

TOURISM AND ‘DIRT’: A CASE STUDY OF WWOOF FARMS IN NEW ZEALAND

Abstract

Tourism research on host-guest relations in non-profit exchange programmes remains scant. Using a case study of WWOOF farms in New Zealand, this paper examines the experiences of farmers and volunteers (‘WWOOFers’) in the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) programme. Using qualitative methods that privileged participants’ voices, the research aimed to uncover the nature of the host-guest relationship in non-for-profit tourism. The key theme of ‘dirt’ is explored in this paper to illustrate both the physical nature of the voluntary farm work and the perceived exploitation of volunteers that are reported to characterise this experience. Overall, the findings challenge the idealistic aims of this type of volunteer tourism exchange programme that is usually reported in tourism literature. Specifically, the findings indicate the tensions of economic and ethical accountability within the WWOOF network and its community. The paper contributes to tourism studies research by providing further understanding of the experiences shaping the relations and tensions between hosts and guests in this non-profit exchange programme.

Keywords: WWOOF; volunteer tourism; host-guest relations; ethical accountability; dirt.

1. Introduction

Not-for-profit organisations generally seek to maintain congruence between their social values, activities, expectations and the experiences of the person involved. Potential disparities can arise in this alternative tourism context, however, between host and guest expectations around the nature of the work. Despite a long scholarly tradition of examining host-guest relations, the topic of host and guest experiences in non-profit exchange programmes has received considerably less attention among tourism scholars. In 2001, McIntosh and Campbell’s study on WWOOFing positioned this non-profit exchange programme as an alternative type of farm tourism. Since that early work, tourism scholars have studied the WWOOF programme from different angles, for example from environmental, social, and cultural studies viewpoints

(Alvarez Villanueva, 2012; Bernkopf, 2009; Börjars, 2012; Durmic, 2012). Yet, a deeper understanding of the distinctive experiences that shape the host-guest relations and tensions between WWOOF farm hosts and their volunteers remain unassured. In this paper, we will illustrate the experiences of both WWOOF farm hosts and volunteers as they endeavour to sustain and invest in this alternative tourism phenomena. In particular, we will examine the tensions that occurred for both parties as they try to work within this framework and illustrate how they attempted to resolve these tensions through ethical accountability.

Emerging as a movement and established in 1971 in the UK as Working Weekends on Organic Farms, WWOOF developed into one of the world's largest voluntourism programmes. WWOOF is a non-monetary exchange programme where the guests work on the farm for up to six hours a day in exchange for food, accommodation and often get insights into organic farming (McIntosh, 2009). The programme was started by a London secretary, Sue Coppard, who wished to escape city life and support the organic movement (Coppard, 2012). Today WWOOF stands for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms and is a global exchange program with over 50,000 volunteers working on more than 7000 farms in about 100 countries (Pier, 2011a). New Zealand hosts the second oldest and second largest WWOOFing network worldwide (Millener, 2016).

In its early days, the WWOOF programme was shaped within the context of the 'back to the land' movement supporting organic farming, environmental trends, and 'green' worldviews idealised in industrialised contemporary society (Pier, 2011b). In this context, 'organic' refers to chemical-free or 'natural' forms of agriculture and their underlining values stem from involvement in the broader issues concerned with organic, sustainable food production (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, 2017; Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Mummery, 2002; Organic Trade Association, 2017). The distinctive aims of the WWOOF programme are to connect people from urban areas with farm hosts in order to support farmers with organic farming, to provide education to WWOOFers about organic farming practices, and to engage in a sociocultural exchange between WWOOFing participants (Federation of WWOOF Organisations, 2016).

WWOOF volunteers travel to other countries to acquire meaningful experiences during their travels, to get to know locals and to experience a farm lifestyle and sustainable living principles while learning and living on organic farms (Maycock, 2008; McIntosh, 2009;

McIntosh & Campbell, 2001; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Nowadays, many WWOOF volunteers are long-term international travellers with limited financial means, who do not see themselves as commercial tourists and see the WWOOF programme as a way to avoid the popular tourist track (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2001; Deville & Wearing, 2013). Hence, WWOOFers tend to stay longer at host farms, but their motivations are not always driven by an interest in organic farming (Deville, Wearing, & McDonald, 2016b; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Thus, as a form of alternative tourism as well as an alternative to tourism (Deville, 2011), the WWOOF programme tries to connect hosts and guests while avoiding the commercialism of tourism. As such, it is said to espouse a different philosophy of travel from traditional commercial farm tourism. But, questions remain of mismatched values, expectations and unethical interactions and experiences. To this end, in this paper, we aim to further examine the nature of the host-guest relations in WWOOFing and understand the tensions that may be inherent in the participants' interactions.

