with food. Nico said:

If you want to change your life and you want to see where your food comes from ...you know people go to the super market everyday and they buy some meat and they buy some vegetables and those vegetables could be from you know 3000 miles away. So to see your food growing out of the ground and to see your cow smiling eating grass and you know it's super important and nobody even gets that.

Similarly, Layna exclaimed this experience for her is "learning how to be less dependent on processed everything, city life and more working harmony with nature." Layna was fortunate to grow up outdoors in connection with the environment, the earth and its elements and she believes the organic volunteering experience is a continuance of who she was and what she currently believes in. However, this experience taught her more about her connection with nature and how being in harmony with nature is more than being outside in nature. She explained how her time at the farm helped her develop a greater awareness and connection with the plants. Her desire to know nature and her connectedness with the garden has shaped her experience from just knowing of the

plant's existence to actually identifying types of plants, how they are to be nurtured, and how to grow them.

Volunteers continuously learn how to live within nature. Participants described how their new awareness of this life perpetuates a desire to become conscious of, and learn how to be in harmony with, the natural world. These experiences might encourage us all to ask: Do I live in harmony with our earth? Am I open to a connection with nature?

*Imagine...close your eyes and imagine...*

*Dirty lunch dishes teeter, piled in the corner of the kitchen, they look daunting. You quickly scan the stack, counting at least 20 different pieces. As you walk towards the wobbling stack of plates, bowls, pots, and pans, James and Jody join to help. Whew, you sigh. Now you perceive the load to be much more manageable. You select a few pieces to carry over to the basin on the far side of the kitchen near the stove. There is no running water, but the pot of water from the rain-catch slowly comes to a boil. Picking up the heavy hot pot, James carries it over to the basin where you and Jody stand patiently next to Zion, the young bearded volunteer, waiting to help. While Jody begins to prep the dishes, dunking each piece in the boiling water one-by-one, you search for soap. This search is unsuccessful. You look once more above and below the sink-like basin; again no soap, but you see a bucket of grey, gritty mush next to a scrub brush. "What is this?" you ask, perplexed. Zion, the volunteer who has been here the longest, picks up the bucket and scrapes a heap of the unidentified substance onto the dirty plate. "These are wood ashes." He exclaims. Now you're really confused. Ashes, you think, are we not supposed to be cleaning the dishes? Your uncertain look in Jody and James' direction, elicits a deeper explanation. "Ashes..." Zion begins to say as he pinches the gritty matter between his thumb and index finger. "...not only an excellent abrasive to remove grease, but we clean with them because ash is natural and the run-off water will not harm our mother earth." You sheepishly and slowly nod your head in agreement and contemplate the question: why would we want to harm our environment? It is from this earth, from nature, in which we grow our food and live.*

While organic volunteering, volunteers experience and learn new ways to incorporate harmonious organic practices, which are more natural and environmentally

sustainable. It's an experience, which values nature; our mother earth. For instance, this can be illustrated in the story Sadie shared about washing dishes on the farm. One of the longer-term farm residents (living there for 6 months) was washing up dishes after the communal meal one afternoon and Sadie, being relatively new to the mix, was eager to extend her help. Sadie joined in expecting to find an "eco-friendly" detergent, one that may have been a little less harmful to the environment, but was surprised to actually hear ashes were the choice of dish cleanser:

Faucue was washing up and we sort of just walked over and sussed it out and he's got a few buckets there and a tray of ashes and that's what he's using to wash up, ya know. And we're sort of like "oh so like no detergents here?" So, I was thinking a natural detergent, of course, you know, less harmful. "Um, no I prefer to use ash because it doesn't hurt the earth." I was like "awesome, cool I'm happy to fucking do that, let's have a crack."

Though not completely versed in this lifestyle, Sadie's openness to these values was evident through her experience. At times she was shocked by new insights, but she received them as fascinating teachings about living in harmony with nature and she was eager to implement them herself.

***Discussion*** – Experiencing harmony: Being in touch with nature

Organic volunteering engenders the experience of connecting or reconnecting with the natural world. Volunteers described organic volunteering as a harmonious experience, helping them to better understand their connection with nature. As a way of escaping preoccupations they once knew, volunteers also noted benefits to being in harmony with nature. Benefits of organic volunteering include personal and intrinsic benefits such as feeling better and more connected with the earth and food. Some benefits were highlighted in Dylan's description of his dissatisfaction with the technological and

economically-driven society of his Australian home. Dylan desired to reconnect with nature, the natural equilibrium of the planet, of the cycle, the seasons and the way things grow, wanting to find a way of life more intrinsically satisfying than that in the city.

In addition to reconnecting to a more satiating lifestyle through organic volunteering, global benefits are created through the use of sustainable practices. Within the volunteer tourism literature, authors like Wearing (2001) and McIntosh and Zahra (2008) discuss the potential sustainability and harmonious aspect of volunteer tourism, as it may offer a sustainable alternative to the consumptive trends of mass tourism. Furthermore, Choo and Jamal's (2009) research investigated the experiences of organic volunteering. Choo and Jamal conducted interviews to better understand the sustainability of "eco-organic farm tourism" in Korea. The authors concluded these farms used traditional organic practices by working closely with local ecosystems and their findings expose the importance of human-environmental relationships within the everyday life of the Korean organic farmers. On the farm in Argentina, alternative practices, ones deemed more sustainable and environmentally-conscious, were implemented in hope of reducing negative environmental impacts. An awareness of human-environmental relationships was exemplified in Sadie's discussion about the benefits of using ashes to wash dishes. Furthermore, connections with nature were repeatedly illuminated in the very experience of gardening, as volunteers connected with the garden, learning how to identify types of plants.

These volunteers described the ways they perceived themselves to be connected with nature; how they had learned to move beyond a view of nature and humanity as separated. This reinforced my understanding of organic volunteering as more than just a

niche market of volunteer tourism. With a new perspective, my horizon expanded as I reconsidered relevant literature. As a starting point, I read the work of Grimwood and Henderson (2009) and their efforts to flesh out the associations between culture and nature. In their paper, *Inviting conversations about 'Friluftsliv' and relational geographic thinking*, Grimwood and Henderson contribute to the discourse surrounding theorizations of nature, exposing a shift from dualistic worldviews to relational worldviews. Dualistic thinking differentiates between Nature and Society, while the relational thinking refutes these distinctions. In their discussion of the dichotomies that dominate Western thinking, (e.g., outside/inside, object/subject, nature/culture), Grimwood and Henderson (2009) reflect on a perspective presented by Castree (2005):

From this perspective, humans are embedded within integrated networks of diverse, interrelated, and contingent socio-ecological beings whereby, for instance, a so-called environmental health problem like cancer is only treatable when we treat environmental/body toxins beyond seeing the body as other to nature. (Grimwood & Henderson, 2009, p. 10)

Experiences of the volunteers I spoke with exhibited the potential of organic volunteering to bring relational dimensions of nature and culture to the forefront, as volunteers continuously learn how to live in relation to nature. For example, and as noted above, Hope understood nature's importance. She explained, "It gives you food and you can build yourself a place to stay and you can enjoy. You can feel a lot of beautiful things in places like this. Within the water, everything with the plants..."

Volunteers gain awareness of the dynamics of their relationship with nature, thus perpetuating their desire to become more conscious of, and learn how to be in harmony with, the natural world. However, I ask myself: What is the extent of these harmonious relationships within organic volunteering context? The brief exploration of literature

regarding the relational dimensions of nature and society within organic farm experiences suggests an important avenue for future research. These research ideas are further explored in Chapter Six.

### ***Building bonds: Experiencing human connections***

“You know, it’s like if they [people on the farm] get sick, you’re taking care of them. Like so it’s very connected. Which is who we are as human beings and that’s why it’s very unnatural the world that we’ve inherited right now, the society the way that it is, it’s very unnatural. Human beings are very separated from one another.” – Clayton

Volunteers develop deep bonds by working together and through cultural exchanges with farmers and other volunteers. Life on the farm is very interconnected; people in the farm community care for one another and rely on each other. The life and culture volunteers knew before volunteering now seems “unnatural” and “separated” especially when juxtaposed with the connections and relational bonds created at the farm through their experiences. Close your eyes, open your heart, and open your mind as I try to help you imagine the experience and meaning of organic volunteering as experiencing bonds.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*You finally arrive at the farm after a long day of travelling, plane flights and bus transfers. The taxi pulls up to the farm “house,” a structure hand-built out of local and natural materials and drops you off. Here goes nothing you think, and enter through the doorway. The green-tinted, recycled wine bottles create a flower motif in the mud and clay sculpted walls, allowing just enough light for your eyes to settle on the faces of those waiting to welcome you. As you walk through the entrance you’re greeted with warm hellos, as each of the volunteers and hosts embrace you and place a soft kiss on your cheek. Sheepishly, receiving the kisses, you are uncertain what to do back. Do I embrace or kiss back? You ask yourself. The expressions on these unknown faces are glowing and the warmth in their eyes welcome you with gratitude. Though none of volunteers literally resembled your friends or family, and you are certain you’ve never met any of them, you feel a familiarity among them, like you are being re-introduced to close friends. Unsure why, you can’t help but*



*smile. The energy from each of them is contagious. As Soren hugs you, first taking your hand into her soft, yet dirty and well-worked and padded palms, she gently squeezes then pulls you into her body, sincerely embracing you. Her genuine disposition generates this unusual feeling of openness within you. Feeling a tingle through your body, you're overcome by happiness and warmth. Now comfortable and safe in the arms of Soren, you smile and embrace back. Her presence, and that of the others revives you, filling you with infinite energy even after your long day of travel. You compare the genuine and welcoming salutations with those you envision receiving from complete strangers back home. There would be no kiss, most likely no hug, maybe a handshake? You confirm the greetings on the farm have left you feeling different, it's strange, even though you actually do not know them, but the genuine dispositions generate this unusual feeling of openness, allowing you to bond immediately. You look forward to being here for the next several weeks, as you believe you've already created an immediate bond with the other volunteers.*

Similar to the scenario presented above, Nico described experiencing an immediate bond with Melody, the farm host. He reminisced:

So she walked up and immediately we clicked we had a connection and I felt at home. I didn't feel nervous. And we spent the first two or three days just the two of us and we did a little bit of work around the house ya know, but mostly just chatted and got acquainted and you know it was an immediate connection.

Through his memory, he reflected on the initial days of his time at *Pura Vida* (Melody's farm). How he "clicked" with the farm host immediately. These volunteering experiences were not just about work like a "normal job," rather as Nico noted, you experience authentic conversations and develop friendships. These authentic conversations embody a feeling of connectedness and happiness for these volunteers. Avery described bonds and relationships he was creating with volunteers and farm hosts as refreshing. He compared this to his experience of working in the music industry where there was more of a negative mentality, "...just taking, no helping, there's not let's help each other out, it's just oh, you've got that can I have that?" Moreover, his experience as an organic volunteer provided perspective on human connection. He was amazed to see organic and

wholesome bonds being created. Avery also illuminated this connection in the following example.

It's refreshing to see people just trying to be happy... trying to be happy, just trying to be nice to each other, trying to be decent human beings...it's sorta like wow, people are just, they're genuinely trying to be helpful and nice to each other. Which is why it's refreshing to me.

