

**WEEDING THROUGH THE WWOOF NETWORK: THE SOCIAL ECONOMY
OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM ON ORGANIC FARMS IN THE OKANAGAN
VALLEY**

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2011

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Interdisciplinary Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Okanagan)

December 2014

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical ethnographic examination of the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) network in the Okanagan Valley. My research questions explore the motivations for farmer hosts and volunteer tourists to participate in WWOOF, and the outcomes of their participation. Based on my interpretations of the responses of the hosts and volunteers that I spoke with, as well as my own observations while visiting farms, I found that the contributions of WWOOFers on the farms in the Okanagan went beyond their helping hands or the learning opportunities implied by the arrangements being framed as work-learn farm visits. For hosts, labour needs were marginal compared to many other perceived benefits of hosting, with greater emphasis being placed on the benefits of having WWOOFers for the cultural exchanges, the opportunity to share their knowledge, and a desire to give back if they had WWOOFed themselves. Similarly, volunteers chose to WWOOF for various kinds of experiences the network offered outside of the aspect of learning about organic farming, primarily the idea that they were getting to know Canadians in a different way than other tourist experiences, as well as the benefits of immersion for learning English. Building on these findings, with a focus on both the ideological and practical elements of WWOOF, what I saw emerging were social economies that operated at the level of the farm, the host farm's community, and at the broader level of the WWOOF network transnationally. The expansive organic consumer-base and infrastructural support already in place, such as farmers' markets, regulatory frameworks for production standards, and product availability in mainstream grocery stores have served the growing demand for organic foods. These structures, while criticized as diluting organic agriculture, could be utilized for implementing agendas that address issues of inequity in the food system. Considering these factors, I conclude my thesis with this proposal: that WWOOF, and the organic movement, have the potential to be powerful forces for greater social change and could be utilized to advance issues of social justice as they relate to food.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Jon Corbett and Mary Stockdale, for their guidance and support as I stumbled my way through this process. Both of your insights have been invaluable and I have appreciated your patience, encouragement, and gentle prodding when I needed it. And thanks to my committee member, Donna Senese, who offered sources and possible directions that I hadn't considered.

Two other faculty advisors I want to acknowledge are Rachelle Hole and Lawrence Berg. I appreciate the guidance you provided me while my supervisors were away on sabbatical, and the support you offered by employing me on your various projects.

I am grateful to have such generous and supportive parents, I can't thank you enough for everything, without your help I would not have gotten through this graduate degree.

I have much gratitude for Menno Salverda and Joanne Carey, my unofficial committee members. Menno, I will miss our conversations, they were instrumental in shaping my thinking about my research, and my views of the world. Joanne, you deserve many thanks for helping me navigate the university systems, and sharing your insider knowledge on graduate school. I will miss our chats over the file cabinet.

I've also been extremely lucky to have had many wonderful people to share this experience with. I'm so grateful for Eva-Marie, Elise, Marcella, Gabrielle, Casey, Heather, Sara, Earllene, Andy, and Levi, you have all been such amazing officemates, friends, and advisors.

Most importantly, many thanks to all of the volunteers and hosts who participated in my project and shared their stories with me. And I particularly appreciate those hosts who opened up their homes and farms to me, shared meals, and shared their knowledge. All of the people who have been involved have made this a wonderful experience for me.

I would also like to acknowledge that this research took place within unceded Syilx territory.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the two most thoughtful, joyful, spirited, kindest, and hilarious people I know – Elliott and Marlowe. Thank you for always challenging the way I see the world, and reminding me every day what’s important in life. I am proud to be your mom, and am so grateful for you both.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is based on my research with participants in the World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) network in the Okanagan. The WWOOF network has been connecting tourists with work-stays on organic farms for over forty years, and has grown from its origins in the United Kingdom into a global network with host farms in over 100 nations. The network has long been established in Canada, and volunteering (or WWOOFing, as participants refer to it) overseas has become an increasingly popular way to travel. Canada also has a growing number of farms that host volunteers who are visitors from other parts of Canada or from other nations. In 2011, a survey of the 968 WWOOF host farms reported an estimated 7,468 WWOOF stays on their farms during the previous year (WWOOF Canada 2012). Though each WWOOF arrangement is negotiated between individual hosts and volunteers, and hence the details of each stay will vary, the idea behind WWOOF is that the experience provides a learning opportunity for travelers who are expected to work a few hours per day in exchange for meals and a place to stay.

The first time I heard about WWOOF was through a friend who had spent time in Europe the year after we graduated from high school. I remember her telling me about her experience as a WWOOFer on an organic farm in Ireland. She joyfully recalled stories about her days spent on this farm half a world away as we sorted through her photos taken during her trip – photos of her in mud covered rubber boots with her hands plunged wrist deep into black soil as rain drizzled onto her shoulders, the green hills in the distance beyond her. At the time, I thought it seemed a strange thing to do while traveling, and was not something I would consider partaking in myself.

My interest in WWOOF is mainly out of curiosity, as I've been both a tourist and a worker in an organic market garden, but never combined those two ventures. Throughout my postsecondary education, as I learned more about agriculture and food systems from diverse cultural and political perspectives, I felt a rising academic curiosity about WWOOF. Academic attention on WWOOFing has largely been from studies of tourism, with WWOOF being viewed from the perspective of agri-tourism (McIntosh and Campbell 2001; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006), ecotourism (Choo and Jamal 2009), slow tourism (Lipman 2012), sustainable tourism (KotUulek 2012), and volunteer tourism (Ord 2010). I acknowledge that WWOOF is largely a tourism-oriented organization, however, rather than approaching WWOOF from a tourism perspective, my study examines the WWOOF network as it relates to the larger organic movement, specifically it asks what motivates people to participate in the network as a volunteer or as a host, and what are the outcomes of this participation?



Figure 1.1 Required footwear on the farm

The WWOOF network is closely associated with the organic movement, which is a holistic philosophical and methodological approach to agriculture that uses natural systems as models for production and pest control, and restricts the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers in favour of naturally-based inputs or management techniques. In the past, organic agriculture was a counter-cultural endeavour linked to other movements such as environmentalism or the back-to-the-land movements (Belasco 1989, Conford 2008). Over the years organic agriculture has become increasingly commercialized with a correlating growth in popularity. Presently, organic products can be found in most mainstream grocery stores and are no longer considered counter-cultural. Food studies scholars have named this contemporary period as post-organic, which implies organic products have been institutionalized through regulation and grown into a global commercial industry which operates alongside conventional agriculture, and small-scale organic farming (for example see Goodman and Goodman 2007).

At the outset of my study, I was interested in the meaning of the post-organic period for those participating in the WWOOF network. I pursued my research questions with WWOOF hosts and volunteers through a critical lens that was informed by theoretical perspectives that examine social movements as cognitive praxis, and as lifestyles. As well, I applied frameworks that focus on a movement's practical capacity to mobilize resources in its service, and other conceptions that focus on movement ideology and framing of ideas, values, and beliefs. These paradigms, drawn from social movement theories, guided me in formulating my research and throughout the entire process of reviewing literature, preparing interview schedules, gathering the data, and analyzing it.

My research study with WWOOF participants in the Okanagan was designed using a critical ethnographic approach. I used a reflexive methodology that included my own experiences, which is typical of a critical approach that utilizes participant observation as one method of data collection. Given this, I will use personal pronouns and first person perspectives where appropriate throughout this thesis.

Data was collected using the ethnographic methods of semi-structured interviews with host farmers and tourist volunteers, as well as participant observation on host farms. I conducted interviews with 27 people involved with the WWOOF network in the Okanagan. Interview data was combined with field notes made during my periods of participant observation on eight farms. During these periods I helped with all tasks being done the day of my visit alongside hosts and/or volunteers, as well as notes made after sharing a meal with hosts and their WWOOF volunteers.

My research project was driven by the questions: why do people participate in the WWOOF network in the Okanagan, and what is produced through these engagements? This thesis is my interpretation of how participants articulated their views on the reasons they participate in WWOOF, what the benefits are in participating, and how they construct themselves in that participation in terms of the roles they play as hosts or volunteers. Participation results in a number of things, but I have focused on the social economy that emerges through participation in WWOOF network in the Okanagan. Then, as part of my critical methodological approach, I take my analysis beyond a reporting of the findings of this project, into a discussion of the potentialities of advancing social justice through the WWOOF network.

This thesis is organized in nine chapters. Chapters two and three describe some background to provide context for this thesis. Chapter two outlines the development of the organic movement from a fringe agricultural practice into a global industry, which is now characterized as post-organic. Chapter three focuses on the origins of the WWOOF network, its association with the organic movement, and describes the slight shift in focus from a work-learn that emphasized sharing organic knowledge to one more centred on cultural exchange, as it grows in popularity and expands its membership throughout the world.

The theoretical frameworks that guided my data collection, analysis, and interpretations of findings are explained in chapter four. Several of these are drawn from social movement studies, such as resource mobilization, cognitive praxis, frame theory, and lifestyle movements when interpreting the motivations for people taking part in the WWOOF network. I also draw from Polanyi's work on social economy, and from Delanda's application of assemblage theory as an aid to visualizing the WWOOF network and what results from participation in it.

Chapter five outlines my methodological approach to this project and my research design. My approach to my project was a critical ethnographic examination of WWOOF using qualitative ethnographic methods of interviewing and participant observation. Details on the research process are included in this chapter, such as how I recruited participants, the number of interviews and farm visits I completed, and how data was managed and analyzed.

The next two chapters are comprised of the findings of my project. In chapter six I discuss the first part of my research question, which focuses on the reasons and benefits

associated with participation in the WWOOF network, and how WWOOF participants view their roles as they engage in WWOOF relationships. I include some of my own observations and experiences as part of these findings. The social economy that emerges from participation in the WWOOF network is the topic of chapter seven. This is discussed as an outcome of multiple relationships and factors that coalesce to form an assemblage, or sets of assemblages, that make up the WWOOF network.

Chapter eight builds on the findings and proposes the potential role of the WWOOF network in advancing further issues of social justice within the dominant food system. My proposal supports the re-centering of organic movement ideology that includes social justice, which I relate to more recent food movements such as food justice and food sovereignty as the way forward.

The final chapter concludes my thesis with a summation of the findings, reiterates the proposed path that WWOOF could take in line with other food movements, and suggests areas for future research.

Chapter 2. Organic Farming

My research questions examine reasons for participating in the WWOOF network, which ultimately is intertwined with the development of the organic movement. An understanding of how the organic movement arose, developed, and has moved into a post-organic period is important for forming a foundational understanding of the WWOOF network and for envisioning the potential future of ‘organic as a social movement’ and a transnational commodity. This chapter will provide an overview of the origins and growth of the organic movement, its associations with multiple sub-cultural groups over time, and its current iterations in mainstream markets as an increasingly commercial large-scale product, existing alongside smaller scale producers who adhere to organic agriculture as a way of life, as well as a method for food production.

2.1 Origins of the Organic Movement

The organic movement arose in the postwar period as a reaction among farmers against increasing agrochemical application and the mechanization of agriculture. Relying on long-standing methods as well as experimentation and innovation, farmers developed ways to intensify production without the use of chemical inputs and continued to cultivate their lands on the fringes of ‘conventional’ agriculture. Some academics note that early organic farmers’ practices and motivations were rooted in Christian beliefs regarding the primacy and perfection of natural cycles and the responsibility of people as stewards of the land (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007). Lord Northbourne coined the term “organic” in his work *Look to the Land* (1940) and distinguished this type of agriculture

and its adherents from other production systems (Kristiansen, Taji, and Reganold 2006: 3; Rigby and Caceres 2001: 24).

Farmers who held similar beliefs about their relationships with the land and responsibility to their communities formed their own networks that operated on the periphery of conventional agricultural systems. Through these networks, such as the Soil Association in the U.K. and the Rodale Institute in the U.S., farmers supported each other and exchanged information on innovative cultivation methods and pest control (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007; Kristiansen and Merfield 2006: 4-7). Organic agriculturalists also developed their own distribution systems and markets for their produce through these connections with other producers and supporters among their local communities (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007).

Organic agriculture became closely tied to counter-culture movements during the 1960s and 1970s and took on a stronger activist stance in the process. Environmentalists, anti-consumerists, anti-capitalists, and back-to-the-land idealists embraced the tenets of organic agriculture and strengthened the organic movement by broadening its base of supporters (Belasco 1989, Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007, Vos 2000). It was during this period that the Working Weekends on Organic Farms (WWOOF) network emerged. WWOOF is addressed in more detail in the following chapter. Briefly, the network was established to provide opportunities for people to link with organic farmers and exchange their labour for knowledge about organic production, and experiences in sustainable lifestyles, rural areas, or other countries. According to WWOOF Canada, this organization “is part of a world-wide effort to link volunteers with organic farmers and growers, promote an educational & cultural exchange, and build a global community who

are passionate about sustainable organic stewardship of food, animals and land while respecting nature and protecting natural resources” (WWOOF Canada 2013).



Figure 2.1 Ripening raspberries in the North Okanagan

In 1974, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM) was founded to advance more widespread adoption of organic principles globally. These principles outline a holistic approach to agriculture that includes concerns about social justice and animal welfare along with sustainable cultivation as part of the organic movement’s philosophical foundations (IFOAM 2005). Four principles have become codified as the guide to organic practices: 1) The Principle of Health, which refers to the maintenance and improvement of the health of soils, plants, animals, people, and the planet as an interrelated whole; 2) The Principle of Ecology, meaning that organic methods should be modeled on ecosystems and natural cycles to achieve greater harmony and balance in food production; 3) the Principle of Fairness, characterized by

respect, dignity, equity, and justice in relationships among people and other living beings to ensure quality of life for all; 4) The Principle of Care, which emphasizes the responsibilities of organic farmers in their role as stewards of the land (IFOAM 2005). These principles reflect the ideological roots of organic agriculture as a social movement. They are meant to inspire a vision of the potential impacts of widespread adoption of organic agriculture, and posit the need for change from conventional farming practices that do not align with these core beliefs.

Organic farmers underscore their role in providing healthy food for their communities, and maintaining the well-being of the farmlands under their stewardship (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007; Maxey 2006; Morgan and Murdoch 2000; Sumner 2005). The shared values of organic producers and supporters that have been institutionalized through international organizations such as IFOAM also influence certification bodies which now serve as regulators for the growing organic industry that has developed over the past couple of decades (Allen 2008; COABC 2005; Delind 2000; Friedmann and McNair 2008; Guthman 2004; IFOAM 2012).

There is a long history of organic farming in the Okanagan, with the community of organic farmers self-regulating from early on by developing their own grower networks, and establishing branding and labeling for local markets. The Silmilkameen Okanagan Organic Producers Association (SOOPA), founded 1986, and the North Okanagan Organic Association, founded 1989, are two of the earliest certification bodies in the region that were established by farmers to boost consumer confidence in locally produced organic products as organic foods became more sought after (Organic Farming Institute of British Columbia 2013).

2.2 Labeling and Certification

Labeling of products has been central to the success of the organic industry as it moved from the margins into the mainstream through the 1980's and 1990's. During this period, organics underwent gentrification as they were marketed as 'health food' by restaurants and natural food stores. Organic was also linked to environmentally and socially conscious consumption, alongside buying produce grown locally and in season (Belasco 1989; Cook 1994). For consumers purchasing organic foods through grocery stores, their only point of contact or way of connecting with farmers is via the labeling of foods. Faced with so many choices, organic producers wanted to ensure confidence in their products by developing industry-wide standards that consumers could trust. Guthman locates California as the birthplace of organic regulation, as the state was the first in North America to pass legislation specifically on the organic industry (1998). The California Organic Food Act, 1990, set the precedent for establishing minimum standards to guide third-party certifiers and promote accountability of producers who were becoming further removed from the people buying their products. The standards have received criticism, as they emerged out of negotiations among organic producers, corporations, certifiers, and other stakeholders, many of whom were more interested in the profitability of the growing market for organic products, and less interested in advancing a social movement (Delind 2000; Guthman 2004; Jaffee and Howard 2010; Mutersbaugh 2004). The standards codified by California law, in comparison to the principles established by IFOAM fourteen years prior, essentially were reduced to a list of acceptable practices, techniques, and inputs that a farmer may use and still label products 'organic'. The social justice and philosophical aspects of the organic movement

were made marginal, enabling larger-scale, industrial-like operations to follow the certification guidelines, leading to the birth of “Big Organic”, which is practiced as agribusiness and is less concerned with the earlier ideals of the organic movement (Allen and Kovach 2000; Delind 2000; Vos 2000).

Organic farmers in B.C. were facing similar circumstances as those that led to the California Organic Food Act. Here, the response was to form the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia (COABC) in an effort to limit the confusion that a growing number of certification organizations with differing standards were causing for consumers and producers alike (COABC, 1995 British Columbia Organic Industry Strategic Plan). Official endorsement from the provincial government came in 1993 with the implementation of the Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act that gave COABC the power to accredit certification associations within the province (BC Ministry of Agriculture 1993).

Under the federal Organic Products Regulation in 2009, the term ‘certified’ became redundant as only products that have third party certification may use the Canada Organic label when products are sold inter-provincially and internationally (Canadian Food Inspection Agency 2009). The COABC has implemented similar rules of use for their label with even stricter parameters that include products sold within the province in addition to inter-provincially and internationally traded goods (2009). There has been resistance to this institutionalization of the term ‘organic’ by a number of organic producers (COABC 2013). The number of (certified) organic farms in the province rose from 452 in 2005 to 569 in 2010 (Statistics Canada 2012). The 2006 Census of

Agriculture reported 2,767 ‘uncertified organic’¹ producers in BC. This category has since been dropped from the census, but given that COABC launched a research initiative in 2013 targeted at bringing more producers without certification under their regime suggests there remain a significant number of uncertified farms using organic methods (COABC 2013).

2.3 Farming in the Post-Organic Period

The multiplicity of factors that producers consider in their choice to certify (or not) points to the diversity within the organic community about the reasons for farming organically. There is a distinction between those who farm organically out of primarily ideological or philosophical motivations and those who are more pragmatic or even profit-driven (Reider 2007: 11; Rigby and Caceres 2001: 28) and who do not necessarily consider themselves to be engaged in a project of social change. As organic has become more popular in the mainstream, it has appeal for some farmers as a means to increase their profit margins (Reider 2007; Rigby and Caceres 2001; Wittman 2012). Increased product popularity, institutionalization of standards, and the entry of larger-scale farms into the organic industry lead to arguments that we are in an era of post-organic agriculture (See Clark 2007; Goodman and Goodman 2007; Guthman 1998). Post-organic production has been stratified into streams, differentiated by the scale of production and the intended end point of consumption. The organic industry consists of large-scale, corporatized industrial farm operations targeting international markets,

¹ Producers who purport to use organic methods but are not certified by any third party and accredited certifier.

alongside small-scale farms producing for local markets, and other operations that fall somewhere on the continuum (Greene 2007).

Producing organically is labour intensive, and many farmers require paid, and preferably skilled, workers at some point during the growing season. Small-scale organic farms also rely heavily on family, and it is common in organic farming families that one partner generates income from non-farm employment. In the Okanagan, organic farms that host WWOOFers tend to be small to mid-scale in size, where the unskilled work of volunteers can be valuable and the cultural exchange aspect of WWOOF is better appreciated when the host and volunteer interact more often and develop a relationship, things that are difficult to do on a larger farm with many employees. Post-organic farmers may or may not identify with the larger organic movement as a social movement (Clark 2007; Rigby and Caceres 2001), but labour needs remain the same. The higher price point of organic foods grown smaller-scale farmers is somewhat reflective of those labour costs, but is also what makes small farms viable in a competitive market. Without getting into the debate on the true cost of food production, or whether or not the higher prices of organics simply stem from and reinforce the elitism associated with organic products, small farms face numerous barriers, and 'going organic' (meaning becoming a certified producer) as a measure of boosting consumer confidence offers a more stable livelihood for some (Rigby and Caceres 2001). For some smaller, more marginal farms, hosting WWOOFers who can offer a bit of extra help through their labour relieves some of the pressure for farm operations as they compete in post-organic markets.

Chapter 3. The Birth and Development of the WWOOF Network

“What is WWOOF?”