2. Literature review

McIntosh and Campbell (2001) conducted the first study focusing on WWOOF and examined WWOOF hosts' attitudes, motivations, and environmental values in New Zealand. In 2006, a further study conducted by McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006) focused on the experiences of the volunteers in New Zealand. Generally, previous studies have found that farmers do not see their WWOOF farms as farm stays (McIntosh & Campbell, 2001), that WWOOFers distinguish themselves from tourists (Nimmo, 2001), and that representatives of national WWOOF organisations prefer to distance WWOOF from tourism altogether (Dana, 2012; Ord, 2010). Some studies position the WWOOF programme as a part of alternative tourism (Deville, 2011; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Mosedale, 2009) and others closely associate it with volunteer tourism (Deville, Wearing, & McDonald, 2016a). Scholars have also described WWOOFing as a transformational form of tourism (Deville, 2015; Deville & Wearing, (2013)). As a transformational form of tourism, researchers have shown how WWOOFing provides experiences leading to change, through challenging the purpose and meaning of life through empathic, engaged, authentic and invited encounters with locals (Deville, 2015; Deville & Wearing, 2013). Indeed, many previous studies have proffered that, as an exchange programme, WWOOF facilitates an alternative tourism experience with an educational and cultural exchange

component based on the pro-environmental values and philosophies (Alvarez Villanueva, 2012; Malec, 2014; Melin, 2012).

Although it remains a niche form of tourism, scholars have attested, however, that some tourists increasingly tend to neglect the founding ideals of the WWOOFing phenomenon and its sustainability ethic. Instead, these tourists see WWOOFing as a way to get off the beaten track of mass tourism and to achieve a more authentic tourism experience in an affordable way (Deville et al., 2016a). Often, these changes can lead to the collision of two worlds: organically minded farmers and tourists who may not share the same interest in farming, sustainability and alternative lifestyles (Alvarez Villanueva, 2012; Azizi & Mostafanezhad, 2014; Cronauer, 2012). Interestingly, the increased scholarly interest in the WWOOFing phenomenon has coincided with the growth of the network, the popularity of the organic movement, as well as the growing concern around environmental issues and food trends on the global scale (Choo & Jamal, 2009; Deville & Wearing, 2013; Deville et al., 2016a; Kosnik, 2014; Lans, 2016; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014).

Conceptually, as a form of host-guest exchange, WWOOFing provides a unique opportunity to experience a rural and organic lifestyle, to learn about organic farming, foreign culture and, ultimately, gain an alternative life experience (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). As noted above, much of the current literature on the WWOOF programme sees the phenomenon as a part of alternative tourism (Wearing, 2001; Wearing & Neil, 1998). Previous researchers sought to understand WWOOF's relationship to farm-based tourism (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006), volunteer tourism (Miller & Mair, 2015), sustainable and ecotourism (Deville, 2011; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Nimmo, 2001) and gave it those labels respectively. Stateva (2010) viewed WWOOFers as farm tourists with a 'romantic gaze' who search for an 'authentic' experience. Seymour (2007) described WWOOFing as a system of alternative economy based on exchange and sharing. Deville (2011) articulated 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 chance to meet and engage with locals on cultural and social levels beyond commercial tourism settings.

Aside from being identified as a tourism exchange programme, WWOOFing has developed into a network for cultural and information exchange which offers educational and transformational experiences. Scholars emphasise the importance of the educational facets of

WWOOFing, ensured by the nature of the WWOOFing experience and human engagement in a noncommodified setting (Álvarez, 2013; Deville et al., 2016a; Engelsted, 2011; Malec, 2014; Melin, 2012). Additionally, WWOOFing not only provides a platform for learning but also facilitates change. Deville and Wearing (2013) have argued that WWOOFing represents a form of transformational tourism as it provides its participants with experiences leading to change through challenging the purpose and meaning of life through empathic, engaged and authentic encounters. Similarly, Stehlik (2002) stated that WWOOF enables people to grow personally through engagement with local customs and environments. Especially for volunteers, the WWOOFing experience often facilitates personal discovery (Devlin, 1998) and personal development (Jamieson, 2007; Maycock, 2008; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006) which often lead to an alteration in worldviews (Farrer, 1999) or a change in overall life direction (Deville & Wearing, 2013).