The explanation Avery provided is also reflected in Clayton's quote at the beginning of this "Building bonds" section. Through his quote Clayton described the unnatural world we inherited, which created separated experiences in our society. Juxtaposing experiences of organic farming against these separated, unhappy, and disconnected experiences described by Clayton and Avery makes the bonding and the opportunities for people to interact and connect more apparent. Encounters and interactions with people on the farm not only facilitate bonding opportunities, they also provide opportunity for deep and lasting connections.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*You and Nora, the Argentinian volunteer, share a 5 Peso taxi ride into the small near-by town. From the remote countryside, you both will board a public bus in opposing directions; it's time for you to part ways. Unfortunately, your time in Argentina has expired, as friends and family back home anxiously await your return. It's only been seven weeks, but you feel as if a lifetime has passed. In such a short time, volunteers and hosts you lived and worked with became your family. You're not sure you want to leave, not sure you're ready to say good-bye, especially to your new friend Nora. Passing the final stretch of fields, the cab enters the city centre. As you near the bus terminal you recall the initial feelings of arriving at the farm. You recall your first encounter with Nora. You couldn't help but grin from ear to ear, because within Nora's presence you felt so alive! Although Nora spoke very little English, and your beginner-level Spanish often left you speechless, she became one of your most prized confidants. You did everything together; you shared workloads, silly broken-language stories, laughs and even comfortable silences. You and she connected. It's as if you just understood one another, and the language barrier, though frustrating at times, never prohibited you from bonding. With a faint screech of the breaks, the cab*

*slowly roles to a stop, causing your thoughts to drift back into the present moment. You realise the dreaded farewell moment has arrived. You and Nora collect your packs from the trunk, and hug tightly one last time. Exchanging kisses on one another's cheeks, you remind her that the invitation to your home up north was a serious and genuine offer. She waves her final salutations, and begins to walk away. Trying to hold your emotions in, the words "I'll miss you," breaks from your cracking voice. Grinning, Nora turns around and says "estamos juntos siempre." You smile. She's right, you think, we will always be together. "Cuidate, take care of yourself!" you chime back as you slowly turn to walk towards your boarding bus.*

Volunteers bond with others who share the same conscious values. These bonds are created while on the farm and despite the separation at the end of the farm stay, volunteers noted the bond remains. For instance, Hope was still in contact with two Swedish volunteers she had met at a previous farm in Cordoba, Argentina. She explained how each of them is interconnected with one another, as their like-mindedness initially brought them together, "It's like building up a web of people that exchange information because they are in the same vibe. So, it's beautiful." Similarly the possibility for depth and meaningful connections is reflected in Xavier's experience. Xavier discussed the bond he had with hosts of a past farm he volunteered for in New Zealand:

*It was the first place that I WWOOFed at ... We stayed for two weeks and then we came back a month later... I was travelling with one of my French friends at that time and they [the WWOOF hosts] asked us to come back and if we wanted to participate in their wedding and it was a beautiful wedding.*

Organic volunteering fostered opportunity for Xavier to open up, bond, and connect deeply with hosts. As such, hosts experienced connection with Xavier, inviting him and his friend to share in an intimate occasion. Though currently he does remain in constant communication with those farm hosts, Xavier implied the bond he built with the hosts will always be, and if he ever were to return to New Zealand he would stop in to visit

them. Correspondingly, Xavier would extend the invite in the other direction; opening his home to these friends.

Similar connections were also apparent in Dylan's organic volunteering experience. He explained that one-on-one time with a host often produced prime time to establish such bonds.

I've been to a few places where I've been the only person there and sometimes I prefer that. Sometimes you establish much more of a deeper bond with the host when you're the only person there because you are spending all your time with them, there's no distractions, you're able to get really deep into conversation without, sometimes you're like uh, I don't want to say something like this in front of someone else you know?

Dylan believed the depth of his connection reflected the exclusive nature and one-on-one time he was able to have with the host. Intimate interactions facilitated the creation of a space for openness; whereby hosts were willing to share. In contrast to open bonding, Dylan also noticed sometimes cultural differences can create a dissonance or closed feeling towards volunteers. Thus bonds, which connect volunteers with hosts, seem closed or less connected. This is illuminated through Dylan's account about working with Argentinian hosts versus, North American or Australian hosts. Dylan disclosed:

I feel that the Argentinians, and I'm going to generalize here, are very warm people they are also very private people and they have their public face and their public life and this the part of our family, our life, our opinions that we allow other people to see and they've got another set of opinions that they don't share.

### ***Discussion*** – Building bonds: Experiencing human connection

Volunteers experience organic volunteering as bonding through encounters and interactions with each other. These interactions can generate strong relationships and lasting friendships. Fostering strong connections among volunteers, organic volunteering

may also create an opportunity for volunteers to open, share, and bond deeply with the farm hosts. This was demonstrated through both Xavier and Dylan's accounts of meaningful relationships with hosts noted above. In Xavier's case, he was invited to the hosts' wedding, what some would perceive as an intimate occasion. Dylan's bonds with hosts seem to be the strongest when he had exclusive time to interact and work along-side them. These ideas are reinforced by McIntosh and Zahra's (2008) discussion of volunteer tourism in which they emphasise the significance of cultural encounters, deeming them essential to establishing bonds among volunteers and Maori people. Working interactively with members of the community on projects, volunteers and locals developed strong and meaningful relationships (McIntosh & Zahra, 2008).

Organic volunteering fostered the building of bonds and created a feeling of happiness and connection, as volunteers described caring for one another and relying on one another. Sometimes this connection was felt immediately, as portrayed by Nico's experience with Melody the host. However, at other times there was a perception of disconnect or dissonance. Dylan disclosed this through reflection about Argentinian hosts. In addition, I also perceived some kind of disconnection while on the farm. In my observation notes I explain:

*Two volunteers left this morning, they were meant to meet with me for an interview tomorrow, but left unexpectedly. I presume they were unhappy with their experience on the farm, specifically with their interactions with the host. From the little I gathered from the other volunteers, there was confrontation between these volunteers and the host. I'm unsure why or what about. However, during a breakfast conversation, the shifting dynamics of the farm was noted. After the unhappy volunteers left, volunteers expressed feeling better, suggesting that the energy was much more positive, after their departure. I too felt this shift in energy.*

This reflection exposes the possibility that not all participants experience bonding. It would have been interesting to understand why these volunteers left the farm and what kind of bond was actually developed with the host. Were the volunteers not open to bonding, or closed to the organic volunteer experience? Did they possess negative attitudes toward the workload? Or was the host not open to building a relationship with these volunteers?

Considering the building of bonds between volunteers and host one may ask: What facilitates feeling of connection versus disconnection? Do openness and attitude determine relationships formed while organic volunteering? Do these conditions determine depth? And will these connections remain? It seems to me, bonds formed while organic volunteering are generally facilitated and maintained when like-mindedness and openness exists. McGhee and Santos's research (2005) highlights the importance of like-mindedness, suggesting volunteer tourism facilitates these relationships and connections. Their research and my thesis illuminate the importance of these shared values and make me wonder whether there needs to be something in place before volunteers even begin the experience for relations and bonds to deepen. Additional exploration of host-guest relationships within organic volunteering experiences seems necessary. Particularly, research which explores in greater depth the conditions which facilitate a better bonding atmosphere and those which prohibit bonds from forming. These concerns will be addressed in the final section of this chapter.

### ***Consciousness-raising experiences: Creating awareness for future activism***

“Here’s there’s this nice philosophy of let’s just grow as much as we need, let’s only eat as much as we need, let’s only take as much as we need, let’s leave some stuff, you know. – Avery

Organic volunteering affords volunteers opportunities to build relationships, particularly with like-minded volunteers, and thereby has the potential to encourage consciousness-raising. Within these experiences volunteers may develop a heightened awareness of the complex nature of societal, community, and global issues. Volunteers may be inspired by these new conscious understandings, thus developing a deeper perspective about lives they had prior to this experience. They may even discover an intrinsic desire to become involved with future activism. Change can start with you and I; close your eyes, open your heart, and open your mind, as I try to help you imagine the experience and meaning of organic volunteering as a consciousness-raising experience.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*The rickety old-wooden bookshelf of the farmhouse sits in the room adjacent to the kitchen. Jordan, the knowledgeable farm host, posses an extensive collection of consciousness-raising books. Immaculately organised, grouped by subject, there are too many intriguing titles to process. You feel intrinsically stimulated, as you enthusiastically you gaze at the top shelf, skimming through the books left to right, top to bottom. Stopping at the familiar binding, you slide the tattered, blue-green glossy paperback copy of the Celestine Prophecy half way out, just enough to read the entire title. “What a great book,” you unconsciously say aloud, as you push the book back into its respective space. “Sure is,” you suddenly hear a voice pipe in from behind you. Startled a bit, unaware of whom it may be, you turn to see Jordan standing over your shoulder, admiring your selection. “How did you feel about the insights?” Jordan inquires. You begin to discuss the spiritual insights of this book, which quickly dovetails into a consciousness-raising discussion of the current situation in the world, and the preoccupations of the society you know from back home. As you continue your conversation, you and Jordan simultaneously step away from the bookshelf and make your way towards the two Oak stools in the corner of the room. As the conversation gets more heated, volunteers begin to filter into the house. They join in the*

*discussion, as each begins selecting books that resonate most with them. Colonization, marketization, assimilation, and commodification; these controversial subjects spiral in and out of bouts of debate with no lulls. Initially you feel intimidated as opinions erupt from all directions and these are world issues you never invested much thought into. Specific standpoints are shared, some of these sentiments stronger than others, but the conversation illuminates a like-mindedness among many of those on the farm as each topic surges into the limelight. You feel energised as new awareness is created in you.*

Organic volunteering can engender continuous consciousness-raising experiences.

Through stimulating and even controversy-ridden discussions, as well as by having access to thought-provoking literature, volunteers on the farm become more aware of the world they live in. Clayton expressed broad consciousness-raising thoughts when he described his experience on the farm. He believed he and other volunteers were at these farms because they are “waking up” and argued experiencing organic volunteering, this way of living, was the fate of each of them. Similarly, Dylan was also convinced people everywhere need to wake up. He claimed:

I think fundamentally the way that 99% of the population lives their life is destroying their soul...I really think this is the case. And I think that humanity, the direction we're heading and I don't think it takes a genius to look at where we're going, and it's not getting better, we're not getting healthier, we are not loving more.

These farms provide a space for volunteers to experience living outside of the current paradigm of our society, and this becomes an important realization for many. As Clayton stated:

This is exactly what needs to happen...I am speaking to this way of living... I feel in one way or another, I personally in the world as a whole and the culture we both come from will not be able to continue the way that they are living and I feel that whoever does not harness an awareness of how to live outside of that paradigm is doomed.



In the previous quotation, Clayton is referring to the dependence many people have on cultural and societal structures from back home. Clayton further explained this idea:

I'll just throw out a random scenario. Let's say um like a solar flare ejects from the sun. And it knocks out the power grid for two months and you see people that are living in California, lets just say hypothetically they can hardly wipe their own ass, they've never grown a plant they have maids and blahblahblah.... And then the power grid get's knocked out, you can't get food from stores, they don't have backup storage food all of these things, then what are they going to do? What are they going to do? They're totally dependent on a system that's pretty fragile... And that's why I'm drawn here because if the power grid goes out, we probably wouldn't even know... In LA if the power grid goes out every person would know in a second because they are living off of it, it sustains their life.

Experiencing organic volunteering on these farms, Clayton became more aware of society's reliance on technology and electricity. He suggested the hypothetical power grid scenario to explain his understanding that many people back home would be at great loss if this were to actually happen. Whereas on the farm, due to its self-sustaining nature, life would continue on as is. In Clayton's eyes, a new paradigm is being created. These experiences are a small piece of the foundation of change as it led Clayton to Argentina, to meet these people and to live within this environment.

Nico explained how time on the farm has generated thought-provoking conversation and discussions concerning who's responsible for creating change with in our global society. Nico insisted the onus is on the socially, environmentally, and politically conscious people, such as himself. Nico claimed:

We talk a lot about corruption of the world government. We talk a lot about corruption in agriculture as well. Monsanto seeds taking over, genetically modified foods, the obesity epidemic of the United States, you know? People are so oblivious to the damage we are doing to the earth and no one is doing anything to fix it. So it's up to those conscious people to do things like this to make the change to make the shift.

Similarly, Clayton exclaimed, “I think that it fuels my desire to be progressive and consciously active in shifting the world and the way the world is.” These experiences allow volunteers to further develop their awareness of the way they live in the world; creating continuous consciousness-raising opportunities, and facilitating awareness of the potential change that can occur. Nico believes organic volunteering experiences may be a crucial phase in gaining the aforementioned awareness. “Maybe until you come here and see it with your own eyes and then maybe you’ll want to change your way of life and maybe give more than consume,” Nico said as he further explained how this change could occur:

Change in their own lives or the view of the human race and our planet, like from just being here with Melody it’s like she has so much knowledge about the world, about corruption, about government, and about organic farming. Her bookshelf is just immaculate ya know? So just from being here and speaking with her and with the other volunteers and sitting down each day and reading really, really, really important books that I would otherwise not know about, my view continues to be, continues to change more and more everyday.

