Methodology to Investigate Critical Discourses around World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms as Alternative Tourism

ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to propose a possible methodology to study discourses around the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) program. The WWOOF program is an exchange program that connects organic farms and travellers who are willing to work on farms on a voluntary basis for food and accommodation. Current research suggests that WWOOFing is both alternative tourism, as well as an alternative to tourism. Many WWOOF volunteers are long-term international travellers with limited financial means, who do not see themselves as commercial tourists and see WWOOFing as a way to avoid the popular tourist track. Hence, WWOOFing is a voluntary hosting exchange that avoids the commercialism of tourism. As such it espouses a different philosophy or discourse of travel from traditional farm tourism. Thus, to understand philosophy of WWOOF it is necessary to apply diversified methods for data collection and analysis in order to understand the critical discourses around it. This paper proposes a possible methodology to investigate critical discourses around WWOOF farms as a part of alternative tourism on example of organic farms in New Zealand. The paper discusses and suggests an appropriate qualitative methodology aligned with appropriate methods using creative artefacts built around metaphors to uncover discourses around World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms.
Keywords: Discourses, WWOOF, Constructionism, CDA, LEGO Serious Play, creative methods, volunteering, alternative farm tourism

INTRODUCTION

The Rio Summit in 1992 and the development of the Agenda 21 plan led to the dissemination of green and sustainable ideals to people's daily lives throughout the globe (Seyfang, 2009). During the last twenty years sustainable ideals have pervaded our lives as people become eager to conserve the resources, to develop renewable energy and implement sustainable business practices (Cohen et al., 2013, Seyfang, 2009). The discussions on global warming and its impact on agriculture (Innes and Kane, 1995, Le Page, 2012, Paudel and Hatch, 2012), influence sustainable agricultural practices, organic farming and consumer awareness of these issues (Maycock, 2008). In this way, programmes like World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) have become of more interest for study, as they help to communicate organic ideals and ways of sustainable living.

The World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms is an exchange program that connects organic farms and travellers. WWOOF is a voluntary non-monetary exchange, where the guests work on the farm for up to four hours a day in exchange for food, accommodation and education about organic farming (McIntosh, 2009). Current research suggests that WWOOFing is alternative tourism as well as an alternative to tourism (Deville, 2011). Many WWOOF volunteers are long-term, international travellers with limited financial means, who do not see themselves as commercial tourists and see WWOOFing as a way to avoid the popular tourist track (McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006). Thus, WWOOFing is a voluntary hosting exchange that avoids the commercialism of tourism. As such, it espouses a different philosophy or discourse of travel from traditional farm tourism, which aims to generate additional farm income (Phillip et al., 2010).

Previously scant research around WWOOF phenomenon was done. Academic literature on issues related to the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms Programme is mainly built on the studies conducted by McIntosh and others (McIntosh, 2009, McIntosh and Campbell, 2001, McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006), Nimmo (2001) as well as the recent studies by Cronauer (2012), Deville and Wearing (2013). However, prior research has overlooked the importance of the social dimension of the hosts'-guests' exchange and understanding of philosophies around WWOOF phenomenon.

The proposed research will examine the WWOOF phenomenon on a sample of certified organic WWOOF farms in New Zealand. The key aim of the research is to identify and critically examine the discourses around WWOOFing and to investigate how these discourses shape and sustain this type of tourism. The research focuses on the communication of philosophy within cross-cultural tourism experiences to understand how the host-guest relationship may be best matched, and therefore reduce the potential for host-guest conflict and misperception. As such, the research aims to examine whether the values and organic philosophy shared by WWOOF hosts are effectively communicated and shared/received by the volunteers, or whether a mismatch remains. The findings will not only contribute to the academic literature in tourism management and management communication but could also benefit WWOOF farmers by heightening their understanding of important values for the WWOOF experience and how these can be used to match hosts with suitable volunteers, and how these values might be best shared with the volunteers for the wider benefit of organic

farming and sustainable lifestyles. Deville (2011) claims that further research on WWOOF could contribute to sustainable agriculture and farming, as well as organic food production, which still represent a small segment of global organic food production (Willer and Lernoud, 2014).