Another element of the WWOOFing phenomenon is eluded to by Miller and May (2015) who emphasise that WWOOF has the potential to move tourism from an experiential commodity to a decommodified experience. However, in a later study, Deville et al. (2016a) found a fusion of WWOOF with mass tourism. These researchers explore the ways in which WWOOFing appears to be increasingly exposed to processes of commodification and how WWOOFing discourse shifts from alternative to mass tourism. However, Deville (2016) offered the conclusion that the WWOOFing experience is successful in fulfilling the main aims of both parties if farmers and WWOOFers engage in reciprocal relations with each other. In viewing the aims of the WWOOF exchange, Cronauer (2012) has suggested that it has become more focused on the social exchange than the philosophies of the organic movement that it used to be based on. She proffered that the complex and multidimensional host-guest interactions in WWOOFing encompass relations which are continuously re-evaluated, negotiated, and transformed. Therefore, to resolve the tensions between hosts and guests in WWOOFing a deeper understanding of the interactions between farmers and WWOOFers becomes important, as these are open to interpretation and possibly negotiation based on the expectations of farmers and WWOOFers.

Indeed, previous studies that have examined the host-guest experiences in WWOOF (McIntosh, 2009; McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006; Seymour, 2007) report a potential mismatch between farmers and WWOOFers, especially when WWOOFers align with a 'backpacker'

identity. This noted imbalance in the host-guest relations is also somewhat evident in the literature on commercial homes (Andersson Cederholm & Hultman, 2010; Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007; Kastenholz & Sparrer, 2009; Lynch, Di Domenico, & Sweeney, 2007; Lynch, McIntosh, & Tucker, 2009), within a spiritual hosting network (McIntosh & Mansfeld, 2006), and host-guest interactions and exchange (Paraskevaïdis & Andriotis, 2017; Sharpley, 2014; Smith, 1977; Smith & Brent, 2001; Trucker, 2003; Tucker & Lynch, 2005; Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006). These scholars point out that the host-guest relations may become problematic by the clash of participant's ideals, motivations and philosophies. Whereas, if the aspirations of hosts and guests are compatible, the exchange experience is likely to be satisfactory for both parties (Ingram (2002).

Nevertheless, previous tourism studies on host-guest relations in the non-commercial setting have failed to focus on the critical links to the experiences of hosts and guests and notion of meaningful travel that frame the host-guest exchange experiences in WWOOFing, especially with regard to how hosts and volunteers relate to each other. In this paper, we adopt a case study approach aim to explore the experiences of host-guest relations in this non-for-profit tourism programme (Hyde, Ryan, & Woodside, 2012). We aim to illustrate the experiences in host-guest relations, which are complex, personal and multi-dimensional.

3. Study methods

To explore host-guest interactions and understand tensions occurring between WWOOF hosts and guests, this study took a qualitative approach. In this study, we used blend of qualitative data collection methods, specifically, observation, unstructured interviews and researcher field notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 24) Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Guba, 1981). Observation was adopted by the first author to gain an understanding of the research phenomena through the emic perspective. The first author collected the data over a seven-month field work period at WWOOF farms located on both the North and South Islands of New Zealand. She had the dual role of researcher and a volunteer and explored the relations between farmers and WWOOFers, aiming to provide a detailed, in-depth description of the social practices within the WWOOFing phenomenon (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012). Unstructured qualitative interviews were used as an extension of participant observation during the fieldwork (Patton, 2002). In this research, interviewing represented a tool to explore the experiences (Allen, 2005; Burr, 1995) and the

dynamic interactions between participants which helped to understand individuals and their lived experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). The reflexive approach to this study, in the form of a field note journal, added further depth to the exploration of research questions and enhanced understanding of experiences within the WWOOFing phenomenon (Burr, 2003; Denzin, 1994a; Ortlipp, 2008; Watt, 2007).

In total, 10 farms from the North and South Islands with 25 respondents, 12 farmers and 13 WWOOFers, participated in the research (Table 1. Summary Profile of Participants). Farmers introduced the researcher to the WWOOF volunteers, and they were asked about their willingness to participate before the researcher arrived on site.

Name*	Gender	Country of Origin	Category
Alex	Male	New Zealand	WWOOFer
Alice	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Amber	Female	USA	WWOOFer
Angelika	Female	Germany	WWOOFer
Charlotte	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Chris	Male	New Zealand	Farmer
Liz	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Danny	Male	Mexico	WWOOFer
Erik	Male	Sweden	WWOOFer
Eva	Female	Canada	WWOOFer
George	Male	New Zealand	Farmer
Gregory	Male	New Zealand	Farmer
Jacques	Male	France	WWOOFer
John	Male	New Zealand	Farmer
Rachel	Female	UK	WWOOFer/ Farmer
Lea	Female	France	WWOOFer
Leo	Male	New Zealand	WWOOFer
Linley	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Martin	Male	Germany	WWOOFer
Mary	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Milena	Female	Slovenia	WWOOFer
Noa	Male	France	WWOOFer
Tessa	Female	New Zealand	Farmer
Vincent	Male	New Zealand	Farmer
Xavier	Male	Spain	WWOOFer

*Table 1. Summary Profile of Participants (** Original names have been changed for confidentiality)*