As Nico argued, reading consciousness-raising literature can lead to heightened awareness. Xavier also mentioned this, as he used much of his free time on the farm to read books such as *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, by Eduardo Galeano. This political, social, and cultural narrative has been organised by the facets of Latin American history, according to the patterns of five centuries of imperialism and exploitation, illuminating these unfortunate truths. Through reading such material, and through host and volunteer discussions, Xavier’s understanding of these global issues shifted.

Organic volunteering has the potential to create awareness about important global topics including issues of imperialism or agriculture corruption; however, awareness

regarding such subjects will only increase if others experience consciousness-raising. For example, Hope wished for more people to know these farms. She said, “It would be really great for many people to live this way because it’s a way of changing and making awareness, to be aware we have to take care of the land and ourselves.” Hope believes spaces such as these farms are only the first step to change, but if more people were aware and conscious of this way of living, it would create more awareness about the need to return to the land and nature. Through living and experiencing organic volunteering and surrounding yourself with socially, environmentally, and politically aware people, Hope suggested awareness would be created. Thus, a greater understanding about how to live more consciously in everyday life, in the cities, in society, could be generated. With Hope’s thoughts in mind, read the next scenario.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*You’ve recently returned from volunteering on the organic farm. The awareness of this mindful and wholesome life is still fresh in your mind. You begin to think how you could implement some of the sustainable practices into your own daily routines. Because you live in the city, you understand a composting latrine toilet may not be plausible, but you contemplate the idea anyhow as you shift furniture in your living room. You decide to set more realistic goals. I will be more conscious of my water consumption you ponder, as the philosophy “leave not take” echoes in your head. And you ruminate on your electricity use as you walk back upstairs to turn off the lights in the abandoned rooms. Hmm, maybe I will cancel my cable too you suggest to yourself wilfully. You went without television for two months and actually did not miss it. The mere consideration of no t.v. triggers nostalgia, as you yearn for the quiet time you had on the farm, free from electronic gadgets and technological distractions. Later that evening you are sitting with your nephew at the dinner table. Though only seven years of age, his thick round stature is misleading. He pushes bits of food around with his fork and asks, “What’s this orange thing?” Flabbergasted, you inquire if he meant the carrot on his plate. “Carrot, I never seen one of them before,” he remarks with confusion. As you wave good-bye to your family, with the dinner episode branded into your memory, you enthusiastically extend an invite to your nephew, “Hey, Jimmy come back to my house this weekend, I’d like your*

*help with my new garden. It could be our very own backyard project!” You understand it’s now your turn, your turn to teach, your turn to create awareness; it’s now your turn to create the change you wish to see in the world.*

Organic farms have the responsibility and goal to show there is another way of living. Like many volunteers, Jade also believed she was brought to Melody’s farm to experience this awareness. After experiencing these alternative ways of living, she believes it is her own and the other volunteers’ obligation to further disseminate these understandings to people back home. Jade’s comments exemplify this belief:

The conscious farming and these organic farms, they have this goal to show an alternative way of life and doing things. And I’m now looking into communicating this way of life and these places for people to know there is another way.

Now that she has been immersed in this interconnected experience, the philosophies and practices are embodied within her, thus transferring the onus of responsibility from the farm owners to her. The awareness and consciousness-raising experiences have planted the seed within her, as she now identifies with what she believes to be her own social-responsibility. Jade’s desire for activism and future action is apparent, as she stated that she, “Wants to walk along the way with the farmers that want to change and do this sort of thing.” Furthermore, Jade found herself more open to new projects. As she was experiencing organic volunteering, Jade became involved with community projects outside of the farm. In her Argentinian community, her desire was to teach families how to grow their own food. This pursuit is no longer a dream for Jade, as prior to my departure she began instructing young children about gardening, farming, and organic agriculture.

Avery's perception of "leaving" versus "taking" has been the foundation of his growing awareness of the importance of these organic and self-sustaining lifestyles. His experience on the farm embodied this philosophy, as he learned about other ways to implement certain organic practices in his life. Furthermore, although farm hosts did not propose this philosophy exclusively, this outlook is apparent in the implementation of organic practices and teachings namely through recognition of our connection with the land and one another. He sees himself in the future, living in connection with nature and communities around him. However, it is not his future welfare he is concerned about; rather he revealed his growing concerns about the youth of our society and their levels of awareness about food and nature. Avery attested:

A lot of kids aren't aware that things, like food need to be grown...They're not going to have any idea of... what does an apple tree look like? You know? And I think it's really important and I think it would be really beneficial for society if kids were exposed this a lot more.

Avery further reflected on this problem, offering additional ideas to address some of these concerns. He believes community and family gardens should be implemented in society, requiring children to learn about the growth process of plants, exposing the truth behind dinner. Though these are small ideas, Avery suggested we can only do our small part to help create change in the society, and sometimes these small actions become much larger movements, and sometimes not. Regardless, Avery believes it is our responsibility to "find that small inspiration in people and tease it out."

***Discussion*** – Consciousness-raising experiences: Creating awareness for future activism

Dylan is convinced humankind must "wake up," claiming the way the majority of world's population lives is destroying their souls, as global issues such as capitalism,

consumerism, and resource consumption, are not being resolved. Clayton believes he and other volunteers are on these farms because they are “waking up” or about to be awoken more and accordingly it was the fate of each of them to experience organic volunteering. Sentiments, such as “we can make a difference” or “change starts with you and I,” arise while volunteers are on these farms. Does organic volunteering facilitate the vital “waking up” process volunteers identified?

Organic volunteering possesses potential to raise awareness and spark change. This awareness is fostered through discussion of the complex nature of social, community, and global issues. McGehee and Santos (2005) propose awareness can be the result of encounters with like-minded volunteers, facilitating opportunities for consciousness-raising experiences. Through their research, McGehee and Santos determined volunteer tourism affords realizations such as the “us and them” dichotomy and social inequalities within host communities. Accordingly, Lepp (2008) concluded volunteer tourism generates participant awareness, allowing volunteers to develop deeper perspectives while working on volunteer projects abroad. These new insights foster ambitions of becoming involved in more meaningful and purposeful ways upon their return home. Volunteers involved in the organic volunteering experiences reinforce this desire for change and activism. Avery displays concern for society’s youth and their awareness of the origins of food. Recognizing the perceived disconnection, Avery hypothesized solutions for these societal dilemmas. Organic volunteering has an apparent potential to fuel activism.

Regarding potential activism, McGehee and Santos (2005) indicate volunteers within their study came to an understanding; time and effort are inevitable factors before

effective and permanent change will occur. Although time and effort can be acknowledged as conditions for change, volunteers embodying consciousness-raising experiences while on organic farms believe these efforts are their responsibility. Avery noted it is our responsibility to “find that small inspiration in people and tease it out.” He believes we all need to do our small part to help create change in the society. Similarly, Jade proclaimed “I’m now looking into communicating this way of life and these places for people to know there is another way.” My research participants’ feelings of responsibility are supported by Raymond and Hall’s (2008) work on global citizenry and volunteer tourism. Reverberating the notion volunteer tourism establishes a sense of global citizenry among participants (Raymond & Hall, 2008), as volunteers of my research too are reminded of their global role within communities to which they belong. Organic volunteers’ experiences of awareness and desire for activism align with the postulations of McGehee’s (2002) work. McGehee recognizes the potential power of alternative tourism to motivate and mobilize on-going social movement participation.

***Transformation: Experiencing growth***

“Every place I have been was exploring different lifestyles, meeting people and helping but it’s been...it has changed my life being to those many places. Just really realizing how much... how many people are doing that and yea put all their energy into it. It’s really powerful” – Xavier

Volunteers come from different parts of the world to participate in organic farming experiences. Sometimes upon arrival, these volunteers are not completely open to the experience, initially taking the experience for granted. However, as time elapses, perspectives grow and transformation occurs. Close your eyes, open your heart, and open

your mind, as I try to help you imagine the experience and the meaning of organic volunteering as a transformative experience.

*Imagine... close your eyes and imagine...*

*You put the last of your dirty-tattered farm beaten clothes into your 75 litre hiking pack. Tightening the draw and clipping the last of the compartment buckles, you're almost all packed up and ready to venture back to the motherland. You can't believe that nearly two months has passed and it's now time for you to return home. After attaching your tent snugly to the bottom of your hiking pack, you collect the remaining of your possessions, including your digital camera, and make your way towards the top of the dirt drive-way. You take a seat on the over-turned log one last time, as you await your taxi. With the calming breeze at your back and the sounds of the birds' chirps, you close your eyes and begin to reminisce, evaluating your time spent here. The corners of your mouth slowly curl upwards. You're grinning uncontrollably now at the passing memories, as you clench your camera in your right hand, glad to have captured some of these memorable moments. You reflect on how you feel now, compared to when you first came to the farm. You feel different, new, maybe changed? The experience was refreshing and completely different from your spoiled upbringing, you think. You never performed so much manual work. Though there were times you yearned for your bed, your own room, showering with running water, and eating when you wanted to, your time on the farm was humbling and granted you a new perspective. We all counted on one another you recall; the community needed each other to help out so things could get done. The vision of countless hours of cutting, stripping bark, and carrying logs arises. The work, yeah it was hard, but satisfying. You remind yourself, these logs were to be the foundation of the new all-natural house. Building the house together taught you the importance of using local natural resources and the power of teamwork. These lessons and the entire experience have helped make you who you are today and who you knew you were always capable of being. You feel stronger, in and out, from experiencing this way of life. You feel honoured to have been blessed with the opportunity to organic volunteer.*

Perceiving organic volunteering as an experience for change and transformation  
volunteers recommend the experience to others. Xavier testified:

If ...you kind of want to try to have a change of life and you've been living in cities for a long time and you want to try. Then come and try, but as soon as you think about coming and trying, I think you've already made the first big step to organic volunteering anyways.



Xavier continued to explain how he believes the change we want to see is already within us. The volunteer growth and transformation did not occur all at once, but we all have the potential for this transformation. As illuminated in the scenario above, new perspectives were cultivated as time elapsed. Nico attested to this, as he did not always participate in organic volunteering because he was solely interested in farming. Similar to other volunteers, Nico began organic farm volunteering as a traveller trying to save money. Acknowledging his past decision, he qualified it as a starting point. It did not take long for him to realise that life on the farm is so much “more than just a place to drop your bags.” Just as he was transformed from his first organic farm experience, Nico claimed, as he visited more farms he noticed the growth among other volunteer participants. He believes these experiences help volunteers gain a sense of self, helping them to recognize what is important. Nico reflects on these transformations:

I watched them transform, ya know, they came here from their party circuit in South America and then maybe form speaking with me or speaking with the owner of the farm or other people in the community, have developed a love and a huge interest in this life style. And the change it can bring to the planet.

Furthermore, Nico suggested everyone is continuously growing, although hectic preoccupied lives outside of these farms sometimes stunts or delays this growth.

Nico indicated:

The experience definitely changes with time. I mean any walk of life, everybody is constantly growing, but here I think because you are so far away from your normal life...like say you live in a city and work nine to five and you went to university and got your degree and then went straight into work and you never really had time to figure out who you really were. I think when you come here you are so far away from all that, that you can

just get in your own head space and you know figure out what's important to you.

It is obvious organic farm lifestyles grant necessary space to remove one's self from the chaos of life back home. However, the underlying implication is this space also provides an opportunity for self-discovery in which one may solidify personal values and universal perspective.

These new perspectives afford volunteers a chance to evaluate their experiences and what they mean. Jade's experience allowed her to view life differently; it has allowed her to assess what was really important to her. For example, she was involved with other projects in Argentina while volunteering on the organic farms. However, she often questioned her involvement in these outside projects, as some of these projects did not suit her, her beliefs, or who she believed she was. Through her organic volunteering experience, working together with other volunteers, she gained confidence with herself and her abilities. Jade claimed, "I feel like working together with all the people in a team, I am now comfortable and will take other options or positions in my life because of this." This personal growth and transformation empowered her to break free from the work she was uncomfortable with; realizing there were other options for her life.