This question is posed on the home page of WWOOF Canada, with the succinct corresponding explanation: “WWOOF is a help exchange - In return for volunteer help, WWOOF hosts offer food, accommodation and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles” (2013). The WWOOF network was established forty-four years ago, and has experienced exponential growth during its lifetime (WWOOF International 2013). This chapter will explore the history of the WWOOF network, and examine how the aims and purposes expressed by the network itself, as well as those of participants, have changed through its expansion into a global network.

WWOOFing is promoted as an alternative and inexpensive means of travelling abroad with the understanding that it would likely appeal mostly to tourists with a pre-existing interest in organic agriculture but little practical experience on an organic farm (Maycock 2008; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006; WWOOF Canada 2013). Analogous to the organic farming associations that continue to disseminate information among the community of farmers, WWOOF is another grassroots initiative that supports and promotes organic production.

3.1 The Birth of WWOOF

Upon beginning this project, I researched available sources on the origins of the WWOOF network. The most popular lore holds that the network emerged from within the organic movement in Britain. Accounts report that Sue Coppard, a young

professional living in London, founded WWOOF in 1971 with the initial acronym standing for Working Weekends on Organic Farms (Maycock 2008; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006; WWOOF Canada 2013). The first account that I read claimed that Coppard was a supporter of organic agriculture and wanted to [re-]connect with the people who produced the food that she consumed, learn about organic production methods, and support the organic movement beyond her own consumption choices. Establishing the WWOOF network enabled other urban-dwelling organic supporters to build relationships with organic farmers, and extend and strengthen the organic movement (Maycock 2008; WWOOF Canada 2013).

A 2006 interview with Coppard (The Guardian Newspaper, reposted on WWOOF Canada website) reveals that her initial intentions were more oriented toward fulfilling a desire to escape her urban setting. She recalled, “I desperately missed being able to get out to the countryside. I thought that if I offered to help out on a farm, they would let me stay” (2006, reposted in WWOOF Canada 2013). According to Coppard, she was exposed to the organic ideology² while working for *Resurgence* magazine. Fuelled by her longing to get out of the city, it occurred to her that organic farmers, whose production methods are labour intensive, might be more willing to take on unskilled workers for a couple of days a week. Looking for a way to get in touch with organic farmers, she contacted the editor of *Soil Association* magazine (which has been dedicated to the organic movement) who put her in touch with the vice-principal of Emerson College, Sussex, where farmers were being trained in biodynamic agriculture on the 200-acre college farm. The farm managers reluctantly agreed to a trial weekend, so Coppard

² By ideology, I mean a shared set of ideas and beliefs that guide practices of organic producers.

placed a recruitment ad in London's Time Out magazine, which resulted in fifteen responses. That first trial involved three volunteer workers, including Coppard, who described the experience as "a blissful weekend" spent helping on the farm, enjoying the rural setting, and socializing with the students training there (2006, reposted on WWOOF Canada 2013). This initial positive encounter instituted the connection to organic agriculture specifically as Coppard went on to organize the WWOOF network.



Figure 3.1 The view from the porch, near Kamloops, BC.

3.2 Growth and Expansion

While WWOOF's emergence from the organic movement may have been incidental, the network has nonetheless played an important supporting role for organic farmers and growing the organic movement internationally. The number of hosts and volunteers expanded rapidly within the United Kingdom, and soon WWOOF went international as networks were established elsewhere in Europe and New Zealand

(WWOOF International 2013). WWOOF Canada, initially linked to the U.S. network, was established in 1985 with five host members listed (WWOOF Canada 2013, personal communication). The acronym was changed to ‘Willing Workers on Organic Farms’ in the early 1980s to reflect the longer durations that volunteers were staying and the evolving nature of the expectations central to these arrangements. The designation of ‘worker’, however, has been an issue in instances where WWOOF has been confused with migrant labour programs, and often conflicts with travel visa requirements (WWOOF International 2013). An organic farming family whom I spoke with that had been farming and hosting in the Okanagan for 25 years mentioned this misunderstanding of the network by state authorities. These hosts had heard recent reports through the network of travelers being turned back at the border because of their plan to volunteer their labour on a farm while on vacation; consequently, the couple had been advising WWOOFers not to disclose that they intend to WWOOF when they arrive in Canada. Another acronym change, ‘World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms’, was conceived of as a solution to this misinterpretation of the WWOOF network as well as an acknowledgement of the global tourism prospects it provides (WWOOF International 2013).

Each national WWOOF organization, and the WWOOF Independents³, operate autonomously and organize their network as best fits their host and volunteer members, while maintaining affiliation with other WWOOF organizations and adhering to an accepted set of principles, that include the concept of knowledge and culture exchange, as well as the emphasis on the basic obligations of hosts to provide room and board for their

³ WWOOF Independents represents WWOOF hosts in countries without a national WWOOF organization.

volunteer labourers' time and energies (Maycock 2008; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006; WWOOF Canada 2013). As the network grew, the benefits of more formalized collaboration and consensus on the direction of WWOOF began to be recognized. The first International WWOOF Conference was held in Britain in 2000. Representatives of fifteen national WWOOF organizations discussed the development of guidelines that would clearly elucidate the expectations/obligations of WWOOFers and hosts, and put forth a mission statement of sorts of what it means to 'go WWOOFing'. It was proposed that an International WWOOF Association be created in order to support fledgling WWOOF organizations, particularly in the Global South, with the aim of equal representation for all WWOOF organizations (WWOOF International 2013). Since 2000, conferences have been held in Japan, 2006, and in Korea, 2011, where participants pledged to work toward the formation of the Federation of WWOOF Organizations (FoWO) with the anticipated involvement of over 50 WWOOF organizations worldwide (WWOOF International 2013). The FoWO announced its achievement as the formal representative body for all WWOOF affiliates in June 2013 (WWOOF International 2013).

3.3 Changes for the Organization

The WWOOF network has grown wider and more extensive in support of and in concurrence with the increased popularity and spread of the organic movement, though not necessarily due to it. Growth and shifting needs and desires of WWOOF participants have necessitated some changes for the organization(s) that include shifts in the orientation towards a more globalized perspective. WWOOF maintains its original tenet

of connecting farmers with extra helpers in a labour/knowledge exchange. It has always been primarily an opportunity for tourism, but the significance of the cultural exchange developed to a greater degree as WWOOF became a larger international network. An archived webpage from WWOOF International back in 2000 states the aims of WWOOF are to support organic farmers and the organic movement, and enable town-dwellers to experience life on a farm and learn about organic growing methods (via Way Back Machine 2013). This description adheres closely to the roots of the WWOOF network, with the tourism aspect equated to a rural experience, rather than a cross-cultural one. Other national WWOOF organizations, such as WWOOF Canada, WWOOF Japan, and WWOOF Mexico, explicitly mention learning about the culture of the hosts as part of the exchange on both archived pages (2005 via Way Back Machine 2013) and their present webpages (WWOOF Canada 2013; WWOOF Japan 2013; WWOOF Mexico 2013). Differences between WWOOF International and other WWOOF organizations suggests that the expectations of hosts or administrators is that most of their volunteers will be international travelers seeking a particular kind of travel experience within a cultural context perceived as different from their own, rather than an opportunity to visit the countryside.

Capacity to trace the WWOOF network prior to organizations going online is limited. Each national organization print published its own catalogue of host listings that volunteers had to request, and updates or information for WWOOF members was communicated through newsletters sent by post. One host participant I spoke with who had been hosting prior to host listings going online reported that he used to have regular phone conversations with the WWOOF Canada administrator, but that since everything

now is done online he feels somewhat cut off from the network (H115). The 1997 annual newsletter for host members of WWOOF Canada (which was subsequently uploaded via a host farm website) related details on the past year's membership. By 1996, the network had grown to include 280 hosts across Canada, with 46% of those in B.C. alone, and nearly 1000 WWOOFers registered (Vanden Heuvel 1997, via First Nature Farms website). Nearly two-thirds of the volunteers that year were women, and Canadian nationals were the largest group, followed by visitors from Japan, then Western Europe and the U.S., with smaller numbers travelling from a number of places including Korea, Denmark, Italy, South Africa, and New Zealand, among others (Vanden Heuvel 1997, via First Nature Farms website). WWOOF Canada went online with its own webpage in 2003/2004, and reports a huge jump in membership that same year, starting with 243 host members increasing and to 569 in 2004, with volunteer numbers rising from 912 to 2,137, and continuing to grow. Online host listings were made accessible in 2009, and in that year there were 832 hosts and 3,634 volunteers registered. 2012 membership peaked at 1,016 hosts and 4,450 volunteers, and dropped slightly the following year to 970 and 4,150 members respectively (WWOOF Canada 2013, personal communication). Host survey results from 2011 do not show whether more women than men continue to volunteer, but the home countries of the majority of volunteers remain parts of Western Europe and Canada; the number of visitors from Japan had dropped to 4% (from 13% in 1997), and a handful of volunteers continue coming from a diversity of areas, although now nations in Latin America and Eastern Europe are better represented, which is a shift from the trends a decade ago (WWOOF Canada 2012).

3.4 Changes for Participants of WWOOF

Several hosts from the Okanagan who participated in this project have been accepting WWOOF volunteers for at least ten years. I took the opportunity to ask those hosts with a decade or more of experience in the network if they noticed any changes in WWOOF, in terms of general orientation as an organization, or in the volunteers they themselves hosted. The decline in the number of visitors from Japan was notable for several hosts, as was the rise in travelers from Germany and France, trends that were supported by the 2011 host survey data (WWOOF Canada 2012). One host family confirmed that they were now getting requests from people travelling from previously underrepresented areas of the world, again, as suggested in the survey results. In the past year, these hosts had visits from two sets of WWOOFers from the Czech Republic for the first time (H105&H106). Another new development that was discussed was the use of WWOOF for language immersion by groups in Asia. Learning a new language is often a motivation for travelers staying in a country for an extended period of time, however, hosts described having hosted WWOOFers who were part of a larger group that had come to learn English in Vancouver, and then had been paired up for WWOOF stays in the Interior arranged for them by the larger organization who had organized their trip in order to further their language skills in a community setting. These arrangements were not seen as an abuse of the network, but did cause some concerns for the hosts involved. One host farmer felt it was placing unreasonable expectations on hosts to teach WWOOFers English, and that the language barrier made giving instructions challenging and interactions were limited. This arrangement also potentially placed WWOOFers in a situation they were not suited to and would not have chosen for themselves, making the

experience less enjoyable for both hosts and ‘volunteers’. Going online has increased the accessibility of the WWOOF network; however, according to comments by hosts from the 2011 host survey, greater accessibility for budget travelers may have resulted in more mismatches for hosts with volunteers who seem less interested in farming and are not as willing to do the work that is a central part of the exchange (WWOOF Canada 2012).

Another shift that has occurred over the years was the relaxing of the requirement for hosts to be organic farmers. WWOOF Canada lists in the criteria for hosts that they must have farms that are organic (indicating certification) or they must use sustainable methods, or they must live sustainable lifestyles (2013). This third option is open to interpretation, and a number of hosts that I spoke with were concerned that this represented a move away from the original intent of WWOOF, or at least “diluted” it (H113). Nearly every participant in this study had heard stories about experiences with hosts that were not farmers, or even gardeners, and had volunteers do a variety of non-agricultural jobs for them such as housekeeping in a bed and breakfast, serving in a café, helping with construction work, or fixing up old vehicles. It was felt that this was against the spirit of WWOOF. In fact, I had eliminated one host participant from this study because a preliminary visit to the property revealed that it wasn’t a farm of any kind, and the property owner/WWOOF host planned to develop it as conference venue and retreat. Thus, this host did not meet my criteria as it was not a productive farming operation.

In the past, WWOOF Canada administrators have received complaints, but it is beyond their capacity to exhaustively monitor and regulate the network. The role of the administrators is to manage the website, maintain records, collect fees, and update communication throughout the network. If hosts or volunteers need to be notified of

something, such as a host misrepresenting the nature of their operation, the only thing that can be done is to post alerts so that if WWOOFers choose to stay with such hosts they have prior knowledge that farmwork is not what will be expected of them during those stays. If there are complaints of other types, such as mistreatment of hosts or volunteers by a particular member, the only recourse through the network is for administrators to revoke memberships. Verification of profiles or policing of members is not part of the administrators' role. The swell in the popularity of WWOOF, possibly due to the wider accessibility of the network via the internet, seems to have led to the codification and institutionalization of WWOOF principles through FoWO (see section 3.2) as a response to issues associated with growth such as the ones above.

3.5 WWOOF in the Literature

Since its founding, WWOOF has been a type of tourism that appeals to certain individuals searching for an alternative experience. From an academic standpoint, WWOOF is generally understood as a form of alternative tourism that is tied to organic farming or smallholder farm operations. It has been conceived of as agri-tourism, because of its focus on farms (McIntosh and Campbell 2001; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006), and as ecotourism as it's seen to be nature-based and supportive of preserving rural landscapes (Choo and Jamal 2009). WWOOF also displays characteristics of slow tourism, as it involves longer visits to one place and deeper immersion in the communities where it takes place (Lipman 2012). It has been studied as sustainable tourism, as well, for some of those same reasons, as longer stays mean lower carbon footprints for travelers, and because WWOOF is in support of 'sustainable lifestyles', a

category that includes organic agriculture (KotUulek 2012). Additionally, the voluntary nature of the work exchange enables WWOOF to be classed as volunteer tourism (Ord 2010). WWOOFing is inextricably linked to the organic movement, but is not considered a social movement on its own merit. The nature of WWOOFing results in a values-based system of exchange that places social relations as central to trade; these types of exchange systems are known as social economies, which will be discussed in a later chapter, but WWOOF itself will be evaluated as tourism not simply because that is how it is treated by academics, but because that is how it is perceived by hosts and volunteers engaged in the WWOOF network. This does not diminish the contributions that WWOOF has made for the organic movement, or for individual farmers. It points to the potentialities of grassroots organizing in support of food movements, the power of the collective, and the ways in which building international relationships can move us toward greater food sovereignty⁴.

⁴ From the Declaration of Nyeleni, 2007, the transnational grassroots peasant or small farmer collective of organizations of La Via Campesina defined food sovereignty as follows: Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems

Chapter 4. Theoretical Frameworks

Examining the organic movement and the WWOOF network in the contemporary post-organic society requires that I draw from multiple theoretical traditions. According to prominent social movement scholars Della Porta and Diani, the study of social movements entails examination of “how ideas, individuals, events, and organizations are linked to each other in broader processes of collective action, with some continuity over time.” (2006: 5) This chapter will explain four different frameworks that have arisen from social movement studies that have provided a lens for my approach to the WWOOF network, as well as the background of two additional frameworks, which I will employ in conceptualizing the outcomes of participation in the WWOOF network. Starting with some background on theories on collective behaviour, I will go on to describe the frameworks that I have drawn on in examining participation in WWOOF which include resource mobilization, frame theory, cognitive praxis, and study of lifestyle movements. In explaining the findings of this study, I found the work of Manuel Delanda with assemblage theory to be an effective outline for conceptualizing the social economy that arises from the WWOOF network. I will address these two concepts at the end of this chapter on theoretical frameworks.

4.1 Collective Behaviour Theories

Prior to the waves of activism of the 1960s, social movements were largely conceived of by Marxist social theorists (see Arendt 1958 and Kornhauser 1959) as reactionary outbursts by marginalized individuals who spontaneously banded together in

response to mounting strains on their livelihoods or the crossing of some kind of threshold by those in power (Turner & Killian 1957; Smelser 1962). Scholars explained collective actions using ideas drawn from social psychology and were heavily influenced by the work of Marx and Durkheim. Social movement theorists often refer to traditional models as collective behaviour. Collective behaviour theories explain actions using notions of crowd mentality or tensions due to relative deprivation. (see Turner & Killian 1957; Smelser 1962; Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1982; and Gurr 1970; and Snow & Oliver 1995).

Theories of collective behaviour stemming from Marxist and Durkheimian perspectives framed social movements as erratic, unorganized expressions of discontent. This perspective questions *why* events (such as protests or riots) happen, not so much *how*, and the role of agency is largely left out (McAdam 1982). Olson, on the other hand, theorized that individuals would base decisions related to whether or not to become involved in collective action through a cost-benefit analysis of the impacts (1965). His *rational choice* approach addressed the lack of personal agency in collective behaviour theories, including the idea that incentives induced people to participate. What rational choice theory cannot explain, however, is the reasoning to take part in high-risk protests, under the threat of military or police violence, or actions that may result in personal losses such as ruined careers or relationships (Cohen 1985). In order to understand participation in movements that might result in personal harm, value-oriented approaches that incorporated ideology were needed.

Clearly, conceptions of social movements as spontaneous bursts of activity by groups of people do not describe the organic movement. However, the concept of

rational choice is a key component of the traditional collective behaviour theories that is useful for understanding this movement because it clearly articulates the role of personal agency of participants. Organic farmers form of 'protest' was, and continues to be, producing food in the manner that upholds their own ideals which in itself is an expression of resistance to the dominant form of agriculture (food production). More recent theories on collective action that move beyond earlier conceptions of collective behaviour contain elements that can account for movements that are 'lived out' every day, requiring sustained commitment and the development of collective identities.

4.2 Resource Mobilization Theory and New Social Movements

The student movements and counterculture activism of the sort that defined the 1960s and 1970s challenged prevailing theories on social movements. These movements were considered a departure from previous forms of collective action, and necessitated new approaches to studying them. One response was resource mobilization theory, which moved away from social psychology perspectives and examined how resources, which can be both material and non-material, are employed to carry out organizational goals. Resource mobilization analyses evaluate how materials, (such as funds, vehicles, spaces, or even things like banners) ideas (which would also include different knowledges and skills), and people are put to use in strategies of recruitment and mobilization (see Cohen 1985; McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam et al 1996). Tilly outlined a goal-oriented focus of collective action in his work *From Mobilization to Revolution* (1978), claiming that a movement's success relies on action rather than ideology. Following Tilly, resource mobilization scholars were interested in strategies

deployed and rational interaction of those involved in collective actions (Jenkins 1983; Cohen 1985; Mueller 1992; Buechler 1995). Critics of resource mobilization approaches claim that examinations of severely repressed and marginalized groups with very few resources who resist in less outward forms are excluded from this approach (Melucci 1989; Scott 1990; Burdick 1995). Departing from psychological explanations also tended to leave resource mobilization paradigms devoid of personal experiences and feelings or views that motivate and reward individuals involved (Zald 1992).

The WWOOF network fits with resource mobilization when seen as a resource of human labour employed in advancing organic farming and disseminating knowledge. Unfortunately, the resource mobilization paradigm leaves out personal experience and ideology which are central motivators for WWOOF participants. However, combining resource mobilization theory with other social movement theories that incorporate motivating factors is useful when looking at the emergent social economy of WWOOF (which will be discussed in section 4.6).

Another dominant paradigm that was developed to discuss the activism of the 1960s and 1970s sought to classify this split from traditional collective action under the form of New Social Movements (NSM). Here, 'New' refers to a change in how academics viewed social movements and their focus of inquiry rather than the movement itself, although innovative forms of resistance would fall under this umbrella as well (Saunders 2013). NSM approaches place greater importance on the role of culture and identity in collective action than previous social movement theories. Described as decentralized and fluid, NSMs rely on direct participation of those who identify with the movement in either symbolic resistance or direct actions (Saunders 2013). For actors

involved in NSMs, solidarity and the formation of a collective identity can be a goal in itself (Melucci 1988). For example, Melucci (1988) cited the feminist and environmental movements of his day as collective identity movements with a political agenda. Based on shared culture, values, and identity, such movements constitute a way of life for participants that is in opposition to dominant, state-ordered society (see Habermas 1981; Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989; Calhoun 1993).

From within the theoretical milieu of NSM, two approaches clearly emerge to provide useful frameworks for studying the organic movement and WWOOF: framing and lifestyle movement theory. Framing emphasizes ideology, identity, and culture, while lifestyle movement theory looks at how those concepts are put into practice. Also of utility is Eyerman and Jamison's method of combining ideology with practice in social movements, which they call 'cognitive praxis' (1991), I will discuss these in the next three sections.