In the next section this paper provides the literature review of articles related to WWOOF phenomenon. The following section of the paper proposes a paradigm to examine discourses around WWOOFing. In addition, an appropriate methodology and methods are discussed. Finally the paper provides the summary of proposed methodologies and implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) is a multi-faced phenomenon, which could be investigated from many directions. This section gives an overview of the most relevant literature for the research aim and it draws attention to the gap in academic literature in relation to hosts'-guests' relationships and discourses around WWOOFing.

The WWOOF program was developed in 1971 in Great Britain for people, who were willing to support the organic movement, to learn about organic farming and to work on organic farm around four hours a day in exchange for food and accommodation (McIntosh and Campbell, 2001). The network rapidly spread among the organic farmers and volunteers worldwide (McIntosh, 2009). At present WWOOF unites 52 countries with 11899 hosts and 80149 volunteers (International WWOOF Association, 2013). In the New Zealand context, WWOOF started in 1974 with 6 organic farms and rapidly grew. Between 1993 and 2003, the numbers of WWOOF travellers were found to have increased by 153% (McIntosh and Campbell, 2001). Recent statistic shows, that New Zealand is the third largest national WWOOF organisation with 1289 hosts and 7953 volunteers (International WWOOF Association, 2013).

Even though WWOOF is a global network the academic articles related to WWOOFing are limited (Deville, 2011). Previous studies have described WWOOF in the frame of rural and farm tourism, where WWOOFers were defined as tourists looking for the alternative farm tourism experience as well as a part of eco or sustainable tourism (McIntosh and Campbell, 2001, McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006, Deville, 2011). WWOOF provides an opportunity to experience a rural and organic lifestyle, to learn about organic farming, to get to know a

foreign culture and ultimately gain an alternative life experience (McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006). The first study focusing on WWOOF in New Zealand examined WWOOF hosts' attitudes, motivations and environmental values (McIntosh and Campbell, 2001). In 2006, a further study was conducted by McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) which focused on the experiences of the volunteers. The study found out that WWOOFers in New Zealand share many similar characteristics with the profile of long term budget travellers, such as backpackers. In that study it was clear that host and travellers distinguished WWOOFing from commercial farm tourism in terms of motivation, willingness and the chance to learn about organic farming (McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006).

Stehlik (2002) conducted a study on WWOOF with a scope on cultural exchange and informal adult learning, whereas Maycock (2008) provided a general overview of the concept of WWOOFing. Deville (2011) sees WWOOF as a tool or a 'new model of travel' which gives an opportunity for the long term budget travellers to extend the period of travel along with the change to meet and engage with locals on cultural and social levels beyond commercial tourism settings. Ateljevic and Doorne (2001) see WWOOF as a long term way of travelling which avoids the mainstream tourism flows.

Stanford (2008) mentions economic, cultural, social and environmental aspects as vital aspects for the alternative tourism. These aspects are related to "concepts of respect, awareness, engagement (and taking time to engage), excellence and reciprocity, as well as the harder facts of spending money" (p. 270), however, to be a responsible tourism it does not mean to demonstrate all of these dimensions. In that case, WWOOF is a form of responsible tourism, as it embraces respect and awareness, reciprocity, benefit to the local economy and engagement with local community (Stanford, 2008). Apart from this, WWOOF was studied as a volunteer network by Schloegel (2007), Moscardo (2008) and McIntosh (2009).

Two recent studies on WWOOF investigate in-depth host-guests' interactions and experiences (Cronauer, 2012, Deville, 2011). For instance, Cronauer (2012) examines the complexity and diversity of host-guests' relationships from a non-commercial hospitality perspective, as well as uncovers the pre- and post- experiences of participants, and Deville (2011) describes the nature of the phenomenon and examines "…it from varied perspectives of WWOOFers and hosts" (p.11).