Unstructured interviews informed by previous WWOOF research (for example, Cronauer, 2012; Deville, 2011) were employed covering the participant(s) background, expectations and relations, overall experience and reflections. The first author also engaged in participant observation (Patton, 2002) in order to understand participant's experiences, as the interviewer can track deeper meanings around the research questions (Jennings, 2010). She also captured events in her reflexive journal and highlighted emerging themes (Kottak, 1996). Whilst various data collection methods were used, the single case, geographical locale of the research must be noted (Xiao & Smith, 2006). To analyse the data, we chose thematic analysis, which is an established tool for qualitative analysis based on searching through the collected data in order to find frequent patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We followed the six phases of thematic analysis put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006). In summary of this section, the research design and analysis also adhered to the four criteria for credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004).

4. Findings

From the analysis of the data, a key theme of 'dirt' emerged to characterise both the physical nature of the voluntary farm work and the perceived tensions between hosts and guests that are reported in this study. Other findings from the research are to be reported elsewhere. Symbolically, 'dirt' stands for unclean, unethical, not true, and as a metaphor, 'dirt' stands in opposition to the notion of purity (Lee, 2016). Douglas (2003) defines dirt as a 'matter out of place', which in symbolic form means that dirt appears in the wrong place, and thus interrupts a sense of order in the world (Cohen & Johnson, 2005, p. xi). In this research, 'dirt' became an evident theme as participants repeatedly used the word in association with their description of the nature of the work, and, metaphorically, to describe their perceptions of the unethical, exploitative treatment of the nature of their experience. Hence, the findings of this research provide some evidence to suggest that the theme of 'dirt' is central to understanding the tensions between farmers and WWOOFers and their lived WWOOFing experiences.

The data revealed that dirt is a twofold concept according to participants. On the one hand, it relates to physically ‘getting your hands dirty’ by being involved in physical work, farming activities, and through, for example, planting, weeding, harvesting, and taking care of animals. This research found that the WWOOFers are motivated to volunteer on New Zealand WWOOF farms as they enjoy getting their hands dirty and learn about organic farming principles and sustainable life ideals, whereas farmers feel connected to the land by practising ‘dirty’ farming activities. On the other hand, the concept of ‘dirt’ relates to and describes the perceived ‘dirt’ within the relations between farmers and WWOOFers, their experiences with each other, as well as their motivations and hidden agendas. The findings show another ‘dirty’ side of the WWOOFing experience and illustrate examples of the lack of ethical accountability in this type of tourism exchange. The symbolic meaning of ‘dirt’ represents the nature of the experience which is perceived by the participants as imbalanced, unethical or even turns to become an exploited relationship. The findings confirmed that participants face this negative WWOOFing experience when their values, motivations and philosophies are not matched.

4.1. Getting Your Hands Dirty

Farming activities in WWOOFing are typically associated with garden dirt, soil, farm maintenance, and animal care. Participants stated that they gained satisfaction from the activities connected to ‘dirt’. For example, as Eva remembered: “I really love to get my hands into the dirt. ... I grew up gardening with my mum. For me, it feels good to be with the plants and the insects; it is really relaxing”. Other participants revealed their love for nature and being outdoors:

I have always enjoyed working in gardens. We never had an extensive garden when I was growing up, but we usually had some plants growing. I enjoy planting, and I enjoy getting dirty. (Amber, WWOOFer)

What is noticed in the above quotes is the tactile nature of the farming activity that facilitates tacit experiences and learning, evoking memories. Many of the WWOOFers stated that they were motivated to join WWOOFing New Zealand as they enjoy working outdoors in the pristine scenery while getting their hands dirty, learning about organic farming, gardening and sustainable life ideals. Many farmers commented that they chose a rural lifestyle to feel connected to the land through ‘dirty’ farming activities. They mentioned that they found the

WWOOFing programme attractive because it allowed them to get outdoors and enjoy working with plants and animals in an attractive setting.

People working together outdoors is what I love about WWOOFing. I like that because it reminds me of my tunnel house [built together with WWOOFers]. I also liked the fact that there is a whole lot of conversation going on while we are working. Working with WWOOFers makes time flow faster, and hard work feels easier. (Linley, Farmer)

One of the farmers, Anthony, often repeated “the soul [of WWOOFing] lies in soil” and mentioned that the phrase was central to understanding WWOOFing values. He emphasised that healthy soil is the most valuable asset on the farm as it provides nutritious food for plants, animals, and the people who live there or come to volunteer on his farm.