4.3 Framing of Social Movements

Frame theory is part of the social constructivist model, which encompasses emotions, culture, and identity in its approach to studying collective action (Oliver et al 2003). Drawing from the work of Goffman (1974) in which *frames* are seen as interpretive maps, Benford and Snow define *frames* as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (2000: 614). James M. Jasper points to the role of claiming a moral high ground and the use of negative and positive emotions in constructing a frame for mobilization (1998, 2011). For Jasper, the success of moral positioning is key to

motivational framing, frame alignment, and the cohesion of collective identities. For instance, empathy or indignation can be nurtured into powerfully motivating emotions in mobilizing against perceived injustices. Organic farmers often speak about the connection between their practices and their sense of responsibility and concern for the environment (Conford 2008; Vos 2000). Their collective identity within their communities of practice is predicated on the perception that farming sustainably equates to farming the ‘right’ way⁵ (Belasco 1989; Fromartz 2007).

The framing approach can be employed as both a framework for analysis and a methodological tool in explaining how meaning is produced within a social movement. Culture constitutes the basis from which meaning and ideas are drawn, and can act as a constraint or a precipitator. Scholars argue that under a framing approach, meaning is deliberately constructed/negotiated in order for it to have the most resonance for social movement actors and be successful in motivating action (Snow & Benford 1992; Gamson 1992; Benford & Snow 2000; Tarrow 1994). As Klandermans points out, “[c]ollective beliefs and identities alike are formed and transformed through public discourse” (1992: 93). This process underscores the importance of frame alignment in social movements in how members of the collective construct the meaning behind the movement as well as how those outside the movement perceive its purpose. Contemporary collective action is less concerned with attaining political power or preserving economic status; social movements, particularly NSMs, are more focused on promoting certain value systems, and for behaviour that adhere to specific moral codes (Della Porta & Diani 2006).

⁵ What I’m referring to here is the tendency towards moralizing that often takes place in the discourse surrounding organic farming, including the concept that organic farming is better for the environment and for our health, and is therefore ‘good’, as opposed to conventional practices which within that discourse are painted as destructive and toxic, or ‘bad’.

Motivating individuals to act relies on assigning meaning to experiences or practices that “align” beliefs of the movement with those of the movement participants. This convergence is known as *frame alignment* (Benford and Snow 2000; Della Porta & Diani 2006; Jasper 2011). The organic movement was able to garner greater support through its associations with ‘health food’ and local food trends throughout the 1980s and 1990s because the framing of what organic food represented for consumers became *aligned* with consumers desires for better health and better quality food (Belasco 1989).

Snow and Benford (1988) have outlined how *framing* can be viewed as a three step process in which the issue to be addressed is defined (diagnostic framing), then alternative courses or solutions are presented (prognostic framing), and finally the reasoning for going forward with the collective action is explained (motivational framing). In this manner, framing not only produces meaning and identities for movement participants, it provides a vision of what is possible to accomplish by participation in a movement which motivates participants to attain those goals. The organic movement is diagnostically framed as a more environmentally sustainable and healthier approach to agriculture that, as a prognostic frame, proscribes the rejection of the use of synthetic chemicals in favour of more natural methods of fertilization and pest control. The movement’s motivational framing is the collective view for the need to provide environmental stewardship for the future, as well as the responsibility to produce healthy, good quality products. The WWOOF network is framed as supporting this vision and efforts at achieving it.

4.4 The Cognitive Praxis Perspective

Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1991) proposed an approach to studying social movements that is complimentary to frame theory. Their views build from the work of Melucci, Giddens, and Habermas on the formation of collective identity with specific attention to the interactions between and among individuals within a movement, the collective as a whole, and larger societal level institutions (Eyerman & Jamison 1991). Their *cognitive praxis* framework for studying social movements emphasizes the interactive process of knowledge production and the understanding that actors have of the meaning of their actions (1991: 3). As the authors describe: “It is precisely in the creation, articulation, formulation of new thoughts and ideas – new knowledge – that a social movement defines itself in society” (1991: 55).

Three dimensions of this knowledge production process are outlined – cosmological, technological, and the organizational. The cosmological articulates the issue and contextualizes it within the perspective of participants in the movement as to what the ideal society or world might look like should the issue be resolved. The technical dimension are the strateg(ies) and actions to deploy in order to bring about that collective ideal. The third element, the organizational, refers to the means by which the new knowledge that has been co-created within the movement is coordinated and spread beyond the movement participants (Eyerman & Jamison 1991). The final defining aspect of a social movement, according to the authors, is its *praxis*, meaning that the ways in which movement participants put their knowledge, skills, and ideas into practice and the enduring commitment to those practices is what makes a social movement successful. However, the success of a movement also, in their view, necessitates its demise as the

more the knowledge and practice of a movement becomes part of general society, or in other words as society becomes more aligned with the movement's ideal society, the movement itself becomes obsolete (1991: 4).

The framework of cognitive praxis can help examine how the organic movement arose, spread, became institutionalized and moved into the post-organic period. The WWOOF network fits as part of the technological and organizational dimensions of how the knowledge of food production is put into practice to bring about changes in society and the way the knowledge is disseminated beyond organic producers. Cognitive praxis is particularly useful when looking at how the participants in the WWOOF network understand the meaning of their actions as hosts or as volunteers.



Figure 4.1 Thinning a row of wine grapes in a vineyard in the Central Okanagan

4.5 Lifestyle Movements

Looking at organic as a contemporary social movement is salient when conceived as a *lifestyle movement*. A lifestyle movement refers to diffuse individuals or small

groups working towards social change via daily actions that cohere with their values and identity, and serve as challenges to the state or a particular social-cultural structure. Lifestyle movements are usually carried out outside of institutions and endure over long periods. Participants derive personal satisfaction and identify with a broader collective although their actions are individualistic (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones 2012; Taylor & Whittier 1992).

Political change is not always the goal of lifestyle movements, therefore other conceptions of social movements that include organizational elements and protest cycles are less relevant for examining actions that are part of daily life. Lifestyle movements fit Zald's characterization of social movements as actions that are constituted through ideology (2000), as well as Snow's definition that includes non-political challenges to existing authority structures and dominant systems (2004). Other NSM scholars have included ideas about self-awareness and the politicization of identity and personal choice (Giddens 1991; Bennett 1998; Taylor & Whittier 1992) and conceptualize disparate movement actors as 'communities of meaning' (Cohen 1985) who rely on ideological synergies for group cohesion and collective identity for these networks.

In their work on lifestyle movements, Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012) situate the site of social change as the individual, who understands his or her own actions as contributing to the larger collective movement to effect change on a broader level. Adherents incorporate collective values into their everyday practices, giving the movement longevity and stability (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones 2012). The movement proliferates through informal social networks, as well as exposure due to adherent's promotion in public arenas or by association with non-profits or social movement

organizations. Participants in the WWOOF network often hear about it from other travelers, or friends who have WWOOFed, and WWOOF hosts and volunteers seem to be mainly responsible for encouraging new participants and informally endorsing the network.

While many individuals who engage in lifestyle movements would not participate in conventional political resistance such as civil disobedience or protest (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones 2012), their daily practices have impacts and can be conceived of as a type of direct action that is prolonged and continuous. Commitment to the movement depends on cultivating the self in alignment with the values of the collective, and participants often identify with the movement by forming emotional and moral attachments to it (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones 2012; Hunt & Benford 2004). Lifestyle movements centre on the self while fusing personal values with political actions in everyday life.

For participants in the WWOOF network, hosting or volunteering represents the embodiment of their values and ethical orientations. The network provides connections for individuals among the diffuse communities of meaning who are resisting conventional production and the dominant agricultural structure through their everyday practices. The tools of this resistance are the land, the food produced, and peoples' bodies, as labour is the critical keystone on which organic farming rests. This materiality, as well as corporeality, is what sets the organic movement apart from other lifestyle movements that are mainly ideologically constructed (Carolan 2011; Miller 2008). Movements such as veganism, or virginity pledgers manifest their values through abstentions; the organic movement, while it does involve refraining from certain

chemicals and technologies, is heavily oriented towards the production of tangible, material items, ie. food. WWOOF can be thought of as a tool of the organic movement, in the network's role in providing some farmers with labouring bodies and as a mechanism for spreading knowledge about organic methods.

4.6 WWOOF: Assemblage Theory and Emergent Properties

After exploring the motivations and benefits for both hosts and volunteers of participating in the WWOOF network using frame theory to examine the alignment with the larger WWOOF network's ideology, I will turn to examine the outcomes of the WWOOF network. Here, I found Manuel Delanda's application of assemblage theory a useful tool for this purpose, particularly his discussion of emergent properties (2006). Through this framework, I propose an emergent property of WWOOF to be a social economy. I will briefly describe both concepts in the following sections.

The concept of assemblage is drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who envisioned social networks as complex conglomerations that are constituted by individuals, knowledge, ideas, relationships, and common aims and interests, as well as infrastructural and material elements. The key to seeing social entities as assemblages is recognizing that the whole is made up of varied parts with their own characteristics, and that unity is maintained through the associations and interrelationships between diverse parts as they gather, cohere, and disperse along their own individual trajectories (Delanda 2006). Delanda (2006) uses the example of a city as an assemblage of people, organizations, neighbourhoods, interpersonal networks, who interact with each other and articulate with infrastructural aspects of a city. Each individual, or each organization, or

each street or bridge, retains its own identity, characteristics, and independence within the city. People can move in and out of neighbourhoods, buildings or structures may change, yet through time and space the whole of the city retains its identity. Furthermore, the whole cannot be reduced to its parts, as a city is more than the people who live within its boundaries, or the streets and structures that shape its geographical space. To conceptualize a city, then, as an assemblage is to view it as a whole that emerges from the interactions of all its parts.

Assemblage theory fits with Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) in that it incorporates articulations of objects, ideas, people, tools, funds, and any other tangible or intangible entities into a whole that is employed in the advancement of the movement. Assemblage theory provides a way of conceptualizing how all of these parts, or resources, converge, interact, and disperse while maintaining a comprehensive whole, both at the level of the farm, and the larger network. For the purpose of this study, my interest in Assemblage Theory is not to study the WWOOF network in all of its complexities, but rather what the outcomes are of the WWOOF network as conceptualized as an assemblage with emergent properties. In other words, I'm less interested in what an assemblage *is*, more so in what it *produces*. In the case of WWOOF, as an assemblage of administrators, hosts, and volunteers with knowledge, ideas, and skills, who interact with one other, as well as with the other aspects necessary to food production such soil, seeds, plants, animals, and the tools used for cultivation and harvest, not to mention the time and energy expended in the labour required to accomplish tasks. Just as important for the WWOOF network are the social aspects and material items that accompany the reciprocal relationships that are established through the network, such as the housing and

food provided by hosts, and the ideas exchanged during the farm stays. Each farm/assemblage is different and distinct, yet remains conjunctive to the larger network, which is a whole made up of all of the national WWOOF networks, which are made up of individual host farms. Of importance for this study is when all of these different parts assemble together, interact and work in conjunction with the goal of producing food based on a particular system of values, what emerges is a social economy.

The difference between looking at this through resource mobilization or through assemblage theory is a difference in intentionality of actors. Assemblage theory is more appropriate because, as will be further explained in a later chapter, the different people participating in the WWOOF network have different motivations and aims for being involved, and may or may not share concerns about environmental conservation, sustainable food production, healthy food supplies, or the viability of small-scale farms. Regardless, their participation in the WWOOF network, and interactions with all of the other pieces that constitute it, result in a social economy. The intentions of the actors are less relevant in achieving this outcome than the relationality inherent in articulations of all the parts of the assemblage. This differs from a resource mobilization perspective in which all of those disparate pieces would be gathered and directed toward a clearly delineated outcome, which may sometimes be the case for WWOOF and organic agriculture, but is not what I found among participants of this study in terms of the emergence of a social economy. As for the emergent property itself, next I will describe what is meant by the term social economy and how the WWOOF network can be conceived in this way.

4.7 Karl Polanyi and Social Economy

Karl Polanyi, mid-twentieth century economist, emphasized the interrelatedness of social issues and economic systems (1957). Polanyi is credited with developing the idea of ‘substantivism’, which defines an economy simply as a mechanism for distributing material goods. Within this basic view of economic activity, both formal and informal economic systems operate simultaneously (Baum 1996: 47). Polanyi distinguished types of informal exchange as reciprocity, householding, and redistribution, which perform the dual role of meeting material and social or cultural needs (Baum 1996; Polanyi 1957) from the market economy and argued that all types were enmeshed in the cultural framework of communities. Polanyi drew on the earlier work of Marx, Weber, and Tonnies in formulating his theory of the substantive economy (Dale 2011; Polanyi 1957) and exemplifies the embeddedness of economic systems with descriptions of traditional exchange activities (Baum 1996: 12-15).

The central difference of Polanyi’s economic theory compared to the conceptions of the dominant capitalist economic system by other economists is his orientation that “social issues drive the economy, rather than economic concerns drive society” (McMurtry 2010: 12, original italicized). His critique of the self-regulating market system in *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1957) highlights that any separation between economics and society is artificial. He decries the commoditization of labour and land as a result of the emergence of the self-regulating market system. In fact, the co-optation and subsequent destruction of the land at the hands of capitalist companies was of great concern for Polanyi who felt that markets

in which land and labour had been transmuted into ‘fictitious’ commodities would ultimately cause the disintegration of communities (Baum 1996: 16).

Claiming this type of market system to be devoid of ethics, he outlines how these changes in the formal economy have led to what he refers to as the ‘double movement’ which are the protective responses of communities to the structural violence inherent in such a system of exchange (Baum 1996; Beckert 2007: 17; Polanyi 1957). Polanyi credited communities’ abilities to maintain social relations through informal exchange systems as the key to enabling societies’ resilience (Baum 1996; Polanyi 1957). As opposed to other conceptions of humanity in his time (such as a model like *homo economicus* which depicts people as selfish and distinguishes economic activity from social activities), Polanyi recognized that identities are produced through the social relations of exchange and that individuals will readily act to defend their communities or advance the greater good over their own individualized needs (Baum 1996).

Polanyi’s ideas continue to be influential. The notions that economics are embedded within the social fabric of communities, and that social concerns often drive economies are at the heart of what today in Canada is referred to as the ‘social economy’. By contemporary definitions, a social economy begins with concerned individuals coalescing around a particular social issue, and forming a collective dedicated toward that common cause. McMurtry defines these types of economies as primarily values-based with the priority being on addressing unmet social needs or broader community well-being (2010: 4, 29). They function outside of the dominant economic system and may involve volunteer work and practices of reciprocity. These enterprises are often referred to as the ‘third sector’, indicating that they neither public nor private, and include non-

profit organizations, charities, and cooperatives. (SES RN 2012) As Brown, writing on behalf of the Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network, explains “[w]hile they may intend to make a profit, they do so in a context that sees profit as a means to meet social goals, not primarily as a means to create individual wealth.” (SES RN 2012)

Participants in the WWOOF network exhibit the main attributes that define a social economy. As will be discussed in a later chapter, hosts and volunteers for the most part place other benefits and values above profit in their endeavours. The WWOOF network meets the criteria of a social economy in its communal and environmental goals, as discussed in the history of the WWOOF network chapter. I posit a social economy as an emergent property of WWOOF rather than a deliberate aim, because this social economy arises from within the interactions of participants without any direct effort (at least not by the participants in this study) by any parties to bring it to fruition. This is not an intended outcome of their involvement with WWOOF, but a result of their participation regardless of intentions. In this sense, I draw from Polanyi’s definition of social economy to a greater degree than more recent descriptions of ‘third sector’ social economies; most organic farms are private businesses, and so don’t fit into the third sector. However, these private businesses involve reciprocal relationships, are positioned as pursuing social goals, and often are characterized as benefitting the community in both the provisioning of food and caretaking of farmland.

4.8 Summary

In looking at the motivations and aims of participants of the WWOOF network in the Okanagan, I drew from theories within social movement studies, namely resource

mobilization, frame theory, cognitive praxis, and lifestyle movements. These theoretical frameworks provided context for examining WWOOF from the differing perspectives of volunteers and hosts, and aided in examinations of alignment with the overarching ideology of the organic movement and the WWOOF network. In explaining my findings, Delanda's model for applying assemblage theory offered a tool for describing the process of the emergence of a social economy from within the WWOOF network. I applied these multiple frameworks to structure my research approach and methodology, which will be described in the following chapter.

Chapter 5. Methodology

As noted in the introduction, my thesis examines the WWOOF network as it relates to the larger organic movement. Specifically it asks what motivates people to participate in the network as a volunteer or as a host, and what are the outcomes of this participation? I designed the project using ethnographic methods and approached the study from a critical perspective. In this chapter, I will explain my approach to research, my positionality and subjectivity as a researcher, then explain the methods used, as well as provide details on how the research was carried out.

5.1 Critical Ethnography: What that means to me

For me, defining ethnography first makes it easier to then proceed to what it means to do critical ethnography. From an anthropological standpoint, ethnography can refer to the methods of research and/or the written product that results from a holistic research project. Ethnography as an approach to research has been defined as “social research based on the close-up, on the ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do.” (Waquant, 2003: 5) Ethnographic studies rely not only on observation but also on a dialogic relationship between the researcher and participants in order to approach an understanding of actions, thoughts, and feelings from the perspective of the participants. Fieldwork is a core aspect of ethnography, which refers to Waquant’s aforementioned ‘embeddedness’ of the researcher. It has become commonplace to engage in

ethnographies of one's home culture (for examples, see Hannerz 2006; Peirano 1998), an undertaking that requires the researcher to make the familiar unfamiliar through self-reflection and questioning one's assumptions about their own socio-cultural realities. Interpretation, of course, can only ever be said to be a partial understanding from the position of the researcher. Therefore, I cannot claim to have discovered the "truth" about WWOOF participants. I intend to present my interpretation of what I understand to be the views and explanations as conveyed to me, and hope to represent the thoughts of people I spoke with in a manner that is in keeping with their intended meaning. Critical ethnography draws from critical theory approaches and applies them to ethnographic inquiry with the understanding that knowledge creation is a social construction impacted by various forces of power (Carpecken 1996). Thomas (1993) characterizes this methodological approach as a reflective examination of the interplay of culture, knowledge, and action that encompasses political agendas. Critical ethnography most often is concerned with a particular issue being faced by a group of people, and aims to elucidate it from the standpoint of those whom it impacts (Gille 2001: 321). This understanding is co-created intersubjectively through cyclical processes of communication between the researcher and community members, often requiring questioning, confirming, and negotiating meaning (Carspecken 1996; Conquergood 1991).

Conducting critical ethnography means that the researcher examines the underlying structures that form the context for behaviour, as well as interrogating how things could be different rather than simply describing actions and views observed or reported during the study (Thomas 1993; Madison 2011). This involves exposing

structures of power and control, laying bare subsurface agendas and oppressive assumptions within the dominant discourse, and reflecting on how that broader discourse impacts the culture and activities of both the researcher and participants, and querying possible alternative courses of action (Thomas 1993; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo 2004). Carspecken (1996) advocated a non-linear model of a critical methodology that involves several phases of inquiry, observation, and analysis. He suggests a stage of observation in the field during which the researcher assesses and records ‘what’s going on’. The researcher then analyses her observations and attempts to construct an explanation of them, then returns to the field to engage in intersubjective dialogue to come to a better understanding of how the members of that society explain ‘what’s going on’. Further reflection, communication, and analysis bring the researcher closer to being able to place the data collected within the broader structural context, and draw connections with theoretical frameworks (Carspecken 1996). From here, the researcher can then move from describing *what is* to positing *what could be* (Carspecken 1996; Madison 2011; Thomas 1993).

Taking a critical stance also entails reflection by the researcher on their own values and identity, and how those impact the research (Tedlock 2000). My own position as a student, as a white woman, as a supporter of the organic movement, as a parent, among other aspects of my identity, influenced my project in a number of ways, some of which I didn’t expect. I acknowledge that my position shaped the research in terms of the questions asked, how the data was analyzed, and the choices I made to narrow down the information to include in this thesis. Who I am and how I presented myself also influenced the way I was received and the types of conversations I had with the people

who participated in my project. The way in which participants perceived me and my project, as well as their own roles within it, shaped our conversations. Some of my participants related to me through our shared experiences, such as university education, or working on farms. Some hosts and volunteers viewed me as someone with authority on the WWOOF network and organic production and queried me about my knowledge. Others spoke with me with the tone that I was there to learn from them and explained things in great detail.

I noted that gender (both mine and theirs) was a factor in the types of conversations I had with participants, as did whether I spoke with host families together, or spent time with family members separately. Often, much more personal information was shared with me during informal conversation, particularly when I worked alongside hosts and volunteers in participant observation periods, suggesting that setting and context, such as whether or not we were being recorded, or if I was taking notes, tended to influence the comfort level of participants in sharing their personal thoughts and feelings with me. In addition, each participant chose to participate in my study for their own reasons, which weren't discussed with me. The participants themselves had their own sets of understandings and identities, and ways that they performed their own roles in relation to the questions I was asking. Each participant tended to focus on their own interests, within the questions I was asking.