In addition to empowerment, volunteers gained appreciation and new life insights through the organic volunteering experience. Dylan declared, "Well I think if you strip away everything other than the fundamental fact that I grew up on the land and now I've come back to the land, then that kind of tells the whole story." Dylan's experience, compounded with his journey to these farms, instilled a new appreciation of his childhood, giving him an increased level of affection and admiration for his parents. He now understands challenges of a farming lifestyle and has a greater appreciation for his

parents' sacrifice and hard work. Furthermore, Dylan's organic volunteering experience contributed to his revolution and desire to return to the land. For Dylan farming was always a part of his childhood, but he left this farm life for a job in the city. He eventually grew increasingly dissatisfied in the city, causing him to return to the land, reconnecting with what he knew. As Dylan reconnected with farming as an organic volunteer, he was transformed, discovering a new meaning to satisfying, happy, healthy lifestyles. This discovery brought him full circle, as he now hopes to own his own farm one day, creating for himself the very lifestyle he was born into; Dylan no longer wanted to escape the life he's always been connected to, rather his openness and new appreciation lead him "back" towards his future.

Contrasting Jade's life breakthrough and appreciation and insight gained by Dylan, Layna believed organic volunteering did not represent a huge life-changing moment, but was simply the next step for her, as she was continuously exposed to learning and growing. She stated, "I think that I'm just constantly developing and figuring more and more where I'm headed in life ...". She continued:

As far as changing my life I knew what I wanted to do... so I'm building off of that and um so the change that I see mostly is just learning. You know like being outside all of the time but not being able to identify anything, and now I can look over and be like oh yeah that's this plant... or that's this vegetable or fruit.

***Discussion*** – Transformation: Experiencing growth

Volunteers experience organic volunteering as transformative growth. However, this growth and transformation does not occur immediately. Instead, the awareness of change grows over time. This growth was experienced through the recognition of new perspectives, as organic volunteering provides a place and space for self-reflection. Some volunteers claimed to be more confident as a result of time on the farm, while others

regained a sense of self and appreciation for their lives. Dylan's participation fortified his appreciation for farm life and human-environmental connections. After spending many years trying to escape the life he was born into, Dylan was reacquainted with the life he was once accustomed to, reassessing its meaningfulness. These ideas support McIntosh and Bonnemann's (2006) study as they described tourists who participate in voluntary work to gain an opportunity for self-reflection and to assess what is personally meaningful.

Sin (2009) sought to better understand volunteer motivations in a university programme "Action Africa." The theme of "Self" was identified as a major motive for becoming involved. Similarly, the typology "Quest for oneself," was identified as the major volunteer type in Rehberg's (2005) investigation of young Swiss adults interested in international volunteering. While organic volunteering facilitates the chance for self-reflection and experiences of growth and transformation, one cannot to assume this was the basis for their being on the farm, as measuring motivations was not a primary concern of my hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Therefore, future research would be necessary to clarify motivations of organic volunteers, identifying underlying desires for participation in this experience.

In addition to organic volunteer motivations, understanding historicity and pre-understandings seem to be helpful when analysing and understanding changes, growth, and transformation within experiences. Furthermore, because growth occurs over time and as volunteers' horizons of understanding expand, I inquire: How can the actual experience of growth and transformation expand?

### **The essential structure– Opening to living in interconnectedness**

The horizon is “...something into which we move and moves with us” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 304). Thus, to understand the overarching essential structure of the phenomenon of organic volunteering, it was important for me to first engage in a process of reflectively appreciating and understanding my own horizon of interconnectedness. Participating in a hermeneutic dialogue with my text and my own experiences on the farm, I was able to create meaning and understanding, ultimately expanding my horizon. After analysing and discussing underlying essences, I realised the essential nature of interconnectedness within organic volunteering. Each underlying essence is rooted in the experience of interconnectedness while also intersecting one another. The following section illuminates the essential structure of “Opening to living in interconnectedness” and I reflect on how each of the essences linked to this structure.

I will use a slightly different representation than the imagination CAP pieces presented in the previous sections. Interconnectedness, like many of the essences of this research, is one which articulation through text and dialogue does not come easy. Therefore, I present the essential structure with a first-hand journal account; my experience of interconnectedness while I was on the organic farm. After this entry, I provide a brief retrospective reflection of how I came to understand this as interconnectedness.

The purpose of this journal entry is to describe the essential structure, as seen through my eyes. Like some of the other essences, interconnectedness is a concept best understood through embodying the actual experience. Through this embodiment one would be able to feel, live, and relate to the concept. I recognize my audience may not be

able to experience the farm first-hand. Thus, to elucidate the experience of opening to living in interconnectedness as an organic volunteer, I provide the journal entry below. It is at this point where I remind you, I too was a volunteer on this farm, experiencing interconnectedness and each of the other essences. Accordingly, the entry represents my own emerging horizon of this experience. This journal entry will be supplemented by discussion of interconnectedness, drawing on quotes from my participants. However, first I define my interpretation and understanding of interconnectedness so as to offer insight regarding my interpretation of this essential structure.

I interpret interconnectedness as a concept that implies a state of connection, joined and always connected. It's a word that means oneness. It's a word that implies interrelatedness. All life is interrelated, interconnected. Or in the case of my research, the elements within the experiences of organic volunteering are interrelated, as one affects the other. Within the notion of interconnectedness, all elements - things, beings, and phenomena – are affected by a shift or change to one or more of these elements. For example, if one were growing a plant and were to eliminate or alter an essential element from the growing/life cycle, such as water, the manner in which the plant blooms will change. This change will ultimately alter the existence of water as well, as water manifests from plants' leaves, and is released back into the atmosphere. The removal of the water source does not mean its connection or relation to the plant is eradicated, rather it further supports the notion that the plant's existence is interconnected with this element and vice versa. All things, beings, and phenomena exist or occur in relationship with all other things, beings, or phenomena.

*Journal: My initial encounters*

I made it to the farm. After a long day of bus travel and navigating through the small remote town of this Argentinian countryside, I finally arrived at the farm. I waved goodbye to the make-shift remi driver (fake taxi driver), and made the last 1km trek down the dirt road. My first encounter was with Hope, her hair matted to her head and shoeless. Hope greeted me with the typical Argentinian kiss on the cheek and a gentle and genuine smile. I smiled back, her energy was contagious, I was exhausted from two days of travel, but Hope's presence revived me. I felt good, I felt alive. I couldn't help but grin ear to ear. My thoughts and body were overcome by excitement, as I looked forward to starting that new way of life. Although Hope spoke very little English, and I weak Castellano, she became one of my most prized confidants on the farm. It's as if she and I just understood one another, and the language barrier though frustrating at times, never prohibited us from bonding. Hope offered to show me around the farm community.

Moments later, I look up to find two men walking towards us, Clayton being one of them. Before they arrived in front of us, I made note of my feelings and my first impressions. The expressions on their face were glowing and the warmth in their eyes made me feel welcomed. Neither of them had ever met me, but I felt like I was being re-introduced to very close friends. It was strange, an unusual feeling as I had not known them, but the genuine dispositions of these men made me feel very comfortable and welcomed. They both received me in the same manner as Hope had done. Their transparent excitement energized me for the rest of my farm tour.

After visiting the small arroyo (creek) skirting the property and having a break for Mate (herbal tea), Hope finished orienting me to the farm community. Hope brought me to Immanuel's farm and then returned to her daily tasks, leaving me to explore. Unexpectedly, a feeling of anxiety surged through my body. My stomach tightened into knots. Up walks Immanuel, his words were kind from what I understood, but his face was stoic and his presence uninviting. The brief conversation left me feeling depleted, that energetic and positive frame of mind was lost. I felt scared, uncertain, and confused. The words exchanged did not solicit these emotions, but I sensed something was wrong. I was unsure if I was even a part of the situation, but I felt dead, paralyzed by my fears and uncertainties. I did my best to calm my racing heart and hide the panic from my face and decided to walk towards Melody's property, as I was meant to be helping out both her and Gabriel. The frantic and fearful emotions within me had begun to slowly wane with every passing step.

Finally, I walked through the gates of *Pura Vida* (Melody's farm property) and was greeted by Melody, Nico, and Clayton. I felt at ease again. The meeting with these volunteers was not as exuberant as was the initial encounter; however my breath grew a bit deeper. I couldn't put my finger on exactly why I had just felt the way I did back at Immanuel's, but there was something going on.

### *Reflection on my initial encounters*

*I did not have fears or at least none that I was consciously aware of, when I arrived at the farms. I had decided prior to travelling down to Argentina, I would do my best to let go of my trepidations regarding living this type of life, sleeping in a tent for a month, not knowing anyone, and the possibility of limited showers and regular meals. I told myself I would arrive with an open-mind and I believe this open-mindedness, the welcoming feeling that I was greeted with, when I met Hope and Clayton, was actually the volunteers reciprocating my openness. They too were open-minded and the energy that resulted from our initial conversations and exchanges was livening. From the very beginning I felt interconnected with the volunteers I met.*

*However, when I continued my tour, I remember the dynamics changed. My nerves stood on end when I met Immanuel for the first time. I felt unwelcomed and although he was speaking with me, I felt as if he was closed off and unwilling to receive my genuine salutations. Unknown to me at the time, Immanuel and Melody had miscommunication about the plan for my tent and for whom I was to be working during the duration of my stay. This miscommunication in addition to personal circumstances and past encounters with irresponsible English-speaking volunteers (as I've been informed about), may have prompted Immanuel's skeptical and indifferent welcome. I look back at this initial occurrence with a new perspective of interconnectedness. At the time I did not know what my visceral and uncertain reaction meant, Immanuel and I never interacted before, but I had the ability to pick up on his emotions. For me, within the very same afternoon, the dynamic shifted from an open and energetic atmosphere to an unexplainable disconnect.*

*Experiencing both the positive energy of my volunteer encounters and the negative gut twisting uncertainties of my encounter with Immanuel fostered some retrospective reflection. Though I felt a disconnect with Immanuel, was I necessarily disconnected? My intuitive reaction and the embodied experience I endured leads me to believe that it was not a broken connection we were experiencing, rather Immanuel and I were actually interconnected, which allowed me to pick up on his reservations about me. His reservations may have caused him to be less open with me, even closed. Additionally, maybe the initial feelings of unease produced fear within me, causing me to close off to Immanuel, severing our exchange. Thus the changing dynamics I had felt; the negativity I had felt may have actually been a product of our closed mind mentalities.*

The above journal entry is my personal account with retrospective reflections of the experience of living in interconnectedness while organic volunteering. The entry presents my experience of lived interconnectedness within the organic volunteer context.



However, to supplement my experience, I provide textual support from volunteer transcripts below.

### *Experiences of interconnectedness*

“This contributes to other people, my work if it contributes to keep having places like this then other people can come because, the tomatoes I’ve planted I won’t see them grow, but other people will see them grow.” – Hope

The central essential structure, *opening to living in interconnectedness*, manifests throughout the organic volunteers’ experiences. This understanding of an experience of interconnectedness was not always articulated clearly in each volunteers’ interview, but as I analysed their experiences, exploring each essence more deeply, I realised this concept was ever-present. While each volunteer was experiencing each of the six aforementioned underlying essences, I also discovered and realised interconnectedness was being experienced. The individual underlying essences were each a part of the whole interconnected experience of organic volunteering. I illuminate this notion by briefly discussing each of the six essences. Within this discussion I reveal how each essence interrelates to the essential structure of interconnectedness, and how each is interconnected to the others. Lastly, I provide discussion about the prejudices, conditions of truth as suggested by Gadamer, which may affect how interconnectedness is perceived.