Although the above mentioned studies on WWOOF (Cronauer, 2012, Deville, 2011, McIntosh and Campbell, 2001, McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006, Nimmo, 2001) are mainly qualitative, they have predominantly neglected the social dimension of the hosts'-guests' relationships and deeper understanding of the meanings of WWOOF phenomenon (apart from Cronauer's recent research 2012). Nevertheless, her study does not go far enough in terms of uncovering and evaluating the narratives and discourses around WWOOFing and how they are shaped, sustain and challenge particular conceptions of identities, ideals and lifestyles in this type of tourism. Arguably, as a distinct form of tourism, WWOOFing has very clear underlying values and philosophies, based on organic farming for instance, which shape the communication between hosts and guests, throughout their networks, and shape wider discourses of this volunteer exchange programme (Cronauer, 2012). Scant research has explored this unique form of exchange in this type of tourism, and the role of communication of values here has too been neglected. Yet this perspective is vital to ensure the appropriate level of fit between WWOOF host and volunteer traveller such that conflicts and mismatches of values and perceptions are avoided.

Within WWOOFing, language and text become significant important sources of information, as WWOOFers gain and share their experiences via the WWOOF network homepage as well as using word of mouth, forums, blogs and friends' personal experiences. Thus, communication theory is an important component of the proposed research, which aims to identify the communication ideals behind WWOOF phenomenon. The study will examine the communication of discourses around the WWOOF experience. The research is endeavouring to understand the narratives and relational dialectics of-and-between hosts and guests, and to investigate how these shape and sustain this type of tourism between WWOOF hosts and guests. In particular, the research will critically examine the underlying discourses that surround the values and philosophy that socially construct this type of tourism.

PROPOSING A PARADIGM TO EXAMINE DISCOURSES OF WWOOFING

Although traditional tourism research has been dominated by the positivist approach, discussions on research methods within the social sciences over the past two decades have focused on dissemination of qualitative research in social sciences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2009). Recent tourism studies have often applied the constructionist paradigm to study social interactions (Dunn, 2005, Li, 2010, Pritchard and Morgan, 2005b,

Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, Tribe, 2008). Social constructionists believe that individuals construct their reality through the subjective meanings of their experiences, hence scholars seek to understand the world and people living in this world (Young and Collin, 2004). The aim of the constructionist researcher is to discover the complexity of the meanings (Creswell, 2009, Gergen, 2001), therefore personal involvement through visiting the context and personal collection of data are important; consequently an appropriate methodology should also be chosen (Crotty, 1998, Jennings, 2010).

Investigation of host-guest interactions within the WWOOF phenomenon fits into the constructivist paradigm as these interactions are a construct of social exchange and interaction based on subjective, individual worldview of participants and their mutual exchange. This worldview is a way to see the realities which are shared solely by participants of the WWOOFing network. This study attempts to discover dynamic and complex social interactions within the WWOOFing which demand a multidimensional approach to achieve deeper understanding. Thus, social constructionism is deemed as the most appropriate paradigm to identify and examine the discourses, which are the part of the socially constructed realities (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), as well as to understand discourses around WWOOF. The social constructionism paradigm allows reaching the depth of the research and appreciates involvement of the researcher in the research process. The constructionist paradigm is a subjective research approach which accepts multiple realities which are co-created between researcher and participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Appropriate methodology for the critical examination of the discourses around WWOOFing is now discussed below.

PROPOSING A METHODOLOGY FOR THE CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF DISCOURSES OF WWOOFING

Qualitative research applies several methods which considerably differ from each other. The following section describes potential appropriate methodology for the proposed research. Ethnomethodology originates from anthropological research and unites ethnography with participant observation (Botterill and Platenkamp, 2012). Ethnography requires time, as the researcher is meant to 'live' the research as one of the social actors, observe and participate in daily activities. The method is widely used in tourism studies including community development (Azcárate, 2006, Cole, 2008), the lived experiences of backpack travellers (Westerhausen, 2002) and construction of tourism identities (Pritchard and Morgan, 2005a,

Westerhausen, 2002). Bryman (2012) mentions that ethnographers usually employ qualitative interviewing, which are the source of learning about individual experiences and could provide desired meanings and depth. Interviews help to support data collected via other methods, for example participant observation and allow the researcher to bear out his/ her assumptions made via observation, as well as gain the depth of the researched subject (King and Horrocks, 2010). Interviews are widely used across social sciences and tourism is not an exception (Voigt et al., 2010, Campbell, 2009, Jordan and Aitchison, 2008).