In light of reflecting on the process of doing this project, I reiterate my awareness of the parameters in which this research is situated. My findings are focused around the research questions, so I acknowledge that this study by necessity did not delve into many areas that could have been explored further, such as the gendered nature of hosting or the

structural inequities inherent in a tourism-oriented network. These topics could be the subjects of future research.

A critical ethnographic approach to studying social movements is advocated by scholars, such as Burdick (1995) and Edelman (2009), because of its potential to reveal processes within movements and situate them within broader social structures. Burdick (1995) illuminated that the importance of ethnography is in its capacity to understand the complexities and heterogeneity within a social group. Every group of actors will have points of contestation, and for Burdick, revealing these points are essential to “revealing a social movement's potential for dynamism and change.”(1995: 363) Edelman (2009) also warns that painting a picture of a social movement with a singular brushstroke does not serve the movement well, as glossing over variant perspectives is a misrepresentation of the movement. A movement's overarching ideological standpoint provides a frame for the diversity of individuals who each have their own interpretations of that collective ideology and experience and understand the movement's issues and goals from their own perspective. Within social movements there is an overlapping of meanings but as in any group of people there will be a multitude of voices and opinions (Burdick 1995). A critical ethnographic approach not only explores the diversity of actors, it also deconstructs the wider social and political arenas in which the social movement and its actors mobilize (Edelman 2001). Taking a critical stance then also pushes the ethnographer to ask: how could the movement advance, or what direction could the movement take in addressing issues of social justice? Or in this particular case, what potential advances could be made in food movements in the Okanagan with the support of the WWOOF network?



Figure 5.1 Gifts from generous hosts

5.2 Study Region: The Okanagan

My study took place in the Okanagan Valley – a 200 km long, 20 km wide valley in British Columbia’s Southern Interior within the traditional unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) Nation. This region is known for the string of lakes that form the heart of the valley, and the orchards and vineyards that line the hillsides. The northern end of the valley has significant vegetable and meat production, and to the south ranching provides livelihoods, alongside the expanding wine industry.

Since the late 1800’s, settlement and development of the valley has been shaped by agriculture. Dryland ranchers were followed by land developers who parceled off irrigated plots and recruited Western European immigrants with the promise of a “British Garden of Eden” where a community of “gentlemen farmers” managed orchards, driving the emergence of a thriving fruit industry that remains a major contributor to the local economy (Demeritt 1995; Koroscil 2003; Wagner 2008). Today, the Okanagan has a

reputation as a top wine and fruit producing region in Canada, and attracts an influx of visitors each year who come to enjoy the recreational opportunities offered by both the natural features of the valley, such as the warm, dry climate, beaches, lakes, and hillside trails, as well as agri-tourism and wine provided by agricultural activities.

As mentioned in the section on the history of organic agriculture, the Okanagan has long been home to organic farmers who were some of the first in the province to form associations in order to standardize and self-regulate the production of organic products (Similkameen Okanagan Organic Producers Association 2013). Long-established farmers and orchardists have been joined by newer generations of farmers who benefit from the reputation of the Okanagan and its popularity as a vacation destination in marketing their products locally to both residents and visitors (Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission 2012; Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association 2013). My intent was to recruit host farmers who represented a range of organic producers throughout the valley in order to understand diverse perspectives on the motivations for participating in the WWOOF network.

5.3 Recruitment

The simplest method of approaching potential participants was contact through the WWOOF Canada website. My hope was that I would start with hosts, who could then connect me with volunteers. In retrospect, a different process for recruiting volunteers that would have enabled me to contact WWOOFers directly, might have generated more volunteer participation in my study. I'm not certain whether or not such contact would have been possible, as volunteer profiles can be accessed by registered hosts, but not by other registered volunteers. When I began my project, I did post a

notice on the WWOOF volunteer forum that I was hoping to speak with people visiting the Okanagan as WWOOFers, but received no responses, which left me reliant on contacting WWOOFers through hosts. Prior to contacting hosts, I spoke with the WWOOF Canada administrator about my project, and obtained permission from the administrator to conduct my study using the host listings for recruitment. The administrator agreed to distribute a notice to hosts that I would be contacting them for research purposes. The initial introduction by the administrator helped lend some trust and legitimacy to my subsequent request for research participants.

In order to gain access to the host listings I was required to sign up as a volunteer and pay a membership fee. Part of my study was to do participant observation and offer a few hours of work to hosts to both experience WWOOFing and attempt to compensate hosts for their participation in the research project. I filled out a detailed profile introducing myself and explaining my research. These profiles are intended to aid in matching volunteers with hosts. Hosts post profiles of their farms as well; these profiles serve as the first point of contact between hosts and volunteers. While it is the volunteers who actively seek out hosts, hosts can access profiles to learn a bit more about those volunteers before accepting them.

A reading of the host listings in the Okanagan revealed a variety of farms in terms of size and types of produce. Most host farms appeared to be family-run, but a handful identified themselves as a collective living and working together. There was also a range in the level of experience each host has had with the WWOOF program. I approached hosts that represented these variations to get a broader picture of the WWOOF network in the Okanagan as well as a better understanding of the diverse people who host on their

farms. As part of my initial interest lay in how the WWOOF network might contribute to the viability of organic farms, my attention focused on farms that produced food as a significant form of income. To give an example on how I determined which farms were a better fit for my study interests, I eliminated a couple of hosts that were operating horse farms with no mention of any marketable products, and others classified as “hobby” farms indicating that farming was not their primary source of income. I took these out of my list of potential participants, as my interest was primarily in establishing relationships with hosts who appeared to be running their farms with the intent of making a livelihood.

After establishing myself as a WWOOF volunteer, I sent out invitations via email to 58 host farms listed on the WWOOF Canada website under the sub-category “Okanagan”. This geographical designation included farms as far south as the US-Canada border, and areas that might be considered to be outside of the Okanagan as most people would define it, such as Kamloops and Sorrento to the north.

My initial invitations generated positive responses from 27 hosts.

5.4 Preliminary Fieldwork

I visited with several hosts before doing any interviewing or participant observation during an exploratory stage of preliminary fieldwork. As outlined in Caine, Davison, and Stewart’s reflection on preliminary fieldwork (2009), the purpose of this stage was to get an idea of range of the different types of host farms, initiate the building of relationships, and develop an approach that would be relevant for both myself and the community of potential participants. These visits were very helpful in refining my interview schedule and preparing me for the next phase of the project. I visited with 15

hosts, further explained my research, and toured a handful of their properties. I invited all but three to take part in the interview/participant observation phase of my project; visits to their properties revealed that those three hosts were not farming, and therefore did not fit my criteria. Two were gardening very large plots primarily for their own consumption, and the third was not producing any food at all.

After this preliminary period, two hosts that I had visited preferred that I only interview their farm managers who had taken over some of the hosting responsibilities, and four others decided not to participate, with the result that 9 of the 15 hosts who were part of this initial stage were included in the study.

5.5 The Interview Process

Preliminary fieldwork, interviews, and participant observation were carried out throughout the growing season of 2012 (May – October). Recruitment continued after the interviewing and participant observation began, resulting in additional participants who were not part of the preliminary period. In total, I interviewed 19 hosts and 8 volunteers, and conducted participant observation on 8 farms. Interviews and participant observation often occurred in conjunction, but I will discuss them separately, beginning with the interview process.

Host farmers were invited via email to participate in an interview. Times to meet were set at the convenience of the host farmers, and all interviews were conducted on-farm, with the majority done at the hosts' homes. Access to volunteers was through the hosts, and all volunteers but one were interviewed immediately following the interviews with hosts. The one exception was a volunteer who arrived in the Okanagan a couple of

weeks after I had been to their hosts' home, and the hosts contacted me to invite me back to interview their volunteer who had agreed to participate. Because of these arrangements, whereby access to volunteers was through their hosts during their stay on-farm, hosts were usually nearby while the interviews with volunteers took place. From what I could tell, no one was coerced into speaking with me, and there didn't appear to be any tension between volunteers, hosts, or myself. The nature of my study is relatively uncontroversial, and relationships between participants during our conversations appeared congenial; however, I think it's important to note that volunteers were often speaking of their experiences in the presence of hosts, which may or may not have influenced our conversations.

Interviews were semi-structured, with slightly different sets of questions for hosts and volunteers. Questions were designed to lead into conversations about experiences with the WWOOF network, specifically around why participants got involved with WWOOF, and what some benefits and challenges they have experienced, and how they viewed their roles within the network. These questions were open-ended to allow responses to be narrative in nature. Following basic demographic profile questions such as age, gender, details about farm for hosts, or nationality for volunteers, I explained again what my study was pursuing before beginning the questioning. After doing a couple of interviews, I revised my approach based on the responses I received, and continued to make small changes to my questions throughout the period of data collection as necessary. For hosts, I asked questions regarding the operation of their farm, and reasons for farming organically, in addition to queries about the WWOOF network (See Appendix A). Hosts were asked about their decision to become hosts, and encouraged to

recount stories of WWOOF experiences. I inquired about many aspects of hosting, including the benefits and challenges, and how hosts perceived their role in the network. Specifically, I questioned hosts about the labour contributions of volunteers for the operation of the farms, as well as other types of contributions made by WWOOFers.

Both hosts and volunteers were asked to consider how WWOOF fit within the larger organic movement, and whether or not participants personally identified with that movement. Volunteers were also given questions designed to elicit stories about their experiences, and asked about the benefits and challenges of WWOOFing from their perspectives as travelers and volunteers (See Appendix B). Again, I was interested to know their reasons for participating, and what the outcomes of that participation were for individuals, and what could then be extrapolated as results of their participation at a broader, network level. Generally, interviews with hosts were 45 minutes to an hour in length, and interviews with volunteers were slightly shorter, approximately 30-45 minutes on average. Notes were taken during interviews with both hosts and volunteers, and all interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

5.6 Participant Observation

Part of my study included an offer to spend a few hours working on hosts' farms. This served the dual purpose of compensating hosts in some way for the time they were to take in speaking with me, as well as affording me the opportunity to have similar experiences to those a volunteer might have when visiting these host farms. I was surprised that not all hosts who agreed to an interview took me up on the offer to help out with some farm work while I was at their properties. When I broached the subject, the

reactions I received were mixed among hosts who did not have work for me. A couple of hosts responded that I had come at a slow time, and they didn't have any pressing tasks for me to help with at the time. Another host seemed reluctant because I was there in the capacity as a researcher and working on the farm seemed unnecessary, even contrary, to the purpose of my visit. One host who refused my offer gave me the impression that having me work for a couple of hours was more disruptive for her operation than helpful, as she speculated she would then have to find me a task, and supervise me in doing it. As a result, I worked/participated on only 8 of the farms I visited, with 4 work periods occurring after the interview, and 4 prior to the interviews.

I enjoyed the participant observation parts of my research. It gave me a chance to talk with hosts, volunteers, or employees in a less formal manner and I learned a great deal about the specific tasks I was doing, as well as about farming more generally and the personal lives of hosts and volunteers. During five of the eight participant observation experiences I found myself working alongside a host; on these occasions I asked questions about what we were doing, and about organic farming more broadly. Hosts also spoke with me about their families, and asked me personal questions, so in this way we got to know each other a bit as we completed the work. Once, I worked with both hosts and WWOOFers, and on another farm I worked with only the WWOOFers. Again, we chatted informally as we worked and became more familiar with one another. In the remaining participant observation period I was partnered with a farm employee (who happened to also be a former WWOOFer, though I asked about her experiences as we worked, I did not receive her formal written consent, or formally interview her, so she was not included in my research data.

I valued these conversations and experiences very much, as I spent time doing a range of tasks on orchards, vineyards, and vegetable farms. I was able to learn about these various operations, and about the different organic methods employed in producing a diversity of products. While I wouldn't claim that I truly experienced 'WOOOFing', my participant observation contributed considerably to my research and to my own knowledge. I kept a journal and immediately after these visits I recorded my field notes. These notes were transcribed and included in my analysis.

5.7 Analysis

For pragmatic reasons, the analysis component of the research was conducted in tandem with data collection. As I transcribed interviews and field notes, the emerging themes were then incorporated into subsequent interview questions and new responses were then analyzed in a process of continual comparisons among data that continued throughout data collection, transcription, and coding of interviews and field notes. I did all of the interviewing, transcribing, coding, and analysis myself over the course of a year.

I used qualitative research software NVivo to organize, store, and sort data into themes that arose during the process of coding interviews and field notes. Dominant themes emerged under different subcategories, such as 'motivations', 'benefits', 'challenges', and 'roles'. Themes became substantiated as more data was collected, allowing me to synthesize interview data with my own observations, and start applying my theoretical frameworks drawn from social movement studies to facilitate a deeper analysis of the meaning behind the themes that were arising. This will be discussed in the following chapter focusing on my findings.

5.8 Protection of Participants and Data

In an effort to protect the confidentiality of those who participated in my project, each person interviewed was assigned a category as either a host (H) or a volunteer (V), and then numbered sequentially in the order in which the interviews took place. When more than one participant was interviewed at the same time, I assigned numbers based on which person responded first during the interview. As hosts and volunteers had responded to separate, although similar, sets of questions, to further differentiate between hosts and volunteers responses I assigned hosts with interview schedule '100', and volunteers with '200'. For example, the first host I spoke with was assigned the identifier H101, the first volunteer was V201, and so on. The result of this is a system that easily identifies which category the respondent belonged to which was beneficial during the analysis phase of this project and aided in a cross-comparison among host and volunteer responses. I have used this system throughout this thesis whenever quoting or paraphrasing participants. All data, including original recordings, coded transcripts, and fieldnotes have been stored in password protected files to further ensure the confidentiality of participants.

5.9 Summary

I approached my research project with a critical lens and applied the methods of ethnographic research in gathering the data and during the analysis of materials. My position as a white female student in the field influenced how I was perceived by my participants and I acknowledge that my interactions with them may have been different than I had intended when I set out to 'experience WWOOFing' by volunteering for a few

hours on their farms. My research brought to light a number of aspects that are outside the scope of my research, which also relate to my positionality in the research, such as gender roles and hosting or volunteering. My own subject position, and those of participants shaped the research in such a way that I emphasize that I can only present my own interpretation of what was told to me, and I have tried to represent my participants thoughts and ideas about WWOOFing as accurately and as respectfully as possible with the aim of discovering the meaning of participation in the WWOOF network for those I spoke with.

The research project was designed with the intent of coming to a better understanding of the reasons for participating in the WWOOF network for both hosts in the Okanagan, and for the volunteer travelers who visit farms in this region. Interview recordings and field notes were transcribed, and analyzed with the use of qualitative research software. Emergent themes were then queried with theoretical frameworks. The following section will discuss the results of my project, which is an examination of the motivations and significances for participating in WWOOF, and the ways in which perceptions of WWOOF participants align with the ideological framing of the WWOOF network as an organization.

Chapter 6. Embodying the Organic Movement: What Inspires Participants to ‘Live, Learn, and Share Organic Lifestyles’

“It takes a certain kind of person to do the WWOOF” – former WWOOF volunteer

A person I interviewed during my preliminary fieldwork made the above statement when speaking about his experiences WWOOFing internationally. For me, this quote became the crux of my later inquiries. It seemed to cut right to the heart of my research question, and if I could find out who this “certain kind of person” was, then I might better understand what WWOOF meant to the people involved. I included a number of questions in my interview schedule that I hoped would bring me closer to answering who participates in WWOOF, that queried about what motivated people to host or volunteer, what were things they found challenging, what were the benefits of participating, and how did people conceptualize and articulate their role(s) within it. Drawing from Benford and Snow’s definition of frames as ideas and meanings espoused by social movement proponents that inspire action (2000: 614), I will compare what was expressed by participants in response to these questions in articulation with the ideas and meanings associated with participating in WWOOF from the WWOOF Canada website, as well as what I directly observed during my visits to farms.

This chapter is divided into sections that are guided by my areas of inquiry and analysis. The subsections in 6.1 examine the range of motivations for people to participate as hosts. Section 6.2 outlines the different motivations from the volunteers perspectives. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 look at some of the common characteristics of hosts and volunteers. The contributions and various roles that hosts embody are described in

the subsections of 6.5, and then contributions of volunteers follow in section 6.6. Section 6.7 is my interpretation of my findings regarding participation through the lens of social movement theories (as discussed in Chapter 4), and 6.8 summarizes the findings and analysis of this chapter.

6.1 Why host?

Host participants responded to questions regarding the reasons why they decided to become a WWOOF host. As WWOOF describes itself as a work exchange, I asked directly about labour needs; as a result, labour was a dominant theme although the emphasis on it as a motivation for hosting varied greatly. The other four themes emerged from more open-ended inquiries about what made participants decide to become hosts. WWOOF hosts cited the enjoyment of cultural exchange, the desire to teach about organic farming, the fact that they had WWOOFed themselves, and their views of WWOOF as a support system for organic farming as being motivators for hosting. The following sections address each theme in descending order according to the number of hosts who mentioned it as a motivator for participating in WWOOF, with the exception of labour needs, which will be addressed first because I emphasized this theme with all of the hosts I spoke with.

6.1.1 Labour

Sixteen hosts addressed the question of whether or not having extra help on the farm was a primary motivating factor in their decision to begin or to continue hosting WWOOFers. Eight hosts conceded that it would be difficult for them to run their farm

without the help of WWOOFers. Two of those hosts felt they really needed WWOOFers only at certain times, such as during late season harvesting, while the remaining six were dependent on having WWOOFer help them for most of the season. One host couple, who have been hosting for more than 20 years, explained that they would not have been able to continue farming without WWOOF volunteers, and due to this need they have “put up” with negative WWOOF hosting experiences because they rely on the help, since having paid employees is too costly for them and family help was limited, “I’d say yeah we were pretty well reliant on having a WWOOFer, one WWOOFer, not more than one, but one WWOOFer pretty well all the time...but most of the time we’ve been like just on the edge, so really we have no money to pay anybody, it’s been survival.” (H115 and H116) Other hosts who considered WWOOFer help as not integral to the running of their farm acknowledged that they knew of other host farms that were reliant on WWOOF labourers for their operation to be viable.

Other hosts described the help of WWOOFers as an extra benefit, but not a primary motivation for hosting. When the labour offered by WWOOFers was ‘good’ help, it was a benefit; however, having extra help was offset by the time spent training volunteers and overseeing their work, and sometimes the ‘help’ was counterproductive when WWOOFers made mistakes. Several hosts referred to WWOOFer help as a ‘bonus’, and expressed that running your farm based on volunteer labour would be inadvisable, given the unpredictable nature of the volunteers in terms of when they would be there and the quality of their contribution as a worker. One host summed up his characterization of WWOOF help in the following analogy:

The WWOOFer workforce is sort of like, it’s gravy because...you have to manage your farm in a way that you can deal with it on your own, and

with the extra help of WWOOFers it's like 'bonus', if it works out it works out, great, if not you've just had your mashed potatoes without gravy, and you're gonna live, you know, so the WWOOFers are like a bonus. - (H112)

WWOOF Canada downplays the labour aspect in favour of promoting other reasons for participating in the WWOOF network, particularly as an educational and cultural exchange (2013). WWOOF Canada lists the aims of WWOOF as being a way to facilitate the opportunity for travelers to: “1) get first-hand experience of organic farming & gardening and to lend a helping hand wherever needed, 2) get into the countryside and experience Canada and Canadians, 3) help the organic movement, which is often labour intensive and does not rely on artificial fertilizers & pesticides, 4) make contact with other people in the organic movement, 5) have a wonderful enriching experience, and 6) have a cultural exchange with Canadians” (2013).