The essence *Reconnecting: Experiencing what was* emerged as an obvious part of the organic volunteering experience. Life on the farms exhibited how life could be lived, or more specifically, how life once was lived and experienced. To explore interconnected living within this reconnecting experience, I return to some of the questions I posed in the discussion section of this essence. First I asked: Is organic volunteering actually a reflection of a life we all initially came from? For some volunteers, such as Dylan, this

was very apparent as they articulated this notion within their transcripts, suggesting that organic volunteering has allowed reconnection with a previous life. For Dylan farming was always a part of his childhood, as his parents farmed to sustain his family. He left this farm life for a job in the city. He eventually grew increasingly dissatisfied in the city, causing him to return to the land, reconnecting with what he knew.

Through evaluating vital steps Dylan took, which led him to organic volunteering, and through exploring some of his pre-understandings, interconnectedness emerges within the experience of reconnecting. For example, Dylan perceived his childhood farm life as difficult and “unsatisfying.” Therefore, Dylan moved to a city, where again he developed a new understanding of his pre-understood notion of “unsatisfying” through his experience in a corporate, materialistic, and economically-driven workforce. Realizing his farm life and the experiences created in organic volunteering contexts were much more satisfying, Dylan came full circle and returned to the land. However, had one of these interconnected steps not occurred, the experience of reconnecting may never have manifested for Dylan.

Let us now examine the full circle of reconnection from another perspective. As I asked earlier: Does organic volunteering actually reflect a life in which colonization, industrialism, and technological advancements strived so hard to progress away from? Are these organic volunteering experiences echoing the very life our own ancestors, and people who lived on the land before us? With these questions in mind, conceptually reconnecting with land and agricultural lifestyles through organic volunteering allows volunteers to experience life similar to their ancestors and natives of the land; coming full

circle by implementing agricultural practices used before the creation of pesticides and farm machinery, and living consciously within nature.

As interconnectedness emerged in the experience of reconnecting to what was, it also underlies the essence of *Exchanging knowledge: Experiencing teaching, learning, and sharing*, which was an essential part of the volunteers' experiences of organic volunteering. Farms provide a place for this educational exchange to occur, allowing volunteers to learn from the land, the hosts, other volunteers, and themselves. However, learning and teaching was a shared responsibility for both volunteers and hosts. These roles and responsibilities of learning, teaching, and sharing are interconnected. Clayton indicated this through his statement about the only way to teach is by also being a student. Furthermore, volunteers understood this educational exchange relates to the openness and attitudes of hosts and volunteers. As Clayton suggested the onus is on the student to learn. He said, "If you think about it you could have the best teacher in the world and if the student is not ready to learn, it's not going to learn." Nico concurred, "For sure it's the attitude you take towards it ..."

Like other volunteers, Clayton understood the role of teaching and learning to be interchangeable. Interconnectedness is illuminated within reciprocal roles of learning and teaching. As Clayton suggested, to be a teacher one must be a student, thus those who are teaching are also learning. Hosts are learning from volunteers, while volunteers also teach hosts. Realizing this, I then ask myself: Would the meaning of organic volunteering change if the roles of teaching and learning were not shared? Also, would the meaning of organic volunteering change if either element, teaching or learning, were to be removed? I believe the experience of the educational exchange and the experience of

interconnectedness within this educational experience is only embodied if there is openness to both being a teacher and being a student. This openness is considered by volunteers through the mention of the need for the right attitude. If volunteers and hosts are open and willing, then the learning, teaching, and sharing facets of this educational exchange seem endless.

The sharing of teacher-student roles puts forward the potential for an interesting discussion regarding non-traditional educational techniques. As was noted above, the volunteers and hosts are interconnected through the sharing of these responsibilities, shifting between teacher and student. Volunteers' pre-understandings and how education is understood will determine the degree of openness to exchanging knowledge within the organic volunteering experience. For instance, if educational exchanges are imbedded in pre-understandings of traditional ways of learning, then volunteers may see themselves as student and hosts as solely teacher, rather than in terms of a mutual and shared role that reciprocates within the educational exchange. Expanding an understanding of education in general, identifying different pedagogies, such as sharing the student-teacher role, then opening to living in interconnectedness, all could occur within the organic volunteering context. Furthermore, shared teaching and student roles would ideally achieve a level of reciprocity, which further supports the essential structure of interconnectedness within these organic volunteering experiences. However, as previously mentioned in the section about educational exchanges, reciprocity should be reviewed critically. Therefore, I ask myself: Can we ever actually achieve an absolute reciprocal relationship within exchanges, specifically in tourism contexts of host-guest relationships?

Just as interconnectedness is experienced through reconnecting and exchanging knowledge, it is also experienced in the essence of *Experiencing harmony: Being touch with nature*. Volunteers identified a feeling of being connected or being reconnected with nature. The words “in touch,” “in sync,” “in tune,” and “in harmony” were all used to express connections volunteers believe they were experiencing with nature. Volunteers recommend organic volunteering to those with desire to become more connected with nature. According to Hope, “a place where nature is, nature will give you all, so you live with nothing, but you live with a lot of things.” Similarly, Nico identified the significance of these experiences, “You see your food growing out of the ground and to see your cow smiling eating grass and you know its super important and nobody even gets that.” Organic volunteering fosters opportunities for volunteers to experience and learn new ways to incorporate harmonious organic and sustainable practices. This was illustrated through Sadie’s story about washing dishes on the farm. Another volunteer explained to Sadie that he chose to use ashes rather than organic detergents because it “doesn’t hurt the earth.” As openness was harnessed on these farms, many volunteers, like Sadie, recognized their own interconnection with nature and how nature benefits them.

Learning to use ashes to wash dishes created awareness for Sadie exemplifies the importance of our connection with the earth; illuminating interconnectedness between humans and the natural world we live in. We are interconnected with cows, the garden, the river, and the mud we use to build. Our connection with nature is a powerful and important connection to be aware of, as nature benefits us. But, we must care for our natural environment appropriately. Furthermore, during my own experience of organic

volunteering on these farms, I recall implementing specific alternative practices, such as using ashes or not using soap when bathing in the river. Retrospectively I question: Why didn't we use soap to wash? In theory, the soapy water run-off from each activity not only goes into the earth, preventing plant growth, but it could become drinking water for the animals and even ourselves. Thus, we nurture plants, so in turn they can nurture us. We respect our environment and in turn respect ourselves.

Reflecting on my new understandings of how I am opening to living in interconnectedness with the Earth, I ponder why I was not living harmoniously within nature prior to my organic volunteering experience. After some consideration, it seems to me that to gain understanding of my connections with nature, I had to be aware of sustainable and natural experiences. It is as though learning and the exchange of knowledge are crucial to understanding the importance of, and experiencing, harmony with nature. Thus, interconnectedness does not only manifest within each essence, rather each essence itself is interconnected to the others. Moreover, the interconnectedness of exchanging knowledge of harmonizing nature experiences, such as using sustainable practices, is the essence of *Consciousness-raising: Experiencing awareness and potential for activism*, whereby learning about these practices generates a new awareness among volunteers, such as myself and Sadie, who had not realised practices such as these existed. Experiencing interconnectedness through harmonious connections with nature further expands our horizon of understanding regarding the phenomenon of organic volunteering.

Interconnectedness also emerges in the essence *Building bonds: Experiencing human connection*. Organic volunteering was experienced as a bonding opportunity,

allowing volunteers to establish deep and lasting relationships through working with other volunteers and hosts on the farm. The bonds and relationships were refreshing to participants when compared to the life volunteers knew before organic volunteering. Avery compared his interactions while volunteering to his life in the music industry. “It’s refreshing to see people just trying to be happy... trying to be happy, just trying to be nice to each other, trying to be decent human beings...” he declared. This happiness and genuine encounters among one another allow for a deeper connection to form. Hope explained how she still remained in contact with two Swedish volunteers, “It’s like building up a web of people that exchange information because they are in the same vibe. So, it’s beautiful.” The interconnectedness between hosts and volunteers can be discerned on this farm, sometimes immediately. Nico claimed he “clicked” with the host and felt “at home” when he first arrived at Meldoy’s farm, *Pura Vida*. Conversely, Layna described the interconnected energy between she and a host in North America as negative, and immediately sensed that “he was kind of a creep.” Furthermore, some volunteers sense a pull or connection to people even before volunteering. Clayton stated, “That’s why I’m here because I now find myself attracting and being attracted to people along those same lines. For instance, people that live in sustainable communities.” Once on the farms, organic volunteers claimed to feel comfortable and welcomed, but recognized the dynamics and depth of these relationships depended on open-mindedness. When open-minded, volunteers were more willing to share intimate bonds with other volunteers and the hosts. Once these bonds are created, connection remains.

As noted above, organic volunteering allows volunteers to make deep and lasting connections. Therefore, I put forth the question: Is the essential structure of

interconnectedness truly about always being connected? This continuous connection is reflected by volunteers' attempts to stay in touch with one another, like the web Hope described. Yet the belief of always being connected generates a thought deeper within me. If we are "always" connected, does this mean we were connected prior to our arrival at the farm? Although it seems as if interconnectedness is embodied differently for each volunteer, I believe I was always connected to the volunteers and hosts I met. I, like Nico and Layna, felt interconnected with other volunteers and hosts immediately. In my journal entry at the beginning of this section, I described feeling as if I knew the other volunteers before actually meeting them, referring to them as old friends. I also mentioned how I perceived negative emotions not as a disconnection, but rather as further confirmation of living in interconnectedness. Volunteers, such as Clayton, also expressed this sentiment by acknowledging how they felt pulled to come to the farm. However, it is important to consider the like-mindedness and similar values of volunteers, which likely attract them to these farms in the first place. Does this pull reflect interconnectedness of these farms?

Conversely, I also realise once on these farms, some volunteers may decide this experience is not for them; they may no longer want to participate in organic volunteering. A scenario such as this was briefly presented in my observation notes. The volunteers' desire to no longer participate makes me question the degree of interconnectedness; however, I do not think this is a reflection of disconnection, but rather perhaps it reflects a greater need for openness. Therefore I postulate, if interconnectedness is central to the phenomenon of organic volunteering, then perhaps some people are not yet open to living in interconnectedness; perhaps they have yet to



genuinely open their minds in a way that enables them to experience organic volunteering completely, unaware that people, volunteers and hosts, on these farms are reflections of themselves.

Bonding and connecting with people on the farm, exchanging knowledge and learning about harmonizing with nature, all while organic volunteering, creates the potential for consciousness-raising experiences. *Consciousness-raising experiences: Creating awareness for future activism* was also an emerging essence in the experience of organic volunteering exhibiting interconnectedness. Intriguing discussions, thought-provoking books, and daily experiences on the farm facilitated consciousness-raising among volunteers. Witnessing application of philosophies and values to everyday life also created new perspectives for some volunteers. For example, Avery acknowledged, “Here there’s this nice philosophy of let’s just grow as much as we need, let’s only eat as much as we need, let’s only take as much as we need, let’s leave some stuff, you know.” Adopting the “leaving” versus “taking” attitude, Avery spoke of hosts and volunteers appreciating interconnectedness between themselves and life which came before, and life which will come after themselves. This philosophy was illuminated through Hope’s experience and work on the farm. She exclaimed, “This contributes to other people, my work if it contributes to keep on having places like this. Then other people can come because, the tomatoes I’ve planted I won’t see them grow, but other people will see them grow.” Although there is no explicit mention of interconnected living, there is obvious awareness of its existence in the organic volunteering experience. Hope and Avery’s comments brought to light awareness of our interconnections with others and the land through the examples of the tomatoes and the “leaving” versus “taking” philosophy.

Furthermore, Hope's anecdote represents recognition of the importance of her efforts, as they interrelate to the future of the farm and continuance of change she wishes to see.

Volunteers' understanding of interconnection generates a consciousness of the implications of the lives they lived before the farm and impact they may have had on others. These consciousness-raising experiences have the potential to inspire change, or catalyse the desire for action or future actions. Avery believes, "You can only do your little bit, that's all you can do and sometimes that becomes big and sometimes it doesn't. You got to find that bit of inspiration and tease it out of them." Interconnected living flows from volunteers to those back home, as they use their new awareness to inspire others.