Discourse analysis is a major analytical tool of qualitative research and is importantly associated with social constructionism (White, 2004, Berger and Luckmann, 1967, Burr, 2003, Gergen, 1999). Discourse analysis is a reflexive, interpretive approach interested in language as a mean of social construction (Burman and Parker, 1993). Phillips and Hardy (2002) argue that social reality is a product of discourses, and discourse analysis helps to understand how the reality is constructed, sustained and experienced by people. Considering the above mentioned methods, discourse analysis is an attractive methodology to analyse WWOOF as it allows deeper understanding of the meanings and ideals associated with the phenomena.

One multidisciplinary approach, widely used to investigate language, discourse and communication, is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA sees "language as a social practice" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) and therefore it is interested in the relationships between language, power, history and ideology. Recent studies include analysis of magazines, information brochures and analysis of tourism related web-content (Caruana and Crane, 2011, Feighery, 2006, Small and Harris, 2012, Thurlow and Jaworski, 2003). CDA is increasing in popularity in tourism area and is used to study subjective experiences of the tourists and to reach desired depth. It therefore seems to be the most appropriate methodology to analyse WWOOF as it allows deeper understanding of the meanings and ideals associated with the phenomena. As such, Fairclough's CDA model will first be used to analyse the qualitative data as well as the content of WWOOF New Zealand website.

PROPOSING METHODS FOR THE CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF DISCOURSES OF WWOOFING

The research aims to discover the philosophy around WWOOF phenomenon. Sharing the experience of organic farming was the underlying philosophy of WWOOF back in 1971

(Maycock, 2008). Hence, current research is framed within the 'organic nature' of farming and it is essential to re-discover the importance of the 'organic nature' of the WWOOF experience for hosts' and guests'. To gather the primary data, I will contact certified WWOOF farms throughout New Zealand. The data will be collected from WWOOF hosts and guests through participant observation and one-on-one in-depth interviews based on a set of themes. The one-on-one interviews are the preferred data collection tool due to the sensitive nature of potential topics to discuss, including for example, experiences of hosts' and guests' with each other. In addition to the interviews, the data will be collected via the participant observation.

The participant observation will happen on farms, where I will observe the interactions between hosts and guests as well as make reflexive field notes. The data from the participant observation will complement the qualitative interviewing, allow the researcher to bear out her assumptions made via observation as well as gain the depth of the researched subject (King and Horrocks, 2010, Bryman, 2012). The observation of the interactions between hosts and guests will be kept in the reflexive field journal and will further assist me in interpreting the findings and the creation of the research text (Watt, 2007). Using notes from a field journal is an accepted practice within a constructivist approach (Denzin, 1994). Reflective journals increase the researchers' sensitivity to participants and help researcher to take a closer look on the way of creating history, values, and assumptions around the phenomenon (Gilgun, 2008, Ortlipp, 2008) .

The third method of data collection represents an innovative approach of LEGO Serious Play (LSP) methodology, which fits to the constructionist epistemology. LEGO Serious Play is a communication, problem solving and team building technique used in research and business contexts. LSP is based on the ideas of Piaget's constructivism (1955), who claimed that intelligence increases while the mind interacts with outer world and Papert's constructivism, and his idea of building knowledge by 'learning hands-on' (Papert and Harel, 1991). The second pillar of LSP is the 'concept of play' which assumes that innovative and creative ideas are most likely to come through playful process (Gee, 2007, Kane, 2004, Terr, 2000). The third pillar of LSP is imagination, which is seen as a central part of playing and the fourth, is identity (Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006). LSP applies 'play' and ensures learning through exploration and storytelling or telling it in more academic way, through metaphor (LEGO Serious Play, 2006). The story telling and use of metaphors, that is "a form of thinking and

language through which we understand or experience one thing in terms of another" (p.7) are important elements of the LSP concept and the creation of innovative ideas and solutions (LEGO Serious Play, 2006).