The research findings highlighted the high degree of interest among participants in outdoor work activities which allowed ‘getting their hands dirty’. Despite the mismatch in motivations of farmers and WWOOFers as reported in some previous studies, the participants, on the whole, demonstrated their genuine interest in organics, gardening and farming (McIntosh & Campbell, 2001; Miller & Mair, 2015b; Yamamoto & Engelsted, 2014). For many WWOOFers ‘getting the hands dirty’ was a core and integral part of their New Zealand WWOOFing experience.

4.2. Ethical accountability

WWOOF farmers and volunteers stated that the programme was beneficial for all concerned. For example, George (Farmer) said that WWOOFing is “...a fair trade for accommodation and food” model, and many WWOOFers viewed the programme as a meaningful way to travel which allowed them to interact with locals, learn and gain new experiences. However, this research presented some evidence of misinterpretations and perceived unethical relations between farmers and WWOOFers. The stories illustrated a lack of ethical accountability in WWOOFing exchange as some individuals pursued a hidden, ‘dirty’ agenda. However, participants did express that WWOOFing could achieve a win-win encounter if all parties have a similar interest.

Commonly, farmers had pragmatic reasons for becoming a WWOOF host. They expected some benefit from participation in WWOOFing. For example, despite the fact that Mary enjoys

the hosting experience and tries to provide a meaningful experience for her WWOOFers, she admitted that the WWOOFing experience would not be valuable for her unless it was a win-win exchange.

I try to be accommodating to WWOOFers. I try to give them the experience that they are looking for and respect that it varies from WWOOFer to WWOOFer. But at the same time, it is not valuable to have a WWOOFer unless I get some return. I try to make sure that it is a mutual benefit for both of us, not just one side. (Mary, Farmer)

Not surprisingly, some WWOOFers saw the WWOOFing experience simply as an exchange of labour for food and accommodation. For example, Jacques, who had just wanted a change in his daily routine after quitting his job, thought that WWOOFing was a good way to travel.

I think that [the] WWOOFing relationship is a bit capitalistic. They are feeding me, they[re] hosting me, but I am paying them by working. But the WWOOFing experience for me is also about the right atmosphere and making sure that the deal is there for everybody, and it is a win-win thing for everybody. (Jacques, WWOOFer)

Although social interactions with “interesting people full of energy” (Rachel, Farmer) was found to be an integral component of the New Zealand WWOOFing experience desired by both farmers (who often live in remote areas) and WWOOFers (who seek interactions with locals), both parties mentioned the challenge of balancing the social interactions and work. In the following extract, Chris mentioned the ‘dirty’ side of the social component of the WWOOFing exchange. He admitted that hosting volunteers was a challenging process.

When we have a WWOOFer coming, we try to explain our routine and how stuff on the property works, not that we have a strong routine, but we try. And often one challenge we had is the balance between the work and the social side of it. ... so when one day we have not done much, the next day it is hard to say that we need to start working in the morning. It is an interesting relationship, and that is why we explain things, and we do things together, and you do not have to say ‘now it is time for you to go working’. (Chris, Farmer)

Farmers reported examples from their experiences when WWOOFers undermined their work or practices. For instance, some recalled situations where WWOOFers did not follow the rules related to the use of water or the internet. In some regions of New Zealand, farms are not connected to the national electrical grid or water pipeline and need to be self-sufficient in terms

of producing their own energy and water. Thus, periods of drought can reduce basic resources and these farms, usually apply strict rules on the use of these resources. In this research, some farmers shared their experiences of WWOOFers' having over-consumed the resources despite explanations and warnings from the farmer's side. For example, Linley (Farmer) shared: "So we have limited resources: we have solar water heating, we have composting toilets; we grow a lot of food. But one WWOOFer could not understand why essential resources were limited, so they ended up by using all the hot water in the mornings despite we told her about that!" These negative experiences reported by farmers contributed to framing their encounters in a slightly negative and controlling relationship with their volunteers. In contrast, some WWOOFers reported that the hosts were not interested in them and "they [hosts] just had too many WWOOFers on site to operate the farm. They did not even ask me about my country, culture or any other stuff. I think they are not interested in us, only as workers" (Milena, WWOOFer).

Despite the reported tensions and conflicts related to differing values of how to consume scarce resources, most of the hosts provided reasons to excuse this misunderstanding. WWOOF hosts frequently pointed out that people from urban areas do not understand the challenges connected to living self-sufficiently in a remote area. As Tessa explained: "...we are living in the area where you cannot just go and get milk or cooking oil when you run out of it. There is no dairy store around the corner. The next supermarket is over the hill 70km away". Talking about a similar issue, another farmer shared the following example:

I let people know that we have only 10 gigabytes of internet a month. So it is fine to check emails, but not downloading. But there was one chap who did not understand it. In the end, all of us ended up without the internet for the rest of the month, and he was gone after three days. (Linley, Farmer)

Even with the regulations regarding tasks for WWOOFers to perform and that hours of work should be around four to six hours on the land and in-house (WWOOF New Zealand, 2016), some farmers seemed to have a different agenda for their volunteers. One farmer confirmed that the WWOOFers on her farm worked long hours, often the same hours as paid employees.