Furthermore, interconnected living extends further than being the change and action on these farms. The essence of consciousness-raising experiences itself represents interconnected living, as each part is a necessary piece of the whole. In other words, the essence is cyclical: awareness yields a raised consciousness, which arouses more awareness, which inspires change and action, which then brings about new awareness, and so on and so forth. Like Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic circle, to completely understand the whole, we have to move from the whole, to the parts (in this case the parts being awareness, consciousness, and change), and back to the whole. Furthermore, just as the essence of consciousness-raising experiences is built on a foundation of interconnected parts, the essence of consciousness-raising itself is just one part of the whole experience of organic volunteering. Thinking about organic volunteering as a whole, all essences are interconnected and reliant on one another. The removal of one essence would alter the meaning of the entire experience. For instance, if bonds among

volunteers are not created, there may be no opportunity for learning or exchanging, which would thus alter the potential for consciousness-raising experiences.

When experiencing organic volunteering the essence *Transformation: Experiencing growth* arises for volunteers. For some volunteers, transformative experiences helped volunteers gain a sense of self, allowing them to recognize what is important to them and empowering them to make change in their own lives. The extent of this growth is different for each individual; however, transformation and interconnectedness are apparent throughout volunteers' accounts of their experience. Some volunteers now feel more confident with who they are, as space on the farm and organic volunteering experiences facilitated opportunities for recognizing and connecting with skills and interests they already possessed. This was captured in Jade's account of organic volunteering, "I feel like working together with all the people in a team, I am now comfortable and will take other options or positions in my life because of this."

In addition to personal growth, volunteers gained appreciation and new life insights through organic volunteering. For example, when Dylan experienced reconnecting with the land, this engendered experiences of transformation. Dylan stated, "...the fundamental fact that I grew up on the land and now I've come back to the land, then that kind of tells the whole story." Dylan's organic volunteering contributed to his revolution and appreciation for the land and farm life. He understands his connection to this life and organic volunteering brought him full circle. Though he tried to escape his old childhood farm life, Dylan realised he has always been interconnected with this way of life. His openness and new appreciation lead him toward a broader horizon.

Aware of the growth and transformation potential, volunteers recommend organic volunteering to others. However, as Xavier suggested, the change one wishes to see is already within them and by “coming and trying” organic volunteering, one has already made the first step to recognizing this change. The change, the potential for growth and transformation, is within us already. Xavier’s reference to already possessing the change people seek supports the notion of interconnectedness as the core of this phenomenon and the structure for the other essences. What I think Xavier means is: We are already interconnected with the transformation and growth we wish to experience, as it already exists in us. It is the experience of organic volunteering that helps this transformation manifest. For instance, let’s reconsider the plant example I provided in the introduction of this chapter. Think of the plant. The seed was placed in the soil because someone knew and understood its potential to bloom into a beautiful orchid. If the conditions and elements are right, the flower will grow and develop. The sun, water, and nutrients in the soil, all contribute to the manifestation of the beautiful flower transformation. Now I apply this same idea to the organic volunteering experience. Growth and transformation are within us as volunteers, however conditions, attitudes, and dynamics of experiences all contribute to the extent of its manifestation. Again, I recognize if one part of experience is removed or altered ever so slightly, the entirety of the experience, and growth and transformation of the volunteer manifests differently.

Just as the right conditions are needed for transforming experiences to manifest, I consider there be likewise conditions relevant for experiencing interconnectedness in general. Through the discussion of the central essence structure of “opening to living in interconnectedness” in the previous section, it was apparent that interconnectedness is

best illuminated and perceived as positive experiences when openness is harnessed. Thus, acknowledging organic volunteering as an experience of living in interconnectedness I ask: Does this experience of interconnectedness happen in other places, such as the city? If so, why did these volunteers feel disconnected in these cities? Maybe the foundational difference between experiences of organic volunteering and experiences in places such as the city is volunteers only begin to realise and become conscious of interconnected phenomenon once on the farm; hence “opening” to living in interconnectedness. Life in the city may not be disconnected; rather interconnectedness is not yet recognized in this context. Moreover, it seems that volunteers perceive negative situations, both on and off these farms, as experiencing disconnection. And so, I ask: Are these volunteers open to these experiences? Or are they closed? Furthermore, do closed-ness and negative attitudes disguise the connection?

Gadamarian philosophies such as *prejudices* and *Bildung* can help us to further explore the aforementioned questions. It seems disconnection may be a prejudice to living in interconnectedness. Gadamer (2004) identifies prejudice as “a judgment that is rendered before all elements that determine a situation have been finally examined” (p. 270). Accordingly, maybe a volunteer is already perceiving the condition of disconnection to something or someone, before considering the rest of the conditions or elements, which may actually allow interconnectedness to be felt. I question further, how the prejudice of disconnection is associated with Gadamer’s idea of *Bildung* or *openness to meaning*. If one remains open to otherness, or more specifically remains open to the notion of interconnectedness, regardless of the experience or context (e.g. city, farm, etc.), will one still perceive their experience to be disconnected? Or will this newfound

openness modify this prejudice of disconnection? It seems to me, as the volunteer begins opening, living in interconnectedness manifests and is embodied and illuminated within the organic volunteering experience.

To further explore the central structure of “opening in living in interconnectedness” research may necessitate a deeper understanding of the prejudices of the process of “opening.” What conditions of truth shape our projections about the concept of “being open?” For example, within my own journal entry about interconnectedness I retrospectively reflected on conditions that affected my openness: *“The initial feelings of unease produced fear within me, causing me to close off to Immanuel, severing our exchange.”* This excerpt reveals unease and fear rendered me unable to be open. Once regained my sense of openness, I began to perceive interconnectedness again. Accordingly, understanding these conditions, which may impact the degree of opening, may be beneficial for expanding the horizon of interconnected experiences, ultimately better understanding how to maintain this sense of openness.

Organic volunteering is an experience of opening to living in interconnectedness. Interconnectedness within organic volunteering is embodied in experiences of reconnecting, exchanging knowledge, being in nature, bonding with others, consciousness-raising, and transforming. The meaning of these experiences and the interplay between intersecting essences is illuminated in sections through the use of Creative Analytic Practice (CAP), and further supported by participant horizons. Through exploration and discussion of these essences and the essential structure my understanding of organic volunteering has expanded (and continues expanding). To further interpret this

new understanding in Gadamerian tradition I use the concluding chapter to reflect back on some of my pre-understandings.

## **Chapter Six: Reflections and concluding thoughts – My expanding horizon**

Throughout this thesis, Gadamer's foundational teachings of hermeneutic phenomenology have been woven into this exploration of organic volunteering. Gadamer's (2004) notion of the *fusion of horizons* aligns with the concept of "interconnectedness", which emerged as the essential structure and has been illuminated in the findings and discussion sections of this thesis. Gadamer proposes *understanding* to be the fusion of our past and present horizons; our present cannot be formed without the past. Past and present are interconnected parts, which form the whole and shapes understanding and making meaning about an experience. In-keeping with notion, it is appropriate to reveal my present horizon of the organic volunteering experience, while also examining my past horizon. I reflect first on my past horizon, critically examining aspects of my pre-understandings and historicity, re-connecting with ideas presented in Chapter One. I then consider how I came to these understandings in light of my research findings – essences formed by horizons of my research participants. These new understandings represent my present horizon. Through a reflection on the fusion of both my present and past horizons, my ever-expanding horizon is made apparent. During this discussion of my expanding horizon, I also suggest avenues for future research regarding volunteering experiences and use of Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology.

### **Expanding horizons: Fusion of past and present**

To explain my expanding horizon of organic volunteering, I call on my pre-understandings as presented in Chapter One. The excerpt below represents some of these pre-understandings.



*The research I am proposing to undertake may cast light on this fairly controversial topic: experiences of volunteer tourism, more specifically the experiences of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). As of now, I understand WWOOFing, as an opportunity for like-minded people to come together to participate in organics and sustainable living; an experience that may be sought out in order to escape life back home and learn something new; potentially I can see it as being a form of emancipation from the commercialized farming industry; and finally, from a traveller's perspective, I see WWOOF as a cheap way to travel, a way to "give back," and to experience another culture more in-depth.*

Shaped by my prejudices and the literature review, prior to my research I understood organic volunteering or "WWOOFing" as niche experiences within the volunteer tourism sector. My horizon of organic volunteering has since expanded and continues to expand as I continue to reflect on the research. I now believe the experience of organic volunteering, though mirroring some components of volunteer tourism, extends beyond an alternative way to travel in which tourists "undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society" as suggested by Wearing (2001, p. 1). Indeed, my past horizon has shifted from seeing organic volunteering as a "*different way to travel and farm*" to an understanding of organic volunteering as an experience of opening to living in interconnectedness. I now understand volunteers as reconnecting, exchanging knowledge, being in nature, bonding with others, consciousness-raising, and transforming. These new understandings are discussed in much more depth in the paragraphs to follow.

I used the words "*controversial topic*" as a descriptor for the experiences of volunteer tourism and organic volunteering. Perhaps I chose this phrase because in my review of research on volunteer tourism debates surfaced regarding points of contention between hosts and guests. These debates were explored in the literature review in Chapter Two. Critics including Guttentag (2009) and Sin (2010) deliberate on the negative socio-

cultural implications of volunteer tourism, examining host-volunteer relationship from the hosts' perspective. Critics conclude volunteer tourism is far from achieving "equal relationships," perpetuating existing power and social hierarchies "between the rich and the privileged, and the poor and less privileged" (Sin, 2010, p. 991). Prior to my data collection and analysis, I had already situated organic volunteering within volunteer tourism, thus positioning organic volunteering as potentially controversial. After data analysis, I moved away from this pre-understanding, as tensions did not manifest as an essence within the organic volunteering experience. However, because tensions within my research never emerged, does this mean they do not occur in this context?

I posed the above question because although there was no declaration or explicit mention of power and social hierarchies during the volunteer interviews, I did observe a seemingly contentious event. This occurrence was briefly discussed in an excerpt from my participation observation notes included in chapter five, where I wondered about the host-guest relationship between two volunteers and the farm host. Through my brief observation of those two volunteers who left the farm unexpectedly and with little notification to the host, it became clear that volunteers, ultimately, still possess the power to pick up their bags and leave at will. If other volunteers had not been present at the time of this departure, the host would have been stranded; abandoned with no help. As mentioned in the discussion section of chapter five, it would have been interesting to understand why these volunteers left the farm and what type of bond was actually developed with the host. Additional exploration of host-guest relationships within organic volunteering, particularly power relationships of this sort, is necessary.

Before travelling to Argentina, I understood organic volunteering as “*an opportunity for like-minded people to come together to participate in organics and sustainable living.*” This understanding was formed by my review of research including McIntosh and Bonnemann’s (2006) study, as their findings concluded organic farms provided an opportunity to learn about organic agriculture. I also relied on Choo and Jamal’s (2009) research as they suggested care and stewardship of the biophysical world are an integral part of the eco-organic farm tourism ethos. Furthermore, my assessment of WWOOFing websites revealed their efforts to promote this experience as one that provides people with the ability to travel, volunteer, and share more sustainable ways of living.

The above pre-understandings are similar to understandings of my participants and findings of my study, which were carried throughout the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. For example, though this understanding was developed prior to my on-site exploration, my understanding regarding organic practices and sustainable ways of living were further expanded as the research unfolded. Accounts such as Sadie’s with regard to learning to use ashes as an abrasive for washing dishes fused with my own understanding of my experiences of sustainable-organic practices, and allowed me to expand my understanding of human-nature connections. However, I have come to understand organic volunteering not as living *with* nature through sustainable practices, rather, I see it as an experience whereby volunteers are opening to living *within* nature. In other words, they are interconnected.

This shift in words may seem subtle, but it can change the meaning of the sentence significantly. The word *with* refers to *being in relation to* or *affected by*. Are

humans and society only living in relation to and/or, affected by nature? However, the word *within* means *inside*. Through my research, I now understand organic volunteering as a harmonizing experience: being inside nature. Indeed, are humans inside of nature? In other words: are we interrelated with, rather than in relation to nature? I now see humans and nature as interconnected.