The idea of extra help in exchange for the experience on a farm, as well as room and board was emphasized, and hosts were cautioned against treating the WWOOFers as simply ‘free labour’ (WWOOF Canada 2013: 5). None of the host participants interviewed disclosed that they had entered into hosting solely to gain access to this cheap workforce, but all hosts had heard ‘horror stories’ about WWOOF hosts elsewhere who abused their volunteers, and several warned against dependence on WWOOFers as free labour as this line of thinking by hosts is what leads to situations where WWOOFers are being overworked. This concern was expressed by a number of hosts, one responded by cautioning that “if your business plan is dependent on apprentice or WWOOF labour, that's not a good situation ‘cause first of all it's a very unpredictable type of labour, and second of all it, it creates the potential or higher potential for exploitation.” (H103) The need for labour was a complex issue with hosts' needs for extra help falling along a

continuum ranging from reliance on volunteer labour to considering the contributions of WWOOFers as superfluous. Labour was mentioned by the majority of hosts interviewed, yet was not described as the primary motivator for hosting. Even those who relied on the help put greater emphasis on other aspects of hosting.

I had set out on this project intending to examine WWOOF as a social economy, which would place the volunteer labour aspect as central for the viability of WWOOF host farmers. Having found that most hosts are not reliant on volunteer labour in order to operate their farm business prompted me to re-evaluate what I thought was going on. If help with farmwork was simply the “gravy” of WWOOF, then motivations for participating were much more nuanced than I had anticipated. While I did not enter into this project with the idea that WWOOF was as simple as nothing but a work-learn exchange, I had expected that the need for labour among organic farm hosts would have been more prominent in decisions to participate in WWOOF. This finding actually fits more with a social movement lens, as the goals and benefits for participants go beyond the economic considerations of organic farming, and the organic movement’s ideology includes social and cultural goals as well as environmental stewardship and health.



Figure 6.1 In the orchard near harvest time in the Central Okanagan

6.1.2 Cultural Exchange

WWOOF Canada underscores that WWOOFing is widely regarded as a cultural exchange by participants. Statements made on the website are explicit in emphasizing this aspect of WWOOFing beyond volunteer labour (2013). My understanding of the term ‘exchange’ implies an equitable trade and implicates all parties as active agents in these interactions. Comparatively, in my opinion tourism is an experience in which the tourist is the recipient but not necessarily required to reciprocate. While several volunteers described their WWOOF participation as ‘experience’ rather than ‘exchange’ (discussed further in the section on volunteers’ motivations for WWOOFing), most hosts felt WWOOFing was closer to an exchange.

14 hosts claimed that the aspect of cultural exchange was the most significant motivating factor for their involvement in the WWOOF network. Most host participants were interested in learning about the cultures of the volunteer travelers they hosted, and many enjoyed travelling themselves. One host who expressed enjoyment at having visitors from all over the world considered himself “a traveler at heart” (H119), as he had

been abroad years earlier before being settled into building his farm business, and another host described the hosting experience as “feeling like we’re travelling without leaving home” (H111). Two hosts appreciated the opportunity to meet people from places they were not likely to visit themselves, and learn about cultures they knew very little about. Specifically, the arrival of a number of WWOOFers from the Czech Republic was pleasantly surprising for the hosts and afforded them a chance to learn more about a nation that they were less familiar with (H105 and H106).

Six hosts mentioned the benefits for their children in meeting people from different parts of the world, and learning about how people do things in other cultures, saying that they enjoy hosting:

...because it just really enriches our lives, culturally, and for our kids too, it’s really cool for our kids to be able to meet people from all over the world, and our WWOOFers cook for us so we get these traditional Japanese meals, you know, and they get to hear about what life is like in [volunteers’] home countries, and hear new languages. - H111

Asking WWOOFers to prepare a meal was a common practice among many hosts as part of the cultural exchange with volunteer labourers. Language also was often exchanged, as some volunteers offered up common words and phrases in their own tongue in trade for the English equivalent. For instance, during one of my visits to a farm, I had lunch with the hosts and their WWOOFers who were four young women from South Korea. Throughout the meal, the women asked the names of various things to expand their English vocabulary, and the host would then ask for the word in Korean. Everyone appeared to be enjoying this kind of interaction and I got the impression it was a common activity when hosts and volunteers gather together (H117 and H118; V204,V205,V206,and V207).

Coming from a background in anthropology, I think it's important to note that the idea that it's possible to exchange culture in this manner is problematic. Food, words and phrases, folk songs, and descriptions of home are artifacts, items, or symbols associated with and emerging from culture, not culture itself. Anthropologists define culture as values, ideals, and beliefs that are learned and shared among a group of people which shape interpretations of the world and influence actions and behaviours of members of that group (Haviland et al 2013). I think that it is important to distinguish between culture and cultural artifact because while the WWOOFers are immersed in the culture of their hosts, they can only offer snippets of their own culture in return. This does not necessarily devalue the exchange for those who participate in it, it simply points to the limits of the notion that culture is something that can be traded.

Adding to the question of what is being exchanged when participants speak of 'cultural exchange', the 'culture' that is being experienced by WWOOFers is characterized in a range of ways by WWOOF participants. Some participants spoke of Canadian culture, while others named smaller geographically related cultures or areas, such as British Columbian culture, or Okanagan culture. Others differentiated between the experience of rural culture as opposed to urban, and some talked about the exchange involving 'organic' culture specifically. Which 'culture' it was that was being experienced or exchanged depended entirely on the perspective of the WWOOF participant in relation to other participants, and often related to their personal motivations for WWOOFing. For example, when hosts were speaking of WWOOFers who were from large cities both in Canada and elsewhere, they described the experience they offered as rural and agrarian. Other times, when thinking about WWOOFers as

international travelers, the hosts felt they represented Canadian culture more broadly. Regardless of which ‘culture’ was being referred to on the part of the host, most participants found cultural exchange (however they conceived of it) to be an enjoyable and principal reason for partaking in the WWOOF network.

6.1.3 Desire to Share Knowledge

WWOOF participants consider sharing knowledge as separate from sharing culture. Knowledge exchange implies the sharing of ideas, skills, and experience, and participants related stories on this theme in addition to stories about cultural exchanges. This exchange at times involved teaching/learning about farming, but often the knowledge contributed was unrelated to agriculture. Knowledge exchange fits with a host’s role as an educator according to WWOOF Canada, and fulfills one of the stated goals of the WWOOF network which is to broaden the reach of information about organic farming. Six hosts made references to sharing knowledge as a motive for participating in WWOOF.

One host offered her interpretation of WWOOF, explaining that its purpose is “to share knowledge, and learn something from each other really” (H113). For some, sharing knowledge about organic farming was important. Hosts would usually be the ones sharing their expertise on agriculture, but two hosts recalled volunteers experienced in viticulture in Europe who had been valuable resources for them early on as they developed their vineyard and boutique winery (H109 and H110). As the majority of volunteers are inexperienced, the knowledge and skills that WWOOFers contribute is generally in other areas than agriculture. For example, one host couple had learned some

new recipes from two culinary students who had been WWOOFers on their farm the previous year (H117 and H118).

6.1.4 Hosts Formerly WWOOFed

Four hosts had prior experience with the WWOOF network as volunteers. One host couple had WWOOFed while travelling through Canada and the U.S, and the other host couple had been involved with the network in Australia. Their previous engagements with WWOOF elsewhere led to their decision to become hosts themselves. One host couple felt obliged to host as they had had wonderful WWOOF experiences and were now in a position to offer that opportunity for travelers wanting to come to the Okanagan (H111 and H112).

While only a small number of WWOOFers go on to become farmers themselves, it does happen and participants in this project mentioned on three occasions knowing of people who had WWOOFed on their farms going on to start their own organic operations. As one of the aims of WWOOF is to spread the organic movement, and with that to extend the WWOOF network, these cases would show that participating in WWOOF can inspire people to join the organic movement.

Viewed from a social movement theory perspective, this shows that WWOOF can be seen as a resource to be mobilized in advancing the organic movement. In doing so, it can also serve as a forum for recruitment into the lifestyle movement of organic farming. Such cases of former WWOOFers becoming farmers themselves show that WWOOF serves both the ideological and material advancement of the organic movement, by spreading knowledge and ideals, as well as encouraging more people to produce

organically. But this is only a few cases out of the vast majority of WWOOF experiences, and points to the potential of WWOOF to advance the organic movement.

6.1.5 To Advance the Organic Movement

WWOOF originated as a network in support of the organic movement, however, participants expressed a range of opinions on the level that WWOOF has retained this tenet. WWOOF Canada aligns itself with the Federation of WWOOF Organizations as a member of a community that promotes ecological farming practices (2013). One host participant based her decision to sign up on that premise, saying -“of course, I was under the illusion that it was all about organic and so that really appealed to me” (H107). She went on to explain that after having hosted for a couple of years, she no longer sees the network as primarily to support sustainable agriculture. Hosts who have been involved with WWOOF over many years acknowledged that the focus on organic has changed since they began hosting. One long-time host described the network as having become “diluted” (H113), possibly due to the growth of the network. Other hosts did not really connect WWOOF with the organic movement at all, viewing it mainly as a travel opportunity. The reasoning for this view was that organic has become more mainstream, and so farmers didn’t rely on the WWOOF network for support and promotion of their farm businesses as much as they had in the past (H103).

The term organic is maintained in the acronym for WWOOF, and WWOOF Canada includes it as partial criteria for hosting. However, WWOOF Canada recognizes that the label of “organic” is now regulated, as the term now refers to operations that are *certified* organic. It is a partial criteria, as farms in transition to (certified) organic, or

farms that employ sustainable methods but do not have certification, can still participate as hosts.

For some hosts, this is a relaxing of the ‘rules’ of WWOOF hosting, and is seen as having led to issues within the network, since there is very little capacity for oversight by the organization that hosts are what they purport to be. Many hosts and volunteers had stories about places that were signed up to host WWOOFers that were not farms or had little to do with organic farming. In fact, during my preliminary fieldwork, I visited the home of a WWOOF host who was not involved in agriculture, but claimed to be a supporter of sustainable lifestyles as justification for hosting WWOOFers. Visitors to this particular host would be partaking in different construction projects or whatever else needed doing as part of the visioning of the host couple. I decided to eliminate this host from my study because my interest is in farming and this host did not fit my criteria for inclusion in this project. Reactions to this move away from the centrality of organic agriculture for the network were mixed, although most hosts in the Okanagan felt that while WWOOF may not serve the same purpose for the organic movement as it once did, it still contributed to their farms and aided their own efforts at sustainable agriculture.

I think it is important to note that participation in the WWOOF network can have positive impacts on the organic movement whether or not advancement of the movement is the intention of participants. Many of the hosts that I spoke with in the Okanagan are knowledgeable about a range of food-related issues, and some are actively involved in political campaigns that address concerns that the larger organic movement has taken a position on, such genetically modified organisms (GMOs), or efforts to create regional policies in support of local production and distribution of food. Volunteers who visit the

farms of hosts who are engaged in these issues will be exposed to new ideas and political views. Interactions and engagements with a range of people within the network has the potential to raise the awareness of individuals, change their perspectives, and even inspire them to become involved in these campaigns themselves. In this way, the WWOOF network builds capacity for change by creating the opportunity for discussions about issues concerning farmers (and consumers) to occur between hosts and volunteers, and potentially gain support for political struggles by engaging individuals who come into the network knowing little about food and agriculture- related issues. However, while this type of person-by-person awareness raising serves to change individual behaviours (such as buying organic or non-GMO foods and expanding those markets), it does not address the systemic inequities and power imbalances that have created and perpetuate these issues on a global scale.

6.2 Why Volunteer?

Part of my original inquiry into the WWOOF network was to explore the different reasons and aims of participation in the network from the standpoint of hosts and volunteers, examine how those two perspectives align, and look at the kind of relationships this creates between hosts and volunteers. This was based on an assumption that hosts more or less would hold a certain set of perspectives, or frames (as per Benford and Snow 2000), that could be identified as oppositional to volunteers' views of WWOOFing. I had hoped to speak with a more balanced number of hosts and volunteers in order to compare the different sets of viewpoints, but circumstances led to interviewing twice the number of hosts to volunteers. As I asked hosts to describe their impressions of

volunteers, and to relay what their volunteers had told them about what they thought of WWOOFing, I've included hosts' answers to questions about volunteers' motivations to supplement the information given by volunteer participants.

WWOOF Canada frames the network as an economical travel option, which includes exposure to the lifestyle and culture of hosts and an opportunity to learn about organic agriculture and sustainable living (Guide to WWOOFing 2013). For the volunteers I spoke with, the most appealing aspect of WWOOFing was the opportunity to experience something they never had before, whether that referred to rural living, spending time on a farm, learning organic methods, or more broadly, experiencing a different culture. Other motivations cited by volunteers and hosts include the view of WWOOF as an alternative way to travel, and the benefits of language immersion for people learning English during their visit to Canada.

6.2.1 Different Way of Life

Six volunteers explained that WWOOFing appealed to them as an opportunity to experience something new. This was expressed by WWOOFers who lived in large cities, or more densely populated parts of the world, so these WWOOFers were referring to living and working on a farm in a rural area as being different from their lives back home. For most travelers, new experiences are sought out as part of the entire adventure; one WWOOFer summed it up saying that WWOOFing was “a fun way to travel because it's something different and you kind of feel like you have a new life temporarily” (V201). This also relates to several hosts assessments about the people they've had volunteer on their farms as people who are often going through some type of transitional period in

their lives, and leave home as a way of ‘finding themselves’. (H102) One host couple referred to the enduring romanticism that surrounds farm life, and felt that volunteers were often seeking out the tranquility associated with farming, but soon discover that there’s hard work involved, too. (H105 and H106)



Figure 6.2 Coop next to strawberry patch, farm in the North Okanagan

For other volunteers, the different life they were speaking of was more aligned with experiencing a new culture, specifically Canadian culture. Many felt that living with a Canadian family was a more “authentic” view of Canadian culture. One volunteer was very clear in explaining why she chose to WWOOF, saying “I want to enjoy country in Canada, I want to live with Canadian [laughs] I want to meet Canadian” (V204). This points to the notion that authenticity exists in rural agrarian spaces, and whether or not a rural experience is a truer cultural experience than an urban one. Regardless of my analysis, volunteer travelers valued their WWOOF experiences for this reason.

Three volunteers conceived of the uniqueness of the WWOOF experience as being an alternative way to travel that is off the beaten tourist trail. This can be linked with the idea of authenticity, in that WWOOFing enables tourists to get out into areas that the majority of travelers wouldn’t go to, because farms may be remote, not on easily

accessible public routes, and don't feature the kind of sights that fill the pages of tourism brochures. It also provides a way of connecting with locals that more mainstream travel experiences do not, so for tourists who are interested in experiencing a different culture or way of life as it's lived every day, staying with a family affords a better chance for that than staying in hostels, for example, where travelers would generally only encounter other travelers.

These ideas about having an alternative experience align with the framing of the WWOOF experience by WWOOF Canada, and are supported by my own observations on-farm. Most of the farms I visited were off any route easily accessible by public transit and only one was a regular stop for conventional tourists. WWOOFers volunteering on the farms I visited were certainly seeing parts of the Okanagan that few other travelers would see. Additionally, WWOOFers were experiencing the place in a different way, because the hosts shared local knowledge with them, and some took the volunteers that stayed with them out on hikes or biking trails that mostly locals used.

In addition to experiencing a place differently, and participating in a way of life unlike their lives at home, volunteers had social encounters that were not typical of conventional travelers' social lives. Many of the participants told me stories about volunteers establishing friendships with host family members, and other members of the community, such as farm employees, who they likely would not have met otherwise. Four WWOOFers, who were staying at the same host farm together, were excited to show me photos of a birthday party they had planned for their hosts' granddaughter the week prior. These types of experiences line up with the way WWOOF Canada frames

these farm stays as sharing in the lives of the hosts and being treated as part of the family (WWOOF Canada 2013b).

6.2.2 Learning About (Organic) Production

While seeking an alternative tourism experience was the primary motivation for many volunteers, nine expressed that the opportunity to learn about organic farming influenced decisions to participate in WWOOF, rather than the other ‘alternative’ travel options available. One volunteer couple claiming to be consumers of organic foods had brought their two children with them because “[they] figured that if kids can see how food is growing, where it comes from and what it costs to make it food that they see on their table then that would be really interesting for them” (V202 and V203). WWOOF Canada portrays the exchange as a learning experience and encourages the transfer of knowledge between hosts and volunteers as a mechanism of spreading the ideology and practical skills associated with organic production. However, from the perspective of some hosts, teaching their volunteers about organic methods was not a priority. Many hosts felt that volunteers were not really interested or that it took too much of their time and energy (H102 and H103; H105 and H106; H119). The general feeling among hosts who de-emphasized this aspect of hosting was that they would only take that time with WWOOFers who showed a genuine and enthusiastic interest in learning to farm organically, and were entertaining ideas of becoming farmers themselves. Interestingly, this line of questioning often prompted multiple hosts to relate instances in which their former WWOOFers later did become farmers, indicating that the aim of educating, or at

least exposing people to a way of life, is successful in a number of cases and inspires individuals to action.

6.2.3 Language Immersion

None of the volunteers listed language immersion as their principal reason for deciding to WWOOF. However, participating in WWOOF did facilitate learning English for WWOOFers as part of their overall travel objectives. Arguably, learning the language is part of experiencing another culture, so language immersion would fit in WWOOF's framing as a major aspect of cultural exchange. Volunteers were observed to be actively engaged in improving their English proficiency whenever I visited farms hosting WWOOFers from non-English speaking nations.

Hosts were more forthcoming about WWOOFers' intentions to learn the language. Several hosts were reticent to invite volunteers to stay with them if applicants explicitly mentioned they were in Canada to learn English. One host couple explained that they simply didn't have the time to work with volunteers on their English skills, and other hosts admitted to mild frustration when communication was a challenge. These hosts did not view language teaching as being within the scope of their roles as WWOOF hosts. Other hosts accepted that working on language skills was a legitimate reason to become a WWOOF volunteer, and treated it as part of hosting volunteers whose first language was not English. Four hosts told me about having an organization contact them to arrange WWOOF stays for pairs of students who were attending a language school in Vancouver. According to these hosts, part of the program was to spend some time in an immersion situation, and the program organizer believed WWOOF was a good way of achieving that.

Hosts were divided in their perspectives on their role as language teachers, conceiving themselves as playing a number of different, more significant roles as hosts and within their community, which will be explored next.

6.3 Who Hosts?

Not only does it take “a certain kind of person to do the WWOOF”, it takes a certain kind of person to host the WWOOF. Viewing organic farmers and WWOOF hosts within the framework of a lifestyle movement, meaning as people who enact the values and ideology of the movement in their daily lives, can be useful in understanding who these ‘certain kinds of people’ are. The WWOOF Canada host guidelines (2013b) list expectations for hosts that include responsibilities for the health, comfort and welfare of volunteers during their stay. Hosts’ lifestyles are expected to reflect the values of the organic movement, and they should provide opportunities for volunteers to experience and learn about their lifestyle, as well as methods of organic farming. There are also reminders for hosts to treat volunteers respectfully, and to be open to accepting people with a range of different personalities. The guidelines also ask hosts to be mindful of cultural differences, and the lack of farm/garden experience many volunteers will arrive with. Volunteers, in turn, are expected to be eager and willing to work and learn, and also to behave respectfully while staying with their host

The hosts I spoke with were often involved in their communities in a number of ways. Among them were individuals who organized community events, taught at children’s camps, and did mission work. One host was engaged in what she termed “community development through the arts”, connecting community members with

agriculture and the land through community-based art and performance (H116). Other hosts cared for people with disabilities in addition to farming, and one farming family hosted international students during the school year. The decision to farm organically was related to feelings of responsibility for supplying their communities with healthy, good quality food, and for providing stewardship of the land. These values are reflected in the way organic farmers practice farming and sustainable living every day, and align with the framing of the organic movement as being concerned with the health of the environment as well as people. This indicates that hosting WWOOFers is part of a broader ideology that many hosts in the Okanagan expressed as a sense of obligation to their communities and an ethos that involved giving back in some way. As mentioned above, one host couple was explicit that the reason they decided to host was because they felt a sense of reciprocity; they had been WWOOFers themselves, and thought that now as farmers they should host and provide that same experience for others (H111 and H112).

6.4 Who Volunteers?

Hosts reported a diversity of volunteers, both male and female from a range of backgrounds and of various ages in many stages of life. The WWOOF guidelines suggest that volunteering is intended for people interested in organic or sustainable lifestyles; only a few of the volunteers I spoke with expressed an interest in organic production, and a number of hosts felt that very few of the volunteers they had hosted were actually interested in learning about organic farming. Unlike hosts who are all part of the community of organic growers and with that adhere to certain set of values, volunteers cannot be characterized in the same way.