There are very few academic studies describing the application of LSP in research (Cantoni et al., 2009, Gauntlett, 2007, Gauntlett and Holzwarth, 2006). Apart of this, there are few journal articles describing the implementation of LSP as a tool for improvement of organisational performance in the business context (Oliver and Roos, 2007, Packard, 2008, Peter et al., 2005, Pink, 2003, Secondulfo, 1997). The proposed thesis research will implement the LSP concept to create the philosophy of WWOOF using constructionist epistemology and metaphors in order to get a deeper understanding of the ideals of the phenomenon. According to Schön (1983), metaphors play an active, constructive and creative role in human cognition and can even create completely new ways of understanding of things.

The LSP concept will enrich the research and let participants co-create the philosophy of WWOOF together by building models from LEGO bricks and explaining them through metaphors. According to the LSP methodology participants will use their imagination before using the conscious knowledge to construct mutual model of an ideal WWOOF experience. In this concept, metaphor will be used as a filter to uncover the multiple nature of WWOOF phenomenon from the participants' subjective point of view. This creative component of the research allows a deeper insight into the philosophy of WWOOFing and helps to explore personal meanings, attitudes and experiences of the participants. The data generated through the LEGO workshops will be analysed within the Fairclough's CDA frame. The metaphorical LEGO models will be analysed on the three levels: text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation) (Fairclough, 2003).

To enrich and expand the analysis of the text within proposed research, the web content related to WWOOF phenomenon will be studied by applying the CDA. Current studies on web content are predominantly focused on language usage and/or lexico-grammatical aspects; the CDA approach is neglected by many researchers and still relatively rare (Kilgarriff and Grefenstette, 2003, Meyer, 2003, Mautner, 2005). The WWOOF New Zealand homepage serves as a mediator for participants of this socially constructed reality and contains significant information regarding the philosophy espoused of WWOOFing as well as the hosts-guests experiences. Thus, the visual data analysis will be completed by analysing the

official WWOOF New Zealand homepage content with the help of Critical Discourse Analysis. The critical analysis of WWOOF homepage offers vital insights into the researched subject. Discourse analysis of the WWOOF homepage is an important component of this study, as discourses around WWOOF represent "socially constructed knowledge of reality…[T]hey have been developed in specific social contexts, and in ways which are appropriate to the interest of social actors in these contexts" (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996).

Other analytical techniques often used in qualitative data analysis were considered less appropriate because of their different focus on analysis of the data. For instance, content analysis was deemed as less appropriate as it is more an approach to data collection which allows to group and reduce large amount of qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). Although thematic analysis is a flexible tool applied across social sciences and psychology it could miss nuanced data as it has "limited interpretative power beyond mere description [and] does not allow researchers to make claims about language usage" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Guest et al., 2012). Further tool, semiotics, is keen on the meaning of the signs, "it has a tendency to become formalistic and ignore the way in which people actively create meaning" (Myers, 2009), thus this approach is deemed as potentially inappropriate to study the social constructed reality of WWOOFing, where every unique voice of each participant is important.

CONCLUSION AND AN OUTLINE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper suggests a possible appropriate methodology to study discourses around the WWOOF phenomenon. WWOOF is a phenomenon which requires diversified methods and methodologies in order to discover discourses around host's- guest's interactions within this program. For the proposed study social constructionism was deemed as the most appropriate paradigm which will reveal the socially constructed reality of WWOOF and uncover deeper meanings. The data will be collected via multiple methods including participant observations and in-depth interviews on WWOOF farms, as well as production of creative artefacts using LEGO Serious Play methodology and the analysis of the data from the official WWOOF New Zealand homepage. In addition, field notes in the form of the researcher's reflexive journal will be used as a part of social constructivist methodology. Discourse analysis, strongly associated with constructivist epistemology (White, 2004), is deemed as an appropriate tool for the analysis of the interviews, creative artefacts constructed by WWOOF hosts and guests and the information contained on the WWOOF New Zealand Homepage.