As I discussed briefly in the section discussing the essence “Experiencing harmony: Being in nature” in chapter five, this idea of interconnectedness and interrelatedness to nature is an expansion of our understanding about human-nature relationships and is garnering increased attention in many disciplines. As noted earlier, Grimwood and Henderson (2009) explore relational worldviews to investigate the relational dimensions between nature and society. Grimwood and Henderson contribute to the discourse surrounding theorizations of nature, exposing a shift from dualistic worldviews to relational worldviews. This notion of relational thinking helps us to further examine the context of organic volunteering and illuminates the interconnectedness; it draws attention to the extent to which volunteers develop a heightened awareness of the dynamics of their relationship within nature. This may also ultimately fuel their desire to become more conscious of, and learn how to be in harmony with, the natural world outside of their organic volunteering experience.

My pre-understandings of organic volunteering were also based on the assumption that people decide to volunteer in order to “*escape life back home.*” Regarding my present horizon, my understanding of organic volunteering as a potential escape from life back home has deepened, as the notion of escape emerged in some participants’ accounts. For example, Dylan juxtaposes his time on the farm to his

unsatisfying corporate and economic-driven life in Australia. Additionally, Hope reflected on how she left the city to organic volunteer because she was “feeling tied up” and uncomfortable. She expressed feeling relief upon her arrival at the farm. Thus, my understanding of the “need to escape” motivator has been reinforced by my participants’ experiences.

Furthermore, I now understand organic volunteering as reconnecting and experiencing what was. This essence underlies the volunteers’ experiences. For some volunteers this means remembering childhood leisure pursuits, and reconnecting with forms of leisure and play. Others described reconnecting with farming lifestyles they once had; remembering how rewarding and satisfying it was to plant and harvest their own food. This new understanding leads me to ask: For people who possess the desire to escape life back home, do they need to also have an understanding of *what was* or *what life could be*? It would be worthwhile to continue to investigate the motivation of volunteers who chose to participate in organic volunteering experiences. As well, understanding the concept of escape within tourism studies may unlock a whole new discussion surrounding prejudices of a traveller or person leaving the city to organic volunteer. Researchers might ask: What makes a person want to escape?

A desire “*to learn something new*” is how I understood the educational aspect of organic volunteering prior to my research. Educational facets of organic volunteering are reflected in some of the volunteer tourism literature, which, in retrospect, may be why learning is part of my pre-understanding. However, my pre-understanding of education and learning within the organic volunteering context was narrow and underdeveloped. Gadamer (2004) states it is possible to speak of the “narrowness of horizon, or the

possible expansion of horizon, of the opening of new horizons, and so forth” (p. 302).

Opening to new horizons, my understanding of the educational facets of organic volunteering expanded through interviews with participants and my own participation in this experience. I now understand this experience as exchanging knowledge through teaching, learning, and sharing.

As I consider this new understanding of organic volunteering, it is imperative to reflect more on the idea of exchanging knowledge. Unlike traditional western education perspectives, to which I was accustomed, organic volunteering creates an educational experience in which teacher-student roles are shared and learning happens outside of the classroom. This was exemplified by Layna, when she referred to the farm and gardens as her classrooms. Furthermore, the interconnected roles of teacher and student were reflected by Clayton’s beliefs and supplemented by the accounts of other volunteers. Assuming both roles allowed for a more reciprocal exchange process to take place. The idea of reciprocity emerges in the volunteer tourism literature including, but not limited to, McGehee and Andereck (2009), McIntosh and Zahra (2008), Raymond and Hall (2008), and Wearing (2001). These authors all discuss volunteer tourism experiences as fostering a more “reciprocal” host-guest connection. However, drawing on critiques of volunteer tourism as well as reflections on international service-learning by Sharpe (2011), I believe further research is needed to understand experiences of exchanging, and more specifically the notion of reciprocity within exchanges. This could lead to a greater awareness of the exchange experience underlying organic volunteering, and could also expand the understandings of exchange processes within other areas of research, including education, volunteerism, and tourism more broadly.

The idea of organic volunteering as “*a form of emancipation from the commercialized farming industry,*” was also a former understanding. Upon reflection, I’m curious as to why I understood organic volunteering in this way. More specifically, what were the prejudices, or conditions that affected this understanding? When I wrote my pre-understandings in preparation for this thesis research, I was also finishing a project in a qualitative methods course. Conducting a narrative inquiry, I interviewed four participants in an effort to explore WWOOFing. One of the participants in this study was adamant about the unfortunate nature of commercialized farming practices. Thus, she saw organic farming experiences such as WWOOF as a way to move away from the unsustainable practices of commercial farms. I had never been presented with these perspectives before these interviews. However, as these ideas emerged, they broadened my horizon of understanding with regard to organic volunteering and heightened my awareness of the implications of commercialism within agriculture before entering the field for my thesis work.

The idea of emancipation from commercialized farming reemerges in the research findings and further broadens my horizon of organic volunteering. As Nico exclaimed, “We talk a lot about corruption in agriculture as well. Monsanto seeds taking over, genetically modified foods, the obesity epidemic of the United States, you know?” He then suggested “... it’s up to those conscious people to do things like this to make the change to make the shift.” Like Nico and other volunteers, I continued to have consciousness-raising experiences while volunteering on the farm and became aware of the potential for consciousness-raising more broadly. I engaged in discussions of the complex nature of social, community, and global issues, and learned about such issues

including, but not limited to, commercialism, colonization, assimilation, and commodification. In turn, I came to see how this awareness facilitates the potential for creating positive change, such as moving away from commercialized agriculture.

In accordance with some of the volunteer literature, such as McGehee and Santos (2005), awareness occurs among like-minded volunteers. McGehee and Santos make reference to like-mindedness, but do not divulge how like-mindedness is achieved. I too referred to the idea of meeting “*like-minded people*” in my pre-understandings of organic volunteering. If like-mindedness does contribute to awareness as McGehee and Santos (2005) suggest, then future researchers might ask: How are these volunteers like-minded and how does this contribute to consciousness-raising and awareness? However, in order to further explore these questions we must consider the meaning we give to the notion of *like-mindedness*.

What does it mean to be like-minded? What produces like-mindedness? Based on my experience on the farm, I would argue the following need to be in place in order to achieve like-mindedness among volunteers: (1) an opportunity to share knowledge; (2) an openness, among the volunteers, to new ideas and insights; and (3) collectively created understanding with one another other regarding these ideas. Of course, each volunteer possesses their own unique historicity, which contributes to their own understanding, and so future researchers might ask: What is the degree of “general understanding” needed to achieve like-mindedness? Unfortunately, the meaning of like-mindedness, as it relates to volunteer tourism, is not yet well understood. Like-mindedness and its role in consciousness-raising and volunteer experiences demands further research.



In my pre-understandings, I proposed organic volunteering was a way to “*give-back.*” In hindsight, I think this pre-understanding was reflective of my activist spirit, as I wished to be a part of change-making through volunteering. The concept of giving back manifested in my research, as the volunteers expressed how these experiences can inspire activism. After experiencing the enactment of philosophies such as “leaving” versus “taking” and engaging in consciousness-raising discussions, some volunteers expressed a desire to return home to implement and re-teach these new practices and philosophies. This is apparent in Avery and Hope’s accounts as they announced their desire to teach youth about organic food and farming. They believe the responsibility of creating change is now theirs. Furthermore, Nico and Xavier believe organic volunteering is a foundational step towards the change people wish to see within themselves and the world.

Likewise, the ideal of giving back was further understood throughout my own experiences, thereby contributing to my expanding understanding of organic volunteering. Moreover, reflection on the meaning of giving back illuminates the notion of interconnectedness once again. Within giving back the concept of reciprocity or the idea we are all interdependent or related is emphasised. For example, volunteers give back to the earth as they harmonize with nature, planting and nurturing the earth, and knowing the garden will in turn give back to them by providing produce. Volunteers give back to others through teaching and learning, and by sharing the teacher-student roles in educational exchanges. Volunteers also give back to society through activism inspired by their consciousness-raising experiences, and with their hopes of inspiring others to in turn “give back.” Finally by giving back in these ways within the organic volunteer context, volunteers ultimately give back to themselves, as they transform and grow. Although

giving back was not explicitly expressed in the volunteers' interviews, the examples above highlight its presence within the essences of this phenomenon. This leads me to believe my pre-understanding of giving back was merely an initial interpretation of the essential structure of the organic volunteering experience. I now understand giving back as living in interconnectedness.

Lastly, it is important to restate my choice to move away from the WWOOF title. As I mentioned in chapter one, I realised WWOOF, as a title did not completely encompass my research participants' experiences. In fact, some volunteers were engaged in volunteering through sustainable and organic building projects. Because of this expanded understanding, I made the decision to no longer identify these experiences by the WWOOF title, and instead used the all-encompassing phrase of *organic volunteering* when referencing these experiences. However, I also mentioned in chapter one that I recently re-visited and reflected on my pre-understanding of this phrase, therefore my understanding was expanded again. To further explain why I believe *organic volunteering* encapsulates the volunteer experiences, I briefly reflect on what the word *organic* means to me and how it relates to my research.

If one were to Google search the word *organic*, they would most likely find the majority of the top search results relate to food production. Organic has become a word used to denote agricultural products produced without the use of chemicals. Yet, we must look beyond organic produce production and consumption. When I think of organic, I think of the words nature and natural development, existing or manifesting as nature intended. Indeed, this does reflect organic produce, but this idea can also be used to describe other things. For example, for a person to be organic, they would present

themselves and be as they are, naturally developing without the use of things like conventional beauty products and performance enhancing drugs. Seemingly, in my view, for something to be organic, elements that may interrupt natural development processed should be avoided. Volunteering experiences within organic farm communities, like the ones in my study, illuminate natural development through the implementation of organic and sustainable practices within their agricultural and building projects.

The word organic also takes on other meanings in the experience of organic volunteering. The word organic can also denote relations between elements such that they fit together harmoniously, such as the *organic* unity of bees and flowers. In this example, nature creates the conditions so that a flower would manifest pollen. This allows for the proliferation of bees that pollinate. They are stronger because of the existence of the other, a relationship that arose because of natural processes, while also both species are interconnected and mutually benefit. The notion of organic in this context echoes experiences I explored with my research, as organic volunteering comprises different essences or unique experiences that make up the integral whole. Thus, organic volunteering seems to be a more encompassing and well-suited phrase for this phenomenon.

Through a brief review of organic literature, I began to understand the term *organic*, yet again; a word associated with political and social hegemony, as presented by Gramsci (1971). In his discussion of *organic intellectuals*, Gramsci (1971) suggests hegemony not only represents domination, but is also about learning. Sumner (2005) believes this learning component is vital to any discussion of sustainability and social change, as she conducted research about organic farmers. Furthermore, organic

intellectuals perform an educational and organizational role on behalf of their class or group, understanding the “homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 43). As portrayed by Sumner, the role of these organic farmers is to be organic intellectuals, reproducing and disseminating an effective hegemony. This is done through the contribution of “an intellectual and moral reform to lay the foundations for a socially more just society” (Sumner, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, these farmers are environmentally conscious, as they speak publicly, work politically, and act responsibly within their relationships with the earth, one another, and their communities (Sumner, 2005).

The ideas put forth through Sumner’s (2005) organic farm research reverberate the findings of my own work. Additionally, I believe Gramsci’s (1971) notion of the organic intellectual is reflected in the concept of organic volunteering. Organic volunteering in its own right has emerged as experiences in which volunteers and hosts consciously learn together, recognize interconnectedness, and create an experience for heightened awareness about economic, social, and political issues of the world. In turn, organic volunteers disseminate an alternative hegemony, spreading the word of these consciousness-raising experiences, ultimately encouraging more people to participate in these organic experiences. Future research could study these experiences more deeply, as organic volunteering is seemingly part of the foundational step towards political and societal reformation, whereby the hosts and volunteers assume the role of organic intellectuals.

Finally, in light of my own research, I ask: is there something to be learned about volunteer tourism, and more broadly tourism, through the exploration of organic

volunteering experiences? Higgins-Desbiolle's (2006), recognises tourism can still be seen as a social force or catalyst for change; however, she believes the transformative capacities of tourism are lost, as they are overshadowed by *tourism as industry* discourse. After this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry I now see past the industry attributes of tourism. My exploration of organic volunteering within this thesis illuminated the transformative capacities of these experiences; whereby this research contributes to the expanding horizon of volunteer tourism literature, and also engenders hope for future social and political agendas to address unsustainable and destructive forms of tourism that currently exist.