We are very busy all the time, there is no end of jobs, we welcome WWOOFers as a part of the team to make a farm a better place, and we ask them to work the same hours as the rest of our team. Another thing, ... that it is pretty much

full-time work. And that seems to work. There are some people too that it will not suit, and that is why I tell everybody before they come. (Alice, Farmer)

Alice is a co-owner of a certified organic farm which despite employing paid workers relies heavily on the help of WWOOFers who work up to 10 hours per day. On another farm, the researcher noted a situation where a farmer asked WWOOFers to work extra hours in order to compensate for a volunteer who was sick at that time. Farmers for example sometimes asked volunteers to perform a task they do not want to be involved in, such as housework. While volunteers expected a more purposeful use of their time in, for example, projects which farmers could not afford to employ a professional to do, or to learn new skills and knowledge around organic farming. These examples illustrate where farmers took advantage of WWOOFers, also how the concept of volunteering becomes fluid and dependent on the interpretation of what constitutes meaningful voluntary work or unpaid labour.

Leaving aside the previously mentioned examples discussed above, the majority of the farmers in this research stated they did not want to take advantage of a WWOOFer's labour or exploit them. During the fieldwork phase, the first author met farmers and WWOOFers who commented on these exploitative practices as something that should not represent the movement or experience for WWOOFers. Some participants talked about the long working hours at some farms, and in two cases the first author experienced this too. Both farmers and WWOOFers stated strong negative feelings towards these types of practices and considered it 'slave labour'. Tessa for example, is an organic farmer, who is passionate for the sustainable movement and acknowledged the benefits for organic farmers of the WWOOF scheme.

WWOOFing supports people who want to be organic because it is so labour intensive. You could not do organic farming without slaves. But it does annoy me when people use WWOOFers when they should employ people. (Tessa, Farmer)

However, she was aware of the reality for some volunteers of 'dirty' practices in her region and the intensive working hours to which some volunteers have had to commit. She discussed some commercial organic farms in her neighbourhood:

And when I saw it, I thought Jesus Christ! I thought that the whole organic movement works on slaves! You cannot do it without the cheap labour. Organic farming is super labour intensive and how could you make organics survivable

if you have to do it only by yourself?! But this guy had that family there, and those people work out there without a break. And I just thought it was disgusting. I thought it was exploitation. And there are so many organic places around here doing that, they all run on WWOOFers, and it is a slave practice! And when I see it, I think oh my God, organic farming cannot survive without slave labour. (Tessa, Farmer)

During her fieldwork, the first author did not encounter many WWOOFers who were unhappy about the working hours. Despite two occasions experienced by the first author, the only imbalance between farmers and WWOOFers stemmed from the nature of tasks and the potential mismatch of the expectations between host and guest. Only one farmer in this research acknowledged that due to the busy nature of the farm, WWOOFers were treated as paid employees and work the “same hours as rest of the team”. These experiences recounted in the research illustrate the potential tension between how volunteering is envisaged and practiced in the movement. They also start to indicate interpretations of what particular types of work conducted under certain contexts and conditions is deemed meaningful and provides engaging activities to make a difference around organically sustainable lifestyle (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009).

Despite the potential tensions, imbalance and differences in the farmers’ and WWOOFers’ motivations, this research revealed that WWOOFing could be a win-win exchange for both parties. On the one hand, farmers in these relations benefited from the extra help and social contact, and the WWOOFers gained a more meaningful form of travel by staying with locals and learning about organics, gardening, farming, and also getting to know the Kiwi culture. The following comment by George illustrates the mutual benefits of the New Zealand WWOOFing experience for farmers.

I just wanted to say that I think the WWOOFing system is very beneficial for smallholders around the world. Especially for those, who are living on the land like us here and who[re] growing organic food. And also for those who have some small farming business, but who do not have very much money. So they can trade food and accommodation and have some labour. That is why WWOOFing was important for us in the beginning. We did not have very much money either. Now, it is less important. Our volunteers are helping our economy because we are a lot older now, it is important just to have help to

maintain our vast property ... also the social component, having great company is very nice. (George, Farmer)

4.3. Discussion

Ideas of reciprocity have been widely debated in the volunteer tourism literature, and many scholars see volunteer tourism as a niche that fosters more reciprocal host-guest relations (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Wearing, 2001). However, some researchers, for example, Mowforth and Munt (2009), critique volunteer tourism for its inability to achieve “equal relationships” (Sin, 2010, p. 991) between hosts and guests. However, in their study on organic farm volunteering, Miller and Mair (2015a) argue that tourism exchange programmes like WWOOF provide space for in-depth interactions and sometimes offer opportunities to create meaningful bonds and friendships between farmers and WWOOFers. The findings of the present study provide further insights through its exploration of the host-guest relations in WWOOFing. The evidence presented by WWOOFing participants suggests that the WWOOFing experience can provide a win-win exchange, and hence more ‘equal relationships’ between farmers and WWOOFers, as long as farmers and WWOOFers have a mutual interest in each other. The value of this mutual interest was reflected in the experiences of farmers and volunteers reported through the fieldwork.