6.5 What Hosts Contribute

Hosts perceived their role as WWOOF hosts in many ways. The variety of ways they see what hosting means can be related to their values and that aforementioned desire to contribute. Many took on the role of host in a traditional sense of the term, meaning that hosts felt obligated to include volunteers in family activities and take them touring off farm. Several felt that they took on a parental or guardian-like role as well. A few hosts saw teaching about organic as one of their prime responsibilities as hosts, but not all hosts felt that this aspect was a major part of their role as WWOOF hosts.

6.5.1 Family Inclusion

“ I mean I think making them part of the family, for us, is part of the appeal because we learn so much from them and hopefully they learn from us too” – H109 and H110

“ If we’re invited somewhere we take them with us, they’re pretty much in the family, part of the family” – H113

All hosts I spoke with expressed the importance of including their volunteers in their family. Hosts who boarded volunteers within their homes expected this aspect of hosting to be primary. Hosts who had separate accommodations for volunteers, such as cabins or trailers on their property, made efforts to open their homes to volunteers but left the amount of interaction up to the WWOOFers. Some hosts ate all meals with volunteers, but arrangements for meals varied from host to host. Taking volunteers on family outings, or even running errands at times, was seen as part of hosting in general. Hosts mentioned taking volunteers with them on regular visits with extended family, grocery shopping with them, or simply watching television together. While helping with

the household was not expected, many hosts expressed appreciation for volunteers who pitched in by washing dishes, helping with meal preparation, or entertaining children. One host felt that having another person in your living space and socializing with volunteers was a challenge at times, but understood that hosting entailed a social responsibility. In his view:

If we're going to take someone, we've discussed it and said we're committed in giving them some social experiences, whether with us or we try to get them off the farm, do you know what I mean? We've set certain standards for ourselves that it's not fair to the WWOOFer if we're not willing to make sure they're having a good time socially, make sure they're eating well, and making sure they feel welcome. – H103

One farm I visited was particularly illustrative of how volunteers were welcomed into the home of their hosts. Accommodations for WWOOFers were a cabin on the property, but volunteers ate meals with their hosts in their home. I arrived at this farm mid-morning and was put to work alongside these volunteers in the vineyard, which is a short drive down the hill below the house site. When it was time for lunch, the hosts picked us up and took us all back up to the house. Immediately the volunteers and hosts began prepping food, and I was also given a task chopping vegetables for a salad. It was a very relaxed atmosphere, the volunteers seemed to need little direction and were in and out of cupboards and the fridge, setting the table, and portioning out food. There was much chatter and laughter, everyone appeared comfortable and there were many congenial exchanges between the hosts and volunteers. I had the sense this was a familial scene, like any other meal with a number of family members. This was the only meal/context of this type that included hosts and volunteers in which I participated in during my research, so I can't say whether or not this would be typical experience,

although it seemed to be representative of how these hosts lived out the framing of WWOOF that encourages immersion for volunteers in family-life.

6.5.2 Hosts as Tour Guides

Hiking, biking, fishing, boating, and going to the beach were some of the activities that hosts did with volunteers. Often, these would be regular family outings that volunteers were invited to join in on, giving them a chance to experience some recreation in the area and see a bit more of the region. Sometimes, hosts took volunteers on activities that they might not do otherwise if they were not hosting people, feeling like “tourists in their own town”. All hosts recognized that volunteers were here on vacation and wanted to ensure that they enjoyed their stay. For example, one host responded:

I think it’s very important that we as WWOOFer hosts try to immerse them in our culture as much as possible and that doesn’t just mean work, that means taking them downtown for walks and you know, try some of the restaurant meals things like that, and don’t overwork them... we took them on a wine tasting tour here, and yeah we try to have fun with them not just all work, ‘cause you know they’re human too, and like I said they’re here to enjoy the Okanagan – H106

The WWOOF network often appeals to budget travelers who see the benefits of working a bit for room and board. Hosts participate for a variety of reasons, but the network offers much needed labour to some farmers. While these two positions are not in opposition as hosts and volunteers can both benefit from participating, for farmers who rely on WWOOFers this may pose a problem. Volunteers initiate contact with hosts, based on the host profiles they gain access to through membership in the network. Hosts are advised on ways to make their profile appealing to increase the chances of volunteers contacting them to arrange a stay (WWOOF Canada 2013b). For commercial farmers

whose livelihoods really benefit from having WWOOFers, this puts them in a situation of competing for volunteers with other hosts who can provide a more vacation-like experience. Given the choice, spending work exchange hours caring for horses or tending a household vegetable garden may hold more charm for travelers with less of an interest in learning about organic production than shoveling compost, harvesting half a hectare of zucchini (note: wear long pants for this task!), or digging postholes. Being able to provide volunteers with touristic experiences is an advantage for hosts in attracting volunteer labour.

6.5.3 Sense of Guardianship

Nine hosts spoke about taking on a parental-like role, especially with younger volunteers. This might naturally emerge from the emphasis hosts placed on including volunteers as family members during their stay, and hosts' feelings of responsibility towards anyone staying in their homes. The WWOOF network also encourages hosts to be accountable in ensuring the safety of volunteers on their property and to make sure that travelers have travel insurance should something happen during their trip (Host guidelines, 2013). Four hosts used the terms 'motherly' or 'fatherly' when describing this aspect of hosting (H105, H108, H116, H110) and one host couple related it to how they would hope their daughter would be treated when traveling abroad (H117 and H118).

This role felt natural to one host who explained:

You do, well if they're young, like if they're only 19, 20, you do kind of fall into a mother kind of role, make sure they're eating and taking them to get groceries, and laundry and all those kind of things so, it's like having kids back at home – H105

One host made sure that volunteers knew that if they needed help or got into trouble after leaving his place that they could contact him with any challenges they were having (H110). He felt that younger travelers in a foreign country with unfamiliar ways of doing things could benefit from having a connection with a Canadian friend in case of an emergency.

This sense of responsibility posed a challenge in some instances for hosts. One host was concerned about liability for WWOOFers following having a volunteer place himself in a dangerous situation after he had been warned against it (H101). Another host couple also told me a story about a former WWOOFer endangering herself while staying on their farm, and the stress it caused in their household as they set about trying to deal with this person's issues (H115 and H116).

6.5.4 Role as Educator

There was a range of opinions among hosts as to whether or not educating volunteers on organic production was an important part of their role as WWOOF hosts. WWOOF Canada promotes the spread of the organic movement through education, however, a number of hosts I spoke with admitted that they only put any effort into teaching WWOOFers if individuals showed a genuine interest in learning about organic farming. These hosts perceived the WWOOF network more as purely a travel opportunity and did not see it as contributing much to the spread of the organic movement. They shared knowledge of farming with volunteers if asked about it, but did not make concerted efforts at educating their volunteers. One host lamented that the language barrier often prevented any teaching opportunities that arose. Another host

family were training an apprentice, and felt that she deserved more of their attention in terms of educating because she was there for that purpose for the whole season.

I spent time with these hosts working alongside them, and my experience was different. However, I was there as a student/researcher, and in this role I asked questions as we worked. All of the hosts were happy to respond, and I learned a great deal about organic production methods during my visits, although this may be because I was one of those individuals who showed an interest. I also observed that while working alongside one host and a couple of WWOOFers, that the volunteers did not inquire much about the task we were doing, and the host did not explain or volunteer any information to them. He did, however, talk with me quite extensively about the task, the farm, and organic farming generally in response to my queries. This could be simply that the host and volunteers had had a conversation about this particular task previously (culling apples ‘stung’ by codling moth), or it was due to the limited English proficiency of the volunteers. I suspect it was the latter, because as we worked, I spoke with them, but the conversation lacked depth due to the language barrier.

On the other hand, other hosts placed great importance on teaching their volunteers. Some hosts initiated learning opportunities for particular things, such as teaching volunteers to drive a tractor, or showing them how to do certain tasks including how winery machinery works, that were not part of the regular work that was being done during their stay.

Our role is, first of all, we look at it as a learning experience, and we know that most of these young people, they live in cities or small towns but they don’t have access to farms and gardens, so this can be a life experience, so what you’re learning is going to carry you through your life, now you might not use it in the next two years but when it comes to learning how to pound a post or hang a gate, you’ll know how to do it, because you’ve

done it...it's a scary thing learning how to use a chainsaw but once you've done it, it's "woohoo!" [laughing] – H107

Other hosts incorporated education into daily tasks, when working alongside volunteers and explaining things to volunteers as they completed a task. This came quite naturally to some hosts, one in particular approached teaching in that "if there's a job we're doing together, then yeah during that time I try to point out why I'm doing something a certain way, or why this is better or more organic or whatever it is" (H112). Many hosts said they really enjoyed the teaching aspect of WWOOF hosting, and that it seemed important to pass on their knowledge.

6.6 What Volunteers Contribute

When asked about how they saw their role, volunteers responded by listing the types of tasks they performed during their stay. Volunteers perceived their contribution to the farm in their labour, and defined their role within that distinction. Tasks reported were related to daily farm maintenance, such as weeding, harvesting, or thinning of plants. Of course, tasks varied depending on the time in the season, what was being produced on particular farms, and the level of skill or teaching/supervision tasks required. Some hosts limited jobs to what was farm-related, others put WWOOFers to any tasks that needed doing, such as domestic work. Volunteers felt that labour was the main responsibility in holding up their end of the exchange, and while a number of those I spoke with were supporters of organic, none of them characterized their role as advancing the organic movement.

Hosts acknowledged that WWOOFers' labour was a valuable contribution, but that it was only one aspect of the exchange. WWOOFers contributed ideas, dynamism and youthful energy, and enhanced the mood of their farm in addition to helping with farmwork. "[N]ot only do they contribute as far as labour goes but they kind of contribute to the whole atmosphere of the farm right, we've had a couple ones that really fit into the family, it's great, you know, you're being enriched by it right, you have these ideas and young people, and it certainly adds that extra to everything" (H101). Other hosts spoke of specific WWOOFers who had contributed in unique ways, such as having volunteers that were trained as chefs prepare meals for them (H117 and H118).

6.7 Cognitive Praxis and Frame Alignment in the WWOOF Network

To reiterate my analysis, I turn to viewing the WWOOF network in the Okanagan through the lens of social movement theories of cognitive praxis and framing. According to Eyerman and Jameson (1991), there are four major aspects to a social movement. Three are centred on the process of how knowledge is co-created by movement participants, and influenced by outside discourse, these being: 1) cosmological, 2) technological, 3) organizational. The fourth aspect is praxis, which refers to the way the first three are mobilized and practiced.

The cosmological refers to what the issue to be resolved is constructed as, and what will a resolved issue result in (Eyerman and Jameson 1991). The issue for the WWOOF network, as it's posed as a support for organic agriculture, then is the environmental sustainability of farming practices, and the related health impacts for local ecology and people living and eating locally produced food in the Okanagan. The

visionary goal of WWOOF in relation to this issue, according to WWOOF Canada, is to support farmers who are living and producing in an environmentally sustainable way, and to spread knowledge of and support for organic products. Based on the findings on this research, WWOOF participants in the Okanagan place less emphasis on this cosmological aspect of the WWOOF network, and regard the benefits of participation as well as their own roles within the network to be in relation to cultural exchange and tourist experiences.

The strategies/actions needed to bring that ideal vision to fruition is the technological aspect of this framework (Eyerman and Jameson 1991). Organic agriculture can be characterized as a lifestyle movement (see Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones 2012), in which every day practices are performed in consideration of the impacts of agriculture on local environments and communities. Organic farmers follow methods which adhere to their goals of environmental sustainability and maintenance of health. For hosts, the WWOOF network can provide a support base in the form of extra helpers for those who need it in order to maintain the viability of their farm operations. Other hosts who are less reliant on volunteer labour still benefit from the network as enrichment for their families, which may not directly advance sustainable farming practices but in the building of relationships and connections through such experiences, the vision of the lifestyle of organic farming and collective identity can be (re)produced through these social interactions.

The third element, the organizational, examines how the knowledge co-created by members of the collective become consolidated and spread beyond movement (Eyerman and Jameson 1991). WWOOF hosts in the Okanagan who see educating as part of their

role utilize the WWOOF network in spreading the knowledge of the organic movement. Others who feel that WWOOFing is less about learning organic techniques in advancement of the organic movement still access WWOOF for extra help or for the experiences it provides. In terms of the network itself, as WWOOFers move in and out of the network they carry their experiences as volunteers, and share them with others as they continue to travel or back in their home communities. This type of word of mouth knowledge transfer was mentioned by several volunteers in this study as the way in which they first found out about WWOOF network, and so seems to be a common way of spreading the ideas and beliefs behind WWOOF beyond the network.

The fourth major aspect of Eyerman and Jameson's (1991) framework of cognitive praxis of a social movement are the ways in which that knowledge is put into practice to advance the movement; in other words, the movement's praxis. This would encompass WWOOF participants transferring knowledge about the network which often encourages new participants, former WWOOF volunteers becoming hosts, former WWOOF volunteers becoming organic farmers themselves. It would also be related to the material outcomes of WWOOF on organic farms, that being the production of organic food and other products. This is most salient in cases where farmers rely on the help and/or view the network as in support of the organic movement, and so utilize what the network offers in the form of labour and other benefits with the vision at the end resulting in the production of goods. In this way, the cognitive aspects of WWOOF as a support system for organic agriculture, are put into praxis to produce sustainably and advance the organic movement. In the Okanagan, only a small number of WWOOF participants I spoke with would fit this model.

Given that based on the findings of this project, the cognitive praxis of WWOOF is more about seeking out and obtaining experiences, whether as a host or a volunteer tourist, the way the WWOOF network has been framed at an organizational level may not transfer into the every day experiences of WWOOF participants. Returning to Benford and Snow's definition of framing in social movements: "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (2000: 614). These sets of shared beliefs and meanings that are co-created through participation in WWOOF are important in forming collective identities, and also for coordinating practices throughout the network. This relates to frame alignment (see section 4.3) between the espoused goals and visions of WWOOF Canada at an organizational, network wide level, and the actual experiences of participants everyday. Based on my findings, participants of WWOOF in the Okanagan view the network as primarily as a cultural experience, which is reflected in the descriptions of the network by WWOOF Canada. Participants expressed the importance of labour and learning about organic methods as secondary, and maybe at times incidental, which deviates from the framing of WWOOF Canada as a work-learn exchange. Despite this slight misalignment in practice, this concept continues to be emphasized in spreading the movement at the organizational level.

6.8 Summary

A large number of participants in the WWOOF network, both hosts and volunteers, place less emphasis on the network's role in spreading knowledge about organic methods and advancing the organic movement. The role of WWOOF within the

context of the post-organic era is primarily an alternative travel opportunity that for some farmers supports the viability of their operations, but for most participants the motivations and benefits of WWOOF are the experiences it offers. This finding is reflected in the literature on WWOOF, as another study of the WWOOF network which examined the motivations of participants through a volunteer tourism perspective found similar motivations for participation, noting that while the help was appreciated by hosts in the study, intercultural and knowledge sharing were more valued (Ord 2010). WWOOF Canada places prominence on hosts demonstrating the values of the organic movement in their daily lives, and in providing learning opportunities for volunteers. In practice, while many hosts are living and producing in a sustainable way, cultural exchange or an alternative travel experience are perceived as the primary outcomes rather than a chance for knowledge transference or advancement of the organic movement, although this does occur on some level. The conception of what the WWOOF network means is slightly divergent from the framing by WWOOF Canada in that for participants that I spoke with in Okanagan, learning about organic is not what the network is all about. This makes the experience of WWOOF by participants here further removed from the organic movement that WWOOF is framed as supporting and advancing.

Chapter 7. The Social Economy of WWOOF

“[Organic farming]’s a lifestyle, you definitely don’t do it for the money!” – H101



Figure 7.1 Roadside "honour-system" market in the North Okanagan

The previous chapter explored the motivations behind participation in the WWOOF network from the perspectives of hosts and volunteers, and how the perspectives expressed by research participants align, or don't align, with the ideology of the organic movement and the foundational organizational philosophies of WWOOF. This chapter will draw on those findings and elaborate on how WWOOF fits into the wider community as a social economy that emerges from the interrelations of participants.

Using Delanda's model of assemblages to explain this emergence, I will establish WWOOF as a social economy that arises in support of local, sustainable food systems.

7.1 Assemblages, Not Networks

Delanda's model (2006) shows how assemblage theory can be a useful tool for describing and analysing how disparate and diverse sets of autonomous actors come together to form a whole. This whole is not simply the sum of its parts, nor are its parts smaller pieces of the whole. The whole is (re)formed through the interactions of heterogeneous parts, and the properties of the whole emerge as a result of those processes (Delanda 2006). To apply this to the WWOOF network, the 'pieces' that constitute the assemblages include the hosts, volunteers, extended family and friends, farm employees, as well as the WWOOF administrators. Other pieces are the materials of the farm, such as the plants, animals, and other elements necessary to food production as in farm implements, soil, etc. The values, knowledge, and ideology of the organic movement and of the individuals also form pieces of the whole. The relationships that are formed, the roles of WWOOF participants, and the cultural exchange are also important factors in the assemblage. Considering all of these pieces that are part of a farm, and part of the WWOOF network, as an assemblage, what emerges from the whole is a social economy.

Put simply, a social economy is a value-based enterprise that operates to address social, environmental, or other communal needs rather than to purely pursue profits (McMurtry 2010). When viewed as a values-based endeavour practiced by individuals who identify as part of a larger collective whose aim encompasses environmental and

social concerns, organic agriculture's practitioners can be positioned as agents engaging in Polanyi's concepts of embeddedness and social cohesion through economic exchange.

Historically, organic agriculturalists developed their own distribution systems and markets for their produce through connections with other producers and supporters among their local communities (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007). Smaller-scale post-organic farmers still maintain a more localised consumer base. Organic farmers emphasize their role in providing healthy food for their communities, and maintaining the well-being of the farmlands under their stewardship (Conford 2008; Fromartz 2007; Maxey 2006; Morgan and Murdoch 2000; Sumner 2005). Early adherents to organic farming methods have embodied several of the social economy criteria identified by Polanyi (1957) in that they were not primarily financially motivated and understood economic transactions to be intertwined with social relationships. Participants in this study illustrated a number of ways that organic farmers can be seen to be pursuing values-based enterprises that contribute to the public good and provide services for their communities. WWOOF can be characterized as a support system for these endeavours.

I began my project looking to explore WWOOF as a social economy. What I came to understand was that while WWOOF participants may not have entered into these work-learn-stay relationships with the intent of fostering a social economy, social economies emerged from these relationships through the processes of articulations among hosts, volunteers, the farm work, and the values that motivated people to become involved. For this purpose I prefer the concept of an assemblage, rather than a network, which denotes a conglomerate of dispersed nodes linked through time and space by different sorts of connections in a way that seems static and homogenous. An assemblage

can maintain the diversity and fluidity that characterizes WWOOF and provide a useful tool for explaining how despite its heterogeneity, the ‘network’ retains certain properties as an entity that exists and operates in multiple, disparate locations. Assemblage also is an aid to conceptualizing social economy as an emergent property of WWOOF.

The theory of assemblage has been increasingly employed in social science research as an effective tool in dissecting and rebuilding social entities, collectives, and organizations. For McFarlane and Anderson (2011), assemblage is not only a type of relational thinking, but is an “ethos of engagement” that recognizes the agency of actors, and is open to disruption and non-linear configurations of social groups. Assemblage is a method of analysis that allows us to describe the whole as well as all of the elements it is composed of, and identifies unity across dispersions in time and space, while placing emphasis on the processual nature of social groups as they coalesce, disperse, and re-assemble. Recently, social movement scholars and geographers have used assemblage to this effect (see Anderson & McFarlane 2011; Bennett 2005; Davies 2012; and McFarlane 2009).

For my own project, it is the idea of emergent properties that result from the process of assemblage that is of utility when analysing the WWOOF network. Certainly, assemblage can be applied in looking at how actors move in and out of the network, how each volunteer-host-farm relationship is shaped and re-shaped depending on the individuals involved, and that from each of those different experiences emerge. The previous chapter discussed the framing of the WWOOF organization and how and why participants engage, so I will leave off of this line of analysis (although the potential for

further analysis using assemblage is tempting) and focus on social economy as an emergent property of the WWOOF network.