### **Transformed, yet still transforming...**

As I reconsidered my pre-understandings, I note my present horizon of organic volunteering is no longer completely reflective of my past horizon. Rather, by fusing my past and present horizons along with the horizons of my participants, I have formed a new understanding. Furthermore, this horizon will continue to expand and transform as I continue to think about this project. Using Gadamerian hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodological foundation for my research, I gained many new understandings. As the volunteers are transforming, experiencing growth, and changing through their experiences of organic volunteering, I too have transformed and am still transforming. Through the use of Gadamer's philosophy I now comprehend and appreciate processes of understanding and transformation differently. I offer my final reflection below.

Regardless of the context, it is necessary to consider one's historicity, when assessing growth and transformation. In my case, this required developing an understanding of who volunteers were, where they come from, and what they believed.

Understanding historicity and pre-understandings is helpful in analysing change, growth, and transformation within experiences. What is transformation? Because growth and transformation occurs over time, I think the implementation of reflexive journaling methods (e.g., having volunteers journaling periodically) throughout the entirety of the data collection phase would be beneficial. These periodic journals would afford volunteers opportunity to express expanding understandings of their experience and transformation, and also provide researchers with more comprehensive data for a deeper exploration.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to remember that conceptually, transformation aligns with Gadamer's hermeneutics and the idea of an expanding horizon. We are constantly revising our understandings about the whole as more parts come into view. In this way, volunteers may think they are transformed, until they transform again. We think we've transformed from an experience, only until we understand it in a new way, and thus we transform again. I believe experiences of transformation, just like horizons of understanding, are infinite and on-going; they are always expanding.

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## Appendix A– Farm Recruitment Letter

Dear (Farm Name):

My name is Maggie Miller. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Professor Heather Mair. I am interested in experiencing and participating in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement and am looking for WWOOF farms and hosts who would be willing to participate in a study about WWOOFing. Also, while conducting my research, I would like to be an active volunteer on your farm. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

My project's main objective is to understand the experience of WWOOFing from both the host perspective (your perspective) and the volunteers' perspectives (the other WWOOF volunteers on your farm). I would like to travel to your farm between the months of October and December 2011 and stay for any amount of time between 4-12 weeks to collect my data. While there, I will assume dual roles: 1) as a volunteer 2) as a researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in my research and host me as a volunteer, you will be asked to take part in one voice-recorded interview of approximately one hour in length to take place during the down time on the farm. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Sometime after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. Additionally, I would like to participate and observe the practices and daily happenings at the farm. These observations will be reflected about in a private journal. Finally, I would like to interview the other WWOOF volunteers at the farm. Again, these interviews will be conducted during the down time on the farm. If you agree to participate, I would ask you to forward an information letter to the other volunteers on my behalf. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 2-3 years in a locked office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

I believe what WWOOF farms are doing is important and would like to better understand these experiences. For your willingness to participate I can offer you an executive summary of the findings upon the completion of my research, which may ultimately provide suggestions and insights on the type of WWOOFers your farm is

attracting, what their motivations are, what is being done well on your farm and what may benefit from improvements.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (+1) 814-746-4214 or by email at [m4miller@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:m4miller@uwaterloo.ca). You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Heather Mair at (+1) 519-888-4567 ext. 35917 or email [hmair@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:hmair@uwaterloo.ca). I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes of this office at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or [ssykes@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ssykes@uwaterloo.ca).

If you are interested in being part of this important research study and hosting me as a WWOOF volunteer, please contact me at [m4miller@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:m4miller@uwaterloo.ca) or +1 (814) 746-4214. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Maggie Miller  
MA candidate, Student Investigator  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
(814) 746-4214, [m4miller@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:m4miller@uwaterloo.ca)



## Consent Form

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

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I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Maggie Miller of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the Director, Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 ext. 36005.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES    NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

YES    NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.

YES    NO

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B– Information Letter

Dear WWOOFer:

My name is Maggie Miller. This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting during your stay at the [INSERT FARM NAME] farm. This research is part of my Master's degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada under the supervision of Professor Heather Mair. I am interested in experiencing and participating in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) movement. My project's main objective is to understand the experience of WWOOFing from both the WWOOF host perspective and the volunteers' perspectives (your perspective). I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in my research you will be asked to take part in one interview and one focus-group of approximately one hour in length each. This research will take place during the down time on the farm, outside of regular volunteer hours. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Sometime after the interview has been completed, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Additionally, I intend on participating and observing the practices and daily happenings at the farm. Therefore, not only will I be working along side you as a volunteer, but I will also be recording observations intermittently as a researcher. If this makes you uncomfortable at any time, please notify me and I will avoid from including observations about you in my research notes. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study, however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for 2-3 years in my locked office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. Prior to the start of my research, I will request that you sign a participant consent form and a focus group confidentiality form.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me, Maggie Miller at (+1) 814-746-4214 or by email at [m4miller@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:m4miller@uwaterloo.ca) or my advisor Dr. Heather Mair at (+1) 519-888-4567 ext. 35917 or by email at [hmair@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:hmair@uwaterloo.ca). Also, concerns may be directed to the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Susan Sykes at (+1) 519- 888-4567 ext. 36005 or [ssykes@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:ssykes@uwaterloo.ca).

Respectfully,

Maggie Miller

MA candidate  
Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
(814) 746-4214, m4miller@uwaterloo.ca

## Appendix C – Informed Consent Form

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “Understanding host and guest experiences: The exploration of the WWOOF movement” being conducted by Maggie Miller of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study and to receive satisfactory answers to my questions. I acknowledge that my interview will be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from this interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that pseudonyms will be used. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

I am aware that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (file #15631). I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the researcher, Maggie Miller, at +1 (814) 746-4214 or by email at m4miller@uwaterloo.ca or her advisor Dr. Heather Mair at +1 (519) 888-4567 ext. 35917 or by email at hmair@uwaterloo.ca. I am also aware that my concerns may be directed to the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Susan Sykes at +1(519) 888-4567 ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

**With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.**

YES  NO

Participant Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When the study is completed, would you like to receive a copy of the executive summary?

YES  NO

If yes, please provide me with an email address so that I may send the Executive Summary to you.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D – Participant Observation – Question/Topic Guide**

- How are people actually engaging in WWOOFing?
- How do pre-understandings shape the experience ?
- My expectations and what I think I may observe
- Changes in actions/interactions as time goes on
- Social exchanges that take place

## Appendix E – Volunteer Interview – Question Guide

*Preamble: Hello, my name is Maggie Miller, I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with organic volunteering. I am interested in learning about your experiences on the farm, and how you understand and interpret these experiences.*

*If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not have to answer them, and you may request to stop the interview at anytime. In order to gain a more accurate account of our conversation today, I will be audio recording our interview. Is this okay with you?*

### **Volunteer Interview One:**

*Preamble: This interview is meant to be conversational in style. I have a several questions that I would like to ask, however, I am more interested in exploring new ideas and topics as they arise. With this interview I would like to ask about your thoughts on organic volunteering and get a better understanding of who you are and how you became involved with this movement.*

- 1) Who were you/who are you? How does that contribute to what brought you to being here today?
- 2) What is it like to be a volunteer so far? Can you describe a typical day as an organic volunteer?
- 3) How do you experience organic volunteering? Tell me about your time on the farm, the daily encounters on the farm as a volunteer
- 4) How has the meaning of organic volunteering changed for you?

## Appendix F – Host Interview – Question Guide

*Preamble: Hello, my name is Maggie Miller, I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I would like to ask you some questions about your experience as a host within the organic volunteering movement. I am interested in learning about your experiences on your farm, and how you understand and interpret these experiences.*

*If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not have to answer them, and you may request to stop the interview at anytime. In order to gain a more accurate account of our conversation today, I will be audio recording our interview. Is this okay with you?*

### **Host Interview:**

*Preamble: This interview is meant to be conversational in style. I have several questions that I would like to ask, however, I am more interested in exploring new ideas and topics as they arise. With this interview I would like to ask about your thoughts on organic volunteering and get a better understanding of who you are and how you became involved with this movement.*

- 1) Who were you/who are you? How does that contribute to what brought you to being here today?
- 2) What is it like to be a host? Describe a typical day as a host.
- 3) What is the experience of on the farm? Tell me about your time on the farm, the daily encounters on the farm as a host.
- 4) How has the meaning of organic farming/volunteering changed for you?

**Appendix G – Confidentiality Agreement for Interpreter/Translator**

I understand that as an interpreter / translator for a study being conducted by Maggie Miller of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada under the supervision of Professor Heather Mair, I am privy to confidential information. I agree to keep all data collected during this study confidential and will not reveal it to anyone outside the research team.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix H – Essences that emerged from all transcripts

### **Nico (17)**

Different/alternative from what was known  
Back to the organics/ small farmer  
Beyond volunteering – beyond farming  
In touch with culture/ community  
Individual – down time  
Every farm is different  
Something to learn  
Knowledge exchange  
Growth and transformation  
Change it can bring – consciousness  
Creativity experienced  
Frustration with organization and tasks  
Love for this life  
A way of life  
Volunteer work ethics/attitudes  
Ever-changing dynamics  
Something to teach something to share

### **Xavier (19)**

Different/alternative from what was known  
Beyond volunteering – beyond farming  
In touch with the community/ culture  
Every farm is different  
Something to learn  
Something to teach/share  
Knowledge exchange  
Growth and transformation  
Change it can bring – consciousness raising  
Daily happenings – tasks  
A way of life  
Volunteer work ethics – attitudes  
Bonds- connection  
A way to travel  
Working together  
Time for yourself  
Challenges experienced  
Expectations  
Community vibe

### **Hope (16)**

Different/alternative from known  
A connection point/ path  
Reflection time

Want for change  
Transformation and growth  
Enjoying the daily happenings  
Something to learn  
In touch with nature  
Family- community vibe  
Conscious of authentic  
Creating awareness and consciousness  
Work ethics – volunteer dynamics  
Every farm is different

**Jade (11)**

In contact with nature/ farming  
Something to share  
Something to learn  
Working together  
Step/path towards dream  
Enjoyment of life  
The attitude of volunteers  
Connecting – bonding  
Cultural exchange  
Change – growth  
Activism – awareness

**Avery (11)**

Relaxed  
Daily farm routine – dynamics  
Together  
Learning  
Low impact – conscious lifestyle  
Awareness  
Growth  
Exchange  
Dissatisfaction with organization  
Refreshing -different from known  
Activism

**Clayton (15)**

Feeling connected w/ people/lifestyle  
Sustainable- conscious community vibe  
Awareness  
Different from known  
Hard work  
Group togetherness  
Learning  
Self-reflection

Every farm is different  
Disenchanted w/ society - life back home  
A part of a bigger social movement  
Exchange  
Growth and transformation  
Mindful – conscious living  
Not satisfying

**Dylan (18)**

Need for lifestyle change  
In touch with land and nature  
Positive benefits  
Making connections – bonding  
Every farm is different  
Knowledge sharing  
The daily routine  
Work distribution based on culture  
Openness  
Something to learn  
Different from other volunteer/travel experiences  
Farm dynamics  
Frustration with organizational structure  
A mode for path  
Exchange  
Community vibe  
Work ethics – volunteer attitudes  
New awareness/ consciousness

**Layna (14)**

Harmony with nature – outdoors  
Learning – want to learn  
Awful experience  
Something to teach  
Path/mode to larger goal/dream  
Daily routine/ farming dynamics  
Connection – bonding –likeminded  
Want for alternative from known  
Self-reflection: learning about self  
Growth and transformation  
Openness  
Mindful- organic  
More then volunteering  
Exchange

**Sadie (14)**

More than farming

Learning

Lifestyle

Awareness – consciousness raising

Farm dynamics

Daily Routine

Cultural exchange

Conscious-living – Wellness

Experience sharing

Alternative from known

Bonding – connecting

Organic – simple

Path/connection to bigger goal

Transformation