The implication and importance of discourses around the WWOOF phenomenon makes social constructionism the most appropriate paradigm to discover the multiple realities and deep meanings of the socially constructed reality of WWOOFers. However, this does not mean that social constructionism is better than other existing paradigms, but rather it is deemed as a more appropriate one in terms of this particular research. As outlined earlier, some alternative paradigms, such as positivism, see the researcher as a superior person, who is in the best position to investigate and describe the phenomenon. The social constructionism paradigm challenges this view and focuses on cooperation between the researcher and research participants and opens up new meanings and perspectives to be explored around the WWOOF network. A social constructionism approach allows me to immerse in the research and to bring up my own experiences and co-create the reality with research participants.

Research tools including creative artefacts and a reflective field journal will contribute to depth of the study. Metaphors captured in the creative artefacts will contribute to the understanding of WWOOF philosophy by capturing, key to the participants, a moment of WWOOF life. My reflective journal will allow me to co-create the WWOOF reality as a researcher and will draw one of the multiple faces of WWOOFing. Data collection through the qualitative interviews and participant observation permits me to acquire multiple realities of the phenomenon and get the scene beyond the setting of WWOOFing. Critical Discourse Analysis underpinned by social constructionist epistemology is considered to be an appropriate tool to discover deep meanings of discourses around the WWOOF phenomenon. The CDA will be applied to describe, interpret and explain the meanings through the three levels of discourse analysis.

Although much remains to be done, this research aims to generate important findings around hosts'-guests' interactions and the philosophy within the WWOOF non-commercial volunteer exchange network. The most obvious limitation of this study its geographical location in New Zealand, however it is hoped that the study will give valuable insights into WWOOF philosophy as New Zealand is one of the first countries introduced WWOOFing in 1974 and has high numbers of farms and WWOOFers (Nimmo, 2001). The results of the study may later be compared to other WWOOF international networks in order to gain broader overview on the philosophy of WWOOF worldwide. The second limitation is the farm sampling based on organic certification, which potentially decreases the number of farms appropriate for the research. However, it is believed that research should be framed within the 'organic nature' of

farming, which was the founding idea of the WWOOF phenomenon. Another limitation is related to the research methods, in particular the analysis of web content. Web content data are often of big volume, they are diversified and constantly changing which results some challenges. Mautner (2005) suggests several steps to ensure the significance of data, like for example limit data to several categories of web page, capture main sections of web data in paper or electronic form in order to avoid loss of the data.

Furthermore, the proposed study contributes to the academic literature as it investigates the philosophy of the non-commercial volunteer exchange network WWOOF on example of New Zealand farms. The research is mainly built on previous studies around WWOOFing phenomenon (McIntosh, 2009, McIntosh and Campbell, 2001, McIntosh and Bonnemann, 2006, Deville, 2011, Deville and Wearing, 2013, Ord, 2010). This study is aimed to provide deep understanding of the multiple realities socially constructed by WWOOF hosts' and guests' as well as their subjective and potentially various meanings on WWOOFing. This study contributes to the academic literature on the phenomenon of WWOOF, as well as the literature on hosts'-guests' relationships in non-commercial volunteer tourism. Moreover the study contributes to the literature on farm tourism in New Zealand. Besides, the study contributes to qualitative methodologies by application of creative visual methods. For instance, personal artefacts created by the participants will be used to uncover the deep metaphoric meaning of the WWOOF philosophy and to understand what shapes WWOOF.

The study opens new horizons for prospected researchers in the fields of non-commercial hosts'-guests' interactions, volunteer and farm tourism. As it was pointed out by Cronauer (2012) it is time to move away from the consideration that hosts' and guests' interact only on economic level, since the non-commercial tourism networks like WWOOF or CouchSurfing increase with the popularity; and it is essential for tourism scholars to understand what moves people and to hear the voices of non-commercial tourists as well as to understand what shapes their realities.

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