7.2 Values-based Enterprises

In the previous chapter I described some of the values that underlie hosts and volunteers' motivations for participating in WWOOF and examined their alignment with the framing of the organic movement. It is these shared values that also are foundational in the emergence of the social economies that develop out of the WWOOF network. The ideas and beliefs held by participants are embodied and operationalized in the daily practices of organic farming, and WWOOFers contribute to the enactment of those values through their voluntary labour and other contributions to farm families.

The values that form the basis of the social economy of WWOOF have been expressed as part of the organic movement's overall ideology (as discussed in a previous chapter), and were highlighted as reasons for farming organically. The most often cited were concerns for the environment and a desire to provide land stewardship, and the importance of maintaining the quality and healthfulness of foods or farm-products. When asked about the reasons for farming organically, one host addressed both of these concerns:

I would add that feeding people feels great...but, primarily I think it's first and foremost about the stewardship aspect for us...I think we produce very high quality and we do it, you know, in a way that's much better than many other types of farming, on the environment – H103

Eleven host farmers made statements that captured the sense of responsibility they felt as stewards of the land they farmed. Several described their properties as reservoirs

of biodiversity and havens for wildlife. Stewardship of agricultural land was expressed in both a philosophical and practical sense, as some host farmers felt strongly about their duty to protect the environment and improve the soil through their own practices. One host farmer described the central nature of their practices as based in this idea, saying “being organic is about maintaining that soil health for the future, it’s not about today” (H107). Others spoke of the economic benefits of farming organically, saying it was actually a more costly cyclical situation you get into if you are relying on synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, and that taking a view of your farm as an ecosystem was a much more self-sustaining model. Three hosts referred to organic practices as an ethic they believed in. One host farmer acknowledged that a number of consumers sought out organic foods primarily because of this ethic, but that public awareness of what organic agriculture could contribute to environmental preservation was in need of enhancement.

While the term food security was used by only two of the host farmers with whom I spoke, the concept was implied in several responses that addressed issues of stewardship with long-term outcomes in mind. The organic farmers I spoke with consider what they do as beneficial for their communities for years to come. One expressed how she conceived of the larger implications of what she does in her daily practices, explaining “we just feel that we are helping create sustainability in our community and with climate change I think that’s going to be a huge issue” (H101).

Host farmers painted a dire picture of the state of farming, with issues of sustainable practices, land degradation, and farm succession leading future generations into a crisis situation. One host spoke very passionately, pointing out:

When you realize that the planet earth is covered with a thin skin called the soil, and that's all we have, and if we don't look after it we're all gonna starve! – H106

Many hosts felt that more young people would be encouraged and supported in farming, and to use more environmentally sustainable practices if there was increased public education on these issues. Host farmers took opportunities to educate people whenever they arose, such as at the farmer's market, and saw awareness-raising as part of their responsibilities as well.

From a consumer perspective, when organic food is equated with health, it is the correlation of the absence of chemical sprays that is considered to make the food healthier for consumption. Among host farmers, there was also the idea that being organic was healthier for the farm family in their daily practices, and this desire to protect family members was commonly mentioned as a reason for growing organically. A number of host farmers had had some experience with conventional farming practices and had first hand knowledge of the potential problems in using synthetic chemicals. One host farmer who had inherited a conventional orchard and converted to organic production methods was convinced that adverse health effects of conventional sprays had led directly to his father ending up “in an early grave” (H106). Another host farmer who had worked on conventionally managed orchards told me of his experience, saying:

I got a full body hives on the last week of picking, I had chemical poisoning from sprays, so, that in itself just seems wrong, and it's just unnecessary...there really is no need to be spraying poison. – H119

A greater number of host farmers chose to use organic methods out of concern for their children/grandchildren's health. Many of these parents and grandparents not only

wanted to feed their families without the use of synthetic pesticides or herbicides, they also wanted their properties to be safe, chemical-free places for family members to live in. For many, stewarding the land and maintaining good health are essentially intertwined in the heart of organic production methods. One host explicated their decision to farm organically, despite the lack of support from others in their industry:

We've got four kids so, I mean we didn't want to have a shed full of chemicals that they might come upon, you know, and mess around with, so we're not spraying anything in the vineyard that's toxic, so we can get out there anytime, the kids can run around or drive around on their bikes and we're never worried about it – H110

The health of consumers was also often mentioned, but what was interesting was that from the producers' perspectives, supplying their communities with healthy, good quality fruit, vegetables and other comestibles (wine, or vinegar in one instance) was construed as a service they provide. Under a traditional economic model, producing a product of quality increases the longevity of your business and growth of your consumer-base. However, host farmers emphasized that growing food organically was a benefit for their community, a standpoint that aligns more closely with the social economic model. One host farmer, who was active in spreading the organic movement through missionary work overseas, was motivated to create a more equitable food system, and had chosen to farm organically, in order to make organic foods more affordable and accessible in his own neighbourhood. The host farmers I interviewed generally produced on a smaller scale and distributed their products within their communities, and the emergence of the local food movement in recent years has likely bolstered demand, which supports the idea that local organic farmers are filling an unmet need, akin to other types of service-oriented endeavours that fall within the social economy sector.

As a lifestyle movement (see earlier references in section 4.5), organic agriculture is an embodied and applied philosophy that results in a social economy. Organic farmers choose to use organic methods because of their beliefs and values. They apply their value system to their business, in an economic model that appeals to some consumers as ‘green’ or more ecologically or socially conscious than conventional agricultural production methods which rely on synthetic inputs. As part of the movement’s framing, organic growers do not consider the conventional farming model sustainable. When I asked about sustainability, most hosts did not associate WWOOF labour with their ideas of sustainable farming. As was discussed in the prior chapter, labour needs are higher on organic farms, but WWOOF volunteers are not seen as a reliable source of help. Most of the WWOOF hosts I spoke with cautioned against reliance on WWOOFers for this reason, however, WWOOF labour may enhance the viability of some farm operations, if not their sustainability. This fits with viewing engagement in WWOOF as a social economy because organic host farmers hold particular ideas about sustainable agriculture that guide their practices as they operate a business, and those practices as well as the resultant consumable products, are constructed as advantageous to their community. As discussed previously, WWOOFers contributions to individual organic farm operations are variable, however, overall this volunteer labour pool does provide support for organic farming as a whole regardless of whether that is the primary contribution as perceived by participants. This supportive labour pool when taken as whole beyond personal experiences, contributes to the lifestyle movement of organic, at the same time as resulting in a social economy.

7.3 The Business of Farming

“it’s labour that makes it expensive...it’s very hard work, so, we have to pay for that somewhere, I don’t make any money on raspberries, none, because, what it costs me to pick them, put them in a box...I break even on that “ – H107, on responding to a consumer’s question about prices at the Farmer’s Market.

The market for organic products has expanded substantially, as explained in the section on the history of organic, but the labour needs remain intense and are a major challenge for farmers. The majority of host farmers interviewed were operating at a scale that produces for an intended local market, with only a handful that distributed some of their products outside of the Okanagan. Smaller-scale producers are not only organic, but are also contributing towards demands for ‘local’ products by local food advocates. The local food movement, while largely a consumer-driven initiative, is supportive of farmers within the region.

Leaving aside an in-depth discussion of the virtues/faults of local food movements, the significance of local markets within the lens of social economy is the focus on community. Specifically, the model outlined by Polanyi is centred on the idea of transactions as social relationships. Supporters of local food economies strive to inform themselves about the origins of their food. In order to learn as much as possible, proponents of eating locally are also encouraged to get to know the people who produce that food. Farmer’s markets are on the rise, and are an important place for this engagement (Beckie et al 2010; Hergesheimer and Kennedy 2011; Wittman 2012). These markets act as spaces where Polanyi’s model can operate. Consumers and producers interact, and form social relationships through the exchange of goods, thereby (re)producing a social economic model of market transactions.

Local markets are supportive of the social economy of local organic farmers, as is the WWOOF network. As examined in the previous chapter, host farmers benefit from the extra help but place greater significance on the other benefits of hosting. Participating in WWOOF is values-based, not profit-driven. Those other benefits, such as cultural exchange, knowledge exchange, or social aspects that motivate hosts to participate denote the underlying beliefs they hold. Choosing to host is grounded in those values that form the basis from which the social economies of WWOOF emerge.

Volunteerism is another attribute of social economies. Recent explanations of the social economic model describe volunteer labour as one of the key tenets for this sector (see McMurtry 2010). WWOOF is described as an exchange of labour for room, board, and learning opportunities, and according to WWOOF guidelines, the labour is unpaid work so it fits under the category of volunteerism (other studies have looked at WWOOF as volunteer tourism, see Ord 2010, which supports that it can be considered a volunteer activity).

7.4 Social Economies from Multi-scalar Assemblages

Social economies emerge at different levels: on-farm, and in the wider network. At the farm level, each particular assemblage of people, materials, and knowledge and ideas will be different, and so the resultant social economy will vary not only from farm to farm, but also will shift as people come and go, materials change, or new knowledge results in a different way of doing things. As stated earlier, an assemblage is not static, but it does need to maintain a certain amount of stability in order for it to function as a whole, and to give rise to emergent properties. Each farm has a different assemblage, and

each WWOOFer brings his or her own unique personality, skills, knowledge, beliefs, and ideas to add to the assemblage on each farm. While each WWOOF stay is different, there is continuity in the social economy that gets formed each time. Each WWOOF volunteer contributes in some way to each values-based farming operation they visit, an enterprise that provides healthy food for the local community which is produced in an environmentally sustainable manner that safeguards farmlands for future generations. The details of each of these encounters will be different, but viewed in a wider lens, each encounter gives rise to a social economic approach to food production given that all of the elements that define a social economy remain throughout the process of on-farm groupings changing and re-forming. WWOOF hosts and volunteers need not set out to create a social economy, or even be cognizant that this is the result of their interactions as they go about the daily business of farming/WWOOFing, in order for this to occur; therefore, the social economy that is produced can be said to be an emergent property of the WWOOF network on farm.

Moving from the farm up to the scale of WWOOF as a network that operates in multiple localities simultaneously, each farm is part of the larger assemblage of WWOOF Canada, and of the global network operating under the title and philosophy of WWOOF among participating national organizations. At this larger scale, the WWOOF network acts to facilitate the emergence of a social economy of organic food production by providing the opportunity for connections between WWOOF participants. The WWOOF network as a whole also works to support organic farmers and promote sustainable methods of food production, a mandate evident in the guidelines and descriptions of what WWOOF is all about from the organizations themselves. Individual participants'

contributions vary; however, the overall result network-wide can be viewed as a social economy, given that it holds to placing greater value on the learning and cultural exchange, and supports sustainable livelihoods through the work of volunteers.

7.5 Summary

Hosts and volunteers (re)create social economies through their participation in the WWOOF network. WWOOF hosts operate their farms in a values-based manner and conceive of their enterprises as providing services to their community, in the form of quality food and land stewardship. Their chosen methods of food production are seen to have health benefits for themselves, their families, and for consumers. The local distribution of products enables relationship-building among producer and consumers, which is something desired by local food movement proponents and is beneficial for small-scale organic farmers in establishing a consumer-base within their communities. As explained in the previous chapter, hosts choose to participate in the WWOOF network based on their personal values, similar in their choosing to farm organically because it better aligns with their belief systems. Volunteers may or may not adhere to those same values, but regardless, they make valued contributions to the farms they visit.

The use of assemblage as a theoretical tool aids in understanding how WWOOF gives rise to social economies without the expressed intent of actors to bring this about. Through WWOOF, social economies are (re)produced as a result of participation. Assemblage theory provides a framework for viewing a social economy as an emergent property, and also helps to envision how unity and continuity through space and time is maintained within the network as people and materials move in and out. Participation in

the WWOOF network contributes to the values-based pursuits of organic farmers, and provides support for sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods through volunteerism. In these ways the results of participation fulfill descriptions of what constitutes a social economy.

Chapter 8. Moving ‘Beyond Organic’ in the Post-organic: a Proposal for Mobilizing through the WWOOF Network

“Food informs individuals’ identities, including their racial identities, in ways that other environmental justice and sustainability issues –energy, water, garbage, and so on do not.” (Alkon and Agyeman 2011: 10)

In this chapter, I explore food movements that support social justice related to food. The organic movement has traditionally aligned itself with social justice, however in the post-organic, much of this has been dropped in favour of a more pragmatic focus on non-toxic cultivation methods. In my opinion, the organic movement should re-embrace social justice, as the organic movement philosophy is similar to other food justice and food sovereignty tenets. As the organic movement grows, and becomes more established across many nations, the WWOOF network accompanies it, and grows its support base alongside. This positions WWOOF again as a resource through which ideas about social justice and food movements could be further advanced through networking.

The increase of industrialized, monocropped, larger-scale certified organic operations that characterize the post-organic may be propelling organic foods into the mainstream, but have been criticized as corporate takeovers that have led to the ‘watering down’ of organic standards in order to accommodate organic economies of scale (Guthman 2004). The growing availability of organic food products in large chain stores may have increased access, but has reduced organic production to simply a set of agricultural techniques (Clark 2007). Granted, this results in fewer synthetic chemicals in our soils, waterways, and food, however the ideology of the organic movement embraces much more than this. In the post-organic era, a surging number of producers are

fomenting a movement emerging from small-scale, organic, local food supporters called ‘beyond organic’, which calls for producers to reject the certification regime and operate their farms according to organic principles which go beyond what’s seen as the minimum standards codified by the legislation surrounding organic agriculture.

There has been some academic attention paid to the reasons why considering food as simply a commodity is not only problematic, but also unethical. Winson (1993) referred to food as the “intimate commodity”, and several other scholars have outlined why food should be considered differently due to its necessity for life, but also because of its cultural and social implications (see for example Counihan and Van Esterik 2012; Nestle 2013; Pretty 2002). Peter Rosset’s work on the global food regime and regulatory framework (2006) makes a convincing case for why food items should be removed from World Trade Organization (WTO) regulation. Rosset explains policies and issues, and links them directly with farmers’ lives revealing how the existing agrifood system creates and sustains economic, environmental, and social injustices. One of the solutions offered is to place management of the resources necessary for agriculture in the hands of producers, who have a vested interest in sustaining their livelihoods and communities, as well as the knowledge and skills to conserve effectively (2006). In keeping with Wallerstein’s World Systems analysis (1982), negative impacts of the global food regime affect the periphery, which are low-capital, labour intensive producing regions of the world, while the benefits remain largely in core nations, or more accurately, corporations that operate transnationally but originate from core nations. Race and gender inequalities are exacerbated as well under the dominant agrifood system, making transnational policies complicit in the structural violence perpetrated on those in periphery regions.

Organic farmers operating on the margins of the global food regime, particularly the smaller-scale organic farmers like those who participated in this project, often identify themselves with the organic ideology or as living sustainable lifestyles. Their chosen method of producing food informs their identities within their communities, and influences how they are perceived by others as contributing to environmental conservation and feeding their communities healthfully. While individuals may or may not consider themselves ‘activists’, their daily practices serve to advance the movement(s).

A number of alternative food movements have taken up similar anti-corporate, anti-industrial, anti-globalized stances, to varying degrees. The organic movement has lately (if not continually) found its strongest voices in smaller-scale producers who have formed a collaborative relationship with local food movement supporters in direct opposition to the transnational corporate control of the food system. While these movements have made strides in revealing some of the ills of the globalized food system, they have been criticized for having too narrow a focus, and being exclusionary. Local and organic have not sufficiently attended to issues of social justice constructed by and reproduced through our food system. As Allen points out, these alternatives are still market-based, and cannot on their own resolve problems of inequity (2010).

Alternative food movements champion ‘choice’, and encourage consumers to make the ‘right’ choice when they go to the market. Emotion-laden language and moralizing of consumption behaviour plays a large role in both organic and local food rhetoric. This offloads the burden of systemic change onto individuals, or actually, individuals who can afford to participate. Because of this micro-focus, food movements

operate on the margins of the dominant food system, rather than disrupting or enacting changes at a structural level where the power to really institute change needs to be. As Allen observes: “While individual choices based on an ethic of care for others...can certainly be part of working toward justice, a concatenation of individual choices to improve social equity does not address the basic political economic structures, resource allocations and cultural conditions that have created inequity in the first place.” (2010: 300)

As previously explained, the ideology of the organic movement as institutionalized by IFOAM (not through accredited certification bodies) embraces tenets of social justice as part of the philosophy of organic agriculture. Currently, those who go ‘beyond organic’ are eschewing certification, while proclaiming they practice at a higher standard. The most influential voice among ‘beyond organic’ adherents is Joel Salatin, whose farm, Polyface, was featured in American food culture writer and journalist Michael Pollan’s best-selling *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006). I think it is important to note two things: 1) that the sort of alternative food movement perspective articulated via the work of Michael Pollan is typical of the privileged, elitist reputation that local and organic have acquired (Alkon and Agyeman 2011) and; 2) going ‘beyond organic’ is a site of controversy for organic farmers. Leaving aside the first point for the moment, for some farmers, going beyond organic is a reaction against government oversight guided by what are seen as a watered down set of standards. For these producers, a checklist of allowable inputs does not uphold the holistic philosophy of organic agriculture (Beyond Organic Insider 2011; Conner 2004). Others who have embraced certification view this movement as simply a flouting of the rules that lent the organics market legitimacy and

propelled organics into the mainstream (eg. see Kulla 2010). Perhaps it is a movement of farmers seeking the return of the core values of organic, which include social aspects. As an increasingly popular resistance to the co-option of organic methods by industrial-scale, profit-driven agribusiness, ‘beyond organic’ may be positioned to bring social justice issues into the forefront of food movements.

8.1 Food Justice

If ‘beyond organic’ moves in the direction of illuminating the socio-cultural inequities of the dominant food system, this would align with related food movements, specifically the movements for food justice, and food sovereignty. Food justice is a rights-based approach that envisions community-based food systems characterized by equity, dignity, accessibility, and security (Allen 2010; Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Veteran food justice organization Just Food describes the paradigm as “communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat [food that is] fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals.” (2014) Food justice recognizes that the agrifood system produces and perpetuates social, economic, and environmental inequities and aims to balance out how the risks and benefits of a food system are shared at all points in the food chain from field to plate. Food justice is a critique of alternative food movements such as local and organic, as it points out the voices that are omitted from these movement narratives. Alkon and Agyeman characterize alternative food movements as predominantly from the perspective of middle-class whites (like Michael Pollan), and claim that those involved are unaware of the exclusiveness of the local and organic movements (2011). These

scholars focus in on those who are largely left out, asserting that the way a food system organizes its production, distribution, and consumption is along racial and socioeconomic lines (Alkon and Agyeman 2011:3). This of course, has adverse consequences for those who bear an unequal share of the risks and injustices inherent in the globalized, agrifood system.

Recent research provides evidence of racialized, class-dependent hunger within our own communities. The 2011 Household Food Insecurity in Canada reports that 12.2% of Canadian households (estimated to be 3.9 million people, 1.1 million of whom are children) experience some level of food insecurity. Food insecurity in Canada has risen from 11.3% in 2007-2008, and more households are likely to struggle in the future due to correlative rising poverty levels (Tarasuk et al 2013). In BC, food insecurity is experienced by roughly 11% of residents, and leads to long-lasting detrimental health impacts, including increased susceptibility to disease and illness, decreased life expectancy, as well as stress and mental anguish (Dieticians of Canada 2011). Food insecurity during early childhood results in poor growth and development, and learning challenges, which in turn leads to lower levels of education attainment and fewer employment opportunities in addition to those long-term health effects, contributing to the cycle of poverty within low-income households (HELP 2013; B.C. Representative for Children and Youth and Provincial Health Officer 2010).

These same reports also show that those most at risk of food insecurity are single mothers and their families, Aboriginal households, recent immigrants, people of colour, and those on income assistance (who are often suffering from mental or physical health issues) and people with disabilities (Dieticians of Canada 2011; Tarasuk et al 2013).