Despite many of the benefits of host-guest relations in WWOOFing mentioned in previous studies (Hallmann & Zehrer, 2016; Kosnik, 2014; Lans, 2016; McIntosh, 2009; Mostafanezhad et al., 2014; Mostafanezhad et al., 2015; Ord, 2010; Terry, 2014), a certain degree of imbalance in the WWOOFing experience is evident. For example, evidence was found to show that WWOOF farmers bear the noneconomic costs of WWOOFing such as lack of privacy and ‘emotional labour’ involved in hosting WWOOFers (Mostafanezhad et al., 2014). Additionally, as demonstrated by McIntosh and Bonnemann (2006), farmers felt that WWOOFers treat their farm as a backpackers’ hostel and, therefore, do not “have the right spirit” (p. 95). On one side, Kosnik’s (2013) research reports that manipulation and exploitation are potential risks of total immersion into the farmers’ reality. On the other, volunteers’ exploit farmers’ hospitality when volunteers stay longer than they are welcome. Although these instances are possible in the WWOOFing experience (Kosnik, 2013), the current study moved beyond this ‘motivations

misbalance' (McIntosh, 2009) and in so doing drew attention to the issue of a lack of ethical accountability within the WWOOFing experience and programme.

The interactions between individuals revealed the tensions inherent in the 'dirty work'. The majority of these tensions were evident in the differing interpretations of values, expectations and the blurring of leisure and work. One tension for both parties was between paid employment and volunteering. Paid employers have contracts, are covered by regulations and are expected to stay within a particular time period. In contrast, volunteers may envisage the experience as a social or leisure hobby outlet, are not covered by regulations and can leave at any time. The key difference between paid employment and volunteering is the relationship of power between the individual and their 'boss' changes (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009). Added to this was the context of tourism as a leisure experience versus the reality of physical labour needed for many farm duties. Also, the divide between rural, countryside and urban, city knowledge was also evident in the comments from the participants and shaped their relations as well as the overall experience of the WWOOFing phenomena. Even though many participants considered WWOOFing as a mutually beneficial exchange, this theme illustrates that the values underpinning the WWOOFing exchange did not always provide the positive benefits sought and that often the parties took advantage of each other.

Aligned to this, the contemporary concept of volunteering underpins many of the foundations and expectations that frame the WWOOF programme. Volunteering, both formal and informal, is seen as in response to the fiscal and economic pressures facing sectors, organisations or communities. It is loosely defined as a "non-obligatory" practice without expectations of rewards, especially financial compensation and "that the actions in question benefit others" (Gasiorek & Giles, 2013, p. 2660). Acting as both structure and discourse, volunteerism, Ganesh and McAllum argue, was used to create social cohesion through highlighting stability, as well as "cohesion over discord, and individualism over collectivism" (p. 347). These concepts of volunteering, which is embedded in the philosophy of WWOOFing, start to reveal the tension in our findings especially around the dynamics of status between the farmer (host) and tourist (guest and volunteer), and the blurring of leisure and work. These dynamics are all played out and reflected in the embodied labour, particularly in terms of contractual expectations.

This study for the first time within the tourism literature touches on a lack of perceived ethical accountability within WWOOFing. Cherry and Jacob (2017) define accountability as "an

ethical duty stating that one should be answerable legally, morally, ethically, or socially for one's activities” (p. 162). Previous tourism research suggests that the nature of ethical values and volunteers’ motivations in volunteer tourism is bi-polar and relates to altruism and egoism (Clary et al., 1996; Nyland, 2001). In this research, the notion of ethical accountability is embedded in the underlying philosophy of WWOOF as an exchange programme. When farmers and WWOOFers join the WWOOF movement, they are subscribing to a known set of values and philosophies, despite whether or not they are primarily motivated by them. As stated by the Federation of WWOOF Organisations, the WWOOFing experience is based on mutual respect and trust, and the findings of this study revealed that this exchange can only work in that manner. In fact, fairness is a fundamental principle of the win-win exchange in WWOOFing, where:

The host asks for maturity, respect, loyalty, commitment and some ability in this exchange. A willingness to communicate honestly is essential. The WWOOFer expects nourishing food, clean accommodation, reasonable work hours and tasks and an integration into the family and its surroundings. (WWOOF International, 2012)

The above quote highlights the ideals of the WWOOF programme and host-guest experiences in WWOOFing. In a positive case, when the expectations of farmers and WWOOFers are met, the WWOOFing experience has the potential to be a win-win exchange for both participants. However, the findings of this research confirm that this is not always the case. Throughout the interviews, participants talked openly about their negative WWOOFing experiences. For example, farmers commented that some WWOOFers are disengaged and are not interested in organic farming or the host's way of life. In turn, WWOOFers commented that on some WWOOF farms they work more hours than initially agreed to in a conversation with a farmer, or that they are required to work more than the four to six hours a day suggested on the WWOOF New Zealand website.

Hence, the above examples illustrate the critical importance of communicating expectations. They also demonstrate the need to “understand the term volunteering in performative and action-orientated terms, as contextual activity and experience that individuals and groups and communities may go through” (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009, p. 347). Derived from the observation process in this research, it could be suggested that one possible reason for this miscommunication stems from the incomplete host profile listed in the WWOOF directory and on the WWOOF New Zealand website. However, in 2015, WWOOF New Zealand introduced a

new website where farmers can provide more detailed descriptions of their properties, such as a description of regular tasks available at the property, skills they offer to teach and are keen to learn. Hence, the organisation hopes that the new website will help to minimise the misunderstandings between farmers and WWOOFers.

Furthermore, the lack of a formal structure for WWOOFing relations, for example, a contract between the farmer (in this case employer) and a WWOOFer (in this case employee), such as that used in the case of Au Pair (Cox & Narula, 2003; Isaksen, 2010; Williams & Baláž, 2004), could lead to misunderstandings occurring between the participants. However, as the founder of WWOOF Sue Coppard noted, such ‘business’ formalities were not embraced by the original spirit of WWOOFing where the relations were based on mutual trust and respect (Pier, 2011). Furthermore, WWOOFing exchange is voluntary, and WWOOFers are free to leave at any time; farmers also reserve the right to turn a WWOOFer away. Thus, a win-win exchange in WWOOFing is based on mutual respect, trust, and interest in each other. Arguably, as this research has illustrated, these ethical values are open to interpretation, misunderstandings and possible exploitation.

One of the consequences of a lack of ethical accountability related to the New Zealand WWOOFing experience is thus the exploitation of volunteers’ labour. Many businesses in tourism and the farming industry advertise volunteer placements and refer to WWOOFing when they mean any arrangement where work is performed for accommodation and/or food. Cropp (2016a) claims that illegal ‘volunteer’ labour practice in New Zealand is ‘blatant and endemic’. Since late 2016, the New Zealand Labour Inspectorate has been investigating the illegal use of volunteer labour in several New Zealand businesses (Cropp, 2016a). The authorities point out that if volunteers are expected to work regular hours and receive the value of any payment, for example, accommodation, free Wi-Fi or food, then it is not volunteering, and this experience is equivalent to employment (Employment New Zealand, 2017). Hence, the idea of an exchange of ‘labour for food and accommodation’ that is used in WWOOFing provides fertile ground for exploitation of volunteers’ labour and tarnishes the image of the WWOOF programme. As its name is used to attract workers to those businesses, this contradicts with trust, which is one of the founding values of the WWOOF movement.

5. Conclusion

This research revealed that ‘dirt’ is an integral element of host-guest experiences in WWOOFing. The term ‘dirt’ was used to denote the physical nature of farm work but also used by the participants metaphorically to describe something unclean, unethical or not true. The participants in this research enjoyed being involved in gardening and farming activities ‘to get their hands dirty’ through the experience of physical labour on the farm. On the other hand, symbolically, ‘dirt’ was given to describe instances whereby the nature of the experience became imbalanced, unethical, or turned exploitative. A critical finding of the research revealed a lack of ethical accountability within the WWOOFing programme. The WWOOFing experience revealed critical tensions regarding the interpretation and practice of the philosophy underlying the WWOOF movement. This became evident in the relationship between farmers and participants, especially around the notion of consumption, urban-rural divide and volunteering work.

Within this paper, we have highlighted attention to the central role of communication for resolving and reshaping the boundaries of this movement’s relations and ideals. If the expectations and motivations of farmers and WWOOFers do coincide, then the experience can be a win-win exchange for both parties and the overall goal of creating sustainable lifestyles and farming. However, based on the participants’ experiences recounted in this paper, if one party privileges their agenda, then an antagonistic relationship can eschew. The result can then become unbalanced with the relations between farmers and WWOOFers unravelling to become fragile, unethical, and ‘dirty’.

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