Food insecurity affects already marginalized groups, who happen to be the same groups who are largely left out of alternative food movements such as local and organic due to their low-income status. Food justice activism aims to empower those left out of the food movement to work toward meeting their own food needs by developing their own community-based food systems. Where this intersects with organic is how food justice weaves together sustainability and justice:

The vision espoused by many food justice activists goes beyond one in which wealthy consumers vote with their forks in favor of a more environmentally sustainable food system to increased access to healthy food and the power to influence a food system that prioritizes environmental and human needs over agribusiness profits. - Alkon and Agyeman 2011: 6

8.2 Food Sovereignty

Food justice initiatives unveil the inequities and structural violence of the globalized agrifood system and reveal how social issues need to be incorporated in order to shift the balance of power. Proponents of food sovereignty have a similar orientation in that it is a rights-based approach that calls for community-based solutions for resolving inequities, particularly for producers in the global south. Food sovereigntists struggle to wrest control of food chains from the hands of profit-driven transnational agribusiness corporations and mitigate the impacts of neoliberal policies on their communities. Food sovereignty declares that agricultural products are for nourishment first, and only used as trade goods once first needs are met (Allen and Wilson 2008: 537; Via Campesina 2012). This term was first used by the Latin American small-farmer organization La Via Campesina (Via Campesina 2012; Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010). It refers to the rights of communities to control the means of producing and distributing their own

food (Desmarais, Wittman, and Wiebe 2011: 19-20; Patel 2009; Rosset 2003). La Via Campesina has grown into a transnational organization that calls for the de-commoditization of food, the removal of food products from international trade agreements, and the need for regionalized, accountable food systems (Wittman, Desmarais, and Wiebe 2010; Via Campesina 2012). It includes the kinds of concerns that food justice entails, as well as environmental and economic issues, and demands an overhaul of the global food system that would make producers and their communities the center of food systems.

Food sovereignty activists argue for changes at the local, national, and international political levels to develop their vision for community-centred food systems. La Via Campesina (2012) has summarized what a food sovereign system would look like in both policy and practice in their seven principles:

1. Food: A Basic Human Right
2. Agrarian Reform
3. Protecting Natural Resources
4. Reorganizing Food Trade
5. Ending the Globalization of Hunger
6. Social Peace
7. Democratic control

Each principle prioritizes the rights of producers and their communities, and suggests policies that would ensure those rights are upheld above the interests of profit-centred agribusiness. Without delving into too much detail, these principles assert the rights of farmers to be free from discrimination and oppression. Producers have the right to dignity, a livelihood of their choosing, and access to the lands on which they produce. The products grown with their labour should be available within their communities without pressure from imports. Sustainability of such a system should be supported, not

undermined, by trade policies. Particularly, indigenous peoples and women, who are often the most marginalized by multinational trade policies, must be included in decision-making processes. Rather than a redistribution of benefits and risks, these principles stipulate a redistribution of power, and insist that “[f]ood must not be used as a weapon” (2012).

8.3 The Organic Movement and Social Justice

Both food justice and food sovereignty require social change in order to create sustainable and equitable food systems. The organic movement’s four guiding principles as outlined by IFOAM incorporate some of the same ideals: 1) The Principle of Health, 2) The Principle of Ecology, 3) the Principle of Fairness, and 4) The Principle of Care (2005). Some intersections can be seen between organic principles and food sovereignty principles in the organic principles of health, of ecology, and of care, which accentuate the responsibilities of organic farmers to steward the land and ensure the health and well-being of soils, plants, animals, and in turn, consumers. This aligns with food sovereignty in its aims for sustainability of agricultural systems, and concern for the health of communities and food systems. The third Principle of organic agriculture, that of Fairness, touches on what food sovereignty and food justice are oriented around, which is the social relations of food systems. In fact, within the concept of the Principle of Fairness is the aim to work towards greater food justice and food sovereignty:

Fairness is characterized by equity, respect, justice and stewardship of the shared world, both among people and in their relations to other living beings. This principle emphasizes that those involved in Organic Agriculture should conduct human relationships in a manner that ensures fairness at all levels and to all parties - farmers, workers, processors,

distributors, traders and consumers. Organic Agriculture should provide everyone involved with a good quality of life, and contribute to food sovereignty and reduction of poverty. It aims to produce a sufficient supply of good quality food and other products. – IFOAM 2005

As discussed previously, organic agriculture has been criticized for not placing enough emphasis on IFOAM's mandate to practice the Principle of Fairness. Organic has become a niche market within the larger globalized agrifood system. So-called 'Big Organic' (corporate, industrial-scale organic operations) likely have no desire to overturn a market system from which they benefit, and smaller-scale producers lack the power (or aspiration either) to do so. A commitment to social justice within organic agriculture is taken up by individuals, and is certainly encouraged by the International Federation, but there remains no framework for addressing social injustices related to agriculture at the structural level of the organic movement. The power of the food sovereignty model is that it also recognizes the need for policies and strategies to implement its ideals. Organic has already compiled a list of what they aim to achieve, but are missing the piece on operationalizing those aims. Allen reiterates the necessity of policy changes to bolster and maintain the visions of alternative food systems, such as local and organic, to become more equitable (2010). Organic methods of production are advocated for by food justice and food sovereignty supporters as these movements also seek sustainability. If the organic movement, as a mainstream, highly recognizable type of branding sought out by consumers, paid more attention to the social injustices (re)produced by the global agrifood system, it would be poised to push through meaningful change.

Going 'beyond organic' re-centres the organic movement's philosophy, and hearkens back to its roots as a network of producers and supporters who practiced their

values in the ways they produced food and operated at a community-level. Social justice is already embedded in organic ideology, it just has yet to have an implementation framework. Food justice and food sovereignty can provide a model for that framework, and organic farmers have the established networks to move forward with it. The WWOOF network could readily fit within a strategy as well, as it too is a recognized organization with a global presence.

The prevailing global food regime has created a dissonance that surrounds agricultural products: food is regulated and traded in the global market like any other commodity, yet it has been declared a human right and is necessary to sustain life. This conflict may be an obvious point, but one that cannot be resolved by the global agrifood system in place.

Organic agriculturalists who identify with the principles of the organic movement express similar ideals to those of food sovereignty proponents (Fromartz 2007; Sumner and Llewelyn 2011; Tovey 2002), and the WWOOF network may provide an avenue to work toward wider implementation of food sovereignty and food justice concepts. Like the social economy that emerges through the articulations and interrelationships of the WWOOF network, food sovereignty and food justice are founded on values of equity and dignity, and advance collective benefits over personal profits. Re-configuring food systems to be community-centred and values-based might draw from the social economy approach in the way that Polanyi originally described the concept. WWOOF may also be viewed as an example of how a social economy is created transnationally within sectors of the economy that have environmental, or social, priorities. I see the WWOOF network as having the potential to support and advance efforts towards greater food justice and

food sovereignty, just as it has supported the organic movement. Food sovereignty frameworks offer strategies on how to take a philosophical stance, like the Principle of Fairness, and put it into practice.



Figure 8.1 Two hours spent picking apples in the Central Okanagan

8.4 Canadian Initiatives

In Canada, the latest Census of Agriculture data reports there are 294,000 farm operators, which represents 0.8% of the total Canadian population, and organic farmers represent 1.8% of all Canadian farmers (Statistics Canada 2012). In other areas of the world, particularly in the global south where a greater percentage of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods, producers have been the driving force behind advancing food sovereignty. Canada's demographic make-up does not have that critical mass of producers, and so efforts at food sovereignty and food justice require collaborative efforts of a variety of community members, and we need to abandon the

rhetoric of individual choice as the sole avenue for food system change. As Allen reminds us, “no social advances have ever been made without the combination of social movements and legislation” (2010: 306), which is particularly true in a North American context. Grassroots organization Food Secure Canada (FSC) has been doing groundwork, gathering voices of Canadians across geographical, class, gender, and racial divisions that might provide policy-makers guidance on how to craft and implement inclusive and fair legislation that develops and ensures a more equitable food system. Using food sovereignty precepts as a model for inquiry, FSC carried out the Peoples’ Food Policy Project (PFPP) from 2010-2011. The project consisted of 350 group discussions called Kitchen Table Talks, online forums, analyses of policy proposals and three conferences, which resulted in the generation of ten policy discussion papers consisting of recommendations and strategies for enacting policy changes (FSC 2011). The FSC positions food sovereignty as an approach that envisages food as the basis for the health of community members, local economies, and the local environment (2011). Based on the PFPP, the FSC propose policies that prioritize regional/domestic markets and support localized, sustainable production/distribution, including a federally funded program devoted specifically to children’s food security. Equitable decision-making processes should involve the public, especially people from within marginalized groups, in conjunction with a national strategy for poverty reduction in order to balance out the power relations constructed through the dominant food system, address issues of food insecurity, and promote food justice for all Canadians.

Collaborative work among alternative food movement participants, including organic farmers and supporters, can potentially attain the critical mass needed to push

forward with changes such as those proposed by FSC. Creating values-based food systems that are community-focused may incorporate a social economy approach as a deliberate strategy which would, like WWOOF, allow non-farmers to more fully participate in their own food system, forge connections, include traditional foodways, and expand the envisioning of alternative food movements beyond ethical consumption reliant solutions and break down the illusory binary of producer/consumer in favour of a food system built on webs of relationships and collaborative work among community members.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

In this research project, I set out to examine some of the reasons that individuals participate in the WWOOF network in the Okanagan as either hosts or volunteers, and what participation in the network produces. The WWOOF network has been associated with the organic movement since its inception, and as organic agriculture has expanded and spread around the world, WWOOF has accompanied it into more and more nations. Over the past two decades the market for organic products has developed into a niche within the mainstream, and organic as an industry has become codified by regulation and certification regimes. Today, organic producers' profiles are diverse, with farmers producing at many different scales with varying degrees of industrialized practices. Both the codification of organic agriculture and the range in operations have led to the determination that we are in a post-organic period (Goodman and Goodman 2007), in which all who participate in the industry do not emphasize organic agriculture as a social movement. WWOOF also has changed and grown recently, and its organizational vision of a work-learn exchange has become de-emphasized by many participants in this study.

I designed and carried out my project with a critical ethnographic approach, using established ethnographic methods of semi-structured interviewing and participant observation. My findings are drawn from field notes from preliminary fieldwork with 15 hosts, interviews with 19 hosts and 8 WWOOF volunteers, and fieldnotes from periods of participant observation on 8 separate farms. Analysis was an iterative process of coding and cross-comparisons throughout the entire interviewing and participant observation phases. My connection to the volunteers was via hosts, which turned out to be somewhat problematic as I was less successful in recruiting volunteers because it was more difficult

to contact volunteers directly unless I met them on the farm they were visiting. This resulted in a disproportionate balance of host and volunteer participant perspectives. In order to amend this, I included the hosts' opinions and knowledge about the WWOOFers who had visited them to add to the responses from volunteers.

A number of theoretical perspectives guided my research and influenced data collection and analysis. Several frameworks that were useful in looking at motivations for participating in WWOOF were drawn from the field of social movement studies: frame theory, cognitive praxis, and lifestyle movements. Frame theory focuses on the emotional, cultural, and identity aspects that social movement campaigns offer or construct for people involved, and how meaning is produced within social movement structures (Benford and Snow 2000; Oliver et al 2003). For this project, I utilized the concept of frame alignment, which refers to how closely the sets of ideas and beliefs that drive social movement collectives line up with the practices and experiences of those participating (Jasper 2011), to examine the alignment between the meaning and vision of WWOOF as an organization compared to the meanings and experiences of WWOOF for hosts and volunteers in the Okanagan.

The cognitive praxis framework added another dimension to the lens through which I was looking at motivations and evaluating experiences, in that this framework concentrates on the interactive process by which participants in a social movement produce knowledge and understand the meaning of their own actions, and put the ideals of the movement into practice (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). WWOOF hosts and volunteers in the Okanagan have their understandings of what it means to participate in WWOOF, which both motivates them to act (ie host or volunteer), and also creates

knowledge about the network that gets circulated through the larger collective as individuals move from farm to farm, or in and out of the network.

Theories about lifestyle movements are useful in explaining how different types of collectives work toward social change, and show how movements such as the organic movement are embodied daily practices that reflect and reinforce participants shared beliefs and ideas (Cohen 1985; Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones 2012). Hosts and volunteers in the WWOOF network participate as an enactment of their values (which may or may not align with the framing of WWOOF at the organizational level), and while WWOOF is not a social movement in its own right, those participating in the network have worked to advance the organic movement by spreading knowledge about organic agriculture and promoting it as a lifestyle.

WWOOF is constructed by the broader organization as a help exchange, yet most participants in the Okanagan who I spoke with had other more significant motivations for engaging in WWOOF, particularly the kinds of experiences it provides. WWOOF participants placed greater emphasis on the opportunities for cultural exchanges, and while hosts appreciated the extra help, neither the volunteers nor hosts thought of WWOOF as primarily a work-learn arrangement. WWOOF volunteers felt that the network offered an alternative tourism experience, and many appreciated the opportunity to spend time with Canadian families and explore what life on an organic farm in the Okanagan was like, while generally learning about Canada and possibly improving their English proficiency. Hosts, in general, enjoyed meeting people from different parts of the world, learning about other cultures, and sharing about themselves, their farms, and

their communities with their visitors. Even for hosts whose need for the volunteer labour was significant, these other reasons for hosting took precedence over labour needs.

In looking at WWOOF from a social movement perspective, I found that participation results in the (re)creation of social economies at the level of the farm, the community in which the host farm is located, and as a larger global network. Using the frameworks of resource mobilization theory (Tilly 1978), assemblage theory (Delanda 2006), and the concept of social economy (Polanyi 1957), I propose that the social economy of WWOOF is an emergent property of participation in the network. Resource mobilization theories of social movements examine the ways in which materials, ideas, and people are deployed in strategic actions towards advancing the movement's political and social goals. From such a perspective, WWOOF can be positioned as resource for advancing the organic movement.

Furthermore, the deployment of this resource has the resultant outcome of social economies. A social economy is an enterprise that is rooted in social values and aims to address social issues, as opposed to profit-driven, market-based business models which place social relationships outside of economic transactions. I applied Delanda's concept of assemblages (2006) as a tool for explaining the way in which these social economies are produced through the WWOOF network. In other words, assemblage theory is useful in articulating how an enduring whole such as a social economy can be sustained amid a diverse, ever-shifting network such as WWOOF. WWOOF hosts embody the values of the organic movement in their daily actions in how they practice agriculture. Their values guide their practice, and are integral to the way they operate their farm businesses. These same values also influence their motivations for participating in WWOOF as hosts.

As values-based endeavours, organic farms that host WWOOFers can be conceived as social economies at the individual farm level. More broadly, organic farming is founded in concepts of land stewardship, health, and quality for the benefit of all. Positioned as a support for organic farmers addressing these social issues, the WWOOF network supports the transnational social economy produced by the organic industry.

To date, the WWOOF network has been given little academic attention outside of tourism studies. WWOOF has been studied as sustainable tourism (KotUlek 2012), slow tourism (Lipman 2012), and ecotourism (Choo and Jamal 2009), because of the longer periods tourists stay, as well as the network's support for 'sustainable lifestyles' and the environmentally-conscious practices of participants. Other studies have regarded WWOOF as agri-tourism, comparing WWOOFers experiences with other types of farms stays (McIntosh and Campbell 2001; McIntosh and Bonneman 2006). Another recent study approached WWOOF as volunteer tourism, a type of perspective that considers the exchanges that happen among hosts and volunteers to be the goal of participation (Ord 2010). My project took a very different approach to examining the WWOOF network and explaining some reasons that people participate using theoretical frameworks outside of tourism studies. Other studies have used similar methods, such as interviewing (McIntosh and Bonneman 2006), however, the application of assemblage, and the characterization of the network as a social economy was not part of any prior studies of WWOOF.

In my critical approach, I took the results of my study and proposed potential trajectory for WWOOF that would support movements addressing social justice concerns within the global food system, as well as what's missing within some food movements.

As the majority of studies of WWOOF have been from within tourism studies, future research into the network could be undertaken on multiple aspects of the network, as well as from numerous approaches and perspectives from social sciences. A few interesting questions that arose for me during my project, but fell outside the scope of my research questions, would be worthy of further inquiry. Potential areas of further study could look at the gendered aspects of WWOOF, or the racialized nature of the network, as well as questions surrounding home/work spaces when hosting. Longitudinal studies that traced WWOOFers after their experiences with the network might shed light on how individuals change their own practices or hold different perspectives following their interactions with hosts who may have exposed them to new ideas about food production. More broadly-based studies might look at the relationship of WWOOF to issues related to land use, and agriculture as an economic and community public good, as these topics arose among many of the hosts I spoke with. What would be of interest to me would be a similarly designed study, a critical ethnography, of WWOOF in terms of social justice for small organic farms/farm communities in the Global South, particularly with indigenous communities, local or abroad, regarding potential collaborations to contribute to community members' capacity to maintain traditional foodways.

My approach through the lens of theories on collective behaviour and social movements argues that WWOOF can be characterized as a resource to be mobilized in support of the advancement of the organic movement. An explicit decision by the WWOOF network to expand beyond the promotion of sustainable farming into food sovereignty and food justice initiatives could be a trajectory for the existing infrastructure of the WWOOF network and the organic farming community. Re-invigorating the social

movement spirit and advancing greater social justice could be readily incorporated and operationalized through the network. In this post-organic arena, the organic movement and those ‘going beyond’ organic would benefit from utilizing the WWOOF network in support of the direction that these other food movements are moving toward and advancing the concepts into mainstream thought.



Figure 9.1 Old tractor in need of repair in the Central Okanagan

My critical ethnographic study of the WWOOF network shows that people participate in the network because of the experiences it can offer, and that participation results in the (re)production of economies that are rooted in shared social values. Through the experience of conducting this research, I met many wonderful and

interesting people who practice their values in their daily lives and consider what they are doing to be of benefit to others. I learned a lot about organic farming, and about what it's like to take part in the WWOOF network. I feel that I have a better understanding now of what would motivate someone to WWOOF. Now, thinking back to my initial confounded reaction upon hearing about my friend's trip WWOOFing in Europe, it has become clearer to me why that part of her trip seemed to be so meaningful to her. I also see the potential of the network in mobilizing agents for social change, and in the spirit of that endeavour, I have reconsidered and would WWOOF in support of moving towards food justice and food sovereignty.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

WWOOF Host Interview Schedule

Age:

Gender:

Number of years farming:

Size of farm:

Types of produce:

Own or lease land:

Off-farm work:

Number of employees:

Farm Operation

- 1) What made you decide to become an organic farmer?
- 2) Tell me about your farm. Describe generally what a growing season looks like. (what is produced, yields, etc.)
- 3) Where (or how) do you sell your produce?
- 4) Describe the daily operations of the farm, activities, etc.
- 5) What do you like about organic farming? What are some drawbacks?

WWOOF Volunteers

- 1) How did you hear about the WWOOF network?
- 2) Why did you decide to become a host?
- 3) Tell me about your first WWOOF hosting experience.
- 4) In your opinion, what are some of the benefits of hosting WWOOF volunteers?
- 5) Drawbacks?
- 6) What other kinds of labourers are available to you?
- 7) Describe your relationship(s) with your WWOOFers. What is your role as a WWOOF host?

Organic Movement

- 1) In your opinion, how is the WWOOF network related to the organic movement?
- 2) How important are WWOOFers in supporting organic agriculture (also to the running of your business)?
- 3) Advice for potential hosts?

Appendix B:

WWOOF Volunteer Interview Schedule

Age:

Gender:

Occupation:

Home city/country:

Length of time in BC (or Canada):

WWOOFing Experience

- 1) How did you find out about the WWOOF network?
- 2) What made you decide to volunteer?
- 3) Is this your first WWOOF experience? If not, tell me about your previous experience(s).
- 4) Tell me your first impression when you arrived at the farm/village. (What did you notice, or what feelings were associated with first experience?)
- 5) Why did you decide to volunteer on this particular farm? Other options?
- 6) What is a 'typical' day like? Or are there any typical days?
- 7) How many other WWOOFers are there at the time? Are there other types of labourers also (wage labourers, interns, family help, etc.)?
- 8) Describe your relationship with other volunteers. With the host farmers.
- 9) What has your experience been like compared to your expectations?

Outcomes

- 1) Where does the produce from the farm go?
- 2) In your opinion, is volunteer work important for the operation/maintenance of the farm?
- 3) What have you learned from your experience?
- 4) Would you do it again? Or do you plan to continue WWOOFing?

Organic Movement

- 1) In your opinion, what is the relationship between the WWOOF network and the organic movement?
- 2) Based on your experience, why do you think people choose to WWOOF instead of other options available for travelling, or volunteering?
- 3) Do you have any advice for people considering getting involved in WWOOFing?
- 4) Do you have any recommendations for the WWOOF network organizers?
- 5) Any other comments, opinions, etc.?